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**Elfland Revisited: A Comparative Study of Late Twentieth
Century Adaptations of Two Traditional Ballads**

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1. Introduction

Once upon a time there was a minstrel. He travelled the land, stopping at the halls of noblemen to entertain their households. He sang old songs he had learned as a child, songs he had picked up during his travels and sometimes songs he had made up himself out of pieces of stories he had heard in villages and halls. He sang of knights and maidens, battles and births, witches and fairies and how another minstrel had once met the queen of fairies herself.

Many centuries later a woman is sitting at a desk. Or maybe a kitchen table. Or maybe a café table. The table is strewn with books and sheets of note paper, surrounding an ancient typewriter. Or a laptop. She is working on stories involving knights and maidens, battles and births, witches and fairies... And sometimes she feels a bit like a medieval minstrel, making new stories out of scraps of old ones.

These two scenarios are both romanticised fictions. But maybe they can explain something about the fascination that a handful of old songs seems to exert on writers of contemporary fantasy fiction. In my study of ballad novelisations dating from 1971 to 2003 I could not help thinking that apparently a kind of spiritual kinship is felt by modern authors with the storytellers and -singers of old. And just as medieval minstrels thrilled their audiences with stories about tragic loves and fairy kingdoms, present-day authors have hit on these same materials to similarly entertain their audiences – even though now the story is presented not orally but in written form and not to a group of listeners but rather to individual readers consuming the stories at various times and places. Despite the tremendous differences regarding the environment of the recipients of these stories then and now it is somehow consoling that nowadays they apparently cater to the same basic desires they served hundreds of years ago. Or is it frightening, considering how little people seem to change in their emotional core, in spite of the drastic changes in their surroundings?

It is, in any case, necessary to note that the line that stretches from the medieval minstrel to the modern-day fantasy author is not quite as unbroken as I tried to present it just now. The interest in stories of the supernatural and here especially in those about fairies (which were only one part of the minstrel's repertoire among more realistic stories) has experienced its ups and downs throughout the last few centuries with peaks in the twelfth, sixteenth and nineteenth century. At the moment, however, it is certainly experiencing an 'up'-phase and it is no exaggeration to state that a veritable 'boom' of fantasy literature has taken place over the last 30 years. At the beginning of the new millennium, Christine Ivanovich observed:

For some years, fantasy has been attracting the renewed attention of literary criticism. The last phase of an intensified discussion of fantasy, which lasted approximately from the 1970s to the early 1980s, was in

Germany dominated mostly by the readers; they formed a not too narrowly defined community of fans, whose requirements were catered to by several publishing houses that started voluminous fantasy series. In contrast to this, the increasingly theory-oriented discussion today finds itself confronted by an all-inundating *practice* of fantasy, which has already left behind the medium of books and has instead become a ubiquitous phenomenon, and maybe even a problem of every-day culture. (2001, 7, my translation)

This assessment is still true a few years later, in 2007, as can be inferred from the mass-media and on an international scope, as for example from the reports of American and German newspapers:

“They refer to it as the fantasy boom,” says Sharyn November, senior editor at Viking Children’s Books and editorial director of Firebird, an imprint that specializes in reprints of fantasy and science fiction books for teens and adults. “I think all booms necessarily fade or come to an end, but there will always be more genre books published than there were before, which is really exciting.” (Kridler, *Florida Today*, 10 September 2007)

If literary historians cared more for bestsellers than they actually do, if they wandered through the new book-temples as mentality-detectives and observed people when they are buying books, then 2007 would stand a chance of entering literary history as the 1959 of fantasy. 1959 was the great year of German post-war literature, when Grass’s *Tin Drum*, Böll’s *Billiards at Half-past Nine* and Uwe Johnson’s *Presumptions about Jakob* were published. And 2007, even though the comparison may be impertinent, could prove the big year of internationalised fantasy. (Freund, *Die Welt Online*, 21 September 2007, my translation)

Fantastic fiction is a genre which fans out into a variety of sub-genres: from ‘sword-and-sorcery’ and ‘heroic’ over ‘humorous’ and ‘Christian’ to ‘urban’ or ‘feminist’ fantasy – many attempts have been made to establish typologies for the many sub-genres. The present study also deals with a special type of fantasy fiction, even though here the choice has not been guided by considerations concerning the structure or the underlying ideology or the authorial stance found in the books in question. The texts that are of interest here have been chosen solely for their treatment of a literary motif: the dealings of humans with elves and fairies, and, more specifically, the abduction of certain types of humans by the inhabitants of Elfland.¹ That this motif is so popular among contemporary authors is apparently no coincidence.

Recently, Helmut Birkhan, an Austrian celtologist, observed that the (Western) industrialised world has been subject to a very process of what he called ‘elfinisation’ (*DIE ZEIT*, 16 August 2007) – meaning that elves and fairies have invaded popular culture, from cinema to fashion, from popular literature to furniture design, according to Birkhan enriching the dull modern world with a touch of the exotic (and the erotic). This recent mass influx of elves is of course not the first in post-medieval times – in the Elizabethan and Jacobean age fairies were an integral part of court culture, while in the nineteenth century a fairy craze greater than the present one was experienced in Victorian England. Thus, the fairies whose ‘farewell’ (their ultimate disappearance from this world) has been lamented for centuries,

¹ “Elf” and “fairy” are two terms with slightly different meanings. Their semantic differences will be discussed in chapter two. Throughout this study, however, they will normally be used synonymously.

have returned once more. And they have returned as much darker creatures than twentieth century readers are used to – the most common idea we associate nowadays with the word fairy is a small, delicate, normally female creature with wings and often a magic wand, which lives close to nature. But this image is one that is far removed from the idea of traditional fairies and elves, who are actually very ambivalent and often highly dangerous and fearsome creatures and who are again coming into their own in late twentieth century fantasy fiction.

The same tendency towards revitalisation seems to be true for traditional ballads, though maybe not to the same extent as for fairies. The most recent ‘ballad revival’ took place within the context of the 1960s folk-rock movement and seems already over again, the actual singing of ballads having become a more or less marginal activity, once more practised only in those regions where the ballads once originated (e.g. Scotland and Ireland). But, as the ballad adaptations in form of novels, picture books, short-stories etc. show, using ballads in writing seems a trend that is still en vogue among writers of the Anglophone world (GB, USA, Canada, Australia), maybe because these songs have been part of the cultural socialisation of a whole generation of authors, most of whom are what Faye Ringel calls “survivors of the great Sixties folk [music] scare” (1999, 199).

But what could be further reasons that make ballads suitable for modern retellings apart from the fact that they were a part of the popular culture that shaped the tastes of the authors in question? Like the folktales and fairytales to which they are related and which have been similarly popular for retelling in the last 35 years, ballads may be appealing because of their very simplicity – they provide authors with a basic storyline but still leave a lot of room for invention.² Their shortness and simplicity thus give authors the opportunity to make use of different strategies of expansion. In regard to folktale retellings John Stephens and Robyn MacCallum have named those strategies *elaboration* and *combination*, a terminology that can also be used for ballad retellings:

As with other kinds of story, folktale is *expanded* into novel by elaborating common elements of literary fiction: main characters may be more complex, the motivation for their actions will be a little more than stereotyped, and experiences may be depicted as having subjective or introspective impact and consequence; both social and physical elements of setting may be more detailed and specific; reduplicated events or actions may be individually elaborated so as to stress differences rather than similarity; and the positioning of audience towards characters and event may be more complicated. (...) Second, folktales may be *combined*, whether by drawing on several analogues or variants of a single tale-type, or by joining unrelated tales. (1998, 221, emphases mine)

² An example for fairy tale retellings for adults is Angela Carter’s *The Bloody Chamber and Others Stories*, on the Young Adult field there are for instance Donna Jo Napoli’s retellings of “The Frog Prince” (*The Prince of the Pond*), “Rapunzel” (*Zel*), “Beauty and the Beast” (*Beast*), “Jack and the Beanstalk” (*Crazy Jack*) other authors on this field are for instance Sheri S. Tepper (*Beauty*) and Jane Yolen (*Briar Rose*).

Apart from their formal simplicity, the ballads of the supernatural used by the authors also often deal with universal, almost timeless topics – quite like fairy tales, as Martha Hixon (2004, 68) notices – which makes it possible for them to be retold in all kinds of settings: they can be close to the original or rather modern.

Of the great wealth of ballads – the collection of J.F. Child for example contains more than 300 of them – actually only a small number seem to find the authors' favour. These, however, are retold again and again. Two of these ballads are Child #37, "Thomas the Rhymer" and Child #39, "Tam Lin". I have often wondered why these two ballads have been repeatedly used as pre-texts for contemporary fantasy novels and the possible explanations I have come up with will be discussed in detail later on in this study.³ One reason has probably to do with the character constellation especially in "Tam Lin", which has a strong female hero, a fact that apparently makes this ballad perfect for late twentieth century tastes. Another reason, namely for the fact that most of the authors in question use both ballads together as pre-texts for their respective novels, could be that Child #37 and #39 are indeed somehow companion texts, as Colin Manlove (1994, 23) noticed: one ballad describes the abduction and enchantment of a human by the queen of fairies and the other one tells about the end of such an enchantment.

State of research

Returning from the realms of enchantment to the realities of research one will notice that the state of research on the topics in question is rather uneven. Trying to assess the state of research I have focused on three areas. First of all, I have researched the available literature on the traditional ballad and its adaptations. Secondly, I have concentrated on topical research about fairies, either from the point of view of cultural history or literary criticism. Thirdly, I have surveyed scholarly literature on the genre of fantasy literature in general and, more specifically, on the authors whose works I will analyse in some detail in this study.

Scholarly interest in traditional ballads first emerged in the eighteenth century with collectors like Thomas Percy, Bishop of Dromore, it deepened throughout the nineteenth century (e.g. ballad collections by Robert Burns and Sir Walter Scott) to find its culminating point probably in Francis James Child's comprehensive collection of English and Scottish popular ballads (1904). In the twentieth century, it seems that ballad research experienced a kind of heyday in the 1960s and 1970s – maybe due to the 'ballad revival' among

³ *Pre-text* is the term used by J. Stephens and R. MacCallum in their study of literary retellings for children. They define *pre-text* as follows: "to be a retelling, a text must exist in relationship to some kind of source, which we will refer to as the 'pre-text'" (1998, 4).

contemporary folk musicians who adapted and recorded a great variety of ballad material. During this time, book-length studies on the history and structure of the traditional ballad were published e.g. by James Reed, Willa Muir, David Buchan, David Fowler and Albert B. Friedman. After that, critical interest in ballads seemed to abate once again, even though a small but steady stream of scholarly material is being published to this day, often with a focus on the social conditions of ballad making and ballad transmission (e.g. Sigrid Rieuwerts, Faye Ringel). And for instance the volume published to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the death of J.F. Child (*Ballads into Books*, 1999), which traces the legacy of the Child ballads throughout the twentieth century, proves that, at least for a group of interdisciplinary working specialists, the traditional ballad is still a valid topic for research.

The second area of research to be considered here is a traditional topic for ballads, but has on the whole of course found expression in a much greater spectrum of narrative forms: fairies and elves and their relations to the human world. Here, similarly as in regard to the ballad, folklorists rather than literary critics were the pioneers of research and were only later followed by the second group. Thus, there are two strands of fairy research – firstly, folklorists asking: “what are fairies?” and “why and how did/do ‘common people’ believe in them?” and secondly, literary critics asking: “how are popular beliefs absorbed and transformed by authors of poems, plays, tales and novels?” and maybe also: “why are fairies a literary motif at all?”

The folklorists’ study of fairies begins with the Enlightenment, although considerable impetus stemmed actually from the ‘counter-Enlightenment’ movement, as Nicola Bown observes:

The Enlightenment sought universal, rational laws based on a conception of human nature as unchanging and fought against prejudice, tradition and superstitions as impediments to the discovery of demonstrable truths. The counter-Enlightenment opposed these aims by arguing for relativist and historicist views of human society, human knowledge and human nature. Instead of pursuing general truths which would reveal immanent laws governing the functioning of the universe, ‘counter-Enlightenment’ thinkers sought knowledge in the myriad and changing and equally valuable particulars of human existence. (2001, 16)

Belief in fairies was one of these ‘particulars’ and the study of fairy belief developed over time, experiencing its heyday in the nineteenth century, largely due to Victorian interest in vanishing folk beliefs and the supernatural in general. Some notable fairy researchers from the seventeenth to nineteenth century were Robert Kirk (*The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns and Fairies* (1691)), Thomas Crofton Croker (*Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland* (1825-28)) and Thomas Keightley (*The Fairy Mythology* (1850)). In the twentieth century the work of folklorists continued, but on a much smaller level, one outstanding figure here being Katherine Briggs, who produced numerous publications on

British folk beliefs, such as the four-volume *Dictionary of British Folktales in the English Language* (1970) and *An Encyclopaedia of Fairies* (1976), both widely acclaimed in folklorist circles.

Literary critics, following in the footsteps of the folklorists, have by now analysed fairy literature by authors of almost every epoch, from the Middle Ages (romances, ballads) over the Renaissance (stage-plays and masques), the seventeenth century (especially satires), to the eighteenth and nineteenth century (especially literary fairy tales, plays, poetry). However, the number of studies is relatively small and book-length studies are rare, mostly the research takes the form of journal articles, no matter which epoch is considered. With regard to the twentieth century research becomes even scantier, and I have not found a single study that deals exclusively with the treatment of fairies in twentieth century literature.

However, as I pointed out before, it seems that interest in fairies (both in literature and folklore/popular culture) has revived in recent years. Three studies published in English between 1999 and 2001 that focus exclusively on fairies stand out here. In *Troublesome Things – A History of Fairies and Fairy Stories* (2000) Diane Purkiss explores the cultural history of fairies from classical antiquity to the twenty-first century. The author takes a critical stance towards modern fairy beliefs which, in her opinion, have become idealised and sanitised during the nineteenth century, and focuses on pointing out the dark origins of fairies, linking them repeatedly with death and the dead. For the authors of the two other studies, the Victorian fascination with fairies constitutes the centre of attention. Carole G. Silver's *Strange and Secret Peoples: Fairies and Victorian Consciousness* (1999) looks at fairies from a cultural historian's point of view, also with a special emphasis on the darker aspects of fairies – abducted children, the evil nature of goblins, the fairy host (wild hunt) and similar phenomena. Thirdly, there is Nicola Bown's *Fairies in Nineteenth Century Art and Literature* (2001), focussing on literary and visual representations of fairies in the Victorian Age and providing explanations for the Victorian fascination with the fairies, the main one being that industrialization's pressures caused people of the middle classes (especially men) to dream themselves into carefree fairy worlds. The twentieth century seems to be more or less neglected by the authors mentioned above – merely the last two and a half chapters of Purkiss's study take the fairy into the twentieth century at all and here she dedicates only about one page to fairy fiction written after 1950. Very recently (November 2007) a work appeared that unites both research areas mentioned above – fairies and ballads. This is Emily Lyle's *Fairies and Folk*, the first part of which deals with a number of fairy ballads and

relates them to traditional Scottish folk culture, while the second part looks at late nineteenth and early twentieth century ballad singers, collectors and scholars.

But while fairies and elves in modern fantasy literature are apparently a topic that is to this day granted only specialist's attention, the study of fantasy literature in general has experienced a great expansion since the 1960s and 1970s, with Tzvetan Todorov's *Introduction à la Littérature Fantastique* (1970) constituting the first seminal work on this field. Todorov's approach has been refined and elaborated by many critics, one of the more recent contributions being Uwe Durst's *Theorie der phantastischen Literatur* (2001). But also in the Anglophone world many studies about fantastic fiction have been published, a few of the most recent are Lucy Armit's *Fantasy Fiction: An Introduction* (2005) and Brian Stableford's *Historical Dictionary of Fantasy Literature* (2005) and Matthew Dickerson and David O'Hara's *From Homer to Harry Potter* (2006).

But even though genre overviews are proliferating, studies on individual authors are still relatively rare. A number of books deal with authors who use fantasy elements in their novels but are nevertheless considered part of the 'canon' – such as Angela Carter, Jeanette Winterson, A.S. Byatt, Fay Weldon etc. Moreover, there exists a growing number of monographs about authors who clearly belong to the fantasy and/or science fiction genre but whose books have reached the status of classics in the late twentieth century – J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis for instance, but also later authors like Ursula K. LeGuin or Marion Zimmer Bradley or, most recently, J.K. Rowling. The fantasy authors who are the focus of my study, however, have either never been popular enough to become classics or belong to a younger generation than most of those mentioned before. Therefore, works of literary criticism dealing with Elizabeth Mary Pope, Catherine Storr, Dahlov Ipcar, Diana Wynne Jones, Terry Pratchett, Patricia McKillip, Ellen Kushner, Pamela Dean and Janet McNaughton are rare or non-existent – of all the authors listed here, only Jones, Pratchett and McKillip can boast of one or several monographs written about their work. Analyses of the oeuvre of the other authors can be found in journal articles, book reviews or as part of book-length genre overviews. In some cases, however, the only source of information for me were discussion groups on the internet (where readers of fantasy fiction deliver analyses of the books they have read) or interviews with the authors in online magazines. Thus it can be said that the state of current academic research on the authors in question is rather fragmentary.

A possible reason for this scarcity of scholarly interest in the abovementioned authors is probably their position outside the literary canon. They are certainly 'genre' authors, but I would like to argue that this does not automatically entail that these authors write 'trivial'

literature or even trash. This is still the suspicion that hovers over the genre of fantasy fiction, and, certainly, this suspicion is often justified. What can be found on the ‘fantasy’ shelves of bookstores nowadays is indeed to a large extent formula fiction, dominated by endless series of Tolkienesque quest fantasies. However, between those authors who have been accepted either as ‘literary’ canon authors or at least as ‘genre’ classics and those that produce formula fantasy, a third group could be situated that covers a sort of middle ground. Their novels do usually not display the narrative complexity and the more or less experimental quality typical for ‘highbrow’ authors of fantasy but they are nevertheless much more original than the Tolkien-imitators and at times also quite complex in their game of transforming a wealth of traditional and contemporary material into new stories. In my opinion they therefore deserve the attention of literary criticism and so, in this study, I will try to make up, at least partly, for the fragmentary state of scholarly literature on this topic – that is, the retellings of fairy ballads by the above-mentioned ‘middle brow’ authors. Eight novels written between 1973 and 2003 will form the focus of attention (with additional, not quite as detailed consideration of two further novels), which will be read in comparison with each other and against the background of British fairy and ballad lore.

Research questions

The novels examined in this study are based on the same pre-texts and tell basically the same story (or stories). But of course they are not identical. A few important questions that have guided my research were therefore: What do the retellings have in common? Where do they differ? For what reasons do they differ? How far have considerations of different literary target-groups (the books are intended for readers of different ages: adult, young adult, children) shaped the writings? Another aspect that contributes to the differences between the adaptations is their use of additional pre-texts, a further question has therefore been: What other influences are at work, apart from Child #37 and #39? Have other Child ballads found their way into the retellings? Have texts from other centuries and contexts? Moreover, “Tam Lin” and “Thomas Rhymer” are not just fanciful works of fiction but echo folk beliefs about fairies. Do the authors limit themselves to the aspects of fairy lore found in the ballads? Or do they use other motifs from folkloristic sources? Furthermore, one of my central research interests was to ask how the texts portray the elves. Do they adhere to the picture of elves as presented in the ballads, or have more recent notions (such as the miniaturisation and prettifying of fairies typical for fantasy fiction in the nineteenth century) found their way into the retellings as well? Complementing the examination of the elves I also analysed how the

human characters are portrayed. The focus here was on those characters for whom the ballads provide a model, that is, the figures of Janet and Tam/Thomas. In regard to Child #39 I found it moreover important to examine how the central conflict in this ballad (out-of-wedlock-pregnancy) is handled in different historical settings, if it is not omitted altogether. If the latter is the case, it will of course have to be asked why this happens.

Finally, it will be interesting to ask how innovative a twentieth or twenty-first century novel that tells a medieval story can be, if at all. In connection with this I tried to find out if the values and morals that pervade the ballads are used unquestioningly by the authors or if they maybe employ their models in a more critical manner.

Structure of the study

As can be seen even from the most perfunctory reading of the novels in my ‘corpus’ all of them are more or less densely intertextual, using many more sources of inspiration than merely the two Child ballads. In order to do justice to the wealth of literary allusions and folkloristic material found in the retellings, the analyses of the novels will be preceded by several chapters preparing the ground for these analyses.

The point of view of the first chapter of my study is therefore largely folkloristic and ethnological. Since we are dealing with a phenomenon that passed from popular belief into literature I think it is necessary to depart this far from the study of literature and include linguistic, historical, theological, ecological and even medical aspects if they can shed light on what people thought (and think) about fairies and their appearance, behaviour and origins. In this chapter I will therefore trace the etymology of the words “fairy” and “elf” and find an adequate definition for both terms as well as consider differences in their linguistic use. I will then continue with an exploration of the folkloristic aspects of fairies and elves, that is, how they were viewed in popular belief in the British Isles from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century. I will present a typology of different kinds of fairies, based on Katherine Briggs’s classification, and then go on to give an overview of the most important (and often contradictory) characteristics ascribed to them. Having thus explored what fairies or elves are (or were thought to be), I want to present a short overview of folkloristic theories about the supposed origin of the fairies, including both ‘scientific’ and ‘folk’ theories. Since in both folklore and literature it is often difficult to distinguish clearly between elves/fairies and related creatures such as dwarfs or elemental spirits, I will round off the chapter with an overview of a range of other supernatural creatures from European and Oriental folklore with whom they are sometimes mixed up.

Having sketched the view of fairies and elves held in folklore and popular culture, I will then proceed to the general literary part of my work. Before, however, I launch into a more or less detailed literary history of the fairy, chapter three will give an introduction to the most important literary theories and terminology used in the ensuing chapters on literary history and analysis of the selected novels. As I have pointed out earlier, a considerable body of ‘fantasy theory’ exists by now and is indeed helpful for the examination of the particular brand of fantasy fiction which forms the focus of attention here.

Chapter four will outline the literary history of the fairy on the British Isles (sometimes widening the focus to the whole of Europe or to the USA) from roughly the Middle Ages to the end of the twentieth century, presenting certain trends and fashions in the portrayal of fairies and illustrating them by example of selected literary works.

While the chapter on the literary history of fairies presents the development of all sorts of fairy stories, highlighting now and then predecessors and descendants of the Tam Lin/Thomas the Rhymer-story, the chapter following it will trace the origin of the actual source material of the adaptations – the two traditional ballads “Thomas the Rhymer” and “Tam Lin”, as they can be found in the collection by Francis James Child. I will examine them in their context as Scottish border ballads of uncertain age, composed by unknown authors and point out the characteristics which may have made those two ballads especially attractive for twentieth century retellings.

The third part of my study will concern itself with the retellings themselves. I have chosen eight novels out of a larger ‘corpus’ of novels, short-stories and picture books which all narrate the history of Tam Lin and/or Thomas the Rhymer in one form or another. First of all, I will present the reasons that guided me in choosing those particular eight novels (and two additional ones that will not be analysed in detail but nevertheless included in the final discussion for purposes of comparison). Then I will proceed with the analysis-chapters, arranged in chronological order of the novels’ publication. The analysis-chapters all have roughly the same structure: First of all, a short biography of the authors is presented, followed by a summary of the novel. The next part of the chapter usually deals with the intertextual influences by which each novel is shaped to varying degrees. After that, the rest of the chapter is mostly dedicated to a detailed analysis of the character constellation, consisting (with exceptions) of the girl-hero, the captured young man and the fairies. Special emphasis is laid on a comparative analysis of how the fairies and Fairyland are depicted. Each chapter closes with a short reconsideration of the aspects that make the analysed book different from the rest of the corpus.

My study ends with a final discussion of the research questions mentioned earlier in this chapter. How far have the questions been answered and what can be said about the novels in comparison to each other? I will point out differences and resemblances and offer several hypotheses for the appearance of striking resemblances, especially where those cannot be sufficiently explained by the fact that the authors used the same source-texts.

The methods used in this study are mostly description and comparison. I will detail how the elves and Elfland and the most important human characters are portrayed and compare this on the one hand to the other novels examined here and on the other hand to possible models and sources from folklore and literature, thereby showing how strongly modern fantasy authors can be indebted to literary and, in this case, also folkloristic tradition.

2. Folkloristic aspects

Before I start my analysis proper I think it is necessary to do some groundwork. The fairies that populate contemporary fantasy literature have not come out of the blue and have not been created completely freely by their authors' imagination. There may be exceptions but usually modern-day fairies owe a lot to tradition, or, as the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1959, 39) puts it: "They are not the immediate product of one country or of one time; they have a pedigree". Literary models have been around for several hundred years, from medieval romance, from Shakespeare's plays, from Victorian novels. But even those usually go back to an even older substrate. Therefore, many of the modern-day fairies are in fact descendants of fairies people once believed in, the fairies of folk tradition.

Fairy tradition and fairy belief

The regions of the British Isles with especially strong fairy traditions were/are those whose culture was (and still is) shaped by Celtic influences.⁴ These are Cornwall, Wales, Scotland, the Orkney and Shetland Islands, the Isle of Man and the whole of Ireland, even though other regions (e.g. Yorkshire) have their fairies too. There are of course also fairies outside the British Isles: Brittany, as a Celtic area, is rich in fairy lore, but also for example Germany, Scandinavia and Newfoundland (the latter probably influenced by French traditions, for fairies there are called by the French name for goblin, *lutin*) have fairies or similar beings.

Belief in the reality of fairies – documented for example by the existence of protective charms and the use of objects that were thought to have shielding powers against them – goes back a long way. It seems to have been alive from Anglo-Saxon times through the Middle Ages well into the Elizabethan and Jacobean Age, even though it was steadily on the decline by then. Belief in fairies lasted longest probably in Ireland, where even in the first decades of the twentieth century cases of fairy sightings were reported or e.g. roads had to be built differently because otherwise they would have traversed a site inhabited by or holy to the fairies.⁵

⁴ The Celts were described as an extremely superstitious people already by Julius Caesar in *De Bello Gallico* (6.16).

⁵ In Ireland, the so-called Fairy Tree of Latoon (County Clare), a hawthorn, which is a sort of tree traditionally connected with the fairies (Briggs 1976, 159), made the headlines around the year 2000 since the locals persuaded a road building company to make a detour around it (Cunningham 2003).

By the late nineteenth or beginning twentieth century, as actual belief among adults had more or less died out, fairies became creatures of the nursery. Belief in them was purposely encouraged in children, for didactic aims. For instance, children were told that malicious fairies would catch them if they did not keep out of dangerous places; especially the bogey type of fairies was used for this purpose (*Dictionary of English Folklore* 2000, 116).⁶ Another tale was that a tooth fairy (contrarily to the bogeys not a figure from tradition but a twentieth century invention) would reward the children for placing their milk teeth under the pillow.

From the fear-inducing elves of the early ages to the cute tooth fairy – the creatures I call *fairies* within the context of this study have come quite a long way. And during the course of their long history they had time to develop, change, produce regional variants and get mixed up with other supernatural creatures, often from different culture areas. As a result a great variety of fairies known by an even larger number of names have been identified by folklorists – and are apparently also well-known to authors of modern fantasy. But since in fantasy fiction names and ideas of fairies are of course often used with considerable artistic license some confusion might arise for a reader and even more so for anybody who intends to compare several contemporary authors. Therefore, I will give an overview of the names and the concepts connected with a number of supernatural creatures, starting with fairies and elves – their etymology, attempts at classification, their general characteristics and theories about the origin of fairy belief. After that, for reasons of easier differentiation, I will continue with a (less detailed) overview of other supernatural entities, such as demons, spirits, vampires, dwarfs, trolls, etc.

Fairies and elves – the same? Or different beings?

The terms *fairy* and *elf* seem to be used synonymously sometimes but on other occasions are employed to refer to different types of supernatural beings. The confusion may arise from the fact that both terms mean more or less the same but are of different linguistic origin – *elf* has its roots in Old English and is often connected to beings from Scandinavian mythology, while *fairy* is of Romanic origin and is nowadays the more generally used term.

⁶ A *bogey* is defined by K. Briggs (1976, 33) as the term nowadays used for a number of mischievous creatures. Originally it referred to a malicious goblin and was afterwards used to denote the kind of nursery-demon mentioned above.

Elves

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*, 1989) the word *elf* derives from Old English *ælf*, which probably derives from Latin *albus* = ‘white’ and corresponds to Old High German *alp* (the latter is still existent in Modern High German in the meaning of ‘nightmare’).⁷ The *Dictionary of English Folklore* traces the usage of the term up to the present:

In Old English, *ælf* was the general all-purpose term for a fairy; after the Conquest, however, the French ‘fairy’ partially replaced it, though Chaucer and Shakespeare still used them interchangeably, and ‘elf’ seems to have faded out of rural usage in most of England (though not in Yorkshire). It kept a place in literary English, however, so it now sounds both more archaic and more elegant than fairy. (2000, 109)

The *OED* complements these observations on usage:

In mod. literature, *elf* is a mere synonym of fairy, which has to a great extent superseded it even in dialects. Originally *elf* was masculine, *elven* feminine; but in the thirteenth and fourteenth c. the two seem to have been used indifferently of both sexes. In mod. use *elf* chiefly, though not always, denotes a male fairy. (...) The Teutonic belief in elves is probably the main source of the mediæval superstition respecting fairies, which, however, includes elements not of Teutonic origin; in general the Romanic word denotes a being of less terrible and more playful character than the ‘elf’ as originally conceived. (1998)

So much for distinguishing *elf* from *fairy*. But what is an elf? The *OED* defines an elf as one of “a class of supernatural beings, in early Teutonic belief supposed to possess formidable magical powers, exercised variously for the benefit or the injury of mankind”. The ambivalent nature of elves is a characteristic on which also Briggs (1976) and the *Dictionary of English Folklore* (2000) agree. On the one hand, elves must have been thought helpful at least in some contexts, otherwise the prefix *ælf* would not have been used for names like *Ælfred* (*ælf*= ‘elf’ and *ræd* = ‘counsel’) and *Ælfwin* (*ælf* = ‘elf’ and *wine*= ‘friend’). On the other hand, accounts of the disturbing habits of elves are numerous. They were believed to steal children and to cause diseases of different kinds (‘elf-sickness’) in human beings and cattle. Cattle especially could be hit by ‘elf-shot’ (nowadays identified as the flint-arrowheads used by pre-historic hunters) and in consequence become ill and die. Elves were moreover said to tangle human hair and horses’ manes at night (producing so-called ‘elf locks’) and to ‘ride’ humans and horses by night, causing sweat, troubled sleep and nightmares – hence the etymological connection to German *alp*, as well as the occasional equation with incubi and succubae. If offended, their revenge was, according to common belief, bound to be terrible.

There are different regional strands of elf-belief. In pre-Christian Scandinavian mythology (e.g. in the *Snorra Edda*) a distinction was made between light elves and dark elves. The light elves can be thought similar to the small trooping fairies (for the meaning of

⁷ I have used the online-edition of the *OED*, 2nd edition, 1989, therefore, no page numbers are indicated after quotations.

this term see below) of England, while the dark elves, who are said to live in the earth, are often equated with dwarfs. Fairies in general were called the *huldre folk*, ‘the hidden people’, this name refers to a legend about their origins (see below). In Christian times the belief in elves in the Scandinavian countries persisted. Assumptions about their appearance seem to reflect the ideas of their ambivalent nature – the Swedish *huldre* girls were imagined as beautiful but had cow-tails hidden under their skirts, while female Danish elves were beautiful on the front but hollow behind.⁸ In Scotland elves were thought of as beings of human size and Fairyland was in these parts often called *elfame*, while in England the term *elf* was used for smaller trooping fairies, especially for small fairy boys.

Fairies

Now that the more specifically used term *elf* (to recapitulate – it can mean male fairy, small fairy boy, or a more frightening and malicious creature than a fairy) has been filled with life, it remains to look at the more comprehensive and complex term *fairy*. The term is complex for example in its numerous meanings, such as the *OED* lists them (many of them are now obsolete but nevertheless important for a study of fairy literature):

1. The land or home of the fays; fairy-land. *Obs.*: see faerie
2. A collective term for the fays or inhabitants of fairyland; fairy-folk. *Obs.*
3. Enchantment, magic; a magic contrivance; an illusion, a dream. *Obs.*
4. **a.** One of a class of supernatural beings of diminutive size, in popular belief supposed to possess magical powers and to have great influence for good or evil over the affairs of man. See elf and fay *n.*
b. *fairy of the mine*: a goblin supposed to inhabit mines. (The designation is used by Milton; later writers use it as the equivalent of the German *kobold* or *gnome*.) *fairy of the sea*: a Nereid.
5. *transf.* **a.** One possessing more than human power; an enchantress. *Obs.*
b. A small graceful woman or child.
c. A male homosexual. *slang.*

Of these, the fourth meaning seems to be the one most relevant for my study even though it should not only pertain to diminutive fairies but to fairies of all sizes. The definition given by the *Dictionary of English Folklore* is more general than 4.a and might therefore be of greater use for my purposes: “Folklorists generally use the term ‘fairy’ rather loosely to cover a range of non-human yet material beings with magical powers” (2000, 115).

Still more complex than its list of meanings seems to be the etymology of *fairy*. The word has in the past been cause for wild speculations about its origin. Many etymologies

⁸ Maybe there is a connection to the figure of *Frau Welt*, often found at medieval church portals in Germany. She is usually presented with a beautiful front while her back is a skeleton crawling with all kinds of hideous animal life. She belongs to the iconographic field of *vanitas* and is, more specifically, an allegoric representation of evil, aiming at turning man away from God to indulge in worldly pleasures. Originally, *Frau Welt* was a male figure, *mundus* or *princeps mundi*, the ruler of the world. With the growing misogyny of the Middle Ages, the figure was transformed into a woman (*Lexikon der Christlichen Ikonographie* 1972, 495). Female characters in literature, such as the fairies Morgaine and Melusine, were affected by a similar vilification due to medieval misogynist tendencies, see chapter four.

suggested for *fairy* are nowadays considered improbable (Williams 1991, 461) but are yet worth mentioning. It has been derived from the last syllable of Latin *nympha* or from Arabic *peri*, from Modern English *fair*, from Old English *fagen* ('coloured', 'tainted', 'dyed', 'shining') and Latin *fatua* ('foolish, a fool' but also 'clairvoyante').⁹ Also *fatigue* is sometimes considered as the linguistic basis – which might make some sense considering that fairies sometimes were thought to weaken and tire their human victims. The etymology nowadays most widely accepted, however,

follows the pattern of derivation from a word taken to mean female supernatural creatures. Ultimately it would seem to be derived from Latin *fatum* = 'thing said'. This gave *fata* = 'fate', a neuter plural which, it is supposed, was misinterpreted in the Dark Ages as feminine singular, *fata* = 'female fate, goddess', and these goddesses of fate were supposedly identified with Greek Lachesis, Atropos and Clotho and subsequently, following the Roman conquest of the Celtic peoples, further identified with various Celtic deities manifested as tripartite. (Williams 1991, 462)

But *fata*, or its plural *fatae*, is not the direct source for *fairy*. The stage in between is *fay*, which, according to Katherine Briggs "now has an archaic and rather affected sound. [Fay] is thought to be a broken-down form of *Fatae*" (1976, 131). The composite *fay-erie*, which at first denoted a state of being enchanted, then became *fairy*, referring to the creature who was able to leave humans in such a state of enchantment.

Nevertheless, as Noel William asserts, the usage and form of the word *fairy*, shading for example into variants such as *frairies*, *ferrishers*, and *fairfolk* (1991, 472) varied a lot between 1320 and 1829 (and probably also before and afterwards, but these times are not covered by his study). Therefore, "the word is itself neither an object with clear boundaries nor possessed of a meaning with clear boundaries" (ibid. 458). Nevertheless, Williams thinks that the notion of 'fatedness' is often closely connected with it. As support for his hypothesis he quotes the Scottish word *fey*, taken to mean e.g. 'destined', 'dead', or 'accursed', which hints at the close connection between fairies and death, which turns up again and again in the scholarly literature on fairies and will be considered in more detail later in this chapter. On the other hand, the German word *gefeit* is also connected to the semantic field (from *Fei* which is related to *fay*), meaning 'invulnerable', namely through the magic of a fay (Petzold 1996, 72). The two meanings are thus at once contradictory but yet somehow related, implying both times that a human being is singled out from his fellow men by way of magic (which would tie in neatly with the tendency of fairies towards the exclusive).

To round off my discussion of the term *fairy* a few words on euphemisms might be useful. Fairies were thought to dislike being called fairies or elves, moreover, due to the

⁹ The meaning of clairvoyante is illuminated by the fact that the word *fatua* derives from *fatuus*, a mythological name for the prophetic woodland divinity Faunus (*Georges Ausführliches Lateinisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch* 1879, 2702).

fairies' ubiquity and supernatural powers people believed that they might hear everything that was said about them. Consequently, if called by the abovementioned names, the fairies might be offended, which was bad luck for the human being who had insulted them. Therefore, the euphemisms for fairies are legion, varying from region to region: the Fair Folk, the Gentry, the Good Neighbours, They, Themselves, Them that's in it, the Shining Ones, the Strangers, the Small People etc.

Fairy typology

Having now surveyed the linguistic terrain around the fairies it remains to fill the term with more content. But the characteristics of the fairies are even more varied and contradictory than their semantics and etymology. A useful survey of fairy-characteristics is given in the *Dictionary of English Folklore* and will be complemented by a more detailed discussion below.

According to the *Dictionary of English Folklore* (2000, 115) fairies were

- believed to visible or invisible at will,
- thought to be shape-shifters,
- sometimes supposed to live underground, sometimes in woods, or in water, sometimes they were thought to be able to fly,
- believed to be benevolent, giving luck, prosperity, or useful skills to humans who treated them with respect; or they were regarded as troublesome pranksters, or even as dangerous and fatal – this depended usually on the type of fairy,
- blamed for causing sickness (in men and cattle), stealing human babies and leaving changelings (i.e., fairy substitutes), blamed for abducting adults into Fairyland.

This summary, however, can only be a very unspecific overview. As the characteristics of the fairies vary according to different types of fairy and as “the number of local words for species and sub-species, and for individuals, is considerable” (ibid., 116) – in *Collier's Encyclopedia* (1986, 534) Katherine Briggs for example speaks of over 180 names – various attempts at classifying the fairy people have been made.

A two-fold differentiation which was suggested originally by W.B. Yeats in *Irish Fairy and Folk Tales* (1918) as well as by James MacDougall in *Folk Tales and Fairy Lore* (1910), and which appears to be widely accepted by folklorists, distinguishes between *social* (or *trooping*) fairies and *solitary* fairies. Social fairies live in groups and frequently engage in group-activities such as feasting or dancing, but the term includes also the wild and dangerous fairy host, also called the slaugh or the slugh (comparable to the wild hunt of German folklore). Solitary fairies live on their own, either in human households (the brownie type) or as a sort of guardian of an open-air site such as a lake, a tree or a moor (the bogey or boggart type). The distinction is, however, not always clear-cut, remarks the *Dictionary of English*

Folklore, since for instance pixies can be either social or solitary (2000, 116). While the social fairies seem to resemble each other in looks and habits from region to region, the solitary fairies are very varied. As I am no folklorist but find it necessary to include an overview of fairy types as they will occur in the novels I discuss later in this study, I will adopt Katharine Briggs's typology of fairy types since it seems to me the most comprehensive.

Briggs suggests subdividing the trooping fairies according to their size. First, she distinguishes a class called *heroic fairies*, who are of human or more than human size. She calls them the "aristocrats among fairy people, [who] pass their time in aristocratic pursuits, hunting, hawking, riding in procession on white horses hung with silver bells, and feasting in their palaces, which are either beneath the hollow hills or under and across water" (1959, 13). Among the heroic fairies she counts for example the Irish fairies (the *sidhe*) and the fairies of medieval romance. Secondly, she makes out the ordinary fairy people, who can be of any size from that of human adults down to only a few inches and who are more ordinary and agrarian in their habits than the heroic fairies (ibid. 13-15).

The solitary fairies are further divided into three sub-groups by Briggs. The first is the group of the hobgoblin and Robin Goodfellow-type. Among these might be counted the fairies that are commonly associated with the term *goblin*, which derives from French *gobelin*, the name of a French spirit said to have haunted the neighbourhood of Évreux (*OED*, 1989). A goblin is defined by the *OED* as "a mischievous and ugly demon", and its grotesque appearance and malicious nature seem to be agreed on by folklorists. A more benevolent variant of goblins are the hobgoblins, who can probably more or less be equated with hobs, hobthrushes, lobs, pucks, Robin Goodfellows and brownies (and solitary pixies). What these spirits have in common is that they are usually grotesque in appearance – they were thought of as small, rough and hairy – but are not dangerous for humans. Often, like the brownies, they are household spirits, who at night do chores around the house (and keep an eye on the servants). They are usually rewarded with milk, cream and bread but should never be thanked or given a piece of clothing as payment because then they will leave the household and never come back (some stories say that they then go to show off their new clothes in Fairyland). If annoyed – which happens easily – they become a nuisance, tipping over furniture or behaving in other ways like a poltergeist and then it might be difficult to rid oneself of them. It is sometimes reported that even if one moves house the hobgoblin will always be on the last wagon-load and move along into the new home (Briggs 1976, 29). Other subtypes of this group are outdoor spirits, living for example in caves.

As the second subgroup Briggs sees the mermaids, water spirits and solitary nature fairies. Among these might be counted, of course, the mermaids and mermen, furthermore nixies, the Irish merrows, and the Scottish roane or selkies, the seal-people. Of those, the mermaids and mermen are thought to be the most aggressive and dangerous. They are blamed for drowning or devouring men or are generally seen as a source of ill luck. The females are typically beautiful women from the waist upwards and have fishtails below, the males are thought of as ugly and do not always have fishtails. They live not only in the sea but also in streams or lakes. A gentler variant of the merpeople are the Irish merrows, whose females are sometimes said to have married sailors, often having children with them. They are reported to wear red caps which they need to move through the water. In this they resemble the selkies or seal-people, who are very like the merrows but use seal-skins to move through water. Without their respective garments, these fairies cannot return to the sea and they (especially their females) are frequently captured that way.¹⁰ On land the selkies (male and female) are of human shape and great beauty. They are friendly to humans and of both males and females it is told that they mated with humans, the children of these unions being characterized by webbed hands and feet.

The third and last subgroup seems the most varied, among this Briggs reckons giants, monsters and hags. It shall not be discussed in detail here, since the creatures included seem the least fairy-like and thus less relevant for my study.

An additional group that might also be considered are the fairy animals. Endowed with magical characteristics, these are often dangerous for humans – especially the different kinds of water horses (such as the kelpie) or the various black dogs that were thought to haunt the English countryside. A different species is the legendary fairy cattle, which was said to produce especially large amounts of milk and cream. Humans might sometimes be given a cow as a reward for good deeds for the fairy community. Finally, I don't want to omit fairy plants: oak, ash and thorn are the classic trio, but there are others (apple and hazel, rowan, holly, willow, elder and alder (Briggs 1976, 159). Fairy trees were thought to have their own personalities, they appear mostly rather bad-tempered, the willow being the most dangerous of all (Briggs 1967, 83) – a tradition which is reflected for example in J.R.R. Tolkien's portrayal of 'Old Man Willow' in *The Lord of the Rings*.

¹⁰ Here exists an obvious parallel to the swan-maiden tales to be found for example in German folklore.

General characteristics

As various types of fairies play different roles also in twentieth century fairy literature, I found it essential to provide some basic information about the folkloristic background of the types presented there. What seems equally important to me are the often contradictory attributes attached to fairies at large. Their contradictoriness often results from the fact that there are so many different types of fairies, but is sometimes also rooted in the fairies themselves, being oscillating and ambivalent creatures. In the following I will discuss a few of the most important traits ascribed to the fairies in folklore and literature.

“The fairy people are good and bad, beautiful and hideous, stately and comical, but one the greatest of their many variations is that of size” observes Briggs (1976, 368). Fairies can be taller than human adults (heroic fairies) but can also be as tiny as ants, occupying all possible varieties of size in between. It is a common assumption that the tiny fairies are a Shakespearean invention, later becoming a vogue, in the form of Victorian and Edwardian flower fairies. Briggs, however, contends that the tradition is older: the Portunes mentioned by Gervase of Tilbury (in 1211) are tiny (about a finger long), as are the Danish trolls (ant-sized), which she seems to reckon among the fairies (on the problem of distinguishing trolls from fairies see below). Frequently, fairies are shape-shifters, being able to assume a shape much taller or smaller than their normal size, a trait which might account for some of their variety of size. Tiny fairies seem to be less dangerous than the larger ones, even though among them troublesome spirits can be found as well. In literature the presentation of fairies as diminutive creatures often goes hand in hand with a satiric or humorous treatment (e.g. in Jacobean literature) or with a sort of bowdlerisation (Victorian and Edwardian literature), presenting fairies as cute, ethereal things with wings and wands and omitting their darker characteristics. Carol Silver sees one reason for the fact that fairies were robbed of their dangerous appeal during the nineteenth century in the increasingly scientific approach towards them. One popular theory explained fairies as the memory of an ancient pygmy race inhabiting Britain. Another perceived them as a species of non-sapient creatures – a kind of “psychic insect life” (Silver 1999, 57) – that had evolved just like animals and flowers and thus possessed little glamour.

Maybe the tendency of presenting small fairies less seriously persists even today, e.g. in Terry Pratchett’s portrayal of the pixie-like Nac Mac Feegles in *The Wee Free Men*, who are presented as a bunch of likeable but chaotic and not very bright drunkards or in J.K.

Rowling's presentation of a race of submissive and not too intelligent house-elves in the *Harry Potter* series.¹¹

Rowling's house-elves are interesting also in another context – for theirs is one of the few contemporary portrayals of fairies as servants, contradicting the idea (seemingly beloved by modern fantasy writers) of fairies as an aristocratic species, popularised especially by Tolkien's portrayal of elf-dynasties in *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion* and parodied e.g. by Pratchett in *Lords and Ladies*.

The fairies of folklore, in contrast, have both variants: the brownie-type, i.e., the fairy-servant, dedicated to the service of a household and the fairies who are, due to their beauty, longevity, supernatural abilities and habits presented as a sort of superior race and natural aristocracy. Fairies, at least those that live in groups, seem to be an embodiment of the ancient system of feudalism, usually with a king and queen ruling over them. Often there are fairy knights and fairy ladies who make up their court. In Scottish tradition especially there is a division between a so-called 'seelie' and 'unseelie' court, of which the former is potentially benevolent towards humans (though easily offended) and the latter is constituted solely of evil fairies and often equated with the terrible fairy host.

Could the modern-day fascination of fantasy authors with (heroic) fairies be read as an indication of their longing for a more conservative world order?¹² The later parts of this study will hopefully shed some light on this question, tracing the literary history of fairies from the Middle Ages up to the late twentieth century and then taking a closer look at a handful of fairy novels.

But contrary to the impression that many contemporary fantasy novels might evoke, fairies are not simply the representatives of an 'old order'. The connections between fairies and issues of class and order are varied and fascinating, since it seems that over the centuries fairies were used to support whatever aim the teller of the 'fairy tale' happened to pursue. They could be employed for didactic means – known for their love of order, fairies were variously used to threaten servants and children into cleanly behaviour. But they could also be used to disguise rebellion and asocial behaviour, such as when bands of poachers claimed to be 'servants of the Queen of the Fairies' (Purkiss 2000a, 106) or when women claimed to have been impregnated by a fairy man, refusing to reveal the real father.

¹¹ There is, however, more to Rowling's house-elves than first meets the eye – they are for instance highly magical creatures who are able to perform spells without the help of a magic wand, something which human wizards and witches in the *Harry Potter* series are not able to.

¹² In my readings of modern fairy novels, I have come across a democratic fairy nation only once, in Eoin Colfer's *Artemis Fowl* novels.

And the variability of fairies is exploited even in more recent times. Fairies were and are instrumentalised by both high and low. On the one hand, “fairies were pressed into service – not too successfully – at the coronation of the current queen and at the funeral of the later Princess of Wales” (Purkiss 2000b, 4) and, on the other hand, during the wave of protest against British road-building schemes in the 1990s by eco-activists:

Protesters see themselves as the ‘little people’ standing up to the power of the state; (...) protesters position themselves as outside of and opposed to mainstream society; and (...) the adoption of fairy mythology helps to justify their counter-cultural morality. (Letcher 2001, 154)

In fact, the activists used words like “pixieing” to denote acts of sabotage against e.g. road-building machinery (ibid., 152), thus making illegal acts appear more harmless by associating them with the mischievous, playful pixies.¹³

Another association, which is quite the contrary of that between fairies and eco-romanticists is that between fairies and social upstarts. It was believed that encounters and bargains with the fairies (thought to own great riches themselves) might help humans towards wealth and prosperity, an aspect documented for instance in the records of early modern witch trials (Purkiss 2000a, 104).

Some fairies are benevolent towards humans – assisting them in acquiring a fortune and in other ways – but this is by no means the rule. In regard to their morality the fairies are just as variable as with regard to so many other characteristics. Apart from bringing prosperity to a household, fairies might help humans do chores in exchange for a bowl of milk – especially the abovementioned brownie-type of fairy – or reward people with special abilities. They are sometimes portrayed as generous, richly rewarding kindness. However, fairy gold given to humans frequently turns into withered leaves the next day – the consequence of fairy magic, commonly known as ‘glamour’, wearing off. But, on the other hand, seemingly worthless objects given by them can prove real treasures.

A curious trait of fairies is their strictness with regard to reciprocity. A human who has helped them will be rewarded whether he wants to or not. Yet, they should not be thanked, since they do not seem to understand the idea of gratitude, they only accept equivalent payment for their help. They are moreover very rigorous in regard to the keeping of contracts and agreements and it is not advisable to try to cheat them. Yet, once they have agreed to a pact they are themselves absolutely bound to it and this might be a way to get the better of them.

¹³ However, the “pixies” were only the ‘softies’ among the protesters, another, more violently-disposed group called themselves the “trolls” (Letcher 2001, 153), reflecting modern ideas about comparatively ‘nice’ fairies and brutal trolls.

So far, the fairies' characteristics might appear quaint at most, and not really dangerous but actually humans had many reasons to fear fairies. Many kinds of fairies of folklore have rather lax morals about stealing, or 'borrowing' things. They also often intrude into the privacy of humans (e.g. troubling them in their sleep) but are themselves very sensitive if their own privacy is disturbed. They are easily offended and remorselessly avenge injuries. Often portrayed as great lovers of dance, music and musicians and sometimes also as great healers, they are, on the other hand, often described as cruel and heartless towards humans and animals, without the merest idea of sympathy or pity. Their habit to abduct children and special kinds of adults (especially wet-nurses and musicians) has already been mentioned, as has their tendency to cause illness and disaster for humans, who have sometimes not even offended them but had merely the bad luck to look at them or made the mistake of talking to them.

Another way of risking fairy vengeance was arousing their jealousy by wearing colours dear to the fairies – so a few remarks about colour symbolism might be appropriate here. Green is the colour most frequently associated with fairies. (Other fairy colours are red, grey, brown and black and white, but green is the most prominent among them). It is interesting to look at the superstitions connected with green, for it is a colour that evokes many contradictory associations not only on the British Isles. In other cultures green is ambiguous as well: “for Hindus and Buddhists, it can mean both life and death (...), for Chinese, both life and disgrace (...), for Muslims in North Africa both growth and corruption” (Hutchings 1997, 55). In Britain and Ireland the association with freshness, fertility and healing is countered by that with envy and jealousy, unripe things, mould and poison and the idea that green clothes are unlucky: “wear green today, wear black tomorrow” (Hutchings 1997, 57). The reason for considering green unlucky is directly connected to green being a fairy colour, explains Hutchings – wearing green will arouse the fairies' jealousy and this should be avoided by any means.¹⁴

Apart from colour-connected superstitions, many other different beliefs concerning protection against fairies are known. Diverse charms against fairies have been recorded from Anglo-Saxon times onwards, but there are also a few objects that might be used to ward off fairies (Briggs 1976, 336) – twigs of rowan, preferably bound with red string, or clover, which

¹⁴ Hutchings lists also several rationalist explanations for the belief that green is unlucky, such as “the stomachache that comes after eating green meat or unripe green fruit”. Others are: “green is the colour of the churchyard”, “the green gown symboliz[es] the loss of virginity”. Yet another explanation might be “the ease and cheapness of dyeing cloth green and brown (...)[making green and brown] the dress of the poorest of the population”. In addition, the legend of green-skinned river fairies is explained through “the presence of the giant green duckweed, *Lemna minor*, which covers large stretches of water and is dangerous to step on” (all quotations: Hutchings 1997, 60).

is supposed to help humans see through fairy glamour, while ash twigs were used to protect cattle against fairy-induced illnesses.¹⁵ Moreover, the sound of church bells is sometimes said to be disagreeable to fairies, even though some types of fairies, e.g. the fairy ladies of medieval romance, are not infrequently presented as Christians. Turning one's clothes or at least a pocket inside out was said to help as well, representing a change of identity that apparently confused fairies. The most well-known weapon against fairies, however, is probably 'cold iron', for example in the form of horseshoes over doorframes. The reasons for the belief in the power of iron are not clear but two explanations seem to offer themselves. On the one hand, it might be assumed that fairies live in so close accord with nature that they fear the iron plough which injures the untouched earth sacred to them – such an explanation would put the fairies close to an eco-romanticism associated e.g. also with Native Americans. On the other hand, the idea that fairies might actually be a memory of an early people of Britain who had not yet learned the extraction and use of iron might explain their fear of it – they were driven to the fringes of civilization by more advanced tribes who used weapons made of iron.

But can fairies be killed, even by weapons made of iron? Fairy mortality is yet another debatable issue. One assumption seems to be that they are immortal – which might make sense if one assumes that fairies are the spirits of the dead anyway (for theories about fairy origin see below). Elvish immortality seems to be implied whenever accounts speak of fairies versus mortals (= humans). A variant of this assumption seems to be that elves could be killed in battle but not die a natural death. In some accounts, however, even this is only possible when there is a mortal present. Another hypothesis seems to be that they are extremely long-lived but eventually mortal. C. S. Lewis calls them *longaevi* (*longaevus* = 'aged', 'very old') in *The Discarded Image*, taking the term from 5th century author Martianus Capella's *De Nuptiis Mercurii et Philologiae*, a text-book introduction to philosophy and mythology, which speaks of "dancing companies of Longaevi who haunt woods, glades, and groves, and lakes and springs and brooks" (cited in Lewis 1967, 122) and who might be nymphs as well as fairies.

But even if one holds with Lewis's view that fairies are indeed mortal, descriptions of fairy funerals are nevertheless a rarity. One famous example is William Blake's account, quoted by Allen Cunningham in his *Lives of Eminent British Painters and Sculptors*: "I saw a procession of creatures the size and colour of green and grey grasshoppers, bearing a body laid out on a rose leaf, which they buried with songs and then disappeared. It was a fairy

¹⁵ It is interesting to note that red, which was another typical fairy colour, was thought to help protect people against them.

funeral” (1831, vol II, 137). Similar events are reported by folklorists like Robert Kirk or Leigh Hunt (Briggs 1976, 145) but are not very numerous.

Even though fairies in general seem to be extremely long-lived, they are not always endowed with eternal youth and beauty – quite the contrary: many are described as wizened and ugly. But fairies are “masters of glamour and shape-shifting” (Briggs 1959, 14) – which to a large extent explains why they are associated with beauty and hideousness at once. Certainly, there are fairy types that are generally connected with beauty (the fairy ladies of medieval romance, the alluring mermaids, the ethereal flower fairies) and others with ugliness (such as grotesque goblins, withered hags and malformed changelings). But appearances are deceptive – a statement which seems to be especially true for female fairies. Beautiful fairy maidens may have hidden defects, such as the already mentioned cow-tails or hollow backs. Others, alluring and apparently endowed with eternal youth, appear ugly and withered as soon as a mortal manages to see through their glamour e.g. by applying a magic ointment.¹⁶ Also the fairy palace is frequently revealed as an old hut or a miserable cave – or vanishes altogether when the glamour is destroyed. On the other hand, there is also the reverse possibility – the motif of the ‘hag transformed’, popular in fairy tales and referring to a seemingly revolting old fairy woman changing into a beautiful maiden as soon as a spell is removed or a heroic task completed.

It seems that fairy beauty exerts a considerable fascination on modern authors – small wonder in a world where looks are as important as our present one. In this context it is interesting how, with regard to fairies, beauty and class are related – in folklore as well as modern literary fantasy the beautiful fairies are usually the aristocratic ones and the lower classes appear more grotesque. So it might be asked what function the beautiful fairies have for modern readers? Do they serve as figures of identification?¹⁷ This can probably only be the case if the fairies are presented as at least partly good characters – and not as evil as they are portrayed in many folkloristic accounts. The chapters of this study dedicated to the analysis of several fairy novels will hopefully provide some answers here. It might also be interesting to investigate the notion that fairy beauty may sometimes be as false as human beauty assisted by surgery and make-up. Is this reflected in modern fantasy literature or has fairy beauty become stable to serve as an ideal counterweight to defective human beauty? There seem to be two tendencies: on the one hand, there are indeed unchangingly beautiful

¹⁶ In the romance “Thomas of Erceldoune” the lovely queen of the fairies turns into a withered old woman as soon as she has had sex with a mortal and her beauty can only be restored by a return to Fairyland. This will be discussed in more detail in the chapter on traditional ballads.

¹⁷ Here one might also think of modern live-action-role-play as a context where identification with fairies and elves certainly takes place.

elves in the more strongly Tolkienesque works of fantasy. On the other hand, other works that are more strongly influenced by British folklore, tend to feature shape-changing or even permanently ugly elves.

It seems worthwhile also to investigate fairy sexuality and gender issues and their change over the centuries. In folklore, fairies are generally connected with strong sexual forces. They, especially the heroic fairies, are frequently presented as amorous and the tales about sexual unions between fairies and humans are numerous, both of men being seduced by fairy women and women by fairy men. The connection between the fairy queens of folklore/romance literature and amorousness has been judged differently by scholars. On the one hand, as an expression of male fears of and fascination with uncontrollable female power and excessive sexuality (Purkiss 2000a, 103) and on the other hand, as an expression of male fantasies about relationships characterised by equality of man and woman (Lundt 1996).

But not only the aristocrats among the fairies are reported to have affairs with humans. The different kinds of water- and sea-fairies are just as notorious for their interest in men and women. Also the smaller and uglier types of fairies are sometimes said to pursue amorous intentions – but they may be sometimes conflated with dwarfs who abduct human women.

What remains puzzling, however, is that although fairies are connected with fertility – they are said to appear e.g. at human births – they themselves are usually not presented as fertile. There seem to be few fairy children and their mothers do not seem to be very adept in handling them. Numerous folkloristic accounts report the stealing of healthy human babies to replenish the waning fairy population and of nursing mothers to suckle fairy babies as well as the fairies' need for human midwives.

Another aspect which, however, does not seem to be rooted so much in folklore but rather in the later development of fairies (especially in the nineteenth century) is their androgyny. In twentieth century popular culture male fairies are frequently presented as ambiguous creatures respecting their gender – such as the long-haired and always well-groomed elves in the film version of *The Lord of the Rings*. Moreover, one modern meaning of fairy is 'male homosexual'. This is a relatively recent addition to the many meanings of fairy, stemming from the nineteenth century. In the 1890s, American homosexuals founded e.g. the "Fairies of New York", listed by the *American Journal of Psychology* as one of the "peculiar societies of inverts" (Scott 1896, 216) where men met to amuse themselves with "coffee-clatches, where the members dress themselves with aprons, etc., and knit, gossip and crotchet; [and] balls, where men adopt the ladies' evening dress" (ibid.). In the last decades

more than one Tolkien parody (e.g. *Bored of the Rings*) has made playful use of the connection between elves and homosexuality.

Fairies and change – this is another important aspect worth investigating. For they are frequently linked with change and transition. First of all, in both folklore and literature humans encounter fairies frequently in phases of change and transition:

A fairy is someone who appears at and governs one of the big crises of mortal life(...). She presides over the borders of our lives, the seams between one phase of life and another. She attends christenings and stages funerals, organizes first party-dresses and lays dead kings to rest. (...) She is a gatekeeper, and she guards the entrance to a new realm. (Purkiss 2000b, 4)

Often the people who encounter fairies (at least in literature, less so in folklore), are outsiders of society and are maybe therefore more willing to strive for development: “people who seek change seek [them] out: adventurers, knights-errant, Romantic poets and artists” (ibid.). In modern-day fantasy, too, it is often the marginalized, ex-centric person, who is more likely to meet fairies or similar beings than socially integrated people. There is certainly a connection between outsiders tending to withdraw into lonely places and outsiders encountering fairies, for fairies tend to patronize lonely places, removed from daily human business. Often these places could be called liminal, for example moors or coasts, which are situated on the border of two elements. But also abandoned gardens, marking the border between wilderness and civilisation, are places where encounters with fairies are frequently staged in folklore and literature.

Finally, the relationship of fairies to nature should also be looked at, since at least some of the novels analysed in the later chapters take this issue into account. With the exception of the splendidly civilised fairy queens and the rest of the heroic fairies, it might be said that fairies in general are often closely associated with wild nature, often acting as guardians of lakes, hills or trees. Small wonder then that in recent years fairies have been used by representatives of the eco-protest movement (see above). Purkiss’s statement that the fairy “guards the entrance into a new realm” (2000b, 4) can also be applied to the eco-protesters, because “on entering a protest camp, one crosses a boundary where different rules come into play” (Letcher 2001, 155). The protest camps of the 1990s had constructed their own eclectic culture, composed of elements from “Wicca and Druidry, the New Age, Buddhism and theosophy (...) anarchist politics, feminism, and 1960s psychedelia” (ibid., 148), complete with a fairy-mythology. The protesters being strongly inclined towards orality, many fairy stories circulated in the protest camps. In protest-camp ideology “the fairies or pixie folk and the protesters are part of the natural order of things, part of the natural force of green growth which will make Eden reborn again” (ibid., 151). The use of the fairy-mythology goes hand in hand with a romanticising of the English countryside, even though this countryside is actually

the product of hundreds of years of cultivation and not the primeval Eden the protesters made it out to be. In general, the relationship between fairies and nature is probably equally complex as the interplay of nature and civilisation in their function as shaping forces of the English countryside and cannot be analysed in detail here. An interesting thought however, is the fact that fairies (as forces of nature) started to lose their threatening power when men managed to achieve more and more control about the wilderness, i.e., from early modern times on (Purkiss 2000b). It is curious, though, that the ‘farewell of the fairies’ (i.e., the fairies leaving this world because it has become unbearable for them to live there) is actually a very old topic in fairy literature, at least as old as *The Wife of Bath’s Tale*, where the narrator indirectly blames the disappearance of the fairies on the spreading of Christianity. During Romanticism the country’s increasing industrialisation was made out as the culprit and in the nostalgia for the vanishing of rural life and ‘wild’ nature a nostalgia for ‘the vanishing people’ (Briggs, 1978) became included, a tendency that can also be found in later works of fairy literature, especially J.R.R. Tolkien’s.

The origin of fairy beliefs

Having introduced the most important characteristics of fairies in folklore and literature and having provided a general idea of the richness of British fairy-lore, it remains to ask: where did the belief in fairies originate at all? Who or what are the fairies? There are various theories about the origin of fairies, both ‘folk theories’ by which the rural people of Britain and other countries tried to account for the ‘Good Neighbours’ as well as scientific theories, developed by folklorists. As the scientific study of fairies had its heyday during the nineteenth century, many theories of the second group date from this era. Carole Silver suggests two large groups of theories (including both folk theories and scientific theories): a religious group and a scientific group. I think her distinction is useful for broadly categorizing the numerous explanations, even though some of them cannot be easily placed in only one category. The basic assumption behind all theories grouped as ‘religious’ is that “fairies are spiritual beings or, at the very least, that they have originated in realms beyond the material” (Silver 1999, 36), while the ‘scientific’ views hold that “fairies or their prototypes ha[ve], in some sense, originated on this earth” (ibid. 43) – so maybe the two groups could also be called *spiritual* and *material* theories, respectively.

Religious/spiritual theories

1. Fairies are fallen angels who did not take sides in the struggle between God and Lucifer or were trapped on earth during Lucifer’s fall. Some fell on land and some in the sea

and thus became land fairies and sea fairies, respectively. This was a popular folk theory, examples of which were recorded for instance by nineteenth century folklorists like Lady Wilde (Ireland) and W. Y. Evans-Wentz (Scottish Highlands).

2. Another folk theory, also very common, is that fairies are the dead who were neither good enough for salvation nor bad enough for damnation. Here, besides the general view, several sub-groups exist:

2a. They are the souls of unchristened children

2b. They are the souls of those who died before their time

2c. They are the dead awaiting reincarnation

2d. They are the souls of “long-dead, pagan or extinct races” (Silver 1999, 36).

Ancient Pagans were, because they were unbaptised, not thought good enough for heaven, but, since Christianity had not then existed, they were neither thought bad enough for hell.¹⁸ This theory is also one considered by folklorists – Briggs calls it “one of the most well-supported ones” (1976, 393), calling on Lewis Spence’s *British Fairy Origins* (1946) as the chief reference work for this theory. And indeed, a number of reasons (cf. Silver 1999, 41f. and Briggs 1967, 52) can be found that make this theory plausible, for the fairies and the dead actually share many characteristics. Both live in subterranean places (not all fairies do, but many), and fairies do in fact often inhabit pre-historic burial places. Both are often active at night. It is possible to summon them by striking the ground. They are confined to one place or even to one family home (in case of the fairies this is not always true, only for fairies doing household chores or warning families of deaths (brownies and banshees)). Their realms are characterised by timelessness or at least a different count of time. They try to lure mortals into their realms and people who claim to have visited Fairyland sometimes report to have seen dead relatives and friends among the fairies, while encounters with fairies on this earth sometimes take place at graveyards. Both fairies and the dead can be placated by offerings of food or milk or gifts and both were said to rule over fertility. Moreover, a subgroup of the trooping fairies, called host of the air, sluagh, the slaugh, or the wild hunt were only regarded as fairies in some parts of Britain, while in others the Host was believed to consist of the dead, especially the evil dead. And even the small size often attributed to fairies can be reconciled with the view that fairies are the dead since in traditional iconography, classic or medieval, souls are often portrayed as small human-shaped figures escaping from the mouth of the deceased. Moreover, some apparitions are sometimes regarded as fairies, sometimes as ghosts – such as the Will o’ the Wisp (the *ignis fatuus*): it is sometimes thought to be a fairy,

¹⁸ In Dante’s *Divine Comedy* these kinds of people are found in the ante-chambers of hell, thus they are also somewhere in between – but closer to hell than to heaven.

sometimes thought to be the ghost of a usurer or a man too clever for the devil. Another example would be the brownies and other household spirits, who can be seen as fairies or as ghosts of dead servants. Thus, it can be said with some justification that “the distinction between the fairies and the dead is vague and shifting” (Briggs 1967, 51).

3. Two other folk theories, related to each other, but seemingly not very widely spread, hold that fairies are children of the first biblical men. They are thus not exactly spirits, but maybe these theories can nevertheless be placed among religious views since they are closely connected to religious lore.

3a. In one version fairies are the children of Adam and Lilith, his apocryphal first wife. This view is held particularly in Norwegian lore about fairies, there called *tusse*, as collected e.g. by J. Skar in 1903:

Then the *tusse* said, “That woman, who was created in the very beginning, was Adam’s equal in every way, and would never be under him in anything. She considered herself as just as good a creation as he. But God said that it wasn’t good for man and woman to be equal, and so he sent her and her offspring away, and put them into the hills to live. They are without sin, and they stay there inside the hills, except when they want to be seen,” he said. “But in the second chapter, God took a rib out of Adam’s side and made a woman out of it, and then Adam said, ‘*This time*,’ because she was taken out of the man. Her offspring have sin, and that’s why God had to give them the New Testament. The *tusse*-folk only need the Old.”

3b. In another version they are the hidden children of Adam and Eve. Behind this view, to be found also in Norse folklore, lies the following tale:

Eve went on to have a multitude of children after Cain, Abel, and Seth. She had so many children, even in her years in which women stop bearing, that she was ashamed. When God asked to meet all her children, she brought out a flock of them, but left quite a few behind because she was embarrassed. God understood, but felt hurt, and he said the children she was hiding from him would always be hidden from her. The missing children were then transformed into faeries, or *haug*-folk. (Skar, 1903)¹⁹

Another version of this legend (*Collier’s Encyclopedia* 1986, 536) tells that God came to visit Adam and Eve and since Eve had washed and dressed only about half of her children when God arrived she told the others to run and hide away, and in consequence those became the *huldre*, that is, the hidden people.

4. Fairies are elemental spirits, as they were first mentioned by the Neo-Platonists of the 3rd century A. D. and described in detail by Paracelsus in the sixteenth century (see below). The view that fairies are elementals was held by several groups of nineteenth century spiritualist groups, such as Rosicrucians and Theosophists. As evolutionary biology developed, the idea of ‘psychic evolution’ arose and fairies/elementals were analysed and categorised in evolutionary diagrams, such as that of C.W. Leadbeater, placing gnomes,

¹⁹ The references were to J. Skar’s “The Origin of the Huldre Folk: The Huldre Minister” in *Gamalt fra Setesdal* and Odegard’s “The Origin of the Huldre Folk: The Hidden Children of Eve” in *Gamal Tru og Gamal Skjik ifraa Valdres* as sources. The theory about Eve’s hidden children is also mentioned by Katherine Briggs in her article on fairies in *Collier’s Encyclopaedia* (1986).

'surface fairies', fire-spirits and sylphs on an evolutionary ladder parallel to insects, reptiles and birds. The various spiritualist groups believed fairies to be real, yet subhuman and not possessed of human intelligence (Silver 1999, 57), a view that would eventually make fairies a rather insignificant part of life on earth.

5. After these theories that all more or less seem to accept fairies as entities in their own right, a last theory reckoned by Silver among the group of religious views proposes that fairies are folk memories of ancient faiths, relics of decayed pagan gods or local English deities. Briggs contends that this theory can only account for some of the fairies, e.g. for the Irish Daoine Sidh, for "a few of the more primitive spirits such as the Cailleach Bheur, the Hag of Winter, Black Annis and so on" (1976, 394) and for tree and water spirits. However, it seems to me that the theory is no less comprehensive than the others. If one includes ancestor-worship within the range of ancient faiths (which puts this theory of course close to the one regarding fairies as the dead), then the theory can also account for household fairies and probably also for phenomena like the fairy host and so on.

Scientific views

Silver identifies three 'schools' among the Victorian folklorists who held 'scientific' views on fairy origins: the mythological-linguistic school, the comparative-anthropological school, and the historical-realist or euhemerist school. The latter two seem, with modifications, to have lasted into the twentieth century, while the first view seems to have been abandoned by modern-day folklorists.

1. Mythological-linguistic view: This view is connected with the name of Max Müller and had its heyday between 1856 and the 1880s. Its basic premise was that all myth and all supernatural beings are reflections of celestial phenomena (sun, lightning, thunder, stars, moon etc.). It assumed that primitive people try to express their experiences with these phenomena through language. Later myth originates in one people misunderstanding the language or metaphors of earlier peoples and so "the barbarous features of fairy lore [are] explained as poetic, metaphoric phrases from early human mythopoeic thinking" (Silver 1999, 44), expressing for example "early man's view of the conflict between night and day or wind and calm" (ibid.). George W. Cox, Müller's disciple thought that fairies were to be "associated with the stars; their origins are to be found in stellar phenomena" (ibid.).

2. Comparative-anthropological view: This group, associated with Andrew Lang, Alfred Nutt, Edwin Sidney Hartland, etc., holds similar contentions as the first group – again the attempt of primitive people to come to terms with the basic and often inexplicable phenomena of daily life is seen as the core of fairy belief. But the focus here is not so much

on linguistics, moreover, myths are not necessarily read as mistakes or distortions. The comparative-anthropological school was, as the name indicates, inspired by Victorian anthropology. One influence was the theory of animism – the personification of nature and the perception of its manifestations (plants, rivers, mountains, the weather etc.) as living. Another was the idea of ‘survivals’, – as propagated by E.B. Tylor – the idea that animistic beliefs and primitive myths can still be found among simple people of present times.²⁰

One example how the promoters of this theory accounted for incidents common to folklore is their explanation for the stories telling of a fairy man ravishing a mortal woman or those describing a mortal man’s conquest of a supernatural bride. They are said to mirror the practice of marriage by capture. Connected with these assumptions is the belief that the stories were told by tribes that had attained a higher level of development, about more primitive tribes among whom such crude practices were still common.

3. Historical-realist or euhemerist view: The view of this group seems to have been rather popular and is still often cited today. It assumes that fairies were early inhabitants of Britain, probably dark-skinned and of low height, who were driven to the brinks of civilisation by other peoples invading the British Isles. Similarly, Irish folk theory holds that the Irish fairies are the *Tuatha De Danaan* (People of the Goddess Dana), who were driven into hiding when the Celts invaded Ireland. There were, however, several opinions about who those early people may have been. Early proponents of this theory contended that they were either Druids hiding underground from Christian persecution or a group of early Irish invaders. Later on the hypothesis (put forth e.g. by John Campbell of Islay and John Rhys) that they were the conquered British aborigines gained favour. Still other researchers of folklore, such as Sir Walter Scott, Jacob Grimm, Sabine Baring-Gould, George Laurence Gomme and Frederic T. Hall, speculated that the people behind the fairies were Laplanders, a dark-skinned, Mongolian people that had come over from Scandinavia. Finally, building on the work of his predecessors, David MacRitchie developed his famous “pygmy theory” (1890), which held that fairies were a memory of an ancient, dwarf-like, non-Aryan race that had settled Europe before the Indo-Europeans arrived. MacRitchie also believed that some members of those primitive people may have been “half-domesticated” (Briggs 1976, 394), doing chores for more developed tribes and thus laying the foundations for the belief in

²⁰ “When a custom, an art or an opinion is fairly started in the world, disturbing influences may long affect it so slightly that it may keep its course from generation to generation, as a stream once settled in its bed will flow on for ages. (...) an idea, the meaning of which has perished ... may continue to exist, simply because it has existed” (Tylor, 1924, 70). This phenomenon, Tylor writes, is known by the name *superstition*, but since this word had by his day become negatively connoted, he coined the term *survivals* for the phenomenon described above.

brownies and similar spirits. The belief that fairies can be frightened away by iron objects, can, as mentioned earlier, also be explained by this theory: the human beings who became fairies were Stone-Age or Bronze-Age people, who had no knowledge of working iron and were eventually conquered by the peoples who had. Similarly as with the theory of psychic evolution, the view of fairies as remains of an old primitive people robbed them of their glamour and superiority (Silver 1999, 50).

Medical theory

Yet another theory that offers a scientific explanation for the stories told about fairies is a medical one. This seems to be a rather recent addition to the theory corpus and, certainly, some of its assumptions could only be made in the twentieth century, when medical knowledge about congenital diseases became available. This theory explains fairies, especially fairy changelings, as results of certain congenital disorders or malnutrition and neglect of young children. The traditional changeling stories tell how the fairies robbed healthy human children and replaced them by sickly-looking fairy-changelings. The typical appearance of a changeling – small, wrinkled, always hungry but never really growing, etc. – is linked by Susan Schoon-Eberly to certain congenital diseases. These can for instance be physiological malformations, which physically inhibit digestion or “metabolic disorders which prevent a child from metabolising essential nutrients” (1997, 236) and thus produce the symptoms of never-ceasing hunger and failure of growth typically found in changeling stories. Also other hereditary illnesses such as Hunter’s or Hurler’s syndrome (the former resulting in wide-eyed, pretty elf-like children, the latter in somewhat goblin-like children with a squat stature and a lot of body hair) and several forms of dwarfism are linked to stories about fairies and dwarfs (ibid. 237-8). Furthermore, stories about solitary or domestic fairies such as pookhas or brownies are linked to the existence of mentally retarded and probably also physically deformed humans, who might either have lived apart from society or might have attached themselves to households doing menial services in exchange for food and lodging (ibid. 242).

Summing up, it can be said that the theories about the fairies’ origins seem to be almost as numerous as the variants of fairies themselves, representing folk beliefs of several regions and different times. For example the idea of fairies as the dead dates perhaps from pre-Christian times, while the notion of fairies as fallen angels is definitely Christian (Briggs 1976, 319). All of them, however, can explain some of the characteristics ascribed to the fairies. The same is true for the scientific assumptions. Therefore, one might agree with Briggs, who, with regard to three theories considered by folklorists (the fairies as the dead, as

a primitive race and as dwindled gods) sagely remarks: “On the whole we may say that it is unwise to commit oneself blindfold to any solitary theory of the origins of fairy belief, but that it is most probable that these are all strands in a tightly twisted cord” (1976, 394).

Blurred boundaries: related figures from folklore and mythology

While it is sometimes hard to tell what fairies are and where they have come from, then it is often no less easy to define what they are not. Since folklore and the mythologies of different cultures tend to mix throughout the centuries – aided not least by writers of literature – the distinctions between fairies/elves and other supernatural beings have become blurred. To facilitate orientation in this labyrinth of names and concepts I have assembled a – by no means comprehensive – list of cover-terms, indiscriminately used for fairies and other creatures, followed by an overview of related ‘species’, explaining in how far they resemble fairies and where they differ from them.

Cover-terms: spirits, demons, monsters

These three terms are more or less frequently used with reference to fairies but also with regard to other supernatural creatures. I think, therefore, a clarification of the core-meanings of these words is needed before the more specific terms can be investigated.

Spirits: *Spirit* seems to be the most comprehensive term, being used indiscriminately for fairies, elementals, ghosts and other supernatural beings. The earliest English uses of the word (dating from 1250) are mainly derived from passages in the Bible, referring for example to creation and here denoting “the animating or vital principle in man (and animals); that which gives life to the physical organism, in contrast to its purely material elements; the breath of life” (*OED*, 1989).

The meaning relevant here, however, is one given in the *OED* only at third position, namely “a supernatural, incorporeal, rational being or personality, usually regarded as imperceptible at ordinary times to the human senses, but capable of becoming visible at pleasure, and freq. conceived as troublesome, terrifying, or hostile to mankind”. It is in this meaning that *spirit*, often also in its reduced form *sprite* (which is now regarded as obsolete by the *OED*), is used for fairies. However, *spirit* has one more meaning that connects it with the fairies, for it can also refer to “the disembodied soul of a (deceased) person, regarded as a separate entity” (*OED*, 1989), which would support the view that fairies should be equated with the souls of the dead. But the immateriality implied by *spirit* does not agree with all descriptions of fairies, many appear rather material and embodied. Admittedly, some fairies are reported to employ humans to lift things for them for them because they cannot do this on

grounds of being immaterial, but this does not seem to be a common trait. One should also recall the definition in the *Dictionary of English Folklore*, describing fairies as “non-human yet material beings” (2000, 115), so the corporeality of fairies is probably yet another one of their disputable traits.

Demons: The use of the term *demon* seems to be closely related to that of *spirit*, however, over the centuries it seems to have acquired a qualifying connotation, namely that of evil. According to the *OED* a demon in ancient Greek mythology would originally denote, rather neutrally, a “supernatural being of a nature intermediate between that of gods and men; an inferior divinity, spirit, genius (including the souls or ghosts of deceased persons, *esp.* deified heroes). Sometimes, particularly, an attendant, ministering, or indwelling spirit; a genius”.

The demons seem to share their intermediate position with the fairies and also their vilification through Christianity (which often also brought along the mixing-up of fairies and demons). In a Christian context, *demon* came to refer to “an evil spirit (...) [and was] applied to the idols or gods of the heathen, and to the ‘evil’ or ‘unclean spirits’ by which demoniacs were possessed or actuated” (*OED*, 1989). Also in general current use, the negative connotation remains, for *demon* in modern usage denotes “an evil spirit; a malignant being of superhuman nature; a devil” (*OED*, 1989).

Monsters: It seems that the original meaning of the term *monster* is the narrowest of the three analysed so far, for “it denoted a mythical creature which is part animal and part human, or combines elements of two or more animal forms, and is frequently of great size and ferocious appearance“ (*OED*, 1989). Famous monsters that correspond to this definition are e.g. the centaur, the sphinx, the Minotaur, the hydra, Scylla, the sirens, the griffin, Lamia. Later, however, the meaning was expanded, coming to denote “any imaginary creature that is large, ugly, and frightening“, so that it has become a kind of hypernym for a great number of supernatural beings. With regard to the attributes “large, ugly, frightening“, Katherine Briggs is justified in reckoning giants and dragons among the monsters of British folklore and also various other creatures that stand out especially through their deformity, having missing or misplaced parts of body, no skin or no shape at all. With regard to the hybrid nature of the monster, some creatures reckoned to be fairies are also monsters, such as the mermaids with their human/fish body, Melusine with her serpent-tail and the glaistig, a Highland water spirit, often described as half-woman and half-goat and it should be recalled that Briggs even counts monsters as one sub-category of fairies.

Having clarified a few important generic terms I will now investigate various creatures that in many respects are like fairies but are no fairies. Often they have their origins in the mythologies of other cultures and were only later ‘imported’ to the British Isles, there to mix and mingle with the ‘native’ fairy population. One group (imps, familiars, incubi and succubae) is connected to early modern witch-trials, during which stories about fairies and stories about devils were frequently treated as identical. A last group, the elementals, are more or less the brain-children of one author, Paracelsus (although they were just elaborately described and not invented by him), but are in many ways close to the fairies and have often been equated with them.

From Classical mythology: Lares, nymphs, sirens, satyrs, fauns...

Mythological beings from classical antiquity seem to be important ancestors of the fairies. Some kinds of fairies may have developed from ancestral spirits like the Lares, other from the Parcae, as already mentioned, and yet others from nature divinities such as nymphs and fauns (Harf-Lancner 1984). This mixed ancestry may account for the mixed characteristics of fairies, e.g. the tendency of female fairies to be influential on people’s fate (Parcae) and amorous (nymphs) at the same time. Later, the fairies became explicitly mixed up with their ‘ancestors’. While the Lares seem to have been mixed up with the fairies at the time of Reformation, where almost all supernatural creatures, be they Celtic, Roman or other in origin, were equated with devils, the mixing of other characters from classical mythology with figures from English folklore started already during the Renaissance, when poets, rediscovering classical antiquity, brought together different strands of tradition (Briggs 1967, 174).

Lares: These figures from Roman mythology are defined as “household or ancestral deit[ies]” (*OED*, 1989), they are believed to be spirits of the dead of a family. Therefore, they are connected with one household and they are – probably because the dead were formerly buried around the hearth by certain tribes in the Roman Empire – regarded as guardians of the household fire.²¹ They were worshipped at house altars where offerings of food and drink were placed. The brownies of English folklore are related to the Lares in so far as they devote themselves to the service of one house and like to receive gifts of meal or milk and J.A. MacCulloch observes that “the family ghost has become a brownie, lutin, or pooka, haunting the hearth and doing the household work” (1911, 167). Fairies differ from the Lares in that

²¹ About the Celts of France, J.A. MacCulloch writes: “The cult of the dead culminated at the family hearth, around which the dead were even buried, as among the Aeduii [a celtic tribe, situated in Mid-France]; this latter custom may have been general” and a custom probably also among Italian tribes (MacCulloch 1911, 166).

they are not bound to one household and can leave if they are not content with their current abode (Briggs 1967, 38). Interestingly, there were also Lares as patrons of streets and especially crossroads, the *lares compitales* (from Latin *compita* = ‘crossroads’) – another parallel to fairies who were connected with crossroads, too. (Although this is not so surprising after all, if one assumes that the fairies may indeed have evolved from ancestor spirits like the Lares.)

Nymphs: These exclusively female nature spirits have their origin in Greek mythology. Originally, nymphs were just maidens of marriageable age, only later the term came to refer to “one of a numerous class of semi-divine beings, imagined as beautiful maidens inhabiting the sea, rivers, fountains, hills, woods, or trees” (*OED*, 1989). The nymphs are more or less ubiquitous, inhabiting all kinds of biotopes, a characteristic they share with the fairies.

In literature nymphs are often introduced as attendants on a superior deity (*OED*, 1989), the gods they are most frequently associated with being Artemis, Dionysos and Pan. The nymphs are seen as personifications of the creative and fostering activities of nature. In that they seem to resemble the Victorian flower fairies which were sometimes thought to “make a plant bulb grow, absorbing something from the atmosphere, reentering the tissue of the plant, and discharging what they have absorbed“ (Silver 1999, 56).

The nymphs are thought of as extremely long-lived – they are allowed to eat the food of the gods, ambrosia (Purkiss 2000b, 39), but they are mortal. Thus, they are border-creatures, quite like the fairies, positioned between gods and humans. Since they are usually thought of as perpetually young women, they might be said to be ‘stuck in the middle’ in more than one way, since they are eternally in the phase of transition from girl to woman. This aspect can also be found in one of the derived meanings of the word nymph in English, i.e., “an insect in that stage of development which intervenes between the larva and the imago; a pupa” (*OED*, 1989). (Here they differ from fairies, among whom full-grown women are not unusual, e.g. the fairy queens of medieval romance.) Yet, even though the nymph herself might have been immune to change, at least her image in Greek folklore seems to have changed over the centuries. While during classical antiquity nymphs were reputed to be benign foster-mothers of children that were given in their care, in modern Greek folklore nymphs are frequently presented as child-stealers, a trait in which they again resemble the fairies.²²

²² This change is explained by Diane Purkiss (2000b, 46) as a possible result of lower rates of child-abandonment today. She assumes that in former times there was need to invent mythical foster-mothers to relieve the consciences of parents who abandoned their children. Today, the nymphs are not given children

But on the whole the nymphs are reported to be benevolent towards humans, though it seems that sometimes they have the desire to make others ‘stuck’ as well, so the nymph Calypso keeps Odysseus on her island for nine long years and his condition there is compared to a life-in-death or death-in-life state (Purkiss 2000b, 39). The nymphs that capture (young) men are also part of folklore and in this not unlike the fairy queens of medieval French and English literature or the mermaids of English folklore.

Sirens: Another mythic creature famed for enchanting men is the siren. And while the nymph’s abduction was not necessarily fatal for the man, the lure of the siren usually was. Sirens are described as creatures of half-bird/half-human shape, who enthrall men by their singing. “According to Homer there were two Sirens on an island in the western sea between Aea and the rocks of Scylla. Later the number was usually increased to three, and they were located on the west coast of Italy, near Naples” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, 2007). Odysseus alone is able to resist them; other sailors must perish on the rocks of their islands. In their destructiveness towards sailors the sirens are clearly related to the malicious version of the mermaid.

Satyrs and fauns: The *OED* defines a satyr as “one of a class of woodland gods or demons, in form partly human and partly bestial, supposed to be the companions of Bacchus”. The satyrs are part of Greek mythology, they are exclusively male, a sort of counterpart to the nymphs, and are represented as men with horse ears and tails. They were later blended with the Roman fauns, who derive their name from a Roman god, Faunus, worshipped by shepherds and farmers (often equated with Pan). They are characterized by the ears, tail, horns and legs of a goat. Both are notorious lechers and the satyrs are infamous for their chasing of nymphs. They seem to be related to nature fairies in so far as they are connected with a special natural habitat – woodlands – and Briggs sees some parallels between Puck and the satyrs, since they share certain features of outward appearance (1967, 174).

From Scandinavian and Teutonic mythology: trolls, giants, dwarfs

Trolls: Trolls are clearly of Scandinavian origin, however, the definition that the *OED* offers, seems a bit confusing in itself, at least with regard to outward appearance: a troll is “one of a race of supernatural beings formerly conceived as giants, now, in Denmark and

freely anymore, so they have taken to stealing them. I think this argument is rather speculative, at least it does not seem to hold when other areas that have child-stealing creatures in their mythology (such as the British Isles) are taken into account. It is to be assumed that in Anglo-Saxon countries child-abandonment has also been higher once and decreased over time. Yet, here, fairies have always been child-stealers but if one takes Purkiss’s theory seriously they should not.

Sweden, as dwarfs or imps”.²³ Thus, concerning size, it seems that trolls share with the fairies the astonishing flexibility. But in contrast to fairies who have beautiful and ugly individuals among their ranks, trolls are almost always described as ugly and often portrayed with big noses, long arms and a hairy body (in that they resemble of course certain kinds of fairies, especially the different variants of goblins). There is, however, also a direct connection between trolls and fairies in the folklore of Shetland and Orkney, where malicious fairies called ‘trows’ are, at least etymologically speaking, directly derived from the trolls (due to the Norse dialect formerly spoken on these islands).

Trolls, especially the giant-sized ones, are frequently described as rather stupid but strong and brutal and often with a liking for human flesh. They are “supposed to inhabit caves or subterranean dwellings” (*OED*, 1989), and are also sometimes mentioned as guardians of bridges, a task that is complicated by their stupidity, for example in the classic children’s tale *The Three Billygoats Gruff*: the troll in this tale is defeated by the three goats, which are smarter than him. Maybe there is a connection between trolls and fairies in regard to their function as guardians of crossroads. The great weakness of trolls is that they often turn to stone in sunlight. Therefore they share with many fairies an inclination towards nocturnal activities. Trolls entered English language and literature only in the nineteenth century and have since then been popularized mainly by writers of fantasy and children’s literature.

Dwarfs: According to the *OED* dwarfs are “a supposed race of diminutive beings, who figure in Teutonic and esp. Scandinavian mythology and folk-lore; often identified with the elves, and supposed to be endowed with special skill in working metals, etc.”. Here the connection to the fairies is already made in the dictionary definition and indeed, also Briggs finds many figures in English fairy lore that resemble dwarfs, even though “it is doubtful if they were ever explicitly called dwarfs” (1976, 115), such as the spriggans of Cornwall, and the “wee wee man” of the Child Ballad #38, as well as the North Country duergar (who is also etymologically akin to the dwarfs (*OED*, 1989)).

The most outstanding feature of the dwarfs is of course their size, “some being no more than 18 inches (45 cm) high and others about the height of a two-year-old child” (*Britannica Online*, 2007). They are moreover described as sturdy, hairy and very often as bearded and appearing very old. Thus, unlike other supernatural creatures which are said to be

²³ Thomas Keightley in *The Fairy Mythology* (1870) even equates trolls and dwarfs: “The more usual appellation of the Dwarfs is Troll or Troid, [a] word originally significant of any evil spirit, [b] giant monster, magician [c] or evil person; but now in a good measure divested of its ill senses, for the Trolls are not in general regarded as noxious or malignant beings” (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/celt/tfm/tfm026.htm>), a definition which nicely shows the great confusion of terms with regard to supernatural creatures in general.

extremely long-lived but eventually mortal, e.g. nymphs, dwarfs do not seem to have eternal youth.

Sometimes dwarfs are said to have deformed feet with only four toes or even bird-feet (Petzold 1996, 196). Deformed feet can be read as signs of connections to the underworld, Purkiss remarks, referring to Carlo Ginzburg's observations on the deformed or naked feet of e.g. Oedipus, or priests giving sacrifice with one foot unshod: "(...) odd or anomalous feet produce an odd or anomalous gait, and an odd gait is often a sign of dealings with the underworld" (Purkiss 2000b, 37). And indeed, one theory about the origin of dwarfs claims that they are connected with the dead, since early tales about dwarfs often centre around pre-historic settlements and burial places (Petzold 1996, 196 f.). The association with the dead would of course again connect dwarfs with fairies, as does the other theory about dwarf-origins, which equates them with pre-historic, small aboriginal tribes of their native countries (ibid.). This latter theory might also account for the fact that in latter accounts dwarfs are seldom connected with magic (in contrast, however, to the fairies, to whom the same theory of origin is repeatedly attached), since they are just human beings with some extraordinary skills. They are described as famed miners and smiths and reported to inhabit interiors of mountains and the lower levels of mines. In contrast to the solitary household goblins with whom they are sometimes mixed up, dwarfs are said to live socially, in organized groups, ruled sometimes by kings (Petzold 1996, 196). Great riches as well as love for gold are also part of the dwarf-cliché, legendary wealth being something that is also often mentioned with regard to fairies.

Dwarfs can be hostile to humans and are sometimes said to sabotage human mining. But they are often also reported to be benevolent and helpful, performing labours for men – various weapons of legend were said to have been forged by dwarfs. As with the fairies, humans should be careful not to offend dwarfs for their revenge is said to be terrible (ibid.). Other characteristics connected with dwarfs that can also be found in fairy lore are: stealing of human women, stealing babies and leaving changelings, the need for human midwives, as well as the motif of 'payday' – humans making dwarfs depart by giving them a gift of clothes, which is also part of the brownie tradition.

In view of these many similarities it should come as no surprise that dwarfs are often mixed up with fairies, especially with various types of goblins, a fact that has probably been helped by the indiscriminate use of the word *dwarf* already in Old-High-German, where it served as a kind of portmanteau-term for gobliness creatures of different origins (ibid., 197).

Another ‘species’ often equated with dwarfs are the gnomes of Paracelsian origin (see below). Interestingly, the small figurines for the decoration of the garden, imported from Germany to Great Britain for the first time in the 1860s, are called *garden-gnomes* in Britain but *Gartenzwerge* (= ‘garden dwarfs’) in Germany.

A last interesting trait of the dwarfs is their connection to racism. There can be dwarfs of different skin-colours, at least black and white ones are reported by Briggs (1976, 115) and the connection between dwarfs and foreign races was seized on especially by Victorian researchers and writers, who started to connect newly discovered exotic tribes of small size, such as the Pygmies, to the dwarfs of legend. Thus, these “re-mythified and racialized” (Silver 199, 117) dwarfs were associated with the primitive and the evil – murder, rape, cannibalism – and in the middle of the nineteenth century became favourite monsters of Victorian literature, partly replacing fairies (ibid., 147).

From Slavonic folklore: vampires

The vampire stems from Slavonic tradition and was shaped in its current form only in the nineteenth century by English novelists. It is defined by the *OED* as “a preternatural being of a malignant nature (in the original and usual form of the belief, a reanimated corpse), supposed to seek nourishment, or do harm, by sucking the blood of sleeping persons; a man or woman abnormally endowed with similar habits”. The original idea of a vampire is that of a hideous blood-filled corpse (*Dictionary of English Folklore* 2000, 374) of which there exist some accounts from Medieval and early modern England. The romantic image of the (male) vampire, connected with eternal youth, intelligence and a penchant for young women is an addition of nineteenth century writers.

Vampires are related to fairies in so far as they are thought to be the walking dead – the vampire definitely, while for fairies this is one theory of many. Apart from that fairies and vampires share many habits, not least that of a more or less parasitic life-style: vampires suck blood, while fairies steal cattle and human beings and sometimes seem to suck the life-energy from humans. But the fairies can also be helpful, which is not a trait reported of vampires. Like fairies vampires are thought of as magical. They too are shape-shifters and can appear for instance as a bat, a wolf or a mist. They are moreover believed to be able to control human minds (though only from Victorian times onwards, before they were believed to be dull, almost animal-like beings). With the fairies they also share a tendency towards strict rule-keeping and pedantry. Of both fairies and vampires it is sometimes told that they need an invitation before they can enter a house, and while it is often the bane of the fairies that they must keep any bargain they have agreed on, a vampire can be severely impeded if its way is

strewn with little objects (like rice grains) for it will stop to count them. In contrast to the fairies, vampires seem to dislike crossroads, or are at least said to be made harmless if buried at a crossroads for, even if they should rise from their grave again, they will not know which way to go.

From Arabian mythology: jinn and peris

Jinn: According to the *OED* jinn are, “in Muslim demonology, an order of spirits lower than the angels, said to have the power of appearing in human and animal forms, and to exercise supernatural influence over men”. In this they resemble European fairies. Jinn is actually the plural form, which is, however, often used for a single being. The real singular is jinnee. Jinn were popularized in English literature in the nineteenth century through collections of Arabian fairy tales such as the *The Arabian Nights*.

Peri: A peri is “one of several beautiful but malevolent female demons employed by Ahriman [Ahriman is the chief evil spirit, often equated with the devil, in Zoroastrian teaching] to bring comets and eclipses, prevent rain, cause failure of crops and dearth, etc. (...) In Persian mythology, one of a race of superhuman beings, originally represented as of evil or malevolent character, but subsequently as good genii, fairies, or angels, endowed with grace and beauty. Hence *transf.* ‘a fair one’” (*OED*, 1989). In modern Persian *peri* denotes a beautiful or graceful being, so the term can be compared to the current English usage of *fairy*, yet, the *OED* insists that *peri* has no etymological connection with *fairy*, similar as they may sound.

From witchcraft-beliefs: familiars, imps, incubi and succubae

Familiars: Familiars are “minor demons, who, at Satan’s command, become the servants of a human wizard or witch. It is one of the distinctive features of English witchcraft that these spirits were very often thought to take the form of small animals” (*Dictionary of English Folklore* 2000, 118). Supposed witches claimed to have received their familiars either directly from the devil or to have inherited them from relatives. Reports tell of familiars in form of cats, dogs, toads, mice, rabbits, flies or bumblebees. They could enable the witch to find treasure or do damage to enemies. It was believed that in return for services the witch had to nourish her familiar with her own blood or milk, causing her to grow ‘witch teats’. The fact that they belonged to one household makes familiars similar to household fairies, while their habit to suck milk from humans makes them similar to fairy changelings. The similarities between fairies and familiars is pointed out also by Emma Wilby in her essay about familiars

and fairies in early modern England and Scotland (2000, 283): “there must have been considerable confusion between the two kinds of spirit, particularly on a popular level”.

Familiars were, however, clearly associated with the devil and according to the *Dictionary of English Folklore* “commonly called imps, a word which combines the meanings of ‘child’ and ‘small devil’” (2000, 118).

Imps: Originally denoting a young shoot of a plant or tree, the word *imp* came, via the meaning of child, offspring, eventually to mean “a ‘child’ of the devil, or of hell. a. with parentage expressed: Applied to wicked men, and to petty fiends or evil spirits. b. Hence, with omission of the qualification: A little devil or demon, an evil spirit; esp. in seventeenth c., one of those with which witches were supposed to be familiar; now chiefly in art and mythology” (*OED*, 1989). Imps are equated with witches’ familiars but the term might be broader in meaning. Katherine Briggs (1976, 232) contends that it is hard to distinguish them from goblins and bogles and of course fairies were often believed to be devils anyway. In English literature they were popularized through R.L. Stevenson’s *The Bottle Imp* (1891). This creature is kept in a bottle and fulfils all wishes of his owner, thus showing similarities to both the witch’s familiar and the brownie.

Incubi and succubae: Related to the imp and the familiar are also the incubus and the succubus, in the context of witchcraft thought to be male (incubus) or female (succubus or succuba) demons, which practiced sexual intercourse with witches and wizards. They may be related to fairies in so far as in some folkloristic accounts men reported having very exhausting sex with the queen of the fairies (Purkiss 2000a, 105) and witch-trial accounts of women being seduced by green-clad men (which were usually interpreted as encounters with devils) might just as well be interpreted as encounters with fairies (Purkiss 2000b, 89).

Elementals: gnomes, undines, salamanders, sylphs

The definition given by the *OED* that comes closest to the idea of the elemental as a relative of the fairy is that of “an entity or a force which is regarded by occultists as capable of producing physical manifestations”. However, this is only the view of elementals taken in the nineteenth century. The sixteenth century physician and alchemist Paracelsus may be hailed as the ‘inventor’ of the elementals (even though the idea of them goes back to the Neo-Platonists of the 3rd century AD) and his description of them is much more comprehensive than that found in the *OED*. According to Paracelsus elementals are part of God’s creation and stand between humans and pure spirits. They are made of matter finer than humans and have some supernatural properties, such as being able to move at superhuman speed. They are extremely long-lived but mortal and do not have an immortal soul. There are four groups of

elementals, each connected with one of the four elements: gnomes or 'pygmei' (earth), salamanders (fire), sylphs (air) and undines or nymphs (water). Each group is said to inhabit its accorded element. Since they have no soul, elementals frequently strive for marriage with mortals which would grant them salvation. This desire is ascribed especially to the undines, who are, in outward appearance, also the group that resembles humans most, while the salamanders are said to be extremely long and thin and the gnomes small, misshapen and dwarf-like. The sylphs are described by Paracelsus as stronger and rougher than humans, though in later literary and visual portrayals they are often pretty creatures. The elementals are often mixed up with the fairies of folklore. The line between dwarfs and gnomes is especially hard to draw – both are small, live underground and are said to guard treasures – as is that between undines and the various water-fairies, even though here it can be said that the undines seem to be decidedly benevolent while many water-fairies of folk-belief are at best ambivalent if not downright evil.

Summing up

As this short introduction has hopefully shown, fairies, elves and their like are multifaceted, contradictory creatures. This phenomenon is, as already pointed out earlier in this chapter, very probably the result of their long history and the blending of different local and national popular traditions with high-culture notions about the nature of these beings. Having surveyed the part that (mostly rural) tradition and popular culture played in the creation of fairy lore it will be the task of the next chapters to shed some light on the development of the fairy as a literary figure from her first appearance in medieval romances to the latest 'sightings' in twentieth century fantasy novels. Before, however, the literary history of the fairy will be traced, I want to introduce some basic theoretic concepts and terms pertaining to the study of fantasy literature in general and also fairy literature in particular.

3. Fantasy literature: theories and terminology

Since this paper is not a primarily theory-oriented one but rather dedicated to textual analysis, I would like to limit this chapter to outlining the most important statements of the theorists that have influenced my overview chapter of the fairies' literary history and my analyses of ballad adaptations, influenced them especially in so far as they have provided me with a descriptive terminology. Since, starting with the publication of Tzvetan Todorov's *Introduction à la Littérature Fantastique* in 1970, the last three have seen the publication of numerous works on the theory of fantastic literature, my overview will consequently be exemplary and incomplete (for a critical but very detailed overview of the history of theories about fantastic literature from a structuralist's point of view cf. for instance Durst 2001, chapter one).

First of all, however, a few words on language and translation problems. For my study I have used both English and German (and French) theoretical studies on the nature of fantastic literature and everybody who deals with definitional aspects of fantastic literature in the first two languages will encounter the following problems: In English, the overarching term for non-mimetic writing is *fantasy* (or *fantastic literature*).²⁴ This can include fairy tales, myths, romances, horror stories, science fiction, different sub-genres of fantasy in its narrower sense (heroic fantasy, comic fantasy, religious fantasy, children's fantasy and many others) and fantastic literature in its narrower sense (the latter will be explained below). The differentiations are by no means clear-cut and taking into account Anglophone studies of non-mimetic literature (e.g. Brian Attebery, Rosemary Jackson, Colin Manlove) it seems that every author arrives at his or her own definition of what fantasy or fantastic literature is. Since my study pursues a strictly motif-oriented approach, I will touch upon this genre debate as little as possible.

Since some German-speaking authors' theories have also influenced my study, I think it nevertheless necessary to explain how in German the use of terms for different (sub-)genres of non-mimetic writing differs from their use in English. In German, *Fantasy* is merely a sub-genre of non-mimetic writing. The portmanteau in German would be *phantastische Literatur* (or sometimes *Phantastik*). These terms cover different sub-genres. German theorists differentiate between *Phantastik im engeren Sinne* (i.e., fantastic literature in a narrower

²⁴ Most of the theoretical works published in the Anglophone countries have *fantasy* in their title, for example: Rosemary Jackson (*Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, 1981), Brian Attebery (*Strategies of Fantasy*, 1992), Colin Manlove (*Scottish Fantasy Literature*, 1993 and *The Fantasy Literature of England*, 1999), John Clute (*The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, 1997), Neil Barron (*Fantasy and Horror: A Critical and Historical Guide*, 1999), Lucy Armitt (*Fantasy Fiction: An Introduction*, 2005).

sense, sometimes called *the fantastic* in English) and *Fantasy*, the latter of which has often depreciatory connotations (fantasy = escapist mass-market trivial literature featuring supernatural elements).²⁵ Some theorists moreover include science fiction and horror as subgenres. For English-speaking theorists, however, as far as I could make out, the differentiation between *minimalistischer Phantastik* (only *fantastic literature in the narrower sense*) and *maximalistischer Phantastik* (this latter would be the same as the English hypernym *fantasy*) is much less crucial than for German theorists. However, the discussion seems to have reached the English-speaking countries also, as Brian Stableford observes in his introduction to his *Historical Dictionary of Fantasy Literature* (2005, xl):

Critics employing this argument [that fantastic literature is a post-enlightenment phenomenon, see below] sometimes find it convenient to separate ‘fantasy’ and ‘the fantastic’ in a contemporary context as well as a historical one, because it helps to identify contemporary literary forms from the pejorative connotations routinely attached to the notion of ‘fantasy’, or at least give diplomatic recognition to the fact that many writers and other critics wish to make such saving moves.

In the face of such confusion let me therefore try to clarify my terminology for this paper. Since this paper deals predominantly with texts written in English, I will adhere to the widespread English-speaking tradition of using both *fantasy* and *fantastic literature* as portmanteau terms. If I want to differentiate between what would in Germany be *Fantasy* vs. *Phantastik*, I will indicate this by using the terms *fantastic literature in the broader sense* (or maximalist view) vs. *fantastic literature in the narrower sense* (or minimalist view). I think it rather unfortunate that the terminological confusion is such as to require wordy specifications, however, as the confusion arises from two quite different strands of tradition in writing and literary criticism it is difficult to avoid.

Among the definitional approaches to fantastic literature, three main tendencies can be found – one is a motif-oriented approach, which usually consists in lists of themes that according to the respective theorist constitute fantastic fiction (such as: the appearance of vampires, ghosts, werewolves, fairies, aliens, magicians, pacts with the devil etc.), the second is a structure-oriented approach which tries, on a more abstract level than the first, to find the central narrative element(s) that differentiate(s) fantastic fiction from realist fiction. Since the motif-oriented approach (as pursued for instance by Louis Vax (1960) and Roger Cailloix (1965) and criticised by Thomas Wörtche (1987, 27-30)) has proved unsatisfactory for purposes for differentiation between the fantastic (in its narrower sense) and fantasy, I will concentrate on the structure-oriented approach in this chapter and summarise the theoretical positions which have influenced my paper (concentrating on Tzvetan Todorov, Uwe Durst

²⁵ The word “fantasy” does have pejorative connotations also in English (according to Stableford 2005, xl), being connected with escapism and children’s literature.

and Maria Nikolajeva).²⁶ Apart from the structural approaches, which are important for definitional purposes, a third view has been formed by theorists who have tried to approach the genre from a point of view of function. I will include a few functional approaches (J.R.R. Tolkien, Rosemary Jackson, Gerhard Haas) in this theoretical chapter as well since I think it is not sufficient merely to define a genre and then forbear from asking what its effects on a reader may be. I think the functional approaches especially important when it comes to a diachronic discussion of fantastic literature and for the question why fantastic literature as a whole (or a certain subgenre of it) experiences a surge of popularity at some times and undergoes a decline at others, a phenomenon that is the focus of my attention in chapter three, where I trace the ups and downs of the motif of the fairy in English literature throughout the centuries.

The division between structural and functional approaches will destroy the chronological order of theoretical approaches presented here somewhat, since Tolkien wrote before Todorov but is dealt with later. I nevertheless think the division reasonable, even though it may sometimes be a slightly artificial one as some theorists who have advanced functional theories have also formulated thoughts on the structural aspects of fantastic literature and the other way round – however, usually one approach is dominant over the other in their respective writings.

Structural approaches

Many of the structural approaches concentrate on fantastic literature in its narrower sense, which puts me in a kind of dilemma. The structural approaches, especially Todorov's, are indispensable for a discussion of theories of the fantastic. However, they will not be very fruitful for my later text-analyses since almost all the novels examined by me are what Todorov would call stories of the 'marvellous': they accept the existence of magic and other worlds beyond our own and are therefore uninteresting to theorists of the fantastic in its narrower sense. These concentrate on texts for which the eternal hesitation between the acceptance of the supernatural and its dismissal is crucial. However, at least partly, the observations of the theorists of the fantastic in its narrower sense are also useful for fantastic literature as a whole as they might help to put modern (post-enlightenment) fantastic writing into perspective. I think it is justified to bear these theoretical approaches in mind despite the fact that the topic of my study is one that somehow defies these approaches, bridging the

²⁶ I am aware that I myself pursue a purely motif-oriented approach in my study, but as the aim of my study is not an attempt at defining a genre but an analysis of a specific motif as handled by different fantasy authors, I think my approach is justified.

chasm between non-mimetic literature before and after Isaac Newton (see below): “Thomas the Rhymer” and “Tam Lin” are medieval stories retold by late twentieth century authors with all the consequences this implies in regard to the different world-views of the original ballad authors and the world-view of their twentieth century successors (to put it more bluntly: the original ballad authors probably believed in fairies – their twentieth century counterparts probably not). How important the author’s/reader’s worldview and reality concept are for a discussion of fantastic literature will be shown in the following paragraphs.

Often the phenomenon which is central to fantastic literature (in its narrow sense) has been described as a rupture or fissure in reality or the confrontation of two different realities (for instance by Castex (1951), Vax (1960) and Caillois (1965)). There is, however, a prerequisite for this fissure to be perceived, which hints at the historical dimension of fantastic literature (in the narrower sense of the term), namely a rational-scientific world-view as established in early modern times. Peter von Matt puts it more succinctly:

To express it in a drastically shortened way: Fantastic literature [in its narrower sense] requires Newton. Why is that so? In Newton modern science with its thousand roots in Classical antiquity, in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance, reached an end and a new beginning, the dramatic effect of which we can nowadays hardly document any more. (...) The whole cosmos is subject to one law that can be formulated in mathematical terms. Nowhere does our world fade into a world of a different kind. Nowhere is there any threshold towards the realm of spirits. The world is a closed whole which is governed by clear laws.” (von Matt 2002, my translation)²⁷

Only if reader and author agree on this rationalist world-view will the occurrence of ghosts and magicians in a text create the sense of rupture, which, according to the theorists, is so essential to (minimalistically defined) fantastic literature. One might object now that of course non-mimetic literature was written even *before* Newton. However, according to the structural group of theorists of the fantastic, texts including ghosts and fairies dating from a time where belief in the supernatural was still pervasive cannot really be called fantastic, since no rupture between world-systems would have been perceived by the (implicit) reader. Brian Stableford sums up this discussion for the English-speaking world: On the one hand there is what he calls the “Carter/Barron strategy” (2005, xl), which “extend[s] the history of modern fantasy literature all the way back to Homer, in a more or less unbroken evolutionary chain” (ibid.). This is the equivalent to the German ‘maximalist view’. On the other hand there is what Stableford calls the “Clute/Attebery strategy” (ibid.), which corresponds to the German ‘minimalist view’. It is characterised by the following approach:

²⁷ “Drastisch verkürzt gesagt: Die phantastische Literatur [im engeren Sinne] setzt Newton voraus. Warum nun dies? In Newton erreichte die neuzeitliche Wissenschaft mit ihren tausend Wurzeln in der Antike, im Mittelalter und in der Renaissance einen Abschluss und Neubeginn, über dessen dramatischen Effekt wir uns heute nur noch mit Mühe Rechenschaft geben können. (...) Der ganze Kosmos unterliegt einem einzigen, in mathematischen Begriffen formulierbaren Gesetz. Nirgendwo geht die Welt über in eine Welt anderer Art. Nirgendwo gibt es eine Schwelle zu einem Geisterreich. Die Welt ist ein geschlossenes, von klaren Gesetzen gelenktes Ganzes.”

While admitting that genre fantasy takes its definitive themes and images from myth, legend and folklore – raw materials older than literature itself – they [the Clute/Attebery school] nevertheless insist that ‘fantasy literature’ is something relatively new that needs to be distinguished from the literature of earlier eras despite the many elements they have in common. (...) This argument alleges that we should not speak of ‘fantasy literature’ as having existed before the Age of Enlightenment, because ‘fantasy literature’ is an essentially contradictory notion, formed in direct opposition to the notion of ‘realistic (or naturalistic) literature’. Before the Enlightenment, there was allegedly no such manifest opposition, because the realistic and fantastic elements of literature coexisted harmoniously, free of any apparent tension or enmity. (2005, xxxix-xl)

Todorov: *Introduction à la Littérature Fantastique* (1970)

A similar opinion as that of the followers of Clute and Attebery is represented by Tzvetan Todorov, in fact, it has to be assumed that Clute and Attebery have been influenced by him, as their writings were published after Todorov’s seminal work on fantastic literature. This work was *Introduction à la Littérature Fantastique* (1970) and it elaborates and refines the formerly more or less vaguely formulated idea of the tension between realistic and fantastic elements of literature or, respectively, the ‘rupture’ in reality. Todorov defines the fantastic as follows:

Dans un monde qui est bien le nôtre, celui que nous connaissons, sans diables, sylphides, ni vampires, se produit un événement qui ne peut s’expliquer par les lois de ce même monde familier. Celui qui perçoit doit opter pour l’une des deux solutions possible : ou bien il s’agit d’une illusion des sens, d’un produit de l’imagination et les lois du monde restent alors ce qu’elles sont ; ou bien l’événement a véritablement eu lieu, il est partie intégrante de la réalité, mais alors cette réalité est régie par des lois inconnues de nous. (1970, 29)

In a world which is ours, that which we know, without devils, sylphs, neither vampires, an event occurs which cannot be explained by the laws of this familiar world. The person who perceives it, must decide for one of two possible solutions: Either this is an illusion of the senses, a product of the imagination and the laws of the world therefore stay what they are; or the event has really taken place, it is an integral part of reality, but this reality is ruled by laws unknown to us. (my translation)

Faced with an event which seems ‘supernatural’ (on condition that the text is neither understood in a poetical nor an allegorical manner), the person who perceives it has to decide about its nature. For Todorov the decision-making entity, however, is neither the reader nor any character in the book. It is the *implicit reader*, a function of the text, an ideal-type concept coined by Wolfgang Iser and embodying the sum of pre-orientations which a text offers to the reader (the ‘real’ reader has to have at least some characteristics of the implicit reader in order to be able to understand the text). For texts that present the implicit reader with some strange occurrence (Todorov refers to something which does not seem to comply with “the world, which is ours”, i.e., a world where natural laws as formulated e.g. by Newton apply), Todorov now proposes a four-part spectrum of possible text-classes. First, there are texts where something apparently supernatural happens but can be very easily explained by applying a rational explanation – such texts are categorized under the label of the *uncanny* (“l’étrange”) by Todorov. A second group are texts which are labelled *fantastic-uncanny*: events which for

a while appear supernatural are, after a period of doubt, in the end traced back to natural causes, either due to the fact that they were merely dreams or (drug-induced) illusions, or because they *have* really taken place but were not supernatural and merely seemed so through some trick, fraud or by mere coincidence. A third group are texts which at first leave the implicit reader in doubt about the supernatural character of events but which in the end prove to have taken place in a world where our natural laws do not operate – these are called *fantastic-marvellous*. Finally, Todorov defines a group of texts which from the beginning leave no doubt about the supernatural character of the events that take place: these texts belong to the *marvellous*. The pure fantastic (i.e. *Phantastik im engeren Sinne*) now, Todorov claims, resides on the boundary line between the fantastic-uncanny and the fantastic-marvellous and depends on this tension never being resolved. The question whether the events in the text have a rational explanation or not must never be answered in any definite way, otherwise the text is no longer fantastic.

Apart from the structural model, Todorov also suggests different functional aspects of the fantastic: the first is a social function – fantastic literature (in its strict sense) works against censure and thematises taboo-topics. The second function is literary/pragmatic, referring to the potential of fantastic fiction to move and/or frighten its readers and to keep up narrative tension. (But Todorov strongly criticises theorists who take the fear-inducing potential of fantastic texts (in the strict sense) as the decisive aspect for their definition – because then, Todorov argues, the definition of the genre would depend mainly on the fearfulness of the individual reader). Thirdly, he describes a cultural/historical function, which, however, is closely connected to the first one: fantastic literature as the bad conscience, the anti-rational, ‘other’ side of the positivistic nineteenth century.

Todorov’s model has been met with both praise and criticism. It has been praised because it attempts a structural approach on which many later theorists build their own models. It has, on the other hand, been criticised for its narrowness and moreover for the historical limits which Todorov himself applies to his model, for he claims that fantastic literature in the narrow sense of the term only existed between the eighteenth and beginning twentieth century. On the one hand, a rationalistic world-view is seen as a precondition for an author to write a fantastic text. On the other hand, Todorov claims that the pure fantastic as a genre died out with the advent of psychoanalysis. This latter statement is due to the fact that, besides his structural model, Todorov proposed also a content-oriented approach which claimed that the themes of the fantastic are topics of the subconscious, suppressed taboo-topics. He calls them “thèmes du je” (reflecting the relationship between individual and

world, e.g. pan-determinism, the boundary between subject and object, transformation of space and time, multiplication of personalities) and “thèmes du tu” (reflecting the relationship between the individual and the subconscious, often (deviant) sexual desires are thematised here). But now that psychoanalysis had extracted these topics from the taboo-area, there was no longer any need to write about them in a ‘coded’ form, Todorov claims. He has been heavily criticised for this idea of the ‘death’ of fantastic literature with the beginning of the twentieth century, since fantastic literature, also as defined by Todorov, continues to be written.

Wörtche: *Phantastik und Unschlüssigkeit* (1987)

Two theorists who have expanded and improved Todorov’s model are Thomas Wörtche (*Phantastik und Unschlüssigkeit* (1987)) and Uwe Durst (*Theorie der Phantastischen Literatur* (2001)). From Wörtche’s work I will here only include the assumptions on the role of the narrator. Wörtche reproaches Todorov for neglecting the role of the narrator in fantastic fiction and to remedy this shortcoming, he introduces the concept of the *destabilised narrator*. This enhances the above-mentioned insecurity and hesitance that Todorov sees as the defining characteristic for fantastic texts. A destabilised narrator is characterised by the following textual strategies: on the macro-level for instance by contradictory narrative perspectives (several narrators who contradict each other) or the lack of a coherence-creating narrative centre; on the micro-level for instance by modalisation (1987, 102) (‘as if’-constructions), grammatical corrosion (which hints at the narrator’s questionable state of mind) and the ambivalent treatment of tropes (e.g. taking figurative expressions literally). Moreover, Wörtche mentions what he calls *motivation*, for instance hints given by the narrator that the narration might be a dream, a fever vision or an illusion of the senses.

Durst: *Theorie der Phantastischen Literatur* (2001)

Writing 14 years after Wörtche, in his dissertation *Theorie der Phantastischen Literatur* Uwe Durst builds on both Todorov and Wörtche and proposes a model which, (even though some of his fundamental assumptions appear debatable to me) is the one I will apply at least partly to the texts examined in this paper. The biggest difference between Todorov and Durst is probably that Durst rejects extra-literary reality as a reference point for what is ‘supernatural’ and what is not. Durst criticises that Todorov bases his model too naively on a rational-scientific world-view, which leads to a lack of differentiation between extra-literary reality (“extra-literarische Wirklichkeit”) and intra-literary reality (“inner-literarische

Realität”). This in turn leads Todorov to adhere to the popular opinion that the defining aspect for fantastic texts is the occurrence of a phenomenon which one thinks impossible in the real world. This is, according to Durst, problematic, since the this definition depends on the individual concept of reality of each (real, not implicit) reader, which can indeed be very varied. As proof he cites polls in which considerable segments of the population in Western industrialised countries profess their belief in ghosts and other supernatural phenomena.

Thus, the idea of the ‘supernatural’ disqualifies as the defining characteristic of fantastic literature. Moreover, according to Durst, every fictional text, even the most realistic is in some way ‘marvellous’ (“wunderbar”), because it can (of course) not deliver a 1:1 picture of ‘reality’ and uses strategies of narrative shortening, focalisation, omniscient narrative perspective etc. He therefore concludes: “It is a basic characteristic of narrative to defy natural laws (...). Faced with these marvels it is absurd to believe that the literature of the marvellous is any more marvellous than the rest of literature” (2001, 75, my translation).²⁸ So in contrast to Todorov, who bases his definition of the fantastic on the assumption that fantastic texts question the existence of our natural physical laws, for Durst the following aspect is crucial: “The pivotal point of the marvellous is, however, the rupture of a standardised reality system in favour of a deviant, which behaves heterogeneously against the norm, which means the rupture of a canon of supernatural laws in favour of another” (2001, 87, my translation).²⁹

But the ‘standardised reality system’ is not ‘reality’, nor Todorov’s ‘world which is ours’. The fundamental assumption of Durst’s theory is that any literary text creates its own world-system or reality-system (2001, 80). The reality system, i.e., the laws which govern the fictional world, thus replaces the reference point of extra-literary reality. According to Durst, ‘realistic’ texts use a reality-system which resembles ‘reality’. For him these are the plausibility-creating conventions which were established by the ‘realist’ novel of the nineteenth century (as arbitrary as that may be). Furthermore, Durst lists (building on an essay by Roman Jakobson (1921)) the following criteria for a text to be classified as ‘realistic’:

- the author defines his work (in text and paratext) as ‘probable’
- the reader understands the text (due to text, paratext and literary business) as ‘probable’

²⁸ “Es ist eine grundlegende Eigenschaft des Erzählens, sich über die Naturgesetze hinwegzusetzen [...]. Angesichts dieser Wunder ist es abwegig, zu glauben, die Literatur des Wunderbaren sei wunderbarer als die übrige Literatur.”

²⁹ “Der Angelpunkt des Wunderbaren ist vielmehr der Bruch eines normierten Realitätssystems zugunsten eines devianten, das sich zur Norm heterogen verhält, was den Bruch eines Kanons übernatürlicher Gesetze zugunsten eines anderen bedeutet.”

- numerous details beyond the actual plot are described
- the events in the text are motivated
- extra-literary persons and topographies are used in the texts
- the text takes on an enlightened-critical stance
- the text formulates an explicit claim of verisimilitude and hides the ‘marvellous’ nature inherent in every fictional text (Durst 2001, 91-6).

According to Durst, throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century a narrative spectrum developed where so-called ‘regular reality systems’ (usually those adhering to the realist norm; abbreviated ‘R’) and ‘marvellous reality systems’ (abbreviated ‘W’ for “wunderbares Realitätssystem”), which are subject to different rules than the R-system, stand in opposition to each other. If the reality-system of a text contains both R and W elements in about equal proportions, a “battle of the systems” ensues which should be decided in favour of one or the other system. If there is no decision, the so-called “non-system” (abbreviated “N”) of fantastic literature is the result – thus Todorov’s hesitancy is reformulated according to intra-literary criteria. Durst now works with a kind of reality-system formula, which can be set up for all kinds of fictional texts.

These formulas describe the texts as a whole (left side of equation) and reflect their development (right side of equation). Durst differentiates between stable (non)systems $W=W$, $R=R$, or $N=N$. An example for $W=W$ would be a classic fairy tale, where from the beginning talking animals, sorcerers etc. appear and the marvellous nature of the text is never in question, while $R=R$ would e.g. be a realist novel and $N=N$ a text where from the beginning an uncertainty about its reality status is established and never resolved. Next to those stable systems, Durst sees so-called mobile reality systems, in which a kind of systems-shift (“Systemsprung”) takes place. Here, Durst suggests six possible combinations. For instance a text which starts as a seemingly realistic text, then enters a phase of uncertainty where events occur for which it cannot be determined whether a regular or a marvellous reality system is at work and where it can finally be determined that the system is marvellous after all. The equation for such a text would be: $W = R + N + W$. The examples Durst lists for all the possible system-shifts are the following:

$R = N + R$ Christie, *Ten Little Niggers* ($R = R + N + R$)

$R = W + R$ Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* ($R = R + W + R$)

$W = N + W$ Villiers de l’Isle-Adam, *Véra* ($W = R + N + W$)

$W = R + W$ Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

$N = W + N$ Lovecraft, *The Music of Erich Zann*

$N = R + N$ Mérimée, *La Vénus d'Ille* (Durst 2001, 123)

Even though I think it always a bit risky to try to contain complex entities such as texts in simplified formulas, Durst's approach is nevertheless a handy tool to describe the reality status of texts or their development without having to retell the whole plot.

With regard to the ballad adaptations analysed in the later chapters of this study, the following equations seem to apply:

Thursday: $N = R + N$

The Queen of Spells: $W = R + N + W$

The Perilous Gard: $N = R + N$

Fire and Hemlock: $W = R (+ N) + W$ ³⁰

Thomas the Rhymer: $W = R + W$

Winter Rose $N = R + N$ (or $W = R + N + W$?)

Tam Lin: $W = R + N + W$

An Earthly Knight: $W = R + W$

Lords and Ladies: $W = W$

The Wee Free Men: $W = W$ ³¹

Using Durst's method, the ten ballad-adaptation would therefore be classed as belonging to different genres – most of them would be 'literature of the marvellous', where a deviant reality system clearly prevails or is established from the beginning. A few others could, however, be called 'fantastic' (in the narrower sense of the word) since there doubts remain as to the reality status of the fictional world. At least for me, as an 'empiric' or 'real' reader, those doubts remain. Let me explain: In *Thursday*, the fairies (proof of a different reality system) are never seen by the narrator at all. She merely hears what an old, maybe slightly eccentric, woman tells her about them and what her friend Thursday – who is being treated for psychological problems – reports about them. These two, I think, are not very reliable sources. Thursday claims to have brought a golden necklace back from Elfland but in

³⁰ Farah Mendlesohn classifies *Fire and Hemlock* as 'liminal fantasy' a category that corresponds roughly to Durst's 'N' or, respectively, Todorov's pure fantastic, a more detailed discussion of this will follow later in this chapter.

³¹ For Pratchett's two novel maybe even the equation $W = W_1 + W_2$ might apply, as we have a marvellous reality system here into which another, also marvellous reality system intrudes – I am, however, not certain, if the world of the elves is different enough from the discworld to justify being called a deviant reality system. For a discussion of the so-called 'second-order marvellous' (W_2) see below.

his hand is only a dry leaf. Of course this could be read as an occurrence of fairy magic – but it could also be the object Thursday has merely imagined to be a piece of jewellery in a daydream or a hallucination. So I think the answer to the question regarding the existence of an otherworld in *Thursday* must be a clear “maybe”, but with a certain tendency towards “no, there isn’t really an otherworld”.

The evidence for a different reality system is slightly stronger in *The Perilous Gard*. Here, most of the strange incidents can be explained, the only one that remains mysterious is the existence of the Guardian of the Well. The ‘fairies’ in this novel seem to be of flesh and blood – endowed with arcane knowledge but, as far as can be perceived through the eyes of the narrator, not magical. When the fairies are driven away in the end, however, Geoffrey Heron’s men find a bundle of old bones wrapped by some grey substance – which, they think, “had been dead for a long time” (*The Perilous Gard*, 257). These bones, the reader will conclude, must be what remained of the Guardian. But if he was dead how could he have guarded the well and interacted with the others? This question is never cleared up – either Geoffrey’s men are mistaken and the creature has only just died when the caves were flooded or there is really something in *The Perilous Gard* that defies the conventions of the realist novel.

In *Winter Rose* the number of occurrences that point to the existence of magic and Fairyland are more numerous and for almost none of them a rational explanation is provided. But here the narrator, Rois, appears to be highly destabilised and unreliable: she is chided by many people for her wild imagination, she likes to daydream and throughout the novel she is ill several times and has fever-visions. What she sees during her time in Elfland may therefore often merely be something she experiences inside her own head. A few things, however (a handful of roses that appear out of nowhere, a dead man who ages decades while he is kept on ice waiting to be buried, a man who appears under the ice of a frozen well) seem to be clear proof that the laws of the fictional world are disrupted, especially as two of these incidents are witnessed by other characters as well. Is *Winter Rose* therefore a ‘marvellous’ novel? Maybe there should be a ‘W’ on the left side of the equation after all, as I find it hard to find rational evidence for these incidents and neither can they be ascribed to the unreliability of the narrator.

But I think that here Durst’s (and probably also Todorov’s) theories are not without certain weaknesses. For even though they take recourse to the implied reader in order to escape the problem of different readers judging certain incidents differently, I, as an in all probability empirically existing reader, find it impossible to know how an implicit reader

would judge *Winter Rose* – the text does not contain enough clues. Maybe other (real) readers would interpret the incidents which I find doubtful and mysterious as clear proof for the victory of the marvellous reality system and therefore claim that the implicit reader must come to the same conclusion. I think here the ambition of dealing objectively with a piece of literature reaches its limits, as it seems impossible to keep personal judgement out of the interpretation.

Another controversial issue is the binary character of Durst's model. If anything occurs in a text that is, without doubt, a breach of the reality conventions of that text, this text then belongs to a different genre, usually it would be a movement from a realist text to a marvellous text. But does only one small apparently marvellous incident turn a 300-page novel which is otherwise shaped according to the conventions of the realist novel really into a marvellous narration? Or should it be overlooked and the novel be classed as $R = R + W + R$ because it is only such a small incident? Or should the novel now be called 'fantastic' because the reader (real and implicit) should now be in a state of unresolved uncertainty about the novel's reality status? Durst argues that there is nothing like 'a little marvellous' (similarly as one cannot be 'a little dead') but maybe those critics of Durst who suggest that something like a criterion of dominance should be added to the theory are right after all – of course then the question remains of how to define this dominance – how many incidents are needed to form sufficient evidence of the deviant reality system? The discussion about such topics will still continue for some time, it seems.

Moreover, as I have said before, I think Durst's definition of what constitutes a regular reality-system a bit doubtful, as Durst rejects extra-literary criteria but then takes the realist novel (which has certainly been shaped by extra-literary criteria) as his reference point. I think it would be more consequent not to talk of R and W but rather of one literary reality system X and another literary reality system Y (or X1 and X2). If one takes Durst seriously, then one must conclude that in fact W has the same reality-status as R, as he himself says: "Consequently, we cannot ascribe a higher reality value to *Madame Bovary* than to a fairy tale by the Grimm Brothers" (2001, 75, my translation).³² While R is used, however, it is always easy to confound R with "reality" even though it isn't intended to stand for 'reality' but for 'regular'. I think using X1 and X2 would also be more consequent with regard to the so-called 'second-order marvellous systems' ("das Wunderbare zweiter Ordnung"). These systems occur in texts which do not start in the R-system but in an already marvellous system with laws different to those of realist fiction. Then yet another system with yet other fictional

³² "Konsequenterweise kann *Madame Bovary* kein höherer Wirklichkeitswert zugewiesen werden als einem Grimmschen Märchen".

laws governing it occurs and tries to gain dominance over the marvellous system: now Durst speaks of the 'second-order marvellous'. However, I think, it would be similarly justified to talk of a system Y, where a system Z intrudes (or a system X2 where a system X3 intrudes).

Nikolajeva: *The Magic Code* (1988)

Another approach for dealing with the respective terminology is taken by Maria Nikolajeva in her dissertation *The Magic Code* (1988). In contrast to Todorov and Durst, whose interest lies in the fantastic in its narrow sense, i.e., texts that contain an unsolvable question about their reality status, she is interested in fantastic literature in the maximalist sense. Her focus is thus broader than that of Todorov and Durst. On the other hand, in her study, Nikolajeva deals exclusively with fantasy literature for children, so her interest is limited after all to a particular subgroup in the genre of fantastic writing. Nikolajeva calls her approach 'morphologic' (and not structuralist, even though both schools are of course closely related) and sees herself in the tradition of Vladimir Propp and his studies of the folk tale.

Nikolajeva defines the following elements as constitutive for fantastic literature: the presence of magic, a sense of wonder and the violation of natural laws, but also, which she emphasises as the most important aspect, the existence of two worlds, a *primary* and a *secondary world*. In this context, Nikolajeva also introduces the concepts of the *fantaseme* and the *chronotope*.

The term *fantaseme* is derived from the *mytheme*-theory of the Russian semiotic school and is defined by Nikolajeva as an abstract, recurrent paradigmatic narrative unit. A fantaseme can e.g. be a motif or a function but also a whole narration. She differentiates between the fantasemes of:

- magic space (This is the primary/secondary worlds concept. According to Nikolajeva there are 10 possibilities where a secondary world can be located, ranging from alien planets over underground worlds to parallel and alternative universes),
- magic time,
- magic passage,
- magic impact.

Here I will only elaborate on magic space, a concept for which Nikolajeva builds on ideas of e.g. Tolkien (see below). As mentioned above, she differentiates between a primary world ('our world', which is not defined in detail) and three types of secondary worlds. First there is the so-called *closed secondary world*. This is a world without any contact to the primary world. Often the primary world is not included in the text: sometimes there are hints that the narrator and the readers live in this primary world, sometimes there is no mention of

the primary world at all. As an example of this type (which is equated with the sub-genre of high fantasy) she lists Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. The second type is the *open secondary world*, where contact between primary and secondary world is possible and both worlds are present in the text (her example is Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*). The third type is the *implied secondary world*, which is not directly present in the text but in some way intrudes into the primary world, for instance in form of a magic object (this type is equated with low fantasy), her examples for this are Astrid Lindgren's *Pippi Longstocking* and Paul Maar's *Sams*.

I think that Nikolajeva's concept of the different types of secondary worlds is a clearly defined way of classifying fantasy worlds – applied to the ten novels examined (in more or less detail) in this study, the following list results:

Thursday: implied secondary world

The Queen of Spells: open secondary world (?)³³

The Perilous Gard: open secondary world

Fire and Hemlock: open secondary world (?)³⁴

Thomas the Rhymer: open secondary world

Winter Rose: open secondary world

Tam Lin: implied secondary world

An Earthly Knight: implied secondary world

Lords and Ladies: closed secondary world (+ open tertiary world)

The Wee Free Men: closed secondary world (+ open tertiary world)

Linked to the concept of the *fantaseme* is the idea of the *chronotope* (which can be literally translated as “time-space”), which complements Nikolajeva's theory. The idea derives from Mikhail Bakhtin's chronotope concept, i.e., a significant connection of temporal and spatial relations which are artistically assimilated by literature.³⁵ For Nikolajeva, the

³³ I think it is justified to call the world of the elves a secondary world which can also be accessed in the novel, namely by crossing the blood-red river (even though the world of the gypsies that is reached by this way might still be only a kind of ante-world to the so-called “Green World” of Tom's descriptions).

³⁴ Here I was also uncertain whether this is an open secondary world or merely an implied world. Laurel and her people seem to live in the human world – however, in the end Polly and the others undertake a strange train journey which brings them to Hunsdon House, Laurel's place, but it seems that this time the House is located in a different world. But the case is not quite clear as glimpses of this world sometimes seem to shine through everyday reality, for example when Polly and Tom watch the garden pool at Hunsdon House mysteriously fill with water during their first meeting.

³⁵ Mikhail Bakhtin defines the term as follows: “The chronotope is where the knots of narrative are tied and untied... // Time becomes, in effect, palpable and visible; the chronotope makes narrative events concrete, makes them take on flesh, causes blood to flow in their veins.... Thus the chronotope, functioning as the primary means

fantastic chronotope subsumes the fantasemes of magic space and magic time, but this concept will not be of major importance for my study, therefore I will not investigate the idea in detail.

Mendlesohn: “Toward a Taxonomy of Fantasy” (2002) and *Diana Wynne Jones: Children’s Literature and the Fantastic Tradition* (2005)

A classification similar to that of Nikolajeva’s magic space has been devised by Farah Mendlesohn in her essay “Toward a Taxonomy of Fantasy” and her book-length study *Diana Wynne Jones: Children’s Literature and the Fantastic Tradition*. Here the author differentiates between *intrusive fantasy* (≈ implied secondary world), *portal-quest fantasy* (≈ open secondary world) and *immersive fantasy* (≈ closed secondary world) and *liminal fantasy* (similar to the pure fantastic as defined by Todorov) and additionally draws conclusions as to the typical plot-pattern (and functions – once more it is difficult to divide theoretical approaches into only structural or only functional ones) that these different world-concepts often imply.

First of all, there is liminal fantasy. Mendlesohn delineates this type of fantasy as follows:

The liminal fantastic relies on one of two techniques deployed either separately or in conjunction: *irony* and *equipoise*. Each relies on a sense of unease and estrangement that permeates its text, and each gives the ordinary an air of the fantastic.

Equipoise is the moment of balance between mimesis and the fantastic. What is happening and whether it is magical, is held in doubt. (...) In the story of *equipoise*, we are held in that moment of expectation waiting for magic to happen (...) The reason that this is not synonymous with Todorov’s notion of the uncanny is because the reader expects the fantastic. *Irony* is about what we actually do see, and the distance between how the protagonist and reader chose to interpret this. (2005, 137)

On her website, she gives a concrete example how she defines irony in this case:

The example I always use is Joan Aiken’s “But it’s Tuesday” in which the Armitage family look out of the window and see unicorns on the lawn. The reader responds “wow, unicorns”. The family respond “but things like unicorns only happen on Mondays!” (June 2005)

I think the category of liminal fantasy is quite different from the other three, since it deals with texts of questionable ‘reality status’ while for her other three categories the existence of the fantastic is a given and Mendlesohn merely differentiates the way in which the ‘real’ world and the fantastic interact. In contrast to Todorov’s idea of the pure fantastic – which is echoed in her idea of *equipoise*, the notion of irony introduces a new aspect, with a reader-response focus, even though she does not detail if she is referring to a real or an implied reader here.

for materializing time in space, emerges as a center for concretizing representation, as a force giving body to the entire novel. All the novel’s abstract elements - philosophical and social generalizations, ideas, analyses of cause and effect - gravitate towards the chronotope and through it take on flesh and blood, permitting the imaging power of art to do its work” (1981, 250).

The other categories can, I think, be looked on as analogous to Nikolajeva's, however, Mendlesohn adds a functional perspective. For intrusive fantasy, Mendlesohn observes, the following story arc is 'natural': As the objects or beings from the secondary world are usually perceived as 'bringers of chaos' for the fictional world (and excitement for the reader), the natural consequence is, according to Mendlesohn, that order must be restored, the intruder must be returned to the world he (or she) came from – even though, in more recent works, this normalisation is not always a permanent and total one, as the possibility of returning intrusions can no longer be ruled out. Similarly, for portal-quest fantasy, Mendlesohn also postulates a 'normalising' story arc – the hero who has been to the secondary world must get back to his own, taking with him the insights he has gathered in the otherworld. Brian Stableford summarises Mendlesohn's hypotheses as follows:

Portal fantasies, unlike intrusive fantasies, are usually didactic. Intrusive fantasies usually present mysteries to be unravelled, traps to be escaped, and adversaries to be exorcised, in the interest of temporary excitement. Portal fantasies usually present obstacle courses to be ingeniously negotiated, quests to be bravely carried out, and – most importantly – lessons to be permanently learned. (2005, liv)

Thirdly, immersive fantasies, where there is no contact between the secondary and the primary world, are the kind of fantasy most strongly associated by critics with escapism, since there is no 'normalisation' possible. However, in contrast to the other types immersive fantasies can have endings where "rewards impossible of achievement in the actual world are generously on offer" (ibid. lxi), thus providing a more powerful gratification potential to the readers – a potential that J.R.R. Tolkien described with the terms 'consolation' by 'eucatastrophe', which will be discussed in the following section.

Functional approaches

While the purely structural approaches are useful for determining the nature and scope of the genre, they nevertheless neglect to investigate the possible meanings and functions of fantastic texts, and therefore Gerhard Haas remarks:

One can admire the theoretical fine-tuning and plausibility of these definition systems and nevertheless retain the feeling that the essence of the genre, that is, the centre of the texts, is only just touched on here. It generally remains to ask what the different definitional approaches, whatever form they take, actually do for the understanding of the thus contained texts and for the insight into their essence. (2006, 27, my translation)³⁶

³⁶ "Man kann die theoretische Feinarbeit und Schlüssigkeit dieser Definitionssysteme bewundern und gleichwohl das Gefühl haben, das Wesen des Genres, also das Zentrum der Texte, sei damit allenfalls tangiert. Zu fragen bleibt nämlich generell, was denn mit den wie auch immer gearteten definitiven Ansätzen für das Verständnis der so eingegrenzten Texte und für die Erkenntnis ihres Wesens geleistet ist."

For this reason I think it necessary also to include approaches that do just that – try to understand the texts and try to arrive at conclusions about their nature. These approaches I would like to call functional approaches.

Tolkien: “On Fairy Stories” (1947)

Since I have chosen to first present structural and only then functional approaches to fantastic literature, the essay which chronologically predates all the previous concepts, namely J.R.R. Tolkien’s “On Fairy Stories” (first published 1947) could not be treated before, but will be presented in the following paragraphs. Tolkien’s approach is not purely a functional one, he also aims at a kind of definition of *fairy stories*. *Fairy stories*, according to Tolkien, can be roughly equated with fantasy literature (or rather with the sub-genre of high or heroic fantasy) and should not be mixed up with fairy tales. Tolkien does not give a straightforward definition of his fairy stories but rather defines the genre *ex negativo* – fairy stories are not fairytales, not satire, not dream-stories and not animal fables. Central to Tolkien’s concept is the idea that “in such ‘fantasy’, as it is called, new form is made; Faërie begins; Man becomes a sub-creator” (Tolkien 1983, 122). Hand in hand with this goes the concept of the primary and the secondary world; the secondary world is the sub-created one. Among other things, a secondary world must have interior plausibility and consistence, and it should be attractive for both children *and* adults. Tolkien even claims that adults have more need of sub-created fantasy worlds and in his essay’s section on the functions of fairy stories goes on to outline why he thinks so.

In his opinion, fairy stories should fulfil the following functions: *fantasy*, *recovery*, *escape* and *consolation*. The first function, *fantasy*, refers to the fact that, ideally, fairy stories will initiate and stimulate the readers’ imagination. Therefore, the reader, seeing the fantasy world before his inner eye, becomes a sub-creator himself, the act of creation being something which Tolkien regards as an essential human need. *Recovery*, the second function, means that fairy stories should help a reader to regain a clear view of reality. Things are presented in an unfamiliar setting, therefore known objects and processes whose perception has been obscured by routine can be again viewed with wonder. The third function, *escape*, is certainly the one that has met with most debate. However, in contrast to many later theorists, Tolkien does not regard escape as necessarily negative. For him, the escape provided by fairy stories is legitimate as they can fulfil longings and satisfy desires that could not be fulfilled in the primary world. Tolkien does not suggest that readers should permanently hide from reality in fairy stories but that those provide something like a holiday from the modern world and a possibly tedious everyday life. Finally, he considers *consolation* as the fourth function of

good fairy stories, meaning that there should be a harmonious ending to the story which will provide consolation to the reader. Here, Tolkien coins another term (apart from *sub-creation*) which has afterwards frequently been used in the Anglophone discussion of fantasy literature: the so-called *eucatastrophe*, the good catastrophe, which means that at the end of the story the impending catastrophe is unexpectedly averted.

Jackson: *Fantasy – the Literature of Subversion* (1981)

In complementation to Todorov, Rosemary Jackson takes into account also the social and historical context of a text, i.e., characteristics which cannot be found within the text and become visible only in its connection to extra-literary reality. According to Jackson, fantastic literature (in its broad sense) “characteristically attempts to compensate for a lack resulting from cultural constraints: it is a literature of desire, which seeks that which is experienced as absence and loss” (1981, 3). Fantastic literature therefore fulfils a social function, which is in some ways close to Tolkien’s fantasy and escape functions. Jackson does indeed take into account the discussion of fantasy’s supposed escapism. She concludes that fantastic literature does actually deal with reality (which is not defined in more detail) and gives suppressed aspects of reality, i.e., taboo subjects such as madness, sexual desires, etc., a room for expression, an approach which to some degree resembles Todorov’s hypotheses about the “thèmes du tu” and “thèmes du je” that the fantastic is thought to address.

However, she does not treat the fantastic as a genre (in fact, Tolkien’s, in her view rather reactionary, *fairy stories* are exactly not what she is aiming at) but rather as a mode of writing. Her model thus has the ambition of covering all kinds of ‘subversive’ literature, supernatural or no – and therefore harbours the danger of becoming rather all-encompassing and of little distinguishing power in the end, since topics concerning the differentiation between ‘me/not me’ or dealing with the subconscious are part of a vast range of literary texts, which would not be called fantastic by any of the other theorists. Jackson’s emphasis on the psychological functions of fantasy, however, has certainly paved the way for other functionally oriented approaches that take into account a psychological or sociological view of fantastic literature, such as that of Gerhard Haas (who wrote about fantastic literature even before Jackson, actually).

Haas: “Funktionen von Phantastik” and others (1978 - 2006)

Apart from dealing with possible functions of fantastic literature (with a focus on literature for children and young adults) Gerhard Haas suggests his own model for defining fantastic texts. In contrast to Todorov and others, who use the supernatural, and to Durst, who

uses the violation of the text-immanent reality-system, Haas suggests that fantastic literature is defined by its analogy to a certain world-view and way of thinking. Taking recourse to Claude Lévi-Strauss, Haas sees the way of *savage thinking* (“das wilde Denken”) typical for so-called ‘primitive’ cultures as a decisive characteristic of fantastic texts. The most important aspects of this way of thought are heterogeneity, a complex visual imagery and the technique of freely combining a limited amount of elements into always new results, all this taking place on the basis of a global and integral interconnectedness or pan-determination (Haas 1982, 21). Haas’s suggestion is certainly interesting, especially in its potential connection to Durst’s theory of the marvellousness of all fiction (pan-signification would be the corresponding term in Durst’s theory), but for my study Haas’s functional approach has been more important. In numerous essays and books, he has made suggestions as to what functions fantastic literature might fulfil. Most explicitly, however, and summing up many years of research, he does this in his essay “Funktionen von Phantastik” (2006).

The first group of functions is summarised under the heading of “fantastic literature as a reflection of socio-political conditions and problems”. Here, fantasy takes on a kind of allegoric function, portraying contemporary concerns in the guise of a more or less exotic setting (this seems to be related to Tolkien’s *recovery* function). A function which is probably connected to this is the ability of fantastic literature to create myths, i.e., a visual-narrative way of explaining the world. A second group of functions is ranged under the heading of “fantasy as a reflection of psychological processes”, especially processes of psychological development (individuation processes) and processes of the subconscious, a function which is certainly echoed in the many coming-of-age-novels in this study. Here, Jackson’s assumption that the fantastic serves as an expression of non-conscious, non-rational contents is echoed, although here these do not necessarily have to be taboo-topics. A third function is called “fantasy as an element of a pedagogic-psychological catharsis of fear” – this probably harks back to Todorov’s ‘pragmatic’ function, but seems only to refer to fantastic literature in its narrower sense or to fantasy mixed with horror elements. A fourth group of functions sees fantasy as a reference to the numinous and religious: fantasy as a means to fulfil the human need for transcendence in an increasingly secularised world. Finally, Haas suggests that the fantastic (especially fantastic literature for children and young adults) opens up a space for creativity-inspiring play (this is probably related to Tolkien’s *fantasy* function).

Another function which Haas mentions but does not assign to a definite group is, after all, a certain escapist function – fantasy as a substitute for a reality that is denied to the reader (2006, 28). But there is also fantasy as a way to help the reader cope with his own world

psychologically by providing him with an alternative world (1978, 82). Finally he mentions the potential of fantastic literature to provoke irritation and to provoke the reader into forming his own opinion about what is presented to him in the text.

Uses of theory in this study

Even though this study is mainly a collection of classic ‘close-reading’ analyses complemented by a folkloristic perspective on the involved source material and considerations of intertextuality, I think at least some theoretical underpinning is useful, even though I am certainly not using the whole definitional and interpretatory potential implied in the range of theories introduced in the preceding paragraphs. Let me briefly outline where theories about fantastic literature have a special relevance to my study: First of all, the chapter following this one will deal with the development of fantasy literature (with a focus on fairy literature) over several centuries, ending with a stocktaking of current fantasy/fairy literature. As has been mentioned earlier, fantasy literature (in the broader sense of the term) has been rather popular over the last 30 years and I think Tolkien’s functions of fantasy/escape/consolation/recovery as well as a number of functions defined by Haas can provide some hints as to why this is so – escapism probably comes first as a possible explanation but I think fantasy literature does fulfil more functions beyond that, for instance the reflection of psychological processes, which is especially important in fantasy literature for children or young adults.

Following the overview of the literary history of fairies/fantastic literature, I will dedicate the rest of this study to an in-depth analysis of a number of “Tam Lin”/“Thomas the Rhymer”-adaptations. As has been indicated in this chapter, the novels in question are based on the same sources but might be classed in different genres if one applies Durst’s/Todorov’s model – which I think quite interesting and also slightly confusing. But the theories advanced by Todorov and Durst have prompted me to take the reality status of the examined novels into consideration, at least briefly, which probably lends a more abstract dimension to my otherwise relatively plot, character and motif-oriented approach. On the other hand I think that the more concrete distinctions of different world types or different types of fantasy made by Nikolajeva and Mendlesohn are useful for a rough classification of the examined novels and thus this study, though not overtly theoretical will here and there nevertheless be interspersed with certain concepts and terms developed by those who have started to apply literary theory to fantasy writing.

4. The fairy's literary history

Beginnings to late Middle Ages

“The earliest mentions of fairies of any kind in England occur in the Anglo-Saxon charms against elf-shot” (Briggs 1967, 4). There is not much material about the occurrence of fairies in Old English literature. Norman Talbot mentions *Beowulf*, where “‘ylfe’ are children of Cain, as Grendel is” (1996, 96). On the whole, it seems that the fairies needed some time to develop from figures of popular superstition into literary personnel and to find a secure place in literature, since also “the mentions of fairies in medieval manuscripts are, indeed, sparse, [however:] they cover most of the types that we shall come across later” (Briggs 1967, 3).

One of the earliest written fairy stories is the Irish *Serglige Con Culainn* or *The Wasting Sickness of Cú Chulainn* existing in an Old Irish version from the 9th and a Middle Irish version dating from the 10th /11th century. Cuchulain is the pre-eminent hero of Ulster in the *Ulster Cycle*. He is the son of the (sun) god Lugh and a mortal woman (the sister of King Conchobar), and one of his important tasks is to defend his land and his people. One day Cuchulain becomes hopelessly sick of a strange illness brought on by the fairy sisters Fand and Liban, after he has shot at two birds which were the fairy sisters in disguise. He falls into a kind of coma. The day before Samhain (1st November) he is visited by a messenger, who tells him that Fand is in love with him because her husband Mannanan has abandoned her and that Fand and Liban entreat him to their defend their people against enemies – in exchange for his service in battle he shall have Fand.³⁷ Liban promises that he will be cured if he goes to the otherworld. Cuchulain at first cannot make up his mind to go, but sends Laeg, his charioteer, who comes back with very positive reports of Fairyland, so that Cuchulain goes there after all, and helps the fairy people fight a battle against their enemies. He then stays a month with Fand as her lover. Emer, his wife at home, is jealous, and plots against Fand, who follows Cuchulain into his human home (this last bit occurs only in the Middle Irish version). Emer gathers fifty women and plans to kill Fand. However, Cuchulain promises Fand that he will protect her. Emer then argues that Fand is not better than she is and that Cuchulain should remember her older rights. During their quarrel, Mannanan appears and demands that his wife should decide between him and Cuchulain. Fand finds both of equal worth but eventually chooses her own husband, since he is without a consort and Cuchulain already has Emer.

³⁷ Could this (a fairy message delivered on Halloween) be an early source for the temporal setting in “Tam Lin”? It is at least a hint at the special situation of All Hallow's Eve: the borders between the human world and the otherworld become permeable.

Cuchulain, seeing her leave, wanders madly into the mountains of Ulster, and it requires the spell of Conchobar's druids and Manannan's magic cloak to make him forget. Finally Cuchulain and Emer are provided with Druidic drinks and forget about the whole episode. William Butler Yeats would later on use part of this story for his stage plays about Cuchulain (*At the Hawk's Well*, *On Baile's Strand*). Apart from that this story looks like an early model for the basic Tam-Lin story: man taken by fairy, recovered by his own wife.

After its slow beginnings, the literary fairy experiences a first flowering in medieval verse and prose romances, written in Old French, Middle High German and Middle English. Especially in works about King Arthur and his circle the heroes frequently have to deal with fairies. In the multitude of Arthurian stories three fairy figures stand out (Paton 1903, 6): Morgan le Fay, the Lady of the Lake and Niniane, of which the first two are often portrayed as antagonists (ibid. 21).³⁸ But of course not only the Arthurian cycle contains fairy stories – another important literary medieval fairy is Mélusine.³⁹ Two French romances centre around her, others mention Mélusine-like characters.⁴⁰ Besides the romances, the Breton lais should not be forgotten, since they prove a fairy-friendly genre as well. Brittany – belonging to the Celtic culture area that has already been introduced as an area where belief in fairies persists even today – has always been rich in oral fairy lore and some of the narratives passed into written form early on.

Breton lais are short verse narratives dating from the late twelfth or early thirteenth century. They are frequently concerned with the intrusion of the supernatural into the world of everyday life and their content is often based on oral sources. Many of the 23 lais that have been handed down in written form have no known author, 12, however, are ascribed to Marie de France (Lundt 1996, 41).⁴¹ Of those 23 lais, 11 are classified as “lais féériques” (Aubailly 1986, 11). Apart from two exceptions (*Yonec* and *Tydorel*) they recount the story of a female fairy in love with a mortal man – the basic pattern of the “Thomas the Rhymer”/ “Tam Lin” stories – while the two exceptions are concerned with the love of a male fairy for a mortal woman.

³⁸ Some scholars, however, regard Niniane (or Viviane or Nymue as she is also called in some works) and the Lady of the Lake as one person, for example Sue Ellen Holbrook (in Fenster 1996, 171 ff.).

³⁹ Furthermore Laudine, Lyones and Marrion (Paton 1903, 284, 287) all belonging to the Arthurian story cycle, could be mentioned, as well as the “dragon maiden”, the “hag transformed” and the “grail bearer” (Paton 1903, 299).

⁴⁰ The romances are *Mélusine* by Jean D'Arras, a prose romance and *Mélusine* by Couldrette, a verse romance. Both were written around 1400. They will be examined in more detail later in this chapter.

⁴⁰ That is, *Mélion*, *Bisclavret*, *Guigemar*, *Graelent*, *Lanval*, *Tyolet*, *Désiré*, *Yonec*, *Tydorel* and the *lai de l'Espine* (Aubailly 1986, 11).

⁴¹ Marie de France was probably the abbess of an English convent around 1160-1170, though scholars are divided as to her definite identity. She may have been abbess in Shaftesbury or Reading but no definite evidence exists in either case.

Still other medieval texts featuring fairies – here, however, the line between fiction and non-fiction seems sometimes hard to draw – are chronicles and text-collections, for example by Walter Map, Giraldus Cambrensis, Gervase of Tilbury or Ralph of Coggeshall.⁴² Here, numerous kinds of fairies are presented – fairy women, men and children – but the most common story here is again that of a mortal man getting involved with a fairy woman.

The blossoming of fairy literature in the twelfth and thirteenth century can be explained by various hypotheses. In her study about the literary figure of Melusina, Bea Lundt remarks: “The twelfth century brings forth, (...) with a heretofore unknown intensity, a wave of fairy tale texts and fairy tale collections in Europe (...) This time, also called the ‘twelfth Century Renaissance’ is considered (...) as a turning point of especially intensive social change” (1996, 115-6, my translation).⁴³ This social change finds expression for example in the founding of several European universities. As Charles Haskins (1927, viii) describes it:

[The twelfth century in Europe] was in many respects an age of fresh and vigorous life. The epoch of the Crusades, of the rise of towns, and of the earliest bureaucratic states of the West, it saw the culmination of Romanesque art and the beginnings of Gothic; the emergence of the vernacular literatures; the revival of the Latin classics and of Latin poetry and Roman law; the recovery of Greek science, with its Arabic additions, and of much of Greek philosophy; and the origin of the first European universities.

Part of the transformation process is, according Lundt (1996, 119) a search for individuality in order to find personal happiness in the individual relationship with a partner. Lundt therefore proposes that the Melusina-stories might have served the function of a fictional ‘laboratory’ for author and readers, where it was possible to experiment with alternative models for relationships: “What was impossible for twelfth century women, namely to enter into sexual relationships with an actively demanding and unconcerned attitude, to set up conditions and prohibitions for the marriage and to insist that they be respected, all this is imagined in the figure of the fairy” (1996, 123, my translation).⁴⁴ Diane Purkiss comments on the flourishing fairy literature of the Middle Ages as well, but her emphasis is a different one: “the first big literary starburst of fairies occurs during and after the Crusades” (2000b, 197).⁴⁵ She goes on to explain that meeting the unknown, the ‘other’, probably served as an important inspiration for fantastic literature: “literary and folkloric fairies begin to proliferate at precisely the

⁴² Walter Map’s *De Nugis Curialium* (1181-1192), *The Itinerary through Wales* by Giraldus Cambrensis (twelfth century), *Otia Imperialia* by Gervase of Tilbury (1209-1214), and the *English Chronicle* (ca. 1220) by Ralph of Coggeshall.

⁴³ “Das 12. Jahrhundert (...), bringt mit einer vorher ungekannten Intensität eine Welle von Märchentexten und Märchensammlungen im europäischen Raum hervor. (...) Diese Zeit, als ‚Renaissance des 12. Jahrhunderts‘ bezeichnet, gilt (...) als eine Wendemarke besonders intensiven gesellschaftlichen Wandels.”

⁴⁴ “Was der Frau des 12. Jahrhunderts unmöglich war, nämlich aktiv fordernd und unbefangene sexuelle Beziehungen einzugehen, Bedingungen und Verbote für die Ehe an den Mann zu richten und auf ihrer Einhaltung zu bestehen, dies alles wird in Gestalt der Fee vorausgedacht.”

⁴⁵ Between 1096 and 1270 eight crusades take place, originating from central Europe and ending e.g. in Constantinople, the Holy Land, Egypt or Libya (*dtv Atlas zur Weltgeschichte*. München: dtv, 1964²⁶, 150-3).

moment when a culture begins to encounter other cultures” (ibid.). Periods of change seem to be especially fertile ground for the occurrence of fairy literature – or fantastic literature on the whole – a phenomenon that will repeat itself in later epochs, as we shall see.

Typology of medieval fairies

What characterizes medieval fairies? In most cases (and in contrast to later portrayals) they are of human shape and adult-sized – their kinship to the heroic fairies of folklore is obvious. They are often described as beautiful, especially those female fairies who become lovers or wives of mortal men. But frequently the fairies are not even called fairies. In the *lais* or in Chrétien de Troyes’ romances they are termed “demoiselle” or “pucelle” (Harf-Lancner 1996, 149), their description, however, makes it clear that these young women are of an otherworldly kind. The fairy can appear as a generous and powerful lover (in the *lais*), who, however, usually tries to regulate the relationship by imposing certain taboos, the breaking of which cause the disappearance of the fairy from the world of men. The fairy can also appear as a healer or as an adviser of young knights. Yet, she can also be portrayed as a malicious, scheming figure that must be defeated, or, and this especially in later texts, as a dangerous lecherous creature, whose temptations the knights must resist and from whose clutches they have to free themselves.

Where do medieval fairies come from? What is their realm? Medieval authors often associate Fairyland with wild nature. Others place it in subterranean countries or equate it with the land of the dead. It can also be found in exotic locations on earth, for example the orient: “Fairyland is always just beyond the boundaries of the known. (...) As the pace of exploration accelerated, so fairyland moved on” (Purkiss 2000b, 204) – further East, for example, from the Holy Land to Persia to the East Indies. This development might remind one of the shifting of the American frontier, including the expulsion of the aboriginal population some centuries later and indeed, some parallels between fairies and aboriginal people (which, according to one theory about their origins they are actually assumed to be) such as their connection to nature and their marginality have been pointed out already.

Several attempts have been made to classify medieval fairies. Probably the most influential typology is that of Laurence Harf-Lancner, dating from 1984. She divides the (female) fairies of medieval romances into two groups: the fairy godmother type, deriving from divinities of fate from classical antiquity (Parcae or Fatae) and the supernatural lover type. Harf-Lancner summarizes origin and development of the two types:

The Middle Ages (...) knew two kinds of fairies: the Parcae, whose classical image had been significantly transformed by popular tradition; and the ladies of the forest whose path often crosses that of mortals. In the twelfth century the latter became fairies when they entered into learned culture and as

the word fairy became more and more dissociated from the character of the Parcae. At the beginning of the thirteenth century the two folkloristic types, previously distinct, melted into one new figure, fully literary, both loving goddess and mistress of destiny. After the Middle Ages, fairies would have no other face, and the fairies of popular tales have often experienced the influence of this romance creation. (1984, 148, my translation)

Two romances where fairies appear as godmothers are *Amadas et Ydoine* (ca. 1200) and *Les Merveilles de Rigomer* (ca. 1260-90). In the former the heroine Ydoine is assisted by her fairy godmothers in escaping from an unwanted marriage. In the latter Gawain and Lancelot of the Round Table have to find ways to deal with the castle of Rigomer, which had been enchanted by a malicious fairy. They are helped in their efforts by a benevolent fairy (Harf-Lancner 1998, 136-138). The Lady of the Lake, who appears as Lancelot's foster-mother in several works of the Arthurian cycle, should probably also be counted among the fairy-godmothers.

The romances that feature fairies as supernatural lovers are subdivided by Harf-Lancner into two further groups – the *conte mélusinien* and the *conte morgainien* (the Melusina- and the Morgain-tale) – of which the Morgain-tale is the one that corresponds with the “Thomas the Rhymer”/“Tam Lin”-pattern. But since both are important influences, both shall be described here. In the first sub-group the fairy enters the world of mortals with the intention of staying there, an effort which is usually thwarted by her mortal lover who accidentally breaks the taboo imposed on him by her, while in second sub-group the mortal lover is admitted into Fairyland.⁴⁶

The *conte mélusinien*

The group of Melusina tales (hence ‘Melusina group’, or, in Harf-Lancner’s terminology *conte mélusinien*) has been named after *Mélusine*, the prose romance by Jean d’Arras, dating from ca. 1387. A few years later (1401) a verse adaptation (with slight alterations) of the same name was written by the troubadour Couldrette. It was, however, much less popular than the version of Jean d’Arras (Frenzel 2005, 515). The plot of both *Mélusines* can be summed up as follows: The knight Raymondin encounters the beautiful Mélusine, who offers to marry him and to found a powerful dynasty (the house of Lusignan) with him, if he is willing to submit to one restriction: never to see her on a Saturday. The marriage is happy, blessed with many children; one day, however, Raymondin transgresses the limit that had been set by his wife and spies after her while she takes her bath on a Saturday. He discovers that his wife has the body of a serpent from the waist downwards (a

⁴⁶ The first type describes “la venue d'une fée parmi les mortels, à son union avec l'un d'entre eux, union rompue par la transgression d'un interdit, après la naissance d'un ou plusieurs enfants” (Harf-Lancner 1984, 203). The second type shows how “la fée, loin de suivre son amant, l'entraîne dans l'autre monde” (Harf-Lancner 1984, 84).

deformation imposed on Mélusine by her mother as punishment for killing her father). There are no immediate consequences to this disclosure but when, one day, Raymondin insults his wife by calling her a serpent, she has to leave him – she becomes a serpent/dragon and flies away. Typical elements of the *conte mélusinien* in *Mélusine* are the violation of the taboo and the disappearance of the supernatural wife. It is, however, untypical, in so far as this does not happen directly after the discovery of the woman's serpentine nature. Harf-Lancner (1984, 113, my translation) sees the following narrative pattern as central to the *conte mélusinien*:

I. The mortal encounters the fairy

1. The hero sets off alone or is separated from his companions during a hunt.
2. He gets lost in the forest and comes into a clearing, often there is water nearby.
3. He discovers an extraordinarily beautiful woman who seems to expect him.

II. The pact

4. The woman accepts the man's declaration of his love for her or declares herself her love for him.
5. She accepts his proposal or offers him her hand in marriage herself.
6. She names the restricting condition, he has to observe a taboo, otherwise the relationship will fail.⁴⁷ The man accepts.
7. A marriage feast takes place, the pair live happily together, several children issue from the marriage.

III. The violation of the pact

8. A jealous acquaintance talks the hero into transgressing the taboo, or he himself decides to do so.
9. The man violates the taboo.
10. He sees that his wife is in fact a supernatural being.
11. The fairy disappears.
12. The children stay with their father. Sometimes the fairy takes her daughters with her, but always at least one son stays with the hero, so the continuation of the line is secured. Sometimes the fairy appears to heal or help her descendants.⁴⁸
13. The man loses the wealth that the fairy had brought to him or had helped him acquire.

Harf-Lancner finds two variants of this pattern, swan-maiden tales and “Beauty and the Beast” stories – in the first variant the relationship between the mortal and the fairy is not initiated by the fairy at all, rather, she is caught against her will by the mortal man, while in the latter variant, which normally features a mortal woman and a supernatural man, a happy ending (i.e., the return of the lover) is not uncommon.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Harf-Lancner names three types of taboos: concerning the fairy's nakedness, concerning her Saturday occupations, concerning child-bed (1984, 83).

⁴⁸ She thus becomes a kind of fairy-godmother, it seems. In the eponymous *Mélusine* the heroine appears later on to announce deaths in the family, similar to the Irish *Banshee*.

⁴⁹ This is also known as ‘Amor and Psyche scheme’ or animal bridegroom motif (Aarne Thompson type 0425A). This motif will be taken up in the “Tam Lin”-retelling by Diana Wynne Jones, where the curious girl hero spies on her friend, the Tam Lin figure, which causes him to be wiped from her memory.

Apart from the already mentioned *Mélusines*, the following works can be classified as Melusina-stories: *Lanval* (ca. 1160-70), a lai by Marie de France, which, however, takes a special place since it can also be classified as a Morgain-tale. Furthermore, there are *Yonec* and *Tydorel* – which again occupy a special position since they describe the love between a mortal woman and a fairy man.⁵⁰ Moreover, several texts in Walter Map's *De Nugis Curialium* (1181-1192), one text in Gervase of Tilbury's *Otia Imperialia* (1209-1214), Konrad of Würzburg's *Partonopier und Meliur* (1260-90), Egenolf von Staufenberg's *Der Ritter von Staufenberg* (1310) and *Melusine* (1467) by Thüring von Ringoltingen. Later adaptations of the Melusina topic were for example written by dramatists Hans Sachs (1556) and Jakob Ayrer (1598), during the nineteenth century by Ludwig Tieck (*Sehr wundersame Historie von der Melusina*, 1829) and Johann Wolfgang Goethe (*Die Neue Melusine*, as part of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, 1816) treated Melusina humorously. The twentieth century has also seen some new German Melusina adaptations, such as Gustav Schwab: *Die schöne Melusina* (1882), Nelly Sachs: "Melusinenzyklus", in *Fahrt ins Staublose* (1961), and Andrea Hensgen: *Melusine* (1999).

Throughout the centuries the Melusina-pattern did not stay unchanged. While in the early texts the Melusina-figure is, according to Lundt (1996, 171), often a nameless entity, serving as a catalyst for the man's development, then in later texts she is portrayed in more detail and advances to the eponymous character of those works which now foreground her characteristics, desires and transformations. Here, the aspect of the fairy trying to attain an immortal soul through the marriage with a mortal is added (for though the fairy is immortal, she does not have a soul – a phenomenon that is discussed with some scientific accuracy in Paracelsus's *Liber de Nymphis* (1550)). I do, however, not quite agree with Lundt's proposed development of the fairy, since already in the early texts, e.g. in *Lanval*, the desires of the fairy are of some importance, for it is she who chooses the knight as her lover and so fulfils her sexual needs. Lucy Allen Paton argues in a similar vein with regard to the type of the fairy-godmother: "the fay is never a disinterested actor. Her influence on the hero's life is for the gratification of her love for him" (1903, 181) and, according to Paton, in the older stories (e.g. *Tyolet* and *Le Bel Inconnu*, late twelfth century) the fairy chooses to protect a (male) child since she intends him to become her lover later on, a constellation which has, however, changed by time the Lady of the Lake makes her appearance as a mentor of young knights.

Lundt interprets the Melusina-tales as an expression of the relationship between a (mostly) male author and socially not integrated aspects of femininity. And indeed, in the

⁵⁰ These stories focus on the conception of a hero (*Yonec* and *Tydorel*, respectively), after this has happened, the fairy man deserts his mortal lover (Harf-Lancner 1984, 243).

Melusina-stories the mortal man is sooner or later deserted by his wife – who can simply not be domesticated. But at least in the early texts the mortals profit from their relationships with the supernatural female, be it by developing their personality, or by obtaining (at least for some time) wealth, fertility and familial happiness. In the endings of the early texts, the men are often left confused or unhappy but are not harmed for life. This changes, however, as new Melusina-texts are produced – Peter von Stauffenberg in *Der Ritter von Stauffenberg* (1310) dies for violating the taboo (Lundt 1996, 119) and “Melusine from Fairyland turns into a devil in a woman’s body “ (ibid., 124, my translation) and the fascination that the otherworld exerted (e.g. in *Lanval*) has vanished. Lundt proposes the growing influence of the Christian church – and the increasing fear of sexuality and female sensuality that went hand in hand with it – as one of the reasons for this development (ibid., 32), a development that affected also the *conte morganien*.⁵¹

Undine and Lorelei

A story cycle related to the Melusina-tales – and taken into consideration because the motif of the *femme fatale* typical for the “Tam Lin”/“Thomas the Rhymer”-pattern is rather distinct here – concerns the water-women Undine and Lorelei. The Undine-motif became, strongly influenced by Paracelsus’ description of the *undenes* (‘waterpeople’), popular especially in the nineteenth and twentieth century. Here as well as in the Melusina-tales the supernatural woman marries a mortal man – hoping to attain an immortal soul through this union – but fails, as for example in Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué’s prose narrative *Undine* (1811) and Jean Giraudoux’s drama of the same name (1939). The focus of the earlier Undine-texts is on the fairy’s need for salvation, but also on the danger inherent in her, since none of the heroes in the two texts mentioned above survives his final taboo-breaking. Interestingly, the norm-violation here is not a transgression of a taboo of sight but the breaking of the marriage oath. Maybe the fact that the type of woman presented in this kind of tale is a different one from the Melusina type can account for this difference. While the Melusina-stories show self-possessed, mature women who try to ensure the happiness of their marriage by a contract that guarantees them some amount of independence, the Undine-stories present a child-woman who totally abandons herself to love – so the faithful dedication of the husband to Undine is of crucial importance in the latter ones (Lundt, 1996). While Fouqué’s *Undine* may be the most famous, a more recent adaptation is Ingeborg Bachmann’s *Undine geht* from 1961, which recounts the story from Undine’s point of view.

⁵¹ Later works will take up the idea of the demonic serpent-like women, for instance *Elsie Venner* (1861) by Oliver Wendell Holmes and *The Lair of the White Worm* (1911) by Bram Stoker.

Related to Undine in her connection to water and her deadliness is the Lorelei/Lore Ley, a beautiful woman who so distracts sailors on the river Rhine with her singing so that they become shipwrecked and drown. In contrast to Melusine and Undine she is not a figure derived from medieval sources but the invention of Clemens Brentano, who used the topic for example in his poem “Zu Bacharach am Rheine” (1800). Lore Ley became famous through the poem “Ich weiß nicht, was soll es bedeuten” (1823) by Heinrich Heine and throughout the nineteenth century attracted many other authors.⁵² The Lore Ley is only one of many femme fatales that populated (late) nineteenth century literature, but she is clearly related to a group of much older femme fatales, namely the sirens, as described e.g. in the *Odyssey*.

The conte morganien

The second group of medieval fairy-stories, the Morgain-group or, in Harf-Lancner’s terms *conte morganien* (the stories of Thomas the Rhymer and Tam Lin would probably be grouped here), is named after the principal fairy of the Arthurian story cycle, Morgan le Fay.⁵³ Harf-Lancner again breaks down the narrative pattern into three main parts. There is the journey of the hero into Fairyland, his sojourn there with his fairy lover, which is often restricted by a taboo, and his return to the world of men, since he has violated the taboo. Often, however, the pair is reunited in the otherworld. Harf-Lancner further subdivides the three main elements (my translation):

I. Encountering the fairy

1. The hero leaves his home and approaches the border of Fairyland (often a forest).
2. An enchanted animal appears; he hunts it and finds himself in Fairyland.
3. A fairy, of whom the animal is frequently a messenger, declares her love for him.

II. The hero’s stay in Fairyland

4. The hero enjoys his stay in Fairyland, time passes without him noticing it.
5. The hero recovers his memory, often after the violation of a taboo, he desires to return to his own world.

III. The return to the world of men

6. The fairy explains how in Fairyland times passes differently and imposes a taboo on him that shall prevent him from aging on his return.
7. The hero breaks the taboo.

⁵² They include Joseph von Eichendorff: *Ahnung und Gegenwart* (1815), Otto Heinrich von Loeben: “Loreley, eine Sage vom Rhein” (1821), Emanuel Geibel *Die Loreley* (1860), Julius Wolff: *Lirkei, eine Romanze* (1886), F. Delacroix: *Fleurs d’outre-Rhin* (1843), Jean Lorrain: *Loreley* (1897), Guillaume Appolinaire: *La Loreley* (1904), James Robinson Planché: *Lureley* (1827), Thomas Bailey Aldrich: *The Loreley* (1876), and Mark Twain: *An Ancient Legend of the Rhine* 1880 (translation of Heine’s poem).

⁵³ Morgain, Morgan, Morgen, Morgue, Morghe, Morge – the variations of spelling are almost as numerous as the appearances of the Morgain character in works belonging to the Arthurian cycle and even in works well beyond it, for example the *Roman de Thèbes* or *Huon de Bordeaux* (Paton 1903, 255-7). Sometimes attempts are made to connect Morgain also to the Morrigan, an Irish goddess of war, but, as Heather Rose Jones (1997) claims, there is no sufficient basis for this assumption.

8. He ages rapidly (often several centuries).
9. He dies or disappears into the otherworld. (adapted from Harf-Lancner 1984, 213)

The first stories belonging to the Morgain-type can be found in medieval Irish literature (as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter), for instance *The Voyage of Bran* (presumably first written down in the 7th century), which narrates Bran's expedition into Fairyland, furthermore *The Wasting Sickness of Cuchulain* – belonging to the Ulster cycle – that describes the love between Cuchulain and the fairy Fand, and *The Story of Oisín* (Harf-Lancner 1984). Among the Breton lais *Lanval*, *Graelent*, *Désiré*, *Guingamor*, *Guigemar* and *Tyolet* are classified as Morgain-tales (Harf-Lancner 1984, 243), even though the first three contain elements of the Melusina-type as well, since here the prohibition is emphasised very strongly.

So far, Morgain, that is, a figure bearing that name, has not appeared yet. The first character which is actually named Morgain (or Morgen respectively, Morgain being the French version) turns up in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini* (ca. 1148).⁵⁴ She is one of nine sisters, who dwell on the Isle of the Blessed. She has healing powers and takes care of the wounded king: "For the first time name of her who cures Arthur in order to allow him to return to his people and reconquer Britain is revealed" (Harf-Lancner 1984, 264, my translation). Morgain is portrayed as a "lovely, learned and potent woman" (Fries 1996, 69) and the fact that her realm is an *insula pomorum*, an isle of apples, seems to stand "as objective to [her] nurturing function" (ibid.).

In *Erec et Enide* by Chrétien de Troyes, Morgain is for the first time located in Avalon, where she reigns together with her companion Guingamar (or Guiomar) (Fries 1996, 69). Also in Layamon's account, in those of Gervase of Tilbury and Giraud de Barri she is mentioned in connection with Avalon. In *Erec et Enide*, similarly as in *Vita Merlini*, Morgain's qualities as a healer are pointed out. Chrétien de Troyes makes Morgain Arthur's sister, a connection never mentioned by Geoffrey of Monmouth.

With the flowering of the Breton romances in the second half of the twelfth century certain elements of romance pass into fairy literature, among other things the love of the fairy for a mortal, whom she takes with her into the otherworld. This aspect can for example be found in the lais *Lanval*, *Graelent* and *Guingamor*. Morgain, too, takes a mortal into the otherworld. Thus it was probably tempting for authors to connect her with the narrative

⁵⁴ Yet, Harf-Lancner assumes that Geoffrey of Monmouth cannot be called Morgain's literary 'father', since the oral tradition provides several stories in which king Arthur dwells in the otherworld with a fairy who has healing powers (1984, 266).

pattern mentioned above, Harf-Lancner assumes.⁵⁵ She cites as evidence the appearance of Guingamar (who bears similarities to Guingamor) in Chrétien de Troye's *Erec et Enide* as Morgain's paramour (1984, 266). The introduction of a human lover, however, seems to initiate the moral decline of the Morgain-figure.

In the early works Morgain is portrayed as a rather positive character – she is the healer who nurses the dying king – but in the French prose romances of the thirteenth century she takes a turn for the worse (Fries 1996, xxxi), thus probably also becoming a model for the evil fairy queens that we find in works of the twentieth century. In contrast to the *lais*, where the world of fairies is presented as an alternative to the courtly world and its shortcomings, and where the fairy in her generosity makes up for the mistakes of the king, the Arthurian court has now become the superior model and serves as a bulwark against the intrusion of the dangerous otherworld (Harf-Lancner 1984, 267, similarly Fenster 1996, xxxix). And the creatures issuing from the otherworld are not presented favourably any more either. Morgain is first established as a villain in the prose *Lancelot* (ca. 1225-1237). In four episodes she imprisons several of Arthur's knights whose love she cannot gain. For the first time this happens in the episode about the *Val sanz retor*, a place where Morgain keeps captive all unfaithful knights that happen to pass through the area, until they are finally freed by Lancelot. In three other episodes it is Lancelot himself who becomes Morgain's victim and is abducted and imprisoned by her. (This seems to be another foreshadowing of an important element of the "Tam Lin"-pattern.) The first abduction is motivated by Morgain's hatred of queen Guinevra: Morgain wants to embarrass Guinevra because of her love affair with Lancelot. The following two times Morgain abducts the knight because of her own love for him. And while in the *lais* a knight would count himself lucky to have been chosen by a fairy, Morgain's love for Lancelot and other knights stays unrequited – the men are her unwilling victims who in the end will be freed and return to Arthur's court. The tales about Alisandre l'orphelin follow the same narrative pattern as the Lancelot-episodes: they can be found in the *Prophesies de Merlin* dating from the thirteenth century, three manuscripts of the prose *Tristan* from the fifteenth century and in Malory's *Morte d'Artur*. Here, too, Morgain tries in vain to win a knight's favour. Like Lancelot, Alisandre escapes her in the end. In order to keep her knights within her reach Morgain uses enchantments and drugs (in the Lancelot episodes) and is even ready to make use of treachery and torture (in the Alisandre episodes).⁵⁶

⁵⁵ In my opinion the name *conte morganiën* is therefore a bit misleading, since the early stories featuring Morgain did actually *not* have the love-between-fairy-and-mortal element.

⁵⁶ She abuses her medical knowledge, promising to heal Alisandre's wounds but intensifying them by a certain ointment until Alisandre promises her in pain to do anything she wants. Only then she applies a really soothing medicine (Paton 1903, 57-8).

Her corrupt character is now also often reflected by a decaying body – Morgain is presented as an aging, ugly woman (e.g. in *Prophesies de Merlin, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Fenster xxxii)). The variations of *Ogier le Danois* present an exception from this tendency – Ogier lives happily in Fairyland with Morgain, who is “gentle and queenly” (Paton 1903, 77) and is later voluntarily returned to earth by her – here, it seems, the pattern of “Thomas of Erceldoune” is foreshadowed.

What is the reason for this development? Harf-Lancner sees as one possible reason the fear of supernatural figures from pagan mythology that increased with Christianisation and resulted in the demonisation of such figures. But this explanation is not sufficient for the development of Morgain, since the Lady of the Lake is a pagan figure as well, but one who is portrayed more favourably and who is presented as a figure who tries to thwart Morgain’s intrigues (Paton 1903, 21). Therefore, Harf-Lancner sees the second reason for the damnation of Morgain in the character itself: Morgain is regarded as a dangerous, disturbing person, who holds men captive and breaks the rules of female modesty through her unfaithfulness and lechery (Harf-Lancner 1984, 267 and 273). Maureen Fries argues similarly, describing Morgain’s decline as “coinciding with the growth of women-hatred in the latter Middle Ages” (1996, 69). Probably this development, which was accompanied by a dual vision of woman – seen either as saint or whore, prototypically represented by chaste Mary and sinful Eve – may also serve as explanation for the different treatment of Morgain and the Lady of the Lake.

While Morgain represents the Eve-aspect of woman, the Lady of the Lake, foster-mother of Lancelot and later helper of the Arthurian court, might represent the Mary-aspect. Fries also regards Morgain and the Lady of the Lake as two aspects of woman, though not from a Christian perspective but rather with a view to the pagan idea of the Great Goddess: “Obviously the Lady of the Lake has been retailored to represent the (mostly) nurturing side of the split mother-image, as Morgan has become the (mostly) devouring side” (1996, 71). It is interesting to observe how this division of the female will persist and find its way also into the ballad of “Tam Lin”: here, the fairy queen is the destructive female actor, while Janet represents the protective, productive side (her function as nurturing mother figure is made quite obvious by the fact that she is pregnant) – but it is even more interesting to see that there is no such split female entity in “Thomas the Rhymer”. Here, the fairy queen appears as a powerful seductress but not as evil. She appears much closer to the early medieval idea of fairy ladies in the Breton lais, and this is probably also where she comes from, as the origins of traditional ballads lie medieval folk songs that have in turn been influenced by French romances (for a more detailed discussion of the ballads see the following chapter)

The observations about Morgain are in line with Lundt's hypotheses about the changing image of the Melusina-figure in the late Middle Ages: "The optimism of individual, self-created dreams of love in the twelfth century is followed by a sense of crisis imbued with deep anxieties towards the other sex, (...) the need for demonising this woman (...) increases in the late Middle Ages" (Lundt 1996, 165, my translation).⁵⁷ Moreover, in later accounts of Morgain there is a tendency towards rationalisation, which robs her of her supernatural glamour. So Paton (1903, 57) judges the story of Alisandre l'orphelin: "we have to do with sadly rationalized material". Morgain treats Alisandre with harmful substances, she does not send him a "fairy debility (...) that leads him to realize her power" (Paton 1903, 57) – as for example Fand does in *The Wasting Sickness of Cuchulain* mentioned earlier, which Paton regards as an early *conte morganiën* – and puts him to sleep with the help of drugs and not through enchantment. As it seems, (male) authors were apparently not any longer willing to present powerful, supernatural and morally ambivalent female figures – they are reduced to mere malicious, scheming women.

A further medieval fairy story, which is not exactly covered by Harf-Lancner's *conte morganiën/conte mélusiniën* typology but which I think nevertheless important, as it foreshadows motifs of "Tam Lin" and "Thomas the Rhymer" is *Sir Orfeo*. This is a late thirteenth century verse romance which recounts the Orpheus-myth with a fairy cast: Sir Orfeo's wife Heurodis (Eurydice) is abducted by the king of fairies; Orfeo is distraught and wanders in the woods. One day he sees his wife among fairies and follows her into Fairyland, impresses the fairy court with his harping and is allowed to take his wife back to earth. In contrast to the classical Orpheus myth, this story has a happy ending, as Orfeo regains his wife and his throne. It is also interesting how the underworld and Fairyland are equated here, giving support to the hypothesis that the fairies are in fact the dead (cf. chapter two).

From the sixteenth to the nineteenth century

After the popularity of fairy stories had been waning in the late Middle Ages, the literary fairies experienced a revival in the early modern period. Now poetry was the leading genre – "Shakespeare's age was the great time of fairy poetry" notes Briggs (1967, 34) – but fairies could be found in contemporary drama as well.

For this second flourishing of fairy literature the encounter with the exotic, the 'other' might have been a just as important source of inspiration as it was for the first wave of

⁵⁷ "Der Optimismus individueller selbstgestalteter Liebesträume des 12. Jahrhunderts weicht einem von tiefen Ängsten vor dem anderen Geschlecht geprägten Krisenempfinden, (...) das Bedürfnis nach der Dämonisierung dieser Frau (...) nimmt im späten Mittelalter zu".

popularity (during the time of the crusades): the Elizabethan Age saw the beginning colonisation of the Americas, Great Britain's ascent to a leading sea-power and the establishment of modern slave trade. But also Queen Elizabeth I and the personal image favoured by her probably helped fairy literature regain its popularity. Considering that Elizabeth was a monarch who enjoyed being revered as a fairy queen and who was repeatedly entertained by spectacles featuring the queen of fairies as her votary (Purkiss 2000a, 113) the renaissance of fairy literature is not surprising.⁵⁸ Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (published 1589-96) is one of the earliest works of fairy literature inspired by the sovereign. However, so Purkiss assumes, Spenser's relationship to his (fairy) queen was not without difficulties. Significantly, Gloriana, the fairy queen eponymous of the work, appears only briefly: "Spenser hardly dares to write about her or invoke her" (Purkiss 2000b, 179) and her presentation is not exactly complimentary for Elizabeth if one takes into account the associations the queen of the fairies evoked:

[She is connected with] masquerade, evanescence; deceptiveness into deliberate deception; (...) with death; with rebellion and the disorder of social climbing; female misrule; with sexual exhaustion, above all, with ontological nullity, for Arthur never meets the fairy queen (...) and his quest (...) is subject to constant deferral. (Purkiss 2000a, 115)

This last observation about 'constant deferral' could possibly also be applied to Elizabeth's courtiers, supposes Purkiss. They had to pursue the queen's favour endlessly, being sometimes forced to give up other relationships in the process, but without ever securely attaining it.⁵⁹ Spenser's fairy queen may appear as a positive figure at first glance – she inspires King Arthur's heroic quest – on closer examination, however, she proves rather problematic.⁶⁰

Shakespeare, whose contributions to fairy literature would prove of crucial influence for later developments, found ways to cope with his complicated queen as well – according to Purkiss he is "indulging Elizabeth's enthusiasm for the role of the queen of the fairies or her votary, while critiquing her through the same figure" (2000a, 116). And indeed, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1594-96) Titania, the fairy queen is ridiculed – she falls in love with a "rude mechanical" (III.ii.10) bearing an ass's head – and Purkiss concludes: "this fairy queen is the butt of the joke. Removing from femininity its power to deceive and rendering it as deceived is a very effective disarming of an otherwise terrifyingly unstable power" (2000a,

⁵⁸ According to Marjorie Swann gifts presented as gifts of the fairy queen were a popular method among courtiers to influence the queen without attracting the suspicion of bribery (Swann, 2000)

⁵⁹ As proof for her hypothesis Purkiss names the close connection between Walter Raleigh and *The Faerie Queene* – he was one of its dedicatees and also involved in its creation (2000a, 116).

⁶⁰ Interestingly, not so much the queen of fairies but rather one of the human female figures in the *Faerie Queene* would later prove a valuable inspiration for twentieth century author Diana Wynne Jones, who, thanks to Spenser's Britomart realized that a work of literature could also have real female hero (Jones 1989, 133).

116). Titania has come a long way from the powerful, potentially dangerous fairy queens of medieval romance – here it is not the fairy who lulls her lover into an enchanted sleep but the fairy queen herself is charmed in her sleep (though on command of her fairy husband and not by the mortal, so the reversal is not quite complete).

Shakespeare finds yet another effective method for taming the fairies: he miniaturises them and thereby sets a trend that will become almost the rule in the centuries to follow. The fairy rulers Oberon and Titania are usually assumed to be adult-sized – having had love affairs with the mortal rulers Hyppolita and Theseus (Swann 2000).⁶¹ But their servants bear names like Pease Blossom, Mustard Seed or Cobweb, names that evoke the idea of tiny creatures who can crawl “into acorn cups” (II.i.31) and who, on stage, might be imagined as seen through a magnifying glass.

Shakespeare’s fairies have apparently not evolved directly from folklore motives. Probably the author did not even have direct access to oral tradition, relying instead on the works of the first folklorists such as Reginald Scot, and adapting characters from classical literature (Purkiss 2000b, 158).

Apart from human-sized Titania, Shakespeare also created a very small fairy queen: Mab, who is described by Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet* (1593-96): she is so small that an empty hazelnut serves her as a coach (I.iv.59).⁶² For Purkiss, Mab is a “consolatory fantasy, dreamt up by a man who cannot control anything larger or more important” (2000b, 169). And also in Swann’s interpretation Mab is quite far from the proud and beautiful fairy queens of the Middle Ages. She is instead associated with greedy dreams of wealth. This is in accord with popular belief which holds that fairies own innumerable treasures and recalls medieval accounts such as *Lanval* where the fairy showers her lover with precious gifts. But the portrayal of Mab and her exotic carriage appear more grotesque than proud. She drives “o’er courtiers’ knees, that dream on cur’sies straight; / O’er lawyers’ fingers, who straight dream on fees” (1.iv.72-73). Shakespeare portrays the fairy queen as a “cutting edge consumer”, equipped with all kinds of commodities (Swann 2000). But her equipage appears “grotesquely parasitic” (ibid.), the grotesque resulting especially from the spider-legs, grasshopper wings and cricket-bones which make up the components of Mab’s coach.⁶³

⁶¹ They are also portrayed as adult-sized in later paintings (in contrast to their courtiers), for example in paintings by Fuseli, such as *Titania and Bottom* (1786-89), *Titania, Bottom and the Fairies* (1793-94) and *Titania’s Awakening* (1785-89).

⁶² The origin of Shakespeare’s Mab is probably the legendary warrior queen Maeve of Connaught, protagonist of the Old Irish epic of the *Cattle Raid of Cooley*. Shakespeare’s tiny Mab, however, is a rather far cry from this formidable superwoman.

⁶³ It is noteworthy that Swann speaks of parasitism since an association between fairies and parasitic activity will also be found in some of the fairy literature of the twentieth century.

For Shakespeare there were apparently two strategies to domesticate the fairy queen – make her laughable or make her small, or both. The tiny, ridiculous fairy was a model that was to be imitated widely in the fairy poetry of the Stuart era, from William Browne over Michael Drayton to Robert Herrick.

The roles taken on by fairies in drama are slightly different. In Ben Jonson's masques they serve as means for the glorification of the rulers, for example in *Oberon the Fairy Prince*, in which King James's son Henry is equated with Oberon (Purkiss 2000b, 177). But fairies in drama also served rather negative roles, being associated with deceit and con artists. This is the case in Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist* (1611). Here the deceivers try to convince the naïve Dapper to give up all his worldly possessions in order to be generously rewarded by the queen of fairies, which of course never happens. This kind of fraud being not uncommon in Jacobean England, Jonson may well have had a model case from real life to base his plot on (Swann 2000). Another play where fairies serve as a means of deception is Shakespeare's *Merry Wives of Windsor*: the children of the town dress up as fairies and distract Falstaff, and so the elopement of a young couple is brought about.

A quite different function of fairies in seventeenth century literature was their role as “a sign of the Good Old Days, the Good Old World before whatever change the writer deploras” (Purkiss 2000b, 164). This trait made them attractive e.g. for Herrick and Jonson, who instrumentalised fairies for didactic ends, for instance queen Mab, who punishes slovenly maids:

She that pinches country wenches,
If they rub not clean their benches,
And with sharper nail remembers
When they rake not up their embers (Ben Jonson, *The Satyr*, 1603)

Likewise, Milton employed old-fashioned, folkloristic fairies in *L'Allegro* (1632). The poem features such rural superstitions as setting out a cream-bowl for Robin Goodfellow or “stories told of many a feat, how Faery Mab the junkets eat” (101-2). Purkiss assumes that Milton could present his fairies in such a friendly and harmonic way because he did no longer believe in them, quite like his contemporaries, so his fairies are picturesque but not scary any more. (For a more detailed account of the Elizabethan attitude towards fairy beliefs see the chapter on E. Pope's *Perilous Gard*).

The Age of Reason

The process of ‘cutification’ of the fairies continued and so “tiny fairies troop on into the Restoration and eighteenth century, finding miniature homes everywhere from Margaret

Cavendish's poetic attempts to explain the discoveries of science to Purcell's nostalgic operas of Englishness" (Purkiss 2000b, 183). But the topic seems to have exhausted itself, at least Purkiss criticises the "the mundane repetitiveness of eighteenth century fairy poetry" (ibid. 215). The interest in fairies was waning during the eighteenth century, and Briggs comments that "the climate changed, and if it had not been for Blake we should have little to say about fairies at that time" (1967, 153). One reason for this may have been the interest in classical themes which did not leave much space for indigenous rural topics such as belief in fairies, except maybe in pastoral literature (ibid.). While the native fairies were not en vogue, translations of *contes de fées* by Madame D'Aulnoy and Charles Perrault from France enjoyed some popularity and thus re-introduced the topic of the fairy god-mother to English fairy literature.

Yet, Briggs does, despite her claim that William Blake is the only English author of this epoch worth mentioning with regard to the fairy topic, discuss Alexander Pope's "Rape of the Lock" in some detail, as does Purkiss. Strictly speaking, the sylphs in "The Rape of the Lock" are not fairies, but elementals, but then some of their characteristics suggest that "Pope's sylphs are clearly fairies of a kind" (Briggs 1967, 156) and "owe something to fairy poetry" (Purkiss 2000b, 215). Pope moreover presents his sylphs as the souls of dead women – according to her temperament, each deceased turns into a different kind of elemental and "the light Coquettes in Sylphs aloft repair, / And sport and flutter in the Fields of Air", which would be quite in keeping with the folk theory of fairies being embodiments of the dead.

Apart from that, Pope's fairies are important for later developments, for they are probably the ancestors of the tiny winged creatures that would later populate Victorian nurseries. Before Pope, "fairies had no wings. The fairies of legend, whose exploit folklorists have collected and catalogued, do not fly, and people who claim to have seen them never report that they have wings" (Bown 1999, 45, similarly Briggs 1967, 157). More butterflies than creatures of power, Pope's elementals are definitely not treated seriously, and this can be read as a clear sign that fairies in the eighteenth century were on the decline.

Romanticism

Yet, "rescue was at hand in the shape of the Romantic revival" (Purkiss 2000b, 215). Before the later Romantics hurried to the rescue of fairies, however, William Blake dealt with them repeatedly, both in his literary and his pictorial oeuvre. Briggs assumes that Blake's fairies, like Pope's elemental spirits, carry erotic connotations – they are associated with "the awakening of male desire by feminine vanity and caprice" (Briggs 1967, 161), so once again

the focus is on the idea of the fairy as something feminine. “The fairies seem at once to arouse desire and deny it, as Pope’s sylphs do in *The Rape of the Lock*” (ibid., 163). This is the case for example in the bawdy poem “Long John Brown and Little Mary Bell”. Blake’s advice is continuously to catch and cage the fairies (ibid., 162), thereby expressing his attitude that female vanity ought to be restrained and controlled. Briggs believes that Blake contributed to the resurfacing of the darker sides of the fairies (ibid., 164), while Purkiss is of a quite contrary opinion.

Opinions are divided also on the period of Romanticism itself. Briggs criticizes that “the English poets of the Romantic Revival showed comparatively little knowledge of fairies or interest in them” (1967, 168), with the exception of Keats. It seems, however, that she is rather alone with this opinion. The fairy re-surfaced in literature and along with this scientific interest in fairies began.⁶⁴ Carole Silver sees the Romantics as important forerunners of the Victorians in their study of folklore, collecting and analysing a lot of primary materials (1999, 28). Important folklorists were Thomas Crofton Croker (specialising in Irish fairies), Thomas Keightley (*The Fairy Mythology*), Walter Scott, James Hogg, and Robert Southey. In Germany, the Grimm brothers published their *Teutonic Mythology* (first published in German as *Deutsche Mythologie* in 1835) as well as an essay “On the character of the elves” (“Über das Wesen der Elfen”) as part of their *Irish Elf Tales (Irische Elfenmärchen, 1826)*, which were met with great interest on the side of British folklorists and (together with Carroll’s *Alice* books) helped to set a trend for the whole developing fantasy genre, for, as Darren Harris Fain observes, it resulted in the “Victorian and Edwardian predilection for book-long literary fairy tales” (1999, 303). Scholarly interest in and literary adaptations of fairy topics certainly cross-influenced each other at the beginning of the nineteenth century. For among those who voiced an opinion on the reality and origins of fairies was also Leigh Hunt – to whose circle John Keats was known to belong.⁶⁵ So it comes as no surprise when Purkiss perceives a renaissance of the fairy as a literary motif during the Romantic era, just as does Nicola Bown: “I argue that the interest in fairies is part of a wider rejection of the values of the Enlightenment which found its fullest expression in Romanticism” (1999, 1).⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Nineteenth century folklorists, however, were not really the first: A predecessor of the Romantic and Victorian folklorists was Robert Kirk with his *Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns, and Fairies*, which was written in 1691, but published in printed form only in the nineteenth century.

⁶⁵ According to Silver (1999, 31), Hunt was the most sceptical among the Romantic fairy scholars since he saw the fairies very prosaically as products of disordered imaginations and the belief in them as something that hindered people from becoming more enlightened. However, concludes Silver, even in his attack of the fairies he admits that he is nonetheless fascinated by them.

⁶⁶ This was of course also the time when the Gothic novel was experiencing its heyday and here lie the beginnings of fantastic literature in Tzvetan Todorov’s understanding.

The Romantics' fairy poems (for poetry was the chief genre of fairy literature at that time) drew inspiration from a number of sources. First of all: popular customs and superstitions. One reason that these came to interest the poets was certainly the industrialisation and urbanisation of England that made simple rural life look a desirable alternative – and threatened at the same time its very existence. In order to preserve rural culture and its oral tradition for future generations (of researchers) the first folklorists started collecting stories and ballads. The publication of Bishop Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) was an early sign of the times and frequently served as a source of inspiration for the Romantic poets of whom “nearly all (...) wrote at least one fairy poem” (Bown 1999, 6). Secondly, the Shakespeare-revival that took off towards the end of the eighteenth century presented another important source for the Romantics, especially Romantic (and later also Victorian) painters, such as Henry Fuseli, William Hamilton and George Romney.

The fairies of the Romantic age are characterised by their connection to nature, magic and romance. Apart from that, melancholy became an important characteristic of Romantic fairy literature (Bown 1999, 8). A melancholy that went hand in hand with the presentation of fairies as symbols of irretrievably bygone times.

For Bown the typical Romantic fairy is “tiny and beautiful and possesses butterfly wings” (1999, 6). However, this is only one part of the picture. Especially Keats presents fairies as human-sized beings (without wings) that are rather dangerous. Both “La Belle Dame Sans Merci” – which is essentially a representation of the “Thomas the Rhymer”-pattern – and “Lamia” present a fairy who brings death and misery to men. The two poems could also be classified as adaptations of the Melusine-pattern (even though “La Belle Dame Sans Merci” also contains elements of the *conte morganiien*, since the fairy carries the knight away into her own realm). They thereby continue a rather old tradition, but in a more lethal fashion than before, since Lamia's lover does not survive her exposure as a snake and the *belle dame* brings death to her obviously numerous lovers. Thus the *fata* of old becomes a destructive *femme fatale*.⁶⁷

Despite all these negative connotations, Purkiss sees the two fairy women also as muses that have taken possession of the poet: “It is a privilege to be loved by them, to be chosen by them, but a deadly one” (2000b, 218).⁶⁸ Similarly, Paul Goetsch (2002) observes

⁶⁷ The type of the *femme fatale* admittedly also appears in medieval texts but is usually connected with nineteenth century literature and painting, as H. and I. Daemmrich observe: “Das Interesse an der Figur erreichte seinen Höhepunkt um die Jahrhundertwende [vom 19. zum 20. Jahrhundert]” (1995, 151). (“The interest in this figure reached its heighday among the turn of the [nineteenth] century”, my translation).

⁶⁸ In Ellen Kushner's *Thomas the Rhymer* Thomas is also loved by his muse, the fairy queen. He returns from her alive but is changed nevertheless and carries an otherworldly touch for the rest of his life.

that, even though both *la belle dame* as well as Lamia have been regarded as evil by many literary critics, Keats himself was apparently ambiguous in his judgement about them. Both fairy women could be seen as acting under moral perspectives quite different from those of the human world, they can thus not really be condemned for their actions. Moreover, both of them could be read as embodiments of ideal, immortal love, a concept which cannot survive everyday reality and will thus leave the lover rather disillusioned, so that here actually the lover would be to blame because of his unrealistic expectations. On the other hand, the females figures are also presented as responsible for the outcome because of their great seductiveness – so Goetsch concludes: “Fascinating as his femmes fatales are, their sexual and moral unorthodoxy appears also to be strange, threatening and monstrous. Thus they are appropriate symbols of Keat’s contradictory attitudes towards art, romance and women” (2002, 118).

The Victorian Age

While the enlightenment had tended to treat fairies lightly and humourously and the Romantics had emphasised their dark sides, the Victorian Age included the whole spectrum in between and many more approaches to fairies beyond that.

The nineteenth century has variously been called the ‘golden age of children’s literature’, since here the genre of children’s literature came into its own. Small wonder then that a lot of Victorian fairies can be found in literature for children. The miniaturisation and prettification in centuries before had paved the way as well as the appearance of fairy-godmothers in the *conte de fées* of Madame D’Aulnoy and Charles Perrault. Thus the nursery fairy originated and was frequently used for didactic purposes. But also literature for adults had its share of fairies, even though, while in children’s literature they populate tales and stories, in adult literature poetry seems a more common genre for them (although there were also fairy tales and fairy romances for adults, such as George MacDonald’s *Phantastes*). Furthermore, the vogue of all things medieval led to a renaissance of Arthurian topics (Tennyson’s “Idylls of the King” probably being the most famous work in this vein) and thus also several works featuring Morgan le Fay or the Lanval theme appeared, e.g. by John Moultrie (*La Belle Tryamour*, 1823-24) and Edward Bulwer Lytton (“King Arthur”, 1848), etc.

The tendency to render fairies as cute little creatures with wings and wands may be the one that has most strongly influenced today’s ideas about fairies, but in fact during the reign of Victoria (and later Edward) the ideas about fairies were as varied as the works of literature

and the visual arts that featured fairies were numerous. Poems, novels, romances, plays, ballets, operas, extravaganzas and paintings – fairies everywhere. “It is in Victorian England that fairyland, like everywhere else undergoes a population explosion. Fairies, elves, gnomes, and small winged things of every kind multiply into swarms and infest writing and art and the minds of men and women” Purkiss notes critically (2000b, 220), while Silver more neutrally declares that “the cultural preoccupation with the secret kingdom of the fairies is a hallmark of the era” (1999, 3).⁶⁹

An escape from a disenchanting world shaped by the industrial revolution (Bown 1999,1), and the link to a fading past – these the fairies certainly provided. But Silver (1999, 57) assumes that the fairies were of such great allure to Victorians because the issues associated with them reflected many worries and anxieties of the Victorian bourgeoisie. As the nineteenth century wore on, the world outside the family became more and more confusing and unstable, the birth-rate fell (*ibid.*, 71) and even the stability and security of the family itself began to be doubted. Therefore the Victorians were concerned about their children – and changeling tales flourished. The century saw a heated debate about the rights of women, their status in marriage and divorce – the issue of the fairy bride (or swan maiden) and her customary desertion of husband and children formed an important literary motif. Moreover, folklorists debated intensely about what lay behind the fairy bride stories of old: recollections of the custom of marriage by capture or even memories of a system where women ruled independently over their children? New and exotic ethnic groups were discovered as the English empire expanded – and promptly dwarfs and goblins, small, dark and often malicious, began to populate Victorian literature in large numbers. Urban populations grew and with them social unrest – and therefore, Silver hypothesises, Victorian fear of being run down by the mob found its expression in stories about the fear of the fairy host.

Traditional belief in fairies may have been waning – urbanisation and industrialisation contributed their share to destroying Britain’s rural culture and hindering the transmission of its lore – but the fascination that the fairies exerted on the middle and upper classes was very much alive. “In a remarkable ‘trickle up’ of folk belief, a surprisingly large number of educated Victorians and Edwardians speculated at length on whether fairies did exist or had at least once existed” (Silver 1999, 33). In consequence, the era saw the publication of a large number of scientific texts on the subject – some of the exponents of scientific theories about the origin and nature of fairies have been included in the chapter about the folkloristic aspects

⁶⁹ Of course, the Victorians were very interested not only in fairies but in the supernatural at large – such as ghosts, vampires and angels. Groups like the Theosophists, Rosicrucians and other spiritualist and occultist formations found not few followers, especially among the middle and upper classes.

of fairy belief. Among the *belles lettres*, fairies flourished as well, but in the Victorian era a new aspect of fairy literature emerged as the fairies became protagonists of children's literature.

Early Victorian fairies were quite different from those created by the Romantics – they had been tamed. The fairies lost their sexual overtones and the connection of children with fairies – which we have come to think of as normal – was established only at that time (Purkiss 2000b, 220). The Romantics saw childhood as a better and more innocent world, a view which led to a veritable cult of childhood during the Victorian and, even more so, the Edwardian Age. Fairies, on the other hand, were representatives of an enchanted, if bygone, world, so the connection between fairies and children followed almost logically.⁷⁰

The fairies to be found in children's books of the early and mid-nineteenth century are relatively plain and simple. "The early Victorians were afraid of fairies and tales" claims Purkiss (2000b, 223), since at first fairies were still associated with lax morals and revolution (which many connected with Romanticism). In reaction to this some highly moral fairies were called into being. The first moral fairies are, according to Purkiss, those in Catherine Sinclair's *Holiday House* (1839), featuring the fairy Do-Nothing, who tempts children into being lazy and the good fairy Teach-All whose name is quite self-explanatory. According to K. Briggs, the work can be placed somewhere between parody and allegory (1967, 182) and up to the mid-nineteenth century many similar works by other authors followed – the fairies, mostly in their function as fairy godmothers, are used for didactic purposes. For Briggs (1967, 182-4), George MacDonald (whose works for children include: *Dealings with Fairies* (1867), *At the Back of the North Wind* (1871), *The Princess and the Goblin* (1872), *The Princess and Curdie* (1883), and *Fairytales*, 1920) exemplifies this trend quite well. Charles Kingsley's *Water Babies* (1863) is another work of moral fairy literature for children – here a bad little boy drowns, is turned into a 'water-baby' and under water lives in a world not only of talking fish and lobsters etc. but also of fairies, who, eventually, help him to develop into a

⁷⁰ The link between fairies and children became obvious especially in the so-called 'fairy extravaganzas' or 'spectaculars' that flourished in the West-End of London during the early nineteenth century. At the beginning of the Victorian era, fairies could actually be found there much more frequently than in poems, paintings or children's books (Purkiss 2000b, 225), even if these are much more familiar to us as typical 'habitats' of Victorian fairies. The fairy spectaculars could seldom boast of intriguing plots but attracted the public's attention by their special effects. The fairies were usually played by children, who were hauled on-stage with the help of ropes and trapdoors, thus appearing to be flying, and satisfied the romantic longings of their largely bourgeois audience. But the stage-fairies were ambiguous beings. They symbolise magic and enchantment but are propelled by mundane machinery. They stand for the fascination that stems from the connection between idyllic Fairyland and the innocent world of children – but they were played by working-class girls who had to grow up early and were confronted with a world dominated by materialism and sexuality, exactly the world from which the middle classes tried to escape by visiting the theatres. As Purkiss sums up: "They [the extravaganzas] straddled a number of divisions central to Victorian society, divisions between adulthood and childhood, artifice and sincerity, industry and country, machines and imagination" (Purkiss 2000b, 227).

responsible person. The book has even a sort of epilogue titled “moral”, in which the lessons that children are intended to learn from the book are reiterated. Even though this is a rather self-conscious way of dealing with the issue of morals and the narrator, who is responsible for bringing across the morale proves unreliable more than once, *The Water Babies* is still a didactic book, albeit one that begins to play with the concept of the moralistic children’s book.

More clearly humoristic treatments were also written – such as Thackeray’s *The Rose and the Ring* (1855), Barry Pain’s *The One Before* (1902), or Andrew Lang’s *Prince Prigio* (1889), along with the ‘prettifying’ fictions about fairies which Purkiss regards as the capital crime of the Victorians which would eventually lead to the fairies’s destruction. Similarly, Briggs criticises the tendency to use fairies more and more just as nice ‘trimmings’, a tendency which is especially true for the tiny fairies and which leads to works such as Rose Fyleman’s poem “There are Fairies at the Bottom of our Garden”. For Briggs, Fyleman’s fairies are “as weak and as lacking in meat as any we are likely to have the ill luck to come across” (1967, 198). But the weak and ‘cute’ fairies are not the only ones that populate Victorian juvenile fiction – “from 1850 onwards tricksier, more irresponsible fairies began to appear” observes Briggs (*ibid.*, 185) and cites as examples *Mopsa the Fairy* (1869) by Jean Ingelow and *Amelia and the Dwarfs* (1870) by Juliana Horatia Ewing.⁷¹

Darker and more complex fairy figures can also be found in nineteenth century fairy literature for adults – especially in the poetry of the last decades of the era. Robert Browning’s “Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came” (1855) is characterised as “perhaps the greatest and most unflinching Victorian fairy poem” (Purkiss 2000b, 243). It is, however, never quite clear if it is set in Fairyland at all, even though Roland does indeed seem to suddenly shift out of one world into another: “pausing to throw backward a last view / O’er the safe road, ‘twas gone; grey plain all round / Nothing but plain to the horizon’s bound”. For Purkiss, at any rate, Roland is a protagonist who sees Fairyland as the sad wasteland which it really is and not as the glittering illusion produced by fairy glamour that is, according to oral tradition, often perceived by those entering Fairyland. Interestingly, Browning claims that the poem came to him as the result of something like a vision: ““Childe Roland came upon me as a kind of dream. I had to write it, then and there, and I finished it the same day, I believe. But it was simply that I had to do it. I did not know then what I meant beyond that, and I’m sure I don’t know now.”” (Browning cited in Perquin 2004). And indeed the poem has a certain

⁷¹ Briggs counts Ewing’s dancing and child-stealing dwarfs among the fairies. And indeed, they are variously called fairies, dwarfs or goblins throughout the tale.

nightmarish quality – something which will later be reflected in Terry Pratchett’s description of Fairyland, where it is the country in which bad dreams come true.

A slightly less gruesome but nevertheless melancholic view of Fairyland is presented in George Macdonald’s *Phantastes* (1857), labelled by its subtitle “a faery romance for men and women”. *Phantastes* takes place in Fairy Land, a mysterious country populated by fairies as well as goblins and other creatures. The hero, a young man named Anodos, is led out of his home into Fairy Land by a shape-shifting woman, who acts as a sort of guide. In his travels through Fairy Land he meets both victory and defeat in the course of many strange adventures. It is interesting to note, however, that most of the ill luck that befalls him in his adventures is the result of his own actions, especially his difficulty in distinguishing between appearance and reality, an ability he slowly acquires throughout his stay in Fairy Land. Persistently following Anodos throughout his journey in Fairy Land is a shadow that the narrator unwittingly unleashes by opening a magical door and which he has to fight to get rid of again. Towards the end, Anodos undergoes death and resurrection but finally finds himself in his own country again, somewhat more mature than when he started his journey: “Thus I, who set out to find my Ideal, came back rejoicing that I had lost my Shadow”, he claims. Anodos, it seems, has been a model for many ‘learning heroes’ in twentieth century fantasy novels, such as the *Earthsea*-trilogy by LeGuin, which even features a malignant shadow, too.

Another example that presents fairy creatures in a different, more negative, way is Christina Rossetti’s poem “Goblin Market” (1862), where two girls are accosted by sly, grotesque goblins, who try to sell them a strange and alluring fruit the consumption of which has dire consequences. One of the girls, Laura, gives in to temptation and, soon longing for more, her desires are spited by the goblins (who don’t call out to her any more), in consequence of which she pines away and is about to die. Only her sister Lizzie’s heroic deed (Lizzie must face the goblin merchants to get some fruit for Laura as an antidote but she must not eat it herself even though the goblins try to force her) can in the end rescue her from her illness. A similar motif will later be found in Patricia McKillip’s *Winter Rose*, where the heroine Rois must forsake her own desires in order to cure her sister Laurel.

As mentioned earlier, yet another type of fairies can be found in the re-workings of medieval, especially Arthurian, myths by both writers and painters. Morgan le Fay, for example, makes a reappearance in new Malory translations and adaptations e.g. by Reginald Heber and C.J. Riethmuller where she is presented as a villainous figure. But usually the Victorian Arthuriana contain more benevolent fairies, for example in works by George Darley, J.F. Hollings, William Wordsworth or John Thelwall. Furthermore, fairies appear

regularly throughout E. Bulwer Lytton's poem "King Arthur", however, they play a "mainly decorative role by suggesting an enchanted innocence and beauty" (Simpson 1990, 164). On the whole, Roger Simpson sums up the general tendency of Victorian Arthuriana containing benevolent fairies: their aim is "to present a world which is essentially good, uncomplicated, harmonious and ruled by a kindly Deity, for, although an ostensibly pagan mythology is adopted, the tenor is implicitly Christian, and few traces remain of the anarchic or erotic fairies of folklore" (ibid., 176).⁷² He sees, however, one exception – the fairy bride motif, which is taken up e.g. in Moultrie's *La Belle Triamour*, a re-working of the Launfal/Lanval theme.

Another medieval fantasy from the late nineteenth century, and one which bears very conspicuous similarities to both "Thomas the Rhymer" and "Tam Lin", is Andrew Lang's *The Gold of Fairnilee* (1888). Colin Manlove calls it "Lang's only memorable work of fantasy" (1994, 137) and indeed, the author is better known for his non-fictional works on history, literature and folklore and his many fairy-tale anthologies. *The Gold of Fairnilee*, according to Manlove contains elements from three ballads: "Lord Randal", "Thomas the Rhymer" and "Tam Lin". The young hero is called Randal. Here the references to "Lord Randal" end already, while those to the other two ballads, especially "Tam Lin", are more pronounced. Randal one day disappears into a fairy wishing well, a famine on the land follows. After seven years, his girlfriend Jeanie revisits the well and wins Randal back from the fairies. On returning to the human world, he takes with him a bottle of fairy ointment, which helps him discover a treasure that eventually saves his impoverished family and enables him to lead a happy life together with Jeanie. In contrast to the Child ballads, Fairyland is presented tinged by Christian criticism, as Manlove remarks: "Certainly, his story catches Fairy Land in a net of moral and Christian condemnation as his sources do not" (1994, 142). At first the country of the elves seems very positive to Randal, cheerful and beautiful, but after he has rubbed the fairy ointment on his eyes he sees it for what it is, a sad and poor country since "the fairies (...) live in a static world of pleasure, where there are no seasons, and time is stopped between night and morning. Because they are no part of mortality, their joys are thin" (Manlove 1994, 139), a presentation of the fairies later taken up for example by Terry Pratchett, whose novels are, however, not Christian but rather something like conservatively humanist. It seems that, moreover, Randal's stay in Fairyland serves as a kind of purgatory for him (even though he does not experience it quite like this). Before he is taken, Randal is a sometimes rather careless boy, not paying heed to the needs of his fellow people. When Jeanie comes to rescue

⁷² A not so kind supernatural ruler is for example presented in Henry Rider Haggard's *She: A History of Adventure* (1887): 'She', the sorceress Ayesha, embodies the *femme fatale*-topic typical for this era.

him, he is at first sent back to her in the shape of an ugly dwarf – his sins are represented by his exterior and only when Jeanie makes the sign of the cross over him three times he is returned to his normal human shape. It is therefore quite clear that not so much her strength of will and her love (as in “Tam Lin”) is the reason for his release but rather the power of Christianity.

The Edwardian Age

While in the Victorian age both children’s *and* adult literature had been very interested in fairies, the beginning of the new century saw the publication of some of the most famous pieces of fairy literature for children and the fairy seemed to be on the decline as a topic for adult literature.

James M. Barrie’s *The Little White Bird* (1902), *Peter Pan* (1904) and *Peter and Wendy* (1911) are all manifestations of his special approach to the fairy topic – even though there is actually only one fairy in them that plays a substantial part: Tinkerbell. Barrie’s Tinkerbell is a typical nineteenth century fairy – tiny, glittery, winged – a Victorian nursery fairy. She is, however, according to Purkiss (2000b, 269) the only character in *Peter Pan* that represents adult sexuality and is thus clearly related to the erotic fairies of the extravaganzas and she thus also reaches back to the fairy seductresses of earlier times. The other figure which is not by name a fairy but rather closely related to them is Peter himself: he can fly and he never ages, so Purkiss assumes that, “though not a fairy, one might call him a modified fairy, or rather an attempt to restore the vitality which was leaking away from it under the over-tender ministrations of the cuties and their makers” (2000b, 272). As a ‘lost child’ and ‘modified fairy’ he is very probably a modern version of a changeling.⁷³ It is variously assumed that Barrie drew his inspiration for the figure of Peter from a friendship with a group of young boys, the Llewelyn Davies children. But Peter Pan was probably also inspired by

⁷³ The figure of Pan, Greek god of forests and shepherds was also a favourite literary subject during the late nineteenth century. Apart from J.M. Barrie’s Peter Pan, who has only few qualities of his Pagan name-sake (he plays the pipes of Pan and is close to nature, but it seems that similarities end here), a number of Pan figures appeared, where the god is used as a symbol for sensuality and the power of nature but also violence and death. P. Merivale observes: “the upsurge of the terrifying Pan in fiction between 1890 and 1930, but especially from 1904 to 1912, is not easy to account for” (1969, 154) but there is probably a connection to the general vogue of literary supernatural figures in Victorian and Edwardian writing. Pan, it seems, presents the dark side of this phenomenon where the nursery fairies occupy the bright side, as he becomes a figure of horror literature: “Machen, E.F. Benson, Saki, Stephen McKenna, Nelson Bond, D.H. Lawrence, and William Faulkner have written stories of this general type: a human being affronts or trifles with the Pan demon, who like other demons in other horror stories, takes a swift, nasty, and inevitable revenge” (Merivale 1969,158). In Arthur Machen’s *The Great God Pan* for instance Pan is a powerful and violent creature that fathers a child on a human woman (as the result of a scientific experiment) and this daughter of Pan in turn leaves a trail of chaos since she drives people into either death or madness.

Barrie's brother David, who died at the age of 13 and thus could never grow up – just as Peter cannot grow up.

Critics have surmised that Barrie himself used his immersion in a children's world as an escape from the adult world which he was finding too complex and restraining for himself and Purkiss speculates that in *Peter Pan*, death is glorified as a way of not having to grow up (2000b, 275). Interestingly, the aspect of the fairies being exempt from the progress of time is also an important aspect of many late twentieth century fairy adaptations, and there their agelessness is generally not viewed favourably since it keeps them from developing and learning.

Barrie's stage play *Dear Brutus* (1917), however (aimed at an adult audience), is a sort of modern day version of Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* and very much about facing problems and not avoiding them. In the play, a group of couples meet and are led to believe by their eccentric host that a nearby wood is enchanted – and everyone who enters it on Midsummer Eve will be given a 'second chance' for life. The couples accordingly venture into the wood but there are no fairies there. They just have to face each other and their own dreams and faults – corresponding to the play's title which is a reference to Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*: "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars but in ourselves" (I.ii.140-141).

Another exception from the widespread longing for a perpetual childhood is Rudyard Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill* (1906). It is certainly nostalgic in tone – Puck is an embodiment of a traditional English working class country man telling episodes from British history and a figure that needs to be listened to if the expanding English empire shall develop in a wholesome way. But he helps the child protagonists Una and Dan to grow up, and, in contrast to works like *Peter Pan*, here growing up is presented as something positive.

In 1906, another story involving fairies and children viewing different periods of history was published: Edith Nesbit's *The Story of the Amulet*. It is the third part of Nesbit's sometimes so-called *Psammead-trilogy*. The series consists of *Five Children and It* (1902), *The Phoenix and the Carpet* (1904) and *The Story of the Amulet* (1906). In the first novel, five siblings playing in a gravel pit discover a somewhat ugly and ill-tempered creature. This is the *Psammead*, the "it" of the title, a sand fairy (the name being probably an invention of Nesbit deriving from the Greek word for sand and the ending -ad, much as in dryad or oread etc.). The *Psammead* seems a far cry from e.g. the flower fairies, as it looks more like a little monkey – it is covered in fur and has bat's ears, combined with extendable, snail-like eyes. In keeping with its slightly grotesque appearance, which owes something to goblins or gnomes, its temper is not exactly charming but rather cranky. Only when the children have saved it

from the danger of getting wet, which would have meant its death, it becomes more amiable. In the first book of the trilogy, the discovered Psammead is under a weird to grant the children one wish per day, with quite diverse consequences: “Cyril, Robert, Anthea, and Jane now found their wishes come true; but, somehow, they never could think of just the right things to wish for, and their wishes sometimes turned out very oddly indeed” (Nesbit 1906, 16).⁷⁴ In the second novel the Psammead is not at the center of events, but is so again in the third, where it has to be rescued from a pet-shop and sends the children in search for a lost amulet. According to her biographer Julia Briggs, Edith Nesbit was “the first modern writer for children [who] helped to reverse the great tradition of children’s literature inaugurated by Carroll, MacDonald and Kenneth Grahame, in turning away from their secondary worlds to the tough truths to be won from encounters with things-as-they-are, previously the province of adult novels” (Briggs 1987, 51) – often combining real-world settings with the appearance of magical beings or objects such as in the Psammead-series.⁷⁵ Her style proved of influence for many subsequent writers, such as C.S. Lewis, Diana Wynne Jones and J.K. Rowling.⁷⁶

Between the wars

It becomes rather difficult to trace the literary history of fairies from the 1920s up to the “explosion of fantasy publishing” (Harris Fain 1999, 348) and thus also of fairy novels in the 1970s. Maybe the influence of two world-wars was indeed as devastating to the fanciful creatures as Purkiss puts it: “mortally wounded by the carnage at the Western Front, fairies limped into the twentieth century” (2000b, 284). In an atmosphere of existential threat, writing about fairies came to be considered a too frivolous occupation for serious authors. But maybe the seeming dearth is also due to the lack of scholarly works that attempt to trace the development of fairy literature throughout the twentieth century – both Briggs and Purkiss end their analyses of fairy literature with the beginning of the twentieth century. There are, however, overviews of the genre of fantasy writing in the English-speaking countries in general, so these will have to complement my more specifically fairy-related sources.⁷⁷ To

⁷⁴ This kind of twisted realisation of the fairies-make-wishes-come-true motif or the idea of Fairyland as the land where (bad) dreams come true will later be used for instance by Terry Pratchett and Diana Wynne Jones.

⁷⁵ This would be the use of ‘implied secondary worlds’ in Maria Nikolajeva’s terminology, see chapter three.

⁷⁶ Another classic of children’s literature published at the turn of the century was L. Frank Baum’s *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900). No fairies can be found here, however, magic and fantastic creatures are part of this as well.

⁷⁷ Notably, in Germany the time between the 1890s and 1940s is regarded as a sort of ‘golden age’ for modern fantastic literature (often called *klassische Phantastik* or *literarische Phantastik*, this is fantasy in the narrower sense of the term, cf. theory chapter). Authors like Gustav Meyrink, Hanns Heinz Ewers, Leo Perutz are filed here. But this genre does not have much to do with fairies. Rather, the split between rationality and the fantastic is addressed and in contrast to fairy literature, which did not mix easily with modernism, German fantastic

this end, I would like to sum up the development of fantasy writing up to the mid-twentieth century and its problems to be recognised as a literary genre by critics. This reluctance is due mainly to two factors – on the one hand, fantasy was and is associated with trivial literature and on the other hand, it has been and still is often equated with literature for children.

The origins of modern fantasy lie (as has been outlined here with a focus on fairy-fantasy), in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century with writers like William Morris, Lewis Carroll, George MacDonald, Sheridan Le Fanu, Lord Dunsany, Robert E. Howard and others. Darren Harris Fain observes that the ascent of the genre went hand in hand with the development of a large readership in the middle and lower classes with more leisure time and disposable income than before. However, the following abundance of cheaply made books and a broad range of popular magazines “would prove especially significant in the future alignment of fantasy literature as part of a mass-produced popular culture, as distinct from a high ‘literary’ culture worthy of social and intellectual respect” (1999, 347). At the beginning of the twentieth century it was, therefore, difficult for writers of longer works of fantasy (for adults) to get published in book form and then to stay in print (ibid. 348) and while genres such as detective or crime or western were emerging at the beginning of the twentieth century, there was still no notion of a fantasy genre until the late 1950s.

Another factor which impeded critical recognition is fantasy’s association with children’s literature, which, as J.R.R. Tolkien observed in his programmatic essay “On Fairy Stories”, “is an accident of our domestic history. Fairy-stories have in the modern lettered world been relegated to the ‘nursery’, as shabby or old-fashioned furniture is relegated to the play-room, primarily because the adults do not want it, and do not mind if it is misused” (1988, 46). In other words, it seems that, as fairies became too embarrassing for adult literature, they were retained as figures of the less ‘serious’ genre of children’s literature and Rose Fyleman’s poem “There are fairies at the bottom of our garden” is often cited as one of the worst examples. (The persistence of this prejudice is proved by Harris Fain who reports that in a *Reader’s Guide to Fantasy* dating from 1982 many people still equated fantasy with children’s literature (1999, 349).)

To sum up: after World War I, fairies mostly showed up in the more or less trashy artefacts of popular culture or in children’s books. The few existing ‘literary’ works from the

literature was closer to modernist topics, such as alienation in urban environments, the border between sanity and madness, etc.

Anglophone countries, however, seem to deal with the more serious aspects of fairies and should therefore be mentioned here.

One renowned author who frequently dealt with fairy topics in the period between the 1880s and 1930s is William Butler Yeats. As an Irishman maybe he was somewhat removed from the European war and much more caught up in specifically Irish struggles. Here, since the fairies are an integral part of Irish mythology, they could be used for national purposes and be presented as a serious topic. As a promoter of the so-called *Celtic Revival* in Irish literature Yeats often took recourse to ancient Irish myths and sagas as inspiration for his plays and poems, many of which feature fairies.⁷⁸

Several collections of myths and fairy stories (1889, 1891, 1892) can be credited to his name. Most famous among his fairy-related works is maybe his poem “The Stolen Child” (1889), which tells the story of a fairy-abduction from the point of view of the fairies. Yeats also repeatedly dealt with the fairy topic in his plays, one early play being *The Land of Heart’s Desire* (1894), where a woman is abducted by a fairy child. Another of his works including fairy characters is the verse play *The Only Jealousy of Emer* (1919) and its prose version, *Fighting the Waves* (1928), which continue the story of the verse play *On Baile’s Strand* (1903). In *The Only Jealousy of Emer*, Old Irish hero Cuchulain (after having witnessed the death of his son and having walked into the sea) is thrown up out of the sea as an image of his own self (a kind of ghost). His wife Emer and his mistress Eithne Inguba are present at his sickbed, trying to call Cuchulain back into consciousness and trying to prevent the soul of Cuchulain from following a fairy woman (Fand) to the otherworld. Eventually, Emer succeeds by renouncing forever any claim or hope for Cuchulain’s love.⁷⁹ He is saved from the fairy Fand and the power of the sea and returns to life and his mistress Eithne Inguba and it seems as though the latter has saved him, even though she was out of the room at the crucial moment.

In general, Yeats’s fairies are not prettified, rather they retain their potentially destructive powers and the humans dealing with them are (at least partly) aware of this, as he writes in a letter: “I myself try to avoid the word ‘fairy’ because it has associations of prettiness. *Sidhe* or ‘gentry’ or ‘the others’ is better. The Irish peasant never thinks of fairies

⁷⁸ As Yeats was drawing on Irish folklore, William Morris had earlier on found inspiration in Icelandic sagas – the middle period of his writing is dominated by his fascination with the ancient Germanic and Norse peoples and (together with Eirikr Magnusson) he was the first to translate many of the Icelandic sagas into English. Towards the end of his career Morris also created what are sometimes called the first English fantasy novels, such as *The Well at the World’s End* (1896), and *The Wood Beyond the World* (1894), which are set in an entirely fantastical world (with medieval touches) and which influenced for example J.R.R. Tolkien (Amison 2006). Similarly, Richard Wagner drew on Germanic mythology for his opera cycle about the Nibelungs.

⁷⁹ It seems that much later a similar imagery is used in Diana Wynne Jones’s *Fire and Hemlock*: to save her friend from the destructive power of a devouring supernatural pool, the heroine has to reject him, too.

as pretty. He thinks of them as terrible, or beautiful, or just like mortals” (*Letters*, 321, cited in Hirsch, 1986, 23).

Another Irish author publishing fairy stories throughout the 1920s and beyond is Edward Plunkett, Baron Dunsany, whose most famous work of fairy-literature is probably the novel *The King of Elfland’s Daughter* (1924). Here, the people in the fictional country of Erl ask to be ruled by a “magic lord” and so their present lord sends his eldest son into Fairyland to win the hand of a beautiful fairy princess in marriage.⁸⁰ Alveric, the prince, succeeds and leads home Lirazel, the king of Elfland’s daughter.⁸¹ However, their marriage is not entirely happy, since the elf-princess longs for her home-country and the people of Erl discover that the introduction of magic rule is not without dangers and tribulations. Eventually, Lirazel goes back to Elfland, prompting her husband to go on a quest after her, so that now the constellation is reversed – now the human has to live under the conditions of Elfland. Phillip Raines comments on Dunsany’s special concept of Elfland:

Dunsany’s Elfland is not so much a real place as a state of being, the ability to see heaven in every grain of sand. In the novel’s climax, the people of Erl achieve this grace when the borders of Elfland reach out and absorb their kingdom, snatching it from the fields we know. Elfland is only a condition of our world and has little autonomy. (...) as Alveric can search for years for a way into Elfland but is bound to fail. All you have to do is invite it into this world and open your eyes. (Raines 2001)

It should be noted that Dunsany’s portrayal of Elfland is a decidedly favourable one and the elves are generally portrayed sympathetically. However, it is interesting that the beauty of Elfland is nevertheless not always enough for Lirazel, who, before she comes to Earth, is very interested in the human world: “She thought how there are always in those fields young generations, and she thought of the changing seasons and children and age, of which Elfin minstrels had sung when they told of Earth” (*The King of Elfland’s Daughter* 26-27, quoted in Joshi 1995, 97). So it seems that in Dunsany’s version of Elfland, the human world is just as fascinating for the elves as Elfland is for humans. It is also interesting how the wish for change and the passing of time is what makes Earth attractive to Lirazel, similarly as in *Winter Rose* Corbet Lynn will harbour a ‘longing for time’. Quite unique, it seems, is also Dunsany’s solution for this problem which does not force the protagonists to decide for one

⁸⁰ “Erl” is a telling name, as S.T. Joshi observes: “It does not require much erudition to know that Erl is German for ‘elf’: already the distinction between Elfland and the real world becomes very problematical” (Joshi 1995, 96). Thus, also Goethe’s “Erlkönig” is in fact a fairy king, maybe preying on the soul of the human child, even though the connection is not quite as straightforward as Joshi claims: rather, Goethe used motifs from a Danish ballad, “Herr Oluf”, translated by J.G. Herder, where the daughter of the elf-king, the “ellerkonge” plays an important role. Herder (mis-)translated ‘ellerkonge’ as ‘Erlkönig’, thus connecting the figure to the alder tree, which is often believed to have connections into the otherworld (Bächtold-Stäubli 1987 Vol. 2, 922).

⁸¹ Also the name of the human prince, “Alveric” is certainly related to the Germanic ‘Alberich’, a dwarf in the Nibelungenlied (and chief of the dwarfs in Wagner’s opera cycle), whose name means ‘king of the elves’ (elbe = elf and rex = king). From Alberich also the name Auberon = Oberon is derived, so the fairy connections of the name are manifold.

world or the other but enables them to live in both – Erl becomes part of Elfland “so that [Lirazel] can enjoy both the eternal charm of Elfland and the variegated charms of earth” (Joshi 1995, 96). This relatively positive portrayal of Elfland and the refusal to favour one world over the other might be connected to Dunsany’s personal religious attitude, which, according to Joshi (1995, 94) was inclined more towards paganism than Christianity (in contrast to e.g. Andrew Lang’s).

Another adult novel from the 1920s is *Lud in the Mist* (1926) by British author Hope Mirrlees. Mirrlees wrote several longer works of fiction but is nowadays remembered mostly for her fairy novel – *Lud in the Mist* has been re-issued in 2000 as part of the *Millenium Fantasy Masterworks* series by publishing house Victor Gollancz. The focus of the story lies on the city of Lud which is situated in the land of Dorimare which borders the land of Faerie. Its inhabitants live in fear of the fairies and avoid talking about them. However, fairy fruit is smuggled into Dorimare, and this fruit produces strange effects in the citizens of Lud – similarly as the goblin fruit in Rossetti’s “Goblin Market”. Contrary to the cute versions of fairies in much of the children’s literature of the age in this adult novel the fairies provide fruit which “is not wholesome stuff, and its effects are alarming. Sexually, do I mean? Oh, yes, there is definitely a pleasant whiff of perversion here. But there is also the sick stench of cruelty. In its etiology, the eating of fairy fruit resembles the unpleasant course of drug addiction. And the inhabitants of Fairyland are the dead” (Swanwick, 2000). Thus, Mirrlees’ fairies are closer to folk tradition than many others of the twentieth century. The hero of the novel is Nathaniel Chanticleer, mayor of Lud, who for most of the novel does not behave very heroically. Only when his son is taken to Fairyland he is forced to grow into a sort of hero in trying to rescue him.

Purkiss has stated that the fairy “never found a place in modernism” (2000b, 304), and indeed, the works mentioned above cannot really be classed as modernist works. The great age of fairy literature was certainly over by the beginning of the twentieth century. Nevertheless fairies were still around, though less in literature than in popular culture. Thus, as Purkiss puts it more bluntly: “the fairy was not banished from all culture by the excess of Victoriana, but only from high culture” (Purkiss 2000b, 304).

The observation is supported by the fact that, as has already been hinted at above, fantasy in general became a part of a mass market throughout the first decades of the twentieth century. In 1923, the first all-fantasy fiction magazine, called *Weird Tales* (published until 1954) was created in the USA, specializing in horror, science fiction and fantasy. Contributors included well-known writers such as H.P. Lovecraft and Robert E.

Howard. There were not too many fairies in *Weird Tales* (a title search in the magazine's online archive yields: *The Fairy Court*, November 1928, *Fairy Gossamer*, December 1924, *The Isle of the Fairy Morgana*, February 1928) but nevertheless it was instrumental in bringing fantasy fiction in general to a wide audience in both the U.S. and Britain. Many other similar magazines eventually followed, most importantly *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* (founded 1949), also a US-publication. It exists to the present day and has featured many well-known science fiction, fantasy and horror authors, some of the most famous being Ray Bradbury, Isaac Asimov and Stephen King. These kinds of popular magazines also played a large role in the rise of science fiction, a genre which almost superseded the fantasy genre for some time – the period between the early 1940s and late 1950s is accordingly often labelled the 'golden age of science fiction'. And indeed, there seems to have been a kind of displacement at work, since there seems to be a dearth of fairy literature between the 1930s and 1950s, even though one might claim that some science fiction stories are just fairy stories in a modern guise – for 'alien abduction' read 'modernised fairy abduction'.⁸²

However, the fairies were eventually bound to make a reappearance in a more traditional guise with the author whose work has proved more influential for twentieth century fantasy writers than that of any other: J.R.R. Tolkien. His children's book *The Hobbit* was published in 1937 and the years 1954/55 finally saw the publication of the *Lord of the Rings* in Great Britain – though it had been written largely already between 1937 and 1949. Tolkien's fairies (or rather elves) have influenced modern fairy literature to an extent that can hardly be underestimated. Almost every contemporary author seems either to be writing in accord with Tolkien's ideas or consciously against them. The world Tolkien describes in his books is the closed fictional world of "Middle Earth" inspired by Norse mythology, which is populated by different races of humanoid creatures – dwarfs, elves, orcs, trolls, etc. and humans. Tolkien's elves are notable because they differ from both traditional ideas and from nineteenth century nursery fairies.

They are, for instance, not diminutive, but rather of slightly more than human size. They are characterized by their beauty and gracefulness but are nevertheless skilled in warfare. Like the fairies of tradition, they have a penchant for music and dancing. Unlike many traditional fairies, however, who are merely long-lived and die at some point in time of natural causes, they are apparently immortal (although they can be killed in battle). The aspect

⁸² The connection between fairies and extraterrestrials is for instance examined (from a folkloristic point of view) by Peter M. Rojcewicz in his essay "Between One Blink and the Next: Fairies, UFOs, and Problems of Knowledge" (1991).

which sets them most distinctly apart from traditional fairies is their morality – even though they are described as strange, haughty and as often inscrutable in their motivations, these elves are hardly ever malicious and rarely cruel (except when they are killing orcs). Rather they are noble-hearted and they care above all for the welfare of the world with all its races. Moreover, Tolkien's elves are rather sublimated creatures – in contrast to many traditional fairies, they bear almost no sexual implications, appearing somewhere between androgynous and sexless. They hardly ever reveal anything about their love-lives – there are elf-dynasties, so they do seem to procreate somehow and also some human-elf-relationships are recorded but these latter are apparently very rare since they force the elves to give up their immortality.

Brian Attebery (1992, 60-1) observes that the elves' immortality is crucial for their whole outlook on life: they never age but are surrounded by short-lived creatures, which contributes to the melancholy mood pervading the *Lord of the Rings*. The typical flaw of the elves is therefore not, as of humans, craving for power but rather the desire to freeze time to prevent their own golden age from receding more and more into the past. But while the golden age of Tolkien's elves, at the end of the novel, is irrevocably gone, their appearance on the literary market helped the fantasy genre towards a kind of golden age of its own (at least quantitatively speaking).

'Post-Tolkien' fairy fantasy

With the *Lord of the Rings* fantasy became recognised as a literary, adult genre, and the market for adult fantasy novels was established, as Maxim Jakubowski sums up:

With the British publication in October 1955 of *The Return of the King* (1956 in the U.S.), completing the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, fantasy underwent a profound change. Although the impact and influence (...) was initially a muted, underground one, its paperback appearance in 1956 from Ballantine in the U.S. (...) was to make it in effect one of the twentieth century's major 'cult' books. (1992, 223)

What were the societal conditions that enabled such a trend? First of all, it should be noted that the novel made its main impact on the USA and that here it is connected with the youth movement, Hippie sub-culture and the opposition against the Vietnam war. Originally intended as part of an oeuvre that was meant to create an 'English mythology', young people in the USA interpreted the trilogy's in fact rather conservative world-structure as an expression of their own longings. One appealing aspect was certainly its nostalgia for a closer connection with nature – this ties in with the fact that the beginnings of the environmentalist movement lie in the late 1960s (for an ecological interpretation of the *Lord of the Rings* cf. for example Flieger, 2000). Another aspect might be that it could be read as a sort of 'anti-quest' – the protagonists do not want to win an object, rather, the destruction of a powerful object is

their aim. In these aspects, the *Lord of the Rings* certainly also fulfilled a certain escapist function, as much of Victorian fairy literature had done. As Tolkien himself had stated in “On Fairy Stories”, one of the functions of fantastic fiction should be to provide “escape” and “consolation” (1983, 145). Even though he was writing from the perspective of one who had experienced a war that had been won for almost 40 years when his novel became successful and was writing in an archaic style with a Victorian morality, he still hit a nerve with young people who feared the outbreak of a third world war and experienced the present as too modernised and technology-dominated.

In the wake of the *Lord of the Rings* ‘cult’, the publishing industry now sought for new writers working in a similar vein and also earlier works that resembled it were brought back into print. All these efforts had perceptible consequences: fantasy publishing boomed, especially in the United States.⁸³ However, the change was not necessarily always for the better, as much of post-Tolkien fantasy literature proved to be “derivative and unimaginative” (Harris Fain 1999, 345), and, as Jakubowski criticises:

Post-Tolkien fantasy has become a commercial rather than a literary genre (...) from the mid-1970s onwards, fantasy lost its status as a literary genre and became a commodity (...) [like] romance yarns, which offer similar placebos of harmless escapist fare, which connect with the reality of sex and human interaction no more than most modern fantasy can be said to relate to the social, moral, or political problems of the late twentieth century. (1992, 223)

The fantasy subgenre propagated by the “Tolkien clones” (Arthur C. Clarke cited by Harris Fain 1999, 345) was that of high fantasy (also called ‘heroic’ or ‘sword and sorcery’ fantasy), roughly defined by its topics (good battles supernatural evil on an epic dimension; connected with this are often quests and coming-of-age themes) and special characteristics (e.g. inclusion of fantastical races such as elves and dwarfs, invented languages and multi-volume narratives). The elves which populate this kind of formula fiction are usually beautiful, tall, slim creatures which are skilled in healing arts, lore, music and war-craft (especially archery). Often, those elves are presented as sexually desirable creatures and even though they may not be uncomplicated lovers, their dark and cruel aspects are seldom touched upon.

One of the most successful writers of heroic fantasy is Terry Brooks, whose *Sword of Shannara* (1977) became the first fantasy novel to appear on, and eventually come number one on the *New York Times* bestseller list. It contains “all the set elements of an epic fantasy quest – a multitude of magical, humanoid races, good and bad wizards; and some vital mission that only a singularly unheroic, ill-equipped innocent from the back of beyond can perform” (Jeapes 1996, 78). Elves do appear in the *Shannara* series, however, they are not as

⁸³ Another phenomenon which is keeping the Tolkien-scheme alive in popular culture in the industrialised world are role playing and computer games that to this date enjoy great popularity.

different from humans as Tolkien's elves, for they are mortal and even though they can use magic (at least in later volumes of the series), this does not make them special, since gifted humans can do this as well. Norman Talbot heaps scorn upon the series as such – “a shameful formulaic rehash of major aspects of *The Lord of the Rings*” (1996, 99) – as well as on Brooks's elves: “they have no magic, no special skills (...) and give no impression of otherness and distance at all. They are differentiated from the other races only by a slightly prettier appearance and mild good intentions towards nature” (ibid.). Later in the first volume of the series it turns out that they are not really elves at all but “merely humans who would have liked to be elves” (ibid.), all real pure-blood elves have been killed and only a few mixed-blood characters are left. Despite the acid criticism by scholars such as Talbot, to this day a total of 21 novels have appeared in the *Shannara* series, the most recent one in 2005, and are apparently a commercial success.

The publication of several heroic fantasy anthologies edited by Lin Carter also helped to establish heroic fantasy as the most popular fantasy sub-genre. Some writers of this genre whose works feature elves or fairies are for instance Jack Vance (Lyonesse series: *Suldrun's Garden* (1983), *The Green Pearl* (1985), *Madouc* (1989)), Poul Anderson (*The Broken Sword* (1954), which, though similar to Tolkien's works in its indebtedness to Norse mythology, is much darker and without the hope of final salvation), C.J. Cherryh (e.g. *The Dreaming Tree* (1997)).

Even though the Tolkien-derivatives flourish to this date, there have nevertheless been certain trends in fantasy that have broadened its scope and have in recent years also served to at least cautiously interest literary critics in the genre. Jakubowski mentions a few milestones in the development of post-Tolkien fantasy. One is the influence of Michael Moorcock, who, according to Jakubowski, introduced anti-heroes to high fantasy and therefore, “in a way, (...) brought reality to fantasy” (1992, 226). Another occurs in 1977 with the publication of the first of Stephen Donaldson's Thomas Covenant novels (*Lord Foul's Bane*, etc.), where a hero plagued by illness and beset by all kinds of doubts sets out on a *Ring*-like quest fantasy. A third influential writer (and one nowadays certainly accepted by the literary establishment) mentioned by Jakubowski is Ursula K. LeGuin. Her *Earthsea* trilogy (originally aimed at a young adult audience) is characterised by him as “a crystal-clear tale of apprenticeship, maturity and the death quest of a magician, [which has] codified the trilogy format as strongly as Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*” (1992, 233). Another series which helped to firmly establish the fantasy genre on the market were C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia* (1950-56), originally intended for children, but, as much fantasy literature, also read by adults. The first book in the

series (*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*) seems to have had, even though it does not feature any fairies or elves, a considerable influence on later writers because of its female villain, the White Witch of Winter who is echoed in many descriptions of fairy queens in the novels analysed in the later chapters of this study.

Although a British writer, Tolkien's influence was stronger in the USA than in the UK – fewer authors in the UK followed in the footsteps of Tolkien, an exception being those working in the area of children's or young adult fantasy. For British writers the Gothic tradition, Romantic writing, and the animal fable proved more important influences after 1955. A notable writer is for example Richard Adams, his *Watership Down* (1972) being the prototype of modern animal fantasy. Another one is Peter S. Beagle – *The Last Unicorn* (1968) is his best-known work, while his *Folk of the Air* (1987) includes fairies that show up during a sort of role-playing convention and the hero "Nicholas is far more Elf than demon, a totally amoral and alien force loose among the humans, who, as with all Elvishness, good or evil, try not to notice, and usually succeed" (Talbot 1996, 101). A writer of fairy fiction frequently praised by literary critics is John Crowley. His *Little, Big* (1981) includes a kind of fairies which are seldom seen throughout the novel even though their presence is often felt and who, in their own ways, are guardians of nature: they "protect Edgewood [the mansion where most of this family saga takes place] through the generations and into the twenty-first century, from the incursions of super-highways and the dependence on machinery which marks the lives of almost all of us in North America" (Evans 1987, 18). And while Colin Manlove thinks that nowadays (in a kind of reversal of the earlier influence of a British writer on the USA) English fantasy is "heavily coloured by American models" (1999, 9), to Jakubowski British fantasy writers still "often appear to be important breakers of new ground" (1992, 231). One of the most important trends in fantasy writing, both British and American, however, is its tendency to merge with neighbouring genres, such as:

- science fiction (exemplified e.g. by Michael Moorcock, Ursula K. LeGuin, Jack Vance, Orson Scott Card, Lyon Sprague de Camp, Suzette Haden Elgin),
- horror (e.g. Raymond Feist),
- historical novel (Here especially the Arthurian cycle has provided inspiration, e.g. for T.H. White, Mary Stewart, Marion Zimmer Bradley (the latter includes a mysterious, rather eerie realm of Faery in her *Mists of Avalon*, however, this plays only a minor role), Judith Tarr (who has written a trilogy set at the time of the crusades where an elf is raised as a foundling in a monastery and where the elves are pursued by another Christian order)),

- detective (e.g. Jasper Fforde),
- gothic novel, etc.

Another, related trend is the adaptation of myths, fairy tales and other folklore: Sylvia Townsend Warner (*The Kingdoms of Elfin* (1977)) for instance has written short-stories about elves in a rather ironic tone, other writers are Ursula K. LeGuin or Angela Carter (especially fairy tales, such as in *The Bloody Chamber*). On the Young Adult field there are for instance Jane Yolen, who has also written a “Tam Lin” adaptation for children, and Alan Garner, who has for example used material from the Welsh *Mabinogion* in the *Owl Service* (1967) and incorporated elements of “Tam Lin” in his novel *Red Shift* (1973). The re-working of folkloristic or medieval material is of course not really new to fantasy writing, but obviously essential to this genre – as Brian Stableford observes, the telling over and over again of old stories, the “implication of ‘deep-rootedness’ (...) gives fantasy its unique qualities and utilities, both culturally and psychologically” (2005, xxxviii).

Another trend is the inclusion of fantasy elements in often highly literary so-called ‘mainstream’ (= everything outside genre fiction) writing, a trend which encompasses writers from Günter Grass over South American magic realists to post-colonial writers like Salman Rushdie. Furthermore, fantasy is getting more and more differentiated, apart from high fantasy and the above-mentioned hybrid forms, there is e.g. also surrealist fantasy, furthermore humorous or satiric fantasy (Tom Holt, Terry Pratchett), to name just a few of the many sub-genres. In regard to fairy fiction, G. Evans describes two highly satiric works (*Who was Oswald Fish* (1983) by A.N. Wilson and *Lady Cottington’s Pressed Fairy Book* (1994) by Terry Jones) in a sub-genre she calls “neo-Victorian”: The writers of neo-Victorian fairy fiction “juxtapose Victorian fairies – or a Victorian view of them – with a modern, often quite sardonic, view which puts in the foreground elements of earthiness, sexuality and malice which are important aspects of traditional fairy lore but which the Victorians tended to omit or disguise” (1987, 12) .

Moreover, there is urban fantasy, i.e., fantasy stories set in a contemporary urban setting. It is also called ‘mythic fiction’ and falls somewhere between fantasy literature and mainstream fiction with a magical realist bent – two of its pioneers are Charles de Lint and Terri Windling, but also John Crowley’s *Little, Big* can be counted among this category. Urban fantasy featuring fairies is written for instance by Emma Bull, Holly Black, or Tad Williams.

In addition to all other trends, the increasing number of both female writers of fantasy and strong female protagonists, at times even feminist fantasy, is a characteristic of late

twentieth century fantasy and Brian Attebery goes even so far as to claim that “fantastic literature is a woman, a woman who looks, at various times, like Joanna Russ, like Suzette Haden Elgin, like Sheri S. Tepper, like Ursula K. LeGuin“ (1992, x).

And even though Harris Fain fears that the great number of books published under the label of fantasy, combined with appearance of parody and satire are signs for the exhaustion of the genre (1999, 351), Jakubowski is quite sure that the genre still has capacities for renewal, if all the “complementary streams and subgenres that make up fantasy continue to prosper and cross-fertilize one another, for in diversity lies the potential for innovation and quality” (1992, 236).

The studies by Maxim Jakubowski and Darren Harris Fain end with the late 1980s and 1990s, respectively. Looking back at the time between 1987/1998 and 2007 one can say that the trend towards the popularization of fantasy has certainly continued. Not only thanks to Tolkien but more recently also to J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* novels, which have become one of the best-selling book series of all time, fantasy has become a mass culture phenomenon and one that in the meantime has come to support a whole industry of book-related merchandise. The box office success of several film adaptations of fantasy novels such as *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* has certainly helped to further this trend. In fact, while there had been some slackening of interest during the 1980s and 1990s, the *Harry Potter* phenomenon and the huge success of the *Lord of the Rings* film adaptations directed by Peter Jackson (released between 2001 and 2003) have lent new impact to the fantasy wave. In recent years there has been much speculation about the socio-political backgrounds that have accompanied this new popularity of non-mimetic fiction. The most popular explanation is of course once again escapism.⁸⁴ In an increasingly complex world with ever faster-flowing streams and cycles of products, information and relationships, readers (and movie audiences) find solace and distraction in the archaic worlds of Middle Earth (never mind how much computer-animated technology is used for the production of the films themselves) and are reminded of the strength of love and friendship as sustaining forces in the *Harry Potter* series. Anxiety about one’s own situation and individual and global future (the turn of the millennium and the threat of 9-11 have certainly played a role here) are possible explanations for the appeal that fantasy literature in general holds for today’s readers of all ages. Heroic

⁸⁴ At the University of Aberystwyth an audience research project of heretofore unknown dimensions (the “*Lord of the Rings* International Audience Research Project”, conducted in 13 different languages, and gathering almost 25,000 responses) was carried out. One of its results was that escapism was not the only function of the films – “movies such as ‘Lord of the Rings III’, on which the project was focussed, are not just an escape, but for many of us a place to work out a bit what might be wrong with the world”, reported Martin Barker, the project’s leading researcher (*ESRC Society Today*, 31.08.2004).

fantasy in particular is suited to fulfil the needs of readers looking for reassurance: it provides stories set in a world that is usually easily divisible into good and evil, a world that may also be closer to nature than our world is today. Often the stories in heroic fantasy feature a humble protagonist who grows into a hero and there is usually a happy ending where evil is vanquished. But not just heroic fantasy has experienced an increase in popularity, as Christine Ivanovich observes looking at fantastic literature in general and trying to relate this to the fin-de-siècle situation:

Given the just completed turn of the millennium it must therefore be asked how much this now increasingly reviving phenomenon of fantastic literature can be seen as an indicator for just those secularly recurring fin-de-siècle experiences, which are often accompanied by political and societal crises, which we now experience – just as people at the end of the eighteenth and nineteenth century did. (2001, 7)⁸⁵

The renaissance of fantasy in the late 1990s is moreover probably connected to the kind of crisis which the science fiction genre suffered from at about the same time. In 2001, Wolfgang Neuhaus observed that probably due to overproduction in the mid-1980s, science fiction sales figures were decreasing and the genre seemed to be ‘dissolving’. He assumed that much of science fiction at the turn of the millennium must appear old-fashioned in its images of machines and robots – due to the rapid development and increased complexity of science it has more or less lost the ability to predict future technological developments – which probably makes it less attractive to readers. Finally, he believes that the glorification of the future, which is at the core of much (though by no means all) science fiction literature is not popular in 2001 and this might still be true today, six years later. With regard to the future, anxiety is the dominant attitude and thus an inherently nostalgic genre such as fantasy fares better among the readers.

However, at least with regard to fantasy literature featuring fairies and elves, not just conservative, but also more subversive tendencies seem to be at work. Probably in reaction to the over-abundance of Tolkienesque noble-hearted elves populating much of formula (heroic) fantasy, there has been a renaissance of more mischievous or even villainous elves, especially in the many sub-genres and hybrid fantasy genres mentioned above. Really ‘bad’ elves make an appearance in Terry Pratchett’s humorous fantasy and in Raymond Feist’s *Faerie Tale* (1989) where they (or at least some of their sub-species) appear like creatures out of a horror movie, while for instance in Emma Bull’s and Holly Black’s urban fantasy novels *War for the Oaks* (1987) and *Tithe* (2002) the folkloristic concept (from Scottish fairy lore) of a dark and

⁸⁵ “Angesichts der eben vollzogenen Jahrtausendwende ist daher zu fragen, inwiefern in diesem gegenwärtig wieder verstärkt auflebenden Phänomen der Phantastik ein Indikator zu sehen ist für eben jene säkular wiederkehrende, von bedeutenden politischen wie gesellschaftlichen Krisen begleitete Endzeiterfahrung, die wir – ähnlich wie schon die Menschen im Ausgang des 18. und des 19. Jahrhunderts – nun erneut erleben.”

a light faction (the unseelie and the seelie court) of elves and the wars that are regularly waged between them shapes much of the plot. And while the unseelie elves are, with regard to ugliness and cruelty, on a level with Tolkien's orcs, the seelie court is at best a bit weird and at worst completely unfathomable for humans in its reasoning. Most of the 'darker' fairy stories owe more to folklore than to Tolkien and even much less to the nursery fairies of the nineteenth century, even though those are still vital for the popular imagination of what constitutes a 'fairy' (wings and wand) or an 'elf' (pointy ears and a long-bow). Stories featuring changelings, pookhas, glaistigs, kelpies, selkies, etc. however, are present on the literary market, just as there are stories featuring amorous fairy ladies that owe more to medieval models than to cute Victorian models or the (more or less) chaste elf maidens from twentieth century heroic fantasy. Some of these amorous fairy ladies will be looked at in more detail in the following chapters but as they are all based on a common model, the stories of Tam Lin and Thomas the Rhymer, the literary history of these source materials will be examined first.

5. The Source Material: Border Ballads

The (traditional) ballad: the genre and its place in literary history

“Ballads are awkward things. Few literary genres give so much pleasure to so many kinds of people and yet pose such refractory problems for the scholar and critic,” remarks ballad scholar David Buchan (1967, 1). He goes on to describe why ballads – of which more than 300 in English, dating from the twelfth to sixteenth century are known – are so ‘awkward’: because of the many unresolved questions concerning definition and authorship. The problems that arise if one wants to access ballads from a scholarly point of view are something they share with fantasy literature, a form of writing that seems to ‘give pleasure’ to a lot of people as well but often similarly perplexes scholars.

George L. Kittredge defines the ballad as “a short narrative poem, adapted for singing, simple in plot and metrical structure, divided into stanzas, and characterised by complete impersonality so far as the author or singer is concerned” (cited in Child, 1904, xi). What does this definition imply? A poem. A narrative poem. A poem that is sung. Albert B. Friedman deduces from this definition that the ballad, “indifferently narrative, dramatic, lyric, (...) defies the categories useful in poetics since Aristotle” (1961, 4) and concludes that even “Dante faltered when he came to set up standards for this chimera of verse, dance and song” (ibid.).

The ballad form originated as an oral form of art but was later transferred to writing. Maybe this is the reason why ballads are commonly categorized as ‘oral literature’, an expression which itself at first glance appears to be a bit of a contradiction in terms, if one defines literature in its more narrow sense as ‘the written word’ and indeed, Friedman claims that “in a literal sense, the ballad is ‘illiterature’, its style and character explicable only by reference to oral transmission” (1961, 2). But just as problematical as pinning down the ballad with regard to genre is the question of authorship. To quote Friedman once again, there probably “was no single author, says one body of ballad opinion; or if there was – to grant the extreme individualists their thesis – he ‘counts for nothing’” (1961, 1). For other ballad scholars, however, the collectors or people who fixed the ballads in written form take on a rather important role, not as the ballads’ authors but as the recorder of a ballad’s final form: “I assume that a given ballad took the particular shape it has about the time it was written down” (Fowler 1968, 5) – and those who fixed the ballad in written form were not always above making alterations of their own. Especially in regard to the sexual aspects of the ballads a certain amount of ‘cleaning up’ was not uncommon.

And as if matters were not already confusing enough, it is rather difficult to place the so-called ‘traditional ballad’ historically (in contrast to the younger ‘broadsheet ballad’, which often has a definite author). This is due to the disagreement about how to define the point when a traditional ballad took its definite shape; either when it was sung or when it was written down. In many literary histories, ballads are classed as literary forms of the fifteenth century. They were, however, usually not taken down in written form before the eighteenth century. The ballad metric, on the other hand, is much older, namely medieval and influenced by the French dance song. Thus Friedman deduces that the typical “ballad style was fixed long before the fifteenth century” (1961, 6). He finally concludes that “as a species of popular poetry, therefore, the traditional ballad cannot be localized in any century” (ibid.). However, it is at least possible to trace its development:

Development

The origins of the traditional ballad lie in folksongs, which, in England, began to emerge in the Middle Ages: “There is evidence of a strong tradition of folksong in England and in Europe generally from the twelfth century, when the vernacular literatures, especially French, began to flourish” (Fowler 1968, 5). The birth of the ballad proper is located by David C. Fowler in the early modern period at the “coming together of traditional song and medieval minstrelsy in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries” (1968, 7). Preceding this convergence, England had seen the decline of the art of minstrelsy. It had flourished at the baronial courts in the North and West of England but suffered a decline when power shifted from the barons to the royal court in London, a development that was complete and irreversible by the end of the Wars of the Roses in the fifteenth century. However, Fowler observes that through a simplification of the forms of narrative typically delivered by minstrels the art secured its survival for a while (in its ‘high-form’ it seems to Fowler to be best represented by the Breton lay), being shortened, simplified and made more symmetrical in the fifteenth century, thus becoming more similar to the folk song.⁸⁶ When traditional song and minstrelsy finally merged in early modern times, “it was this perhaps fortuitous resemblance [i.e., the similarity of the weak line of the minstrel stanza to the internal refrain of carols] that led to the creation of the first ballad” (Fowler, 1968, 11).

As professional minstrelsy disappeared for good in the seventeenth century, the ballads continued to be sung by “non-professional people in all ranks of society” (ibid., 15), even though, in Scotland, Calvinist reformers strongly disapproved of ballads, rhymes and

⁸⁶ Fittingly, many Breton lays have supernatural topics – Jean-Claude Aubailly (1986, 11) counts as many as 11 *lais féeriques*.

other supposedly ‘ungodly’ diversions (Muir 1965, 139). The eighteenth and nineteenth century eventually experienced what is nowadays called the first ‘ballad-revival’, a time in which scholars became interested in the traditional ballad and finally committed this oral narrative genre to written form. Among ballad scholars of the twentieth century, it is, however, controversial if this development can really be called a ‘revival’, since, while the learned turned their attention to the ballad, it continued to lose its vitality among its actual singers so that “what we call the ballad revival, (...) was simply the translation of the genre from an active life on the popular level to a ‘museum life’ on the sophisticated level” (Friedman 1961, 9).

Something like a second ‘ballad revival’ occurred in the 1960s, this time not so much in the area of folklore studies but rather in the field of music with ‘folk’ musicians in Europe and the USA rediscovering and adapting traditional materials. A development which, as Faye Ringel contends, probably eventually led to the popularity of traditional ballads as materials for literary adaptations among contemporary authors, who “grew up hearing the British and American popular ballads interpreted by Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger, or by Joan Baez and Judy Collins; they absorbed the tradition mediated through rock by Steeleye Span, Fairport Convention, Pentangle, and the Incredible String Band” (1999, 199).⁸⁷ Thus, broadly speaking, the origins of the ballads lie in the Middle Ages but their influence stretches to the present day, as will be seen in more detail in the analysis-chapters dealing with the different ballad adaptations.

Border Ballads

When collectors like Bishop Percy in the eighteenth and James Francis Child in the nineteenth century combed the country for material (either by going into the ‘field’ themselves, or, like Child, by directing informants and colleagues in Europe and the USA from his professorial desk in Harvard), they assumed that the ballad tradition on the British Isles would probably be most alive in its most remote regions. In 1761, Thomas Percy writes that “it is in the remote and obscure parts of the kingdom that I expect to find curiosities of the

⁸⁷ *Wikipedia* supports the idea that folk rock bands played an important role in the popularisation of the Child ballads in the twentieth century: “Many Child Ballads remain a live part of contemporary post-folk culture. British folk rock groups such as Fairport Convention and Steeleye Span drew heavily on the Child Ballads in their respective repertoires. Harry Smith included a number of them into his *Anthology of American Folk Music*; they figured prominently in the early recordings of Joan Baez, and they crop up even in the work of bands not usually associated with folk material, such as Ween’s recording of “The Unquiet Grave” (Child 78) under the title “Cold Blows the Wind”, or versions of “Barbara Allen” (Child 84) recorded by the Everly Brothers, Art Garfunkel, and (on the soundtrack of the 2004 film *A Love Song for Bobby Long*) John Travolta” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Child_ballad, 2007).

kind I want” (quoted in Rieuwert 1999, 474). Especially Scotland proved a fruitful region for ballad collectors. One region, namely the Borders, (the area between England and Scotland), has brought about its own brand of ballads, the so-called *border ballads*, which are surrounded by the myth that they are extraordinary in quality.

David Buchan refutes this myth in favour of ballads originating in the region of Aberdeenshire (1961, 4-7), granting the Borders region, however, a certain fame for its reivers’ or riding ballads (*reiving* meaning stealing or raiding, especially of cattle). Nevertheless, “Thomas the Rhymer” and “Tam Lin”, two of the most famous ballads from Child’s collection, can be classed as ‘border-ballads’, even though here not the tangible, real-world border between England and Scotland but rather the border between this world and another plays a central role: “in discussing the landscape of the supernatural, place and periodicity operate conjointly with the concept of boundaries – ‘the magic points where worlds impinge’” (Henderson 2000, 65). Interestingly, however, Abigail Acland (2005) does actually speculate whether “Tam Lin” might not after all be categorized as a typical border ballad, that is, a reiving ballad:⁸⁸

In Tam Lin, our male character can be viewed as the equivalent to the cattle in this story. The faerie troop would be the equivalent of a reiving band who captured Tam Lin when he strayed too near the border between their world and his. There were areas of Scotland that did perform sacrifices of cattle at the New Year, and that was the traditional time to thin down the herd for winter. The faerie troop’s attempt to sacrifice Tam Lin further ties into this imagery. Janet, therefore, is engaging in reiving herself, waiting at a border (the crossroads) to steal back what the other side has stolen from her.

But even though there are – in contrast to true reiving ballads – no historical references and few topographical references in the two ballads it might be helpful to reconstruct the topographical circumstances in which they originated.

“The Borders is not a line but an area, in many respects historically and traditionally almost an independent region, certainly so in the eyes of the inhabitants who gave us the ballads” (Reed 1973, 10). The English-Scottish border-area stretches between Berwick on Tweed in the East, across to the Pentland Hills and down to the Cheviot Hills and the Solway Firth in the South, an area roughly defined by Hadrian’s Wall (the latter being, according to Reed, “thirty miles shorter and territorially much simpler” (ibid.)). The wall, however, did not do much to resolve the issue of the border, so that the latter was fought over and negotiated for about 800 years, namely between 1018 and 1838.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ The idea, however, does not seem to be applicable to “Thomas the Rhymer” – unless one places special emphasis on the fact that in some versions the fairy lady explains that she has come to earth for hunting – and maybe her prey is Thomas. This, however, does still not make the ballad a reiving ballad in the strict sense.

⁸⁹ In 1018 King Malcolm of Scotland claimed the area north of the Tweed, while in 1838 the last local border conflict was resolved without violence (Reed 1973, 9).

John Reed is of the opinion that the special living conditions created by this socio-historical situation have produced a special body of texts, works that are “unique in their representation, however distorted by time and chance, of the way of life of a medieval-Elizabethan frontier community tenuously surviving in a world of poverty, violence and *superstition*” (1973, 10; emphasis mine).

If Reed’s view holds true, it is quite fascinating, though, how such a highly localized product as a border ballad could become the source of inspiration for works so different in their historical and geographical setting as the novels discussed here. But maybe this could happen because the two ballads which were singled out by modern authors differ from others in their concentration not so much on the local but on the supernatural, i.e., the element of superstition mentioned by Reed, which can more or less easily be adapted to other settings.⁹⁰ It might also have been of influence that the supernatural border ballads differ from the others in so far as one of the main themes of the border ballads, namely love (the other being death, according to Reed), is for once treated not in a realistic and rather depressing way but more lyrically and romantically: “the (...) more rewarding love themes appear in ballads of the supernatural, where we find the tale of *Tam Lin*” (Reed 1973, 172).

Origins and versions of the ballads “Thomas the Rhymer” and “Tam Lin”

In Child’s ballad index the two ballads in question are listed as number 37 (“Thomas the Rhymer”) and 39 (“Tam Lin”), respectively. In the following paragraphs I will trace their origin and versions, give a short summary of their plots and discuss some possible interpretations.

“Thomas the Rhymer”

For “Thomas the Rhymer”, Child (1904) lists three versions, called A, B and C. Hermann Flasdieck, curiously enough, lists five (in addition to Child’s A-C, he knows a D and an E version, from the collections in Scott’s library in Abbotsford (Flasdieck 1934, 24)), all of which are more or less fragmentary and which, Flasdieck claims, are all variations of a former, lost original version.

The oldest one, version A, probably reaches back to ca. 1750. In 1800 it was passed on in written form by Mrs. Brown of Falkland (one of the most productive ballad-singers

⁹⁰All in all, Lizanne Henderson counts 11 ballads with fairy content in the Child collection: 2, 4, 19, 35, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 53, 61 (2000, 56), she furthermore states that there are “seven witch ballads, ‘Billie Blin’, a type of brownie, is encountered in at least four Scottish ballads; mermaids play a role in five ballads; and there is one selchie ballad” (ibid., 55).

contributing to Child's collection) to Child's Scottish colleague Alexander Fraser Tytler. It was first published in 1806 in Robert Jamieson's *Popular Ballads and Songs*. Version B was probably written down by an anonymous collector around 1830. Version C was created by Sir Walter Scott from different fragments. Version E, like A, probably goes back to the time around 1750. In Flasdieck's judgement, versions A-D correspond to the laws of folk poetry, being centred around a single plot, with no minor characters, also the recurrence of the symbolic number 3 (the fairy queen points out three paths, the plot has three main scenes (encounter, journey, stay in the garden)) is judged to be typical. Only version E differs because it is more elaborate and is thus closer to a medieval verse romance in its description of Fairyland, and has probably been more heavily influenced by the fifteenth century romance "Thomas of Erceldoune" (also first published 1806 by Jamieson).

Plot-summary (versions A-E, adapted from Flasdieck, 1934)

Thomas lies on Huntlie Bank and sees that a lady is riding towards him from the direction of the Eildon tree. She wears a green silk dress and her horse's mane is decorated with silver bells. Thomas greets her as the Queen of Heaven, which she denies she is. She introduces herself as queen of Elfland, and tells him she has come to visit him. Thomas kisses her and is therefore bound to her for seven years. She mounts her white horse and Thomas sits behind her (in one version he runs behind). They ride swiftly and pass rivers of blood, see neither sun nor moon but hear the roaring of the sea. They arrive in a green orchard. Thomas, hungry now, wants to pick an apple but the queen warns him that eating it would bring the plagues of hell on him. She has brought wine and bread and they eat. She shows him a marvel: three roads can be seen and she points them out to him: the path of righteousness, the path of sin, and the path to Elfland, where they will go. She bids him to be silent from now on, otherwise he will not be able to return to earth. Thomas receives a green mantle and green shoes and is not seen on earth for seven years.

This is where the 'good' versions (according to Flasdieck) end, i.e., the versions that are non-fragmentary up to this point. It is difficult to reconstruct the second half but Flasdieck suggests the following motifs: Thomas lives in Elfland, where there is neither time nor age nor death. Only once, after seven years, is he sent back to earth. Version E suggests that the fairies pay a tithe to hell and the queen fears that Thomas will be chosen as the next victim. He stays among humans for seven years but may see his lover if he wishes; he is granted the gift of prophecy by her. After seven years he returns to Elfland (Flasdieck 1934, 26).

The romance “Thomas of Erceldoune”

Apart from “Thomas the Rhymer” in its different versions, there is a second text that tells the story of the harper Thomas who was taken to Elfland: “Thomas of Erceldoune”. This is not a ballad, but a medieval verse romance. Nevertheless, it is important as source material, since the authors of the twentieth century adaptations have frequently taken recourse to the romance for details which the ballads simply do not supply. The romance consists of three parts, the second and third are mainly prophecies made by the fairy queen – the love affair of Thomas and the fairy provides only a frame-story. The romance probably originated at some time around 1400. While to modern-day writers (and scholars of literature) the fairy part is more interesting, to earlier generations, that is, the people who copied the manuscript, the prophecies were obviously more attractive because more manuscripts of the prophecies alone have come down to us than of the whole romance or only the fairy part. Brian Moffat observes: “The prophecies (...) are crises for Scotland and England – victories and defeats on battlefields, (...) successes and setbacks for royal and noble houses and their key leaders” (1988, 32), which maybe explains why they were regarded as more valuable by the copyists, who were probably more interested in politics and history than in romance.

Presently, five manuscripts of the whole are known, the oldest dating from 1430-40. They are named versions T, S, C, V, and L. Taking version T as a model, the title of the romance which is usually employed today is “Thomas of Erceldoune” (other versions spell e.g. Ersseldoune, Arsildoun or Arseldon). T is also the best-preserved copy and the one which Child used in his collection.

The romance (being of a length of some 700 verses) contains of course many more details than the ballads, but it might be interesting nevertheless to compare it to the three Child ballad versions, especially since the twentieth century authors who adapted the Thomas-material for their novels used the versions selectively and in a highly eclectic manner – as will be seen in the later chapters.

In order to facilitate comparison of (different versions of) the ballad/romance “Thomas the Rhymer”/“Thomas of Erceldoune” with each other and with the adaptations, I decided to break down the ballad/romance into smaller narrative units, listed here in the form of a table.

Stage	Romance, R	Child A	Child B	Child C
Meeting place	Huntly Banks, Eildon Tree	grassy bank	Huntly Banks, Eildon Tree	Huntly Banks, Eildon Tree
Description of fairy lady	Jewels on saddle, stirrup of crystal, bridle of gold, three bells on each side of the bridle, hunting horn, singing, 3 greyhounds, 7 hunting dogs, quiver with arrows	Skirt of green silk and velvet mantle, horse with 59 bells on each teth of its mane	Dapple-gray horse, she holds 9 bells in her hand	Skirt of green silk and velvet mantle, horse with 59 bells on each teth of its mane
Thomas's	Thomas salutes her as queen of	Thomas salutes her as	“Protestant alteration”	Thomas salutes her as queen

salutation	heaven	queen of heaven	(Child 1904, 320): Thomas thinks that she must be a beauty of his land	of heaven
Fairy queen's reply	She corrects his mistake, tells him she is hunting, he wants to be her lover, she warns him that her beauty will go if he loves her	She corrects his mistake, tells him she is here to visit him	She says she is from another country, and here for hunting	She corrects his mistake, tells him she is there to visit him
Physical contact	Thomas embraces fairy queen seven times			She challenges Thomas to kiss him, warning him at the same time, Thomas defies her warning and kisses her
Warning	She tells Thomas that sleeping with her will ruin her beauty and so it happens, she bids Thomas to take leave of sun and moon			
Abduction	She carries him off, he is afraid	She tells him that he must go with her	She tells him that he must go with her	She tells him that he must go with her
Duration of service	He must go with her for one year	He must go with her for seven years	He must go with her for seven years	He must go with her for seven years
Way of traveling	She leads him in at Eildon hill	She takes him up behind her	She rides and he runs	She takes him up behind her
Passage (misplaced in C)	They cross a subterranean water, he wading up to the knee, for three days nothing is heard but the current, crossing takes 3 days, he is hungry	He wades through blood up to he knees for 40 days, sees neither sun nor moon	They cross a 'water clear', he wading up to the knee	
Rest	They come to an orchard	They come to an orchard	They come to an orchard	
Temptation	Thomas wants to pull down fruit, she warns him, if he plucks it, his soul goes to the fire of hell	Thomas wants to pull down fruit and is told that it is cursed	Thomas wants to pull down fruit and is told that it is cursed	
Substitute food		She has brought bread and wine and he can eat	She has brought bread and wine and they eat it	
Journey				They ride through a desert, leaving living land behind
"Ferlies"	The fairy bids Thomas lay his head on her knee, and she will show him rare sights. These are the way to heaven, way to hell. She does not point out the road to Elfland, but the elfqueen's castle on a high hill (last choice of the five); and there are two additional ferlies, the way to paradise and the way to purgatory	The fairy bids Thomas lay his head on her knee, and she will show him rare sights. These are the way to heaven, the way to hell and the road to Elfland, whither they are going	The fairy bids Thomas lay his head on her knee, and she will show him rare sights. These are the way to heaven and the way to hell.	The fairy bids Thomas lay his head on her knee, and she will show him rare sights. These are the way to heaven, the way to hell and the road to Elfland, whither they are going
Behaviour-restrictions in Elfland	Thomas is told to answer none but the elf-queen, whatever may be said to him, her king must not know about the two of them	Thomas is admonished that he must hold his tongue, for if he speaks a word he will never get back to his own country		Thomas is admonished that he must hold his tongue, for if he speaks a word he will never get back to his own country
Restoration of queen's beauty	Lady resumes all the beauty and splendor which she had lost, and no explanation is offered save the naive one in the Lansdowne copy, that if she had not, the king, her consort would have known about her sin. She blows her horn and they ride to the castle			
Passage				Passage through subterranean water, darkness, they hear the sea, they wade through red blood to the knee, which is the blood that the earth cannot hold
Garden				They come to the garden
Gift				The cursed fruit which Thomas is not to touch in A, B and R is offered him by the elf-queen as his wages, she will also give him the tongue that can never lie.
Rrefusal of gift				Thomas claims that his tongue is his own and that he won't dare to talk to

				high-standing persons or ladies if he cannot lie any more but the queen insists (“certainly a modern, and as certainly an ill-devised, interpolation”, Acland 2005)
Arrival in Elfland, stay in Elfland	They are received by kneeling virgins, Thomas lives there more than three years [Cambridge MS: seven], and thinks the time but a space of three days, there is music and dance and feasting	Thomas gets a fairy costume, and is not seen on earth again for seven years.	People at elf-queen’s hall ask him questions, but he answers none but her, she tells them that she found him at the Eildon tree	Thomas gets a fairy costume, and is not seen on earth again for seven years.
<i>Return to earth</i>	The fairy queen then hurries him away, for the day when the devil comes to fetch his tribute is near. Thomas is a strong man, and the queen fears that he will be chosen. She brings him again to the Eildon Tree, and bids him farewell. 2 nd fit: Thomas begs of her a token of his conversation with her, and she gives him the gift of true speaking. (and of harping and singing). He urges her further to tell him some ferly, and she makes him several predictions, but he does not want let her go without more and more. 3 rd fit: She starts to cry for all the doom she is prophesizing, Thomas tells her to go but elicits one last promise from her: to meet him on Huntly Banks when she might, then she leaves him under the tree.			

(Sources: Acland 2005, Flasdieck 1934; the elements which occur only in one version are printed in italics)

Something remarkable about the Thomas Rhymer material is that, in contrast to the hero of “Tam Lin”, Thomas the Rhymer was probably a historical person, living during the thirteenth century and winning fame as a seer, even becoming something like the “Merlin of Scotland” (Flasdieck 1934, 32) throughout the centuries. But Thomas in the romance does not utter prophecies himself. He listens to the prophecies of the fairy queen, who, however, has earlier given him the gift of foresight. The historical Rhymer must have been a legendary figure already when the romance was written in the fifteenth century. There is, however, very little written evidence about his life, only two (more or less creditable) sources claim to report events from his life (Flasdieck 1934, 35). There are furthermore two legal documents dating from the end of the thirteenth century which prove that a person named Thomas Rymor or Rymour existed and from which can be deduced that he was probably born around 1220 (ibid., 40). As for the meaning of his last name, Fladieck is uncertain – to be sure, Thomas’s last name means a person who rhymes or is a poet, and Thomas was held to be both a prophet and a poet.⁹¹ However, Fladieck observes that already in 1296 a person named John Rymour

⁹¹ He was thought to have written a version of *Sir Tristrem* (Flasdieck 1934, 38).

appears in Berwickshire, so that Rymour might already have been an inherited surname that had lost its original significance (1934, 39).

The place-name of Erceldoune is still preserved in the modern-day town of Earlston, where a building called the ‘Rhymer’s tower’ can still be seen today (*ibid.*, 41) and is apparently sometimes visited by modern-day writers for inspiration, as the acknowledgement on the final pages of Ellen Kushner’s *Thomas the Rhymer* reveals. Similarly as Erceldoune, the Eildon Hill is a place in the real world, too. It lies south of the Scottish town of Melrose. The name of the mountain is sometimes pluralised into ‘the Eildons’ or ‘Eildon Hills’, because of its triple peak, a curiosity which several local legends try to explain, e.g. claiming that it was cleft in three by the devil or a magician.

Interpretation

There are not as many symbolic elements in this ballad needing interpretation as there are in “Tam Lin”. Nevertheless, there are a few that might reward closer inspection. One is the subterranean water or river of blood crossed by Thomas and the queen, with regard to which Lizanne Henderson remarks that the crossing of a water barrier is typical for journeys to the otherworld (2000, 57) – the ferry trip across the Styx which the dead have to undertake in Greek mythology is probably the most well known version of this. The river of blood seems a mere dramatic enhancement of the river image, it is, however, interesting how Brian Moffat tries to find real-world circumstances that might have inspired the imagery in “Thomas the Rhymer”. He comes up with an account of subterranean canals, where blood from medicinal blood-letting at a monastery or hospital was disposed of (Moffat 1988, 35): “The inmates of religious houses succumbed to programmes of routine and regulative blood-letting. Along with purgatives, diuretic and emetic drugs, and fasting, blood-letting was used to adjust the humours” (according to the medieval humours-theory). Moffat estimates that at religious houses great amounts of blood had to be cleaned up, which might have been achieved by letting it flow through underground tunnels.

Another point worth investigating is the weird of silence imposed on Thomas by the fairy queen. The ballad versions and the romance explain this differently – in the romance the queen wants to prevent word of their affair getting around to her fairy consort, in the ballad he must not speak with anyone but the queen if he wants to retain his chance to return to earth one day. The second interpretation makes the speech taboo similar to the taboo of eating fairy food, the breaking of which would also prevent Thomas from returning to earth. All in all, Thomas is in a position of subordination to the fairy queen – largely silent, not eating the same food as the elves and bound to her for seven years. This female dominance is one of the

features that makes the ballad different from many other Child ballads and probably more interesting for modern (female) authors and readers as it presumably is also the case with “Tam Lin”, as Colin Manlove remarks: “Both describe men made subject to women: and it must be said that there is a strong ‘feminist’ element in many Scottish (not Gaelic) fairy tales” (1994, 22). Manlove has also suggested that Thomas’s journey can be read as a trip into Thomas’s inner self: “It is also possible to see the journey of Thomas into Elfland as one into the deepest levels of the unconscious mind, away from sunlit earth to darkness and the unknown, and from the realm of speech to silence” (Manlove 1994, 23). It is a journey which, one might add, initiates a change in the protagonist, thus lending a psychological aspect to the story which might have also been of interest to modern writers, as Ellen Kushner’s rendering of it certainly shows.⁹²

“Tam Lin”

According to folklorist Katherine Briggs, “Tam Lin” might be “perhaps the most important supernatural ballad” (1976, 449). Child assesses the ballad as follows: “this fine ballad stands by itself, and is not, as might have been expected, found in possession of any people but the Scottish. Yet it has connections, through principal features in the story, the retransformation of Tam Lin, with Greek popular tradition older than Homer” (Child 1904, 336). One Greek myth related to it is for example that of the marriage between Peleus and Thetis, where Peleus is advised to find the sea nymph when she is asleep and bind her tightly to keep her from escaping by changing form. He finds her and binds her and she does shift shapes, becoming flame and water, a raging lion, a serpent and other animals. But Peleus holds fast and she finally consents to marry him (similar transformations and the compulsion to hold fast are involved in the myth of Proteus).

In a collection of tales named *Complaynt of Scotland* dating from 1594 a tale involving a character named ‘young Tamlane’ can be found. But even though here Tam Lin is presented as a “merry bogey of the greenwood” (Muir 1965, 140) no connection with Fairyland is mentioned, so Muir suggests that the Tam Lin story is probably younger than 1594. This historical placing would tie in with the differing presentation of the elf-queen in the story of Tam Lin and Thomas the Rhymer /Thomas of Erceldoune: While in the (older) Thomas-material, she is rather benevolent, she takes a turn for the worse in Tam Lin and

⁹² There are probably parallels to the state of liminality passed through by initiands as described by Victor Turner (*The Ritual Process*, 1969), as Turner mentions silence and subjection as aspects of their in-between state. On the other hand, Turner stresses that the initiands live in a special state of equality with their fellow initiands, while Thomas is rather lonely as there are no other beings in the same situation as he himself, unless one counts the King Who Waits, the female servant and the dove as the only other humans (or former humans) living in Elfland.

becomes an evil creature. This seems to echo the development of similar supernatural female figures like Morgain le Fay or Melusina during the Middle Ages, who both were presented as increasingly evil in works of literature as misogyny spread during the centuries (see chapter four). There is, however, in “Tam Lin” also some (decorative) material that may date from fifteenth century France – the silver bells on the horse and the 24 ladies attending on Janet may be an echo of courtly French habits, which is not too improbable, Willa Muir suggests, as there were close connections between Scotland and France at the time.

A figure by the name of Tamlane name also shows up in a fragmentary ballad called *Burd Helen and young Tamlane* (Child #28), where Tamlane is described as a “heartless seducer” (Muir 1965, 140) – he has apparently fathered a child on Ellen but does not care for it and her and goes to sea instead – in his seducer’s role he resembles Tam Lin of Child #39, but he does not seem to have any supernatural connections.

Since the name of Tam Lin seems to be something special in ballad and tale, scholars have sought to find out its meaning and come up with several but similar suggestions: Muir holds that *Lin* is a place-name, there being a lake called Loch Linnhe in Scotland (1965, 140), while Niles translates the name as ‘Tom of the pool’ (1977, 346), thus suggesting that the meaning of *lin* must be pool or lake. Whether the name has any connections with the ballad’s resolution, i.e., Tam’s rebirth through water, is not clear, it is, however, surprising, how distinctly the element of water appears in the final chapters of the retellings: a garden pool plays an important role in *Fire and Hemlock*, there is a lake at the end of *The Perilous Gard*, an episode involving the sea in *The Wee Free Men*, a ditch in *Tam Lin* by Pamela Dean and a well is of crucial importance in *Winter Rose*. In some versions of the ballad (e.g. A, B), Janet also first encounters Tam near a well. This is a similarity to tales of the “Frog Prince” type, where the male (enchanted) hero is also often met by the heroine near a well or other spot of water.

Whatever the origins of “Tam Lin” are, it is certainly one of the most variant-rich ballads in Child’s collection. Child lists versions A-K and, in Child’s notes, three more but very fragmentary variants, L-M, can be found, which adds up to 15, (Niles lists as ‘traditional’: “b, c,d, e, f, h, J1, J2, K, L, M and N, [and, outside Child:] Bronson 1, 2.1 and 4 (first stanza), Gavin Greig, Frank Miller, Bessie Johnstone, Willie Whyte, Adam Lamb” (1977, 338)). As the versions are sometimes very similar I will only mention the most remarkable ones. Version B is probably the earliest in which the story is told in more than fragmentary form, found in copies from 1789 and 1791. It served as a source for Child A, which was assembled by Robert Burns for James Johnson’s *Scots Musical Museum* (1796).

The Burns-version shows distinctive traces of authorial revision, for instance the admonition to young girls at the beginning was probably added by Burns himself (according to Muir 1965, 136), also the stanza mentioning that “Janet was as glad of that as any earthly thing” is, in Muir’s opinion, a Burnsian addition (ibid., 133). This latter addition, however, is valued as appropriate to the ballad – quite in contrast to the detail found in version I (assembled by Sir Walter Scott, published in *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*) where the fairies are described to have pipes of hemlock, which Muir judges as out of place (ibid.). But this detail might have inspired Diana Wynne Jones with regard to the setting for *Fire and Hemlock*, where large plants of hemlock surround the garden in which the rescue of Thomas Lynn takes place. The most obvious inspiration for the use of hemlock in *Fire and Hemlock*, however, seems to be Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale”, which is directly quoted in the novel.

Plot summary

A short summary of the most important events in the ballad would probably read like this: Janet (or Margaret in some versions) sits at home, pursuing some domestic activity. She is warned against Tam Lin. She nevertheless goes to Carterhaugh, where he is said to dwell and meets him. Tam Lin seduces her. Janet is pregnant and a member of her family suggests an abortion. Janet goes to Carterhaugh to collect herbs that will induce a miscarriage when Tam Lin appears and asks her why she wants to kill their child. He explains that he is a human man who was once taken by the fairies and who now fears he will be sacrificed by them as a tithe to the devil. He tells Janet how she must proceed if she wants to rescue him and get herself a father for her child – she must hold on to him and finally throw him into water. On All Hallows’ Eve, Janet waits for the fairies to ride by, she discovers Tam Lin on the third horse, the white one, pulls him from his horse and holds fast to him despite the transformations he undergoes – turning into different animals and some kind of burning substance. He is finally turned back into his human shape. The fairy queen is quite enraged but has to give him up to Janet.

Since the great number of variants makes a table that lists them all rather confusing, I will limit myself to only the – in my opinion – most interesting narrative variations.⁹³ I will describe the variations briefly without mapping them onto the ballad versions they belong to as I did with regard to “Thomas the Rhymer” but nevertheless the table will serve to give an idea of the many details that later authors drew from for their novelistic adaptations of the ballad.

⁹³ Acland has on the whole 34 versions: Child 1-11 and Child notes + 22 others (most of those are twentieth interpretations by (folk) musicians.

Element	Sub-elements and variants
Warning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ because Tam Lin is there ○ because he takes objects of value, including maidenhead from girls who go there
Janet's Motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ sowing in her bower, wants to gather flowers for decoration ○ is warned against Tam Lin but sets out to explore the wood nevertheless, takes it as a challenge ○ is warned of Tam Lin and goes to Carterhaugh to seek herself an otherworldly lover
1 st meeting of Janet and Tam Lin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ rape-like ○ more consensual (in version I, Acland suspects that this is a cleaned-up version by Sir Walter Scott)⁹⁴ ○ sometimes Tam Lin disappears immediately afterwards and Janet is left in the dark wood ○ some versions leave out any mention of physical contact between Janet and Tam Lin
Family's reaction to Janet's pregnancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ most versions have her father or other member of the household observing the early signs of pregnancy in Janet. Some versions portray the family's reaction as mostly somewhat disappointed ○ others depict the family as outraged ○ "And still others have a bystander treat Janet's pregnancy as somewhat shameful but not entirely shocking" (Acland, 2005) ○ mother or brother suggest that she should get herbs to induce an abortion
2 nd visit to Carterhaugh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ wanting to pluck noxious herbs ○ wanting to speak to Tam Lin ○ no explained motivation ○ most versions include Tam Lin's question why she wants to kill the baby even when abortion is not mentioned before
Tam Lin's lineage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ he is a fairy ○ he was kidnapped by fairies as a young child because he was not christened properly ○ he fell from his horse when hunting as a child and was taken by the fairies ○ he fell asleep under an apple tree and was taken from there ○ he is from a noble human family
Janet's lineage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ her father is a person of high rank, owns a hall ○ she is a king's daughter ○ she was given Carterhaugh by her father
Tam's situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ has been with the fairies for a long time ○ has not been there so long and knew Janet as a child ○ has been waiting specifically for her
the sacrifice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Tam Lin enjoys living with the faeries ○ Tam Lin describes some of his life with the faeries ○ the faeries perform sacrifices to hell ○ every seventh year ○ the sacrifice is specifically the most recent addition to the troop ○ Tam Lin fears he may be the next because he is so fair ○ Tam Lin fears he may be the next because he is a human, making him lower rank than the faeries ○ Tam Lin is part of a larger sacrificial group ○ the sacrifice will take place the night or next day on Halloween (Samhain) ○ the sacrifice will take place on the first of May (Beltaine) ○ Janet asks how she may identify Tam Lin in the troop ○ Tam Lin tells Janet how he will be dressed so she may recognize him in the troop.
instructions for rescue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ most versions: be there and hold on fast to Tam Lin ○ bring holy water and cast a circle around yourself ○ let the fairies pass silently ○ salute the fairy troops ○ be silent during the transformations ○ cry out Tam Lin's name to remind him who he is
the rescue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Janet travels home again ○ Janet travels to a crossroad or bridge ○ Janet brings a special item (either herb, bible, cane or holy water)

⁹⁴ The stanza in question reads like this: "He's taen her by the milk-white hand, / Among the leaves sae green, / And what they did I cannot tell. / The green leaves were between."

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Janet hides as the faerie troop approaches ○ Janet hails or salutes part of the troop ○ Tam Lin's horse is milk-white ○ the stars blaze, thunder roars, or other unusual events occur as the troop approaches and/or the struggle begins ○ the faerie troop cries out that Tam Lin is away ○ Janet calls out Tam Lin's name ○ the fairy queen tries to talk Janet into releasing Tam Lin ○ Janet throws Tam lin into well water ○ Janet dips Tam Lin in milk ○ Janet holds Tam Lin until the morning ○ Janet puts her mantle around Tam Lin ○ Janet hides Tam Lin
Last words of the fairy queen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ wants to take out Tam's eyes and put in two of wood ○ wants to take out his heart and put in one of stone ○ (version by folk band <i>Fairport Convention</i> (1969) and related): wants to turn him into a tree ○ grudging admiration for Janet/Margaret (K) ○ fears that now she will herself be taken as the tithe to hell (H)

Source: adapted from Acland 2005

Symbolism and interpretation

It seems that “Tam Lin” contains, in contrast to “Thomas the Rhymer”, many more images and occurrences that can be read symbolically, therefore, a short discussion of the imagery and symbolism in “Tam Lin” might be called for. One of the early stanzas of the ballad talks about a toll, or ‘wad’ that every maid who passes Carterhaugh has to pay to Tam Lin. Abigail Acland explains this by pointing out that Carterhaugh is fairy property and that, in general, crossing land or property said to be in the fairies’ possession would have to be paid for by the trespasser. Tam Lin, however, demands special things from the girls: “Either their rings, or green mantles, / Or else their maidenhead.” Acland elaborates:

Tam Lin’s specific demands were of particular significance. A ring was likely to be a sign of allegiance, such as a king might give a vassal or a husband to a wife. A mantle might symbolise kinship and protection, either by the specific colors present or by the symbolic covering they afforded (see covering with mantle, below). Gold was symbolic of wealth, particularly the wealth of nobility and aristocracy. In another sense, all of these items are symbolically linked to the final demand he might make, a maiden’s virginity. A stolen ring, like a broken circle, symbolizes the breaking of the hymen, and is also tied to notions of virginity through association with marriage and fidelity. A mantle is a cover that protects a woman’s modesty, and gold as virginity was sometimes referred to as ‘maiden’ wealth. (2005)

The “covering with mantle” referred to in the above quotation is Janet’s final deed when she has rescued Tam from the fairy queen. She covers him with her green mantle and thus finally ‘claims’ him, declares him to be hers. Thus, it seems, the process alluded to in the second stanza, the giving of the mantle is repeated, and now, it seems, alludes much stronger to Janet becoming the protector of Tam than to the loss of her virginity. The colour of the mantle, however, gives cause to some confusion. Janet wears a green mantle, both when she first goes to Carterhaugh and when she rescues Tam Lin. In the first instance, wearing the fairy colour in a place that is haunted by fairies might be read as a wilful provocation of the

fairies, which might fit the interpretation of Janet as a rather headstrong girl. The second occurrence, however, is puzzling, for Janet should probably have opted for a colour less likely to arouse the fairies' jealousy. Acland speculates that maybe she wears green to confuse the fairies or simply to provide camouflage for Tam Lin in the wood and Henderson supports the former idea, ascribing a "countermagical significance" (2000, 67) to the green cloak. Janet's choice of green may, however, also symbolise other things, namely promiscuity, as it does sometimes in traditional use since "green hides the grass stains" (Acland 2005) and John Hutchings confirms that a green dress might signify the loss of virginity (1997, 60). But the green mantle could also hint at the (temporary) loss of her lover: "a woman dressed in green has left or been left by her lover, [she is] a 'grass widow', from the days back before divorce was a possibility for most folks" (Acland 2005). Jessica Greenlee interprets the green mantle slightly differently, speculating whether it might not be a hint at Janet's female strength and creativity, something which would link her to the fairy queen and something which, according to Greenlee, she eventually gives up for her lover in handing the mantle to him (2001, 78).

Another act also imbued with symbolism, and one used and expanded in the adaptations (especially Patrica McKillip's *Winter Rose* and Pamela Dean's *Tam Lin*) is Janet's plucking of the rose which (at least in some versions) summons Tam Lin for the first time. Roses are of course symbolically very strongly charged flowers, symbolising a whole range of notions, but all in some way related to love and sexuality. By pulling off a flower, Janet actively instigates her relationship to Tam, or, as Greenlee remarks: "Once Janet discovers and claims her own sexuality by picking the rose, a traditional symbol for sexuality, she is in Tam Lin's power" (2001, 76). Similarly, Acland observes how the plucking of the rose "foreshadow[s] her coming 'deflowerment'. More specifically, the tightly folded petals of an opening rose are often used as symbols of a woman's sexual anatomy, a symbolism that goes back at least as far as *The Romance of the Rose*" (Acland 2005).⁹⁵

In "Tam Lin", the fairies are presented as feudal subjects of Lucifer (Lyle, 1970, 179), who have, quite like humans, to pay their liege lord a tithe or 'teind' at regular intervals. The teind is variously explained and detailed in the different "Tam Lin"-versions and in different folkloristic accounts: Emily B. Lyle observes that in some accounts indeed one tenth of the fairy population is sent to hell (1970,178), in other accounts it is merely one person, sometimes standing out because of their beauty, youth and strength who is sacrificed to appease the devil. Lizanne Henderson remarks that it was sometimes believed that the fairy queen tried to capture mortals for the teind so she would not have to pay with her own folk

⁹⁵ Pamela Dean will use the *Romance of the Rose* in this context as one of her intertextual connections by making Janet and Thomas fight over the possession over a library exemplar of this text.

(2000, 63) and in some versions of “Tam Lin” the queen is afraid, after Tam has escaped, that she herself will have to pay the teind now.

The teind in “Tam Lin” must be paid every seven years on Halloween night (in some versions on 1 May, that is, Beltane), and there is probably a special significance to this date. Lyle observes that “Hallowmas was one of the ancient quarter days of Scotland, and half-yearly rents were payable at Beltane and Hallowmas, so perhaps the devil might be imagined to demand his tribute when human rents fell due” (1970, 181). Willa Muir contributes another observation towards the special importance and danger inherent in Halloween Night: “the most ominous crack (...) [in the old Celtic calendar] was the one that opened between the end of summer and the beginning of winter, since it marked the coming of the dark months and at the same time was well known to let the souls of the dead return temporarily to the land of the living” (1965, 128). John Niles interprets the ‘trick or treat’ traditions that have survived to the present day in the USA and Great Britain as a survival of the belief that on Halloween spirits (fairies), witches and the dead could come to people’s houses, and that it was best to keep them happy, for example by giving them food (1977, 341).

In order to rescue her lover, Janet must hold on to him as he undergoes a number of transformations; there are usually three or four stages until he is turned back into his human form. With regard to the transformations, Muir observes: “I suspect that the legend of transformation is (...) older even than Proteus, going back to the time when a priest-king in some tribal emergency managed to substitute a bull or a ram for sacrifice instead of himself, and was credited with having transformed himself into the animal” (1965, 137).

Most of the animals and objects Tam Lin is transformed into are either frightening, dangerous, hard to hold, or all of these at once: he turns, according to the various versions, into a lizard, a snake, a toad, an eel, a lion, a greyhound, a bear, a dove, a swan, an eagle, an ass, a deer, a silken string, a wolf, a red hot iron, a glowing coal, or a flame. Concerning the snake, Acland observes that it may be read as a symbol for sin and illicit sex, which Janet has to come to terms with now (its phallic symbolism probably also pertains to the lizard, toad and eel), but also a symbol for the “primordial forces of nature” (Acland 2005). This latter reading probably also applies for animals like the lion, the bear, the wolf and the eagle. Niles relates the animal transformations to “folktales of the ‘Frog Prince’ type, [where] such imagery carries obviously sexual connotations” (1977, 342) – the girl must overcome her fear of the monstrous aspects of the other sex, before a happy resolution of the tale in marriage is possible. With regard to the glowing iron and burning brand that also make up part of the transformations, Niles thinks that the “erotic connotations of the embrace [of Tam and Janet]

are reinforced by the persistence of the element of *heat* or *warmth* in the sequence of transformations” (1977, 343).

In most versions, Tam instructs Janet to throw him into a spring or pool of water or to dip him into a “stand of milk” at the end. This can be interpreted as a sort of cleansing or baptism ritual, which makes sense especially if one regards Janet’s struggle for Tam Lin also a battle for his soul and Muir observes how in many tales “to regain human shape, or to lose it, one must pass through a liquid, sometimes milk but generally water” because “water is traditionally holy” (1965, 132).⁹⁶ Several adaptations make use of the water symbolism (*Fire and Hemlock*, *Tam Lin*, *The Perilous Gard*, *Queen of Spells*) and omit the actual transformations, while only one of them, and curiously enough one with a twentieth century setting (Pamela Dean’s *Tam Lin*), actually describes the transformations of the hero into different animals and a burning substance while Janet holds him in her arms.

After Tam Lin has been freed from his curse, the last words are usually granted to the fairy queen. In some versions, she wishes an ill death on Janet and says that, had she anticipated this turn of events, she would have plucked out Tam Lin’s own two eyes and put in eyes of wood. Thus she could have prevented Tam from seeing Fairyland and would also have prevented him from telling other humans about it. Katherine Briggs explains: “In many tales those who travel to faerie lands are blindfolded, or those who return from faerie lands with the gift of faerie sight (usually from rubbing a salve on their eyes) later have their eyes plucked out when the faeries learn the mortal can still see them” (1976, 156). In other versions the queen claims that she would have liked to replace Tam’s living heart with a heart of stone. If she had done this, he would not have been able to initiate a love relationship with Janet and would thus not have been able to find someone to rescue him (a similar motif – the exchange of a human heart against one of stone, with grave consequences for the owner of the heart – can be found in Wilhelm Hauff’s fairy tale “The Cold Heart” (“Das Kalte Herz”).

The ballads’ attractiveness for retelling

Although other Child ballads (for instance #218, “The Famous Flower of Servingmen”) have been used as source material for modern-day retellings as well, it seems that “Thomas the Rhymer” and even more so “Tam Lin” are favourites among late twentieth century writers, and here especially female authors. Quite often, both ballads are used as sources alongside each other, in fact, none of the adaptations analysed in the later chapters of

⁹⁶ In L. Frank Baum’s *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, water is used as a means of disenchantment (the Wicked Witch of the West is dissolved by it) as well.

this paper limits itself to only one of the two even though the focus may be on one of the ballads – most often “Tam Lin” – all of them contain at least traces of the other. Why is this so?

Colin Manlove offers a possible explanation for the fact that “Tam Lin” and “Thomas the Rhymer” are often treated as companion pieces: “certainly the two tales could be said to form the halves of a whole: first in the sense that one shows the beginning of an enchantment, and the other its ending; but also in that ‘Thomas the Rhymer’ portrays much more a state of being, where ‘Tam Lin’, which has more action, shows a process of becoming and of continual change” (1994, 23).

As for why the two ballads are of such great attractiveness to twentieth century writers, it seems that a multitude of reasons apply. For “Thomas the Rhymer” it is probably the vivid description of the journey, as Lizanne Henderson observes: “quite possibly, the most remarkable depiction of the journey to Elfland known to exist, in the ballads or any other source, is that made by Thomas Rhymer. It is the most elaborately described journey of its kind, and is alluring in its attention to detail and phantasmal atmosphere” (2000, 57). Maybe also the relatively open and possibly positive ending (at least the romance indicates as much: Thomas returning to earth and becoming famous) contributes to its appeal for modern authors. Moreover, the figure of a minstrel as main character might have been appealing to authors whose musical socialisation was shaped by 1960s folk bands and their often nostalgic attitude towards all things medieval and/or Celtic. Yet another aspect that may have fascinated modern authors is its psychological aspect, the journey into the unconscious, as has been mentioned earlier. However, such a journey should not remain a one-way trip – a return to earth and consciousness is needed, and since “Thomas the Rhymer” provides this only indirectly (in the romance), maybe this is the reason why so many authors have hit upon “Tam Lin” as the second Child ballad to incorporate in their adaptations – it makes the pattern complete.⁹⁷

The appeal of “Tam Lin” has been analysed by various scholars, who all come to more or less the same conclusions. First of all, Janet, the “most memorable heroine in all of ballad literature” (Cowan 2000, 108), is an important reason. Especially female authors seem to have been fascinated by Janet, and certainly, she is “congenial to late twentieth century tastes, so independent and aggressive is she in rescuing her lover from the clutches of the supernatural” (Ringel 1999, 200). Similarly, Polly Stewart observes how Janet is one the few successful women in the Child ballads – one of only 15 in several hundred ballads (1993, 71). Also

⁹⁷ Catherine Storr’s *Thursday* exemplifies this very well: here a musical boy is taken by the fairies and rescued by his girlfriend (however, no teind and no pregnancy are involved).

Jessica Greenlee thinks this is the reason for the many retellings: “Tam Lin has a spunky heroine, one who leaves the normal ways of her community, finds her own husband, and succeeds in fighting against the Queen of Fairies” (2001, 75). Henderson supports this notion – Janet as a role model for independent-minded girls: in her eyes “Tam Lin” is “also about the relationship between a father and a daughter, and between male and female lovers. The daughter defies the paternalism of her father by venturing outside his lands and thus outside his control: thereafter she is immediately engaged in a battle to win the father of her child from the control of another woman” (2000, 68). John Niles is of a similar opinion (1977, 345): while before both Janet and Tam have been bound, either to authoritative parents or to the fairy queen, Janet’s deed frees them both and opens the way for them to begin an independent life – together, forming a new family.

Secondly, the decidedly happy ending of this ballad, which makes it stand out from the bulk of ballad literature, where sad endings prevail, is what makes Child #39 one of the best-loved models for modern adaptations, because, as Faye Ringel puts it: “this ballad, unlike many others, provides the closure of a happy ending expected in the world of fairy tale” (1999, 200).

Greenlee, however, sees the happy resolution slightly more critically, in her view, Janet has only a limited choice of possibilities once she discovers her pregnancy: she must find a husband or she will be an outcast.⁹⁸ Raising the child without a husband is not an option for Janet, as it might have been in a more modern, less patriarchal society. But neither is Janet willing to marry one of her father’s men, a solution suggested in some versions of the ballad, which probably shows how headstrong she is after all. Interestingly, however, only one of the adaptations examined in detail in this study (and two of the ones additionally mentioned) feature(s) a pregnant heroine at all and even in this adaptation, set in 1970s America, marriage provides the final happy resolution – Janet may be a strong female character, yet she stays caught in certain social conventions. But maybe this is even part of her appeal – she is independent and strong, without being revolutionary, and this might make her easier to identify with, even for modern readers.

Summing up the appeal the ballad of “Tam Lin” has held for singers throughout the centuries, I would like to grant John Niles the final words. He observes how the ballad, “tracing the lot of its main characters from a state of isolation and captivity, through terror, to

⁹⁸ What might have happened to Janet if she had failed to save Tam is shown by Janet MacNaughton in her “Tam Lin” adaptation *An Earthly Knight*, set in twelfth century Scotland. Here, Janet has an older sister, Isabel, who is thought to have been dishonoured by a young knight who has vanished without a trace: plans are made to send Isabel into a convent and Janet, before she regains Tam, fears the same fate for herself and moreover is quite certain that her child would not survive its birth for long if it was taken from its mother.

a new life of the family, (...) is able to resolve basic fears in a constructive way” so that “Tam Lin” is, simply put, “the story of a man and a woman who survive” (1977, 347) – and maybe this was also the reason why the ballad itself has not only survived but continues to be a source of inspiration for writers in the twentieth (and twenty-first) century.

6. Choice of texts

My choice of primary texts was guided by several sources: two lists of texts posted at the scholarly website tam-lin.org, compiled by Abigail Acland and Tyra Twomey, an article by Faye Ringel on “Traditional Ballads and American Genre Fiction” (1999) and one by Martha Hixon about traditional ballads and twentieth century children’s literature (2004), as well as a chapter on folktale-retellings in *Retelling Stories, Framing Culture* by John Stephens and Robyn McCallum (1998).⁹⁹ The largest list is that by Acland, who lists about 50 short-stories, comics and novels (making no distinction between children’s literature, young adult and adult literature) which she considers in some way – albeit often rather loosely – based on the ballad of “Tam Lin”. Twomey has about 20 titles, among them novels, stage plays and illustrated children’s books. Ringel concentrates on 7 titles, listing Pamela Dean’s *Tam Lin*, Greer Gilman’s *Moonwise*, Dahlov Ipcar’s *Queen of Spells*, Ellen Kushner’s *Thomas the Rhymer*, Elizabeth Pope’s *Perilous Gard*, Joan Vinge’s short-story *Tam Lin*, Diana Wynne Jones’s *Fire and Hemlock* as retellings of ballads that are (at least partly) based on “Tam Lin” or “Thomas the Rhymer”. Stephens and McCallum discuss Dean’s *Tam Lin*, Jones’s *Fire and Hemlock*, Pratchett’s *Lords and Ladies* and *Deersnake* by Lucy Sussex. Hixon mentions several twentieth century fairy tale and folk tale collections including “Tam Lin”-retellings and analyses the children’s books by Jane Yolen and Susan Cooper as well as the novels by Dahlov Ipcar, Pamela Dean and Diana Wynne Jones in some more detail.

Of Acland’s and Twomey’s lists, many works disqualified for my study because they are short-stories or fairy tales, illustrated children’s books, comics or stage plays, while my focus was exclusively on novels. I chose not to differentiate between novels for young adults (age 12 and over) or older children (age 9-12) and novels for adults since it is typical for the fantasy genre that adults read children’s fantasies (and also the other way round), a phenomenon that would be worth an investigation on its own but that I will not pursue in detail here.

Other titles I excluded because the reference to either “Thomas the Rhymer” or “Tam Lin” is too slight (e.g. *Tithe* by Holly Black, a story about a girl who discovers that she is a fairy herself and who becomes involved in a war between the seelie and unseelie court of fairies or *Moonwise* because “Tam Lin” is only one small influence among many). Another criterion, which led me to disregard several works, was the lack of supernatural elements. One example here would be *Freedom and Necessity* by Emma Bull and Steven Brust, where one of the main

⁹⁹ For the lists of Acland and Twomey see the appendix to this study.

characters is kept prisoner by a kind of neo-Druidic secret society but no supernatural events occur. Another example would be Alan Garner's *Red Shift*. Garner's novel features, on three time levels, six characters that might be seen as embodiments of Tom and Janet – on one time level they are called Thomas and Margery, on another Tom and Janet.¹⁰⁰ But there are no fairies – the fairy-possession of the central male characters is symbolised by a kind of epileptic seizures all three suffer from.

I eventually chose 10 novels (Storr, Ipcar, Pope, Jones, Pratchett (2 titles), Kushner, Dean, McKillip, McNaughton) for closer study, most of which are mentioned in several of the abovementioned lists.¹⁰¹ A greater number of novels than I eventually chose would certainly have been worthwhile examining (for example *Deersnake* (1994) or *Dogs of Babel* (2005)) but this would simply have exceeded the scope of this study. The novels I have chosen represent a spectrum of three decades at the end of the twentieth century (1971 – 2003). The authors are British, American or Canadian (three British, five American, one Canadian). Eight of the nine authors are female. The novels represent a certain variety of settings, from close to the 'original' (twelfth century Scotland) to somewhat removed in time and space (twentieth century USA). They also represent a variety of world-systems in terms of Nikolajeva. There are implied secondary worlds (in *Thursday*), open secondary worlds (as in *Thomas the Rhymer* or *Winter Rose*) and closed secondary worlds (as in the two discworld novels).¹⁰² The target audiences of the examined novels are in some cases adults (*Winter Rose*, *Thomas the Rhymer*, *Lords and Ladies*, *Tam Lin*) the rest is written for children or young adults, but, as far as can be inferred e.g. from internet sources (discussion groups, favourite book lists, etc.) the novels intended for younger readers are frequently read by adults.

However, only eight of the ten novels listed above will have whole chapters dedicated to them, two of them, from the very beginning and end of the temporal range (Storr and McNaughton) will be given shorter consideration. They fulfilled the main criteria for this study: an adaptation in form of a novel of either Child #37 or #39 or both which qualifies as a fantasy novel and where some elements of fairy folklore from the ballads are included. But in comparison to the other eight, the information given in these novels about fairies is rather scanty, which is why I have decided to treat them in less detail than the others but nevertheless include them for purposes of comparison.

¹⁰⁰ On the third time level the Tam-character is called Macey and the Janet-character is nameless.

¹⁰¹ This is the frequency with which the novels are mentioned by the authors of the articles/compilers of the lists: Storr: 2x, Ipcar: 4x, Pope: 3x, Jones: 5x, Kushner: 2x, Pratchett: 3x, McKillip: 2x, Dean: 5x.

¹⁰² In the case of Pratchett's novels there is even a tertiary world – the world of the elves – which is trying to open a door into the discworld.

The first (in chronological order) of all the adaptations considered in this study is *Thursday* (1971) by British author Catherine Storr (1913 – 2001). This novel is set in 1970s England. The female protagonist, Bee Earnshaw, aged 15, is suffering from a prolonged glandular fever and told that her best friend, Thursday Townsend, a boy from her school, has suddenly vanished without a trace. Bee assumes that maybe he has run away from his loveless home. As she is slowly recovering, she searches for him in a spot of wasteland, a World War II bomb site, which the two of them have used as a secret meeting-place, but he is not there. Some time later, she sees Thursday, working on a building-site. As she tries to talk to him, however, he is very unresponsive and tells her not to search for him any longer. Afterwards he is discovered by the authorities and taken to a hospital, where he is treated for mental illness.

An old woman, the mother of the newsagent where Townsend used to work, however, does not believe that Thursday's behaviour has been caused by illness and tells Bee so. Rather, she thinks that Thursday, being musically talented, has been taken by fairies to play for their entertainment. In his stead a changeling has been placed in the human world. In order to win him back, Bee is told that she must get him back to the place where he was taken and hold fast to him no matter what happens. Eventually, Bee and Thursday spend Midsummer Night together at the bomb site and she holds him. Later on she has only confused memories about what has happened during the thunderstorm that night – has she really seen fairies or was it just her imagination? The book ends with the two adolescents reunited and it seems that Bee has decided to stay with Thursday for the rest of her life as his companion or future wife.

Thursday is the first twentieth century retelling of "Tam Lin" in form of a novel, and as such it is certainly noteworthy. Moreover, it paves the way for later retellings in its tendency to focus on the figure of Janet, as Charles Butler observes:

Thursday is not a self-consciously feminist text. Nevertheless, it defines the Tam Lin story more clearly than ever as one dealing with specifically female problems and experience. In this respect the example of *Thursday* is one that almost all later Tam Lin authors have followed, despite their books' great variety of style and setting. (2001)

In contrast to later works such as *Fire and Hemlock* or *Winter Rose*, which consciously avoid the traditional reunion-ending in favour of a rather open outcome, *Thursday* ends more conservatively. It can be assumed from the last sentence of the novel that Bee will eventually – even though she has proven her strength by saving Thursday and also angered her parents by staying out the whole night without telling anybody her whereabouts – assume the traditional role of humble homemaker according to her mother's model.

Like most of the other young adult adaptations, *Thursday* does not include the sexual part of “Tam Lin”. However, it seems that Storr nevertheless alludes to this in one of the novel’s subplots: Bee’s sister-in-law, Jean, is pregnant with her first child (in contrast to Janet she is married, to Bee’s brother, so the pregnancy is socially sanctioned) and gives birth to her son the very night Bee stays with Thursday.¹⁰³

While less interesting in regard to its subversive potential, Storr’s novel is remarkable in so far as it includes an aspect of fairy lore only slightly touched on by later retellings of “Tam Lin” and “Thomas the Rhymer” (of the latter there are also traces in *Thursday*, namely in the fairies’ desire for skilled human musicians): the connection between fairy abduction and mental illness, which also Alan Garner incorporated (though in heavily modified form) in his novel *Red Shift*. As Catherine Storr was not only an author of fiction but also a psychiatrist, this take on the story is probably not too surprising. It results in an interesting mixture of psychological aspects – a loveless home leading to the mental breakdown of a boy – and folkloristic elements – his mentally ill self is not the boy himself but a replica put there by fairies. Whichever explanation one favours for Thursday’s behaviour, the deed that finally ends his state of mental absence is one that fits both explanations: the love of a girl brings Thursday back to the normal world and here it matters not if it works on a psychological plane or on a folkloristic one. However, Fairyland is never glimpsed at all since the whole story is told through Bee’s point of view. Thursday claims that an old leaf he has in his hand when he regains his normal consciousness was a gold pendant once – fairy gold, apparently. He also makes a few vague statements about Fairyland but on the whole the novel does not provide enough material for a satisfactory analysis of the depiction of fairies.

The second adaptation I want to discuss here in not too much detail is Janet McNaughton’s *An Earthly Knight* (2003). McNaughton is a Canadian author with an academic background in folklore studies. Her novel, set in twelfth century Scotland, weaves together the plots of two Child ballads – “Tam Lin” and “Lady Isabel and the Elf Knight”.

Janet (here: Jeanette Avenel), daughter of a Norman count living near Roxburgh has a sister, Isabel, whose involvement with the evil (elf-)knight has taken place even before the narration starts. Isabel, the older of the two daughters, has been flirting with one of the young wandering knights that were guests at their father’s hall. One night she disappears with Bleddri, her admirer, and does not come back for several days. When she returns, she is alone and in a

¹⁰³ This fact might remind the reader of some versions of “Tam Lin” where it is stated that Janet saves Tam on Halloween Night and gives birth to her baby the day after. Jean and her husband call the child Stephen Thomas – Stephen after his grandfather but Bee’s mother wonders “where they got the Thomas from” (213). In fact, this might well be a rather unobtrusive intertextual allusion to Thomas the Rhymer and Tam Lin.

state of trauma, so that her family assumes that Bleddri has raped and then abandoned her. Isabel, however, is silent about what happened during her absence and spends her days praying and weeping. Since her honour is lost, her father determines that she will, as soon as she has confessed her sin, be sent to a nun's convent. This is the situation at the start of the novel.

Jeanette, the younger sister, is very disturbed about the state of affairs and hopes to find a remedy for her sister's melancholy. A harper arrives at the estate and Jeanette hopes that he might stay and cheer up her sister, who loves music. But Jeanette has many troubles of her own, since she has to take over as female head of the household (the mother has died years ago) because her sister is no longer allowed to fill this position. This is difficult for Jeanette, especially as the duties of lady of the house clash with her tomboyish nature. On one of her excursions into the nearby wood she meets Tam Lin, the grandson of the earl of Roxburgh. It is rumoured that the young man is mentally disturbed and moreover trying to usurp the land around the ruins of Carterhaugh, which is by right Jeanette's father's possession and promised to her as her dowry. To Jeanette, however, the boy appears rather amiable and she makes friends with him.

Since Jeanette is of marriageable age, her father is starting to make plans for finding a suitable husband for her, developing a scheme to interest William de Varenne, brother of the Scottish king, in her. Marriage negotiations ensue and Jeanette is torn between the ambition to become an influential lady and her aversion against the uncouth William. In between negotiations, she returns to the wood and in her friendship with Tam Lin she finds consolation from being used as a bargaining chip in her father's ambitious plans. She learns that Tam has dealings with the fairies but she is not afraid of him since he is much more agreeable than William.

Eventually, after an invitation by Tam to visit her, she sleeps with him (which is her own decision) and becomes pregnant. As she realises this, she is desperate. William has accepted her as his fiancée but the marriage is scheduled for about a year later and Jeanette will have no chance to pass the child off as William's. Shortly afterwards her betrothal to William is to be announced and Janet explodes this event by revealing her pregnancy. William and his retinue leave and Jeanette is now in the same state of disgrace as her sister. In the meantime Isabel has fallen in love with the harper, marries him and goes away with him to Ireland. Before she leaves, however, she tells her sister what really happened during her disappearance – Bleddri wanted to kill her, as he had done with several other girls before her, but she defended herself and finally threw him off a cliff, thus killing him.

Jeanette – now threatened with a future in a convent in stead of her sister – finally makes up her mind to try to win Tam Lin as her husband. Helped by her old nurse, who is knowledgeable about fairy lore and Tam, who has told her his whole story, she goes to Carterhaugh on Halloween and rescues Tam Lin from the fairies. Tam marries her and they rebuild Carterhaugh.

McNaughton's novel is interesting in that it mixes the two ballads mentioned above with elements of Scottish history (William de Varenne and his relatives were historical persons) and local colour (Carterhaugh is, after all, a real place, as well as Roxburgh). It does adhere to the plotline of "Tam Lin" quite closely, that is, it does not omit or greatly change any of the events in the ballad, rather McNaughton integrates the ballad into a wider panorama of medieval life, introducing several subplots (Isabel-plot, William-plot). However, there are also two significant deviations from the ballad. One is also a difference from all the other adaptations known by me – in *An Earthly Knight*, Tam Lin has magical abilities himself, once presenting Janet with an enchanted dress that makes all men around her fall in love with her. The other, which also occurs in several other retellings, is that he explicitly states that he was the fairy queen's lover, which is never directly said in the ballad.

But on the whole, the supernatural aspects, or rather, the fairy aspects, are toned down. Local superstitions about elves are mentioned and apparently, the fairies are part of the world McNaughton creates, once for instance weaving elf-locks into the mane of Janet's horse and not just figments of the imagination. But they are hardly ever seen and only servants and peasants seem to really believe in them. The fairy queen is once glimpsed by Janet and her retinue appears at the Halloween ceremony, but no details about appearance or character are given.

What is more, the evil knight who tried to murder Isabel (the elf-knight of Child #4) is never identified as a fairy at all. He might just as well have been merely a vicious and greedy human. Therefore, throughout the book, the elves are a mysterious malicious presence but largely invisible. This is why this novel seemed to me less suitable for an examination of its treatment of fairies, even though it is certainly worthwhile looking at with regard to the social issues hinted at in the ballad which are given much more attention in this novel than in many other adaptations (it is also one of the few that keep the pregnancy element).

Having briefly considered one of the very first "Tam Lin"-novelisations and one of the most recent, I will now launch into a more detailed analysis of the eight novels that were published in between these two temporal 'boundary stones', starting with Dahlov Ipcar's *The Queen of Spells*, published in 1973.

7. *The Queen of Spells* (1973) by Dahlov Ipcar

The author

Dahlov Ipcar was born in Windsor, Vermont, on November 12, 1917. She grew up in New York but for most of her life has been living in Maine. Her parents were the artists William and Marguerite Zorach, and Dahlov Ipcar herself is primarily known as a painter. Her works are now in the permanent collections of many important art institutions such as the Metropolitan, Whitney, and Brooklyn Museums in New York. In 1945 she illustrated *The Little Fisherman*, her first children's book, for author Margaret Wise Brown. Since then she has gone on to write and illustrate thirty children's books of her own. She has also written four fantasy novels for a slightly older audience, as well as a volume of short-stories for adults.

The setting

The Queen of Spells takes place in nineteenth century Appalachia but Ipcar has managed to bring about the translation of an event that took place in medieval or early modern Scotland to the USA in a quite natural manner, placing it simply with the American descendants of the Scottish who emigrated to the States and to whom the old ballads and much of Scottish fairy lore are still familiar. Not quite so natural is the fact that the initial event, the abduction of Tom Linn, in *The Queen of Spells* really takes place in the sixteenth century, the time when "Tam Lin" was probably first sung, then there is a 300 year break and the narration continues in the nineteenth century. However, Ipcar uses the motif of the different nature of time in Fairyland to bridge this chasm – a day in Fairyland is a year in the human world and Tom Linn has stayed with the fairy queen for 300 days before he is sent back and meets Janet Carter.

Plot summary

Janet Carter is the third of the Carter family's ten children. Her father William is a good-natured farmer, while her mother is a strict and pious woman, worn down from housework and childbearing. The Carters are well-to-do farmers who have years ago bought lands on which the old, abandoned farmhouse of the Linn family lies, a house which is said to be haunted.

Janet meets Tom Linn for the first time when she is eleven years old, in 1876. She is seeking shelter from a thunderstorm at the abandoned Linn farm and he suddenly appears inside a room, together with his white horse, all covered in roses. Janet is frightened by him at first, since she knows that this must be the boy reputed to be a mad horse-thief. But he is friendly and

so she promises not to tell anyone about him. He in turn promises to return in seven days. But after seven days nobody is at the house when Janet goes to check. Years pass, interrupted for instance by the annual arrival of a group of travelling gypsies and by a strange encounter Janet once has with an odd dwarfish man who calls himself Billy Blin and shows her where a lost heifer of the family is hiding. When Janet is 18, the rumour that Tom Linn is back reaches her family. Janet goes to the Linn farm straightaway. She meets Tom there and he seduces her. After that he vanishes again and Janet notices that she is pregnant. Her family tries to find out the name of the baby's father, but in contrast to two of her sisters, who had become pregnant out-of-wedlock as well and for whom shotgun-marriages had been made, she refuses to name him. Her father decides nevertheless to talk one of his farm-hands into marrying his daughter – just as he had done for her sisters before. Janet rebels against this decision and her father grants her until the end of the current month – October – to find her lost lover.

Janet goes to the Linn farm and plucks the last dying roses there, whereupon Tom Linn appears, asking her if she wants to kill their baby. Janet is relieved to see him again and he finally tells her his story. The first, short version is that he was born in a faraway country and came to live with his grandfather in America when he was six years old, since both his parents had died. He even affirms the rumour that he fell from his horse as a child and hit his head – which is how the farmers try to explain his sometimes rather strange behaviour.

After this, events take a turn for the fantastic, as Tom now remembers the 'real' story: It is the sixteenth century, Tom is nine years old and living in Scotland, his grandfather is the earl of Roxburgh. One day Tom goes riding with his grandfather's hunting party, falls off his horse, strikes his head falling and loses consciousness. He then awakes with his head in the lap of a strange and beautiful lady who tells him that she is the Queen of Spells (he takes her for the Queen of Heaven at first). She asks him if he will come with her and then takes him with her on her white horse. They enter a cavern in a nearby mountain, pass through an underground river and journey apparently for a long time. They arrive in Fairyland, called the Green World, where Tom leads a seemingly carefree and happy life. One day the queen tells him that he has been with her for 300 days now (which are 300 years on earth). She asks him to name three wishes. Tom wishes for a rose garden, a white horse and to be grown up. Since time on earth passes much more quickly than in Fairyland, the queen decides to send him back to earth for seven years so he can grow up there and she will not have to wait for him very long. Since all his relatives on earth are dead, she now sends him to America (where apparently the Linns' descendants have settled) to an old couple Tom now thinks are his grandparents – Hank and Ettie Linn, who live near the Carter's farm. Tom lives with them but is a difficult boy – because of the

strange past nobody knows about. After seven years he vanishes to Elfland again, coming back only when Janet plucks the rose in 1883.

After this flashback, the narration returns to the present situation and Janet now complains that her father wants to marry her off to a man she does not like. Tom tells her that she could marry him – if she saved him from being used as the fairies' teind to hell. Janet promises that she will try to save him and he instructs her how to do it: go to Miles Cross at night (it is Halloween) and wait for the Queen of Spells and her 'Circus of Fear', identify Tom among the riders and hold fast to him no matter what shape he takes. Janet is afraid at first but then decides to go to Miles Cross after all.

Terrified, she watches a troop of scary black riders pass and decides to follow them and to overtake them before they reach Miles Cross. They ride into the river – which turns blood-red – and Janet, following them, loses her own horse in the flood. She spots a group of other horses in the water, clings to one and is nearly drowned as the horses suddenly continue to swim underwater. She is then picked up by two men in a canoe (with also a small bear on board which rather frightens Janet), who take her to the other side of the river. She is brought into a gypsy camp next, where a gypsy woman takes her into one of the wagons and gives her colourful clothes in exchange for her own wet ones. After that she meets Billy Blin again, who tells her that he will take her to Miles Cross. Having arrived there, the dwarf abandons her and Janet is left to face a procession of circus wagons and all kinds of circus artists, followed by a group of knights. One of them rides a black horse, the other a brown and Janet recognises them as the Knights of the Stars and Hearts as Tom had described them to her. Following them are two white horses with the Queen and Tom – dressed as a Knight of Roses – on them. Janet pulls Tom off his horse and tries to cling to him but then the troop of black riders arrives, attacks them and Janet loses consciousness.

She wakes on a bed in a circus wagon, watched over by a man who looks like a skeleton and is apparently a kind of circus freak, called Mr. LaMort. He tells her that the "local vigilantes" (104) have overrun the circus. They were on the lookout for some criminal and thought he might be hiding there. Mr. LaMort has to leave for the circus show and Janet starts searching for Tom at the circus. She moves through crowds of people, and thinks she sees Tom's dead grandmother but is not sure about it. An artist scatters a deck of cards and the card Janet catches shows the Knight of Roses – so she knows Tom is still around. She wanders into the tent of a serpent-tamer and volunteers to play the magic flute. The giant serpent threatens to overwhelm her but then Janet grabs it tightly and the next thing she knows is that she is holding an iron bar of a lion cage, which then turns into a flaming hoop the lions have to jump through.

As the lion jumps at her, it turns into a bear, and, all the while thinking of Tom's instructions, Janet holds this animal, too. Next, now again holding the card with the Knight, she finds herself in the tent of a gypsy fortune-teller, the Queen of Spells herself. The Queen now deals the cards and attempts to tell Janet's fortune, demanding the card that Janet is still holding. Janet refuses and discovers that the card has turned into a heart-shaped paper-valentine, which, as Janet proclaims it to be a trick, starts to burn, then turns into a flame-red newt and finally into a rose, which then dissolves into petals. Janet is hard put to keep them together and the Queen urges her to give up, threatening that she will take Tom's eyes and replace them with wooden ones or to exchange his heart for a heart of stone. But Janet is adamant, claiming that the queen has never loved Tom, otherwise she would not have allowed him to be picked for the teind. The queen again threatens her, making certain constellations on a star chart on the wall turn into animals (a bear, a lion, a serpent) but Janet persists. The rose-petals in Janet's hand turn into coals. She wants to cool them down, frantically searches for water, finds a tub that is used for watering the circus elephant and throws the coals in. The elephant's trumpeting finally wakes her.

She finds herself back in the bed in the gypsy wagon, with Tom Linn beside her. From the bed she sees many images from her dream but they turn out to be a poster with lions on it, a star chart, etc. They have breakfast with the gypsies and Billy Blin and then cross the river again on the two white horses – which have, in contrast to Janet's lost horse, no problem doing it, even though the river appears wide without end and the sky and the river turn blood-red again. They land safely and Janet discovers that four months have passed. It is now 1884, and her father has died, as years before a gypsy woman had prophesised he would. Janet is shocked but nevertheless determined to marry Tom at once. They find the priest and the vows are exchanged. They then return to Janet's mother who is glad to find her daughter still alive –her parents had thought she had committed suicide. Her mother is still sceptical of Tom but nevertheless gives the young couple her blessing and allows them to stay, so they can repair the old Linn farm to live in later.

Intertextuality

As can be seen from this extensive summary, Ipcar keeps very many elements from "Tam Lin", but there are also a few elements from "Thomas the Rhymer" and other ballads as well as other kinds of fairy folklore.

Apart from the basic plot-pattern, the following details from different "Tam Lin"-versions can be found in *The Queen of Spells*: First of all, as in ballad version I, Tam Lin and

Janet meet for the first time when they are still children (or at least Janet is). As in version A and B, Tom claims that the Earl of Roxburgh is his grandfather and in a slightly altered rendering of version I, Janet's father is called William Dunbar Carter – in the ballad Janet's father is "Dunbar, Earl of March". As in versions A,B, I and J, Tom fell from his horse during hunting and then found himself in Elfland. Another motif that is used repeatedly throughout the novel is Janet's plucking of roses, which apparently works as a means to summon Tom Linn, who is throughout the book closely connected with roses (his horse is adorned with roses, in Fairyland he wishes for a rose garden, later on he is the Knight of Roses). Furthermore the old knight, who appears in versions A, B, G and I and makes a dour remark about Janet's pregnancy is echoed by the old farmhand Moss, whom Janet, quite as in the ballad, rejects as a possible surrogate-father for her child. Something which is connected with "Tam Lin" but probably only indirectly, is Tom's inclination to steal horses. As has been mentioned in the chapter about border ballads, many of this special kind of ballads are 'reiving ballads', songs about cattle theft, which was apparently rather common in the Borders region at the time the ballads took shape. Since Tom is a kind of time-traveller, he remembers sixteenth century Scotland quite well, the time when "highlanders raided the lowlands, and horse thieves were celebrated as heroes in song and story" (78). His morality is therefore shaped by these old-fashioned notions and this is one of the reasons why he has such difficulties adapting to a more civilised society.

Another motif from "Tam Lin" that – in contrast to most later adaptations – *The Queen of Spells* keeps is the animal transformation scene. Ipcar places the events in a kind of dream-scene in a gypsy camp/circus, which is a clever way to incorporate exotic animals (snake, lion, bear) and an air of magic, and even the glowing iron (a burning hoop for a lion tamer's performance) does not appear artificial in this context. As I will later discuss, it is sometimes hard to say if there is magic involved at all or if the fantastic events are merely a dream. An element which is not usually part of the transformations but which Ipcar probably incorporates because it complements the rest of her flower imagery is Tom's transformation into a playing card (Knight of Roses) and into a handful of rose petals. Again quite literally taken from the ballad are, however, the threats that the fairy queen voices towards the end of the scene (she wants to give Tom eyes of wood or a heart of stone).

While "Tam Lin" is clearly the most dominant influence on Ipcar's novel, other ballads are echoed also, among them "Thomas the Rhymer": This is for example the case when Tom first meets the fairy queen and addresses her as Queen of Heaven. She then takes him up on her horse (which is, as in the ballad, white and adorned with silver bells) and they undertake a journey through an underground river. The second variant of the river-crossing, the river of

blood, can later be found when Janet searches for Tom and on her way to the fairies' realm has to traverse a wide river which – through some effect of the light – turns blood-red as she swims through it. Another element to be found in “Thomas the Rhymer” are the ‘ferlies’ or wonders that the fairy queen shows to Thomas. In *The Queen of Spells*, it is Janet, who is shown what he calls ‘ferlies’ by Billy Blin. The first is his marvellous strength (he can lift a whole tree-trunk quite easily), the second is that a spot of swampy ground has turned red because a certain kind of newt comes there in great masses at certain times of the year and the third is that the Carters' lost heifer has taken to living with a herd of apparently magical deer. Later on, Tom is turned in Janet's hands into just such a flame-red newt as Billy had shown her years before. Since Janet is, due to Billy's guidance, familiar with this kind of animal she does not let the newt fall – maybe this is another instance of Billy acting as a helper-figure (see below).

Other traditional ballads (some are from the Child collection, others from other collections) which make an appearance in the novel (usually because one of the characters sings or remembers them directly, in contrast to “Thomas the Rhymer” and “Tam Lin”, which are never sung by the novel's characters) are: “The Heir of Lynne” (Child #267), which, despite the similarity of name does not have any connections to “Tam Lin”, being about a man who squanders his money and loses his inherited lands; furthermore, there are “The Raggie Taggle Gypsies”, and “The Gardener” (Child #219) but also Martin Carthy's “Prince Heathen”, which is echoed in the name of Janet's horse. “The Gardener” also plays a role later on, as the song describes a number of flowers in which a lover wants to dress his beloved and Janet later receives clothes in exactly the colours of those flowers when she is at the gypsy camp – a lavender gown, a green robe, yellow stockings and pink shoes and gloves.

In addition to the ballads, many more elements from (Scottish) fairy lore make an appearance in *The Queen of Spells*. The most obvious figure is probably Billy Blin, who is traditionally “a household goblin or protector, given to prophetic utterances” (Ringel 1999, 208). In Ipcar's novel he is a kind of dwarf, possessed of great strength, and a sort of helper figure, as he assists Janet in finding a lost cow (though she does not catch the cow, she merely learns that the animal is still alive) and later shows her the way to Miles Cross.

Another element from folklore are the mysterious swimming horses Janet encounters on her trip across the river – I would argue that these are kelpies or a similar kind of fairy horses, since they try to drown Janet as she clings to the mane of one of them. Their manes feel like rushes and this is something also typical for kelpies. Even the supposed nightmare of the temporary tenant of the Linn farm could have been inspired by fairy lore. He claims that terrible creatures with long legs haunted the house at night – thus echoing the line “From ghoulies and

ghosties and long-leggety beasties and things that go bump in the night Good Lord deliver us”, which is a “traditional Cornish prayer” (Breebart et al. 2005) also mentioned in *Lords and Ladies*. Inspired by folklore are certainly also the description of the elves, who all wear green clothes (except Tom, who likes grey better and thus echoes his description in Child #39 A and B that he is “an elfin grey”) and the fact that time in Elfland passes much more slowly than in the human world. Also the motif of the three wishes granted to Tom by the fairy queen is a common fairy tale and folk tale motif. Something which does, however, not seem typical at least for fairy folklore is the description of the queen’s palace which, with its different marvellous chambers (containing a forest of glass, a forest of night with phosphorescent fruit, a room full of mist with mysterious altars and the queen’s room which contains a whole ocean) seems rather to echo the kind of more literary fairy tales popular in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Interestingly, and here *The Queen of Spells* differs from many later ballad adaptations, Ipcar’s Fairyland is depicted in a neutral or even positive way. It is not a barren, cold place, rather it is full of lush plant life and, significantly, it is called “the Green World”, where even the sky is green. This might recall an account of fairy children given by Ralph of Coggeshall in a chronicle (around 1200), where he describes how two apparently wild children are discovered near a cave in Suffolk. They report that they come from a country where everything is green, where there is moreover no sun but always a kind of (greenish) twilight, even the children’s skin is tinged with green (Briggs 1976, 200). This last does not apply to the fairy people in *The Queen of Spells* but green is certainly a dominant colour in Ipcar’s Elfland.

Something which is quite unique in Ipcar’s novel is her presentation of the disenchantment-scene as part of a circus/gypsy-setting. But it is nevertheless something which later authors like e.g. Diana Wynne Jones also partly draw from (in *Fire and Hemlock* the horse Lorenzo comes from a circus and Tom and Polly once visit a fairground where the ‘castle of horrors’ suddenly comes alive through Laurel’s magic). Another aspect which is faintly echoed in two later adaptations (*The Perilous Gard* and *Thomas the Rhymer*) is the connection between gypsies and fairies. In *The Queen of Spells*, it seems, gypsies and fairies mingle or are even the same – the fortune-teller is the Queen of Spells who is none other than the fairy queen. Similarly, in *The Perilous Gard*, the fairy queen takes on the guise of a old gypsy woman when she has to move in the human world and in *Thomas the Rhymer* the association is established by presenting both gypsies and fairies as beings who live under different rules than ordinary human beings (even though Thomas learns that fairies are far stranger than gypsies). In *The Queen of Spells*, the fairy queen attempts to tell Janet’s fortune from a pack of tarot cards during the transformation scene, which seems a clever move because it links the fairies with general notions

of superstition and the esoteric. And of course it also echoes the fairies' (linguistic) origins as *fata*, i.e., 'things prophesised'. It also ties in with the dubious dream atmosphere during the transformation scene, a fact which leads me to the next question to be discussed here: the 'reality status' of the narration.

Reality status

On the whole, it is quite interesting how Ipcar manages to leave the reader in two minds about the reality status of the events, not only during the climactic scene: Tom's first appearance is mysterious enough, just as his sudden disappearance, but Janet is still able to find a natural explanation – he may have just slipped from the house while she was too shocked by the stroke of lightning to notice it. Also Tom's story about how he has lived in the "Green World" for a long time may just be the tale told by a mentally disturbed or merely fanciful person and Tom is certainly no ordinary boy, as the rumours about him show.

And the events at the circus? Can they be explained as a fever dream Janet has had while being cared for by gypsies or is there really a fairy queen from whom she has wrenched Tom Linn? Billy claims, after Janet has woken again, that the "queen is an angry woman" (versions A and K of Child #39). But 'queen' could be merely an epithet for the leading woman of the gypsies (just as Billy calls Janet 'princess' without her being of noble blood at all) and the gypsy woman could be angry because she would have liked Tom for herself. The Black Riders from Hell, it seems, could also have been the sheriff's men pursuing a thief and suspecting the circus people of hiding criminals, as Mr. LaMort explains. Even the amount of time that has passed could maybe be explained. Janet thinks that it was only one night and is shocked to learn that it was four months – if she was really ill and unconscious or delirious for a longer period of time, then maybe time has passed without her noticing. On the other hand, she is five months pregnant when she sets out to rescue Tom on Halloween, and it does not seem, as she returns to the normal world, as if her child was due any moment, which it should have been if time had continued to pass normally. So maybe time has really gone more slowly for Janet and Tom.

Tom Linn, Janet Carter and the Queen of Spells

Janet's portrayal is close to the ballad in so far as she is a headstrong girl. She falls in love with Tom and does not want to marry the men her father would provide for her. In contrast to Janet in the ballad, however, Janet Carter is not of noble birth, but the daughter of a farmer. She is, however, somehow different from her many sisters, as she is the only child of the family

who has a small room of her own and can enjoy privacy now and then. She moreover seems to be a favourite of her father who gives her first a horse as a present when she turns fourteen and later the Linns' lands and farm. Also quite like Janet in the ballad she is pretty and blonde.

Tom Linn is described as "tall and very young (...) [and] strangely handsome" (18), with grey eyes and dressed completely in grey. When Janet first meets him, he is playing a lute and he frequently sings old ballads, which makes him similar to Thomas the Rhymer. However, he is, among the male protagonists of the adaptations, actually the character that is closest to Tam Lin from the ballad: he appears only when Janet plucks roses and in contrast to all later adaptations he is the only one who actively seduces Janet. He is definitely also the one with the most dubious morality, quite like the original Tam Lin he is reputed to be a thief and apparently also a potential rapist. He does indeed steal horses and also once a golden watch (thus echoing the part in the ballad where Tam takes golden rings, even though the reason for Tom Linn to take the watch, which also shows days and months, is that he wants to keep track with human time in Elfland in order to be able to visit Janet again). Rumour also has it that "there were ladies too who had been assaulted" (28). It is even said that Tom demands things as a toll from everybody who is going in and out of town, just as Tam Lin demands gold and mantles and maidenheads from the girls who pass by Carterhaugh. The farmers try to explain his strange behaviour by claiming that he is mad, when it is probably rather a relic of his past, where such behaviour was more or less acceptable (or at least grudgingly tolerated) in young knights. Since Tom has difficulties to adapt to civilised farm life, he leaves his American grandparents as soon as he is old enough, fights in the Civil War and goes out West with a band of outlaws, apparently searching situations that remind him of old times. Janet, however, is hard put to reconcile these facts to the impression she has of Tom, namely that of a gentle, musical youth, who may be a bit fanciful but does not appear to be a criminal at all.

The Queen of Spells is also close to tradition, described as a very beautiful, dark-haired woman who dresses finely in green "silk and velvet, with pearls and jewels, with a golden crown on her head" (19), and, fittingly for a fairy, she also has green eyes. The portrayal of the fairy queen is ambivalent – on the one hand she is gentle to Tom Linn, even fulfils his three wishes. But on the other hand she is willing to sacrifice him to Hell and encounters Janet, as she tries to rescue Tom, with "purest hatred" (113), trying to make her let go of Tom (or his image, the playing card of the Knight of Roses) by using all kinds of tricks and threats on her. Tom himself is well aware of his queen's double nature: "He knew she could be capricious and cruel, as well as generous" (76). In this, she is also rather close to the fairies of folklore in their traditional ambivalence. It is not quite sure if the queen is also Tom Linn's lover but as much may be

suspected – there is the queen’s wish to make him grow up quickly by sending him to the human world and at another occasion Tom praises his queen’s beauty: “‘Ah, a beautiful lady she is!’ He paused, looking at [Janet] with an enigmatic smile” (19). Maybe this is an over-interpretation but it could be that Tom Linn has indeed more than only superficial knowledge of the queen’s beauty. The queen is apparently a very powerful woman, who “can control all things except Time” (77) and who can for instance transfer Tom Linn to America by magic. Not much is said about the her court; it seems vaguely medieval, at least there is talk of knights and pages and at the Halloween procession the queen is accompanied by her various knights but otherwise the author is not very forthcoming with information, therefore it is difficult to analyse the fairy folk in *The Queen of Spells* in detail.

Summing Up

As has been mentioned before, *The Queen of Spells* is one of the first of the late twentieth adaptations of Child #39 and Child #37, only Catherine Storr’s *Thursday* precedes it. It is also the shortest of the adaptations considered in some detail in this study – a mere 132 pages. All in all, it is also the one that adheres most closely to the ballad of “Tam Lin”. Apart from the change in setting and the inclusion of additional characters, the plot is determined mostly by the events in the ballad and almost no subplots can be found (apart from the description of the fate of Janet’s sisters and the story of Billy Blin, which, however, take up only relatively little space). Probably due to the relative shortness of the work, not too much value seems to be attached to in-depth psychological characterisation of the protagonists. Through the personalised third-person narrator the reader does learn some of Janet’s thoughts but in contrast to many later novelisations (e.g. *Fire and Hemlock*, *Winter Rose*), the focus here is more on plot than on character, which is also the reason why I this chapter is comprised of a relatively detailed summary and a comparatively short character and sources analysis. In some of the special touches *The Queen of Spells* adds to the story of Tam Lin, e.g. the association of fairies and gypsies, the rose-imagery and the sometimes unclear ‘reality status’ it might nevertheless have served as a model for later, more elaborate, retellings, even though it is not known to me if any of the later adaptors have read the work of their predecessor.

8. *The Perilous Gard* (1973) by Elizabeth Marie Pope

The author

American author Elizabeth Marie Pope (1917-1992) was primarily a literature scholar specializing in Elizabethan England and the works of Milton and Shakespeare. Her one published monograph is *Paradise Regained: the Tradition and the Poem* (1947/1962 repr.). She wrote two young adult novels: *The Sherwood Ring*, published in 1956, and *The Perilous Gard* (1974).

The Perilous Gard was listed as a Newbery honour book by the ALA (American Library Association) but little secondary literature is available about it. It was praised as an “outstanding example of the combined genres of fantasy, romance, and historical fiction” (Del Negro, 2001) and as a book that “captures and combines the delightful essence of fairy tales as well as a sound depiction of Tudor England” (Molson/Miles 1990, 340). A more critical scholar remarked that “in many ways this is a standard young adult novel, about a girl, who, as a result of various experiences, grows as a person and comes to a greater understanding and acceptance of who she is. What makes this more interesting is the fact that these experiences are supernatural” (Harris-Fain 1999, 397).

Plot summary

The Perilous Gard is set in Tudor England, 1558, shortly before the death of Queen Mary and told from the view of Katherine Sutton. Katherine, or Kate, as she is called, is 15 years old, and one of the maids of honour of Princess Elizabeth. Because of a compromising letter written by her charming but hapless sister Alicia, the authorship of which is blamed on Kate, she is condemned to exile at Elvenwood Hall (also known as “the Perilous Gard”) in Derbyshire, owned by the nobleman Geoffrey Heron.

Geoffrey leaves Kate in the care of his castle steward, Master John, being himself not too fond of Elvenwood Hall since the death of his wife and the mysterious disappearance of his little daughter Cecily. Christopher, Geoffrey’s younger brother, also a resident at the hall, has taken the responsibility for Cecily’s supposed death and is accordingly treated very coldly by his brother, even though it has never been proved that a murder has taken place.

Kate, bored and curious, discovers that in the castle and the adjoining village most people believe that Cecily was taken by fairies and probably still lives, only now in caves under the hills. Through some pieces of information provided by a wandering minstrel, Randal,

Christopher finds out that the girl could indeed still be alive. He then strikes a bargain with the fairies to be exchanged for Cecily.

Kate witnesses the exchange, but is powerless to prevent it. She is subsequently taken prisoner by Master John who is in league with the fairy people. He delivers her into their power. Weeks of servitude in the dark and gloomy caves follow but Kate manages to find Christopher, who is imprisoned and prepared to be a human sacrifice at the fairies' Halloween ceremony. In trying to keep up his spirits and to divert his mind from his imminent death, (e.g. by talking about a manor house that Christopher would like to buy if he could escape), Kate wins Christopher's friendship.

At Halloween, Kate narrowly manages to intercept the consummation of the sacrificial ceremony by 'claiming' Christopher, as Randal had told her the heroine of "Tam Lin" had done. The fairies are defeated and flee, the two captives return to Christopher's family and plans for a marriage are made. The queen of the fairies returns once to ask Kate to save the fairies' sacred tree from being cut down. Kate realizes that, although she is relieved that the fairies' tyranny over the Elvenwood is ended, the world has, at least for her, lost some of its enchantment.

Intertextuality: ballads and romances

The main intertextual structuring and coherence-creating devices in *The Perilous Gard* are allusions to medieval romances and references to traditional ballads, of which "Thomas the Rhymer" and "Tam Lin" are the most influential. Pope uses the references on two levels. On the one hand, allusions are built in quite unobtrusively, e.g. in the naming of characters. For example the waiting-lady of the fairy queen, who, true to traditional fairy lore, does not want to reveal her real name to a mortal, allows Kate to call her "Gwenhyfara" – after King Arthur's queen. "That name will do as well as any" (147), she comments her choice laconically but it nevertheless subtly reminds the readers of the book's romance-subtext.¹⁰⁴ On the other hand, the well-read or ballad-knowledgeable characters raise the subject themselves repeatedly.

The genre of chivalric romance, especially of the Arthurian cycle, seems well-known to Kate Sutton, but, like her teacher, the classical scholar Master Roger, who "held the tales of King Arthur and his knights in deepest contempt" (12), she is not too fond of them.¹⁰⁵ In her opinion

¹⁰⁴ It might also be a kind of intertextual joke when a creature of tale and legend (i.e., a fairy) names herself after a queen who is quite legendary and probably fictional herself – it would at any rate be the kind of joke that seems to fit the author's sense of humour.

¹⁰⁵ She thus proves a rather untypical girl, for the romances were the genre considered especially suitable for female readers, as Penry Williams observes in regard to the types of books written for women of the sixteenth century: "Some were practical handbooks, but others were popular and chivalric romances" (1998, 391).

romances – and their heroic and non-naturalist mode – are something for the noble and/or the beautiful – for example her pretty sister Alicia or Christopher, the young lord of Elvenwood Hall, and not suited for a sceptical and pragmatic girl like herself.¹⁰⁶

Firstly, Kate thinks romances suitable for dreamy Alicia, because the latter is someone who, though able to impress and manipulate people through her good looks, is too naive to survive in the world on her own. So Kate decides at the very beginning of *The Perilous Gard*: “You ought to be in a book, Alicia. That’s where you ought to be, in a romance. Riding on a white horse, with a good brave knight to take care of you” (4).

Secondly, Kate thinks romances more suitable for Christopher Heron than for herself because the Herons had “probably [been] knights and ladies when the Suttons were still hauling nets on a fishing smack” (103), so the Herons can afford to adhere to a certain idealistic heroic code of behaviour which the Suttons, as only recently socially risen merchants, cannot. This probably is something that adds to Kate’s occasionally surfacing feelings of inferiority. Feelings which she tries to compensate by devaluing everything that smells of heroism and by deriding it as a useless remnant of a past epoch: “It was all very well for a hero in a romance, like Sir Launcelot, to break his heart and – how did it go? – ‘run mad in the wilderness’; but in her opinion Sir Launcelot had behaved very foolishly” (67). At another occasion she challenges Christopher sarcastically: “Do you think you can fight your way into the Queen’s hall and save Cecily with your single arm, like King Arthur in a romance?” (102).

Even though she rejects the romances’ code for heroic behaviour, it is quite obvious to the reader that Kate is a courageous character herself, who, against better knowledge, tends to do ‘heroic’, i.e., (in Kate’s definition) unreasonable, idealistically motivated deeds, and thus she belies her own statements on heroism. Also with regard to the female characters in romances – which she habitually associates with Alicia and not with herself – she has to admit herself mistaken, since she finds herself in a romance-like situation – only that hers is not exactly comfortable and ‘romantic’ (in the popular meaning of the word) at all: “Katherine Sutton reflected that here she was, like a lady in a romance, riding through the forest on her white horse with a good brave knight to take care of her. At least the horse was white – or as much of the horse she could see for the mud splashes that covered its hide” (16). Drenched with rain and looking towards an uncertain future in exile she is escorted through the forest by Sir Geoffrey.

¹⁰⁶ That Kate considers herself someone who has both feet firmly on the ground shows e.g. in the following self-assessment: “Forgotten heathen goddesses did not stand about under trees; or if they did, it was not Katherine Sutton who would see them” (80).

Pope seems to be rather set on disenchanting romance at the beginning of *The Perilous Gard*. She continues this throughout the book, even though in the end the romance pattern with its (often) happy ending will eventually assert itself and Kate will indeed find her 'brave knight'. It is, however, a humorous employment of the romance scheme which is typical for *The Perilous Gard* and even though the book concludes quite fairy-tale like with preparations for a marriage, a certain wry humour prevents it from turning over-sentimental. The scene that contains the sort-of-proposal by Christopher to Kate is comic rather than romantic because the suitor does not find the right words and finally resorts to rather rural imagery:

"Well you might say it's because I need you." For the first time, Christopher's voice sounded a little uncertain, as if he himself were not very sure of his ground. "You know how it is with me, Kate. I've been going to waste all my life, like the manor. It's not bad land, but it's too heavy and if the dead water backs up in it..."

"And what am I supposed to do – keep you drained?" Kate interrupted him indignantly. "Next you'll be telling me that you want me to ditch and manure you!" (279)

In their amiable squabbling Kate and Christopher might remind a reader of Benedick and Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*, a thought, which is maybe not too far-fetched since Shakespeare was indeed one of Pope's major fields of study.

That she seems rather intent on making fun of romance clichés shows also in the following scene. Having been freed from the enchantment laid on him by the fairies, Christopher invites Kate to get on his horse: "Up, lady! I'm going to carry you off on my saddlebow" (247). But why? The fairies have fled and Sir Geoffrey and his men are on the way to take care of everything, so there is actually little need to carry Kate off and rescue her. Maybe Christopher wants to show off a little and parade his chivalry before his brother: "Shall we go tell him he's come to late for the show? Quick, Kate!" (247), he admonishes her. But Pope does not give him much chance to brag, since at that moment Kate – finally overwhelmed by the events that lie behind her – collapses, thus confirming to another cliché (of popular romance), that of the tender, fainting lady. However, despite her playful approach to the patterns and clichés of romance, Pope does not seem to want to demolish them in earnest, otherwise the ending would certainly have been less harmonious.

A further element typical for romances might be the mysterious Guardian of the Well. Otherworldly well-guardians are for example known in Celtic folklore (Morgan 1909) and have been incorporated in literature most famously in Chrétien de Troyes's *Yvain* (in the English language this story has been retold in the anonymous verse romance *Ywain and Gawain*), where the well-guardian, when angered, sends storms and rains over the whole land.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore,

¹⁰⁷ Much later, W.B. Yeats used the motif of the otherworldly guarded well in his play *At the Hawk's Well* (1917), where Irish hero Cuchulain arrives at a well guarded by a hawk-like fairy woman.

there are parallels to the thirteenth century verse romance *Sir Orfeo*, a Celtic take on the Orpheus myth (see also chapter four), where a woman is abducted by fairies and won back by her husband.

Even more important than the romance pattern, however, are ballads, since they supply the main plot-structuring device. In contrast to the romances the ballads are frequently cited directly, mostly through the figure of Randal, the minstrel, whose function it often is to provide the other characters, and, even more importantly, the reader with important clues which often foreshadow the development of the plot.

Apart from “Tam Lin” and “Thomas the Rhymer”, the song “O where is the queen”, which seems to be Pope’s own invention and another Child ballad, namely “The Twa Sisters” (Child #10) play a part. The former gives rather direct clues to the topography of the fairies’ land and the latter provides the motif of the jealous elder sister (who, in the ballad, desires her younger sister’s lover). But in contrast to “Tam Lin” and “Thomas the Rhymer”, “The Twa Sisters” does just that – provide a motif – without actually shaping the plot. In the ballad, the older sister murders her younger sibling, something which does not happen in *The Perilous Gard*. The song merely serves as a sort of *objective correlative* for Kate’s gloomy feelings when she suspects that Alicia has clandestinely become engaged to Christopher. Interestingly, it is not even Kate herself who thinks of the ballad but Randal. Just as Kate meditates on her own depressing future – “she would have to watch Alicia and Christopher sitting together all the long evening and telling each other secrets. She would have to dance at Alicia’s wedding and marvel at the ruby in her ring” (269) – he sings a stanza from the song about the two sisters and “Kate did not pause to ask Randal what had brought that particular ballad into his mind” (269). Despite his mental disturbance, Randal is extremely sensitive to moods and emotions and has, earlier that evening, recognised that something must be wrong: “Randal had been glancing from Kate to her sister and back again as if something puzzled or troubled him” (265). He expresses his puzzlement later on by the song, telling the truth through a song even though he is probably not consciously aware of it.¹⁰⁸

Pope’s choice to name her minstrel “Randal” may be another intertextual allusion, as Randal is a name also found in ballads (“Lord Randal” is Child # 12, but no allusions to the plot

¹⁰⁸ Readers familiar with the entire text of “The Twa Sisters”, might be reminded of yet another story. In some versions the ballad makes mention of a swan, (“There’s either a lady, or a milk-white swan”), which, in the context of the whole chapter, which describes Kate’s transformation, might call to mind the Andersen tale of the ugly duckling developing into a beautiful swan, even though content-wise the ballad has nothing to do with the fairy tale.

are made) and moreover the protagonist of Andrew Lang's "Gold of Fairmile", who vanishes into Fairyland for several years, is named Randal.

Much more important than the "Twa Sisters" or "Lord Randal" are of course the two other ballads. Like many other authors of "Thomas the Rhymer"/"Tam Lin" -adaptations, Pope is relatively free in her retelling, keeping some elements and omitting others.

Let us first look at "Thomas the Rhymer". As in most of the "Thomas the Rhymer" adaptations, in *The Perilous Gard* the queen of the fairies and her folk wear the traditional green clothing. Another motif that can be found in many adaptations is the marvellous journey: Pope keeps important elements of it, presents them, however, in a way that lets them appear rationally explainable. Thomas sees 'neither sun nor moon' – Kate and Christopher are led into an underground labyrinth of caves. He hears 'the roaring of the sea' – Kate passes an underground river (140) and later Kate and Christopher hear noises that do indeed sound like the sea but are probably just water that is released from a dam at the river (175). Thomas and the queen wade through 'red blood to the knee' – Kate and the Lady merely wade through slime on the ground and they once pass a place where the air feels steamy (139), which *might* be read as a hint to a river of blood, however, the warmth can also be explained by the existence of hot springs (which the fairies quite prosaically use e.g. for washing their dishes). Another element from the ballad, namely that Thomas is not to speak to anyone in Fairyland, or to speak to no one but the queen may be found in slightly modified form, too. The fairies are not allowed to speak to Christopher, merely the Guardian of the Well may talk to him.

With regard to "Tam Lin", Pope adheres closest to the original where the teind ceremony is concerned. As in "Tam Lin", the teind-paying takes place on Halloween, it is, however, not the devil the fairies pay their tithe to, but their pagan gods, who are closely connected with nature and the land but never described in detail. The teind-paying has even – in distorted form – passed into human practice, for Christopher remembers the customary burning of a straw-puppet on Halloween and deduces soberly that apparently "in the old days the man might not have been made of straw" (174). There is therefore a sort of parallel to *Fire and Hemlock*, where Polly reads about the custom of sacrificing the king of the land in *The Golden Bough*, which is meant to give her a hint at Tom's future fate even though she realises this only much later.

Pope adheres to the ballad with regard to the colour-order of the horses, one black (in *The Perilous Gard* for the guardian), one brown (in *The Perilous Gard* for the Lady) and one white (in *The Perilous Gard*, as in the ballad, for the sacrificial victim) and the victim is, as Tam Lin tells Janet he would be, adorned with a helmet and a gauntlet on his right arm (versions A, B, I,

J). It is not mentioned in the ballad, however, that this gear should be made of gold as Christopher's is.

Apart from that, Kate has learned from the ballad how she can rescue the victim by pulling him from his horse. However, as not much in *The Perilous Gard* corresponds literally to the ballads, Kate realises that "she might as well have tried to pull down an equestrian statue" (245). Therefore, the claiming has to be achieved in a less physical sense, that is, by words. Only if she manages to reach Christopher with her words in his trance-like state does she have a chance of freeing him and thus also the advice of 'holding tight' to the teind-payer can only be seen figuratively. Kate does hold tight – insofar as she does not give up on Christopher and pleads with him to just hold still a little longer. In keeping with the general 'low-magic' approach of the author, no transformations occur and the spell is broken quite unceremoniously by Kate's sarcastic remark that Christopher looks like "gilded gingerbread" (246).

All in all, the most important element provided by the fairy ballads are the characters – the musician and the fairy queen from "Thomas the Rhymer" and the young man, the fairy queen and the girl from "Tam Lin". Something startlingly absent in *The Perilous Gard*, however, is any kind of erotic relationship between the young man and the queen of fairies and thus an important element from "Thomas the Rhymer" is missing, as are the sexual relationship of the man with the girl or her unwanted pregnancy that are central to "Tam Lin". One reason for this omission may have been that Pope wanted to avoid censorship and challenge of her book, which was not uncommon in the USA in the seventies and still is.¹⁰⁹ Another reason may have been that in general the treatment of controversial/sexual themes was not yet common in young adult books at the beginning of the 1970s.

The fairies

Their lack of erotic interest in humans is one striking characteristic of Pope's fairies. Another is their austerity. The fairies of folklore are very often described as being incredibly rich and entertaining splendid courts (as do for instance those in *The Queen of Spells*, *Fire and Hemlock* and Kushner's *Thomas the Rhymer*), but the fairies in *The Perilous Gard* live in barely furnished caves and have to be very careful not to waste the candlesticks which are delivered to them by their human suppliers. It is, however, not that the fairy folk of *The Perilous Gard* are poor, on the contrary, they must own considerable wealth since the human pilgrims who draw

¹⁰⁹ The American Library Association (ALA) compiles the 100 Most Frequently Challenged Books each decade. A 'challenge' is defined by the ALA as "an attempt to remove or restrict materials, based upon the objections of a person or group. A banning is the removal of those materials" (ALA 2007). That attempts at censorship are not an issue of the past shows in the figures for recent years – from 1990-2004 the ALA counted 6,364 challenges.

water from the fairies' well reward them richly for their services by throwing jewels down the well. But the only display of wealth, it seems, is the equipment allotted to the human slaves – velvet quilts and silken bed-sheets and golden eating-bowls – the fairies themselves detest luxury.

One question which suggests itself is whether the difference between the Fairylands described by different authors is not just the difference between be-glamoured and sober perception. The reader of *The Perilous Gard* perceives the fairies' country through the eyes of Kate, who repeatedly resists being charmed by the fairy queen. There are a few hints that the other mortal servants, who are definitely under some sort of drug-induced glamour, perceive their environment quite differently and apparently as something wonderful and luxurious.

The readers' impressions of the fairies in *The Perilous Gard*, however, are shaped by Kate's perceptions of them and the impression created here is that of a fairy folk curiously close to humanity. Certainly, the fairy folk think and act rather strangely and their reasoning is more or less incomprehensible to the human characters in the book. However, they appear not as much removed from humankind as the fairies in the other ballad adaptations. The main reason for this is probably what I would like to describe as Pope's 'low magic approach'. Where most other texts present events that cannot be explained by the application of natural laws, Pope presents things that may appear strange and magical at first but for most of them a natural explanation is provided later on and it is not surprising that the book's heroine finds a way of rationalising and humanising even the fairy folk themselves. According to Tzvetan Todorov's theory and terminology this resolution of the fantastic uncertainty towards the rational would probably make the text belong into the category of the 'fantastic-uncanny'.

Kate's euhemerist theory

"That was it. People. Heathen people" – this is how Kate Sutton tries to explain the origins of the belief in fairies which is so alarmingly alive among the inhabitants of Elvenwood Hall, a belief which she had first dismissed as a mere superstition of the uneducated serving-men and women. But now she has constructed a theory which suits her scepticism against the supernatural: The cave-system under the hill does not harbour supernatural creatures but human beings. Pagans – an elite group of pagan priests and adepts – who, with the expansion of Christianity, have retreated into this far-off corner.

This theory which Kate just seems to have thought up on her own – though helped by information previously supplied by Master Roger – is probably closer to the nineteenth than to

the sixteenth century.¹¹⁰ A similar theory called historical-realist or “euhemerist” theory was indeed established by Victorian folklorists (but has since then long been superseded by other explanations, see chapter two). It was propounded in different variations by J.F. Campbell of Islay (*Popular Tales of the West Highlands*, 1860 and 1862) and John Rhys (*Celtic Folklore – Welsh and Manx*, 1901) and later on by Sir Walter Scott, Jacob Grimm, Sabine Baring-Gould, George Laurence Gomme, Frederic T. Hall and David MacRitchie. The theory assumes that fairies were early inhabitants of Britain, probably dark-skinned and of low height, who were driven to the brinks of civilisation by other peoples invading the British Isles, who possessed weapons of iron superior to the bronze weapons of the natives.¹¹¹ This theory also supplies an explanation for the fairies’ fear of ‘the cold iron’, an element of folk belief which plays an important role in *The Perilous Gard*. There were, however, several opinions as to the identity of the primitive Britons. Early proponents of the theory contended that they were either Druids hiding underground from Christian persecution or a group of early Irish invaders. Later, the view that they were the conquered British aborigines gained favour. Still other researchers speculated that the race taken for fairies were Laplanders, a dark-skinned, Mongolian people, which had come over from Scandinavia. Finally, building on the work of his predecessors, David MacRitchie introduced his famous “pygmy theory” (1890), which suggested that fairies were a memory of an ancient, dwarf-like, non-Aryan race that had settled Europe before the Indo-Europeans arrived; cf. also chapter two.¹¹²

Kate’s theory is closest to the belief that the fairy people were Druids, she moreover assumes that they must have had sufficient and high-ranking connections into the ‘normal’ world to secure the protection of a whole dynasty of Christian nobles, i.e., the Warden family, of which Cecily’s mother is the last direct descendant. They inhabit Elvenwood Hall and – doing honour to their name – protect and supply the cave-system inhabited by the pagans.¹¹³

It is peculiar that it should be just Pope’s retelling with its Tudor/Elizabethan background, which of all the adaptations analysed is the one which is most interested in providing rational explanations for seemingly supernatural occurrences connected with fairies. It is peculiar (and suitable) in so far as it was indeed the Elizabethan Age which marks the

¹¹⁰ Pope mixes fictitious characters with historical ones, for not only do Elizabeth I and Queen Mary appear as characters, also Elizabeth’s chief lady-in-waiting Blanche Parry and Master Roger (Roger of Ascham) are historical personages.

¹¹¹ Similarly, Irish folk theory claims that Irish fairies are the *Tuatha De Danaan* (People of the Goddess Dana), who were driven into hiding when the Celts invaded Ireland.

¹¹² Cf. for example *The Testimony of Tradition* (1890) and *Fians, Fairies and Picts*, 1893.

¹¹³ That Warden is a telling name becomes rather clear in the following passage: “‘All they seem to have done for hundreds of years is stick to this place as if they were stewards or bailiffs or-’ ‘Wardens’ said Christopher. ‘Guard the valley, get in the food, keep the world out of here, hold off the Church – and take their pay for it’” (98).

watershed between ages of wide-spread belief in fairies among the population of the British Isles and the following ages which were growing increasingly sceptical – until the Victorian middle classes ‘rediscovered’ fairies and other supernatural beings in the mid-nineteenth century.

The Tudor/Elizabethan Age and fairies

Kate – well-read and educated – does not believe in fairies.¹¹⁴ The peasants around Elvenwood Hall still do. This constellation reflects quite realistically the distribution of the fairy faith in England during the late Tudor and Elizabethan Age: “By the Elizabethan Age fairy lore was primarily a store of mythology rather than a corpus of living beliefs, but it was sometimes still accepted literally at a popular level” (Thomas 1971, 608). The level of belief was dependent on social class; while among the social elite belief in fairies, ghosts and other supernatural phenomena was waning – “it was common in Elizabethan England for the social elite to profess contempt for vulgar ‘superstitions’ as it had been in Augustan Rome” (ibid. 646) – it was still common among the uneducated majority of the population: “for many persons fairies (...) remained spirits against which they had to guard themselves by some ritual precaution” (ibid. 607).

In order to understand Tudor/Elizabethan attitudes towards fairies, it is probably necessary to take a look at the general intellectual climate of the age. Some very important factors which shaped this age (that is, the English Renaissance, usually equated with the reigns of Henry VIII to Elizabeth I) were the Reformation, Humanism and certain economic changes. The most influential event on the latter field is probably the discovery of the Americas, which initiated transatlantic trade which in turn furthered the rise of the middle classes.

To begin with, the Catholic Church of the Middle Ages had of course always disapproved of belief in heathen magic and supernatural creatures – especially when, as in case of the fairies, it was linked to a quasi-religion with distinct rituals (such as people offering sacrifice in the form of milk and food). However, with the Reformation, two things changed and belief in fairies was frowned upon even more.

¹¹⁴ That Kate, the merchant’s daughter is able to read and write, is not too improbable. As Penry Williams writes: “If there was an advance in literacy in the sixteenth century, it directly benefited only certain favoured groups: the gentry of the north, yeomen, and merchants in most regions” (1998, 391). Though this quote refers primarily to men, also for the female members of certain social groups literacy was increasing: “In the latter years of the century women readers appeared as an identifiable group” (ibid.). As Ulrike Tancke observes, “female literacy rates increased as a result of the humanist emphasis on education and the Protestant idea of the ‘priesthood of all believers,’ which allocated to women the role of instructing their children and prompting all household members to lead godly lives” (2006, 17).

Firstly, the Protestant church rejected any kind of magic-related practices and rituals, even those that had formerly been employed by the church itself (such as worship of relics, belief in miracles, etc.): “self-help and prayer” (Thomas 1971, 278) became the only acceptable means of dealing with problems, a development described as follows by Sir Walter Scott in his *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft* (1885):

As knowledge and religion became more widely and brightly displayed over any country, the superstitious fancies of the people sunk gradually in esteem and influence; and in the time of Queen Elizabeth the unceasing labour of many and popular preachers, who declaimed against the ‘splendid miracles’ of the Church of Rome, produced also its natural effect upon the other stock of superstitions.

This development is reflected in *The Perilous Gard* for example by the remark of how the “custom of going on pilgrimage had been dying out in England ever since King Henry had plundered the great shrines” (47) – a certain secularisation was on its way and belief in miracles was lessening, something which is also felt by the protagonist of *The Perilous Gard* brooding about the legend of St. Christopher: “that had been in the morning of the world, when miracles rose out of the wayside grass as easily as larks; it was not to be expected that such a thing would happen again” (70) – in Kate’s eyes the disenchantment of the world has already advanced considerably it seems.

Secondly, apart from its scepticism towards miracles, the Protestant church rejected the concept of Purgatory, and thus the idea of ghosts and also fairies as souls of the dead temporarily returning from it became discredited – according to the Protestant view ghosts and fairies could only be spirits and would usually be regarded as evil spirits sent by the devil (Thomas 1971, 610), a development echoed e.g. in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, where the question whether the apparition of Hamlet’s father is really the returned soul (Catholic view) or a devil sent to lead Hamlet astray (Protestant view) is of vital importance.

The next factor I would like to subsume under the heading of Renaissance philosophy or Humanism. Referred to in *The Perilous Gard* as the ‘New Learning’, it also resulted in a new attitude towards human potential and trust in human resourcefulness. As Sir Walter Scott (*Letters on Demonology*, 1885) puts it:

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were periods when the revival of learning, the invention of printing, the fearless investigations of the Reformers into subjects thought formerly too sacred for consideration of any save the clergy, had introduced a system of doubt, enquiry, disregard of authority, (...), and unhesitating exercise of the private judgment.

This new faith in men’s intellectual faculties meant a break from the typical medieval attitude of fatalism and “contemplative resignation” (Thomas 1971, 643). Hand in hand with this enterprising attitude went what Keith Thomas calls the ‘triumph of mechanical philosophy’, the realization that the universe is governed by certain unalterable natural laws, which, in the long

run “meant the end of the animistic conception of the universe which had constituted the basic rationale for magical thinking” (ibid., 644) and with it the end of the fairy faith and the emergence of empiricism: “the new science also carried with it an insistence that all truth be demonstrated” (ibid.).

It is, however, important to keep in mind that this kind of rational thinking and a more esoteric approach to science had been progressing side by side or even intertwined with each other at the beginning. Astrology and Alchemy were rather fashionable during the reign of Elizabeth I and, as Thomas observes, neo-platonic and hermetic thinking had stimulated a number of discoveries in astronomy and medicine before science and magic started to drift apart and magical practices became declassified as ‘unscientific’ (and were left to the less educated).¹¹⁵

An important question is of course: why could thinking develop in such a way? What were the factors that sparked off the change? Keith Thomas quotes Bronislaw Malinowsky’s hypothesis that as soon as a people gains sufficient technical control over environmental conditions (food supply, housing, infrastructure etc.) it will no longer be in need of magic for the regulation of their lives.¹¹⁶ Thomas admits that this hypothesis holds a certain attraction but cannot properly be applied to the English Renaissance: “the paradox is that in England magic lost its appeal before the appropriate technical solutions had been devised to take its place. It was the abandonment of magic which made possible the upsurge of technology, not the other way round” (1971, 656-7).¹¹⁷ This seems to be a sort of chicken and egg problem – did the abandonment of magic cause technological progress or did a change in economical conditions lead to the abandonment of magic?

It is a question which I cannot answer here, I would, however, like to hypothesise that with regard to the Elizabethan Age the discovery of the American continent and the ensuing colonization and the beginning of transatlantic trade might have been one economic factor which in the long run *did* encourage the rise of rationalism.¹¹⁸ This is not to say that merchants weren’t superstitious, but I would like to mention yet another hypothesis cited by Thomas: “magic is agrarian” (1971, 663), meaning that in an environment where man is left much more at the mercy of natural forces, such as the weather, crop-threatening pests and the like, he will be more

¹¹⁵ The popularity of the esoteric during the Elizabethan age is reflected e.g. in Ben Jonson’s play *The Alchemist*, to name just one famous example.

¹¹⁶ The hypothesis is derived from Malinowsky’s study of primitive peoples in the Pacific regions.

¹¹⁷ Similarly, Horst Breuer argues: “Nicht die Technik erschuf den neuen Menschen, sondern der neue Mensch erschuf die Technik” (*Historische Literaturpsychologie* 1989, 52) – that is, first nature needed to be ‘disenchanted’ before it could be exploited by man.

¹¹⁸ On the other hand, the encounter with exotic people and landscapes seem to have furthered the literary imagination – the Elizabethan Age became one of the golden periods of fairy literature.

liable to resort to magic in order to influence the un-influenceable. Whereas for example in trade people have to rely much more on other people (even though e.g. sea-faring merchants were of course also often at the mercy of the elements) than on nature, for which mere acumen might be more useful than magic. Even though warning against too easy generalization, Thomas concludes:

It is therefore possible to connect the decline of the old magical beliefs with the growth of urban living, the rise of science, and the spread of an ideology of self-help [and] it would make sense, no doubt, if one could prove that it was the urban middle classes, the shopkeepers and artisans, who took the lead in abandoning the old beliefs. (1971, 665-6)

He sees no way of proving this hypothesis but it seems almost as if Pope was familiar with it and used it in her novel. Kate's family, though meanwhile arrived in court-circles, has middle class roots, its social ascent beginning with her grandfather: "Sir Giles had started life as a common merchant seaman (...) and (...) in the end had grown rich and died knighted" (2). So the Suttons seem to be a family who have in the last few generations very much relied on self-help and rationalism and Kate seems to be very much like her grandfather and father in this respect. She has grown up in "the London world of trade and law and merchant-adventuring and the fire new court of the Tudor kings and queens, who had (when all was said and done) been nothing but adventurers only eighty or ninety years ago" (102-3).

But while the Suttons belong to a group of people who dismiss the supernatural as an outdated superstition, the case is different with regard to the ruler who took over the 'fire new' court in 1558 as Elizabeth I. Though descended from a family who had probably also relied much on self-help and common sense during their social ascent, Elizabeth consciously encouraged her subjects to think of her as connected with supernatural powers and was immortalised as an embodiment of the fairy queen in Edmund Spenser's epic of the same name (see also chapter four). Instead of being dismissed as superstition the fairies became fashionable at court (as a pastime, not as a belief). Occasions which typically offered an opportunity for fairy spectacles were the court masques. Here, the fairies were utilised to make up in mythology what the queen's royal house lacked in tradition.¹¹⁹ So it is maybe not so surprising that the Elizabethan (and the following Stuart) Age marked a height of fairy literature – as Keith Thomas remarks: "So far as literary references are concerned, the peak age of fairy allusions appears to

¹¹⁹ Some centuries later, J.R.R. Tolkien would also employ elves as characters to re-create something like an English mythology, which he considered to be lacking due to the Norman Conquest: "I was from early days grieved by the poverty of my own beloved country: it had no stories of its own (bound up with its tongue and soil) ... There was Greek, and Celtic, and Romance, Germanic, Scandinavian, and Finnish ... but nothing English, save impoverished chap-book stuff. (...) I had in mind to make a body of more or less connected legend, ranging from the large and cosmogonic, to the level of romantic fairy-story ... which I would dedicate simply to: to England; to my country ..." (Tolkien cited in Carpenter 1981, 144).

be the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth” (1971, 608). Popular belief in fairies and their attractiveness for literature seem to develop in opposite directions, but maybe it was just their removal from everyday superstition to the realms nostalgia and myth – for “it is true that the more sophisticated Elizabethans tended to speak as if fairy-beliefs were a thing of the past” (Thomas 1971, 607) – which transformed the fairies into the proper stuff for literature.¹²⁰

Waning belief and magic explained

The ‘fairies’ farewell’ has, as also mentioned in chapter four, been a popular motif of fairy literature from the Middle Ages onwards. *The Perilous Gard* employs this motif and combines it with the “Thomas the Rhymer”/“Tam Lin” motifs, a combination which distinguishes Pope’s novel from most of the other adaptations where the elves are still at the height of their powers.

The fairies in *The Perilous Gard* are on the decline, and in the end, Kate can go so far as to declare: “there won’t be any more teinds now, ever again. They’re finished” (255). In contrast to most other novels where the fairies’ defeat is merely temporary and their abductions of humans will continue, *The Perilous Gard* is a book which ends with a sort of ‘fairies’ farewell’, because the last of their holy places has been destroyed and they are condemned to a wandering life and probably ultimately to extinction (192). I think this kind of ending is only possible because Pope’s fairies are different from many others – much less glamorous and powerful. They have been weakened so much that in the end the Lady feels forced to beg a favour of a human – namely Kate – because she herself is in no position to save their ceremonial tree. In my opinion this presentation is certainly connected to the historical background *The Perilous Gard* is set in.

As mentioned earlier, in the Elizabethan Age belief in fairies was waning – at least among the educated – and this development is reflected in *The Perilous Gard*. Kate does not believe in fairies at all, to her, the town girl, they are just some country superstition and the idea she has of them is remarkably modern. She thinks of fairies as “little wee folk, no larger than puppets” (79). It seems that Kate is maybe a little ahead of her time since it was only Shakespeare who introduced very small fairies to popular culture. Susan, the woman from the village, believes in the more medieval idea of fairies as normally adult-sized beings, who can however, change their shape and size if necessary.

¹²⁰ On the whole it should be noted that, while in industrially developed areas, belief in fairies was greatly reduced over the centuries, it lingered in the more remote areas of the British Isles and was alive into the twentieth century in parts of Scotland and Ireland. For a few people there it is probably still a living belief even nowadays.

But as the fairies turn into objects of popular (urban) culture, they are vanishing from folk belief. The Lady foresees it: believers are dying out fast, and there are but “few to serve or remember us except a country woman may tell a tale by the fire or set out a bowl of milk for a luck charm at the door” (207).¹²¹

And as believers are dying out, so are the fairies: “The seated figures were too far apart to talk to one another, spaced out very widely along the walls, as if to fill room that had once been taken up by a much larger assembly” (151). There are no more than 36 left under the hill and only four of them are children, so the well-known infertility of the fairy race in folklore is part of their description in *The Perilous Gard*. The fairies in *The Perilous Gard* have dwindled so much that they even seem to consider to ‘adopt’ Kate (206), who has proven herself worthy and to make her one of their number. This is an idea which shows how curiously close to humans Pope’s fairies are compared to those in the other novels. This is indeed a peculiarity of *The Perilous Gard* which is also reflected in the rationalisation of almost all things apparently magical. Clearly, the fairies do manipulate the humans, that much even Kate acknowledges, e.g. with regard to the description of the transformations at the end of the ballad of “Tam Lin”: “she had seen enough of the Lady’s magic by now to feel sure that it was at least based on a distorted account of something that had actually occurred” (227). On the other hand, her judgement on the fairies’ ‘magic’ is also clear: “nothing but medicine or illusion” (227).

One instance of ‘medicine’ is the supposedly magic water out of the holy well, which does indeed have a soothing effect on humans but this is on account of a drug the fairies mix into it. It is probably also what is regularly given, probably in higher concentration, to the mortal servants in the hill. They seem to be under some kind of enchantment, fairy ‘glamour’, seeing not the bare rock but a wonderful palace, but are actually apparently just the victims of hallucination-inducing psychotropic drugs. The Lady explains that the drug is merely “what we mingle with the water in the rich pilgrim’s cup, to free him of sorrow and pain or the grief of a wound” (136), but it is obviously very powerful.¹²²

Interestingly, it will eventually be just the “grief of a wound”, which will prevent Kate from falling prey to the powers of the Lady. Even though the Lady may not be a real magician, she has obviously knowledge of hypnosis and Kate, who has steadily refused to take the tranquillising drink, is almost put to sleep by the Lady swinging her bracelet in front of her eyes

¹²¹ This is a description that may call to mind the idea of fairies as found in seventeenth century authors, such as in Milton’s poems like “L’Allegro”: “Then to the Spicy Nut-brown Ale, / With stories told many a feat, / How Faery Mab the junkets eat, / She was pincht, and pull’d she sed, / And he by Friars Lanthorn led / Tells how the drudging Goblin swet / To ern his Cream-bowle duly set”.

¹²² The fairies’ use of drugs might recall Thomas Malory’s Morgan le Fay who is similarly rationalised and captures her victims not by magic but with the help of drugs (see chapter four).

and murmuring soothing words. Here, yet another object thought 'magical' by the ignorant village populace does have a protective effect, even though in a way other than expected. The cross made out of the 'cold iron', said to frighten fairies away, which Kate has worn all the time (and which has not helped her much so far) breaks into pieces and only because Kate hurts herself on the jagged crossbar and is startled back into reality by the pain, she can in the end rescue herself and Christopher.

All in all, most of what is presented as magic in ballad and folk belief is explained. Some riddles, however, remain. It is never cleared up, for example, how the fairies turned Randal into the disturbed idiot he now appears to be. Yet more drugs? Or something more enduring? It is left for the reader to wonder. Another mystery is the identity of the Guardian of the Well. While the Lady and the rest of the group may be different from humans in their thinking and in their appearance, they, however, seem to be made of flesh and blood, while the Guardian is always described as something bony, grey and shadowy and not once seen clearly by Kate. When the fairies have fled and Sir Geoffrey's men search the surroundings, all they find is a mass of bones wrapped in some grey substance, which, according to Geoffrey, "had been dead for a long time" (257). Kate does not question his statement further, apparently for once too horrified to inquire into the deeper truth behind things. Maybe it is Pope's acknowledgement of the folk theory that fairies are in fact the spirits of the dead, but how does this account for the rest of the fairy group? Maybe it is an accidental inconsistency in this otherwise mostly well-rounded book, but maybe the mystery was intended to remain unsolved. For all its tendency of doing away with superstitions, *The Perilous Gard* nevertheless conveys a sense that there might still be 'more things in heaven and earth' and that it is maybe not totally wrong to be sensitive to them. A passage which supports this notion occurs towards the end when Kate realises that "nobody was going to miss the Lady or the Fairy Folk, unless – it was a curious notion – unless she herself did" (256). And somehow she seems to miss them, displaying that curious kind of nostalgia which can probably only be found in an age the fairies have just left – a feeling that the world has just been disenchanted a little more. However, some pages later Kate is reminded that the fairies of her age are not dead yet and still a power to be reckoned with. The Lady, though bereft of her abode and part of her power, is indeed still "subtle beyond belief" (280) since she has a clever plan how she can avenge herself on Kate, which is only foiled by Kate's usual stubbornness (see below).

Otherness: aloof, superior and cruel fairies

The otherness of the fairies, and of the Lady especially, is symbolised by the imagery connected with them. All characters' basic dispositions are reflected in the imagery employed throughout the book. Pope uses mainly relatively simple animal/plant and elemental imagery to support her characterization: dogs and horses (Kate), birds (Christopher), pigs (mortal servants), kittens (Alicia) and trees (fairies), furthermore, stone (Kate and the fairies), ice (fairies) and fire (Christopher) are the most important. It is striking, however, that the fairies are almost never referred to in terms of animal imagery – this seems to be reserved for human beings, while the fairies are characterised by tree-, stone- and ice-comparisons, which might be a hint at their longevity and also their distance from humanity, for animals are probably 'closer' to humans than are trees or inanimate matter.¹²³

Stone and ice are one important field of imagery connected with the fairies (and partly also with Kate). The fairies' country is made up mainly of rock and they themselves are compared to ice which has survived in a remote rock-cave for thousands of years without changing (175). The associations evoked here are those of coldness – emotional coldness being typical of the fairy race – and durability – true to folkloristic accounts, Pope's fairies seem to have survived in their corner for a long time, even though no hints at actual immortality or the extreme longevity typical for them are given. A similar imagery can be found also in *Winter Rose, Fire and Hemlock* and *Lords and Ladies/The Wee Free Men*, where the fairies are similarly linked to ice and the hardness and coldness it represents.

Compared to ice, stone in *The Perilous Gard* is more ambiguous and stands for a whole continuum of traits: on the negative side (symbolising an excess of 'stoniness') stone is stiff or immobile, cold, lifeless, oppressive. On the positive side (which means that the characteristics appear balanced by others) stone stands for control, tranquillity and durability.

On the one hand, stone is associated with the otherworldly beauty and extreme poise of the fairies, who have extreme control over both their bodies and their emotions: "both men and women had dark hair and very pale, exquisitely cut faces: severe, remote, and as quiet as stone" (150) and of course also the Lady sits on her throne "so quiet that she looked as though she also were made of stone" (148), descriptions that might remind a reader slightly of Keats's "Grecian Urn", which also has figures that are beautiful – but bereft of time, change and 'real' life.¹²⁴ Not

¹²³ One might wonder whether there are any connections to Renaissance idea of the Great Chain of Being, which puts elements and inanimate object such as stones at the base and plants only slightly above. If there was any connection it would somehow debase Pope's fairies even further.

¹²⁴ Notably, the effect of the fairies' drugs is to rob people – and probably also animals – of all vitality (and of all will-power, i.e., control): Christopher becomes "so still that he might have been turned to stone" (112) when he

alive but at almost eternal – this is another trait connected to stone – and one crucial for so many texts about fairies, namely durability and resistance to change. Durability and toughness can be positive in the face of adversity. But stoniness is also the symbol of stasis and the inability to learn.

Interestingly, quite a few aspects of ‘stoniness’ apply also to Kate. “Don’t sit there like a stone image,” (5) is one of the first commands directed to Kate at the beginning of the book. Maybe this remark, though meant negatively by Alicia, foreshadows that later it is her hardness (which can be seen as a sort of stoniness as well) that turns Kate into someone who earns the fairies’ respect. She is later criticised for her extreme aloofness by Geoffrey, who complains that she acts just “like a stone speaking” (18) and not like a living person. For Kate this works when she “survey[s] Master John in her stoniest manner” (122), here for once better equipped for a situation than the emotional Alicia would have been. But the fact that their rock-caves cause even the fairies themselves attacks of “the weight”, a sort of claustrophobia, hints at the negative sides of their nature and way of life – they may be hardy and beautiful, but their durability has a price.

Kate is able to bear the nature of Fairyland comparatively well for a human – despite suffering from the ‘weight’ at times she manages to live there without being drugged – maybe this is because she has something stony in herself as well. She is someone who desires control and her self-discipline alone makes her endure her underground-existence. In the end, however, the stony side of Kate does not prevail, as is conveyed by one of the final metaphors: Kate imagines a kitten chasing butterflies (Alicia) in the meadow around the standing stone (herself) and finally the stone melts, symbolising the change Kate herself has gone through.

The connection between the fairies and trees is much more traditional than that between fairies and stone – in Celtic folklore certain trees (such as hawthorn, oak and ash) are regarded as abodes of fairies and the traditional fairy colour, green, which Pope uses also for her fairies’ clothing, strengthens the connection with plants.¹²⁵ At her first appearance, the fairy queen is hardly distinguishable from the leaves of the forest at all (20, 25), as she amusedly looks down at the struggling humans on the road: “as if she were watching a pack of half-grown puppies all yelping together in a kennel-run”. Later, she will look just like a “young disdainful living tree” (133) that has suddenly sprung up in the middle of the chamber, making everything familiar

drinks the fairies’ potion and probably also the horses for the Halloween spectacle have been drugged, for the one bearing the Guardian “remained standing like a rock, exactly as he had left it” (235).

¹²⁵ And the characters who will become involved with the fairies do so too, even though they are probably not aware of it: Christopher is first seen wearing a green tunic and Kate is even mistaken for a fairy by the village woman Susan because she wears a green cloak (73).

seem unreal. The fairies' caves are decorated with tree elements (leaves) and trees, such as their dancing oak, are dear to them – probably Pope connects here both fairy folklore and lore about the Druidic religion, for both of which trees have a high significance. But, ironically, trees are some of the things that the fairies cannot sustain in their underground realm – which makes the fairy folk dependent on regular access to the human world and belies their seeming proud independence.

Animals, on the other hand, do not seem to be held in very high regard by the fairies of *The Perilous Gard*. For the fairies, human beings are no better than animals to be used for work or entertainment, however, there seems to be a sort of hierarchy. Kate manages to rise from the status of common prisoner to that of privileged prisoner – “she [Gwenhyfara] used to treat me like a workhorse on the farm. Now it's more like a dog that she thinks she can train for the house” (193) – even with hopes of becoming nearly equal to her guardians later.

In contrast to that, the other mortal women kept in the hill are regarded as and treated like the animals which are commonly connected to stupidity and baseness: pigs.¹²⁶ The image is introduced when Kate rises to meet the fairy queen, thinking that “at least she did not have to stay grovelling on the hearth like one of the enchanted pigs in a story about Ulysses and Circe that Master Roger had read to them in the old days at Hatfield” (134). She is quite mistaken, though, because ‘enchanted pigs’ is just what the mortal prisoners of the fairy queen are and like Circe the Lady puts “into the mixture malignant drugs, to make them forgetful of their own country” (Homer, *The Odyssey*, translated by A.T. Murray 1953, 36).¹²⁷ The pig parallel becomes obvious also when the Lady leaves Kate in a dark cave where the other slaves are kept. Kate at first mistakes the sleepy noises of her fellow prisoners for the wallowing and grunting of pigs and is outraged: “Not pigs. She would not, she would *not*, be sent to sleep with the pigs. It was bad enough to be regarded as a dog or a horse” (142). She is surprised to find not straw or mud but velvet quilts when she gropes for the material the “pigs” sleep on and discovers the following morning that she has been put in a clean chamber with silken and velvet blankets covering the sleeping benches. But the velvet is grey-brown, not unlike mud and the women housed here are actually treated like pigs (or asses or workhorses), and therefore Kate comes to think of the place as “the stable” (148) after all. The fairies' opinion of humans is made all too

¹²⁶ But the pig is associated also with less profane things: “In both the Celtic and the Greek religious traditions, the pig was said to dwell with the spirits of the dead in the realm beneath the earth. This is the place, also, for the initiate, who dwells in darkness, or sleeps for a while in the underworld realm until the goddess or god has shown him the light or set him on the right path” (Boyd 2004), which is interesting in so far as Kate might be seen as something like an initiate. The pig is also sometimes believed to be a soul-animal (Bächtold-Stäubli 1997, Vol. 7, 1474).

¹²⁷ Similarly as Odysseus himself is not transformed and has to watch his comrades misbehave as pigs, so Kate has to witness her fellow servants degrading themselves through their slovenly behaviour.

clear also in their choice of eating gear for their prisoners: their bowls and spoons are decorated with “geese and asses and swine” (154), animals used for work or as food. The bowls are also so richly and sumptuously made that they can only instil further disdain in the fairies who are obviously lovers of the austere and pure. The fairy children are obviously trained in their contempt of human imperfectness when they “watch the mortal women making pigs of themselves out of riches and art” (165), since the women, in their enchantment, quite forget any manners they may once have had and gobble down their food quite like pigs.¹²⁸ In contrast to the enchanted pigs in the *Odyssey*, the potion the humans in *The Perilous Gard* are given does not transform their bodies, but their minds, while the pigs of the *Odyssey* keep their human shape of mind and have to watch helplessly the uncouth behaviour of their pig-bodies. In *The Perilous Gard* it might eventually be a mercy that the human prisoners have little or no idea where they are and what goes on around them, because in the end the Lady lets them drown mercilessly, when her folk flees and the caves are flooded (259).

A certain cruelty shows also when the Lady plays her games with Kate, who eventually is “sick of being run up and down for the Lady’s entertainment like the last forlorn piece on a chessboard” (180). The fact that she thinks the girl amusing and a nice plaything, however, seems to have been responsible for Kate’s survival in the first place. Master John wants to see Kate killed. The girl, however, refusing doggedly to drink the prepared potion, seems to find the Lady’s favour: “her eyes were still on Kate’s face, and they as well as her mouth now looked very faintly amused” (137).

The fairies are indeed different, not only in their sense of humour. The Lady gives a clear demonstration of her otherness when Kate tries to persuade her to dispense with the sacrifice because, in Kate’s reasoning, there is no need for any sacrifices any more, since Christ sacrificed himself for mankind. Instead of relinquishing Christopher, however, the Lady is now even more enthusiastic about him as the perfect sacrificial victim. For her his name – Christ-bearer – indicates that he combines his own strength with that of Christ and will therefore achieve an even better effect (210), which is a reasoning that Kate simply has not reckoned with.

Rule-keeping and truth-telling

As is common for them, the fairies in *The Perilous Gard* are very strict when it comes to the keeping of rules and agreements. Even Cecily’s disappearance might be interpreted as merely the fairies fulfilling their side of a bargain. Christopher, standing near the holy well, pronounces

¹²⁸ This training is, on the other hand, probably only a way of making the fairy children put up with their miserable living conditions: be contemptuous of what one cannot have, i.e. comfort and luxury.

loudly that he wants to be rid of his little niece. The Guardian of the Well, apparently always on the lookout for ‘customers’, hears this and consequently takes the child as it plays at the well – even though the fairies have of course their own plans with Cecily. When Christopher strikes a bargain with them once again, namely to exchange the child for himself, the fairies are similarly strict about keeping their word: Cecily must be given back to her father (120), even though Master John would prefer to get rid of her.

They employ a sort of strict ‘tit-for-tat’ strategy, which, on the one hand, prevents them from cheating, but on the other hand also makes it impossible for them to adjust their bargains as humans might sometimes do out of pity for the person they bargain with. This unemotional approach lets the fairies also assess quite coolly how much of their medicine they measure out to each pilgrim (190): those who promise the most and steadiest returns (in the form of jewels and gold), will be presented with the best water.

It is all the more remarkable and probably a sign of the fairies’ desperate situation, considering that she will have to keep to any agreement Kate will make with her, that the Lady lowers herself to ask a favour of Kate at the end of *The Perilous Gard*. Kate is a little flattered at first, to be asked thus, by a woman who has all reason to hate her. And, in the manner of forgiving humans, Kate does not want to take pay for her service. The Lady, however, once again proves that she is not like humans: She declares her enmity towards Kate and makes clear that she wants to repay her because it is her ethos to do so and not at all because she likes her.

From one point of view, the fairies are very merchant-like figures, they trade back and forth, without letting emotions stand in their way. Dealing like that should be something that is familiar to Kate, the merchant’s (grand)-daughter. However, human merchants are fallible and will very often be tempted to cheat a little to their advantage. The fairies in contrast will keep their deals to the very letter, which is probably what makes them so uncanny. One instance where this rule-boundness appears in an especially stark light is the way the fairies deal with their sacrificial victim: Christopher is told that no one will harm him, should he choose to dismount his white horse and walk away from the ceremony, and actually, nothing much happens, when Kate finally ‘claims’ him – no fight, no trouble – the fairies give up their sacrificial victim and flee. Of course they would not be the cunning folk which they are usually thought to be if escaping from their ceremonies were really as easy as merely walking out on them.

They have managed to bind their teind-payer by subtle psychological manipulation, which leads me to one, in my opinion, very crucial point. Many of the adaptations examined here make use of the superiority/inferiority motif, even though this is found nowhere in the ballads. In

the case of *The Perilous Gard* (as in *Lords and Ladies*, *Winter Rose*, *The Wee Free Men* and *Fire and Hemlock*) the fairies play on the hidden fears of their 'victims', subtly infusing them with the notion that they are ugly, worthless, cowardly, embarrassing – in short inferior – and thus subduing them, at least temporarily. Kate and especially Christopher are both suitable victims for this strategy. Christopher blames himself for the death of his mother, who died at his birth, and (at least for some time) also that of his niece and feels that he has not managed to live up to the expectations of his brother. Thus the Guardian can indeed offer him freedom without risking much:

You can ride that horse out of the circle this moment, if you choose, and not one of us will lift a finger to stop you from going. But will you go? Fail your brother again and go? Leave the child behind to pay the teind in your place, and go? Live with the knowledge for the rest of your life? (242)

Someone who is already plagued by shame and guilt may not be able to bear these feelings any longer. At least not someone whose sense of pride is similarly well developed as his sense of shame. And he may indeed be tempted to prefer death to shame, especially if death is painted so gloriously as it is by the Guardian: he offers Christopher to be “free of shame and fear” (274) for ever. Kate, one of whose core-conflicts throughout the book is her sense of inferiority towards her pretty sister, feels the pull of the Guardian’s words as well, which create “a voiceless aching misery” (244) in her.

Maybe this is how Pope deals with the idea of the fairies ‘sucking away the life-energy of their victims’ found in folklore – it is not magic, but a sort of psycho-terror. Fortunately, the words of the Guardian ultimately serve to make Kate angry, which means that she has enough energy left to act.

Just as to rules the fairies of *The Perilous Gard* are also strictly bound to truth, even though they, like most other fairies, tend to bend truth so as to suit their own ends. One very good example for this occurs when the Guardian of the Well is trying to persuade Christopher to leave everything behind and give himself up as a sacrifice. The Guardian does not work with accusations, which probably bear a much greater risk of provoking objections, he only asks questions and thus stays forever evasive. Kate’s reaction to this is typical: “‘Questions’, thought Kate savagely; ‘why even now couldn’t the thing tell a plain lie, like an honest man’” (242). It is impossible to catch the fairies at a mistake or a falsehood, just as they will not cheat in a bargain. Thus, for someone used to human imperfectness a creature that tells ‘a plain lie’ and is thus somehow assailable, becomes ‘an honest man’.

The fairies, however, are beyond plain lies: everything the Lady reveals to Kate, and may it sound like so much magical humbug, proves to be true in the end. She once tells Kate that no

one but the Guardian of the Well can speak to Christopher. Kate herself finds it easy enough to talk to Christopher and is ready to dismiss this statement as nonsense. However, none of the fairies ever speaks to him and at the ceremony, the Guardian's voice is the only one that seems to reach him, therefore Kate concludes: "in this, as in other matters, [the Lady] seemed to have been telling the exact truth" (237). The same happens, when the Lady describes her observations from the window when she visits Kate for the last time: "I saw [Alicia's] face when she looked at [Christopher], and your face when you looked at [Alicia], and his when he looked at you both" (272). The Lady does not lie, yet Kate at first misinterprets her words heavily to her own disadvantage because her feelings of inferiority towards Alicia prompt her to do so. The fairy lady obviously knows this and has no scruples of using her knowledge of human weakness against Kate. In fact, had not her inborn integrity won through in the end, Kate would have fallen victim to the Lady's subtle revenge exactly because of this weakness: the Lady offers her a love charm and if Kate had accepted it, she would never have been able to be truly secure of Christopher, but would have carried around the notion that she had married a man who had accepted her only because of some heathen magic and not because of herself.¹²⁹

[The Lady] was subtle beyond belief. She had been speaking the truth when she said that she would not avenge herself on Kate and the Young Lord by anything so cheap as robbery or murder. Kate was in no state to trace out all the intricacies of the many truths she had told her. (280)

Truth(s)

"The many truths" – this is an expression which points at yet another crucial issue treated in *The Perilous Gard*, which can also be found in most of the other adaptations (*Fire and Hemlock*, *Lords and Ladies*, *Thomas the Rhymer*, *The Wee Free Men*, *Winter Rose*, *Tam Lin*), even though the ballads themselves do not really foreground this (except for Walter Scott's version of "Thomas the Rhymer" (Child #37 C), where the hero protests against the queen's gift of the 'tongue that cannot lie'): truth and falsehood and the power inherent in stories and storytelling. In *The Perilous Gard* the issue is less often directly mentioned than in other novels, yet, it seems to make up a crucial part of the novel's whole framework. I think it is significant that both the first and the last sentences of *The Perilous Gard* are in some way concerned with the issue of truth and its relativity. At the outset of the novel Alicia defends herself for having written a (rather foolish) letter of complaint to Queen Mary: "every word I wrote her was true" (1), and for Alicia these truths may have been what she really considers to be true, namely that Princess Elizabeth is treated abominably by her half-sister. The delicate relations of Hatfield, the

¹²⁹ Similarly in *Winter Rose* Rois chooses to let Corbet go and does not seize the chance to marry him in Fairyland, where he is offered to her by the fairy queen, but where they would probably both have been unhappy.

dwelling place of Princess Elizabeth, towards the court, however, would have required diplomacy, not truth, and so Alicia's frankness sets the plot in motion because Kate is sent into exile for a crime she has not committed. Towards the end, many adventures and trials having been lived through by the protagonists, one of them surmises that "Randal will be making it all into a ballad, and after a while nobody will believe that it was ever anything more than a tale by the fire" (256). This is exactly what happens and significantly, the very last words of the novel are: "a tale" (280).

My conclusion here is that *The Perilous Gard* is, apart from a coming-of-age story, also a story about the relativity of truth. My hypothesis is also confirmed by the many 'truths' concerning the fairies which Kate discovers behind what she first believes to be mere superstition and also by one instance which shows up the power of stories in a very strong light. Master John once shocks Kate deeply, not just because he wants to murder her, but because he intends to tell a monstrous lie about Christopher's (and her own) disappearance. Master John's tale would turn them both into something completely different from what they actually were – Christopher becoming "the blurred distorted figure of a thief and a coward, entirely unreal" (126) and she herself turning into a whimsical, unreasonable girl ready to run off with the first man close at hand. Sir Geoffrey realises the power inherent in this story as well, for he ultimately chooses to 'recycle' it, merely changing some names, in order to explain the mysterious disappearance of Master John himself, because he thinks:

That was a good story he told you about someone stealing the child and then running away rather than face me when someone else found out the truth and sent me word to ride back. It's such a good story that it seems a pity to waste it – especially as it happens to be perfectly true. We'll only have to change a few of the names. (256)

Here the lie is modified slightly and looked on as a truth by Geoffrey, who seems to be rather pragmatic sometimes too. The ballad Randal finally composes out of what he has heard of Kate's adventures is also very unrealistic, painting inconspicuous Kate as "the flower" among a group of ladies. But of course it is more consoling than Master John's tale and also indicative of how the two actual ballads which shape *The Perilous Gard* may have come into being themselves.

The minstrel

In contrast to e.g. *Fire and Hemlock*, where the ballad characters Thomas the Rhymer and Tam Lin merge in Thomas Lynn, in *The Perilous Gard* the two ballad heroes seem to be identified with two different characters, i.e., Christopher Heron and Randal, the minstrel. While Christopher is – with restrictions but clearly recognisable – Tam Lin, Randal is more of a Thomas-figure. Significantly, Randal's first appearance is preceded by his singing of a stanza

from the ballad: “a high clear voice, curiously piercing and sweet. It was singing a verse from the old ballad about the minstrel who met the fairy lady under the elder tree” (20). Like Thomas, Randal is a minstrel, and moreover one who has met the queen of fairies – here the folklore motif of the fairies’ love of music appears – and has yet returned to the mortal world. However, his stay in the otherworld has marked him for life. Geoffrey recalls taking Randall into his household, “in one harvest time years ago, when he came ill with the fever to my door in Norfolk” (21). The fever, Geoffrey concludes, has harmed Randal’s mental faculties: he often talks confusedly and does not understand questions and requests. What Geoffrey views in terms of illness might well indicate that Randal is, like Thomas, an outcast from the fairy-realm.¹³⁰ Harvest-time might signal the time around Halloween, the time where the fairies in “Tam Lin” and “Thomas of Erceldoune” offer human sacrifices to the devil and the time when Thomas of Erceldoune is sent back to earth by the fairy queen to be saved from being sacrificed. However, the parallel is not quite so neat. Even though Randal may have been sent back by the fairy queen, this happens, as he himself explains, because “by their law they can never use a singer to pay for the teind” (92), a rule which is never mentioned in the ballads.

There is, however, another, and more distinct parallel to the Thomas-Rhymer-motif: Thomas is endowed by the fairy queen with a “tongue that cannot lie” and Randal, too, is someone who tells the truth whether he wants to or not. In his confused mutterings and his songs lies more truth than he himself can fathom. “Go out by the oak leaf with never a bough,” he sings and no one pays attention to him – later Kate will realize that this verse is the key to the way out of the fairies’ labyrinthine caves because a door-latch decorated with a metal oak-leaf marks the right passage. Obviously the fairies have played a cruel joke on the minstrel and mankind at large: “It would be like them to teach him that song and then let him go singing the truth, the exact truth, over half the roads in England, since he himself would know nothing of what it meant, and everyone else would take it for a jingle of the lunatic he was” (222).

Randal is a pitiable figure in his longing to go back to the otherworld and in this respect rather resembles the protagonist not of a traditional ballad but a literary ballad, namely the knight from John Keats’s “La Belle Dame Sans Merci”. The knight recalls: “And I awoke and found me here, On the cold hill’s side,” while Randal formulates it like this: “when I awake I am lying out on the cold hillside again” (92). On his returns from Fairyland, he frequently finds a cluster of withered oak leaves in his hand – which he had imagined to be gold and jewels while in the

¹³⁰ Significantly, what in former times was often interpreted as ‘fairy possession’ can often be explained in terms of certain illnesses, as Susan Schoon-Eberly (1991) hypothesizes with regard to the symptoms displayed by ‘changeling’ children, see also chapter two.

fairies' company. This is the traditional effect of fairy gold when the glamour subsides (which is, however, not part of the "Thomas the Rhymer"/"Tam Lin" ballads). It is interesting that Randal himself seems to suffer the same fate as the fairy gold – at his first appearance he is described thus: "a slight figure dressed in rusty brown came scurrying like a dead leaf around the bend in the road" (22). The minstrel seems to be a kind of withered leaf himself, an impression which is confirmed later on, when Christopher remarks how "Randal seems to have gone blowing off on the wind too" (203) when he and Kate are talking about the leaves that she has seen tumbling on the earth on the dancing night. Randal's fate illustrates the destructive power inherent in the fairies, who can make or break humans just as they choose. And who, in Randal's case have chosen to break him so that he will not tell their secrets, at least not knowingly. He does, however, reveal that the fairies pay a tithe and behaves suddenly very conscience-stricken, because he has sung the ballad of "Tam Lin" near the Lady's abode, the one ballad which tells about a man who escaped the fairies.¹³¹ His singing, however, accidentally provides Kate with an opportunity of distracting him from wondering about the strange relationship between Geoffrey and Christopher:

"Why was it wrong of you to sing the ballad of *Tam Lin*?" Kate cut in. She cared nothing for the ballad of *Tam Lin* - Alicia was the one who like ballads – but any question was better than letting Randal talk any more about Sir Geoffrey's feelings for his brother. (90)

A reader who knows the ballad will of course guess that Kate might have saved herself some trouble if she had been more interested in ballads and songs, for they provide not only the way out of the fairies' labyrinth (as the leaf-song does) but give instructions of how to rescue a human from the fairies. But Randal, with his 'tongue that cannot lie' provides Kate and Christopher also with a piece of (to them) much more solid information, which is actually the one that sends them off on their quest for Cecily. Randal, invited by Kate's initial question, recounts how he sometimes plays his harp for the fairies in the hill and how a little girl once gave him a slipper – the counterpart to the one Christopher has found at the well when Cecily disappeared. Here, in my opinion, the narration becomes a bit construed, because why would Cecily present Randal with her shoe or why would she run around with only one shoe at all? The fairies are apparently capable of producing their own clothing, so they should also be able to make shoes. And if they are not, then it would be more logical if Cecily had worn nothing at all on her feet, but the slipper is "stained and faded and worn almost to rags" (93) as if from long

¹³¹ Randal is obviously aware that he may have revealed a something that the fairies might prefer to keep hidden from the public and is afraid that he will be punished for it by being banned from the fairies' land forever. Paradoxically, he seems to bear no grudge towards those who have mentally crippled him, on the contrary, he longs to return to them and fears a final ban as their worst punishment, which lets the fairies' behaviour towards him appear even more cruel.

wear. And even if we leave aside the question of why she might run around half-shod, the question of why she should have given away her one slipper to the harper remains. Could she have recognized Randal as someone from her father's household? Maybe. And could she have wanted to give him a sign to convey to her father that she was still alive? Is it possible for a four-year-old girl to be so far-thinking? That she has given Randal her shoe just out of fancy, is also possible, but still quite much of a coincidence to base such an important turning-point of the plot on.

Kind Kate, clever Kate: Katherine Sutton

Kate Sutton is in several ways a “typical” heroine of this type of story. Like Polly, Rois and Tiffany in later adaptations, she is somewhat set apart from other girls of her age. In Kate's case it is her physical clumsiness coupled with her sharp intellect which turns her into “the despair of Lady Sutton [her mother] at home in London” (2) and marks her as a girl who does not comply with her environment's standards for female behaviour and capacities (which are more or less perfectly embodied by Alicia – pretty, charming, docile, and good at needlework). Apart from her outsider status, Kate is, like the other girl heroines, a very active person, who, once her interest is aroused, sets her mind on learning the truth behind mysteries, considerably aided by her active mind and her courage and self-discipline. The three girls mentioned above also excel in some way – Polly through her capacity for imagining things, Rois through her sensitivity for truth, and Tiffany, very like Kate, through her cleverness and self-reliance. In one respect, however, Kate is different – her mind works in a rather scientific way and magic, while more or less natural to the other girls, is completely alien to her.

Clever but clumsy (both physically as well as socially) – this is how one might sum up the two extremes present in Kate. She is intelligent, curious, and assertive, likes to be in control of a situation and is sometimes refreshingly pragmatic, if a bit tactless. Behind her sharp-witted quick ways, however, sometimes helplessness and insecurity are revealed. Helplessness because being a girl she has no real power over her own fate. Insecurity because she lacks control over her own body, frequently tripping over her skirts and making a rather ungracious figure. One might even interpret her desire to get a firm intellectual grip on everything as a sort of compensation for her inability to get a grip on her own limbs. In the course of the novel, however, Kate develops – losing some of her edge and ungainliness and acquiring qualities that make her a socially much adept person. In the following paragraphs I would therefore like to

have a closer look at Kate's original characteristics in order to show how the plot development hinges on her characteristics and to point out her personal development.

Kate is undoubtedly a bright girl. Her father seems to approve of his daughter's intellectual potential to an unusual degree and this is probably why she is quite self-assured, sometimes even a little self-righteous. Kate is quite literally a 'down-to-earth' girl. She "had never liked being swept off her own feet and dangled helplessly, even as a game in the nursery" (54) and "had always detested being laughed at" (55) – descriptions which show her need for control and a certain sensitivity towards shameful exposure.¹³² She uses her intellectual faculties to make up for her defects in other areas, and is, deep inside, not nearly as self-assured as she appears. One passage illustrates her inferiority complex and also its causes very well:

Kate thought that [the voices] were coming from somewhere deep in her own body, and then that it was some other voice speaking – her mother's voice: "Go away, child: I can't bear the sight of you"; her old nurse's voice: "There, there, Mistress Katherine, we can't all be as pretty and loving as your sister"; even Alicia's voice crying sweetly: "O Kate, Kate I do wish you were like me! Truly I do." (244)

Driven into believing herself to be less valuable than her beautiful (even though terribly naïve and shallow) sister, Kate clings all the more to the areas where she excels, rational thought and intellect.¹³³ Her necessity for clear thinking makes what the fairies have done to Randal appear particularly cruel to her. It therefore terribly frightens her when the Lady attempts to give her a soothing drug: "she could not bear to have her mind taken away from her" (129). This and her pride – which is much hurt when the Lady remarks condescendingly "do you think *you* could live as we do?" (137) – help her to enter the fairy world with a clear mind and her desire for control over her own mind ultimately helps her to survive.

Another factor which probably increases Kate's desire for control is her practical helplessness with regard to regulating most aspects of her own life – more often than not she is "utterly without help" (219) and cannot prevent others from deciding over her own life or over that of people dear to her. Being female, under age and under special regulations from the queen, she is extremely dependent on her superiors, which often irks her very much and which maybe provokes her stubbornness and her curiosity all the more.

Kate is a rather inquisitive girl, who is convinced that she has a right to the truth. (That truth can be relative is something she learns only in the course of the story.) Her desire for certainty and control are aptly summed up already in the very beginning. On her journey to

¹³² In this she is similar to Polly in *Fire and Hemlock*, who has to overcome her fear of feeling silly in order to be truly heroic.

¹³³ It is interesting how the heroine of Lucy Sussex's *Deersnake*, yet another "Tam Lin"-adaptation, which is set in 1980s Australia, is also called Kate and also stands out because of her scientific mind, being the best science student in her class.

Elvenwood Hall, “one of her chief trials during the last six days had been the riding blind into completely strange country” (19), a statement that seems to foreshadow the rest of the story. For the journey, even though Kate cannot know this, will continue. And the fairies’ land is certainly one of the strangest ‘countries’ imaginable, in which, moreover, Kate will have to find much of her way blindly – either blindfolded or in darkness. To learn how to endure uncertainty is one of the many development processes Kate undergoes in the course of the novel but it is not an easy achievement because Kate’s curiosity and impatience are so strong.

She does for example not believe the stories about Cecily’s disappearance which she is told by Geoffrey, old Dorothy or the village people, nor does she believe Christopher, when he claims to have killed Cecily. She is rather keen on discovering the truth herself: “She longed to sit old Dorothy down on the nearest stool and ask her questions” (33) and when told by Sir Geoffrey to keep her nose out of his family business she remembers her father’s opinion about a certain proverb:

“Don’t meddle in what you can’t mend!” he would growl at her. “And how do you know it’s past mending? There’ll be time enough not to meddle after you’ve looked into the matter. At least you could try to satisfy your mind first”.(41)

Which is of course what Kate tries to do. So she questions Christopher: “What *did* happen?” (55). Having finally listened to his entire account, Kate is seen “groping among her scattered wits for one fragment of story that had puzzled her” (60): how can Master John know that there is a chasm under the well? Her question actually provides a valuable clue to the truth, namely that Master John is in fact an ally of the fairies and therefore knows about the caves in the hill and the underground river. However, she gets no answer. Christopher is too annoyed by her reaction because he has apparently expected a more empathic response to his tragic history. Kate may be logical and clever, but she is not exactly a sympathetic girl.

Her clear mind, however, makes her quite valuable when it comes to solving problems. Instead of being awed by the well she tries to find out how deep it is by pushing a shard of stone off the rim – which is almost an empiric approach, all she lacks are instruments to measure the time it takes the shard to hit the water.¹³⁴ Later she inquires about the holy water: “what did it taste like?” (61). A more credulous person may have asked: “Did you feel changed afterwards?” But Kate – the scientist in ovo – thinks that the well water “might actually be medicinal” (62) and is disappointed when it turns out to be “a pother of outlandish magical nonsense like

¹³⁴ In fact, the well is so deep that Kate never actually hears a sound. This may be an ironic hint at the fact that the truth, especially with regard to the fairies, is sometimes literally unfathomable and can not always be tackled with scientific methods.

something in a romance” (62).¹³⁵ In this passage ‘romance’, symbolising the irrational and unaccountable, is again used as a term of deprecation, one also symbolising emotional excesses.

Kate – the merchant’s granddaughter – does not like waste, neither of emotions, time nor food. Her affinity to food is something which she repeatedly (if unintentionally) uses to startle Christopher out of his gloomy musings. The pattern is established first when Kate is annoyed that Christopher contents himself with a diet of stale bread while living in the leper’s hut – and his response to this is: “I might have known that would be the first question you’d ask me” (87). He has obviously already assessed her and found her to be something of a materialist. Kate’s frankness, combined with her materialistic view of things, often lets her see things realistically, even if in stark metaphors – she compares Christopher with a “goose being fattened for Christmas” (173), which rather amuses him, and it is a similarly strange comparison which dissolves the enchantment laid on Christopher during the Halloween ceremony. Not the promise of love or hope for life on the manor do the trick in the end, but Kate’s outraged comment that he looks “like a piece of gilded gingerbread. Like those cakes they sell for Christmas” (246). In contrast to her other pleadings, this statement reaches Christopher and provokes the usual irritated answer: “nobody but *you* would think of such a-” (246) and the fact that he recognizes Kate eventually breaks the spell. Finally, the reaction of the fairies to the failure of their enterprise shows that Kate’s food metaphors have been surprisingly true, for the cry they utter on perceiving that the sacrifice is lost “sound[s] dreadfully like disappointed hunger” (246).

Kate is a pragmatist and rather proud to be one, and, true to her ancestors, she thinks very much like a merchant herself, in a cool, rational way. She also seems to believe implicitly that the whole world works according to the rules of trade. She is convinced that the fairies keep Cecily merely as a hostage to bargain with, to force Geoffrey to return to the old customs (99). She is therefore rather unhinged by the thought that maybe they think differently and might be keeping Cecily as a sacrificial victim.

Master John provides another instance of disillusionment. He presents himself to Kate as a rational, commercially thinking person and Kate feels much more at home with him than with the fairies. He may not be a really an honest trader but “he [is] at least a dishonest trader, not a heathen magician dealing in spells and charms and human sacrifice” (117). She can accept that Master John sees his dealings with the fairies merely as business transactions. He supplies them with provisions, is rewarded and does not care about his customers’ morals. He significantly

¹³⁵ That the water *is* actually medicinal after all, not by itself though, but when the fairies add their drugs to it and turn it into a sort of tranquilliser is another instance of Pope’s method of rationalising magic.

reminds Kate that her “own grandfather did the same every day of his life” (116).¹³⁶ She moreover thinks that Master John is predictable. However, as he calmly explains that she must be ‘disposed’ of and dishes up a revolting lie about her disappearance he intends to tell Sir Geoffrey, she is shocked: “Dishonest trading of this scope was something she had never met with before” (119). Throughout the book, Kate repeatedly meets with things she has never met with before – to recognise the limits of the trader’s worldview is only one of her realisations.

Kate changes throughout the book, she grows up, becoming more mature in body and mind – entering the caves as a petulant adolescent and emerging as a much calmer young woman. The correspondence to the initiation rites of certain primitive peoples (the initiate enters a cave and emerges a different person) is probably no accident. Kate’s development, however, could also be summed up as a harmonisation concerning body and mind, something which is not necessarily connected with entering into adulthood but might be experienced by persons of all ages. The basic plot-movement with regard to Kate seems to be a movement from imbalance to balance, also in a quite literal way. In the beginning, Kate is someone who embodies extremes: Her intellectual grasp on the world starkly contrasts with her lack of control over her own awkward body.

The learning-process she undergoes is a twofold one. On the one hand, she learns that her mind is not totally under her control – the claustrophobic attacks she suffers in the caves “batter her to pieces” (162) and she is completely helpless against them, which frightens her terribly. This and other experiences of loss of control in Fairyland paradoxically make her cling to her one free choice – not to take the soothing cup. She thus consciously chooses fear and pain, because it is the only choice left to her. Her loss of control, is, on the other hand, compensated by her gaining control in another area: instructed by Gwenhyfara, she learns how her clumsy body can be controlled much better than she knew before. By the end of the novel she will have learned how to fall and how to walk and will in consequence no longer trip over her own skirts as she did in the beginning – she has truly achieved a balance.

Her learning process is, however, not limited to her own person but also to her way of dealing with other people. She starts out believing that all problems can be solved in a rational, argumentative way. By the end of the novel, she does no longer completely rely on intellect and argument, she has, as one might call it, developed a sort of emotional intelligence, knows when to argue and when to be patient.

¹³⁶ Maybe this is not just an appeal to Kate’s business sense but also a reminder that she is middle class and can therefore not afford to be scrupulous?

Finally, her learning process also affects her world-view at large. In the beginning, Kate believes in an almost completely rationally explainable universe and denies the existence of magic and wonders. In the end she seems to have developed a sort of capacity for wonder and admits even the irrational. Firstly, in her environment: Of course most of the fairy magic in *The Perilous Gard* can be rationalised. However, Kate knows now that the fairies do exist and that they have (psychological) powers that cannot easily be accounted for. Secondly, in herself: Kate feels somehow sorry that the fairy folk are gone. She wonders about it herself but it seems to be a sign of her new wholeness, she is now a person who cares not only for the rational but has gained a more emotional side, which shows also when the fairy queen parts from her, bowing before her as before a queen as payment for the favour Kate promised to do her. Kate's reaction is startling – she starts to cry, which is a complete novelty: “Her mind seemed empty of everything but a confused sense of sorrow and pain, like the grief of a wound she would have to bear all her life” (275). And indeed her development has marked her for life, she bears a double-cross shaped scar in her palm, caused by the broken iron crucifix (268) – a symbol of the lasting effect of her experiences in the fairies' country.

“Ardua petit ardea”: Christopher Heron

Christopher Heron is also a developing character, he, however, undergoes a development in quite the opposite direction as Kate, it seems, out of a dream-world of high ideals and irrational self-punishment back to more solid ground. And even though his development is probably as crucial as Kate's, the reader knows much less about it, because the focus is on Kate's perceptions and thoughts and we only get a glimpse of Christopher through Kate's eyes. However, Christopher's tendency towards higher things is clearly painted and supported by the imagery connected with him: He is linked to birds (phoenix, heron) and once to a comet, things both airy and – in the latter case – fiery, which probably symbolizes his idealism but also his rather impulsive temper.¹³⁷

The phoenix-connection is established through the fairies' eating-bowls with their different designs. The designs provide Kate with the decisive clues as to the whereabouts of Christopher, because the hierarchy the fairies have imposed on their prisoners reveals that there must be a hidden one who is different from the rest (the hierarchic thinking of fairies thus constituting a weakness in their system). Christopher's bowl is decorated with phoenixes – noble

¹³⁷ In the context of the book, birds are also connected to the fairies – their lights at the Halloween procession appear like “a skein of birds flying” (234) and later they utter “high sharp screams like the mewing of seagulls” (246) but the function of this imagery is not quite clear. Maybe it is employed to set the scene for the phoenix imagery.

birds from Greek myth and not domestic animals as on the other bowls: “bird shapes falling and rising in and out of a circle of flames” (165). To anyone familiar with the phoenix myth the significance of this image is clear – Christopher is to be sacrificed but will rise again. As it is revealed a little later that sacrifice is practiced by burning the victim alive, the connection becomes even more obvious. Critics thinking this too plain should maybe keep in mind that it cannot be assumed that every intended reader of this young adult book is familiar with the phoenix myth. Pope does not assume familiarity and explicitly explains the image at the end: “why else did your poets make the tale of the phoenix, which among all the birds is the only divine, if not because it alone will plunge gloriously into a holy fire and burn its own mortality away to nothing?” (245) asks the Guardian.¹³⁸ This image, conveying the opportunity to make up for past sins and to achieve immortality through a great deed, is bound to appeal to Christopher, who would like nothing better than to atone for his imagined crimes by some heroic deed.

That the phoenix symbolises the ideal is furthermore confirmed when Kate feels some kind of power passing when the Guardian praises the bird: “it almost seemed to Kate that something had flashed past her, a golden splendour, forever beyond her reach” (246), which touches Kate, who does, in spite of all her pragmatism, have a sharp sense of her own imperfectness and can understand what this treatment must do to Christopher in whom a striving for the ideal is much more deeply ingrained.¹³⁹

The other connection between Christopher and birds in the book is established through his family name, Heron. There is a connection between the heron and a tendency to strive for higher things: “It is called heron, *ardea*, as if from *ardua*, meaning ‘high’, because of its capacity to fly high in the sky (...) Although the heron seeks its food in water, nevertheless it builds its nest in woodland, in tall trees, as the righteous man, whose sustenance is uncertain and transitory, places his hope in splendid and exalted things” (Aberdeen Bestiary), or, in other words: “*ardua petit ardea*”, i.e., the heron seeks high places (*ibid.*).¹⁴⁰ Which is fitting for someone as idealistic as Christopher. Moreover, it fits that, in medieval Christian iconography, “herons are considered melancholy birds. White ones symbolize innocence while ash-gray ones symbolize penance” (Tucker 1998) – and Christopher indeed takes the stance of the penitent at the beginning of the book.

¹³⁸ It is interesting that fairy people know this legend while they do not understand Christianity.

¹³⁹ Another instance where a connection between birds and the marvellous is established occurs rather early in the book – when Kate thinks about the remote past, when “miracles rose out of the wayside grass as easily as larks” (70).

¹⁴⁰ According to Sigrid and Lothar Dittrich (2004, 392) the heron is listed in Christian iconography as a symbol of the soul, a symbol of Christ (due to their white feathers which symbolise innocence and because they feed on snakes and toads which is taken to symbolise Christ’s victory over evil).

It is also very interesting to note that the two birds, heron and phoenix, might not be as unconnected as it first appears, for J.P. Clébert (1971, 205) observes: “The heron has perhaps given birth to the phoenix” (my translation).¹⁴¹ He quotes G. Jequier on the Egyptian origins of this connection (ibid.): “the phoenix, the marvelous bird, doubtless the most celebrated in ancient myths, is identified with the *bennou*, the holy heron of Heliopolis” (my translation).¹⁴² Both birds stand for renewal after death, which is something which also happens to Christopher, since his imprisonment in and return from the caves might be interpreted as a kind of symbolic death and rebirth, a symbolism which is also in keeping with the symbolic rebirth at the end of “Tam Lin”.

Apart from heron and phoenix, Christopher is once associated with a comet, a rather suitable association: high-flying, fiery and usually unstoppable on its way through the universe. In *The Perilous Gard*, however, the image is applied to some comic effect, since Christopher, though enthusiastic and energetic on hearing that Cecily might still be alive, does actually stop: “the comet paused for an instant in its burning flight through heaven” (96) – because Kate grabs his arm and alerts him to the folly of his planned undertakings. It is one of several instances which illustrate the compensational influence she has on him. Idealistic, courageous and sometimes overestimating his own powers – this protagonist is not as passive as some other Tam Lin figures (even though other male characters in the ballad adaptations are active in looking for rescue from their enslavement by the fairies, it has to be admitted). But Christopher is himself trying to rescue someone (Cecily) and only his conscious decision to let himself be exchanged for the little girl make him a victim of the fairies, he is thus not captured by accident as Tam Lin. In contrast to the ballad and most of the other retellings, however, he is willing to go through with the sacrifice, he does not advise Kate how to rescue him because he wants to make sure that Cecily remains safe – moreover, he does probably not know how he could be rescued.

Summing up

The Perilous Gard is a relatively simple and straightforward coming-of-age story with a teenaged heroine growing up through her encounter with the strange and maybe supernatural elfin people. The fact that this novel is intended for relatively young readers is supported also by the fact that some editions are illustrated. Also the fact that there is no sexual contact between Kate and Christopher is probably due to consideration for a young reading audience.

¹⁴¹ “Le heron a peut-etre a donné naissance au phénix.”

¹⁴² “Le phénix, l’oiseau fabuleux le plus célèbre sans doute des mythes antiques, a été identifié depuis longtemps avec le *bennou*, le heron sacré d’Heliopolis.”

It is the only book among the novels examined here that provides an almost complete, rational explanation for the fairies' existence. The fairies in *The Perilous Gard* have less power than those in other retellings, they are dependent on humans for protection and supplies. This robs them of much of their glamour but this presentation is probably suitable for a historical setting where belief in fairies was slowly being superseded by scepticism.

It is also interesting how this novel thematises the issue of truth and fiction, which will be found also in many later adaptations. The issue appears on the one hand because Kate finds out the 'truth' about the existence of the fairy people and also because she learns how cunningly they themselves deal with it – never lying but often telling truth in a distorted way. A further point first appearing in *The Perilous Gard* and later employed by other adaptations is the fairies' talent to manipulate their victims psychologically, making them feel inferior and thus inclined to fulfil the fairies' wishes, a trick that apparently they know in (almost) all later ballad adaptations, i.e., in Pratchett's two fairy novels, in *Winter Rose* and *Tam Lin* and also in the novel which is temporarily closest to Pope's: Diana Wynne Jones's *Fire and Hemlock*.

9. *Fire and Hemlock* (1984) by Diana Wynne Jones

The author

“I think I write the kind of books I do because the world suddenly went mad when I was five years old,” Diana Wynne Jones (1988) once said about her own work. A look at her biography might serve to elucidate this statement. Jones was born in 1934 in London. She and her two sisters were, as her parents were busy working as teachers, brought up largely by a group of nuns, a number of surrogate mothers and their grandparents in Wales. The quotation above refers to the fact that she and her sister were for the first time ‘dumped’ at their grandparents in 1939 as their parents wanted to protect her and her sister (the second sister being too young to be separated from her parents) from the threat of bombing and invasion by German troops. Having survived her chaotic childhood, Jones studied English at Oxford. She married in 1956 and has three sons. She has lived in Bristol ever since 1976. Her first novel, *Changeover*, a comic novel for adults, appeared in 1970, her first children’s book, *Wilkin’s Tooth*, was published in 1972. Up to now she has published about thirty novels – some of the most well-known being the *Chrestomanci* series and the *Dalemark* quartet – each one, as one biographical overview claims “an attempt to write that perfect children's book that she always wanted but never had” (H2G2; 2001) because her parents did not consider it necessary to buy children’s books for their daughters.

Jones is an author not widely recognised by literary critics but still more so than most of the other writers discussed here (excepting Terry Pratchett). Teya Rosenberg (2002, 8) lists about 10 books or articles that discuss or at least mention Jones’s novels. The MLA yields 22 hits, but many of those are articles from Rosenberg’s book-length study from 2002. Probably the most recent (and also one of the most comprehensive) pieces of criticism is Farah Mendlesohn’s study *Diana Wynne Jones: Children’s Literature and the Fantastic Tradition*, dating from 2005.

Fire and Hemlock, written for a young adult readership, but frequently read by adults, is often judged to be Jones’s best novel so far, being more complex and profound than many other of its genre, as its plot is “built on a series of shifting layers and surprising spirals” (Hixon 2002, 96). Brian Attebery is similarly full of praise for the novel: “This fantasy, so intricately constructed as to defy summary; so full of metafictional devices; so Proustian one might say, in its transformations of sequence, order, and duration – this novel was published for young readers” (1992, 64).

Diana Wynne Jones has of course been compared to J.K. Rowling in recent years, and she “herself thinks that J.K Rowling must have been influenced by her works” (Rosenberg 2002, 9). But, Rosenberg observes, while Rowling makes relatively straightforward use of genre conventions (such as those of the school or detective story) Jones “complicates and questions those conventions, creating less comfortable and more challenging variations” (ibid.). Apart from the school story and detective story, the Bildungsroman and the problem novel are some of the genres that shape *Fire and Hemlock*, since much of the plot is taken up by the story of how young Polly Whittaker learns to survive in a troubled home and to grow up to be different from her selfish parents (Yamakazi 2002, 113).

Plot summary

Fire and Hemlock narrates nine years in the life of Polly Whittaker, comprising the time between her tenth and nineteenth birthday. Polly lives in a town near London in the late 1970s or early 1980s. Much of this phase of Polly’s life is shaped by her parents’ divorce and her friendship with a musician named Thomas Lynn. Most of the story is told in retrospect: 19-year-old Polly is trying to remember her childhood. Her journey into the past is sparked off by a short-story Polly is reading about a man who changed his past and ended up with two sets of memory. Having finished the story, Polly has a feeling of deep uneasiness and finally discovers that she, too, seems to have two different pasts, one including Thomas Lynn, the other without him.¹⁴³ Polly now sets out to reconstruct how she met him and which events eventually led her to forget so completely about him. She remembers the following:

On Halloween nine years ago, Polly is playing in the neighbouring backyards with her friend Nina, and then accidentally intrudes upon a funeral ceremony at a villa called Hunsdon House, where she meets Thomas Lynn. Polly is rather uneasy about the people at the funeral, especially one woman, who turns out to be Tom’s ex-wife, Laurel Perry, and her fiancé, Morton Leroy, who both seem to be surrounded by a rather menacing air and behave rather threateningly towards him. However, Polly cannot quite make out what the conflict is about. Furthermore, Sebastian Leroy, Morton Leroy’s 14-year-old son tries to bully Polly but does not really succeed.

Tom at first takes Polly for a relation of the family and leads her into the garden, showing her two mysterious stone vases. Later, when the mistake is discovered, he takes her home to her grandmother after Polly has helped him to choose a couple of pictures from the house (he is

¹⁴³ Here, Lucy Sussex’s *Deersnake* (1994) shows a striking similarity to *Fire and Hemlock* since Kate, the female protagonist, has also, for some time, two sets of memories – one in which Martin, the boy kidnapped by the fairies, exists, and one in which he does not. Since *Deersnake* is of a later date than *Fire and Hemlock* it seems likely that Sussex was influenced by Jones.

entitled to them by the will of the deceased). Polly is given a photograph called “Fire and Hemlock” as a reward for her help.

Despite the misgivings of her grandmother, who is rather suspicious of Tom, a sort of pen-friendship develops between the girl and the much older Tom (who is probably in his mid-twenties at that time). Together they invent stories about being super-heroes and on the few occasions that Polly visits Tom these stories take on the uncanny habit of becoming true – in a distorted way. They have for example invented a second personality for Tom – a hard-ware store owner named Thomas Piper in a place called Stow-on-the-Water, who occasionally has to attend to super-hero duties. Later Polly and Tom discover that there is really a town by that name and in this town lives a shop-owner by the name of Thomas Piper, who even bears an uncanny resemblance to Tom. In addition they find Edna and Leslie, Thomas Piper’s wife and son, who had also featured in Polly’s and Tom’s stories, even though they had imagined them less likeable than they actually are (while Thomas Piper turns out less amiable than they had thought him to be).

Apart from these strange coincidences, Polly’s childhood passes in a rather uneventful way, with school, friends, hobbies, etc. Her life is, however, made difficult by her parents’ slow and painful divorce process, which is the reason why Polly lives with her grandmother for long periods of time. But the only really peculiar thing in Polly’s life seems to be her friendship with Thomas Lynn, made even stranger by the fact that the Leroy-Perry family is trying to prevent them seeing each other. Polly is even for some time shadowed by Mr Leroy and his son and eventually given a dire warning. Polly is quite frightened by Leroy’s threats but nevertheless the curious friendship persists, even though it consists largely of letters exchanged and books (mostly consisting of fairy-tales, myths and children’s classics) sent to Polly by Tom. From afar, Polly follows Tom’s career as a cellist, first with a large orchestra, later with a quartet he has founded together with his colleagues Ed, Sam and Ann. The more successful he becomes in his music, the less influence Laurel Perry and Morton Leroy seem to have over him, nevertheless their presence is always in the background. While Polly reaches puberty, she slowly develops a sort of infatuation for Tom, who seems not very happy about this and tries – as it seems to Polly – to keep her out of the more interesting parts of his life. Prompted by his rejection, Polly tries to find out his state of mind by spying on him. Not in a ‘normal’ way, however, but rather by using magic practices about which she suddenly seems to know without ever learning them. In a sort of vision she witnesses Tom in Laurel’s presence and after that only meets him once more: Sebastian (Seb) Leroy, who is trying to become her boyfriend, invites her to his parents’ house. Here, Laurel explains to Polly that Tom is dying of cancer and should be left alone to make his

few last months or years more bearable. Polly is shocked by this revelation and agrees to stop seeing him.

After this event, no more double memories occur, Polly forgets completely about Thomas Lynn. Remembering this, the almost-grown-up Polly realises that Tom is probably in danger, and her fear is made more acute by the fact that nobody seems to remember that somebody called Thomas Lynn once existed in her life. Eventually, Polly discovers that her flat-mate Fiona does recall Tom and assured by this she sets out to find out what is really going on. By questioning her grandmother, Polly learns that very probably Laurel Perry and Morton Leroy are the cause for Tom's disappearance, since they and their relatives are in fact not normal people but fairies. Laurel is a fairy queen who over the centuries takes young (musical) men to be her lovers and who later sacrifices them, probably to keep up the life-energy of her fairy consort, Morton Leroy. The human sacrifice takes place every nine years at Halloween and since this date is approaching fast and Polly knows who the next victim will be, she feels forced to act. Taking the ballad of "Tam Lin" as a directive, Polly finds Tom, accompanies him and his colleagues from the quartet to Laurel's house and tries to hold on to him and help him as he is made to fight a sort of supernatural duel with Morton Leroy. Eventually, after he had seemed close to losing, Tom wins the duel because Polly declares that she is giving him up. Defeated by this reverse logic, the fairies vanish and Tom and Polly are now left to try and find out what they really feel for each other.

Autobiographical influences

The descriptions of Polly's home are quite certainly informed by autobiographical influences and more so than all other novels discussed here. Jones is known for frequently drawing on incidents and characters from her own troubled childhood and making them part of her novels¹⁴⁴. *Fire and Hemlock* contains autobiographical fragments particularly in the portrayal of Polly's family, i.e., her parents Ivy and Reg and her grandmother. Nevertheless, here probably also intertextual influences are at work. The constellation "defective parents – lonely child" is one frequently found in fairy tales (e.g. "Hansel and Gretel", "Cinderella"). Admittedly, in *Fire and Hemlock*, Polly does not have to go alone into the woods or clean the house but she is treated like a grown-up by her mother – while her father would like her to stay little forever – and used as a substitute for the absent father: "Mum said this kind of thing to her that she would normally have said to Dad instead" (98). On one occasion she even goes out for food while her

¹⁴⁴ A more recent example is probably the awe-inspiring grandfather Gwyn in *The Merlin Conspiracy* (2003), who echoes Jones's own stern and impressive Welsh grandfather as described in her autobiography.

mother stays home in a mood of crisis, thus the traditional roles of adult and child are reversed. The only member of her family who treats Polly according to her true age – not as a grown-up but not as a baby either – is her grandmother. Certainly, the idea of an old woman or man as helper and protector of the child hero is also a common motif in fairy tale and children's literature, but nevertheless, Polly's small, energetic and deeply superstitious grandmother seems also to be modelled on real life, namely Jones's own grandmother, whom she here describes:

Granny was truly marvellous, five feet of Yorkshire common sense, love, and superstition. She was always saying wise things. I remember, among many sayings, when one time she had given me a particularly good present, she said, "No, it's not generous. Being generous is giving something that's entire hard to give." She was so superstitious that she kept a set of worthless china to break when she happened to break something good, on the grounds that breakages always came in threes and it was as well to get it over. I would have been lost without Granny, that I know. (Jones 1988)

Polly's parents seem to echo Jones's parents in so far as both are often too absorbed in their own affairs to care for their child. "Both of Polly's parents are far more immature than she is, and as Polly grows into adolescence and then young adulthood, she learns to see the truth about them and to move beyond their ability to hurt or control her," observes Martha Hixon (2002, 99). This issue of control and power in human relationships is at the core of much of Jones's work. In *Fire and Hemlock* it is also the central theme with regard to Tom and Laurel: Tom wants to escape Laurel's control and for this he – though plagued by scruples – tries to take control over Polly in order to make her work as a tool for his release. Polly herself tries to gain possession over Tom as a teenager and only later on, when she finally sees through this tangle of mutual attempts at possession is she able to free Tom and herself in an act of complete renunciation of all claims, a turnaround of the "Tam Lin"-formula of holding fast that will later turn up again in McKillip's *Winter Rose*.

World-system

In *Fire and Hemlock* there is no clear border between the non-magic everyday world of Britain in the early 1980s and the otherworld, instead, the fairies behave largely like normal British citizens. It is therefore not until the last chapters that it becomes fully clear that Laurel and her entourage are not merely rich, snobbish people but something like a modern day equivalent of the seelie court of fairies. They ride cars instead of horses (362), send their children off to college and had it not been for their strange and archaic rituals at Halloween, nobody might have noticed anything. Charles Butler (2002, 76) observes how

Jones never even mentions that Laurel and her entourage are fairies – and while this may be perfectly good sense for an author not wishing to put off streetwise teenage readers [who might think that fairies are winged cuties], it is also quite in keeping with the traditional propitiatory practice of referring to fairies by indirect epithets such as 'the good neighbours'.

The slow development and constant vagueness about the nature of things has variously been a reason for praise among readers and critics: *Fire and Hemlock* “is sufficiently ethereal. Even at the end, there is nothing to prove to an outsider that magic was at work, although the readers and the characters know what really happened” (Bratman, 1986). It is also the reason why Farah Mendlesohn categorizes *Fire and Hemlock* as a work of ‘liminal fantasy’, a class in her typology which is relatively close to Todorov’s pure fantastic. It might be interesting to trace the fantastic incidents throughout the novel: the story starts as Polly is leaving for college (Uwe Durst’s ‘R-system’) and it is stressed that she does not believe in magic and fantasy heroes any more. Nevertheless she has a strange suspicion that something is wrong with her memory when she starts reading a book that is different from what she remembers (probably here the novel enters the status of the non-system?).

Polly then remembers: during the funeral she and Tom watch an empty concrete pool fill with water suddenly – however, even as a small girl Polly thinks this might have been a trick of the light. Afterwards she helps Tom with the pictures and meets Laurel for the first time – and finds her eyes strangely lifeless but does not seem to wonder about this. When Tom takes Polly home further signs are the reaction of the cat (she flees from Tom) and Granny’s anger and her comment about the unsuitability of getting buried at Halloween. Soon after, Nina claims that she is being followed by a man and a boy. When the two girls confront the boy (Seb), he tells Polly that he is following her for stealing something from Laurel’s house. Polly is frightened but apparently never thinks of asking an adult for help or calling the police.

On their trip to the country, Tom and Polly discover that their story about Thomas Piper, Edna and Leslie is apparently true (though with some changes in details). Of course this might have been coincidence, but rather much of a coincidence, actually. Later on, Polly wants to climb over the wall of Hunsdon House and sees Mr. Leroy standing in the garden even though her granny had earlier claimed that the Leroy’s had gone away for some time. When, still some time later, she does enter the abandoned house (in winter) she hears and sees Leroy and Tom talking but sees no way they could have entered the house without her noticing. Has she had a vision? Polly learns afterwards that both men were in London at the time. She tries to forget the incident because it is so strange (160) – which seems her favourite strategy: just ignore the peculiar things that happen or somehow integrate them into her world-view. It is also startling that Polly can pick out the fantasy heroes from the poster of the British Symphony Orchestra, but this is maybe

not so strange after because Polly and Tom have talked about the characters and probably Tom has had his own friends in mind when making up the stories.¹⁴⁵

Furthermore, Polly is several times confronted and warned by Seb and Mr. Leroy, who also remarks that the opal pendant which she wears out of superstition (it has been given to her by Granny) will not help her (202). Help her against what? Polly never asks, but later it turns out that it has apparently been some kind of magical device that allowed the Leroy's to track her whereabouts and even her thoughts, so it has had quite the opposite function of what Polly apparently hoped it would have. Mr. Leroy also shows up when Polly is in Bristol (226) and Polly never really wonders how he got there so fast.

One of the most significantly strange incidences, however, is the monster built of pieces of rubbish which pursues Tom and Polly through Bristol and which none but them can actually see. Only when Tom eventually drives his car straight through it, it turns out to be his colleague Sam who is getting hurt by the car. Obviously, Mr. Leroy has tried to get rid of Polly by sending the monster, however, when she gets back home, Polly is feverish because she has contracted the flu, so her memories become blurred and the reader might wonder if she has not imagined it all – however, Tom has really overrun Sam with his car, this much is later confirmed by the other musicians.

Even more dangerous is an incident that occurs shortly before Polly forgets Tom: the musicians, Polly and Leslie meet at a fairground for a picnic to celebrate the quartet's success. Slightly drunk they then enter the so-called 'Castle of Horrors', a fairground attraction. However, Tom and Polly are separated from the rest of the group and suddenly a suit of armour positioned there to scare the guests attacks Polly in earnest and as Tom tries to help her, an iron portcullis falls on him, wounding him so much he has to be taken to hospital. When Polly later on tries to reconstruct the occurrences she sees that the wooden wall of the building which they had broken in their despair to escape is without blemish – here clearly supernatural forces are at work, but either the musicians are too preoccupied worrying about Tom to notice the strangeness of this or Ann (who is related to the Leroy's) has told them about Laurel and Leroy. However, Polly and Leslie actually do wonder how the strange accident happened and both are aware that something is definitely weird but they cannot make head nor tail of it. Polly asks Seb to tell her

¹⁴⁵ This is a kind of test: Tom and some colleagues from the BSO want to establish a quartet of their own. Tom has told them about the stories of heroes he has thought up with Polly and now he wants Polly to pick out the persons from the poster which she thinks are the four heroes from their stories. Polly points out exactly the three persons with whom Tom wants to found the quartet, even though she has never seen them in real life and does not know what they look like. Tom is now reassured that the quartet will be a success.

why his father is so apparently set on harming her but Seb will not say – instead he tells her to ask Tom in such a way that he cannot refuse and must answer.

Heeding Seb's advice, Polly then commits an act of what is clearly magic, travelling out of her body into a place where she finds both Tom and Laurel. Soon after Polly is introduced to Laurel again who then asks Polly to leave Tom in peace. Polly agrees and after that her memories of Tom end. I think at least from the fairground-accident (288) onwards it is clear that magic is involved – here Durst's marvellous reality-system has finally asserted itself. However, Polly only consciously admits this to herself much later, when she actually she actually travels to Nowhere – that is, to Fairyland.

In *Fire and Hemlock* Jones employs an extended play on words to encompass her idea of the different worlds that are fitted into one. The concept is embodied by the two stone vases that can be found in the garden of Hunsdon House – on each vase the word “nowhere” is engraved but if the two vases are spun round on their sockets and then viewed together from a certain angle, new combinations arise, such as “where now” or “now here”. Thus, in *Fire and Hemlock*, “now, here” refers to the ordinary “reality”, the world of 19-year-old Polly, who does no longer believe in stories and heroes: “The penalty of being grown up was that you saw things like this photograph [the fire and hemlock one] as they really were” (12). On the opposite is “Nowhere” – an other side of reality, a place where miracles are possible and stories come true – Jones's equivalent of the otherworld. Both words consist of the same letters, symbolising that they are just two sides of the same coin and only separated by a very thin line: “You slipped between Here and Now to the hidden Now and Here – as Laurel had once told another Tom, there was that bonny path in the middle – but you did not necessarily leave this world” (377), which is of course a reference to: “And see not ye that bonny road, / Which winds about the fernie brae? / That is the road to fair Elfland, / Where you and I this night maun gae” (“Thomas the Rhymer”, version A). In Pratchett's *Lords and Ladies* a similar idea of how people slip into Fairyland can be found: “and sometimes there's a shortcut... A place where *there* is very nearly *here*” (79).

That “nowhere” has a special significance, however, is not clear to Polly in the beginning of the book, when, in search of her lost memories, she complains how “there was nowhere to start from” (14). And, yes, indeed, Polly must start with Nowhere, namely the occurrences in the garden of Hunsdon House when she had first met Thomas Lynn, but of course in the beginning the reader does not know this. The same joke – but now the reader is let in on it – occurs sometime towards the end, when her mother Ivy asks Polly: “‘Where're you off to so fast?’ ‘Nowhere,’ Polly said without thinking” (313). Finally, Polly and the quartet take quite literally the ‘train to nowhere’, which brings them to Laurel's Halloween gathering. On the way they pass

a coast, only to arrive at Hunsdon House again, having gone in a kind of circle. Thomas Lynn remembers that nine years ago, the train ride to Hunsdon House took him through deserts and hills. Apparently, this is Jones's version of the marvellous journey from "Thomas the Rhymer". The idea that the journey leads round in a circle, however, cannot be found in the ballad, but is also part of *Winter Rose* ("from Lynn Hall to Lynn Hall" (138)). In "Thomas the Rhymer" the circularity consists in Thomas's return to earth, something mentioned in Kushner's *Thomas the Rhymer*, when Thomas passes through the miraculous orchard once again: "The road has come round to its beginning" (*Thomas the Rhymer*, 165). It is interesting how, while in Kushner's novel the circularity is read as a kind of fulfilment, i.e., in a positive way (the circle is closed, Thomas has served out his seven years and will be released), in the two other novels the interpretation is one of futility – one has come 'nowhere', has not escaped. And indeed, the worst is at that moment still in front of Polly (and Rois, respectively).

Throughout *Fire and Hemlock*, different anagrams of "nowhere" precede the different parts. The first is "New Hero" – Polly starts 'hero business'. The second is "Now Here" – this encompasses a time when Polly is very busy at school and with everyday reality, almost too busy to think of Thomas Lynn. In the third part, however, "Where Now", Polly has become a typical slightly disoriented and confused teenager. She begins to see Tom as more than a friend and realises that something is wrong. Finally, the fourth part is "Nowhere", with its climactic scene at the fairy court.

Intertextuality

Fire and Hemlock has been called "one of the most densely intertextual of [Jones's] works" (Yamakazi 2002, 108). The most easily discernible influences are "Thomas the Rhymer" and "Tam Lin" – quotations from them precede each chapter of the book and the ballads have, on the whole, a strong influence on the storyline. The relationship between the pieces of quotation and the content of the chapter that follows it, is, however, somewhat unpredictable – sometimes, the correspondence is relatively straight, such as for part 1, chapter 1, headed by "O I forbid you, maidens all, / That wear gold in your hair, / To come and go by Carterhaugh / For young Tam Lin is here". On returning from Hunsdon House (= Carterhaugh) fair-haired Polly is admonished by her grandmother to be careful of Thomas Lynn, though not because he is a potential rapist as Tam Lin is, rather because he has dealings with Laurel Perry. At other times the reference is cleverly twisted to suit the content of the chapter, such as for part 3, chapter 7: "Out then spoke her brother dear – / He meant to do her harm – / 'There grows a herb in

Carterhaugh...”. In “Tam Lin” this refers to Janet’s brother who advises her to seek herbs that will induce an abortion. In *Fire and Hemlock* this refers to Seb Leroy (not Polly’s brother, but at that time a sort of friend) who advises Polly to force Tom to speak to her: “If you really want to know, you have to ask him the right way – make it impossible for him *not* to answer somehow” (297). In consequence, Polly sets up a magic setting including hemlock (the ‘herb’) and spies on Tom, an act which will eventually allow Laurel to make Polly forget him completely. Seb has thus indeed managed to ‘do her harm’. In other chapters, however, the relation between the quote and the plot is very difficult to see or seems completely arbitrary.

Another influence which is openly referred to at one point in the book seems to be John Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale”: “Polly thought, for the next few days, in libraries, among friends, with a pen in her hand trying to write an essay on Keats. ‘As though of hemlock I had drunk,’ wrote Keats. Me too! Polly thought” (325). The eradication of memory mentioned by the poem (which continues “and lethe-wards had sunk”) that is ascribed to the drink of hemlock by Keats is something Polly indeed suffers from, too. However, even though the poem fits wonderfully in the context, it seems that the hemlock originally came into the novel via another pathway – the author claims that she herself owns a picture called “fire and hemlock” which resembles that in the novel (Jones 1989, 133).¹⁴⁶ What Jones has done, however, was to invest the motif of the picture with a potent symbolism. The hemlock, which during the final scene also surrounds the supernatural, life-sucking pool (the entrance to the underworld, so to speak) stands for death, cancellation, forgetting, numbness (and the unfeelingness of the elves). The fire, which Polly at first perceives as a danger, stands for light, life, passion but it probably also implies precariousness: the risk of the fire getting out of hand or dying down. Later on therefore it dawns on her that the (imagined) figures in the picture are not trying to put the fire out – on the contrary, they are trying to keep it going so they will not be left in the dark. That the opposition between the elves and the human heroes is symbolised by the opposition of fire (humans) and hemlock (elves) is further confirmed by the author – the heroes Polly and Tom make up are called “Tan Coul”, “Tan Thare”, “Tan Hanivar” and “Tan Audel” and Jones observes that “‘Tan’ has a double source. It is partly the Welsh word for fire, but it is also an adaptation of the medieval ‘Dan’ as in ‘Dan Chaucer’” (Jones 2001).

While the ballads provide inspiration for the plot, and Keats’s poem and the author’s picture gave the idea for the title, the novel’s formal structure, for instance, was influenced by T.S. Eliot’s *Four Quartets*: “What we call the beginning is often the end / And to make an end

¹⁴⁶ Maybe also the hemlock plants mentioned in Walter Scott’s version of “Tam Lin” have had a certain influence.

is to make a beginning. / The end is where we start from". This line from "Little Gidding" shaped Jones's idea for the end of the novel (Jones 1989, 140). The sentence could be read as a comment on the relationship between Polly and Thomas Lynn – for Polly has just claimed that she never wants to see him again, but, as far as the rather open end permits, it might be assumed that they will start anew after this 'end'.

In fact, the author claims that the *whole narrative* is spiral-shaped (ibid., 137), starting in the present, going back into the past, recounting the events up to the present and continuing from there until the end. "The end is where we start from" could furthermore be interpreted as suitable because a funeral at Halloween is what starts off the events and another (namely Thomas Lynn's) funeral would have been the end of events if Polly had not intervened. But apart from providing a motto for the book's structure, Eliot's *Four Quartets* seems to have influenced *Fire and Hemlock* in more than one way. Sometimes just single words and phrases seem to have inspired some detail in *Fire and Hemlock*, and even though Eliot's poems have quite a different scope concerning the metaphysical, it seems yet that Jones has used several core ideas of the poems, providing her own interpretation for Eliot's sometimes cryptic verse, to shape her own novel. For example the description of the garden of Hunsdon House seems to have been influenced by the poems and the scene where Tom and Polly walk out into the garden and have a sudden and fleeting vision of the garden pool being filled with water resembles a paragraph in "Burnt Norton".

Fire and Hemlock: The sun reached the dry pool. For just a flickering part of a second, some trick of light filled the pool deep with transparent water. The sun made bright, curved wrinkles on the bottom, and the leaves, Polly could have sworn, instead of rolling on the bottom were, just for an instant, floating, green and growing. (30)

"Burnt Norton":

So we moved, and they, in a formal pattern,
Along the empty alley, into the box circle,
To look down into the drained pool.
Dry the pool, dry concrete, brown edged,
And the pool was filled with water out of sunlight,
And the lotos rose, quietly, quietly,
The surface glittered out of heart of light,
And they were behind us, reflected in the pool.
Then a cloud passed, and the pool was empty.

And while in *Fire and Hemlock*, none of the fairy people are "behind" Polly and Tom, as are the ghostly entities in Eliot's poem, the fairies' presence in this act of magic is undeniable, even though Polly is not aware of it yet. Another part of the *Four Quartets* (also "Burnt Norton") that may have influenced *Fire and Hemlock* is for example: "Down the passage which we did not take/ Towards the door we never opened/ Into the rose-garden". Polly and Tom also walk out into the rose garden of Hunsdon House during their first meeting. However, when Polly consults

her ‘normal’ memories, no such thing has ever happened – she has never taken the passage. Another detail, where “Burnt Norton” might have provided inspiration is the unusual heat in the autumn garden during the final scene at the fairy court: “There they were, dignified, invisible, / Moving without pressure, over the dead leaves, / In the autumn heat, through the vibrant air” (Jones’s fairies are not invisible, but there might be a connection between Eliot’s dignified ghosts and Jones’s elegant fairies). Even the idea of the paper monster that chases Polly in Bristol could have been inspired by a line in the poem: “Men and bits of paper, whirled by the cold wind”. Also the idea of Polly and Nina hiding in the gardens during their chase seems to be echoed in “Burnt Norton”: “Go, said the bird, for the leaves were full of children, / Hidden excitedly, containing laughter”. Also the continuation of the stanza “Go, go, go, said the bird: human kind / Cannot bear very much reality. / Time past and time future / What might have been and what has been / Point to one end, which is always present,” could be reflected in *Fire and Hemlock*, namely in Polly’s initial denial of the idea that she might have had encounters with the supernatural (this denial of a fantastic ‘reality’ can also be found in *The Wee Free Men*, where only the child Tiffany has “first sight”, namely seeing what is really there and not just what people think should be there). Also larger concepts in Eliot’s poems might have inspired Jones. For instance in *Four Quartets* (here “Burnt Norton”) the idea of a “pattern” is of some importance “Only by the form, the pattern, / Can words or music reach/ The stillness”. Similarly, Polly has the feeling that for a work of art to be good, there has to be a “pattern”, as in the pantomime she participates in at school. Most important probably, however, is the use of paradoxes in the whole of the *Four Quartets*, which clearly hint at the strategy Polly has to follow if she wants to rescue Tom. She has to know without him telling her and pretend that she does not know. In order to free him from the fairies’ spell she has to give him up, she has to go “nowhere” to find him and will arrive at the place where she started from, only that now she knows it is a fairy court and not a human habitation (significant phrases are printed in italics):

In order to arrive there,
 To arrive where you are, to get from where you are not,
 You must go by a way wherein there is no ecstasy.
 In order to arrive at what you do not know
 You must go by a way which is the way of *ignorance*.
 In order to possess what you do not possess
 You must go by the way of *dispossession*.
 In order to arrive at what you are not
 You must go through the way in which you are not.
 And what you do not know is the only thing you know
 And what you own is what you do not own
 And where you are is *where you are not*. (“East Coker”)

This is the *use of memory*:
For liberation—not less of love but *expanding*
Of love beyond desire, and so liberation
From the future as well as the past. (“Burnt Norton”)

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time (“Little Gidding”)

Quick now, here, now, always—
A condition of complete simplicity
(*Costing not less than everything*) (“Little Gidding”)

And even the idea of the Here and Now changing into the mysterious Nowhere might have been at least partly inspired by the *Quartets*, for one phrase that is repeatedly found (in “Burnt Norton” and in “Little Gidding”) is “quick now, here, now, always”.

Apart from the rather subtle influence of the *Four Quartets*, the structure of the book is shaped explicitly by musical terminology – its five parts being sub-titled *allegro vivace*, *andante cantabile*, *allegro con fuoco*, *presto molto agitato* and *scherzando*. But, as has already been hinted at, the division of the book in parts, as Martha Hixon observes, takes place on more than one place:

First with a realistic, ordinary name (“Part One”, etc.); then a musical notation (*allegro vivace*, *andante cantabile*, *allegro con fuoco*, *presto molto agitato*, and the coda, *scherzando*); and then a name that reflects the imaginative, mythic layer of the novel (“New Hero”, “Now Here”, “Where Now” and “Nowhere”). The three-part naming is a hint at three dimensions of narrative that exist in *Fire and Hemlock*: the ordinary events of Polly’s childhood, the sphere of creative imagination, and the supernatural realm of myth and fairy tale. All three of these dimensions interconnect through the roles the characters play on these various levels – ordinary people, “superheroes” in a game of pretend that becomes real, and players in the Queen of Faery’s game of love and life.” (2002, 97)

The author herself points out many of the literary influences that shape the basic structure of all three narrative dimensions – among them Edmund Spenser, H.C. Andersen and Homer. She identifies her female hero, Polly, with “Gerda in *The Snow Queen*, Snow White, Britomart, St. George, Pierrot, Pandora, Andromeda, Janet and many more, in a sort of overlapping succession” (1989, 136), while Tom, the male protagonist, is “Kay kidnapped by the Snow Queen, the Knight of the Moon, Artegall, Bellerophon, Prometheus/Epimetheus, Harlequin, Perseus, Orpheus and of course, Tam Lin” (Jones 1989, 136). Moreover, the *Odyssey* is named as a big influence by the author, with Tom and Polly sharing the role of Odysseus between them and Laurel as Calypso. But since the “Tam Lin” influence is the most prominent one, it will form the focus of attention in this chapter, even though it would certainly also be interesting to trace the influence of the other sources throughout the novel.

Another source of influence for the plot structure (not mentioned above) are tales of the animal bridegroom type (related to L. Allen Paton's *conte mélusinien*), where the heroine breaks a prohibition of privacy and loses her beloved, as for instance in "East of the Sun and West of the Moon" (a Norwegian folk-tale, found by Polly in one of the books Tom has sent her).¹⁴⁷ Another tale of this type is "Cupid and Psyche" – and in her essay on *Fire and Hemlock*, Jones points out this influence and even manages to prove that Tom, the short-sighted cellist, has some crucial things in common with Cupid by asking: "who is mostly blind and goes to work with a bow?" (1989, 139).

The fairy court

That Hunsdon House, Laurel's home, is the meeting place of a fairy court is revealed rather late in the book. Polly's Granny knows what goes on in Hunsdon House and early on drops hints at the fairy nature of its inhabitants, but even those are not easily recognizable. To Granny, afraid of naming the fairies, the house itself is only "That house" and indeed, traditionally fairies are also referred to as "They" or "Them that's in it" (Briggs 1976, 393). This euphemistic practice appears also in many of the other novels of my corpus, e.g. in Kushner's *Thomas the Rhymer*, in *Lords and Ladies* and in *The Wee Free Men*. However, for a reader not specifically on the outlook for such clues, "That house" might simply be an expression of disdain for rich and snobbish neighbours – for that they are as well, as Granny knows: "Pots of money – rolling in it" (149), which of course is in keeping with the idea of the fairies being rich and traditionally owners of many pots of gold.

With regard to the subtlety with which the fairy motifs are woven into the story, Martha Hixon is of the same opinion as Charles Butler:

In fact, the ballad motifs and the supernatural nature of the Leroys are merely implicit during much of the novel. There are broad hints at this supernatural underlayer for the close reader, however. For example, in reprimanding young Polly for crashing the funeral, Granny sniffs, "What kind of respectable people choose to be buried at Halloween?" What kind indeed? Hunsdon House, it turns out, is the scene of a funeral every nine years at the time, and has been for generations, apparently, since Granny tells Polly that the mother of one of her senior citizen friends was the one to point out that every ninth time a woman is buried, while at every other time, a man. (...) The savvy reader, of course, realizes that this funeral is the reenactment of the ballad's fairy tithe to hell (...). (2002, 99)

To Polly, this becomes obvious only on page 378 of a book that has 392 pages in total: "There was suddenly not the least doubt that this was a Court, and Laurel was its Queen".

When looking around at the people gathered at her second Halloween in the park of Hunsdon House Polly observes several times that they are "elegant" (374). And they are not

¹⁴⁷ According to Thompson's study of folktale types this is the 'search for the lost husband', among which Cupid and Psyche is counted is tale type 425 (1955, 97-9).

merely elegantly dressed but get even “elegantly exited” (384) while witnessing the fight between Tom and Morton Leroy. Maybe this apparent lack of empathy during a duel to the death is another hint at their fairy nature, for fairies are often said to possess little or no feelings. Elegant, haughty and unsympathetic people they seem – Polly infers this also from the way the elves treat the musicians: “They were just hired servants too. Which, Polly thought, was what Tom had been all along to these people” (375) – like the musicians of folklore, abducted into Fairyland to entertain the court.

Even the few names of court-people revealed during the novel might be read as hints towards their non-human nature. Among the court ladies is a “Silvia Nuala Leroy Perry” (23). Silvia, deriving from Latin *silva* = ‘wood’ (*The Oxford Dictionary of English Christian Names* 1950, 257), could allude to a certain kinship to wood-nymphs. Nuala is not quite as clear. It is the short form of Fionn(gh)uala, a name from Irish mythology, meaning “white shoulder” from Irish *fionn* = ‘white, fair’ and *guala* = ‘shoulder’ (*The Oxford Dictionary of English Christian Names* 1950, 111) One hint at the supernatural, however, might be there: in Irish legend Fionnghuala was one of the four children of Lir (an Irish sea-god) who were transformed into swans for a period of 900 years. A more obvious allusion might be concealed in the name of “Robert Goodman Leroy Perry” (23) for Robert Goodman does indeed sound a bit like the Robin Goodfellow of folklore and this connection is confirmed by the author (Jones 2001).

As is common for fairies, the fairies in *Fire and Hemlock* live in a feudal system with strict hierarchies, Laurel and Morton being queen and king. One hint at their old-fashioned governmental system might be implied by the name of their court, Hunsdon House. Even though this might be seen as a modern-day version of “Huntly Bank”, where Thomas the Rhymer encounters the fairy queen, it is also, as the author herself points out a “very formal country dance” (Jones 2001), which is suitable for the stiff elegance displayed by the fairies.¹⁴⁸ Another detail that supports the idea of the Halloween party being a fairy court is the old-fashioned system of admittance to the occasion – the guests have to be at least half-blood Perry or Leroy to be allowed in. Two of the musicians (Ed and Sam) and Polly get in only because of Ann, the third musician from the quartet: “My mother was a Leroy, and she told me we had a right to invite three friends” (380).¹⁴⁹ Laurel concedes to investigate this and lets them stay – thus proving how strictly fairies are bound to rules and will obey them.

¹⁴⁸ It is also a fifteenth century manor house in Hertfordshire at some time used by Henry VIII.

¹⁴⁹ Never again is Ann’s connection to the fairies mentioned. What does her kinship to the fairy court reveal about Ann? Maybe it explains her calmness and understanding in the face of Tom’s situation. Ann seems also to be proof that in *Fire and Hemlock* the fairies interbreed with humans, as they do for instance also in *Winter Rose* and *Lords*

Considering that it is a fairy court which convenes at Hunsdon House, an incident much earlier in the book gains significance as well. On entering the first funeral gathering nine years before, Polly is offered a drink by a butler, takes it, but then forgets to drink it, because she is taken out of the room by Tom. Which is probably very fortunate because to accept the offer of food or drink in Fairyland usually proves fatal in folklore. That the drink might have been intended to affect Polly is implied later on, for Seb Leroy reprimands Polly for breaking the rules: “You didn’t eat and you didn’t drink, and you worked the Nowhere vases round first” (67).

There are other details that might obtain a deeper significance if looked at from a folklorist perspective. Charles Lynn, Tom’s elder brother (who has been one the fairy queen’s earlier conquests but escaped by ‘trading’ his younger brother for himself) hides in a small town pretending to be the owner of an ironmonger’s shop. This becomes significant when one knows that ‘cold iron’ is traditionally known to keep fairies away.¹⁵⁰

Maybe even the prelude to Polly’s gate-crashing, the chase through the gardens together with Nina, is revealing. For “they went on, quite unable to stop or go back, neither of them quite knowing why” (20) – they seem to be drawn by something like destiny or fate. Shortly after being found out as an intruder and walking out into the garden with Tom, Polly is also “feeling fated” (24). She probably feels this way because she is afraid of being told off for her misdemeanour, but the notion of fatedness with regard to Hunsdon House may have a deeper meaning. For the fairies have of old been the *Fatae* – and they will take quite an influence on Polly’s fate.

Ironically, Polly, who is due for her first encounter with the supernatural, is just at that moment in her game with Nina parading as “high priestesses doing human sacrifice”. They are quite ignorant that the hearse coming from Hunsdon House, which the children incorporate in their game (““Our corpse was in the hearse! Then what happens?” [said Nina.] ‘Um,’ said Polly: ‘We have to wait for the gods to answer our sacrifice. And – I know – while we wait, the police come after us for murder’” (19)) is really bearing the victim of an act of human sacrifice, namely Seb’s mother.¹⁵¹ With regard to the children’s costuming, one must, however, remember that it is

and Ladies. Ann seems to be a character endowed with special sensitivity, but in contrast to Laurel and her court she is not evil.

¹⁵⁰ Hixon contends that Charles Lynn alias Thomas Piper is just a figment of Polly’s and Tom’s imagination and does not exist at the start of the story but that “once created, Piper, Edna, and Leslie come to life and take part in the subsequent events, even seem to have always existed” (Hixon 2002, 100). I do not agree with this point because I think Charles and his family have existed before Polly and Tom invented Thomas Piper – without the photograph that Tom took with Charles’s camera as a boy Laurel would never have been able to get Tom, which I think, is proof that Charles and the others existed before Polly appeared on the scene.

¹⁵¹ It is probably Seb’s mother, at least Polly learns later that she died at that time. This would then make Seb’s mother the sacrificial victim of Laurel. However, Laurel claims that the dead woman was her mother (which is unlikely) but the reader never really learns the truth.

Halloween and at this time, as Ervin Beck observes, children dressing up as adults, even “super-adults – [namely] witches and ghosts” (1985, 26) are the rule. So Polly’s idea of dressing up as high-priestesses is made relatively plausible within the fictional universe. It seems like a further irony, however, that the event occurs at a time where the roles between children and adults in Polly’s family will become reversed anyhow due to her parent’s divorce, which makes her parents behave rather childishly and forces Polly to behave more maturely than would have been normal for her age.

The second game that Polly and Nina play, pretending to be fleeing from the police (because of their imagined human sacrifice) and running and crawling through foreign gardens seems to be another children’s game not uncommon at the time between Halloween and Guy Fawkes’ Day: “hedge-hopping and cat-walking (i.e. sneaking across walls or hedges in people’s gardens, sometimes moving on hands and knees) represent visitations that are unwelcomed and unannounced, sometimes even unperceived” (Beck 1985, 25). It is interesting that Beck observes that “[m]ost of the tricks could at this season be called ‘threshold tricks’, since they are located on the porches or at the doorways, windows, letter-boxes or knockers of houses involved in a kind of aborted visitation” (25). So the children playing with the liminal and acting as tricksters cross the threshold into the world of the liminal people, whose visitations of human houses are part of many fairy stories – so a kind of reversal has taken place.

At the end of the book, all people except the quartet, Polly and Leslie (Tom’s nephew who had been lured to Hunsdon House by Laurel) suddenly vanish. Jones explains their disappearance like that: “The other people disappeared at the end when the car knocked over the rose bushes because they were immortals too and they were, for the moment, defeated” (Jones 2001). It seems they have given up their pretence of relative normalcy for once and made a speedy exit by supernatural means.

The queen

Most important among the court is of course Laurel, who is a prototypical fairy queen, powerful and attractive but also cold and cruel. She is intertextually connected with various fairy queen figures from literature, the most important being of course the fairy queens from “Thomas the Rhymer” and “Tam Lin”, but there are echoes of other fairy-women from folklore and literature. Jones herself points out that the situation at the beginning of the book resembles the beginning of the *Odyssey* and Tom is cast in the role of Odysseus, whom “we find disentangling himself from Calypso, a possessive supernatural woman, by telling the story” (135). In *Fire and*

Hemlock Polly is the narrator but otherwise the statement makes sense: Tom is indeed trying to disentangle himself from Laurel and the telling of the story is necessary for Polly to work out what has happened and to come to Tom's rescue. And while in the *Odyssey* Odysseus has to pass through the underworld before he can return home, in *Fire and Hemlock* a parallel might be found in so far as Polly has to lose and give up, which could be read as Tom's symbolical death since she has to pretend that Tom is as good as dead to her, before she can finally win.

But many more stories are woven into the structure of *Fire and Hemlock* – Laurel's many names as they are revealed by the lawyer during the funeral give more hints towards her identities. "Mabel Tatiana Leroy Perry" (23) is supposedly Laurel's mother but actually probably just one of her incarnations. Her surname, "Perry" appears common at first and an etymological search produces the result that this name has something to do with pears, however, from a phonological point of view, "Perry recalls 'peri' a beautiful spirit or fairy in several Eastern mythologies" (*Diana Wynne Jones wiki*, 2005).

Tatiana, it is true, does not show any connections to elves at first glance, being derived from the Roman family name *Tatius* (Kohlheim 2007, 390), but it can also be read as an anagram of *Titania* – Shakespeare's fairy queen from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Similarly, Mabel might be a reference to Mab, another Shakespearean fairy queen. Especially the fact that the name turns up again, namely in "Eudora Mabel Lorelei Perry Lynn" (23) (which is Laurel's full name) should make one suspicious. Ironically, if looked at from an etymological point of view, *Mabel* is a short form of Annabel which derives from Latin *amabilis* which means "lovable" (Kohlheim 2007, 277) – which Laurel obviously is not, as Polly perceives quite early in the book: "Laurel was a real bully for all that her voice was so sweet" (40). But of course Laurel manages to make herself appear lovable to young men – e.g. Tom and Leslie – apparently a result of her fairy glamour. The two other names are revealing as well – *Eudora* meaning 'good gift' from Greek *eu* and *doron* (*A Dictionary of First Names* 2006², 94), which seems extremely ironical since Laurel indeed hands out a 'good gift' to Thomas: Like the heroes of "Thomas of Erceldoune" and *Thomas the Rhymer*, Thomas Lynn becomes 'True Thomas'. But while the Thomas of the romance becomes a seer, and in Kushner's version he cannot lie any more, here the interpretation is slightly different. Every story that Thomas Lynn consciously invents (mostly with Polly's help) becomes real and turns against him: "the gift had been given with a twist. Anything he made up would prove to be true and then come back and hit him" (354).¹⁵² But he

¹⁵² Reading the ballads "Tam Lin" and "Thomas the Rhymer", Polly thinks about how "downright embarrassing" (353) such a gift could be – as it is indeed described in Kushner's *Thomas*. In regard to Kushner's novel it is

cannot be killed, no matter what dangers he goes through – “his life is sacrosanct up to this [= up to Halloween]” (380) – since he is needed for the sacrifice.

Laurel’s most obvious name, however, is certainly the “Lorelei”, which is derived from a Germanic name meaning “luring (slate) rock”.¹⁵³ This is of course connected to the German Lorelei – a kind of siren sitting on a rock luring sailors on the Rhine to their deaths – made famous by German Romantic literature, e.g. by Clemens Brentano and Heinrich Heine (cf. chapter four). In this context it is quite fitting that Polly and Tom should find among the pictures at Hunsdon House one of “a mermaid carrying a dead-looking man underwater. ‘It’s awful,’ [Polly] said. ‘They’ve got silly faces. And the man’s body is too long” (38). The picture might echo Laurel luring Tom towards destruction – even Polly’s remark about the man’s too-long body is maybe not pure coincidence, for, at least in Polly’s eyes, Tom is also a bit disproportionate. She thinks of him as something “like a tall tortoise” (27) and an “ostrich”, since from her child-perspective he appears extremely long and tall.

“Laurel”, finally, is apparently used as a short form of Lorelei in the context of the novel, but has of course a meaning of its own, referring to a plant, the evergreen laurel-bush – which is as evergreen as Laurel is immortal. Moreover, “laurel also symbolises triumph” (Jones 2001) and Laurel is indeed used to triumphing over humankind.¹⁵⁴ And of course also the garden of Hunsdon House, Laurel’s house, contains “laurel bushes overhanging the drive” (149). It is interesting that there might be even a sort of connection to Lorenzo, the horse that Tom acquires seemingly by accident. *Lorenzo* derives from the Roman by-name (cognomen) *Laurentius*, meaning “of Laurentum”, a city in ancient Italy, its name probably deriving from Latin *laurus*, meaning “laurel” (Kohlheim 2007, 260). The link between Laurel and Lorenzo would make sense, since Lorenzo is one of Laurel’s gifts to Tom conveyed to him by means of one of the pictures (there is a “Chinese picture” (38) of a horse among them) he had inherited. Lorenzo is also another feature that links Laurel to the fairy queen of “Thomas the Rhymer”. The fairy lady there comes riding a splendid horse, hung with silver bells. Moreover, the chapter where Lorenzo appears for the first time is preceded by a quotation from “Tam Lin”: “The steed that my true-love rides on / Is swifter than the wind; / With silver he is shod before; / With burning gold

interesting that the queen of fairies, mistress of deception herself, should force her servant to be absolutely truthful and unable to deceive. Maybe it is an expression of a weird sense of humour that seems typical also for Laurel?

¹⁵³ While *lei* is an obsolete German word for “slate rock” (Duden 1978, 1655), *lore* is derived from Middle High German *lûre* meaning ambush or look-out (Müller 1990, 1054).

¹⁵⁴ It is interesting what the author remarks with regard to Polly’s mother Ivy and the plant ivy: it is evergreen as laurel but moreover a clinging vine and as the ivy clings to walls, so Ivy clings to the men she hopes to find happiness with (Jones 1989, 137). In European folklore the ivy in general is connected to disaster and death (probably because it often grows in graveyards) and it was thought unlucky to bring ivy into the house (Bächtold-Stäubli 1987, 559).

behind” (72). And finally, Laurel seems to have retained a penchant for riding, at least Tom claims: “Laurel taught me about horses” (88), which is one of the early clues to Laurel’s true identity as the fairy queen from the ballads but one that is easily overlooked, since it fits with the upper class cliché. Laurel and her lot blend in very easily with the ‘normal people’, but in fact not only her names but also her appearance sometimes gives her away.

Laurel is connected to fairies through her preference for the colour green, wearing “a green, gauzy dress” (106) or a green gown (374). Polly herself is considering to wear a green top to the picnic before the fair but rejects it “on superstitious grounds” (277). As discussed in chapter two, green is regarded as a typical fairy colour and people wearing it risk arousing the jealousy of the fairies. Tom, however, does wear a green shirt to the picnic (279), which either marks him as one of Laurel’s men (even though this occurs at a time when he is well on the way out of her grasp) or indicates that he does not care for superstitions. Like the fairy queens of medieval romance Laurel is described as a woman of great, if somehow oscillating, beauty, appearing one time as a mature woman – “plump and quite pretty” (38), while on an other occasion Polly perceives that “with her pearly-pale face, big eyes and dark eyebrows in the clouded pale hair, she was quite staggering. She looked young and slender too. She could have been the same age as Nina” (273), that is, about 19. Laurel can apparently alter her appearance (and age) at will.¹⁵⁵ And she uses her looks to manipulate people: “Seb was leaning over Laurel, being very attentive. Laurel was obviously the kind of person who needed attentiveness” (273). She is, however, given away by the strangeness of her eyes, eyes that at one time easily hypnotise Polly (343): “They were as light as Laurel’s hair, but with black rings in the lightness, which made them almost seem like a tunnel Polly was looking down. They had no more feeling than a tunnel, either, in spite of the sweet look on Laurel’s face” (39). As mentioned in earlier chapters, the lack of feeling is typical for the fairies.

Laurel is also something of a Snow-queen, her coldness exemplified by her voice – “all little angry tinkles, like ice cubes in a drink” (40). At another occasion it sounds “like a little icy needle” (344) – and Jones, as mentioned earlier, has indeed compared Tom to “Kay kidnapped by the Snow Queen” (Jones 1989, 136), the latter being Laurel, of course. With regard to colour-symbolism it is interesting that Laurel’s hair is described as quite devoid of colour – “her hair was rather strange, light and floating, of a colour that could have been grey or no colour at all” (38). Maybe the colourless hair is a sign for her otherworldly coldness – as it is for Christabel

¹⁵⁵ Polly is, in this respect, however, a rather unreliable narrator, since her way of perceiving people changes as she gets older. So she thinks of Tom at first as ostrich-like while later she finds him rather attractive. Nevertheless it is probable that Laurel really changes, while in respect to Tom merely Polly’s perspective has changed.

LaMotte in A.S. Byatt's *Possession*, who has hair of a light-blonde, even greenish colour. Another novel, where greenish-blonde hair is a sign of a connection to the supernatural is Isabel Allende's *House of Spirits*, where the otherworldly Rosa is distinguished by her greenish hair. Christabel LaMotte is thought strange by her family because of her sometimes cool and forbidding appearance – but in contrast to Laurel, who only appears sweet, she is capable of real extremely hot, human emotions, while Laurel remains fixed on her “chilly logic” (392), a fact that in the end will bring about her downfall. Like other fairies, Laurel is scrupulous about keeping to agreements. But on the other hand she tends to bend truth to suit her – for instance the gift of speaking true that she bestows on Tom is, according to the author herself, the mark of a certain type of woman “who confuses fact and fiction impartially for her own ends” (1989, 136). This is of course another aspect that makes Ivy very similar to Laurel, since she, too is a master of distorting the truth, e.g. accusing Polly of being a bad influence on her lover David Bragge. However, it is only by using the same weapons as Laurel, i.e., bending words and meanings, that Polly and Tom finally manage to defeat her.

Before being able to exert her power at all, however, Laurel needs a human to agree to her somehow for she “worked by admissions, one way or another” (367). This is also close to folklore, where fairies (and vampires) have to be invited before they can enter a household (one example from literature would be Samuel Taylor Coleridge's “Christabel”, where the mysterious Geraldine (a demon, a witch, a vampire, it never becomes quite clear what she is) can only enter the household she finally ruins by being carried over the threshold). In Tom's case the photograph of fire and hemlock he took without permission at Hunsdon House made it possible for Laurel to take him (378-9). In Polly's case it is her attempt to spy on Tom which makes her vulnerable to Laurel, who then bullies her into agreeing that she will forget Tom (348). Polly has violated a privacy-taboo, her curiosity has led her to make the terrible mistake that is a motif in many folktales and stories, such as “East of the Sun and West of the Moon”, and “Cupid and Psyche”. But while in those tales the beloved one disappears physically, in *Fire and Hemlock* Tom is not just gone but even completely wiped from Polly's memory. At least until she rediscovers her second set of memories. Ironically, this discovery is set off by a book of science fiction stories, whose editor is a certain “L. Perry” (12), who can be none other but Laurel herself. This seems to be a joke on Polly, for like many fairies in folklore “Laurel had quite a sense of humour” (349) – and, in keeping with the traditional fairy-image it is a mischievous, teasing humour. Similarly, Kushner's fairy queen likes to tease Thomas, while the fairy queen in *Winter Rose* displays a much crueller humour, and the fairy queen from *Tam Lin* is oscillating between a certain dirty humour and the appearance of total humourlessness (contrasting them,

however, the fairy queen's of *Lords and Ladies* and *The Wee Free Men* have no sense of humour at all). Curiously enough, Laurel's book helps Polly to get Tom back. What does this signify? Does Laurel make mistakes, after all? Or does she feel so sure of Tom that she thinks she can afford to make jokes? Maybe this is the only fitting explanation since later on Laurel also accepts the risk of losing Tom by letting him fight with Morton Leroy. And apparently, Laurel has miscalculated there for once, for she does indeed lose him, but this is the exception, not the rule – before Tom, many other young men have been ensnared by Laurel, as Polly realizes looking at the picture gallery in Laurel's bedroom: “She likes them young, she likes them handsome, and musical, if she can get them” (355). In this, Laurel is quite like the fairy queens from folklore and romance. Polly's own grandfather, also a musician, had been taken by Laurel many years ago, as she discovers later on. But it is not just amusement that Laurel needs all those young men for. Every nine years a male corpse comes down from Hunsdon house – and here lies the answer to Polly's question “what Laurel really needed the young men for” (355) – they are human sacrifices, killed for the sake of Morton Leroy, Laurel's husband, the fairy queen's consort.

The king and the teind

Leroy's name clearly indicates his position: Leroy is derived from French *le roi*. Morton, on the other hand, (though literally meaning ‘settlement by/on a moor’ (Kohlheim 2007, 306)) might allude to French *morte*. “Kings Killed at the End of a Fixed term” (216) – one of the chapters in *The Golden Bow*, which is a part of Polly's ‘reading load’ fixed on her by Thomas Lynn, provides a hint to Leroy's true nature. Apart from Laurel, he is the other figure strongly connected with the theme of fate. His laughter disquiets Polly because she thinks “of it as a fatal laugh, the way you think about a bad cough” (36), and it is again mentioned at the very end: “his loud, fatal laugh” (385). Maybe this fatal laugh is also a hint that Leroy is the king who is fated to die if he does not get human sacrifices at regular intervals. However, it is interesting how Jones mixes two narrative traditions here: stories about the king who is killed at the end of his term unless there is a human sacrificial victim to stand in for him and stories about the so-called ‘teind (tithe) to hell’ that the fairies of Anglo-Scottish tradition have to pay every seven years on Halloween or Hallowday to appease the devil because as fallen angels they are in a precarious position between heaven and hell (for the folkloristic background of this belief see chapters two and five).¹⁵⁶ In *Fire and Hemlock* the fairies do not pay the devil, they need the human sacrifice

¹⁵⁶ In *Fire and Hemlock* the interval between the payments is longer: nine years for male sacrificial victims and or 81 years for female sacrificial victims. It is not explained why this is so. Maybe the author wanted to provide more time for her heroine to grow up?

for themselves – which probably makes them all the scarier. As Polly realizes that Thomas Lynn is going to be used for the sacrifice, she develops feverish activities and in the end, due to her intervention, the ending of *Fire and Hemlock* differs from both the ballads and the romance. Polly uses “Tam Lin” as a sort of guide to find Thomas Lynn – waiting at Miles Cross at midnight and interpreting the clues to his whereabouts in a modern way – instead of on a white horse he arrives in a white car. Like Janet, Polly tries to hold on to him no matter what happens in order to save him and thus manages to get into the fairy gathering at Hunsdon House. But Jones departs from the ballad. For instance Polly tries to argue with Laurel, claiming that Morton Leroy has broken Laurel’s rules by trying to kill Polly, and so Polly claims that he has forfeited the right to Tom’s life. Since fairies are strictly bound to rules, Laurel therefore offers Tom a chance – he has to fight a duel with Morton Leroy. But, as Laurel is not somebody to take real risks, the rules of this battle become obvious only gradually to the opponents – to win, the player has to lose everything. Since Leroy is weak already and Tom comparatively strong and willing to use what assistance he can get, Laurel probably reckons that Tom will lose the fight: “Mr. Leroy cried out, ‘Laurel! I’ve no strength!’ and Ann added, ‘But Tom has. That’s the catch, isn’t it?’” (382). Tom tries to summon what help he can – his music (symbolised by his cello), the strength he gathered to break away from Laurel (symbolised by the horse) and finally Polly. All those efforts only serve to make Mr. Leroy stronger. Thus, Polly realises, the solution must be something else and finally it dawns on her that Laurel’s logic is shaped by paradoxes: to help Tom, Polly must renounce him, to win, he must lose everything. The queen of fairies, for whom control and possession of others is so important, can only be vanquished by someone like Polly, who (and this seems what her socialisation process has prepared her for) is willing to give up all control over and claims to another human being (here lies one of the biggest similarities of this novel to McKillip’s *Winter Rose*). It could also be read as a sort of love test, the ultimate proof being to love someone so much that one is willing to give that person up, thus probably reaching the “love beyond desire” mentioned in “Little Gidding”. Polly does so and thus proves the opposite of Ivy, who is always clinging to her idea of ‘happiness’. With regard to Thomas, the idea of losing all also encloses idea of a new beginning, which again *is* part of “Tam Lin”. Tam Lin in the end finds himself naked in a ditch of water (relatively easily recognisable birth and baptism symbolism) and Janet covers (and thus reclaims) him with her mantle. Similarly, Thomas Lynn comes to his senses sitting dripping wet (though fully clothed – this is after all a children’s book) on the edge of the garden pool. Contrary to the ballad, however, Polly has to “go on meaning it” (391) – i.e., that she really never wants to see him again, in order for the rescue to work, it seems. As mentioned before, the end of *Fire and Hemlock* is somewhat open.

Apparently, Tom has indeed escaped from the danger of being sacrificed. However, it is not clear how his relationship to Polly will work out:

They have yet to discover whether either of them actually still exists outside of Laurel's world. And how much of who the person that either one of them believes they are is real. (...) Polly and Thomas each have to move beyond living in Laurel's shadow, by her laws and dependent upon her gifts [= Tom could not be killed no matter what risk he took and Polly had the gift of knowing things intuitively]. They have not ever done so. It is a valid question to ask whether either of them is ultimately able to survive in Here Now, let alone thrive and prosper. In fact, they have a task of truly heroic proportions set ahead of them. (Odell 2002)

Moreover, with regard to Laurel, it is left to the reader to decide if this is a final victory or not. For instance, what is one to make of Leslie's reaction? The boy "had been crying his eyes out" (392) – but for whom? Because Laurel might have died? Or rather because he has been rejected by her? There is no evidence that, although the circle might have been broken once, Laurel has really been defeated. The author confirms that "she didn't die" (Jones 2001) (in contrast to Mr. Leroy, who dies in the duel and will be replaced by Seb) and she will go on capturing young men. As Martha Hixon assumes: "It is just one chapter in a very old story, one that has perhaps been changed in this particular case by the actions of Polly and Tom but not ended" (2002, 99). For, like many fairies of tradition who are either immortal or at least extremely long-lived, Laurel is apparently immortal, even though this is revealed rather late in the book – probably in keeping with the slow disclosure of the magical nature of the inhabitants of Hunsdon House. Once referred to as "the undying Laurel" (344), according to Polly, she "takes a new life every 81 years" (355), for which she needs a human sacrifice, so every 81 years a female corpse is carried down from Hunsdon house.¹⁵⁷ When Polly gatecrashes the funeral, the dead woman is apparently Seb's mother, as Polly learns many years later (347). There is, however, something peculiar about this, because Polly thinks that the woman was "Seb's mother – supposedly Laurel's mother, who is of course the same person as Laurel" (355) but with Laurel pretending that "the dead woman is her mother so that she can inherit from herself" (355). This makes sense only if it is really the corpse of Seb's mother in the coffin. Laurel can then pretend that her mother has died in order to cover up the murder. However, the passage about Laurel inheriting from herself has always left me puzzled. The will that is read at the beginning of the novel is supposedly that of Laurel's mother – but why pretend to the fairy court that this is so when they probably all know that it was Seb's mother who has died? This is something never really cleared up in the novel.

¹⁵⁷ Yamakazi thinks that all the human sacrifices are for Laurel's sake: "She demands lives, a young man's every nine years and a woman's every eighty-one, to maintain her power, youth, beauty" (2002, 113). I think this is not quite correct, since at least the young men are seem quite clearly intended as sacrifices to maintain the life of Morton Leroy.

With regard to the human sacrifices at Hunsdon House and their use, further questions remain, for example with regard to the future of Sebastian Leroy. He vanishes at the end with the rest of the fairy court and it is never revealed what becomes of him. Polly once reads a chapter in the *Golden Bough* about “the Sacrifice of the King’s son” (233), which might hint at Seb being made the sacrifice instead of Mr. Lynn. It seems that Seb fears something like that when he urges Polly to understand why he has tried to keep her from rescuing Thomas Lynn: “it was between him and me” (375). But since Mr. Leroy might lose the duel, Polly, thinks that (in this case) his job will rather be to replace Morton Leroy as the fairy queen’s consort, at least this might be inferred from her remark: “It won’t kill you. Literally” (382). The fact that Seb, when Laurel calls to him (“I shall need you if Morton loses” (381)), looks utterly frightened, is a bit strange – shouldn’t he be relieved that he will at least not be sacrificed? However that may be, Seb, too has only been a pawn in Laurel’s game, and indeed, here too, the name is revealing, for “Sebastian’s name, which recalls the martyred St. Sebastian, suggests his suffering. Seb is perhaps the most extreme example of the exploited and sacrificed child who appears so often in DWJ’s books” (*Diana Wynne Jones wiki* 2005). In this, he is not much better off than the young men captured by Laurel – he will probably survive but he is not his own, ultimately he seems to be just one of Laurel’s possessions. And this is what much of *Fire and Hemlock* is all about, like many other of Jones’s works: “at the center of every story lies the issue of power” (Rosenberg 2002, 6). In *Fire and Hemlock* it is the power to possess and control another human being that is at the centre of the narrative – the book is densely peopled with possessive people.

Possessiveness

First of all, there is Ivy, who “believes that to love is to share everything with each other and blames her partner if he tries to keep any single thing to himself” (Yamakazi 2002, 112). According to the author, Ivy’s name was not chosen without consideration, for ivy, the plant, is “evergreen and clinging” (Jones 1998, 137), and in fact, in her possessiveness Polly’s mother is not unlike Laurel, to whom she is connected by her ‘green’ name and one of Ivy’s lovers even complains: “The woman’s a vampire” (182).

Laurel, of course, is the one who drives possessiveness to its extreme: “She claims to own Tom, in spite of their divorce and his financial independence tries to dominate every aspect of his life, waiting to make him literally a part of herself” (Yamakazi 2002, 114) (behind this statement stands of course the assumption that Laurel will sacrifice Tom for her own sake, not for Morton Leroy, which I think is not correct). Polly perceives this relatively early in the book:

“As if they owned him! Polly thought. They don’t. They can’t. Nobody owns anyone like that!” (157). But she is mistaken, and she is probably also not aware at that time that she herself will show egoistic tendencies that make her appear no better than the two older women. For she commits an act of black magic in order to force Tom to explain what kind of relationship he has with Laurel: “it was not love but possessiveness that motivated her” (Yamakazi 2002, 114) – and she even feels a sort of gleeful excitement while doing so.

But Tom is not free from blame himself – although he may have tried to do it without endangering Polly, and although his motive – trying to save his life – has been justifiable, he has used Polly all the time for his own purposes without her being aware of it, just as does Seb, when he manages to get hold of Polly after she has agreed to forget Tom. However, both men have been prompted to act as they do because they were fearing for their lives, and would probably not have tried to manipulate Polly if Laurel hadn’t gotten control of their lives first.

The unheroic hero: Polly Whittaker

In contrast to most of the other girl-heroines in the novels discussed in this study, Polly is not really an outsider, she has many friends and pursues various hobbies (such as sports, theatre, school choir – though, in contrast to Thomas Lynn, however, Polly is not very musically gifted, but she tries out several instruments and likes listening to music). In spite of her seeming normality, Polly is nevertheless made special by her family circumstances – she comes from a “broken home” (149), which affects her probably more than she herself thinks, makes her e.g. sensitive to the issue of people wanting to control the lives of others. One could even say that Polly is abused by her parents. Her father once uses her for getting back into his old house, pretending to collect her from school but knowing full well that Polly has her own key to her mother’s house and will certainly not object to him coming into the house with her. Polly is indeed glad to see her father. Her mother, however, soon disillusioned her by accusing him of “sneaking in on Polly’s coattails” (147). Polly’s mother, however, is no better than her ex-husband: She habitually blames her daughter when something goes wrong and eventually throws her out of the house, because she believes that Polly is disturbing her new love. Which leads to the situation that Polly is sent to her father in Bristol, who pretends that she is welcome, but who in fact has no intention of letting her live with him permanently, since his new partner does not want children. Thus Polly is the poor “pig in the middle” (230) once again and emerges from this experience very much humiliated. One might even suggest that this trauma is partly responsible for her later behaviour – since Bristol Polly has gathered a certain pride and has become

sensitive to being ridiculed, and Laurel later on exploits Polly's fear of making a fool of herself in causing her forget Thomas Lynn. Despite her more or less traumatic childhood, throughout most of the novel Polly seems to be a functioning member of society, getting through school successfully enough to obtain a place to study English literature at a college in Oxford, while her parents both more or less deteriorate – her father in his rather joyless marriage to posh Joanna Renton and her mother ending up “a bundle of nerves” (311) after scaring away several boyfriends by being overly possessive and nosy.

Polly has the habit of thinking up stories or imagining things, a tendency which is promoted both by her father (with whom she apparently often played “Let's pretend” when he was still living with his family) and by Thomas Lynn. Polly's favourite game when she meets Tom is trying to be a hero, and afterwards they both do ‘hero business’ together, thinking up stories in which they are both super-heroes. To Polly this is just a funny game and only later she realises what being a hero is really about, for example not being distracted from a goal by embarrassment: “being a hero means ignoring how silly you feel” (349).

Another of Polly's distinguishing features, which she keeps in spite of often disillusioning experiences, is her “unheroic soft-heartedness” (105). This prompts Polly to be nice and forgiving to people who are in distress even if those people have not always treated her well. She feels this way for example for her father, David Bragge, Seb (who all more or less take advantage of this weakness) or Nina. It is probably also what makes her stay with Thomas Lynn in the first place because, at the funeral, he seems to be in just as uncomfortable a position as Polly is, and so, when asked to go into Hunsdon House again to help choose some pictures, Polly agrees since she takes pity on Thomas Lynn: “‘I had an idea that it was something like that,’ Mr Lynn said rather sadly. ‘So you're not coming?’ ‘I – I will if you want me to,’ Polly said” (35). Her tender-heartedness in addition to her rather good looks prompt one of her fleeting acquaintances to remark once that she had better be cautious, otherwise men might take advantage of her. And indeed, Polly does have a certain effect on men as she grows up, in contrast to the other girl-heroines in the novels who are mostly described as rather ordinary-looking. Not caring much for appearances when she is small and being quite a tomboy for some time (once she forgets to wash her hair for weeks and ends up with lice) this changes as she notices that others (especially males, as J. Stephens and R. McCallum observe (1998, 225)) like the way she looks when she takes care of herself, so she starts to behave in a gender-conform way. It is interesting that Polly's most distinguishing feature is her silver-blond hair, an aspect which likens her a bit to Laurel, whose (rather strange) blonde hair is also emphasised repeatedly.

Polly is pursued by Sebastian Leroy when she is still very young (13 years old, while he is already 17), and it never becomes quite clear why – it might be because he feels attracted by her good looks or because he wants to draw her on his side and away from Thomas Lynn. Some years later, he even talks Polly into agreeing to get engaged to him even though Polly does not really like him very much, but this is probably yet another result of Polly’s soft-heartedness.

It is interesting what Jones has said about Polly – according to her, Polly’s name hints at Greek *poly*, meaning ‘many’ and according to Jones Polly is indeed some kind of “Everywoman” (1989, 134). She also explains how Polly is at the centre of several triangular constellations: There are Polly, Ivy and Granny, three generations of women, there are Polly, Nina and Fiona, three very different types of girls and there is the triangle of Polly, Ivy and Laurel, who are supposed to present three aspects of the fairy queen: Ivy as the “mundane parasitical version of Laurel”, while Polly is “the aspect that appears not in *Tam Lin* but in *Thomas the Rhymer*, the good and beloved Queen that Thomas first mistakes for the Virgin Mary” (Jones 1989, 137). These are the constellations mentioned by Jones and intended to suggest the “Three-Formed Goddess, *diva triforma*” (ibid.).¹⁵⁸ But maybe there are even more potential triangles – at least Ann Abraham and Mary Fields seem important enough to be included in the game (interestingly, ‘Polly’ is a variant of Molly, which is a variant of Mary – could that have been intended by the author?).¹⁵⁹ Jones claims that the triangular pattern can also be applied to Tom but does not mention details – there could be Tom, Morton Leroy and Seb, former, present and future lover of the fairy queen, there could also be Tom, Charles and Leslie, all of them members of the Lynn family at least temporarily in thrall of the fairy queen. Moreover, maybe Tom could be said to form a triangle with Reg Whittaker and David Bragge, all of them men who are (surrogate) fathers for Polly and treat her very differently, although it can probably be said that everyone of them takes advantage of Polly’s good heart in order to achieve some egoistic aim of his own (one uses her (in vain) to mend his marriage, the other to free himself from Laurel, and the third to get his betting slips to the bookmaker secretly).

Thomas Lynn

In contrast to Polly, whose whole childhood is narrated in the novel, not many biographical details are revealed about Thomas Lynn. About his childhood he once tells that he

¹⁵⁸ Terry Pratchett uses a similar idea of the tripartite goddess (maiden-mother-crone) for his threesome of witches in the discworld series, this is most distinctly problematised in *Carpe Jugulum*, where the fearsome fourth face of the goddess appears.

¹⁵⁹ Martha Hixon remarks that Polly is also “a diminutive of Margaret” (2004, 86), which the heroine of “Tam Lin” is called in some versions of the ballad.

was “in council care until Laurel almost adopted me” (288), so it seems that his parents either died young or did not care for their children. His being ‘adopted’ by Laurel seems a modern-day version of the traditional motif of ‘neglected child stolen by fairies’ from folklore. He has an older brother named Charles, who is first chosen by Laurel as sacrificial victim but who later buys himself free – this becomes possible because Tom had stolen his camera and taken an illicit picture of Hunsdon House (the Fire and Hemlock-photograph), which makes it possible for Laurel to take him. It seems that Charles Lynn, who had realised what Laurel had in store for him, worked a similar act of black magic as Polly to deliver Tom into Laurel’s arms. He makes an enlargement of the photograph, puts a strand of Tom’s hair at the back and then apparently presents this “Obah Cypt”, explained by the author as “a spell to enslave Mr Lynn’s soul” (Jones 2001), to Laurel, who thus can take possession of Tom.¹⁶⁰ (And therefore Granny’s cryptic remark: “he’ll be lucky if he can call his soul his own” (356) makes sense after all.) Ironically, Polly and Tom are making up stories about a mysterious object they call “Obah Cypt” – never guessing what this really is and that Polly has had it in her possession all along. Despite being free of Laurel after his bargain, Charles Lynn is still frightened and apparently disappears completely from Tom’s world, to be discovered later on as “Thomas Piper”, owner of a hardware shop in Stow-on-the-Water. He has taken on this identity in order to escape from Laurel but, through Tom and Polly’s storytelling, becomes involved in the action again. That Tom is ignorant about how he was sold to Laurel, is proven by his remark towards the end that he “need[ed] to know how that bargain was made” (379) and therefore, after having discovered it with Polly, kept going back to Charles’s hardware store repeatedly, which in turn prompted Charles to hide every time his brother entered his store and to appear very unwelcoming towards Polly. Charles’s fear (or inability?) to talk about his past ultimately also seems to make it possible for Laurel to take his son, Leslie.

It seems that the Lynn family is distinguished by a hereditary talent for music – Thomas’s father is said to have played the flute, Thomas himself is a professional cellist and Leslie is a gifted flute-player. Since music is Thomas Lynn’s great talent and Laurel, as a fairy, is fond of music, she apparently spends good money on his education, sending him to a public school, which is famous for its musical education. It is never really told what Thomas Lynn did between finishing school and taking up the cello professionally. All Polly knows is that he becomes married to Laurel, though it is not clear from how early an age and it is not known how Mr.

¹⁶⁰ Jones explains the etymology of the Obah Cypt as follows: “ ‘Obah’ is an adaptation of ‘Obeah’, the West Indian form of (black, quite often) magic. ‘Cypt’ is a sort of anagram of ‘ptyx’ which seems to be a sort of holy vessel or container in use on Christian altars. So the whole thing means ‘a container for dark magic’” (Jones 2001).

Leroy, Laurel's ex- and again-husband, and apparently the official fairy king, thought about this. Maybe it worked because Leroy himself was married to Seb's mother – another mortal, apparently – at that time? Maybe there is even an arrangement between Laurel and Morton Leroy that one binds the men and the other the women intended for sacrifice to them by marriage? (But this of course only a speculation).

However, when Polly meets Thomas Lynn for the first time, he is just divorced from Laurel and, according to Seb, more or less bankrupt. He is nevertheless determined to become a successful musician, which he eventually does – maybe here the power of music and creativity is presented as a means towards freedom? For music is clearly a positive force in *Fire and Hemlock* – Polly experiences this for example when she listens to the quartet's practice in Bristol and also towards the end, the quartet's music inspires her to think of a way how she can help Tom:

Here was a place where the quartet was grinding out dissonances. There was a lovely tune beginning to emerge from it. Two sides to Nowhere, Polly thought. One was really a dead end. The other was the void that lay before you when you were making out something new out of ideas no one else had quite had before. That's a discovery I must do something about, Polly thought (...) And her mind was made up. (377)

With regard to Tom's plans for a musical career, it is not clear if he is confident that he will somehow escape Laurel or if he just wants to make something of his life before he is sacrificed. It is repeatedly emphasised that he can be very determined, so maybe he has hopes of escaping Laurel's clutches even before Polly shows up. Next to his determination, he is sometimes described as rather stubborn – there are certain taboo-topics Polly cannot talk to him about – he has a “way of running you up against silence” (284). As the unspeakable topics all revolve around Laurel and her family, Tom's refusal to talk probably results from a weird put on him by Laurel not to speak about his enslavement to her – similarly as Thomas in “Thomas the Rhymer” is put under a weird of silence. Laurel's enchantment forces Thomas Lynn to communicate his message to Polly by sending her books about fairies and myths whose significance Polly understands only much later.

Despite certain odd qualities, on the whole Thomas Lynn comes across as a rather agreeable person, his occasional stubbornness being countered by his tendency towards obedience, which Polly experiences most strongly in their first meetings and which she finds rather strange in an adult – before realising that much of it is not really meant seriously. However, even though he occasionally makes fun of her, Thomas Lynn takes Polly surprisingly seriously even though she is just a child and the reader may well wonder how realistic a friendship between a ten-year-old girl and a man approximately 15 years older can be. Of course it must be assumed that Tom somehow knows that Polly could be his rescue and that he therefore

tries to make sure of her friendship. However, it is never really explained why Polly is apparently the only one who can do something for Thomas Lynn. Why, for example, could not his girl-friend Mary or his colleague Ann (who, as a mixed-blood is apparently also somewhat sensitive to the supernatural) have rescued him? The only viable reason seems to lie outside the book – a children’s book needs a child as a hero for its readers to identify with. But Polly’s tender age also poses problems – it seems to be causing Thomas Lynn some pangs of conscience and these are probably the reason why he tries to make her “hang on” (371) while simultaneously trying to “choke [her] off” (372). Even though Thomas himself is apparently only partially aware of what he is doing, Polly’s grandmother seems to be much more so. Therefore, she finally takes him to task and after that Thomas Lynn claims that “he wouldn’t forgive himself for using [Polly]” (356) and reduces his contact to Polly drastically. Polly, who of course does not have a clue as to what is going on, feels rather slighted by this behaviour, and, since no one explains it to her (neither Tom nor Granny can, apparently, with Laurel’s charms of silence) decides to spy on him in order to find out what he is hiding from her. That this act of curiosity leads to her completely forgetting him is all the more ironic.

Like the other male figures of the ballad-adaptations Tom is less present than his female counterpart. The whole novel is told from Polly’s point of view and, in fact, her whole contact to Thomas Lynn consists of only a few visits and some letters, even though he exerts a sort of indirect influence on her by making her read loads of books which are in some way important to him. In contrast to most of the other males in the novels, he tries actively to free himself from the fairy queen’s thrall and to get the female hero to help him out of his precarious situation. In the end he even fights a duel with the fairy king instead of just letting himself be ‘held fast’ and thus be rescued by the heroine. However, without Polly’s help he could probably not have won the duel, as Odell (2002) points out. Only Polly’s rejection of Tom bars Mr. Leroy from calling Laurel to his assistance, which would have been his right, since Laurel told him that he could use the exact equivalent of what Tom uses – and Polly and Laurel are to be seen as equivalent here. In his struggle for freedom (which had begun even before he knew Polly) Tom is thus much more active (but maybe also more selfish) than other Tam Lin figures e.g. in *The Wee Free Men*, *Lords and Ladies*, or *The Perilous Gard*, *Tam Lin* or *The Queen of Spells*. In his efforts to find help he is maybe most similar to Corbet Lynn in *Winter Rose*, even though with regard to the latter it is never really clear if his pleas for help are real or merely a part of Rois’s imagination.

Summing up

Diana Wynne Jones's ballad adaptation is one that departs rather far from the source material through its inclusion of many more literary pre-texts and the many sub-plots integrated into the main story. As has been mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, the author's intertextual creativity has made this adaptation one of the most interesting for literary critics, all the more so as it, with its different time-levels and non-linear structure, is also structurally more complex than most other adaptations.

It is also not just a simple coming-of-age story but a story about love and relationships in general, relationships between men and women but also between parents and children, about power and control and also about what constitutes heroism. In this consideration of psychological aspects is it also more complex than many of the other adaptations.

It differs also from some of the other adaptations as its 'reality status' stays undecided for a relatively long time – now and then there are strange occurrences but these can mostly be explained away as the fancies of the over-imaginative child that Polly is. As the novel progresses, however, these incidents gain in strangeness and finally it becomes clear that there must be something like magic at work. The drawn-out uncertainty about events, however, allows one to place it in the category of the 'liminal fantastic' or to call it, in Durst's terms a narrative 'non-system' for a relatively long time, even though in the end the 'marvellous' reality system asserts itself.

The creatures which come with the marvellous reality system, the fairies, in *Fire and Hemlock* are called "undying" but at least the king and queen are dependant on humans as sacrifices to prolong their own lives ad infinitum in a combination of the teind-to-hell motif with the motif of temporary kings from *The Golden Bough*. In contrast to *The Perilous Gard*, however, this dependence on humans does not seem to make them weaker (maybe because they can, if hard put, also pay with one of their own). In this case this is apparently Morton Leroy – but even though the king is apparently killed, the fairies as a whole are not defeated and will probably be back for new victims sooner or later – this tenacity they share with most of the fairies in the other adaptations. Something *Fire and Hemlock* only shares with one later adaptation is the interpretation of the "Tam Lin"-guideline to hold fast to the potential victim. Both Diana Wynne Jones and Patricia McKillip have chosen to use the reversal of this strategy as the means to void the fairy queen's spell and it will certainly be interesting to pay special attention to further similarities between these two novels, also with regard to their relatively open endings. Since, however, my study is structured chronologically, the next adaptation to be looked

at is that by Ellen Kushner, the only novel in my corpus that is, at least partly, told from the point of view of the male protagonist.

10. *Thomas the Rhymer* (1990) by Ellen Kushner

The author

Ellen Kushner (born 1955) is an American fantasy author. She writes novels, short fiction and poetry and has published widely in anthologies. Up to now she has written nine novels (five of them for the *Choose Your Own Adventure* fantasy series for children). Her best-known novels are *Swordspoint* (1987) and *Thomas the Rhymer* (1990), the latter of which won both the World Fantasy Award and the Mythopoeic Award. *Swordspoint*, described by an internet reviewer as “Dangerous Liaisons meets The Three Musketeers meets any Georgette Heyer novel”, deals with politics, intrigue and love in a secondary fantasy world and is unusual for the fantasy genre in so far as it features a homosexual pair (a swordsman and a scholar) as its main protagonists.¹⁶¹ In 2002, a sequel to *Swordspoint* called *The Fall of the Kings*, jointly written by Ellen Kushner and Delia Sherman, was published and a further sequel (*The Privilege of the Sword*) appeared in 2006.

Ellen Kushner is a musician as well as a writer, has taught creative writing and worked as an editor of fantasy books. Apart from being a writer of fiction, she is also working as a radio producer. There is very little scholarly material available on her works, most information about Kushner and her novels can be found in reviews and interviews on the internet. In one of those interviews the author announced how she views her own work and that she is well aware of the accusation of triviality and derivativeness often raised against her genre: “I hate saying ‘I write fantasy’ because people immediately think I write a cross between *Star Wars* and Elf-o-Rama-Imitation-Tolkien-Number-47. I hate saying this because it sounds so snotty, but sometimes I say I write Literary Fantasy” (Kushner in an interview with David Matthew, 1999). And indeed, literature of various kinds plays also an influential role in *Thomas the Rhymer*, even though the sources of influence here are not so much texts from the canon of ‘high’ literature as e.g. for Diana Wynne Jones and Pamela Dean but almost exclusively ballads and folk literature.

Plot summary

Ellen Kushner’s *Thomas the Rhymer* is a retelling of Child #37. It is closer to the original ballad than most of the other adaptations examined here, but expanded by the inclusion of additional characters and by the inclusion of a sequel to the ballad plot. The novel is told by four different narrators: Gavin, Meg, Thomas and Elspeth. It “takes place in a kind of mist-filled

¹⁶¹ www.amazon.com/Swordspoint-Ellen-Kushner/dp/customer-reviews/0553585495

medieval Scotland” (Kushner in an interview with David Matthew, 1999), probably around the twelfth century, the time when, in all probability, the historical Thomas Rhymer was alive.

The first narrator is Gavin, an old Scottish sheep-farmer, who lives with his wife Meg near the town of Erceldoune. One day the old couple give shelter to a young minstrel, Thomas. He is on the run from the family of a young noblewoman, Lady Liliass, whom he has seduced and whose brothers strongly disapprove of the connection. For about two years, Thomas comes and goes in Gavin’s house, trying to rise in society: he intends to become the king’s minstrel. Whenever he is not away at the royal court, he pursues a sort of ‘on-and-off’ love-affair with Elspeth, a local farmer’s daughter. One day, however, Thomas disappears without a trace.

The narration now shifts to Thomas’s own point of view. He recounts how he was seduced by the queen of fairies and taken to Elfland by her for seven years. Thomas’s adventures in Elfland make up about half of the novel. Thomas becomes harper at the elfin court and lover of the fairy queen and is not allowed to talk to anyone in Elfland but her. He also encounters a powerful elf-lord named Hunter, who seems to be very suspicious of him. Moreover, he is given a mysterious invisible servant. The servant later turns out to be a mortal woman, whom the elves cannot bear to look at since she has grown old. Helped by the woman he tries to solve the secret surrounding a strange, blood-thirsty dove, which one day appears close to his living quarters. The dove, Thomas finds out, is apparently the spirit of a murdered knight, who is desperately trying to tell his widow on earth how he was killed. But the dove has no human voice and so its task seems doomed to fail. Thomas, as he uncovers the dove’s story, decides to lend the murdered knight his own voice. The fairy queen agrees to his offer. The dove can carry out its task and the knight’s soul finds peace. But Thomas has to spend the rest of his time in Elfland without a voice and helplessly at the mercy of the fairy queen’s whims. Finally, he is returned to earth and, in reward for his sacrifice, given the gift of prophecy (while the ability to tell lies is taken from him).

Now Meg, Gavin’s wife, takes over as narrator and describes how Thomas is rather hard put to come to terms with earthly life and his awkward gift. After initial problems, however, he slowly adapts to normality again. He is also reconciled to Elspeth, who, since Thomas seemed to have left her for good, has been married and widowed in the meantime and has turned from innocent girl into a rather disillusioned, mature woman. Thomas and Elspeth eventually marry.

Here, Elspeth, the last narrator, assumes the task of telling the rest of Thomas’s life. Thomas takes up his profession as a minstrel again and learns how to use his prophetic gift to earn his living. Thomas and Elspeth raise a family and live more or less harmoniously except for a time when an illegitimate child who Thomas had fathered on Lady Liliass appears. Thomas had

been ignorant of this bastard son but his happiness with Elspeth is somewhat endangered, at least temporarily. Finally, the couple is reconciled. Many years pass, until Thomas falls fatally ill. When Thomas dies, however, Elspeth, who is never quite sure about where he had really been for the seven years he claimed to have spent in Elfland, observes how his soul is carried away by a supernatural woman: the fairy queen has returned to fetch her former lover.

Intertextuality

The most influential pre-texts for Kushner's novel are of course "Thomas the Rhymer" and "Thomas of Erceldoune" (the most important elements used are: musician taken by fairy queen, fairy on white horse, subterranean journey through river of blood, queen shows Thomas 'ferlies', orchard with forbidden fruit, elf-queen temporarily ages after meeting Thomas, Thomas gets green clothes, may not talk to elves, gift of tongue that cannot lie). But many more texts are alluded to, either by the characters referring to them directly, or by being used as plot elements. In fact, Kushner once stated: "I steal all the plots" (interview with Sarah Zettel, 1998) and at another occasion declared that "virtually every plot device in [*Thomas the Rhymer*], from the Dove to Errol's son, comes from some traditional ballad or other" (Kushner, 2005). Thus, her *Thomas the Rhymer* is extremely intertextual and I will try to point out at least some of the probable influences, even though I can certainly not compile an exhaustive list here.

Apart from Child #37, also #39, "Tam Lin", plays an – although minor – part. Elspeth once compares herself to Janet and later Tom and his son perform the ballad together. Maybe there could be a further parallel in so far as Thomas leaves a pregnant (ex)-lover back on earth: Lady Liliass. However, in contrast to Janet, Liliass has no idea where Thomas has vanished to and she probably would not have tried to find him anyway. Even before he vanishes to Elfland, she is married to the Earl of Errol and she passes off the child as Errol's. However, later on, when Thomas is in Elfland, she tries to contact him, because she is unhappy in her marriage and moreover fears, because she has not heard of him for so long, that her brothers might have killed him. But of course there is no way of reaching him during his seven years in the otherworld and so there is no reunion between Thomas and Liliass.

As Kushner remarked, the plot line of 'Errol's son' comes from another Child ballad, but she does not reveal from which. Maybe the character was inspired by "The Earl of Errol" (#231), even though the story here is different: the Earl of Errol marries an infertile woman and only succeeds in getting an heir by eventually taking a country girl to his bed. If this was the inspiration, then Kushner has twisted the plot around: in her novel Errol's son is born by the Earl

of Errol's lawfully wedded wife. Ironically, however, the father is a wandering minstrel and not the Earl himself.

The figure of Lady Liliass seems to come from another ballad, "Jack Orion", which is not in the Child collection (but the related "Glasgerion" (#67) is). "Jack Orion" tells of a young musician who puts all the ladies at the king's court to sleep, save one: "And there he played in the castle hall / And there he played them fast asleep / Except it was for the young countess / And for love she stayed awake". In Kushner's version, Thomas plays in the queen's bower and all ladies but Liliass fall asleep.

Even the name of Liliass Drummond is apparently not an invention of Kushner: Lady Liliass Drummond was the name of at least two historical persons. One was the wife of Alexander Seton, Lord Fyvie, in the late sixteenth century, the other a daughter of the 2nd Earl of Perth in the seventeenth century. According to legend, the first Liliass Drummond died of a broken heart because her husband preferred another woman and she is therefore said to haunt his castle to this day.¹⁶² The ghost is called the "Green Lady" and maybe Kushner even took this legend into account, for even though Liliass does not appear as a ghost, she yet continues to haunt Thomas after his return. First, by means of the ring that a gypsy tinker has brought to Meg's and Gavin's house. Here Thomas reveals his gift of true-speaking for the first time, because on merely seeing the ring he proclaims: "This was from Liliass Drummond's hand. She gave it unhappy, ill, pregnant with her fourth child, thinking Erol didn't love her, that her family had me killed....' He looked up suddenly, ashy-faced, his hand clenched around the ring. 'She's dead'" (181). Even though this is only the first time that Thomas is afflicted by his strange gift, his reaction already shows how much of a burden the instant knowledge of an (unpleasant) truth can be. Secondly, the unexpected appearance of Liliass's son Hugh years later quite upsets Thomas's otherwise relatively peaceful family life. The event is disturbing because, on the one hand, it arouses Elspeth's jealousy, and, on the other hand, because Thomas must live with the knowledge that his new-found son will die soon, an insight he has on accord of his gift and which the boy must of course not know about.

Apart from "Thomas the Rhymer", "Tam Lin" and the "Earl of Errol", some other Child ballads directly mentioned or sung by the characters or used as inspiration for characters' names are: "Fair Annie" (#62), "The Broomfield Wager" (#43), "The Unquiet Grave" (#78), "The Elfin Knight" (#2), "Riddles Wisely Expounded" (#1), "Lady Isabel and the Elf Knight" (#4) and "Gil Brenton" (#5).

¹⁶² <http://www.visitscotland.com/aboutscotland/explorebypmap/features/trustghosts>, accessed 03.06.2007

Not all ballads bear direct relevance to the plot, but Kushner's version of "The Elfin Knight" does. Interestingly, the author has combined it with the riddles from "Riddles Wisely Expounded" (#1) and the murder plot from "Lady Isabel and the Elf Knight" (#4) into a ballad different from the original one. In Kushner's version, a girl summons an elfin knight, as in the original. The knight now threatens to kill the girl after he has had his way with her – this seems to be taken from Child #4, while in the original, the elfin knight puts a number of impossible tasks to the girl who wants to marry him. No murderous intentions are mentioned in the original. In Kushner's version, the girl manages to win herself free from him through putting him to a set of riddles (taken from Child #1). Since he cannot answer her riddles he must let her go. Thomas sings this ballad for Meg and Gavin at the very beginning of the novel and it might be foreshadowing his own fate: later on, in Elfland, an elfin knight (Hunter) will set Thomas to a riddle game and even though it does not seem that Thomas's life depends on solving it, doing so nevertheless influences his fate considerably.

Hunter first introduces his riddle as a story: he tells Thomas of a happily wed young couple. The mother of the wife, however, is jealous of her daughter's husband and sends murderers who kill both the husband and the young couple's only child. The young widow then does not return to her mother, but buries her dead, dresses as a man and seeks employment at the king's court. She is accepted and becomes the king's chamberlain. Hunter's riddle now is: "What became of the knight?" (108).

Thomas at first has no idea what Hunter is driving at and one day, bored because the fairy queen does not want his company all that often, he starts to make a ballad of the story, hoping that maybe a solution to the riddle will emerge. While he is doing this, the white dove, which he had met twice before, appears again, weeping tears of blood, as he sings the song (130). Thomas is irritated and then accidentally nicks himself at a fruit knife, bleeding onto the floor. The dove, which he had, at another occasion, tried to feed in vain, now drinks his blood and begins to speak with a human voice, moaning about a woman called Eleanor and that he has no time.¹⁶³ Thomas is horrified but it dawns on him that this is what became of Hunter's knight: the dead man's spirit sought revenge for his murder and apparently persuaded some powerful creature in Elfland (probably the queen) to give him a body again so that he could return to earth. However, his body now is that of a dove and he has no voice and thus he cannot reveal his story. He is getting

¹⁶³ Popular belief has it that blood was a strengthening drink for the dead, thence the vampire-tradition (Bächtold-Stäubli 1987 Vol.1, 1436). So maybe blood could also be used to make the dead speak. Blood was moreover believed to be the "seat of the soul" (Radford 1961, 58). Is this maybe the reason why the fairies in Kushner's novel, who do not have an immortal soul sometimes crave for it? Because e.g. Thomas's harping has awakened their desire for a soul? The issue of the elves' mysterious 'red thirst' will be discussed in more detail later on in this chapter.

desperate because he has been given only limited time to fulfil his mission. After that, his soul will be forfeit and probably the elves will make a sport of hunting it. Thomas, who begins to divine the whole story, is willing to help the dove but is not quite sure how he can. He continues working on his ballad until Hunter appears again. Hunter teases him about the riddle and shows him how the story went on: Eleanor faithfully serves her king, who is very fond of her (although he takes her for a boy). Moreover, the king recently has discovered a new animal to hunt, apparently a bird. Thomas continues the ballad and then begins to teach it to the dove.

Finally, he takes the song to the elves' hall. There he can present it to Hunter – singing being allowed to him – and show him that the riddle is solved. He also wants to beg a favour of the elf-queen in order to help the dove: a beaker of red liquid regularly served on the elves' tables, which Thomas surmises must be blood – blood that will enable the dove to speak. However, after Thomas has solved the riddle, Hunter prevents the queen from giving Thomas the drink. Thomas searches frantically for an alternative solution. Eventually, he remembers that the fairy queen had once, long ago, mentioned that she might lend the dove Thomas's voice. He therefore asks the queen to give the dead knight his own voice and so it happens. The dove returns to earth and tells the king who his chamberlain really is – the king is both dismayed and delighted, punishes Eleanor's mother and marries Eleanor and the knight's soul is freed from its weird. Thomas, however, must endure his remaining years in Elfland completely mute.

The ballad of Eleanor and her knight, here presented as the work of Thomas, is actually Child #218, "The Famous Flower of Servingmen". (Even though the version Kushner presents here is apparently not found in Child's collection but taken from an album of folk singer Martin Carthy, as the author indicates in her acknowledgements at the end of the novel.) Kushner's novel, however, is not the only recent piece of fiction where this ballad has been adapted: the novel *Through a Brazen Mirror* (1989) by Delia Sherman is based largely on Child #218.

Another intertextual allusion which bears more or less direct relevance to the plot is "King Orfeo". Gavin remembers how "[Thomas] told us one of a heathen king, Orfeo, whose wife was stolen away to Elfland by the king of the fairies" (26). As Kushner presents the story, it was probably inspired by different works – one might be "Sir Orfeo", a late thirteenth century Middle English narrative poem, where the wife of Sir Orfeo is stolen by the fairy king. Orfeo moves the fairy king by his harping and is allowed to take his wife Heurodis back with him. In contrast to the Orpheus of Greek legend, he succeeds in bringing her back to earth. Related to this is "King Orfeo", found as #19 in the Child collection. In this ballad, Orfeo also loses his wife, here named Isabel, to the fairy king and recovers her through his pipe playing. It is interesting how Kushner in her version reintroduces at least a partial failure of Orfeo to get his

wife back: “So his wife was allowed to return to Middle-Earth with him – only she’s eaten seven hazelnuts in Elfland, which is fairy food that mortals may not safely touch; so seven days out of each year she is bound to stay in that other land” (26), a plot twist which clearly echoes the myth of Persephone and the seven pomegranate seeds.

Most of the other ballads and tales mentioned do not seem to echo or influence the plot directly, but add detail and colour to the narration, such as “Drowned Ys”, the “Lady of the Lake”, the story of the King Who is to Come and many others, as I will show in the following paragraphs.

“Drowned Ys” is a ballad which is not in the Child collection. Actually, there seems to be no traditional ballad of that name at all, only the Breton legend of the drowned city of Ys. Here, the daughter of the king of Ys, a coastal city protected from the sea only by a dam, opens, at the request of her lover, the gates of the city to admit him, in consequence of which the whole city is drowned. Thomas is inspired by the blue light in the elves’ hall, which reminds him of an underwater setting, to play this ballad and he manages to capture the elves entirely. Maybe there is even a tentative connection to the plot, as Thomas thinks how “the princess betrays her people for her lover” (89) while he himself has only shortly before left his people (in his case: Meg, Gavin, Elspeth) for the sake of his fairy lover without so much as goodbye. (Although, of course, the consequences of his ‘betrayal’ are not nearly as grave as those in the legend of Ys.)

Back in the human world, and invited to the king’s court, Thomas performs a ballad called “the Lady of the Lake”, which is presented as Thomas’s adaptation of an old story, with some alterations of his own: “now the young king’s faery paramour was become at the same time the mother of his chiefest knight, and she foretells their doom to each, how the young king’s wife in turn will be the knight’s leman, and bring them all to woe” (215). Obviously, this is a take of the Arthur-Lancelot-Guinevra triangle, with the Lady of the Lake apparently in a double function as Arthur’s lover and mother of Lancelot. Five stanzas of the ballad are printed in the novel, however, I have not been able to discover their origin. (They are, at any rate, not based on Sir Walter Scott’s poem of the same name.) The love triangle from the Arthur-cycle is probably also alluded to when Thomas remembers how he saw lovers from legend walk in the forest of Elfland, such as: “two kingly men with their arms around one graceful, merry queen” (63). Other figures he sees there are: “Niamh of the shining hair with Irish Oisian; Fair Aucassin with his gentle Nicolette” (ibid.). The first couple probably represents the Irish legend of Niamh and Oisín, a typical *conte morganién*, where the hero is transported to Fairyland, time passes swiftly and when he returns to earth several hundred years have gone by, he ages on the spot and soon after dies. It is, however, a bit curious that Niamh, who in the legend is the daughter of the queen

of Tir-na-nOg (the Irish version of Fairyland) is presented as a human here, but maybe one must assume that the lovers in the wood are a mixture of elves and mortals. Aucassin and Nicolette, on the other hand, are characters from a thirteenth century French tale, in which two (human) lovers brave all kinds of adversities before they are finally reunited.

Another allusion to legend might be found in the mysterious “King Who is to Come”, whom Thomas encounters on one of his rides through the woods of Elfland. It seems that Thomas accidentally summons him by drawing water from a brook with a broken jug. The king appears and asks Thomas if he has need of him – Thomas declines, but declares his fealty to him, for a future final battle that will apparently be fought against Elfland. This episode could also be an allusion to Arthurian material since, according to legend, King Arthur is indeed only waiting at some secret place (most often it is assumed that this is Avalon) to return to save England from ruin, similarly as Barbarossa in the Kyffhäuser legend. It is not quite sure, however, if “the King Who Waits” (110) is the same as the one Thomas had seen in the lovers’ forest and maybe this figure is not meant to be Arthur at all but rather Barbarossa or quite another king entirely.

Other, minor references are for instance the allusion to a story called “The Blue Falcon”, probably a reference to the Scottish fairytale “How Ian Direach got the Blue Falcon” to be found e.g. in Andrew Lang’s *Orange Fairy Book*. Moreover, there are the love songs Thomas sings when courting Elspeth (201) which are, at least in part, taken from Child #219, “The Gardener”, where a man offers a woman all kinds of flowers in courtship (but she refuses him coldly).

Apart from the quotations which are integrated into the text, the four different narrators’ parts are headed by quotations. Part one is preceded by two stanzas from Child #67, “Glasgerion”, a ballad about a clever fiddler, part two by one stanza from the romance of “Thomas of Erceldoune” and three stanzas from Child #37. The third part has also a stanza from Child #37, while the fourth, dealing with Thomas’s marriage and family, is suitably headed by a quotation from Chaucer’s “Parliament of Fowls” about the nature of love and an excerpt from a charter granted by the son of the historical Thomas of Erceldoune.

While the more “Tam Lin”-centred adaptations mostly end with a defeat of the fairy queen and a reunion of the Janet-character with the Tam Lin-character, Kushner’s novel continues the story far beyond Thomas’s return from Elfland – both Meg’s and Elspeth’s narrative parts start *after* the end of the ballad. While Meg narrates the first weeks after Thomas’s return, Elspeth summarises the 21 years of her marriage to Thomas. Here, Kushner can no longer draw upon material from Child #37, but uses a few fragments of information known about the historical person of Thomas the Rhymer. After Thomas has been somewhat reconciled to his new abilities and disabilities, he by and by wins fame as a seer and political

counsellor of the nobility. He is given lease of a tower in Leirmont as a living place for him and his family and earns enough money to buy land and have it farmed by tenants. He can even send his eldest son Tam to the local monastery for his education. About the historical Thomas not that many details are known, however, there is still a tower in the town of Earlston, called the ‘Rhymer’s tower’. Moreover, one of the few pieces of historical evidence for Thomas Rhymer’s existence is a charter dating from 1294, granted by Thomas of Erceldoun, son of Thomas Rhymer of Erceldoun, to the Trinity House of Soltra (Flasdieck 1934, 41). The historical Thomas therefore seems to have had a son named Thomas and must have been a land-owner. Kushner’s Thomas calls his son Tam (the Northern version of Tom) and owns land, too, thus echoing the historical sources.

Fairyland

Kushner’s Fairyland, one of the most vividly described versions in the novels of my ‘corpus’, has many traditional aspects but there is also a lot of individual invention. It is a separate, self-contained world but contact to the human world is possible – the elves come to earth regularly for their so-called ‘dancing nights’ – it is therefore, in Nikolajeva’s terms, an *open secondary world*. To access it, one has to undertake a long journey, cross an underground stream of blood, a desert and an otherworldly orchard.

True to tradition, there is neither sun nor moon in Elfland. But there are stars and it is not a land of permanent twilight, as many folkloristic accounts describe it, but a place that can e.g. be basked in midday heat and light without there being a sun (97). There are no birds in the woods of Elfland (77), apart from the enchanted dove and Thomas actually never sees any wild animals at all. It is therefore not quite clear what the elves hunt. On the occasion where the hunting party is described, Thomas overhears a conversation: “‘Did they catch anything?’ ‘Yes, but they had to let it go’” (106). So there seems to have been a quarry but also something or someone who interfered with the hunt. Later on, Thomas muses on how the elves hunt the ghosts of humans as a sport (“elves torture our ghosts” (133)). Maybe the aforementioned quarry was not a real animal but also an enchanted spirit? These questions, however, are never answered.

Complementing the apparent lack of wildlife, the vegetation at least is rather lush – there are meadows and forests and gardens. Kushner’s Elfland is therefore no desert or wasteland (at least it appears thus to Thomas, who, however, may be subject to the fairy queen’s glamour), even though, in its lack of fauna, it is yet a sort of incomplete world.

This incompleteness is also evident in Elfland's lack of fire. The elves are able to produce a sort of magic blue light, with which they light their halls. Thomas experiences this on his first night in Elfland: "My servant took a torch from the wall to light us. It burned blue and cold and despite the wind of our passing the flame held steady" (86). 'Normal' candles do also exist in Elfland, but they seem to be rare and valuable: "Only at the high table were there real wax candles burning" (87) and Thomas's servant later confirms this: "We're not supposed to waste real fire" (120). Similarly as in Elizabeth Pope's fairy caves in *The Perilous Gard*, where there is not even magic light as a surrogate, the scarceness of fire supports the idea that Elfland is somehow a cold place.¹⁶⁴ It seems as if none of the authors of the ballad adaptations could quite shake off this idea – some express it rather graphically in making Elfland a land of eternal winter, others use it more subtly, as for instance Kushner and Pope.

The elfin inhabitants are diverse in size and appearance, in contrast to most of the other novels, where one shape, namely an anthropomorphic one, is dominant among the elves. On his arrival there, Thomas sees humanoid but also tiny and gigantic, winged and antlered, goat-footed and strangely-coloured specimens, but in his eyes they are all worth looking at: "there was not a plain creature amongst them. The beautiful ones were beautiful beyond belief: hearty or ethereal, they all might have stepped from the pages of some arcane illuminated missal. And the ugly ones rivalled the whimsy of a stonemason in any cathedral" (82). That Thomas seems inclined to view Elfland favourably also shows in his account of the more appalling creatures: "several gargoyles detached themselves from the drainpipes to take a lively interest in the proceedings. Something green even crawled up out of the well, and sat on the brim with its toes dangling in the water" (81). What might have been demons and evil water spirits in other accounts (or ominous well guardians as in *The Perilous Gard*) become, in Kushner's description, friendly, if somewhat grotesquely shaped, onlookers of Thomas's arrival.

In keeping with an almost universal folk-tradition and as in many works of fantasy (such as e.g. in Ursula K. LeGuins *Earthsea* trilogy or Michael Ende's *Neverending Story*), names are charged with power in Elfland, for the soul of the elves is, according to the fairy queen "bound up in [their] name[s]" (143). Therefore, Thomas never learns the real names of the elves. When he does try to find out, the elf-queen gets angry for the first time and slaps him: "Leave off this talk of names" (115). Since he cannot learn their actual names, he must content himself with calling the elves after their most distinguishing feature, e.g. Doe-eyes or Hinge or Hunter.

¹⁶⁴ The association of elves and cold is strengthened also by the description of the fairy queen – she has a "cool finger" (67) and a "cold, strong hand" (68), even though this coldness is not as strongly emphasised as in most of the other novels and she is capable also of being a rather hot-blooded lover.

Hunter, among all the elves apparently the most evil, tries to exert power over Thomas by calling him by his name, but is discouraged by the queen, who explains to him: “There are a thousand Thomases on Middle-Earth: the name has all the power of a walnut” (80).¹⁶⁵

Also in accord with folkloristic accounts of Elfland and a lot of fairy-literature, time passes differently in Elfland. Thomas quite loses his sense of time, since he cannot tell if what seems to him a day – the time passed between darkness and light – is the same as a mortal day or whether it is much longer. However, he has made the ‘mistake’ at the very beginning of his stay in Elfland to beg the queen to let him live out his full seven years there consciously and not to make it seem like seven days as is the case in many fairy stories. Therefore, the time often appears quite long and tedious to him, especially when the queen deprives him of her company.

As it seems, the elves in Kushner’s Fairyland are immortal or at least very long-lived, as is typical for them in most fairy-stories. Thomas is aware that his queen has had many other mortal lovers before him (and will have, probably, after him). Accordingly, Elspeth later suggests that “the queen, Tam Lin’s queen, was Thomas’s queen as well” (232). Yet, as some remarks of the elf-in-waiting named Ermine suggest, too much contact with the mortal world ages the elves more quickly. Apparently, Kushner’s elves then need to take ‘time out’ as a lower form of being before returning to their former lives, according to Ermine: “I’m getting old, I may have to spend some time as a stone, soon; or maybe a nice tree, in a forest where I can get a little sun...”(92). Despite this ageing-effect, the elves obviously need the contact with the world of mortals to stay alive: “In truth, no elf can live without sometime coming to Middle Earth” (95). Moreover, (as e.g. also Pratchett’s elves) the elves delight in human music – Thomas is brought to Elfland at first for his music, becoming the lover of the queen seems to be a sort of side-effect. It is not quite clear if they feel their own music to be inferior and therefore ‘import’ human musicians, however, to Thomas their songs appear rather “tuneless” (110), which might hint at a limited creative ability among elves. Their literary genius at least is definitely limited, for human stories are much more interesting to them than their own. As Thomas observes, elves are not very imaginative storytellers because marvellous events happen there all the time:

I have heard elves say that humans’ greatest strength and weakness both is their curiosity, which leads them to invention. Elves are not very good liars; they’re not even very good storytellers, as we account storytelling; most of it is not invention, for with the rich stuff of Elfland in their hands, they’ve no need to invent. (109)

So the queen fairly drinks up Thomas’s stories about his loves and his fears (even though these are probably not really invented, rather they are probably based on fact but adorned by Thomas’s

¹⁶⁵ However, some power seems to remain in names, at least in that part of the earth Thomas comes from. Gavin explains: “We hold by the old laws in these parts, so it was right that he know the names of his hosts, and be under no weird to give his own” (13).

fancy). The fairy queen once explains the fascination humans hold for elves in general, which is not just due to their storytelling:

There is a heat in you – a warm glow like the sun, like flame... it warms us. When you harp, Thomas, the heat comes off you with a great radiance – no, that’s wrong: it isn’t heat, it’s ... it’s... it’s like gold. Like sweet air. It’s the sun, Thomas. The sun of life that burns gold at zenith, and the molten red sun that sinks into the earth, red as the blood flowing out of you when you die... (95)

Therefore, it is apparently their mortality, being subject to change, which makes humans so interesting for the elves. At another instance Thomas observes how the elves “leaned into my presence as though I were a winter’s fire. I remembered what the queen had said about our mortal golden heat, and came close to pitying them” (105). This is quite interesting, for in most other novels the elves are portrayed as quite superior to humans and appear only worth of sympathy when they are defeated (*The Wee Free Men*, *The Perilous Gard*). While most other elves seem to be simply disdainful of humans, the elves in *Thomas the Rhymer* apparently experience a mixture of emotions: “mortals and the mortal world are very attractive to us, although we also despise them” (95). There may be a parallel to the (apparently partly supernatural) Corbet Lynn in *Winter Rose*, who is similarly longing for mortality and time as the elves in *Thomas the Rhymer*, who bask in Thomas’s ‘mortal golden heat’.

Too much of humanity or mortality, however, seems to bring on the mysterious “red thirst” (90) among the elves in Kushner’s novel, which seems to be a phenomenon not known in fairy folklore. Thomas causes it with his first harping performance but it is never really explained what happens at that moment: “Now that I remembered it, I wanted to know what had been poured in their drinking cups. Not all the old tales of Elfame concern lovers, some are very grim. But I judged it best to say nothing” (95). Later on he sees that there is really something resembling blood in their cups: “[Hunter] turned the goblet over. Red drink fell splashing to the floor below the dais” (151). Even though it is not stated explicitly, there is probably a connection to the whole blood-symbolism connected with the elf-mortal-boundary, which is also a physical boundary constituted by the stream of blood that separates the otherworld from the world of men. The idea of elves as blood-drinking (vampire-like?) creatures suggests once again a certain parasitical nature (which is so strongly emphasised in Terry Pratchett’s novels).

The idea of the elves’ parasitical nature is maybe also supported by a passage where Thomas describes how the fairy queen was “plumbing my humankind, following it like a vein of silver buried in a hill” (117). As mentioned before, she is greedy for stories about his life and his loves. The idea of his mortality seems to arouse her especially and – fascinated and abhorred at the same time – Thomas thinks that “maybe this is how elves make love together, drawing feelings out of each other that are not desire: fear, cold, anger hopelessness...” (144). Apparently

they have to have to make do with negative emotions since they are not able to feel genuine lust. It seems fitting with their strangeness that Kushner's elves do not seem to form any family bonds. For example kinship terms are used without much differentiation – the elves rather make fun of them: “‘My dear,’ the ivy girl said vaguely, walking past me, ‘you may come to me. I shall be as a father to you....’ ‘No, no - UNCLE!!’ Hinge shrieked” (83-4).

But the elves nevertheless live in a somehow hierarchically structured society with a queen, courtiers, ladies in waiting, etc. At the bottom end of their society are the humans who have been ‘imported’ to Elfland as playthings for the elves. Admittedly, Thomas wins the respect of some elves throughout the story but yet he remains the “queen’s new mortal” (82) and her “pet” (87) for most of them. The fact that for them humans are no better than animals probably also explains their cruelty towards the humans who don’t please them any more. This is true especially for Thomas’s invisible servant, who is repeatedly severely mistreated by several elves, merely because she has grown old and her beauty has faded, a process which is treated as a kind of crime by the immortal (and apparently at least outwardly unageing) elves. Her very invisibility, actually, is a punishment inflicted on her by her former lover, Hunter, who had stolen her from the human world when she was a child. The elves’ behaviour is certainly inhuman; they whip the woman and scream insults at her. But, on the other hand, Kushner seems to suggest later on, maybe their behaviour is not so outlandish after all. Leaving one lover who has grown old for the sake of a prettier one and treating unattractive women as if they were invisible is certainly not a behaviour reserved to elves, as Thomas seems to be well aware. Therefore, when the woman asks him if love in the mortal world is different, he answers: “Yes, I wanted to tell her, very different – and, no, it’s not, not at all. It’s just like that, the world of men” (163).

That the company of elves can prove rather unwholesome even to those humans who have returned to earth is hinted at by an episode later in the book. Elspeth encounters a man at the king’s court who claims that he has been to Elfland and has apparently suffered for it: “I have seen them, too, and they are not kind” (216). As if to prove his bad experiences, his physique looks as if the elves have indeed taken some of his life-energy away: “He was like a withered leaf” (216). This man might remind one of Randal, the minstrel in *The Perilous Gard*, who is also once compared to a brown leaf. Randal has paid for his visits to Elfland by losing his sanity, and the man at the king’s court seems to be a bit disturbed as well. It is, however, not clear if this is a consequence of some punishment inflicted on him by the elves for some real or imagined crime or if his ill-being is due to an inability to adapt to human life again after his return from Fairyland.

Moody but fair: the fairy queen

In her outward appearance, when we first meet her, the queen of the fairies is rather close to the ballad – she rides a white horse with silver bells at its mane and wears a green silk gown. She is moreover, described (in rather traditional tropes) as a very beautiful woman: her hair is “like morning sunlight” (65) and her lips are “berry red” (66). She is also compared to a tree a bit later – being “tall and slender as a young birch” (67) and the other elves also are “like slender trees themselves, like little bushes and rocks and flowers in their earthiness and strangeness” (107). Tree imagery is something to be found also in *The Perilous Gard* and, interestingly, these are the two novels where the elves are portrayed comparatively favourably. In contrast, in other novels not trees – iconographically neutral or positive – but more often the clinging, parasitical ivy is associated with the elves (*Winter Rose*, to some extent *Fire and Hemlock*, Dean’s *Tam Lin*). But even though she is comparatively nice, Thomas’s fairy queen is, like all fairy queens in the ballad adaptations, definitely alien and hard to understand for her human lover.

Like Laurel in *Fire and Hemlock* or the queen in *Winter Rose*, the fairy queen of Kushner’s novel can change her own age (as on page 72 – girl, maiden and crone all within one page) and appearance at will (or according to mood). A display of her changing eye-colours can be found on pages 74-81: “blue as bright heaven” (74), “trusty brown” (74), “tawny gold” (75), “green-eyed grin” (81) and finally a “strange unseely yellow” on page 143. She does also, for a short time, transform herself into a withered old hag (72), in order to – in her words – make it easier for Thomas to resist her temptations for a moment. In the ballads there is no such scene, however, the romance version contains a passage where the elf-queen ages and appears as an ugly old woman.¹⁶⁶ However, there this is explained as the consequence of her sleeping with a mortal man. (Thomas in the romance must then follow her to Elfland but it is not clear if this is a sort of punishment for making her temporarily ugly or whether it is the consequence of him having bound himself to her before – probably the latter).

True to her fairy nature, Kushner’s queen declares that all these changes are nothing but illusion and that she herself is immutable: “I am always who I was, and always who I will be, now and forever the same: I do not change” (167). This trait she shares with all the other fairy queens of the novels and it is the trait which makes her appear quite eerie to Thomas: “She never wept, she cannot give birth ... like Tam’s [note: Tam is Thomas’s son] silly horse [an imaginary

¹⁶⁶ In Chaucer’s *Wife of Bath’s Tale* the reverse version of this, namely the ugly old woman transforming herself into a beautiful young one to reward her lover’s patience, can be found (this is also called the ‘Hag transformed’ motif).

pony], that he can ride forever, but takes him nowhere” (232).¹⁶⁷ The elf-queen seems to weep once, when Thomas is angry with her, but as he takes away her hands in which she has hidden her face, “her eyes were dry” (136). Thus, she can apparently mimic human emotions but does not really seem to have them.

A similar phenomenon is the queen’s embroidery – Thomas once meets her when she is sitting with an embroidery frame, appearing “terribly domestic” (109). However, Thomas soon sees that she is not really creating anything, on the contrary, she is “unpicking threads in a sort of tapestry so densely woven it was impossible to tell what would happen when a thread was severed” (110). This seems to echo and contrast an earlier episode, when Thomas had watched Meg while she was sewing a pattern called ‘Tree of Life’: “It’s like a little world. You’re making a little world. All those beasts and birds and leaves... [Thomas observes and then begs Meg:] Put me in your Tree of Life” (18-9) and he pulls out a thread of his sleeve and hands it to her. In contrast to Meg, however, the queen is not making anything, rather, she is ‘unmaking’ something, supporting the idea found in many of the other novels that elves are a destructive rather than a creative species. On the other hand, one might also speculate if this could be an allusion to the idea of the Fates (traditionally linked to the fairies) influencing and severing human life threads. Thomas himself introduces the connection between coloured threads and persons earlier on in his request to be worked into Meg’s pattern. And, significantly, when Thomas is cheeky to the queen, and she is angry, “a strand of blue unravelled on the frame” (111), which might (or might not) be associated with the Rhymer’s blue cloak that he used to wear on earth.

Luckily for Thomas, the queen’s anger passes quite quickly and soon after she even gives him a present. However, it is a present with a twist. Kushner’s fairy queen may be nicer than most fairy queens of the other novels, but there is still a pronounced streak of mischievousness or even cruelty in her. This is her gift: Thomas complains that he is lonely and she gives him a magic ring that he can use to signal her that he wants to see her, so that whenever he breathes on the ring, the queen will send for him. Thomas is happy to have it and uses it often. However, one night she takes it again from him, later proclaiming that it was never meant as a perpetual gift but merely borrowed. When he discovers the ring gone, Thomas is devastated, feels “cast away like a used tumbler” (119) and calls the queen a “demon” (119), since she has deprived him of any

¹⁶⁷ There is no reference as to how the elves procreate in Kushner’s novel. If the queen is infertile, does this mean all other elves are so as well? The question is seldom given much space in the ballad adaptations – in *Winter Rose*, elves seem to mate with humans quite frequently, in *Fire and Hemlock*, there is, in Sebastian Leroy at least one young elf present and Ann Abraham is apparently a mixed-blood. In *The Perilous Gard* Kate observes that there are fairy children, but they are very few in number, thus echoing the traditional idea of elfin barrenness.

power he ever had over her. Following this incident, Thomas is entirely at the mercy of the queen's whims, often endlessly waiting for her to call him and apparently without any possibility to contact her himself. Their relationship is thus a rather unequal one but his fate is actually not much crueller than that of any lady of a harem or Asian concubine who also lives at the beck and call of her lord. For Thomas, however, used to being independent and unbound, it is quite hard to bear. But, as he eventually learns patience, this treatment does have a kind of educational effect on him.

Kushner's fairy queen is without question a quite dominant woman, however, the bondage her human lover enters into seems somehow less cruel than that imposed on the other protagonists of the ballad retellings. On the one hand, this is probably because he chooses it himself and, on the other, because it is temporary, even though the queen several times alludes to the fact that she has always watched Thomas and will keep her eyes on him even when he returns to earth.

On the whole, Kushner's fairy queen is actually the only one that is portrayed as almost likeable – alien, yes, but not evil. Not only does she keep her promise to bring Thomas back to earth after his seven years, she also seems to take an interest in humankind that is quite unknown to any of the other elf-queens found in the ballad adaptations. For example she tries to help the murdered knight by giving him a shape in which he can return to earth. That the shape of a dove is not ideally suited to this mission is quite a different story and so Thomas wonders: “why had she granted him so much and so little?” (161). Maybe this is because her elvish reasoning is quite different from that of humans.

Yet, in comparison, Kushner's fairy queen is one of the most sensual, palpable and also friendly elf-ladies found in the adaptations. This is probably due to the fact that the focus of retelling is on “Thomas the Rhymer”, where the fairy queen is not actually very evil.¹⁶⁸ And despite all her strangeness, the queen does seem to be capable of some kind of real emotions. It is repeatedly mentioned that there is something like pity in her eyes: “her face shone with an indescribable beauty, full of wit and warmth and pity, all at once” (65) and she even warns him of herself: “‘I am not made for earthly lust’, she said, her white teeth sharp, her eyes cruel with pity” (66). This description might echo Keats's “Belle Dame sans Merci”, where the fairy is apparently also moved to something like pity when she seduces the knight – she cries when she takes him to her cave. But just as the knight, Thomas does not heed the warning, kisses the fairy

¹⁶⁸ In the romance of “Thomas of Erceldoune” she even sends Thomas back to earth because she fears he may be chosen for the teind – quite in contrast to the one in “Tam Lin” who is ready to sacrifice him to the devil. In *Thomas the Rhymer* no teind-paying occurs, as far as this is specified, and Thomas is sent back because his seven years of service are over.

queen and thus binds himself to her. When he realizes what he has done and hesitates to leave the earth behind, the queen is inflexible: “A bargain made is a bargain made. You must be mine for seven years”. True to her elfin nature she is strict when it comes to the fulfilment of contracts. She leaves it to him, however, to follow her or to wait out his seven years on earth but again evokes the notion of pity: “it were pity on you to take you with me” (68) – a kind of pity of course that serves her own desires quite well.

The marvellous journey

Since the journey to Elfland takes up a considerable part of Child #37, it is interesting to see what different authors make of the model with its descriptions of marvellous events. In Kushner’s case Thomas undertakes both a physical as well as a metaphorical journey. *Thomas the Rhymer* is probably the novel that adheres closest to the ballad model, even if Kushner touches it up with her own inventions and interpretations of the fantastic imagery.

When Thomas is abducted, for instance, it is May in the romance but autumn in Kushner’s novel (in the ballad, no time is specified). Kushner’s version includes the ride on the miraculously swift steed, and the passing through the river of blood, which flows through a cavern. Because of the darkness in the cavern (in the romance it is the Eildon hill they pass through, in *Thomas the Rhymer* it is not clear where they go), Thomas does at first not notice that they are wading through blood, he merely feels some warm liquid surrounding his feet. The hoof-sounds of the horse appear like heartbeats to Thomas, while the actual heartbeats of himself and the fairy become the sound of the ocean to him, seeming like “the sound a seashell gives back to you” (69). This is also part of the ballad, where there is the “roaring of the sea” (versions A and C). Blood, heartbeats and in addition “songs, cradle-songs I’d known once” (69) make this part of the journey like one through a mother’s body, especially since at the end Thomas hears himself “let out a cry, as one new-come into the world, instead of one passed from it” (70). This sort of death-and-rebirth imagery can be found partly also in the other novels, but most strongly here.¹⁶⁹ The stream of blood – the existence of which is explained by the same reason as in the ballad (only C), namely that the earth cannot hold all the blood which is shed on it, so it flows underground – is followed by a passage through a grey desert (Child C).¹⁷⁰ This the elf-queen calls “Nowhere” in answer to Thomas’s question what kind of place it is. So the idea of

¹⁶⁹As has been mentioned in the respective chapters, *Fire and Hemlock* has a certain baptism symbolism (it ends in a pool), in *The Perilous Gard* the protagonists pass through the fairy caves and emerge changed.

¹⁷⁰The stream of blood can be found only in the ballad, in the romance it is merely water.

Nowhere, which is elaborated so imaginatively in *Fire and Hemlock* is touched upon here, too, but not pursued any further.

Next follows a rest in a miraculous orchard (romance and ballad versions A and B) and Thomas tries to eat a peach. The garden seems to be a sort of Garden of Eden for the queen forbids Thomas to eat any of the fruit growing on the trees, reminding him of his forefather Adam's mistake¹⁷¹. All the ballad versions and the romance have the eating taboo but it is not explained where it comes from. The fairy lady in the ballad merely tells him that all fruit of this land is cursed and this had great consequences for mankind (Version B) but it is not explicitly stated that it is the Tree of Knowledge that Thomas tries to eat from. The garden could also be already a part of Elfland where eating food is dangerous for humans. Instead of the forbidden fruit Kushner's fairy queen feeds Thomas (as in A, B) earthly food. Something not found in the ballad nor in the romance description of the paradisiacal garden is the constant shift of seasons in it: "every time I looked, I saw and breathed a different season" (70). This recalls the quickly shifting seasons in Fairyland in *Winter Rose*, but the source for this is unknown to me.

In the garden, the queen transforms herself into an old hag (which is not in the ballad and at a different place in the romance) and shows Thomas three roads, an element, which again is part of both ballad and romance (only there are five roads in the romance). Once more, Kushner slightly expands and alters the material. While in the ballads and the romance the queen tells Thomas that the third road is the one they must travel – "that is the road to fair Elfland, where you and I this night maun gae" – Kushner's Thomas chooses the road himself. Of course there is no knowing what charms are on him that influence his decisions, but he declines the other two because they appear too narrow, or, respectively, too orderly for him, (which would of course tie in with his description as someone who is sometimes willing to walk crooked ways to reach his aims).

An element only found in the romance (and here not granted any elaborate description) is the journey back to the human world. Kushner includes this too and makes her fairy queen take Thomas back to the orchard where they started from and where he is given his parting gift: "The road has come round to its beginning" (165).¹⁷² The queen and Thomas then make the whole journey back, including the passage through the river of blood, only now the river "whispered of warmth and old, old battles. And now I heard the songs of all of them, all the songs that ever

¹⁷¹ This fairy queen seems to know Christianity well and fears the devil even though Thomas calls her world "godless Elfland" (71).

¹⁷² This recalls the circle-imagery that can be found in *Fire and Hemlock* and *Winter Rose*: the train ride to "Nowhere" that ends at Hundsdon House in *Fire and Hemlock* and the horse ride from to Lynn Hall to Lynn Hall in *Winter Rose*.

were sung by the men and women of my own land, heard and understood and forgot them in that journey of days and years and heartbeats” (168). The fact that Thomas now claims to understand the songs he hears may be a hint at his greater maturity, for he has certainly undergone some profound changes during his time in Elfland.

Vain Thomas: Thomas the Rhymer

As has already been pointed out, in Kushner’s novel the male point of view is allotted about as much space as the female one (if not more, pagewise), while the male heroes of the other novels are exclusively seen from the point of view of the female narrators. Kushner’s Thomas is presented from four different perspectives and the passage about his stay in Elfland (an aspect which is given rather less attention in most of the other novels, where Elfland can only be known through the glances the female protagonists get at it) is narrated in detail by himself. The development that all Thomases (or Christophers or even Wentworths) go through is also presented in much more psychological detail than elsewhere and shaped by laying the focus on the fairy queen’s parting gift of truth-telling (this motif can also be found in *Fire and Hemlock* but in none of the other adaptations).

The first-person-narrator structure of the novel entails a kind of meta-level in the narration, with the characters quite aware that they are telling a story, but in Thomas’s part this takes on added relevance. On the one hand, because he, as a sort of professional storyteller, thinks himself especially competent in this regard. On grounds of his experience with stories he once objects even to the elf-queen, who tells him that he must go silently into Elfland: “‘Lady,’ I protested, ‘I know the songs. In all the tales I’ve never heard of such a fate.’ She smiled warmly. ‘But this *your* tale, Thomas, whose end you do not know’” (75). And so Thomas does as the queen decrees it and so here, contrary to patriarchal tradition, the woman is wields the power over the narration and Thomas learns that Elfland is indeed the place “where all songs are true, and all stories history” (4). And even though Thomas at another point declares: “I didn’t think of myself as being in a tale” (127), the fairy queen seems to know that he eventually will be: “Should you like that, Thomas, to be a song yourself?” (114).¹⁷³

When he first appears at Meg’s and Gavin’s doorstep, Thomas is an ambitious, clever young minstrel who knows how to use his tongue to flatter and tease. Not much is known of his pre-history, only that he was an orphan, was at first raised by his brother (51), and later ran away

¹⁷³ The idea of the ‘fictionalisation’ of the story just told can be found in two other adaptations as well: in *The Perilous Gard*, Randal the minstrel starts making a ballad featuring Kate’s adventures and in Dean’s *Tam Lin*, Janet at the end wonders if she should write a book about her strange experiences.

to become the apprentice of an old harper. We are given a few other childhood memories throughout the book, e.g. of Thomas witnessing an old woman singing dance songs for the peasants, which signals that he grew up in humble conditions.

Other memories are of him feeling an outsider, which links him to the girl-heroines of the other books but also to their male counterparts, at least some of them. For the male heroes of *The Perilous Gard*, *Fire and Hemlock* and *Winter Rose* (and *Lords and Ladies*, insofar as King Verence can be counted) are often just as much outsiders or underdogs as the girls connected with them (Christopher Heron because he is treated like a murderer, Thomas Lynn because he grew up as an orphan, Corbet Lynn because he is not wholly human). Kushner's Thomas once confesses to the fairy queen that as a child he, too, felt not "really human. Nobody seemed to like me – I mean, other boys – my brother and his – his wife – and I thought I was – somehow – that I didn't belong there. (...) I thought I came from somewhere else. That I belonged to different people" (75). This feeling of estrangement is shared probably most strongly by Rois in *Winter Rose*, who wonders if she might be an elf-child and Corbet Lynn, who knows that his grandmother was a fairy. In contrast to Rois, who is rather frightened of being the daughter of an otherworld-being, Thomas thinks, when he arrives in Elfland: "I was coming home" (74). This is rather unusual and only later on he starts to feel the strangeness as well. But at first he is even a bit disappointed and angry when the queen assures him that he is just a normal human.

This reaction shows how great Thomas's wish for distinction is.¹⁷⁴ He once remarks: "I knew that I was both too good for the mortal world, and not nearly good enough" (91), which seems to show a more differentiated view. On the one hand, there is his conviction that he is different and better (for instance as a musician). But, on the other hand, he is also aware that he has faults, especially in the social area, such as his carelessness and dishonesty. These weaknesses are later more or less purged out by his stay in Elfland. But at the beginning Thomas is a rather vain boy, wishing to stand out, and determined to use his difference for his own ends. This probably makes Thomas different from girls like Rois or Polly, who suffer from their otherness, but similar to Kate and Tiffany who use their special abilities to achieve their aims. In order to rise in the world as a minstrel, Thomas is quite ready to bluff and lie – he for example once claims to have gotten a golden bracelet from the king when in reality only an earl gave it to him. He is himself also quite aware of his deceitfulness. Meg once remarks: "the music speaks true in you" (22) and Thomas's slightly guilty answer is: "The music (...) if nothing else." (25).

¹⁷⁴ Gavin seconds Thomas's self-assessment in his judgement on minstrels in general: "Rhymer's live in their fancy. He'd speak of dead heroes in the same breath as porridge, as if they were his own dear companions. Madmen and dreamers, your rhymer's don't live in the world as the rest of us do" (28).

So when he offers to write a song for Meg, she begs him to “only write a harp tune. I’m not sure I trust you with the truth” (25). The queen’s gift of the ‘tongue that cannot lie’ is therefore an all the more radical change to Thomas, who has theretofore habitually relied on flattery and cheating.

Before his stay in Elfland, Thomas is quite sure that he will make his way in the world of men (and women). He is apparently also rather successful in his designs, managing to play before nobles and even the king and queen. Gavin, however, is not quite sure if this way of life is so very desirable because Thomas looks always very tired when he comes back from court: “It put me in mind of the fairies’ own fiddler” (52). The fairies’ fiddler (or rather harper) Thomas will, in due time, actually become. When the fairy queen comes to fetch him she says that she knows him and that his musical fame has reached even her land (65), which proves that Thomas’s ambition and confidence in his skill are probably not wholly unjustified.

However, his talents also make him rather conceited. This is proven by his remark when he (relatively earnestly) attempts to propose marriage to the queen of fairies. He declares that he has never proposed before because “I suppose it would take the Queen of Elfland to bring me to it” (145). The queen, of course, declines and is rather blunt to him when, on another occasion, he suggests that she will pine and die for him when he is gone: “Vain Thomas. All my other mortal lovers are wind on the hill, dust in the glen. You would like to be the one exception, to out-charm the charmers” (114). At the end of the novel, of course, the elf-queen prevails and it is Thomas who dies. However, it seems as if, in a way, he is indeed an exception since she comes back to fetch him as he lies dying and it can be surmised that he will live on in Elfland.¹⁷⁵ When, during his first stay with her, the queen tells him that she knows the hour of his death, young Thomas is rather horrified and indeed many years have to pass before he welcomes death as a deliverance from suffering, years in which he tries to make the best of his life even though Elfland has changed him greatly.

In the very beginning of the novel, Thomas is sometimes compared to a young animal - “like some young dogs I’ve known, that think to turn your mind from the mess they’ve made with fetching the ball” (14) or to “a kitten that’s caught a mouse and leaves it at your feet” (50). Later, the fairy queen tells him that he looks “like a cat with cream” (116) when he remembers his many girl-friends and as carefree as a stray cat he sometimes seems to be.¹⁷⁶ He has

¹⁷⁵ A model for this outcome can be found in folklore, where Thomas the Rhymer is sometimes mentioned as living with the fairy folk as an adviser.

¹⁷⁶ On his return Thomas’s altered state is also described with cat-comparisons. To Meg he appears “like a half-drowned kitten looking for its mother” (199). Thomas is quite at a loss as to how to deal with the human world now and while before she is often inclined to chide his forwardness she now pities him for his helplessness.

numerous lovers in court and country but does not want to settle down: “no man binds me. (...) Nor no woman neither” (18), he once claims. However, his claim for independence is proved wrong by the fact that in fact he is nothing but a servant to the nobles whom he tries to please. He is in reality wholly dependent on their goodwill (and knows this, too). Notably, his liaison with the court lady Liliás, strongly disapproved of by her family, is what has brought him to the remote countryside when he arrives at Meg and Gavin’s house for the first time: he is fleeing from the girl’s brothers, who would have disposed of him with little ceremony.¹⁷⁷ But Thomas is not only rather carefree with regard to women, he also sees little need to obey the superstitions of the country which Meg, Gavin and especially Elspeth honour. The topic of not provoking the fairies by imprudent speeches is one of constant debate between him and Elspeth. Thomas does not believe in fairies and mocks Elspeth for her superstitions – until he is captured by the queen of the fairies herself.¹⁷⁸ But for all his scorn of Elspeth’s fairy belief, Thomas is a person to whom stories *are* important, since he makes his living by telling tales. But this is not enough for Elspeth: “It’s all just stories to you, Thomas, Elves and queens and all – just a way to get folk to listen you” (41). Thomas replies: “Only words? But words are important – you said so yourself. Words are real Elspeth, as real as anything is” (41) – but for him “Elves and queens” are important and ‘real’ mostly as his muses, not because he believes in the empirical existence of the former. That they are more real than he imagined he will learn only later on.

As in *The Perilous Gard* the time in Elfland is a time of trial for Kate, Thomas’s stay there is trying for him as well. Even though he is treated much better than Kate, his life in Elfland is somehow deficient, or, as one reviewer put it: “his happiness in Elfland is never complete, his misery is never overwhelming. Instead, he exists in a sort of half-life, at times consumed by his desire to stay with his Queen and lover, while at other times he yearns for the

¹⁷⁷ When he later hears that Liliás has been safely married to an earl, his reaction is a little enigmatic, but in keeping with the cat-imagery: “There was a queer smile on his face. ‘Then I’m the King of the Cats,’ says the minstrel to himself; and spoke no more word that night” (44). This is once more an allusion to a folk-tale, namely one where a man reports at his nightly hearth how he has heard a cat pronounce that the old king of the cats is dead, whereupon the old family tom transforms monstrously and vanishes up the chimney, crying out the afore-cited sentence. How this relates to Thomas is a bit opaque - it might just indicate that the news of Lady Liliás’ wedding are good news to him. In *Romeo and Juliet*, Juliet’s cousin Tybalt is also called ‘Prince of Cats’ (maybe after Tybalt the Cat in the fables of Reynard the Fox) by Mercutio – this can be read in two ways: on the one hand as praise for his agility, but on the other hand as criticism of his quarrelsome temperament, for like a (tom-)cat he is very territorial and always intent on picking a fight with rivals. The first part of these associations might apply to Thomas Rhymer, the second, however, I think, do not, for Thomas is probably somebody who prefers running away to fighting, as his flight from Liliás’s brothers shows.

¹⁷⁸ It is interesting that he once buys Elspeth green ribbons and she accepts to wear them (54), later on he buys Elspeth green silk for a wedding dress (200) and Elspeth does not object. So the belief that green (as a fairy colour) is unlucky is apparently not part of Elspeth’s superstitions. (Notably, today green is thought especially unlucky for weddings – but this probably only since the seventeenth century as for example “both Charles I and his bride married in green” (Hutchings 1997, 58).)

life and people he left behind him” (Knapp, 1999). Calling Thomas’s existence in Elfland ‘half-life’ would of course be quite in keeping with the traditional idea that living there is only a kind of shadow version of living on earth, even though, compared with other novels, Thomas’s stay in the fairy realm seems relatively pleasant and interesting. Nevertheless, he undergoes deep-reaching changes that make him return to earth a different man. One central trait of character which is most deeply affected by Thomas’s stay in the otherworld is his relation to the truth.

Before Elfland he had been rather willing to bend truth, to sweet-talk and deceive, in short, he was apt to employ the power of words in order to reach his (not always totally honourable) aims. But he returns as one who has lost the power to lie, which is of course something rather troubling to him since at court a “tongue that cannot lie” (156) is rather impractical. However, in contrast to *Fire and Hemlock*, where the weird of truth-speaking was conferred on Tom by Laurel as a punishment, Thomas in this novel is given this ability as a reward for lending his voice to the dove. Apparently, the queen thinks it quite a gift. As we later learn it is a tricky present, since Thomas becomes a seer but also a person who cannot tell an untruth even if the occasion urgently calls for it. Hunter, apparently suddenly endowed with insight into human thinking, foresees the double nature of the reward, commenting: “I wonder if he will thank you for it” (156).

Before he is rewarded with his gift, however, Thomas must learn how to live in silence. Interestingly, it seems that he thereby – though reduced in other respects – gains importance as an inhabitant of Elfland, for the clothing given to him changes: “All the clothes I found now in my wardrobe were true green, elegant and simply cut. I put some on, and felt as if I wore the colors of some great house: the badge of Elfland” (162). It seems that in a sense he has been accepted as one of them: “after the challenge, the Elves accorded me a kind of honor, treating me as kindly as they could, some even with respect” (164), which seems similar to the development in *The Perilous Gard* where Kate also rises in the elfin world after serving the Lady. Strangely enough, however, his silence seems both to raise *and* degrade Thomas since the elves “spoke more freely in my presence, as though I were a hound at their feet” (164). He has always been regarded as a sort of pet, so maybe his inarticulateness lets him appear even more like an animal to them. That this contradicts the notion of him being treated with honour is quite in keeping with the general ambiguous image of elves created in *Thomas the Rhymer*.

But not only the way Thomas is treated by others changes, he himself undergoes a considerable change, as he describes it himself: “In the queen’s presence I learned patience, and to hold my temper. With even the illusion that words were weapons against her gone from me, I learned what it was to bear another’s choices, and have none myself” (164). Like Kate in the

caves he grows more mature during his time of trial. And the fairy queen responds to his development – Thomas observes that now he cannot talk back to her any longer, she is much gentler to him, “loving, almost, for the sacrifice I had chosen” (165).

His new maturity shows also in his willingness to take responsibility for others. When he is told that he must go back to earth because his seven years are over, he asks the queen to be allowed to take his human servant back with him. He has taken pity on the woman and feels in charge of her, but his wish is not fulfilled since the changeling woman has eaten fairy food and is thus forever bound to Elfland. But at least the queen promises to take care of the woman until she dies.

When Thomas finally returns to earth, he behaves as if he was a completely different person and especially Meg is surprised at how much he has changed (183).¹⁷⁹ She realises that he is, at first at least, completely defenceless, bereft of his ability of bending words and truth to his aims (187). And not only has he lost the skill of telling an untruth, he has also “lost the ability to reconcile seeming and knowledge”. So when Elspeth tells him she is married (193), which is a kind of lie since her husband is already dead at that time, he is quite shocked. He can moreover not understand at first that the others have difficulties believing his tales of Elfland and feels rather desperate about how to make a living (198) – at least in Thomas’s opinion being a minstrel apparently is apparently very much about being dishonest.¹⁸⁰ As time passes, he eventually learns how to handle conversation with the nobility again and they learn to estimate him not only as a minstrel but as a prophet and political advisor and when he dies decades later, he is an established and valued member of society.

No fair Janet: Elspeth

In contrast to the other novels, this one is the only one which gives us – at least for some time of the narration – an insight into what goes on in the head of the male protagonist. The difference between Kushner’s *Thomas the Rhymer* and the other novels is that this novel’s focus is very much on Child #37 (even though traces of Child #39 and many other ballads can be found in it), while in the other adaptations Child #39 is dominant in shaping the plot. This might

¹⁷⁹ His new vulnerability is illustrated by an occurrence shortly after his return. He has gone wandering in the hills and returns with a nest with two blue eggs in it (191), which is not only quite strange for autumn, maybe as much out of place as Thomas feels at that moment but could also be read as a symbol for his fragile condition, especially if one links it to one of his earlier statements about Elspeth, who had, shortly before he vanished, turned into “a sort of trusting thing—a *bird’s nest*, a quick-beating heart I held in my hand” (64, emphasis mine).

¹⁸⁰ Thinking that he is not fit to live on earth anymore, Thomas once even tries to return to Elfland, but cannot find the way in anymore. Whether this is because the elf-queen does not want him to come back or because Meg has put a twig of rowan (a charm against fairies) in his pocket remains unclear.

have to do with the attractions that a ballad with a female hero holds for (predominantly) female authors. However, even though Kushner concentrates on a ballad that lacks a (human) female protagonist, she nevertheless manages to integrate a female perspective by having part of the story told by the women who remain on earth and wonder about Thomas's fate when he vanishes into Elfland (and for whom no model can be found within the ballad). Henry Jenkins assesses this narrative element as one that does more than merely create variety: "Through her female narrators, Kushner interrogates the primacy of the familiar male adventure story with its fascination with seducing beautiful women and of journeying to unfamiliar spaces. She reminds us that when Thomas disappears for seven years, he leaves behind the women who cared about him" (1999). One of these women is Meg, the old peasant who acts as a sort of foster-mother for Thomas. The other is Elspeth, one of Thomas's human lovers and his later wife. In contrast to Tam Lin's Janet, who is a noblewoman, Elspeth is a peasant girl, but one that stands out from her peers through her wit and pride and wish for independence.

Elspeth is a person deeply steeped in fairy lore. She for instance insists on calling the elves 'the good neighbours' out of fear that they may be insulted if called fairies. She is moreover used to the tradition of putting out a dish of milk to appease the 'good folk', having been born in a region where belief in the supernatural is apparently very strong: "she'd been brought up in the shadow of the Eildon Hills, that were cleft in three with a blow of the giant's sword" (40).¹⁸¹

Interestingly enough, Elspeth is courted once by a boy called Jack Rowan, who wants to buy her a green ribbon, so that Tom teases her: "'Isn't that a fairy colour?' 'Say Good Folk,'" (38) she corrects almost without thinking: "They don't like to hear themselves named" (38). But Tom goes on teasing: "Well, you'll be safe enough," he considers, "with a man named Rowan. Or is rowan a charm against witches? Then *he'll* be safe" (38). Rowan is indeed a remedy against fairies (*and* witches). As Briggs observes, it is: "the tree which above all others offered the best protection against fairy enchantment and witchcraft" (1976, 344). Later, Elspeth marries a man called 'Jack on the Ridge', but it becomes never quite clear if this is the same person as Jack Rowan.

Elspeth could of course be compared to Janet in "Tam Lin". Kushner seems to have anticipated this and more or less fends it off by having her character consider the connection herself and reject it: "But I was no fair Janet, I knew. He had wed me out of shame, out of

¹⁸¹ Brian Moffat mentions another local legend explaining the peculiar shape of the Eildon hill: "Eildon has entered local folklore. A fine instance is the contest of skills between the Devil and the local wizard and necromancer, Michael Scot. Scot threw a spell and, lo, Eildon was trifurcated" (1988, 34).

pity...” (232) – this statement is probably not quite correct but reflects Elspeth’s sometimes rather low self-esteem. And certainly, Elspeth is not heroic in the same sense that Janet is, rescuing her lover out of Elfland. Elspeth, who does not even know where Thomas has disappeared to, simply waits. But, as the reader comes to know later, this period of time is one that demands many sacrifices of Elspeth. Left by her lover, she finally consents to marry a widower with children, namely ‘Jack on the Ridge’. After the loveless marriage is ended by the husband’s early death, she is merely tolerated by her husband’s family and treated hardly better than a servant. Therefore, when Thomas comes home, full of marvellous stories about his time in Elfland, she is at first quite unwilling to listen: “I’ve stories of my own” (195), she tells him, contrasting her own bitter experiences with his fairy tale. It may be interesting here, however, to come back once more to ‘fair Janet’, to whom Elspeth compares herself so unfavourably. For, if looked at closely, the situation that prompts Janet to do her heroic deed is not better, or even worse than Elspeth’s – Janet is unmarried, pregnant and not able to procure a father for her child unless she wrenches him from another woman, i.e., the fairy queen. So both Janet and Elspeth have their respective trials to live through. However, it seems to me that in this respect Kushner makes her *Thomas the Rhymer* more similar to “Tam Lin” – and probably more interesting to female readers: by introducing a woman who suffers for the hero’s sake (even though she is, in contrast to Janet, not given any clue as to how she could get her sweetheart back). That she would have tried, is, I think, rather probable, given Elspeth’s characterisation throughout the book. She is portrayed as a headstrong young woman, who for example (even though this is maybe only a joke) considers running away with soldiers (190) after Thomas has gone and her husband has died because she is too proud to return to her brother’s family as a widow.

Apart from that, the ballad of Tam Lin weaves in and out of the narration at other points, too, especially when Elspeth feels unsure of Thomas. For instance when Thomas’s bastard son Hugh visits the Rhymer’s tower and Thomas and his first-born perform “Tam Lin” together. Listening to the ballad, Elspeth is reminded of the teind to hell paid by the fairies every seven years, realizing that she herself has been married to Thomas for seven years now. She consequently fears that she might lose him again, however, this happens eventually only after thrice seven years, when Thomas dies and is taken by the fairy queen.

For some moments she also fears that Hugh might be the son of an elf-lady (“a lady of what court?” she asks herself (229)) and that he might have been sent to fetch his father back to Elfland. These fears dissolve soon enough, but enough human problems remain because Elspeth is hurt that Thomas has never told her about his illegitimate son. Questioned by her he claims that he hadn’t known of Hugh himself but later refuses to tell his wife the name of Hugh’s

mother (236-240). This scene seems like a reverted reenactment of one part of “Tam Lin”, when Janet is questioned by her relatives about her pregnancy but refuses to give away the father’s name. Here is one of many occasions where the power of words – and silence – is thematised and Thomas, having learned the power of silence in Elfland, chooses to keep the secret. (But not forever – he eventually gives in and tells the story about Liliias and is quite surprised that Elspeth remembers the name from one of his old stories about the king’s court, which shows how attentively she had watched and listened to the rhymer from the beginning.)

Apart from the texts already mentioned under the section ‘Intertextuality’, still other fairy stories are woven into *Thomas the Rhymer*: Elspeth once again compares herself to a character from a traditional fairy story, declaring that she feels like the seal-woman’s husband (206). Legends about seal-people or selkies (who are known as roanes in Irish folklore) are common in Scottish folklore and belong to the *animal bride* type of folktale. They are described as fairies who live in the sea in the shape of seals, but when they come to shore they shed their skin and take a human form. There are several legends about fishermen who trapped a seal-girl by hiding her skin, thus forcing her to stay on land and eventually making her agree to a marriage. Usually, however, the seal-woman sooner or later discovers her seal skin again and vanishes (Briggs 1976, 136). Elspeth remembers a slightly different version of the story, which seems reminiscent of the stories of the water women Melusine and Undine – in Elspeth’s tale the husband had promised never to beat his seal-wife but eventually breaks his promise and she vanishes. Elspeth in turn fails to keep her vow never to get angry at Thomas’s enforced truth-telling or his sometimes stubborn silences. Thomas does not vanish, but at least once a serious quarrel ensues, when he does not want to talk about Liliias.

Summing Up

Like *Winter Rose*, *Lords and Ladies* and *Tam Lin*, Kushner’s novel is aimed at an adult audience, and I think this accounts for some of its special characteristics, such as the inclusion of love-scenes between Thomas and the elf-queen, its sometimes rather riddling and indirect style and the number of unresolved questions.¹⁸²

Thomas the Rhymer stands apart from the other novels in my corpus in so far as it is told by different narrators and also in so far as it is the only novel that lets the male hero himself tell part of the tale. This can of course be explained by the fact that, with regard to the source

¹⁸² Such questions are for example: Who is the King who Waits and what is his function? Where has Hunter disappeared to? Why do dead lovers come to Elfland? What is the significance of the ‘game’ that the queen and Hunter play? And quite a few more.

material, the focus here is clearly on “Thomas the Rhymer” with its seductive, but not directly evil elf-queen. This might also be the reason for the relatively positive description of the elves, who are, even though strange in their way of thinking and sometimes cruel in their actions, viewed with a certain goodwill.

But *Thomas the Rhymer* is not only a novel about fairies. It is also a novel about art and its practitioners. Thomas is, as Ellen Kushner puts it, “the artist who is literally seduced by his muse, comes closer to her than any human should to the source of his art, and is profoundly changed. He can never be at home in this world again, and yet he must continue to live in it. That’s how every writer feels, I think” (cited by Windling 1996). The identification of the author with the figure of Thomas rather than with that of Janet (=Elspeth) is probably also a reason why Thomas gets quite a lot to say (his part takes up about half of the book) and why his alienation from earthly life is explored in some detail in Elspeth’s and Meg’s part. In his difficulties of adapting to the normal world again, Thomas also resembles the knight in John Keats’s “*Belle Dame sans Merci*”, a pre-text that is referred to, if not as prominently as the ballads, frequently also in other adaptations. One of them is Pamela Dean’s *Tam Lin*. And if, to come back to this chapter’s beginning, Ellen Kushner labels her works ‘literary fantasy’, then Dean’s novel certainly belongs to this category as well, if not more so, since the latter is one of the most obviously intertextual works (in regard to ‘high literature’) in my corpus, as the following chapter will show.

11. *Tam Lin* (1991) by Pamela Dean

The author

Pamela Dean (pen name of Pamela Dean Dyer-Bennet) was born in 1953. She studied English at Carleton College in Minnesota. She is an American fantasy author who has to date written six novels and a number of short-stories. Dean was formerly a member of a writing group called “The Scribbles”, which comprised fantasy authors Emma Bull, Will Shetterly, Kara Dalkey, Nate Bucklin, Patricia Wrede and Steven Brust.

Plot summary

One autumn in the early 1970s, Janet Carter starts as a freshman at a college called Blackstock somewhere in a fictional American Midwestern town, a college where her father has been teaching English literature for two decades.¹⁸³ She has decided to major in English literature. On her arrival, she meets her roommates, two biology majors named Molly and Tina. With Molly she easily develops a friendship, while her relationship to Tina is always slightly distant, since Tina does not share Janet’s tastes and interests, for example with regard to literature.

Shortly after the beginning of their first term, they meet a group of rather charismatic Classics majors. Three boys of this group, Nick Tooley, Robin Armin and Thomas Lane, become the boyfriends of the three girls. During the next three years, Janet and Nick, Molly and Robin and Tina and Thomas experience the joys and troubles of college life. Most of their time is taken up by their classes, interrupted by trips to the theatre and to town, campus events and holidays.

Despite having one as a boyfriend herself, Janet is repeatedly puzzled by the behaviour of many Classics majors. They form a kind of exclusive group within the college and pursue a range of eccentric traditions, such as riding over the campus at certain nights of the year (Halloween and Midsummer Eve) or spending part of the holidays together. There are rumours that all Classics majors are slightly crazy as well as rumours that the head of the department, Professor Medeous, is having lesbian relationships with her colleague Melinda Wolfe and some of her female students.

Apart from wondering about the slightly strange behaviour of the Classics people, Janet is troubled by the fact that the college is apparently haunted. Books are thrown out of a window

¹⁸³ The name of the college was probably inspired by “*Tam Lin*”: “But the morn at een is Halloween, Our fairy folks a’ do ride; / And she that will her true-love win,/ At Blackstock she must bide” (version E).

at night and Janet watches this incident several times but can never find out if this is, as it is reputed to be, the manifestation of a ghost (of a girl named Victoria Thompson, as rumour has it) or if it was just a trick played on her by other students. She is also worried about the fact that, while at college, she cannot think about these events clearly and can only remember them when she comes home to spend the weekends with her parents.

The otherwise relatively peaceful life of the three girls and their boyfriends is somewhat disrupted (in their first year) by a theatre performance that the boys stage with their drama group and which comes across as a biting satire on Professor Medeous's ways of running her department. Thomas is the one mostly responsible for the staging and is almost thrown out of college for this by the furious Medeous.

Time goes by and in the second year Thomas and Tina split up. Their relationship had always been slightly difficult since they had different tastes and interests. Later on, Nick and Janet split up as well because he neglects her on account of doing a double major and because he apparently betrays her with another girl (even though Janet never has any definite proof for this latter assumption). Janet and Thomas try to make up for the loss of their partners in an – at first purely platonic – friendship.

One evening, however, rather out of the blue, Janet seduces Thomas. Afterwards she fears that she might be pregnant even though she has regularly been taking contraceptive pills. Quite by chance she then finds out that part of the Classics majors, including Nick and Robin, are not simple college students at all but must be Elizabethan actors from Shakespeare's acting company. Janet now fears that she is losing her mind, but in talking to Thomas discovers that what she has found out is true. Moreover, Professor Medeous is the queen of Elfland and has taken the actors (and other people) into timeless Elfland for centuries, from where they apparently make occasional reappearances. Thomas, who is a normal mortal, is one of Medeous's latest victims. After hearing that Janet is pregnant, he asks her not to undergo an abortion because only in her present state she can save him from being killed by Medeous and her crew, who need a human sacrifice to pay their teind to hell.

After Thomas has told his whole story, Janet decides to try and save him. She succeeds in pulling him down from his horse during the midnight procession at Halloween, holds on to him as he is changed into various animals and finally frees him from the spell. Medeous has to let him go but declares that next time there will be two victims instead. Janet and Thomas decide to try to stay together and get married when their child is one year old.

Intertextuality

Since Dean's *Tam Lin* deals with a group of literature students and part of the novel is devoted to the description of their course contents, the book is heavily packed with intertextual references so that the author herself calls it a "love poem, with jokes, to my college, and ultimately to the study of English literature" (interview with Mohanraj in *Strange Horizons*, 2001). It will therefore not be possible to find and discuss every single allusion here and I will limit myself to those most important for the fairy-subplot.

Of the great wealth of allusions, many are merely mentioned once as books that one of the characters happens to read at that moment. Others serve to illustrate a character's current mood, as he or she quotes a particular poem or line from a play. Still others are books a character has a special liking for, thus helping to round off their portrayals. However, only a handful of works make a repeated appearance and serve to illustrate or foreshadow plot developments, so I will discuss these in more detail.

There is, of course, the title-giving ballad "Tam Lin". This, although it provides an important plot element (boy taken by queen of fairies to be sacrificed, rescued by pregnant girlfriend), seems to run 'underground' for most of the narration and only surfaces towards the end of the novel, as can be inferred from the summary. It is moreover never mentioned by name save in the book's title and Medeous's final recitation of a stanza. In an annex to the novel, however, the whole of Child #39 A is reproduced. The careful reader will in fact find many small allusions to the ballad and fairy plot interspersed throughout the book. The first impression, however, will probably be one of a college novel with a fairy plot tagged on at the end, or, as Martha Hixon puts it: "an uneasy blend of two discrete stories, a modern coming-of-age realistic narrative and a fantasy novel" (2004, 84).¹⁸⁴

The most obvious references to the ballad, which indicate the characters' later fate, are the names of the protagonists: First, there is Janet Margaret Carter, who, in her names unites both the names given to the ballad's heroine (depending on the version it is either Janet or Margaret) and the main setting, Carterhaugh. Secondly, there is Thomas Lane (Tam Lin). Another allusion to Carterhaugh (or Kertonha, Chaster's Wood or Chester Wood, as it is called in different versions of the ballad) can be found in the name of the building where the Classics department is housed: Chester Hall. Apart from that there are a few allusions to Scotland, the original setting of the ballad. For instance Janet has Scots-Irish ancestry (241), and Thomas once calls her Jenny,

¹⁸⁴ Admittedly, in Diana Wynne Jones's *Fire and Hemlock* the revelation that Laurel and her entourage are fairies comes rather late, too. However, somehow it seems that Jones handles the unobtrusive introduction of the supernatural more successfully than Dean, as will be discussed in more detail in the final chapter.

claiming that “it was the piping put me in mind of it” (ibid.), meaning the bagpipes which Robin plays during a concert of Nick’s musical group. Moreover, there is Medeous herself, wearing on one occasion a Scottish tartan-skirt “to which Janet doubted she was entitled” (289) – but of course at that point Janet has no idea who Medeous really is.

The references to the plot of “Tam Lin”, are, as mentioned above, a bit unevenly distributed throughout the novel. Right at the beginning, Janet quarrels with Thomas in the college library about the last available exemplar of the *Romance of the Rose*, which has been assigned for reading in Janet’s course and was “edited, it turns out, by the character who is the Queen of Fairies in the novel” (Hixon 2004, 85). This is a modern-day equivalent to Janet plucking roses at Carterhaugh and being accosted by Tam Lin because of her intrusion into his territory.¹⁸⁵ Thomas Lane behaves extremely impolitely at this opportunity and Janet is surprised to learn later that he is usually a very friendly and considerate person. Despite Thomas’s rude behaviour, however, Janet is apparently not as exasperated as she first seems, for in reconsidering the situation “she was not pleased with her own part in the conversation, which felt in retrospect more like flirtation than reprimand” (74). Janet’s rose-plucking in the ballad is also often interpreted as her way of initiating sexual contact with Tam Lin (Acland, 2005) and thus Janet Carter’s behaviour is probably relatively close to the ballad even though the setting is so different.

After this initial tangle, nothing much happens between Janet and Thomas. Janet dates Nick and Thomas becomes the boyfriend of Tina. Together with Molly and Robin they often spend their free time together, having lunch, going to town, etc., but apart from that there is not much close personal contact between Thomas and Janet. At the end, Molly, however, declares that “if you mean you and Thomas, it’s been three years,” (417) when Janet exclaims that she has only been dating Thomas for three weeks and cannot imagine raising a child together with him. Maybe Molly is extraordinarily perceptive. But if Thomas and Janet have harboured deeper feelings for each other than each of them cared to admit, then this has been hidden from the reader quite well. Once Thomas calls Janet, when she fusses over him, “a nice motherly type” (242). He later claims that he would like to have a “motherly sort” (350) of woman as a girlfriend, remarking that “they’re in remarkably short supply these days” (350). Janet is surprised about the grimness that accompanies this remark, not knowing what he is hinting at.

¹⁸⁵ The connection between Janet and roses is emphasised throughout the book: Nick gives her a necklace of silver rose leaves and stems that he commissioned from Robin (162), a shirt made by Janet’s grandmother and now in her own possession has “green leaves and vines embroidered on all the hems, and three tiny roses that it was a game to find” (193) and once she contemplates roses and their symbolism (75).

But since she has no idea what Thomas intends by harping on her motherly side nothing more happens and for a very long period of narrated time nothing points at Thomas and Janet becoming lovers and re-enacting the ballad. Even after Tina has left Thomas and Janet has broken up with Nick and their friendship deepens as they comfort each other in their distress, nothing more passionate occurs: “A nagging worry that Thomas was going to go all romantic on her now that they were both free metamorphosed gradually into a certain irritation that he showed no signs of it” (399). This situation continues for about three quarters of a year, until the beginning of Janet’s senior year at Blackstock.

Only then does Thomas (knowing that the end of October of his seventh year at Blackstock and thus his last days are drawing near) suggest to her that they take time out from their courses and do all kinds of spare-time activities and this is apparently what finally brings them together. The final point of departure is a performance of Christopher Fry’s *The Lady’s not for Burning*, which they see together. Coming home from the play, Janet seduces Thomas (in Chester Hall) thus reversing the role-distribution of the ballad, where Tam takes Janet, in some versions even against her will. Ten days later Janet discovers that she is probably pregnant, but she does not dare tell Thomas for another two weeks. Instead she tries to find a herb that might induce an abortion and eventually goes to seek for yarrow. This behaviour of course resembles Janet in the ballad trying to find noxious herbs near Carterhaugh. Searching for yarrow on campus (again near Chester Hall), Janet is confronted by Thomas, as Janet in the ballad is by Tam Lin. As Tam does with Janet, Thomas pleads with his girlfriend not to kill the unborn child, because this might be the only way to save him on Halloween. At this point (page 429 of 456) he finally tells Janet his whole history. After some confusion she realises that this – the presence of fairies at Blackstock – fits together perfectly with her discovery that Nick and Robin must be Elizabethan actors. Janet had before been very puzzled about this and had not been able to find an explanation for this, but the idea of mortals taken to Elfland makes sense to her:

Not aliens. Not time travellers. Not science fiction at all but a far older idea; remnants of things she had read in her childhood. And this did make sense. If you were in the habit of vanishing under a hill into a realm where time stood still, then, supposing you wanted to live in the world again—and after all, one must do something—you might very well decide to go to college to catch up on what the world had been doing. Adolescents are awkward, they know nothing, nobody is surprised at any ignorance they display. Mingle with college students and nobody would notice you twice. (431-2)

Thomas then tells her how he became the victim of Medeous in his first year at college: Intending to prove his mettle to some fellow students on Halloween, he went to borrow a horse from a nearby farm, where Medeous and her crew also rented their horses for their customary rides. Johnny Lane, one of Medeous’s followers, tried to warn Thomas indirectly that this was the night when Medeous collected new victims but Thomas did not understand, being ignorant of

Medeous's true nature. He took the horse but it eventually threw him off when it saw the other riders. Thomas had to face Medeous, who accused him of stealing the horse, thus making him feel accountable to her. But this is only a pretext. Thomas claims that "she had me from the minute I fell off that horse" (435). This is a parallel to one variant of the ballad (A), where Tam Lin tells Janet that he went out hunting and fell off his horse: "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". There is, however, no information if Thomas has been to Elfland (i.e., in the 'green hill') after he was caught. It is, however, not very probable, since Professor Medeous spends the seven years following the incident on earth, teaching at Blackstock.

Having heard this account, Janet finally goes to consult with her parents about her situation, just as Janet goes home to Carterhaugh in some versions of the ballad after she has slept with Tam Lin. Her father tries to find out who impregnated his daughter but, much as Janet in the ballad, she refuses to tell him. She finally makes her mind up to try and save Thomas, who has given her instructions what to do but has not warned her of the transformations as Tam Lin had done with his Janet. Together with Molly, Janet waits for the Halloween procession of black, brown and white horses. To stay warm, she is wrapped in her green blanket – which corresponds to Janet's green cloak in the ballad. Their waiting place is near a bridge by a river that crosses the campus and this is probably Dean's equivalent of Miles Cross, since a bridge is also a kind of liminal place, connecting two areas.¹⁸⁶ The fairies come on black horses, the humans taken to Elfland ride brown ones. Thomas and Robin both arrive on white horses, in contrast to the ballad, where there is only one white horse, namely Tam Lin's. The significance of this is not quite clear, since at other occasions an even greater number of white horses accompany Medeous and the others, while in the ballad the white horse singles out Tam Lin as the sacrificial victim.

Janet now dutifully pulls Thomas down from his horse and he turns into a lion, a snake, a dove, a swan, animals which can also be found in the ballad (and three of which Dean makes part of the Blackstock coat of arms). During the transformations, Janet hears echoes of conversations Thomas had with her or with her friends in moments of crisis, for which there is no comparable occurrence in the ballad. Finally, Thomas turns into a "burning brand" (448), as in many ballad versions, with which Janet plunges into the nearby river in desperation. This transformation is the last and she ends up holding Thomas, naked but alive. Janet goes on to cover him with her green blanket just like Janet in the ballad throws her green cloak over her similarly naked, rescued lover. In Janet Carter's case she merely thinks that he shouldn't catch

¹⁸⁶ In Child #39, version F, the meeting place is also a bridge, Chester's bridge.

cold, while Janet in the ballad symbolically ‘claims’ her lover by this gesture. Professor Medeous then recites the last line of “Tam Lin”: “Oh had I known Tam Lin / what this night I did see / I had looked him in the eye / and turned him into a tree” (450). The traditional variants of the ballad have the fairy exclaim that she wants to give Tam eyes of wood or a heart of stone but not that she wants to turn him into a tree. Only one interpretation by the 1960s folk band *Fairport Convention* and some versions deriving from it have the line “would have turned him into a tree” – and (in her afterword to the novel) Dean remarks how the *Fairport Convention* version was the first she knew of “Tam Lin”. It seems that she has opted for this relatively recent modification of the ballad in order to let Janet ponder the horrible idea of Thomas being turned into some form of vegetable life entailing some kind of death of the soul thus making the punishment more drastic (450). I think that, however, neither the loss of one’s eye-sight nor a replacement of a normal heart by a heart of stone seems less cruel than the transformation into a tree, as in the latter two instances the victim would retain his human consciousness and probably suffer much more.

Apart from “Tam Lin”, other Child ballads only play a minor role. “Thomas the Rhymer” is only mentioned twice: Towards the end, Janet looks up the fairy ballads in her *Norton Anthology* to find out about the teind to hell. She finds “Thomas the Rhymer” and decides that this is the wrong story (444). The other reference has occurred shortly before, when Thomas recalls his first encounter with Medeous in her role as fairy queen (434). He explains how his experience was different from that of the other Thomas and that he never mistook her for the Virgin Mary or any similar figure but that he was terribly scared (434). There is no journey to Fairyland and neither is a gift of truth-speaking mentioned in the novel, elements of Child #37 which otherwise seem to be the two most popular ones for adaptations. Neither is Thomas Lane described as particularly musical. That he has a beautiful speaking voice is emphasised several times but he is never seen singing or playing an instrument. In contrast to Thomas, Nick and Robin are extremely musical and it might be that they are designed as some kind of Thomas-Rhymer figures as they are both (former) lovers of the fairy queen and Medeous does not seem to want to sacrifice them.

There is a reference to ballads in general, since the ghost of Victoria Thompson frequently throws a book called *Legendary Ballads of England and Scotland* (340). During her first confusion about her pregnancy, Janet moreover recalls the ballad of “Mary Hamilton” (421), which is Child #173. In this ballad the female protagonist is alleged of killing her illegitimate child and punished for this by death.

Since Janet and her friends are interested in theatre and part of them also act in a university theatre group, their attendance of performances of several plays and the ensuing discussions take up several chapters of the novel. The first of these plays are *Hamlet* and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (and a movie version of *Othello*). Here, the first tentative flirtations between the three girls and their future boyfriends take place. Apart from serving as a means for characterisation – the reactions of the students to the plays are very different – they probably also serve to foreground certain overarching themes in the novel: mortality and jealousy. For instance, Janet is rather surprised (and moved) to see Thomas Lane cry at the end of *Hamlet*: She “was greatly taken aback, but warmed to him enormously” (149). Considering, however, that he probably knows at that time already that he is destined to be the next victim of Professor Medeous and her court, his susceptibility to displays of tragic death is probably not that surprising after all. It seems, moreover, that Thomas quite distinctively identifies with Hamlet, though of course Janet cannot know that he is describing his own situation at Medeous’s court, when he commiserates with Hamlet:

“He’s not like any of them, he’s completely alien to that whole bright corrupt court. All of them are against him, even the ones who love him, and none of them can help him out of his terrible dilemma, because their minds and spirits are not like his. He is a stranger in his own country and his own family. He hasn’t got anybody.” Thomas looked at Janet as Hamlet had looked at Ophelia—as if he had been loosed out of Hell to speak of horrors. (151)

However, Thomas does not seem to be the only one who identifies with a character in *Hamlet*, for Robin objects to his gloomy description: “‘He had Horatio,’ said Robin, fixing Thomas with a grave and anxious look” (151). Thomas concedes this but says that Horatio cannot do anything to stop Hamlet’s doom because “their minds don’t meet, either, really” (151). Apparently, Thomas acknowledges that Robin means well and wants to help him but he also seem to think that nobody will be able to do anything for him when the time comes and that Robin cannot understand him anyway. The two of them have apparently quarrelled about this question frequently:

“Nobody’s doomed,” said Robin, with great scorn. “Fate awaits our doing.” “We await Fate’s.” [said Thomas] “If you do that, Fate will doom you; but it’s you who will have made that doom.” [Robin replied] “All I’m saying,” said Thomas, lifting his chin, “is that some situations are hopeless. And Hamlet’s was one of them. And—” “This is an old argument,” said Robin. (152)¹⁸⁷

How clueless Janet is with regard to this argument and Thomas’s actual situation is indicated when Robin quotes another line from *Hamlet* to which the continuation would be: “There’s a divinity that shapes our ends, rough hew them how we will”. Thomas, looking very wretchedly, forbids Robin to say the line and Janet wonders why: “Unless Thomas was as militant an atheist

¹⁸⁷ Maybe this discussion about ‘Fate’ is also a kind of allusion to the Medeous’s nature as a *Fata*.

as her father it seemed an odd sentiment to object to” (152). What she cannot know is that the ‘divinity’ Thomas is thinking of is not God but the queen of fairies. It seems, however, that, at least in her subconscious, something about this has registered with her, for the night after the play she dreams about Hamlet and Laertes duelling and turning out to be Thomas and Nick. Waking up, she thinks that Nick “might fancy himself as Hamlet, but the notion of any rivalry between them was not welcome” (154). She does not realise that it is actually Thomas who sees himself as Hamlet, even though her idea of a latent rivalry between the two young men is probably correct.

The second important occasion where a play brings together the three girls and their boyfriends is their theatre group’s staging of Cyril Tournear’s *Revenger’s Tragedy*, which has frequently been a subject in their discussions in the weeks and months before. All three boys, Robin, Nick and Thomas, plus most of the other Classics majors from Medeous’s circle appear as actors in the play. Janet, Molly and Tina are merely spectators but nevertheless the show has consequences also for their future college life. The Jacobean play is, by means of costuming and lighting, staged by the theatre group as a satire on the Classics department and Professor Medeous’s corrupt rule over it. Thomas is the one who is mostly responsible for the radical interpretation. Despite Nick’s and Robin’s attempts to dissuade him from carrying out his plans, he goes through with it and Nick later explains what has happened:

Robin and I had a scheme (...) to perform a *Revenger’s Tragedy* that would show, subtly, to the initiated, that Medeous runs the department as the Duke ran his court. She would have known, and the Classics majors, but nobody else would. (...) Now Thomas wanted more than that. He’s going to switch to English (...) [but] he could not just walk in and tell [Medeous] so. He had to make a grand and irrevocable gesture. (267)

This unfavourable account may be tinted by Nick’s latent dislike of Thomas.¹⁸⁸ But indeed the play provokes a kind of scandal, since Professor Medeous, who had come to attend the first night, walks out of the play when it becomes clear that she is being parodied by her students (which is certainly yet another allusion to *Hamlet*, where King Claudius leaves the wandering players’ performance when he realises that his crimes are shown on stage – Thomas even quotes from *Hamlet* (“the King rises. Give o’er the play. Lights, lights, lights, lights” (263)) when Medeous walks out). It seems also that she knows who is to be credited for the unsavoury allusions to her own person and therefore, Thomas, in the following weeks “is fighting for his

¹⁸⁸ That Nick is apparently not too fond of Thomas Lane is hinted at repeatedly throughout the novel. On the first occasion when Janet experiences Nick and Thomas together it already becomes obvious that they do not really get on, as Nick starts provoking Thomas: “‘Be quiet,’ said Thomas, ‘leave the girl alone. I don’t mind talking about poetry, but I’m damned if I’ll talk about critics.’ ‘And you so eager to get on to graduate school, where they do nothing else,’ said Nick. Oh, dear, thought Janet, looking at the back of Thomas’s head and the stiff set of his shoulders, this will never do” (165). Much later, Thomas also openly confesses: “Nick and I never really got along” (404).

life, (...) academically” (267), that is, he has to convince the authorities not to throw him out of college.

A third play that decisively influences the lives of the protagonists is Christopher Fry’s *The Lady’s not for Burning*. Most obviously, the two main characters there are also named Thomas and Jennet, even though Janet claims that, in merely reading the play, she had never noticed this. Only in watching it performed on stage does she realise it and also that the play has a “highly unsympathetic Nicholas” (408). Another (though rather hidden) hint that Thomas and Janet can be associated with Thomas Mendip and Jennet Jourdemaine from the play is conveyed through colours. In the gift-shop of the city theatre Janet and Molly admire a miniature model of the theatre complete with a costumed cast of *The Lady’s not for Burning* – Jennet appears in red, Thomas in blue. Much later, when Thomas and Janet go sledding one winter (without the rest of their friends), Thomas uses a blue and Janet a red tray from the college kitchens as sleds – which is certainly not pure chance.

When she first reads the script of the play, Janet is rather impressed by the two couples of lovers in it and their portrayal provokes her to reconsider her relationship to Nick. She concludes that her connection with him is not in any way comparable with the love between Thomas and Jennet (and neither with that between Richard and Alizon, the second couple) and is somewhat disappointed: “She was rather taken with the Fry concept of romantic love, and none of its varied forms was anything like what she and Nick were engaged in” (346). She even writes a term paper on Christopher Fry’s concept of romantic love and the perceived shortcomings of her own relationship seriously bother her. She compares herself and Nick to the young couple in *The Lady’s not for Burning*, where Alizon contemplates the security and warmth that her lover Richard provides her with. This is quite a far cry from what Janet experiences: “When Janet’s thoughts were cold, they stayed so. Nick was bright, but he wasn’t warm” (308). His general lack of warmth and emotional depth is what worries Janet most about Nick. His closeness to the fairies finally provides an explanation for his behaviour, but of course Nick does not reveal his true nature to Janet on his own accord.

Thomas seems to read a personal significance into Fry’s play as well. He knows the play before Janet reads it and, asked what it is about, replies: “‘It’s about two people who save each other,’ said Thomas. He was looking at Tina. (...) ‘From what?’ said Tina. ‘Death, and life,’ said Thomas” (226). Apparently, Thomas is hoping at that time that Tina might be the one to save him. His hope, however, does not fulfil itself, for Tina splits up with him some months later. Nevertheless, the play does work in his favour, since it is, among other things, probably also the effect of watching the performance together with Thomas that prompts Janet to ask him if he

wants to sleep with her. That Thomas is similarly disposed to think of Janet as his Jennet is hinted at by his comment: “You don’t come anywhere near my bottom lip. (...) More like the collarbone” (409) referring to Thomas Mendip’s remark “I’ll not / Reconcile myself to a dark world / For the sake of five-feet six of wavering light, / For the sake of a woman who goes no higher / Than my bottom lip” (*The Lady’s not for Burning*, 89).

There are, apart from the plays, of course also frequent references to all kinds of poetry. Most relevant for the fairy-subplot are probably some poems by John Keats, such as “The Eve of St. Agnes”, which Janet is reminded of when Melinda Wolfe serves her students a range of delicacies as a reward for helping her with some gardening tasks. More importantly, the whole of “La Belle Dame sans Merci” is included, as Janet recites it on their first Halloween Night at college, quite innocently, of course, as she has no idea about what kind of ‘belle dame’ the college itself is harbouring. Interestingly, just after Janet has finished her recitation, Thomas Lane joins the Halloween party (196) – a walking illustration of the poem probably, though none or few of the party guests can guess that. Janet also once notices “a lily on his brow” (348) when Thomas is suffering from his loss of Tina. At a later stage Janet recalls the poem again, explaining to Molly about Nick, Robin and the rest: “They’ve been to Elfland. (...) And they awoke, and found them here, on the cold hillside” (444). Moreover, John Keats himself has a special relevance to Nick and the others, but the boys’ strange antipathy to the poet will be examined in detail later in this chapter.

Finally, a quotation from a novel, E.R. Eddison’s *The Worm Orouboros* (1922), which is mentioned very early in the novel, probably also alludes to the fairy-subplot: “O Queen, (...) somewhat I know of grammarie and divine philosophy, yet I must bow to thee for such learning, that dwellest here from generation to generation and dost commune with the dead” (49) – this seems quite a fitting description for Medeous, who is a scholar with a broad range and moreover moves among people who should have died long ago.¹⁸⁹ Moreover, because of its archaic prose style the novel also affords Nick and Robin an in-joke: “‘Elizabethan English, hmmm?’ said Nick. ‘Think I could manage that, Robin?’” (49). Janet and Molly of course do not know what they are playing at – Robin and Nick *are* Elizabethans – and this is not the only occasion where jokes and allusions hint at the fairies/actors-subplot. These allusions shall be analysed in more detail in the following paragraphs.

¹⁸⁹ Interestingly, Eddison’s novel features an excerpt from “Thomas the Rhymer” as an epigraph.

The fairy-subplot

Of all the adaptations analysed in detail here, Dean's is only one of two set in the USA (the other is *The Queen of Spells*, if one discounts *Winter Rose*, which might be set in New England even though this is never definitely explained) although five of the nine novelists considered in this study are American. It is also the only one that is set in a college. Dean explains her choice of setting in the afterword to her novel:

And suddenly it all reminded me of college, where the fear of getting pregnant collaborated with the conviction that you weren't as nearly as smart as you'd thought you were, that you would never amount to anything practical even if all the professors thought you were a genius, and that the world was going to hell so fast that you'd be lucky to have a B.A. to show the devil when it got there, to produce a sub-clinical state of frenzy; where juggling your love life with anything else was almost but never quite impossible, where we all did any number of foolish and peculiar things while surrounded by and even occasionally absorbing the wisdom of the ages.

This [the ballad of Tam Lin] was a song about adolescents. I could set it in a college. I did; and everything else, including the ghosts, who had no part in the original outline, sprang from that. (460)

For most of the time, the concept seems to work – both the idea of the feudalistic elfin court turned into a hierarchic college department and also the idea of letting part of the never-aging elves and their followers play the “perpetual undergrad” (Wezner 2004, 2). How the court is organised in detail, however, is never really clarified. Apparently, Professor Medeous, head of the Classics department, is the fairy queen. There seem to be other elfish aristocrats, distinguished from the rest by their appearance. Janet first sees them in her first year at Blackstock during their customary Halloween procession (Dean's equivalent of the traditional fairy rade): “Their faces were pale and solemn. Their yellow hair blew behind them, though they went slowly and there was little wind. These were the first three, who might have been men or women” (201). It seems, however, that those androgynous elves, whose description corresponds to that of traditional heroic fairies such as the Irish *Sidhe*, hardly ever show themselves at Blackstock, except for special events, they are “remote and foreign-looking people one never seemed to see round campus” (384).

Apart from these, during the processions, Janet watches other “men and women exceedingly beautiful, but looking, after the four who had just passed, as homely as the [brown] horses [they rode on]” (202). This group is made up of Melinda Wolfe, Professor Ferris and other instructors of the Classics department. It is not quite clear, however, if these are elves as well or merely humans taken into Fairyland and made more or less immortal.¹⁹⁰ Maybe they form a sort of lower aristocracy, but not much is said about them.

¹⁹⁰ Later on it is said about Professor Ferris that he is married, apparently to a ‘normal’ human woman (his “dry-spoken wife” (357)), which might indicate that he is one of the more recent of Medeous's conquests.

Then there is a group of (mostly Classics) students, such as Anne and Odile Beauvais, Kit and Johnny Lane, Nick Tooley and Robin Armin, Robert Benfield and Jack Nickopolous, whose main common trait seems to be that they ride in the Halloween processions and participate in Nick's theatre group. They seem to form a set of lower courtiers, at least they all ride white horses and come last during the first Halloween procession Janet watches.

Their nightly campus rides are probably the most conspicuous aspect of the elves at Blackstock: at Midsummer and Halloween they ride on horses adorned with glowing beads and ribbons and wear fantastical costumes themselves.¹⁹¹ Janet, who watches this event once with a group of girls from her dorm, is at first rather impressed, until a girl named Peg points out that the phosphorous light emanating from the horses' decorations is probably not magical but merely the result of some chemical treatment (204). Given the fact that the riders are really elves, it might be that the light is magical after all, no matter what Peg says (maybe, since she seems to be in league with Medeous herself, she is trying to deflect the girls' attention from the supernatural effect the riders cause). Their ride is usually accompanied by Robin playing the bagpipes but whether he does this in order to distract potential curious onlookers to the ride (Robin wanders around campus leading away from them and usually only joins the riders later for their Halloween party) or if he just plays for suitable musical accompaniment becomes never quite clear.

Apart from a few eccentric traditions, the fairy population at Blackstock seems, on the whole, to blend in without problems – but one might assume that the college authorities are somehow bewitched by Medeous, so irregularities occurring in the Classics department will probably be overlooked anyway.¹⁹² Some open questions, however, remain:

Do Medeous and her court mingle with humans only at Blackstock? Or do they make appearances at other places in the human world? It seems obvious that their present visit to Blackstock is not their first one. During the time of Victoria Thompson in the late nineteenth century, the Classics department was also run by a Professor Medeous. The Classics majors pretend that this was Medeous's grandmother: "Anne and Robin looked at each other. There was a moment of sudden and curious tension; then, as if he were offering a theory for examination, Robin said, 'That must have been her grandmother'" (77). But obviously Medeous and her 'grandmother' are one and the same person, a bit like Laurel in *Fire and Hemlock*, who, during

¹⁹¹ Their festival dates correspond with those of the so-called 'dancing nights' in Kushner's *Thomas the Rhymer*, and, even though there is no dancing, at the parties following the ride there is singing and eating and drinking, as Thomas Lane reports (435).

¹⁹² Nick once explains that it is impossible to do anything against Medeous since she knows everybody at the college and nobody would take complaints by students seriously (331).

the funeral at Hunsdon House, is pretending that “the dead woman is her mother so that she can inherit from herself” (355). But this accounts only for two of their manifestations on earth. Medeous must also have been present at Blackstock when the pregnant student Margaret Roxburgh killed herself in 1967 – and this could indeed be, as in Janet’s second year (1972) Nick says that Medeous has been teaching at Blackstock for five years now (357).¹⁹³ Moreover, Nick once remarks rather shortly that he doesn’t “keep count” (67) of how many students kill themselves out of despair, which suggests that he has been at Blackstock more often than he admits (Janet of course interprets this as a joke on the heavy work load put on the students). Maybe Medeous does not always show up under the same name and in the same guise. At least Nick declares that “the head of the department has often been a trifle odd” (358) and the rumours about Classics majors being a strange lot are also an established part of campus folklore: “Classics majors are crazy” (4). Probably the elves are able to appear as different persons if they like and visit Blackstock at regular intervals.

Another question which is never really answered is why they come to earth at all. As mentioned earlier, Janet thinks that “supposing you wanted to live in the world again—and after all, one must do something—you might very well decide to go to college to catch up on what the world had been doing” (431). So the elves would come into the human world because they have nothing better to do. This seems a rather unspectacular reason, but Thomas seems to corroborate it: “Getting a B.A. at one of the best small colleges in the country is like a vacation to them; it’s like going to the beach for a week” (451). Apparently, Fairyland is a rather boring place, which prompts its inhabitants to go seek for pleasures elsewhere and probably also to look for new victims for the teind (at least Thomas thinks that Medeous “doesn’t pay with one of her own” (435), that is, one of the elves).

Thomas moreover reports how strange the life of the elves and their centuries-old followers is. It seems that, as in many other accounts of fairies, their emotions are somehow reduced and they need especially strong stimuli in order to be touched by events at all.

You don’t know what it’s like in that court. It’s like being wrapped up in cotton. And it’s been going on for thousands of years. And they’re all old, and you know, they don’t get bored or tired; the older they are the

¹⁹³ If one assumes that the sacrifice always occurs after a seven-year period, however, this appears enigmatic after all. The usual pattern for a rescue is that a boy chosen by Medeous as a teind gets a – nice and responsible – girl pregnant and tries to bully her into helping him. After he has avoided the teind he leaves her – and she commits suicide from despair. This is at least the pattern that applied to the suicide of Victoria Thompson. But how, if Medeous was not there before 1967 would the boyfriend of Margaret Roxburgh have known that he was to be a teind? Or, if he was a part of Medeous’s court and arrived with her in 1967, he would have had only little time to learn that he was chosen, get Margaret as a girlfriend and impregnate her. (Admittedly, Thomas Lane also only needs about three weeks for that.) On the other hand, it might also be that Margaret failed to save him and that she committed suicide because of this. Somehow, the ‘backstory’ of this fictional universe appears not always really well thought-out.

more they want to go on living. (...) And they are all so remote there. Things take years to work their way through the cotton. (451)

The remoteness of the fairies and their courtiers shows for instance in their reactions to the failed teind ceremony.¹⁹⁴ Some seem to be amused, others are expressionless and “Anne and Odile might just have watched their team win at some bloodless and polite sport—tennis perhaps” (449). That they have actually witnessed the rescue of one of their friends from certain death has apparently not really registered with them. And even Professor Medeous, the ruler of ‘that court’, is comparatively calm, given the fact that she has just lost her sacrificial victim – she seems bound to her own rules, just as the fairies in *The Perilous Gard*, who have to let Christopher go without a fight once he wakes from his trance. Medeous pronounces that there will be two victims the next time, speaking “still with those wild-flavored vowels, but otherwise for all the world as if she were correcting somebody’s sight-reading” (450). There does not seem to be much of the “angry queen” of the ballad (*Fairport Convention* version) left but probably her very lack of emotion serves to make her all the more eerie.

The fairy queen: Professor Medeous

While the other fairies or court followers blend in more or less well with the college surroundings, Professor Medeous is much more conspicuous.¹⁹⁵ When Janet first meets her without knowing who this is, she is actually a bit frightened of the strange apparition:

She was tall, taller than Tina. She wore a long red cape so heavy that it hardly moved as she walked, and red boots. She had red and black hair, the red like her cloak, and the black like coal. On her broad forehead and highboned face was no expression at all. She walked past Janet in a waft of some bitter smell like the ivy’s only more complex. (23)

Medeous then seems to disappear into the ivy that grows on the surrounding walls, adding to the spooky effect she has had on Janet. However, Janet then discovers that there is a door hidden in the ivy. The seeming magic is destroyed but nevertheless the incident could be read as a metaphor for the fact that, figuratively speaking, Medeous can indeed walk through doors others do not know of. The description of Medeous with its emphasis on the colours red and black might one remind more of a devil than the queen of fairies, but actually red and black also feature prominently in the description of another (evil) elf: Hunter in Kushner’s *Thomas the*

¹⁹⁴ The presentation of the fairies as having little emotions can be found in folklore as well when they are presented as incarnations of the dead. A contrary account is presented by C.S. Lewis who describes the emotions of the heroic fairies as more intense than that of humans (see chapter two).

¹⁹⁵ It seems as if she has no first name, at least it is never mentioned. Her last name could be an allusion to, for instance, figures like Medea or even Medusa. There is also a mythological figure called Medeus, son of Jason and Medea. But how all this relates to Medeous, apart from the fact that she is a scholar of Classical Greek, is not quite clear. Could it maybe be read as a hint that, like Medea, she is familiar with magic and has no scruples to kill her ‘children’, that is, her followers?

Rhymer, Thomas's antagonist, has long black hair and red eyebrows.¹⁹⁶ Medeous is, however, more complex as a character than Hunter, since apart from her definitely evil side, she has also a more positive one, excelling as a "brilliant scholar" (77) and skilled teacher. But when Janet herself eventually experiences Medeous as a teacher, she is puzzled at first, for although Medeous is "pleasant and patient" (289) it seems to Janet that "a profound lack—indeed a positive denial—of humor seemed to be Medeous's primary characteristic" (289). Janet is hard-put to reconcile this impression to earlier rumours claiming that Medeous "apparently delighted in making her students explain, in detail, the dirty jokes in Aristophanes" (137). In later sessions, however, it turns out that "Medeous had more humor than one might suppose" (292) and Janet sees also the dirty-jokes method put into practice – here, Medeous seems to resemble other fairy queens, such as Laurel from *Fire and Hemlock*, who has also a very special kind of humour. The fact that Medeous is "uncommonly patient" (294) during the spring term in Janet's sophomore year makes Thomas suspect that she must have "pulled off some coup somewhere" (294). Nick, once again quoting *Hamlet* (I.i.69), suspects that "this bodes some strange eruption to our state" (295), i.e., some upheaval later on. But it seems that the reason for Medeous's good mood is merely that she has succeeded in keeping the Classics library apart from the Main library (306). However, later on, Nick is quite sure that the calm is deceptive: "These things run in cycles. We are due for an unpleasantness in a year or two" (357).

That Medeous can be very unpleasant is amply confirmed by her students: "'You don't rebel against Medeous,' said Anne, grimly, 'you suffer her, or you flee into exile'" (77). Anne also thinks that Medeous is a "bitch" (77) but she does not explain to Janet why she thinks so (maybe Anne is jealous of Medeous because she has her eyes on Melinda Wolfe, who is said to be Medeous's lover?). Later on, by means of the *Revenger's Tragedy*, much more about Medeous's dirty methods is revealed: "Adultery, incest, rape, nepotism, misogyny, sleazy intrigue?" (330) – Janet can hardly believe that all this should be part of Medeous's repertoire. But Nick explains: "The misogyny was ours. (...) and I should have to deny the rape, I think. Seduction, now. You might very well say seduction. And for all the rest, certainly" (330-1). On Janet's surprised question if Medeous has ever seduced him, he merely answers: "Not recently" (331). Later he proceeds to explain how almost the whole department has sooner or later been to bed with Medeous and how this tends to cause the kind of 'unpleasantness' mentioned before since "from time to time somebody's spouse finds out about Medeous" (357).

¹⁹⁶ Red is, according to K. Briggs a favourite fairy colour: "Red runs green very close, and in Ireland the small trooping fairies, the Daoine Sidhe and the Shefro, wear green coats and caps while the solitary fairies, such as the Leprecauns, the Cluricaun and the Fear Dearg, generally wear red" (1976, 108-9).

Despite the apparent discomforts caused by Medeous, those that are in her thrall always seem keen to enlarge the number of her followers.¹⁹⁷ It is a strange business, but almost from the start, different people from the Classics department try to convince Janet to major in Classics: Melinda Wolfe, Peg, Anne, Odile, etc. When Janet eventually starts to consider majoring in Classics, however, Robin warns her not to do this, claiming “it’s too late for that” (329), but he does not say why. That Janet is probably much better off this way becomes clear to her only later: Janet cannot understand all the bad things she hears about Medeous and Nick explains that she shows her dangerous side only to people who have formally declared their major to be Classics. On Janet’s protest that he himself has not declared his major yet and therefore is hardly in a position to know, he claims that “there are ways and ways of belonging” (331). At that time of course she does not know yet that he has belonged to Medeous for a long time already.

It moreover seems that Medeous guards her victims jealously, at least Thomas seems of this opinion. When Janet attends Medeous’s Greek class, Thomas joins this, too and after the first session urges her to be more friendly to him in the class. He claims that he wants Medeous “to be jealous about the wrong thing” (289). When Janet, totally surprised, wonders what he thinks the right thing is, he tells her that it is Nick. It is a bit difficult to understand what Thomas really intends here – it seems that he is afraid that Medeous might punish Nick for going out with Janet, if she draws attention to herself by attending one of Medeous’s classes. Earlier Thomas had tried to prevent Janet from taking Greek with Medeous, hinting at her jealousy. When Janet ignores his warning, he urges her to create the impression that Janet is interested in him (even though his girlfriend is still Tina) and not in Nick. On the other hand, it has repeatedly been stated that he does not like Nick very much, so why should he try to protect him? Maybe here a certain self-interest is at work? The fact, however, that Thomas seems very serious about Medeous’s jealousy and gets very upset when Janet does not heed his warnings probably indicates that he has indeed Nick’s welfare at heart after all.

That Medeous is indeed dangerous is confirmed by Nick, when Janet asks him about why Medeous should make her students good scholars only in conjunction with making them morally corrupt: “‘She doesn’t have to go out of her way to make you unhappy and wicked, does she?’ ‘She doesn’t,’ said Nick gloomily. ‘It’s just her nature’” (331). In this, it seems, she is a bit like Keats’s ‘Belle Dame’, who is often considered to be outside human moral judgement and therefore cannot be held responsible for her actions since they are ‘just her nature’ as well.

¹⁹⁷ As I already mentioned, these new followers might be collected in order to serve as the next teind. However, the Classics people seem to recruit both boys and girls, whereas the humans chosen for the teind seem to be exclusively male. This would argue against the “newcomers = teinds” theory.

The fairy court: Chester Hall

Connected to Medeous and the fairy court is Chester Hall, Dean's equivalent of Carterhaugh. Chester Hall is the building where parts of the Classics department are housed together with the Music department (which seems not to be fairy-infested). It is one of the old buildings on campus and it seems that Janet has always found it slightly spooky. Once it is described how "Chester Hall really did sneer at you. (...) While Masters seemed to peer anxiously out from behind its four white pillars, Chester looked at you with its twelve-paned windows in their lancet arches as if you were a blot on the earth" (184). This arrogant attitude ascribed to the building would of course be one typical for the fairies themselves. Later on, Janet feels how "Chester Hall's blind dark windows were like openings into a whole lot of very unpleasant dimensions" (280), which ties in with the idea that there is indeed another world looming close to Blackstock. She tries to find a rational explanation for this impression: "The architect must have gotten the proportions wrong or something" (280), but of course the subtext is established. Even Danny Chin, Janet's scientifically-minded childhood friend, had a similar encounter with Chester Hall years before. Janet and Danny once went skating in Chester Hall without being allowed to do so and Danny fell and broke his arm and: "Right when I felt the bone go, I thought the building was laughing at me" (233). Being grown up, however, he dismisses this notion as mere superstition and is convinced that Janet is only the victim of an overwrought imagination.¹⁹⁸

But Chester Hall is apparently truly under some kind of enchantment – at least Janet notices flowers growing there that should not thrive in the given climate: "Chester Hall, that's got lavender growing round it all summer when you can't *grow* lavender in Minnesota this far north; Chester Hall that's got yarrow blooming next to it in October when yarrow stops blooming in September" (436). Later she discovers to her dismay that her birth-control pills have failed when she slept with Thomas – due to the influence of the magic around Chester Hall, she believes and Thomas does so, too: "I should have known Chester Hall would do this" (429).¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁸ This tendency to endow inanimate objects with life might hint at Janet's overactive imagination, a fact which probably makes her a not too reliable narrator (cf. narrator destabilisation, chapter three).

¹⁹⁹ That the magic of Chester Hall should help to get Janet pregnant is actually a bit weird – for Medeous would certainly not want girls to get pregnant, thus enabling them to rescue future teind-victims. But readers have suggested that modern contraception is not part of Medeous's world and can therefore not work in her realm: "magic and science are very often considered to be opposing forces, and it seemed reasonable to me, given the sort of alternate reality of fairy world, that the queen's influence made Carter [!] Hall a place where rules worked as she saw them. And modern science, including birth control, simply has not context or importance to her, and hence doesn't work reliably" (*Chicklit Forums*: August 2004 Bookclub).

Fairy or human? Melinda Wolfe

Another member of the Classics department, but one who does not have an office in Chester Hall, is Melinda Wolfe. Her allegiance to the fairy court seems to be signalled by the wreath of herbs, made for example of the above-mentioned yarrow, that decorates her office door. The true status of Melinda Wolfe, however, never becomes quite clear. Officially, she is a teacher in the Classics department, supervisor of Ericson Hall (Janet's dorm) and Janet's academic advisor. Unofficially, she is part of Medeous's court and, according to rumours, maybe even her lover.²⁰⁰ Whether Melinda Wolfe is human or not is never explained. She is an impressive lady, tall, redheaded with green eyes and always elegantly dressed, and Janet, on their first meeting is startled by her "dazzling presence" (20). All this is of course no proof of a superhuman nature. However, once, when Janet and Molly help her with some outdoor tasks and watch Melinda Wolfe walking through a sunny spot, "her hair took on sparks as if it were full of glitter dust (...) her blue jeans glowed like velvet" (212), an incident which might be read as a hint towards her otherworldliness (or merely as an effect of the sunlight).

She is, on the whole, a rather mysterious figure, and Janet concludes that even after three years of having her as an advisor, "what Melinda Wolfe had at heart [she] had never ascertained" (396).

She appears alternately nice and threatening, especially on the occasion when she asks a group of girls from Ericson to help her protect the garden flowers from too early exposure to the sun. First she cordially expresses her gratitude: "on behalf of the crocuses, I thank you" (213).²⁰¹ As a reward the girls are offered trays full of "confections too beautiful to eat" (210), which remind Janet of the fruit served by the seducer Porphyro in "The Eve of St. Agnes". When Janet comes to discuss her classes with Wolfe shortly afterwards, however, the teacher rather coldly confronts her with the fact that Anne told her how Janet threatened Odile (trying to dissuade her from smoking marijuana in her room). Wolfe tells her that she "keeps [her] fingers on the pulse of Ericson" (214) even if it may not seem so at first glance and Janet is rather irritated by this unfriendly behaviour after the display of friendliness before.

Another, much stranger incident occurs near Midsummer Eve of Janet's Junior year at Blackstock. By chance, Janet has been witness to one of Medeous's campus rides, and as the riders pass Ericson Hall, books are thrown out of Janet's former room – another manifestation of

²⁰⁰ She might also have affairs with her students, at least Janet is suspicious when, on one occasion, she watches Anne Beauvais licking her fingers in "delicate exaggeration" (211) while staring at Melinda Wolfe. Janet wonders if Anne is trying to flirt with Melinda Wolfe but never gets any definite answer to her question.

²⁰¹ Maybe Wolfe's sorrow for the crocuses betrays her fairy nature? This would make sense at least if one thought of fairies as guardians of flowers and plants.

the Fourth Ericson ghost. Janet picks up the books and tries to shelter from a thunderstorm in the lobby of Ericson. There she is surprised by Melinda Wolfe. Wolfe is “wearing a long and voluminous robe with running horses appliquéd on its hem” (371) – quite appropriate to the event Janet has watched before, though it is never explained if Wolfe took part in the ride – and takes Janet into her flat, pretending friendliness. However, as soon as it becomes clear to her what kinds of books Janet is carrying, Wolfe’s mood changes: “‘Did you check these out of the Thompson collection?’ said Melinda Wolfe, as if she were asking how many children Janet had murdered today” (373). Janet now claims she has not taken them out of the library at all and that they have no library markings, whereupon Wolfe contradicts her and indeed, as Janet looks at them, the books have changed: “She (...) stole a surreptitious look at the Shakespeare and the Lidell and Scott, whose bindings had been so fair and empty when she looked them thirty seconds ago. Library markings, as clear as you pleased” (373). It seems as if here magic is clearly at work, while at earlier occasions it was sometimes hard to decide on the true nature of events. Janet, ironically, seems more worried about the fact that Wolfe is trying to deny the existence of the ghost than about the obvious display of magic. Janet is convinced that “somebody had thrown those books out the window, and nobody was going to talk her out of believing that” (374). But Melinda Wolfe finally manages to distract her by showing her the Medeous edition of the *Odyssey*, and over this Janet quite forgets to take the ghost books with her, as she is rather surprised (and flattered) by Wolfe’s renewed friendliness.

If Melinda Wolfe is any example, moodiness seems to be a common trait of those living close to the fairies and all in all, she seems a figure about whom quite a few unsolved questions remain.

Shakespearean actors at the fairy court

A special element of Dean’s variation on the fairy abduction theme for which no model is included in the ballad and neither in any of the other literary models is Dean’s decision to include human actors and poets in her fairy court. The long-term presence of abducted humans in Fairyland is admittedly a common motif of folklore and literature (and can be found e.g. also in *The Wee Free Men*, *The Perilous Gard*, *Winter Rose*, *Thomas the Rhymer*). It is also a common motif that elves prefer creative, especially musical, people. But to put three actors from Shakespeare’s acting company as (more or less) prominent characters into a “Tam Lin” adaptation adds a new turn to the story.

Janet discovers them (very much towards the end of the novel) by randomly leafing through her *Complete Shakespeare*, where a facsimile of the list of “Principall Actors” of the Lord Chamberlain’s Men from the 1623 folio edition is included: Robert Armin (Robin), Nicholas Tooley (Nick) and Robert Benfield (another of the Classics majors usually called Rob). She then starts to research the names to make sure that this is not just chance and finds out about Robert Armin:

She learned that he was an author of plays himself, that he had replaced Will Kempe as the company’s comedian, playing parts such as Feste and the fool in *Lear* and perhaps someone called Autolycus in *The Winter’s Tale*. He could sing, said the essay, because the parts he played called for music, Shakespeare had not written any singing clowns until he had Armin to play them.

He could sing all right. He had definite and peculiar opinions about *Hamlet*, he talked familiarly of Shakespeare. He was certainly an actor. (415)

Janet does not have the nerve to go on searching for facts about Nicholas Tooley, but he is indeed another historical person who was part of Shakespeare’s company, even though he apparently did not play any important parts. Tooley was at first apprenticed to Richard Burbage and later did not only act in Shakespeare dramas, but also plays of Ben Jonson, John Fletcher and others (Boyce 1990, 651). In regard to Robin Armin, Dean was quite probably influenced by the description of the historical person, for in addition to what Janet learns about him during her library research, he was an apprentice to a goldsmith in 1581, before becoming an actor (Dobson 2001, 21) – and significantly, Nick commissions a golden rose-leaf necklace for Janet from Robin (216). Moreover, Robert Armin was reported to be small in stature (Dobson 2001, 21) which corresponds to Robin, who is described as “the short blond one” (28).

Original as Dean’s idea of the Elizabethans at the fairy court may be, there seem yet to be a few problems about it. For example the actors’ age: When Janet first meets Nick and Robin (and Rob Benfield, who only plays a minor part), they appear to be of the same age as she herself. This hints at two possibilities – either Medeous has put an anti-aging spell on them, which keeps them perpetually young: ‘18 till I die’, so to speak. This, however, might be problematic, at least if Medeous and her court stay in the human world long enough for other humans to notice that they never get any older. Thus, it would be more logical if they, as soon as they arrive in the human world, were subject to its time and only rejuvenated on their return to Elfland. Dean does not pursue this question any further. Neither does she tell her readers if Nick and Robin are always part of Medeous’s court when she appears at Blackstock and, should this be the case, if they always register under their proper names (which would be a bit conspicuous in the long run) or if they take on different aliases.²⁰² Nick claims to have had a brother at

²⁰² Nobody at the college seems to be suspicious of the students because of their names. Only Professor Davison at the English department once remarks, when Nick attends her Shakespeare course: “Mr. Tooley, do you mean to

Blackstock – maybe this was he himself during an earlier stay? No answers to these questions are ever provided.

Questions aside, it is quite rewarding to reread Dean's *Tam Lin* with the knowledge about the true nature of Nick and Robin and to collect the clues that point at their being different from their fellow students. Even Janet's first encounter with them is actually quite revealing, since Janet innocently suspects almost the right thing: "she thought of the theater again, of historical drama. They were far too tidy to be her contemporaries" (27).²⁰³ But apart from their charisma and tidiness, the boys act quite like ordinary college students and so Janet probably forgets about this first impression. Yet, over the course of the book, evidence for their otherness accrues, as I will show in the following paragraphs.

One rather conspicuous clue is Nick's and Robin's tendency to use antiquated language and expressions such as "I cry you mercy" – a habit which, however, Janet and Molly explain to themselves by blaming it on the theatrical activities of their boyfriends.

Other, more unobtrusive clues are for instance that they own handkerchiefs in an age of Kleenex, a fact which Thomas explains by describing handkerchiefs as handy for theatrical stunts (150). Maybe even Nick's remark that Robin "thinks 'men' means people" (270) and not merely the male part of the population is an indicator of Robin's Elizabethan background, since roughly until the seventeenth century (and occasionally beyond) *man* could indeed denote a human being in general, "irrespective of sex or age" (*The Oxford English Dictionary* 1989², 284). Nick also staunchly believes in ghosts and "seemed taken aback that [Janet] should question for a moment the existence of spirits" (309). This can either be read as a hint that Nick adheres to some esoteric New Age beliefs or that he comes indeed from a time where belief in ghosts was quite common.

A more obvious hint might be Nick's contraceptive herbal tea. Admittedly, taking into account that the story is set in the beginning 1970s, when many people were inclined towards the natural and 'alternative', be it with regard to food or medicine or other areas, the use of "an old herbal remedy" (180) for birth control might appear not too surprising. However, it is strange that the otherwise rather critical and inquisitive Janet, who "would have pestered the doctor [at Planned Parenthood], too, had she been reduced to going to one" (208), trustingly takes the tea on good faith without questioning it – but maybe the author intended to give her protagonist a

specialize in Shakespeare studies?" (343). Nick does not react to this in-joke, but does not seem to be very happy to be teased about his name, at least he poses a heretic question later in class, which earns him an extra oral presentation. What is not clear is, however, if Professor Davison, as a Shakespeare scholar, merely recognizes the name or if she knows more about Nick.

²⁰³ That they are "tidy" seems a bit puzzling to me since I cannot really imagine that Elizabethan actors will have been much more neat than 1970s college students.

more naïve side as well (or maybe the incongruousness has escaped her attention). The remedy works, apparently, and probably Janet is too relieved that it spares her from experiencing the ugly consequences of the normal pills to investigate the mixture any further.²⁰⁴ Yet, an earlier incident provides another hint at Nick's slightly antiquated approach to medicine and the like. When Janet tells him that her mother used mint to repel ants, which did not work properly, Nick exclaims that "she should have recited the rhyme" (69) for the herbs to work. Janet interprets this as a joke – at least she does not try to find out if Nick is serious. Moreover, Nick and Robin seem to have quite old-fashioned opinions about detergents. Janet early on detects that both Nick and Robin smell of herbs – Robin of lavender (58) and Nick of sage (70). Strangely enough, however, their alternative washing methods seem to be contagious, for Thomas later on is said to smell of rue, another herb, so that Janet, when she has to borrow some clothes of Robin and Thomas, which smell of herbs, "wished they would wash with chemicals like normal people" (453).

The most obvious evidence for Nick's and Robin's true identity is their familiarity with Shakespeare and all matters concerning acting. They have intimate knowledge of Shakespeare and his plays, more than a normal student would have and voice their opinions of the Bard as if he was a personal acquaintance of them, calling him "clever Will" (148) or referring to some Shakespearean actor (probably Richard Burbage) as "old Dickon himself" (67). Robin claims moreover that Shakespeare himself did not understand what he wanted to say with *King Lear*: "Nobody can explain *King Lear*, that's the beauty of it. *Will Shakespeare* could not explain it. He wrote what he wrote; that's all" (270). Nick and Robert Benfield are furthermore experts in stage fencing and Nick and Robin seem to have been in an unusual number of plays (e.g. *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *King Lear*, *Othello*) together, considered their pretended age.

In addition, the two of them have the knack of communicating with each other almost telepathically, which can finally be explained by the fact that they have actually known each other for centuries. And Nick's remark "We are old friends. We met young" (166) isn't even a lie. Neither is Thomas's suggestion that Nick has probably known dozens of Robin's former girlfriends (166). Their great age also explains some remarks of Nick where he claims that Janet and her roommates are still very inexperienced, such as: "I forget how young you are" (273). Robin and Odile also refer to people apparently their own age as "children" (Robin: 271, Odile: 174) and Janet does wonder about these incidents:

²⁰⁴ Janet once asks Nick if Tina could try his tea since her birth control pills are giving her so much trouble, but Nick claims that it is a special complex formula, and: "Tina is a biologist and materialist; I doubt if she wouldn't be suspicious" (207) Here, Janet gets suspicious, too but Nick tells her that he just does not know what is in the tea and "could not tell her, not for [his] life" (207).

A clichéd question about the shortness of life had been greeted oddly; Nick had said she was young, as if he were not; and there were other remarks, Thomas's about how long Nick and Robin had known each other; the large number of plays they seemed to have been in together. She had called Robin an alien; what if it were true? (...) Anyway, why in the world should old aliens attend a liberal-arts college in Minnesota? (273)

Yet another hint is the expertise the boys show when it comes to sexual matters – something which Molly and Janet really have trouble to explain: “we just say, well, you know, theater people (...) but I don't see how you can pick this sort of thing up in the theater” (236). But then, Nick and Robin actually have had centuries to pick it up. His true age probably also solves the riddle why Nick never introduces Janet to his parents and why he apparently very rarely hears from them at all, something Janet often wonders about. He usually claims that they are in England and neglect him. This is probably true in a way – Nick just omits to tell Janet that the reason for this neglect is that they have been dead for a long time. Once Nick spends time in England, with his family, he claims (367). However, Janet notices, his letters contain long descriptions of the places he visits and only very little about his “family” – it would be in keeping with the rest of his characterisation as somebody who likes to avoid problems rather than tackling them if one assumed that Nick probably does not want to trouble himself making up too many details.

In keeping with the tradition that fairies often pick musical humans to be taken into Fairyland, Nick and Robin are also very skilled in music and seem to have a penchant for Elizabethan songs (and folk music in general, so they do not give themselves away during the time they presently live in). They form a kind of band with Anne Beauvais, in addition to which Robin plays the bagpipes during Medeous's campus rides.

One of the most peculiar occurrences and one which Janet can never reasonably explain, is Nick's behaviour when she confronts him with John Keats's poetry. Nick displays a very personal and peculiar dislike for Keats and is even physically affected by Janet's recitation of a Keatsean sonnet. That there is little love lost between Nick and John Keats has been hinted at before, when Nick quoted from “Chapman's Homer”, in a “sardonic” (53) tone. When Janet dares to compare Keats to Shakespeare, Nick is rather put out: “Keats? That querulous, agonizing little emotion-ridden pestilence-befuddled liverer's son?” (115). After Janet quotes “This Living Hand” to prove her point, he turns pale and runs from the table, claiming to be unwell.

The question of Keats reappears throughout the novel – shortly afterwards Janet distractedly writes Shakespeare's and Keats's birth and death dates in her notebook (120), later on she is angry that some distraction causes her to “los[e] two arguments about Keats” (308). But

Janet's insistence on Keats's greatness is wasted – at least on Nick. However, Robin eventually proves open to her arguments: “Robin was rethinking his position on Keats and thought he would like some help doing it” (359), which is why he takes a course in Romantic literature from Janet's father. Nick nevertheless remains stubborn in his opinion that Keats was only a minor literary figure: “If he *had* lived he'd have written a lot of third rate swoony plays and nobody would mark him in the least” (361). This is, so to speak, the official explanation. Thomas later on suggests another reason: Medeous had once also set her mind on Keats but apparently failed to catch him. He goes on to explain: “And she wanted Shakespeare too, but she could not get him, and I think they hate to think that he may have had the right of it. And that's why Nick can't abide the mention of Keats—and if you tried him with Langland or Chatterton [this would have the same result]” (431). I think, however, this – Nick cannot stand Keats because he got away from the fairy queen – leaves still a puzzle: Nick and Robin do not seem to object to Shakespeare, even though he escaped her as well.²⁰⁵

On the whole, there are many things about Nick and Robin that remain somewhat mysterious and not infrequently Janet is troubled by their inscrutability, especially since it makes her relationship to Nick sometimes rather difficult:

[Nick] seems all friendly and open and cheerful, and he seems to talk about himself a lot; but he really doesn't say much. He's met my family dozens of times. All I know about his family is that they're in England and he doesn't go see them during vacations. And he makes inexplicable remarks. (349)

Maybe his charming but somewhat evasive character is also what prompts Janet's mother to be doubtful of Nick, and to wonder if he would stand by her daughter in case of emergency such as if she got pregnant (312).

It seems that Molly is having similar problems with Robin (310), nevertheless, she is the one who is able to maintain her relationship with him for the whole time, while her room-mates both end the relationships with their boyfriends. Maybe this is due to the fact that, among Medeous's followers, Robin, though definitely weird, is still one of the most well-meaning? At least it seems that Thomas trusts him more than the other Classics majors, but he nevertheless feels alienated by Robin as well and confides to Janet: “If I tell you that, when that lot is all together, he is the best of the lot, you may understand why sometimes I choose other company” (199). But Robin is, for instance, very disturbed about the split between Thomas and Tina (328)

²⁰⁵ Even though Robin (who usually played clown characters in Shakespeare's plays) seems to find some rules Shakespeare (*Hamlet*, III, 2, 39-40) laid down rather unfair: “Shakespeare said clowns should speak no more than was set down for them” (128), says Nick and Robin apparently does not like this and has developed a habit of poking fun at Shakespeare as a kind of revenge. At least he embarrasses his friends when they go to see Othello at the movies by having a laughter-fit and Nick explains this by referring to Robin's dislike of Shakespeare's rules for clowns. But this does not really have anything to do with Medeous.

and even tries to talk Janet into making Tina reconsider her decision. Janet does not understand why he is so upset and Robin explains that Thomas is not good company when he does not have a girlfriend, but probably the real reason is Thomas's fate as the future teind. (Even Nick, who does not seem to like Thomas very much, is concerned about the break-up and declares that "Classics majors have to look out for one another" (330).) Later on, Robin tries to soothe Thomas who is upset when he listens to a history lecture given by Janet's father: "Robin laid a hand on his wrist: It was the first time Janet had ever seen him touch anyone of his own accord" (364). But Thomas is still very agitated that history always keeps repeating itself (and he is probably not only thinking of politics) and does not really react to Robin's efforts to calm him down:

"This world uncertain is," said Robin, a little less amiably, as you might offer a five-year old a bowl of ice cream after it has already refused cake, cookies and candy. "Fine!" said Thomas, with such force that people (...) at the other end of the hall turned their heads and stared at him. "*You say farewell earth's bliss, then.*" (...) Robin, staying where he was and not raising his voice, said, "An thou takest it not on thyself, knave, I may well." (365)²⁰⁶

This dialogue shows, on the one hand, how Thomas suffers from his knowledge that he will soon be sacrificed and his conviction that nothing can be done about it. On the other hand, it almost seems as if Robin would be willing to step in as the sacrifice if Thomas refused – his last sentence seems to say as much and this would make Robin a rather noble-hearted character.²⁰⁷

The ghost at Fourth Ericson

The ghost story at first seems independent of the fairy plot but turns out to be connected to it after all. Almost one of the first things Janet hears when she arrives at college is that the room she is going to inhabit is said to be haunted by a ghost which throws books out of the window at night. Soon after term starts, Janet and Molly are awakened by the sound of bagpipes at night and go outside to find the piper. Instead of finding him they witness a manifestation of the ghost – books are thrown out of their window. They start picking up the books but then Peg, a girl who lives in one of the rooms next to theirs, appears, apparently in a somnolent state, picks the books up and takes them inside. Molly and Janet speculate if Tina or maybe Peg herself could have thrown the books but eventually reject these possibilities.

²⁰⁶ Here the two young men are once again playing a game with quotations, this time the quotes ("this world uncertain is" and "farewell earth's bliss") are taken from Thomas Nashe's "A Litany in Time of Plague", except the last one, which I could not identify.

²⁰⁷ This last sentence is apparently a Shakespearean quotation, at least Janet admonishes Robin not to quote Shakespeare at Thomas when he is angry (365). However, I could not find it in the online edition of the *Complete Shakespeare* (<http://shakespeare.mit.edu/>) and it can only be assumed that Robin has maybe lapsed into his native 'dialect', that is, Elizabethan English.

Janet experiences the strange occurrence a second time, at Midsummer Night of her Junior year, when she accidentally sees Medeous's riders and witnesses how the books are thrown at them. This time she picks the books up herself but later on Melinda Wolfe manages to take them from her. She distracts Janet so that she forgets to take them with her from Wolfe's apartment.

Between the two events, Janet has tried to research the background of the ghost story and discovers that her father has been collecting material about it and is hoping to write a book about it one day. (It is not quite clear if Janet and her father really believe in the ghost or if their interest is scientific.)²⁰⁸ From her father's papers, and material kept in the college library, Janet learns that a girl of the class of 1899 by the name of Victoria Thompson, a Classics major, is said to haunt Ericson Hall. Victoria killed herself on Halloween 1897 because she was unmarried and pregnant and apparently saw no chance of living with this shame. Before she killed herself, it is reported, she threw all her books out of the window of her room. The first haunting appeared in 1904, seven years after Victoria's death (339) and after that irregular intervals are reported – however, in some cases, Janet's father supposes, the books were probably thrown by joking students. The books thrown by the ghost are usually a Greek dictionary, a book of English and Scottish ballads, a school reader, *The Scarlet Letter*, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and some others. Of these, the ballads, Hawthorne and Hardy are the most remarkable, since they contain stories about women pregnant out of wedlock. Reading the girl's diary, Janet thinks that "the diary made Victoria's lover sound rather like Kit Lane; but of course Kit's was a type much in vogue at the time" (283). But very probably Janet's first notion is right – Kit was probably alive during Victoria's time and may well have been her lover. Her suicide also takes on a different quality viewed with the knowledge that her lover probably impregnated her in the hope that she would save him from being used as a fairy teind. Thomas once claims that Victoria (and later Margaret Roxburgh) killed themselves because they had been betrayed by their lovers. If Thomas is to be believed, the young men made the girls rescue them from the fairies and then probably told them that they did not need and want them any more – thus causing the girls to kill themselves (430).

²⁰⁸ Readers in internet discussion groups (1999, 2004) have claimed that in their opinion Janet believes in the ghost and that this appears rather improbable in an otherwise critical and inquisitive girl (this is a similar problem as with the contraceptive tea which Janet accepts without questions). Maybe this is just an example of slipshod novel-writing. But maybe this is intentional and meant to give critical Janet also a more naïve personality aspect. Various incidences, however, suggest that maybe this novel has not always been thoroughly edited: in one scene, Odile Beauvais calls for two girls named Barbara and Jen, the girls, however, at another occasion are introduced as Susan and Rebecca. On another occasion Tina complains about Odile spying after her and some chapters after that Janet thinks that Anne was doing the spying. Also, for instance, the sentence "the ivy was red as blood" (213) appears not logical or at least imprecise, as ivy is an evergreen plant, only Boston ivy turns red in autumn.

For this subplot, no model can be found in the ballads but probably Dean just extrapolated what might have happened if Janet in “Tam Lin” had been of a different temperament.

Creepy Classics majors

Molly once claims: “Those Classics people are creepy,” (188) and Janet thinks she knows what Molly means. It is not so much that the Classics people fail to conform to certain social standards – “like washing and making sure that their shirts were buttoned straight and not bringing up awkward subjects in conversation” (188). Rather Janet thinks “what Molly meant had more to do with Anne Beauvais hanging on Robin like a creeping vine, or Odile standing in the doorway of that stifling shadowy room, smiling and patient and uncomprehending” (188). They are eerie, uncanny, an impression that is enforced when Janet is running from a group of Classics majors in a kind of mock hunt. She is trying to slip away with a bust of Schiller, the possession of which is, according to college traditions, a great privilege and the other students pursue her. Janet is somewhat frightened, for “the way they loped after her, like hounds to the hunt, was far too unsettling” (82). She eventually gets rid of them by jumping into a pond and swimming to a small island, but is watched by her hunters, who, even in repose, create an uncanny effect: “They stood up against the blazing sky like huge statues, utterly still” (282).²⁰⁹ As Janet recovers from her adventure, Nick praises her for her quick-wittedness. Jumping into the water is apparently a good way to escape from Classics majors since “that whole lot hates water” (87). This statement corresponds with the saying that evil spirits cannot cross (running) water. However, later it is said that Anne Beauvais is a good swimmer and also teaches swimming – which lets Nick’s remark appear somewhat contradictory.

With regard to the unsettling effect they have, even when not appearing in a group, the Beauvais girls are probably the most outstanding examples among her peers. Described as a beautiful “ethereal blonde” (76), Anne seems to take an interest in many of the male Classics majors at once – displaying a certain possessive behaviour in regard to Robin as mentioned before, questioning Tina about Thomas and warning Molly about Nick (probably hoping that she will tell Janet) (211). And she is probably not averse to flirting with the female part of the Classics department either, as Janet and Molly suspect. When Molly complains about Anne’s behaviour to Robin, however, he merely remarks that in a world without girls like Anne “Hell

²⁰⁹ Later on, the Classics people’s tendency towards immobility is stressed again – Janet watches Anne sing and thinks that she looks “like a statue” (239). This ties in with the descriptions of other elves (even though it is not quite clear if Anne and Odile are really elves or rather enchanted humans), who are likewise rather statuesque (*The Perilous Gard, Winter Rose*).

would be like a Lord's great kitchen without fire in it" (212). Maybe, if one considers the fact that Anne is a good swimmer and that she is a good singer, too, one might call her something like a siren, trying to lure men into her power.

Her little sister, Odile, quite as beautiful as her sister, with "skin like honey" (173) is similarly unsettling, though maybe in slightly different ways. Janet once tries to take her to task for smoking marijuana in her room and disturbing the whole fourth floor of Ericson with the smell. But Odile does not seem very impressed by Janet's angry request, instead "she smiled suddenly, and Janet smiled back completely without meaning to" (174). Odile then tries to convince Janet that she should change her major to Classics. Janet leaves and is rather puzzled about the direction their conversation has taken, asking herself: "I wish I knew what just happened" (174). It seems that Odile has strange powers of psychomanipulation, being able to distract Janet from her intended goal. But it is never explained if Anne and Odile are elves or if they are part of Medeous's human retinue.

Two other characters associated with Medeous's court are Kit and Johnny Lane, who seem to be mortals seduced by the fairy queen and are apparently relatives of Thomas Lane. Medeous tries to pass Johnny Lane off as Thomas's brother – this is "one of [her] little jokes" (433) – but actually "he is a great-granduncle or something like that" (433). It is never explained if Kit Lane is also one of Thomas's ancestors or his real brother. However, the fact that Victoria Thompson's lover apparently looked very much like Kit probably indicates that he, too, is quite a bit older than he seems and probably an other distant and ancient relative of Thomas.

Finally, an especially mysterious case is Peg Powell, a Classics student a year above Janet and her roommates. Peg looks "all fragile and Victorian" (400), she sleepwalks and regularly picks up the books the ghost throws out of the window. She seems to belong to Medeous's circle but does not go on vacation with them, whereupon the others chide her. She seems habitually gloomy and, asked what she would do if her heart was broken by a man, she replies that she would "imitate the Lady of Shalott" (205) – i.e., commit suicide. The very first time Janet encounters her, Peg asks for Molly's hockey stick – Molly is using it to take apart the bunk bed in their room and Peg wants to borrow it in order to take apart the bunk bed in her room, too. When Janet later visits the room Peg lives in, she notices that there are no bunk beds in it at all. She is rather puzzled but then forgets about the incident. It is hard to say what all this evidence points at – is Peg a girl captured by Medeous in the nineteenth century, who lived at Blackstock when all rooms had bunk beds? Is she maybe a reincarnation of Victoria Thompson and feels therefore committed to picking up the books? Peg stays mysterious throughout the

whole novel and the fact that Janet, one morning after Halloween of her third year, discovers her holding hands with Nick – whereupon Janet splits up with him – does not help to clarify matters.

Janet Margaret Carter

Janet Carter is the daughter of an American professor of English literature and his Scottish-Irish wife. Maybe her father has Scottish ancestry as well, at least his first name (Duncan) might hint at a Scottish connection. She has two younger siblings, Andrew and Lilian, who, however, don't play any role in the "Tam Lin"-subplot. Janet has red hair and green eyes, thereby confirming her Celtic heritage, and is of rather short and stocky build.

She has a penchant for green clothes, but seems unaware that she is wearing the typical fairy colour, fairies being a part of "things she had read in her childhood" (431) but apparently nothing she believes in anymore. She is extremely fond of both high and popular literature, reading everything from Homer over Shakespeare over science fiction and fantasy to crime novels. She wants to become an author, or, failing that, a college teacher for English. She occasionally writes poetry and starts a degree in English literature, considering at one time to switch her major to Classics but in the end staying with English. She is a clever girl, achieving good grades in college, but she appears often uncertain about her future and also sometimes the victim of some emotional confusion, as for example her confession that "people were very strange, oneself most emphatically included" (225) indicates. Later on, after she has abandoned Nick, her bewilderment extends also to her love-life when she muses if she should try to flirt with Thomas, but checks herself because "nobody who knew as little as she did about how she felt or what she wanted had any business entangling anybody else" (398) – here she is quite different from Janet in the ballad, who appears quite certain about what she wants.

From early childhood on, Janet has been friends with an Asian American boy from her neighbourhood called Danny Chin. However, their friendship has always been non-sexual: Danny is just "a very satisfactory friend who happened to be male" (304). Therefore, Janet is relatively inexperienced when it comes to boys, and, it seems, in her naivety she is quite an easy catch for the much more experienced Nick Tooley. Janet at first appears to be happy that acquiring a boyfriend has been so easy but in subsequent years often wonders if Nick is the right partner for her. He often treats her in a strangely distanced way and has the habit of stopping her from questioning him about himself and his family (the reason for this is probably that his family has been dead for centuries but of course he does not tell Janet about this). However, it seems that Nick is a good enough companion for her and, therefore, Janet cannot make up her mind to

walk out on him. Only when confronted with evidence that he might be betraying her with another girl does she summon the energy to end the relationship.

Janet is usually portrayed as a reliable and caring girl, but she acts nevertheless often a bit tactlessly and somewhat impatiently, especially in her interaction with her roommate Tina and is reprimanded for this by her friends: “‘Tina has a sweet temper,’ observed Nick. ‘You don’t give her a chance to display it, Jenny my lass. You don’t give her a chance to do anything. You just back away when she does something you don’t like, and the rest of the time you try to pretend she’s not there’” (300). In fact, it might be said that she sometimes treats Tina quite shabbily, because, according to her, Tina is “being either dim or dramatic” (300) and Janet hates both. Janet’s almost perpetual annoyance at Tina as well as her actually quite frequent general crankiness has been the cause for many readers in internet discussion groups to declare Janet a rather unsympathetic character (“rec.arts.sf.written”, 1999 and “Chicklitforums August 2004 Book Club”). However, it seems that Janet is still very much in the grip of adolescent angst and identity crisis. She is moreover disturbed by the historical incidents that shape early 1970s American politics, most importantly the Vietnam War, something she contemplates when reading graffiti on the college walls: “Horrible things were happening in the world outside the college, said the political slogans; and they always had, said the interlocutory verse. ‘This world uncertain is.’ She took Nick’s hand, quickly. When I graduate, she thought, then I’ll think about these things. When I know something” (271). Therefore maybe her behaviour is to a certain extent quite credible. Moreover, as Dean has hinted at in her afterword to the novel, the issue of an unwanted pregnancy during college was apparently another stress factor for young female students during the early 1970s. And indeed, it seems that Janet studies in a time when legal solutions (apart from marriage) for this kind of problem had only just become available, as Martha Hixon observes: “this was the time when contraceptives and abortions were first fairly accessible to young, unmarried women and when socially defined acceptable sexual behavior for young adults was in a state of flux” (2004, 85).²¹⁰ Apparently, it opened up a whole new range of options for girls like Janet, who “since she walked out on Nick that evening, (...) had had the sensation that there was no telling what she might do next” (399). Therefore, she prophylactically gets a prescription of birth control pills but nevertheless seems quite at a loss about how to behave.

²¹⁰ Molly at some time remarks how Janet is lucky that all this happens to her in 1973, after the Supreme Court has passed his judgement on the case of Roe vs. Wade, which permitted legalized abortion under certain circumstances, and not the year before.

At another occasion Janet wonders if her “mind is going” (337), since she regularly forgets to do her intended research about the ghost and other strange occurrences on campus. It is actually a suspicion that occurs to her with a certain regularity – after she has made her first sexual experiences with Nick and this distracts her from her academic work, she thinks along the same lines: “Her mind behaved even more badly once she was back in school” (236). However, it is not quite clear if this confusion and loss of memory is due to academic and emotional stress or if fairy magic is at work. Before learning about Medeous being the queen of Elfland, Janet attributes her confusion to the stressful atmosphere at the college and tries to find consolation in literature:

She was by nature and training an adherent of the Romantic school; but she was at the moment a little frightened of it and all its works. It produced a bewildering and infinite universe devoid of answers. The Augustans, with every bit as keen a feeling for those aspects of existence, had chosen to deal with them very differently. And when you were in love with someone who perplexed you, and friends with people you could hardly stand half of the time and didn't understand even when you could, there was a great deal more comfort in the Augustans than the Romantics. (293)

Janet often muses about her situation as a student, the choices she will have to make and the value of her education and appears therefore appears at times a bit self-centered. Her friends are not always quite happy with Janet's irritable temper and try to take her to task for it sometimes and even she herself is sometimes quite aware of it. For example she is angry at Tina because she thinks her room-mate went to a movie twice just because Nick (on whom Tina has quite a crush before he decides for Janet as his girl-friend) is going there as well and only later realises that she is wrong: “Good heavens, thought Janet, quite clearly, it wasn't Tina who saw *Othello* Friday night. (...) It was Molly who stayed for the movie. And I've been fuming at Tina all evening (...). My mind is going and it's only the first week of classes” (89). It also appears that she is also maybe sometimes a bit slow on the uptake when matters of emotional intelligence are concerned. Thomas at least repeatedly calls her “the dimmest intelligent woman” (287 and 437) he has ever met.

Taking all these points into account one might say that Janet certainly has her shortcomings, but at least she is a strong and self-confident character, who is able to play the part of ‘fair Janet’ from the ballad and does not chicken out when the situation gets tight. She has of course, in contrast to Janet in the ballad, also the consolation that her parents have promised to stand by her in any difficult situation.

It has been remarked by readers in discussion groups that Janet (and her friends) show remarkably little psychological development and I tend to agree with this assessment. Janet, who decides to raise a child with her new boyfriend Thomas Lane seems hardly more or less mature than Janet on her first day at college. On the one hand, it seems that Janet is already a strong

character when she starts college and on the other hand, it seems, her predicament is apparently not strong enough to really make her undergo drastic character changes. In contrast to most of the other girl-heroines in the other adaptations, she only learns about the teind rather late (and thus does not have much time to fret about the mortal danger) and moreover does not have to go to Elfland (in contrast to e.g. Tiffany, Rois and Kate) and fetch her lover back. Admittedly, during the ceremony she has to fight several animals, which, in their struggle to break free, threaten to harm her physically, but apart from a few scratches, it seems, even the breaking of the enchantment leaves Janet psychologically and physically relatively untouched. The greatest challenge – having the baby and finding a future – are probably yet before her but the novel ends before this part of her life starts.

Thomas Lane

Thomas Lane is apparently a few years older than Janet and has started college three years before her – at least he once states that (provided no further obstacles occur) he will have needed seven years to complete his degree. This long period of study seems all the more unlucky since Thomas is apparently not a child of wealthy parents, as Janet, but someone who has to work for his education: “Thomas (...) was on financial aid and worked in Taylor, poor creature, five mornings a week” (223).

Thomas starts a major in Political Science since he has political ambitions, but then he seems to regret his choice and takes another subject, which does not satisfy him either: “Poli Sci, Chemistry, Art History, Astronomy. I didn’t know they let you change your mind that often,” (188) Molly wonders. The reasons for his indecision are never stated. But at least the fact that his advisor is Melinda Wolfe probably explains why he is allowed so many changes: he is apparently given a kind of jester’s licence, maybe because Wolfe knows that he will be the next teind.²¹¹ Maybe the elves even promote his indecisiveness (by whatever means) because they want to keep him at Blackstock until the seven years that pass between teind-ceremonies are up. When Janet starts college, Thomas is majoring in Classics but he eventually decides to change to English and announces his decision through his spectacular staging of the *Revenger’s Tragedy*. Throughout the novel, he is repeatedly fighting with Professor Medeous (over some or other academic matter it seems, but it is never explained of what nature their interactions really are).

Thomas is described as extremely good-looking, tall, slender, blond, grey-eyed (maybe a hint at his being “an elfin grey”, as Tam Lin is) and gifted with an apparently very alluring

²¹¹ If this was the case then Thomas would be treated a little like Thomas Lynn in *Fire and Hemlock* who is under Laurel’s special protection until the sacrifice so that not even his incompetence in driving his car can hurt him.

melodious, theatrical voice. As Janet explains after her first closer encounter with him: “He’s not cute at all. (...) He exists in another realm entirely” (123). That Thomas has indeed been touched by otherworldly powers is not clear to Janet at the moment she makes this joke. But it seems Dean also tries to hint at his otherworldliness by emphasising that Thomas is always cold to the touch, thus letting him partake of the typical coldness of the elves. It could be that he just suffers from low blood pressure, but the repeated insistence on his coldness probably has a deeper meaning: “his hand was very cool and light” (118), “He put a hand on her shoulder. Through the stiff muslin, his fingers were cold” (199) and later on, Janet thinks how Thomas’s hand “was cold. It had always been” (408). He moreover never wears adequate clothing in winter, as if he was quite at home in the cold. In contrast to other students who are also connected with Medeous, his coldness, however, seems only superficial. While Nick once is described as bright but cold and as in many ways rather distant, Thomas is, when required, much more present than Nick, as Janet experiences when she eventually makes love to him (410).

Before it comes to that, however, many other things happen. Janet is, from the start, clearly impressed by Thomas’s physical appearance but in her first year seems relatively content to go out with the visually relatively inconspicuous Nick instead. In fact, she even sometimes seems to pity Thomas for his beauty, wondering how hard it must be to be forced to live up to the expectations created by it and suspecting that women (including Tina) probably love him most for his looks. Actually, the fact that most of Medeous’s victims are either quite goodlooking (like Thomas and Kit) or musical (like Nick and Robin) – or both, like Anne, suggests that this fairy queen has similar tastes as Laurel in *Fire and Hemlock* and of course her penchant for the beautiful and talented is also in keeping with ideas from folklore.

Soon after Janet and her roommates have begun their studies at Blackstock, Thomas starts dating Tina and at first glance their relationship seems perfect: “Tina and Thomas became a model couple, making sheep’s eyes at one another and explaining one another’s views whenever one of them was absent” (176). However, it soon turns out that Tina feels inferior and he in turn is frustrated because she does not share his interest in literature. But he is apparently too considerate to break up with her because he thinks this might be bad for her academic performance and he does not want to ruin her prospects: “it has such an awful effect on people’s studying and it’s bad enough to break the girl’s heart without worrying if I’m going to keep her out of medical school too” (323). On the other hand, his hopes that Tina might save him from being used as the teind might also play a role in his reluctance to break up with her. When Tina however finally finds a satisfying hobby which boosts her self-confidence, she jilts Thomas and he experiences a severe crisis. It turns out that he has rather little self-confidence himself,

ascribing his initial success with Tina merely to circumstance: “Well, Tina was awfully lonely and she had a sort of theory that one must have a boyfriend in college or one is a failure; and it hurt her feelings very much that Nick preferred you” (350). Janet is rather astonished when she hears this but maybe Thomas’s apparently low self-esteem is a reason why he does not actively look for a new girlfriend when Tina leaves him.

But it seems Thomas is always good for a surprise – and be it only to offend Janet repeatedly by his strange mood swings: when Janet first encounters him, he is extremely rude and almost aggressive, trying vehemently to keep her from taking his copy of the *Romance of the Rose*. He soon seems to regret his behaviour, however, and invites her to the theatre twice, which to Janet at first seems a bit over-compensatory. After that, Thomas is nice and amiable for months – until Janet tries to talk to him about what bad effects Tina’s birth control pills have on her health. She asks him to do something about it and Thomas storms off in a huff. Again, Janet is rather taken aback by this outbreak: “It was the first time he had showed his temper since she had met him in the library—even in the face of chronic provocation from Nick” (178). A possible explanation for Thomas’s irascibility is delivered later on by Nick who explains that Thomas has just been told by college authorities that he cannot graduate the year he had planned to (179). A similar, though rather worse, problem (almost being thrown out of college) is the cause for Thomas’s complete disappearance for two weeks after the performance of the *Revenger’s Tragedy* – an incident which completely devastates Tina. When Thomas finally shows up again, he buys his girlfriend – on Janet’s advice – a big bunch of roses to tell her how sorry he is. Tina is soothed but when Janet discovers the bunch of flowers in their room she wonders if Tina has gotten the whole message – for the bouquet contains not only roses and carnations but also rue, a herb symbolising sorrow and remorse.²¹² It seems, moreover, that Thomas in general has a liking for rue, as Janet discovers when she has to squeeze up tightly with Thomas on the big tray they use for sledding: “Thomas smelled of rue” (286). As has been mentioned earlier, all the Classics people seem to have a special liking for herbs but the connection between Thomas and the herb that stands for regret is certainly no accident. Apart from that fact that it probably expresses his remorse about his wasted life etc. it is also interesting that rue is characterised as an abortive herb (Bächtold-Stäubli 1987, 547), something which Janet never discovers. The significance of this, however, is not quite clear – maybe the author did not know about this herself. Otherwise it might be a symbolic hint that Thomas does

²¹² The symbolic meaning of rue (“sorrow and repentance”) is for instance also alluded to in *Hamlet*, when the distraught Ophelia distributes different kinds of flowers to the court members (IV, 5, 177), among them rue (*Hamlet*, New Cambridge Shakespeare edition 1985, 201).

not want to get his girlfriends pregnant only for the purpose of saving his life. Apart from its use as an abortifacient, rue was used as a protection against curses (Redford 1961, 231) – but it is also described as a magic herb for bringing about curses (ibid.), so if Thomas uses rue because he wants to protect himself against Medeous, this is probably not very helpful.

Continuing his history of strange mood-swings, Thomas also behaves rather erratically on his own birthday, being rude to Janet and later (297) claiming that his bad temper has been caused by fighting with Medeous, who had told him to retake Greek 1 and now told him that he does not have to after all, thus causing him to waste valuable time. Thomas and Janet then proceed to talk about Tina and Janet accidentally tells him that she thinks Tina only chose him for his good looks, whereupon he is offended and storms off once again (298). Maybe his academic troubles are the main reason for Thomas's surges of temper, maybe it is also Janet's occasional bluntness that provokes him. But it could also be that his knowledge about the fairies and living consciously in their presence influences him. Maybe Dean also presents Thomas as emotionally unstable because of his awareness that he will be sacrificed to some dark power in the not too distant future. It is, however, not clear from what time on Thomas knows that he will be sacrificed: "they give us a little time to get shriven," (436) he explains, and it can be assumed that he knows about his fate for quite some time, as the remark he makes in Janet's first year at college about *The Lady's not for Burning* (he thinks it is a play about two people who save each other) indicates.

It is a bit strange, however, given that Thomas apparently does know some time in advance, that he does not seem to do anything to change his fate. For he knows about the remedy – having a pregnant girlfriend and making her pull him off his horse during the sacrificial procession. Yet, when Tina splits up with him after a year, he lets her go and does not actively try to find another girlfriend, even though he is aware that he should act: "I need to find somebody else – oh, hell," said Thomas, and grinned at [Janet]" (327). Maybe Thomas has Janet in mind as 'somebody else', but as she is still going out with Nick, nothing more happens. Thomas even claims that he does not know how to find another girl (350), but this seems a bit insufficient as an explanation given what is at stake. But somehow it seems that after his break-up with Tina, Thomas has become resigned to his fate. He even later tells Janet: "I didn't mean to get you pregnant at all; I thought I'd just go through with it" (430). "It" means apparently the sacrifice, and Thomas appears rather fatalistic. However, it appears that he still has a hope that, even without him actively working to achieve it, Janet will sleep with him and get pregnant. Thomas does not want to manoeuvre Janet actively because it seems that his conscience is plaguing him and he does not want to make another person pay for his own folly, at least he

berates the other boys who abused girls for their own ends: “(...)the bastards. Picking out nice sensitive intelligent neurotic types because it’s easier to pull the wool over their eyes, and then cackling like some fucking Victorian villain and saying, ha.ha, you’re pregnant so you have to do what I say” (430). Here he differs from Tam Lin, who does not seem to have any qualms about getting Janet with child. This is a similar situation as in *Fire and Hemlock* and *Winter Rose*, where the male protagonists, in order to save their own lives, must act against their own moral standards.²¹³ After having tried to stick with Tina, Thomas Lane apparently gives up and is thus even more passive than most of the other male victims (excepting those in Pratchett’s novels).

However, by initiating certain actions and then letting fate take its course, Thomas finds his saviour in Janet after all. First he takes her to the theatre where a play about a Thomas and a Jennet, who save each other, is staged and he knows that Janet is usually rather susceptible to literature. Then, as Janet actually suggests that they have sex with each other, he asks her if she wants to go to Chester Hall, for practical reasons apparently – they will not disturb their roommates and the musical practice rooms in Chester are soundproof. But he probably also knows that in Chester Hall Janet’s birth control pills may not work, as Chester Hall is under the influence of Medeous. (Why that is the case, is never explained, see footnote 16). How much even this little interference with fate distresses him, however, is shown in his reaction to Janet’s confession that she is pregnant: “He also looked like a man who could not make up his mind what to do, like somebody who saw no way out” (428). Here, once again, one might observe a parallel to the figure of Hamlet, who is also described as the “man who could not make up his mind” (144) in Janet’s programme book to the *Hamlet* performance she goes to see once. The irony here consists probably in the fact that both Thomas and Robin make fun of this *Hamlet*-analysis when they read it – not knowing that Thomas himself will almost be a victim of his indecision later on.

Summing up

Of all the novels discussed here, Dean’s is the longest (456 pages), which, as has been mentioned before, does not mean that its depiction of the elves is especially elaborate, rather,

²¹³ One reader in a discussion group remarked: “Now that I think about it, regardless of who [Medeous] chooses as tiend the outcome's practically certain--a girl would only be willing to help someone who'd be too honorable to impregnate her solely to save is life (...) and a girl would naturally be repelled and unwilling to help a man who used her, impregnated her and broke her heart so cruelly. And of course finally, if a girl did try to help, the feat she has to perform is a tad difficult... So all these years Medeous had little reason to worry”. (<http://groups.google.com/group/rec.arts.sf.written>, 1999)

Tam Lin is for the most part of it simply a college novel. It is also a coming-of-age-novel, albeit one in which the protagonists hardly develop at all (neither the human ones nor the immortal ones). In this respect, the novel stays very close to the ballad, where Janet is a strong girl from beginning to end – however, in case of the ballad the very brevity of the form entails this – in a novel there would have been much more room for character development.

Surveying reviews and readers' discussions it turns out that many readers are dissatisfied with the fact that this novel is not always neatly constructed and characters could be better developed, as well as with the 'tagged on' fairy ending. Those who praise it, however, mostly praise it for the successful evocation of a certain world with a certain atmosphere – a US liberal arts college in the 1970s. For certain readers (mostly those who have studied at a similar institution) this academic universe seems to be a sort of magic world even without any influence of the supernatural, where one meets fascinating people and is free to experiment socially and intellectually. In this respect one might even claim that there is yet a connection to the ballad model, "Tam Lin". For, as Dean herself writes, "Tam Lin" is a ballad about adolescents and their transgression of certain social (and other) boundaries. Thus, "Dean has integrated the sociological function of the ballad story of 'Tam Lin' as well as its magical motifs into her original work of fiction" (Hixon 2004, 86) – and succeeds at least in regard to the former.

As for the fairy portrayal in her book – the technique Dean employs, namely position small hints at the otherworldly nature of her elves throughout the book and bring on the great solution only at the very end – is not so unlike that used by Jones in *Fire and Hemlock*. However, in *Fire and Hemlock* it seems to work better. Maybe this is due to the fact that the book is shorter. Maybe it has also something to do with the fact that Polly's perspective (for most of the novel) is one of a child that still believes in magic and therefore the strange events that happen throughout the novel seem better integrated.

The image Dean paints of her elves is similar to that presented in the other adaptations. They are probably closest to those in *Fire and Hemlock* in their elegance and aloofness, and, even though the information is sometimes rather well hidden, also echo a lot of folkloristic notions about elves, such as their penchant for green clothes and their moral ambiguity. Moral ambiguity, however, is one characteristic that does not really apply for the elves in the next two adaptations, written by Terry Pratchett – his elves are simply evil.

12. *Lords and Ladies* (1992) and *The Wee Free Men* (2003) by Terry Pratchett

The author

Born in 1948 in Buckinghamshire, Terry Pratchett was working as a journalist at a local newspaper when he started to write fiction. His first novel, *The Carpet People*, was published in 1971, receiving very few but rather positive reviews. It was followed by *The Dark Side of the Sun* (1976) and *Strata* (1981; this contains already some ideas that will appear later in the discworld-novels). In 1980 he switched from journalism to public relations, becoming “publicity officer for the Central Electricity Generating Board (now PowerGen) with responsibility for three nuclear power stations (‘What leak? -- Oh, *that* leak’)” (Smythe 2006). In 1983, his first discworld novel, *The Colour of Magic*, was published which, after a change of publishing house, started to attract a lot of readers’ attention. In 1987, he decided to write full-time and gave up his job as PR-officer. Many of the following discworld novels became bestsellers. Up to now more than thirty novels have been published in the discworld series (plus companion books, such as guides and quiz-books and stage adaptations of some of the novels).

Lords and Ladies is part of the discworld series and was published in 1992. While the discworld series is addressed primarily to adults, Pratchett has also published children’s and young adult books, e.g. the Bromeliad trilogy, the *Johnny Maxwell* novels and lately also three discworld novels for younger readers *The Wee Free Men* (2003), *A Hatful of Sky* (2005) and *Wintersmith* (2006). Pratchett is, in commercial terms, a very successful author: “As far as Britain is concerned, Terry is now the decade’s best-selling living fiction author, with over twelve million sales (but this was before the Potter phenomenon), and now running at over two million books a year” (Smythe 2006). Critical attention has been sparse but in recent years, it seems, Pratchett has begun to be noticed by academia and a number of studies and articles have appeared. Of the authors discussed here, he is, next to Diana Wynne Jones, probably the one with the highest number of scholarly texts devoted to his works – an MLA-search yields 12 hits.

Lords and Ladies: plot summary

The novel is set on the discworld, and here in the tiny mountain kingdom of Lancre.²¹⁴ Three witches – Esmerelda Weatherwax, Gytha Ogg and Magrat Garlick – who have had quite an influence on the country’s fate before, return from a long journey. Things have changed: a group of girls have become self-appointed witches and, moreover, crop-circles are appearing everywhere. The witches know crop-circles mean danger: different worlds come close to the discworld at ‘circle time’ and, due to the girls’ efforts at black magic, elves have directed their attention to the kingdom and plan to invade – offering the leading girl power in exchange for opening a way into Lancre. The witches (or at least the two older ones, who do not want to let the youngest help) start to work against the elves’ intrusion. However, most people in Lancre have forgotten that elves are ‘real’ – the king e.g. thinks they are “old wives’ tales” (155). Neither do they remember that they are dangerous – Magrat, the youngest of the three witches, thinks they are “good” (205).

The would-be witches have, through their belief, provided an entry for the elf-queen and her warriors, and so events come to a dramatic climax on the day of the planned wedding between Magrat and the king, Verence I. Elves invade the country and kidnap the king. The older witches try to stop them, either by facing the fairy queen directly or by appealing to the fairy king (who has, so far, kept out of all the trouble) to fetch back his unruly wife. Magrat, who only then realizes what is really happening, goes on a lonely quest to rescue her fiancé. After a series of struggles the elves are vanquished and vanish. Magrat marries the king and the two old witches return to their positions, having once more proved how important they are for the kingdom’s welfare.

This can only be a short summary of the main elf-related events, since apart from the elf-invasion-plot, several other plotlines are followed simultaneously, e.g. one involving a group of wizards travelling to attend the wedding, one of them (Archchancellor Ridcully) being an old swain of Esme Weatherwax. They are accompanied by a dwarf named Casanunda, who claims to be the world’s second-best lover and who pursues Nanny Ogg with definitely amorous intentions. Another plotline involves a group of craftsmen trying to rehearse a play to be performed at the wedding. A third one concentrates on the wedding preparations in the castle and the tensions created between the witches because of the marriage – Magrat, vexed at being always excluded from really important affairs in witchcraft, decides to give up being a witch and to concentrate on “queening” instead, which, of course, does not really work out either.

²¹⁴ For a short introduction to this secondary world, see the next paragraph.

War of the worlds

As mentioned above, *Lords and Ladies* forms part of an ongoing series of novels. The so-called discworld-series is set in a secondary world, the disc-world, which bears distinct resemblances to earth but differs in a few decisive traits, for example in that it is a flat world, (a disc residing on the back of four elephants, which in turn stand on the back of a giant, space-travelling turtle) and in that it is a world where magic is an everyday phenomenon.²¹⁵ The discworld has its own sun, moon and stars, the sun travelling daily over the disc and nightly vanishing under it to travel to the east again. There are several continents, roughly based on earth's continents and a surrounding ocean which, towards the disc's rim, ends in a great waterfall. Basically, the discworld corresponds to the earthly Babylonian world-model. However, the religious concept is slightly different. While in the Babylonian world there is an underworld below the disc, there does not seem to be such a thing in the discworld. In the center – or the “hub” – of the disc a mountain (probably modeled on Greek Olympus) can be found, which is the seat of the greater discworld gods (the so-called “small gods”, in contrast, are dispersed all over the disc). Instead of an underworld the discworld is equipped with a personified Death, who fetches the dying and conveys them to an apparently not topographically determinable afterworld.

As has been hinted at, the discworld is a slightly antiquated world, without electricity, industry, etc. It is, however, not possible to assign it to any definite period in earth history. There are Medieval, Renaissance but also eighteenth or nineteenth century aspects (such as an opera house, the invention of newspapers and photography). But there also definitely twentieth century elements (such as the invention of cinema or a kind of telegraphy), moreover, some characters think in a rather modern way.

Since more than 30 novels have not exhausted the potential of this fictional world, I can here attempt to give only the briefest of overviews. Important for *Lords and Ladies*, however, is the positioning of the discworld in the surrounding cosmos because the inhabitants of the discworld know something that is “outside” of their world, the so-called “dungeon dimensions”, which seem to be surrounding the discworld and are populated by horrible monsters. Apart from

²¹⁵ This world-model was probably inspired by Indian cosmology myths that have a flat world standing either on columns of elephants or on elephants resting on the back of a turtle. There are several anecdotes in circulation with regard to this world-model. One relates to psychologist William James (in other versions it is mathematician Bertrand Russell), who was, after a lecture, accosted by either a student or (according to other accounts) an old lady, who claimed that the world was not revolving around the sun but rather that the aforementioned turtle-and-elephant model was the true world model. On James's question what the turtle stood on, the reply was: ‘It's turtles all the way down’. This anecdote has been used by mathematical researchers to explain the principle of recursion (Fishman 2001). It also occurs in Clifford Geertz's essay “Thick description”, here told as a conversation between a researcher and an Indian gentleman (1973, 28-29).

the dungeon dimensions, however, there are entirely different, more or less self-contained worlds, that sometimes get in contact with the discworld and one such world is Elfland, or, as Nanny Ogg tries to explain to her son: “Those [the monsters] live *outside*. But Them [the elves] lives [!] ... over there” (63). In other words: A secondary world (the discworld) is being invaded by a tertiary one (the world of the elves). In his description of the elvish invasion, Pratchett outlines his own special ideas about the concept of parallel universes. On the one hand, the idea of parallel universes is brought up in the sense that every person exists simultaneously on an uncountable number of worlds and that, with regard to every decision a person on earth (or rather the disc) takes, the ‘others’ will take quite different decisions and suffer therefore quite different fates. This concept is important for the subplot of Granny Weatherwax and her former lover Ridcully, who play a number of “what would have happened if...” games and conclude that in a parallel universe all the things they dreamt of or feared actually happened. There is, however, another variant to the concept – that of the “parasite universe”. At the beginning this is just a mispronunciation of ‘parallel universes’ by Ridcully (109) and his colleague protests that there are no such things as parasite universes. But in *Lords and Ladies* they actually exist:

There are also stagnant pools, universes cut off from past and future. They have to steal pasts and futures from other universes. Their only hope is to batten on to the dynamic universes as they pass through the fragile period, as remora fish hang on to a passing shark. These are the parasite universes... And when the crop circles burst like raindrops, they have their chance. (111-2)

Elfland is depicted as such a parasite universe and the idea fits in with the traditional idea of time either standing still or passing much more slowly in Elfland. It also fits with the idea of elves being unable to have real emotions, a trait which forces them to live off human emotions. It is also in keeping with the traditional idea that elves are rather barren creatures and have to steal human babies and wetnurses – in *Lords and Ladies* they aim a bit higher and steal a human king. In a similar way, in *The Perilous Gard* the elves are unable to sustain their own food production and thus live off the supplies of the castle – however, they offer something in return (jewels) and do not live parasitically. In *The Wee Free Men*, on the other hand, the world of the elves is compared to a pirate ship that steals supplies (food, children and ‘reality’) from other worlds because it cannot produce any itself, so the idea of the parasite universe is taken up again and maybe even taken a step further. It is not quite clear, however, how exactly the parasite universe “battens on” to the discworld. Pratchett introduces the idea of a crop circle being a door between the two worlds, so this would mean that the parasite universe merely ‘anchors’ next to the ‘real’ world and passage to and from it is possible.²¹⁶ However, later on, there seems to be a sort of war

²¹⁶ Crop circles were a phenomenon especially prominent in Southern England during the 1980s and sometimes thought to be the work of extraterrestrial life forms trying to get in touch with human beings (Biewald 2005, 107).

between the worlds since “Lancre and the land of the elves were trying to occupy the same space” (323), which somehow contradicts the image of the remora fish and the shark.

Intertextuality

It is no mystery that Terry Pratchett is a master of allusion and intertextual play: “Intertextuality - by which all books feed off each other - is rife in the works of Terry Pratchett” (Bryant 2002, 14). Pratchett’s books might be called “Echokammern, in denen die phantastischen Einfälle der gesamten abendländischen Literatur und Kultur widerhallen” (Petzold 2004, 88) – at least as much, if not more than J.K. Rowling’s books, at which this description is originally aimed.²¹⁷ Whole websites are dedicated to decoding the innumerable allusions found in the discworld-novels, for example www.lspace.org. The L-space or Library-space being a (fictional) dimension that Pratchett repeatedly elaborates on in his novels. The basic concept is that large collections of books (magical or mundane) can warp space and time around them.²¹⁸ There is also a short passage about the L-space in *Lords and Ladies*:

The study of invisible writings was a new discipline made available by the discovery of the bi-directional nature of Library-Space. The thaumic mathematics are complex, but boil down to the fact that all books, everywhere, affect all other books. This is obvious: books inspire other books written in the future, and cite books written in the past. But the General Theory of L-Space suggests that, in that case, the contents of books *as yet unwritten* can be deduced from books now in existence. (49)²¹⁹

Some of the “books written in the past” that are referred to in *Lords and Ladies* I will list here, but allusions are so numerous – and often so small – that it is next to impossible to include all literary works (and scraps of popular culture) alluded to in *Lords and Ladies*. One source repeatedly used is Shakespeare’s *Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Most noticeably, there is, in *Lords and Ladies*, a group of craftsmen, who intend to rehearse a play to be performed at the royal wedding. Since they are pursued by curious onlookers they retreat deeper and deeper into the woods in search for a quiet rehearsal space, where (and here Pratchett departs from Shakespeare) they accidentally (they are rather drunk) attract the fairies by talking about “Lords and Ladies” and the “gentry” (although, if looked at strictly, this shouldn’t happen, since “lords and ladies” is a folkloristic euphemism for fairies which was used in order to avoid attracting the fairies’

The idea of making this into a doorway to Elfland is not wholly original, for funghi and also grass circles are sometimes regarded as products of elves in traditional belief, where they are commonly called *fairy rings*.

²¹⁷ Translation: the books might be called “echo chambers, where the fantastic ideas of the whole of Western literature and culture are reflected”.

²¹⁸ According to a Wikipedia entry the relevant ‘scientific’ equation is “a simple extension of the aphorism ‘Knowledge is Power’: (Books =) Knowledge = Power = Energy = Matter = Mass and since large amounts of mass distort time and space, large amounts of knowledge (i.e., any sufficiently-sized library or used-book store) can do likewise” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/L-space>). Travelling via L-space one can access every library in the uni- or rather multiverse, even those that have not been written yet or that were just planned but never written.

²¹⁹ It seems that in this statement Pratchett comes close to the tenets of some structuralist literary theoreticians.

attention). J. Stephens and R. McCallum moreover think that “Casanunda, Ridcully, Nanny Ogg, and Granny Weatherwax take the positions of the four lovers” (1998, 260), complementing Magrat and Verence standing in for Theseus and Hyppolita.

Another allusion to Shakespeare occurs towards the end of the novel, when the defeated fairy queen is fetched by her husband: “The king held out a hand and said nothing. Only Magrat heard it. Something about meeting by moonlight, she said later” – a phrase used by Oberon addressing Titania: “I’ll be met by moonlight, proud Titania” (II, 2). The not always quite easy relationship of Shakespeare’s fairy couple is something Pratchett chose to mock as well: “He [the fairy king] can’t stand her [his wife]: It’s what you might call an open marriage” (306). Yet another Shakespeare allusion finishes off the novel: it tells of a playwright in the city who turns all that happened during Magrat’s wedding into a play which he calls “*The Taming of the Vole*, because no one would be interested in a play called *Things that Happened on a Midsummer Night*” (374). How Pratchett uses the Shakespearean treatment of elves (namely their miniaturization) as a means to achieve the fairies’ defeat will be discussed later.

Another important group of allusions is to folk songs and ballads, among them “Tam Lin” and “Thomas the Rhymer”. “Tam Lin” is present in the Verence-Magrat-Fairy-Queen subplot: a man is kidnapped by the queen of the fairies and rescued by his lover (in this case: bride-to-be). There is, however, as usual for Pratchett, a satiric touch to the treatment of the ballad: the kidnapped man is not an attractive seducer but a shy little man who used to be a court jester (even though he is now king) while his lover is rather unsuccessful with men and not the remarkable and beautiful girl of the ballad. However, even though Magrat is not pregnant, as Janet, she has “everything to fight for” (121) since Verence is probably the only man in her life whom she has any chance of marrying. The fight between Magrat and the fairy queen is repeatedly compared to a phenomenon of the animal world – namely a fight between two queen bees, in which the young queen which does not have a swarm yet also has reason to fight since she wants to be mated.²²⁰ (In the world of bees, an old queen normally leaves the hive with part of her folk before a new queen hatches who will then take over the hive, only when the weather is bad and the old queen cannot swarm is there actually a danger of a fight between two queens (120), so the battle of the queens is the exception, not the rule.) The reason for the kidnapping is also slightly different from that in the ballad. While in the ballad (as far as this is stated at all) the fairy queen abducts Tam Lin for her fun and as a prospective sacrifice, in *Lords and Ladies* the

²²⁰ The elves are also, later on, likened to wasps – the royal beekeeper knows that they sometimes intrude into beehives: “wasps looked pretty enough” (239) but must be killed. Accordingly, some elves are killed with wasp poison by the bee keeper later (265).

elf queen desires a mortal husband in order to conquer Lancre, intending to bend the rules of the land to her own purposes: “when we are married (...) the land must accept me. *By your own rules* [emphasis mine]. I know how it works. (...) The king and the land are one. The king and the queen are one. And I shall be queen” (325). That there is already a fairy king who might object to this enterprise is an objection easily dismissed by the elf-queen: “[elf-warrior:] ‘The king will not like that.’ [elf-queen:] ‘And when has that ever mattered?’ [warrior:] ‘Never, lady’” (8). That the existence of the elf-king *will* have an influence on matters after all will be discussed later on.

The allusion to “Thomas the Rhymer” is not as prominent as that to “Tam Lin”: the craftsmen arrive at a crossroad and choose the third road, a green ferny path which will eventually lead them up to a circle of standing stones, which is an entrance to Fairyland. This echoes of course the three roads the fairy queen shows to Thomas.

Other, minor references (found on pages 78 and 280) are made to: “Rip van Winkle” and similar stories – the craftsmen talk about people who fell asleep at a particular spot in the woods and woke up only years later. Furthermore, there are allusions to fairy stories and tales by George MacDonald (“At the Back of the North Wind”), Tolkien’s *Hobbit* (“there and back again”), Lord Dunsany’s *King of Elfland’s Daughter* (“the fields we know”), William Allingham’s “Up the Airy Mountain”. Also there are allusions to prayers (“From ghoulies and ghosties and long-leggety beasties and things that go bump in the night Good Lord deliver us”) and nursery rhymes (“My mother said I never should – play with fairies in the wood”) and finally to J.M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan*: “I remember someone asking us to clap our hands” (314). The clapping is meant as a gesture of belief in fairies which, in *Peter Pan* leads to the resurrection of Tinkerbell. In *Lords and Ladies*, the allusion takes on a satiric quality if one observes that the admonition also appears during a play in which fairies appear, only that these fairies are not cute at all and can apparently *force* humans into believing: “they [the actors in the fairy play] must have been good, because I really believed [in fairies]....” (314) one of the spectators later states.

Witches vs. fairies

While in the other novels analysed here it is often basically one girl against the fairy queen and her folk, here it is a threesome of witches (and finally the whole population of the kingdom of Lancre), who fight against the invasion from Fairyland. The constellation ‘witches against fairies’ is rather peculiar because in folklore witches are traditionally seen as associates of the fairies, either having contact with (human-shaped) fairies, e.g. being allowed to dine with

them, secondly, witches are sometimes reported to keep small fairies or demons – the boundaries here are not always quite clear – as familiars (for a definition of familiars see chapter two). Apparently, in the distant past of the discworld, witches there were more friendly to elves as well, but as Nanny Ogg reconsiders, the old witches had “made a big mistake about the elves. They’d seen through the buggers in the end, but it had been a close thing” (129). Since there has obviously been a kind of battle between witches and elves in the past, where the old witches made “life in this world to hot for [the elves]” (ibid.), Pratchett’s ‘modern’ witches are still enemies of the elves. Because of this peculiar constellation it might be opportune to look at the three characters in more detail before proceeding to the fairies themselves.

Magrat, Nanny and Granny represent the three faces of the tripartite (Celtic) Mother-goddess (maiden/mother/crone). In *Lords and Ladies*, (fairly) young Magrat Garlick, soon to be wedded to the king, is the maiden, Gytha (Nanny) Ogg, the much-married matriarch is the mother and Granny Weatherwax, though apparently not much older than Nanny Ogg, represents the crone (that there is a fourth face to the goddess is thematized only in a later novel, *Carpe Jugulum* (1998)).

The maiden: Magrat Garlick

Magrat is the one who is cast in the role of Janet – she herself remembers something that sounds a lot like “Tam Lin”: “I remember a folk-song about a situation just like this’,” said Magrat. ‘This girl had her fiancé stolen by the Queen of the Elves and she didn’t hang around whining, she jolly well got on her horse and rescued him’” (277-8). But she is not a typical Janet-figure. She’s not a golden-haired girl, rather a less than averagely attractive twenty- or even thirty-something, tall, thin, with always slightly dishevelled hair. Moreover, she is quite the opposite of the enterprising heroines shown in the other novels, in fact, she is portrayed throughout the discworld series as a ‘wet hen’, habitually suppressed by the two older witches. So it is quite a novelty when Magrat exclaims: “Well, I’m going to do that too” (278) meaning that she wants to set out and rescue her husband-to-be from the clutches of the fairy queen. Small wonder, however, that her companions think her quite unsuitable for such a task, as Magrat has always been rather worldly innocent and Shawn Ogg, Nanny’s son, fears she is not up to distinguishing between fiction and reality: “In real life you die. In folksongs you just have to remember to keep one finger in your ear and how to get to the next chorus” (278).

Quite in keeping with her characterisation as the naïve, Magrat has hitherto believed that “elves are good” (160) and innocently removed the protecting iron around the wounded girl’s

bed (205).²²¹ Only when she is directly confronted with the cruelty of the elves (and moreover spurned by a condescending letter written by the older witches she has found shortly before) her anger is awakened. In her rage – which is of course rather comical to watch – she then turns into a rather ruthless warrior-queen. She puts on a discarded old armour and shoots an elf through a keyhole – an action which Shawn Ogg does not think himself capable of: “I’d have said something like ‘hand’s up’ first” (276). But Magrat simply disregards any rules of combat and just “got them out of the way” (277).

Later on, however, she almost gives in to the fairy queen after all, since at least in one way she is similar to the other girl-heroes in the other novels: The fairy manages to get at her (habitually low) self-esteem: “She had no control of her body. She did not deserve any. She did not deserve a thing. (...) She’d never be any good. She’d never be beautiful, or intelligent, or strong. She’d never be anything at all. Self confidence? Self-confidence in what?” (341). But even though she almost loses herself, at the very last moment her resistance is awakened again and she physically as well psychologically beats the fairy queen.

But even in that glorious victory Pratchett seems to keep an element of ridicule close at hand: in the image of the fighting queen bees – “Only one queen in a hive! Slash! Stab!” (341), thus reducing Magrat to her animal instincts. Contrary to Granny Weatherwax, the most cunning of the three witches who succeeds by using psychological tricks, Magrat can apparently only be strong if she does *not* think.

The mother: Nanny Ogg

Nanny Ogg, the motherly one of the three witches, plays only an ancillary role in the fairy-subplot, supporting Magrat and Granny in their fight. She is, however, probably a representation of an (in Lancre almost forgotten) folk-belief: Someone who fears the fairies. Nanny Ogg is e.g. afraid to name “Them” (63) and lists the whole bunch of euphemisms commonly used to refer to the elves: the Lords and Ladies, the Fair Folk, the Gentry, the Shining Ones, the Star People (63). She is later on also the one who sets out into the ‘other’ world of the elves, where the fairy-king lives. Since this is a place with a rather dubious reputation – resembling a bathhouse – and the fairy king is moreover not disinclined to flirt with a witch, it becomes clear why coquette Nanny Ogg and not prudish Granny Weatherwax takes this task upon her.

²²¹ The elves have wounded one of the young would-be witches with their poisoned arrows.

The crone: Granny Weatherwax

Even though Magrat takes over the role of Janet, Granny Weatherwax is even more important than her as an opponent to the fairies. It is interesting, however, that Granny does have some fairy-like characteristics herself: in a flashback showing a scene of her youth we see young Esme Weatherwax tempting her lover on and on but never really letting him reach her – quite like an elusive elf: “running just fast enough to keep ahead of a young man although, of course, not so far ahead that he’ll give up” (2-3). In contrast to the elegant fairies (as they are portrayed by Pratchett), however, she is “not beautiful” (3), rather she looks a bit too sharp and cool to be attractive. And contrarily to them, who habitually torture all kinds of creatures, she is rather friendly to animals, she e.g. lets a robin which has accidentally nested in her water kettle stay there and has a special relationship with the bees in her garden (55).

Despite the differences, the elf-queen recognizes Granny as someone who is more or less her equal and grants her a sort of compliment: “You know, you think very much like an elf” (326). Granny’s skill at reading (and riding) minds and her extreme self-confidence (“I *chose*, Gytha Ogg,” (126) namely to be a witch, while others were chosen by their mentor-witches) are some more traits that link the witch and the fairy queen. It is probably exactly this similarity which makes the witch an all the more fierce enemy of the fairies: As has been thematized in other discworld-novels, for her the line between being a ‘white’ or a ‘black’ witch has always been thin, and so she probably all the stronger rejects a power that was once – at least partly – alluring to her (cf. the beginning of the novel where young Esme calls the queen into the stone ring to challenge her).

But Esme Weatherwax has chosen to be a ‘good’ witch, who takes care of her country and of all creatures living near her and who harbours also a kind of possessive claim towards this country: “When it came to the trees and the rocks and the soil, Granny saw it as *hers*” (164). (This possessiveness is obviously something which fascinates the author because he will take it up later in *The Wee Free Men*.) Granny’s identification with the land prompts her to defend it against intrusions and so it irks Granny all the more that the fairy queen starts playing tricks with her, making her get lost in *her* own forest: “It was like getting lost in your own garden” (246). With regard to the ownership of the country it could be said that the concept that Pratchett develops considering the ‘war of the worlds’ in *Lords and Ladies* is quite an intriguing one: The kingdom of Lancre will not surrender to the elves because the land has been domesticated by humans. Granny compares it to a dog having been tamed or a horse having been broken. She presents the cultivation of the country with ploughs and iron shovels which the elf-queen regards as barbaric as something positive, because the humans “put back love. They’ve got soil in their

bones. They tell the land what it is. That's what humans are for. Without humans, Lancre'd just be a bit of ground with green bits on it. They wouldn't even know they're trees" (325).²²² Somehow, Pratchett seems to capture the (real-world) historical development, where the progress of civilisation did indeed push the belief in elves to the margins of society, even though his idea of farmers putting 'love' into the soil seems strangely romantic (in such a sarcastic writer).

The idea of people having soil in their bones or their bones being/becoming the soil is further developed in *The Wee Free Men* in the image of Granny Aching being a presence under her home soil. Another idea that seems to be developed further in *The Wee Free Men* is that of the trees not 'knowing they're trees' when there are no humans to tell them. In *The Wee Free Men* the scenery in Elfland, which is basically just a grey mass, develops more details as people approach it, trying to look e.g. like real trees. It seems that Pratchett here alludes to a very common idea of magic (though in a slanted way): the power of naming, which is rather important in many nature religions and also for many fantasy authors (e.g. in Ursula K. LeGuin's *Earthsea* cycle).²²³

On the whole, Pratchett seems to favour a – quite literally – *humanist* world view. This attitude is described by Granny Weatherwax before her final struggle with the fairy queen when she explains how she does not want the elves to reign god-like over Lancre because, if there are gods at all, "they've got to be the ones we make ourselves. Then we can take them to bits for the parts when we don't need them anymore, see? And elves far away in fairyland, well, maybe that's something people need to get themselves through the iron times. But I ain't having elves *here*." (335). This passage seems to contain several enlightening statements at once: On the one hand, the witch argues for a world where gods have not much power over people – the gods being man-made creatures themselves.²²⁴ On the other hand, it plays on the topic of fiction

²²² Connected to soil, there is also an interesting line of imagery that can be found throughout the whole book: repeatedly, pebbles or little stones are mentioned. At first, the haughty elf-queen laughs about trolls, claiming that those are 'only interested in pebbles' (5), while Granny Weatherwax believes that she can learn something even from the trolls. It later on seems that those stones have further significance in that they symbolise the country: Granny keeps some in her secret box that people may only open after her death, so to her pebbles are worth more than gold or silver. In another chapter the wizard Ponder Stibbons wonders about playing with pebbles: "You know, sir, sometimes I think there's a great ocean of truth out there and I'm just sitting on the beach playing with... with *stones*" (336) which, according to L-space paraphrases Isaac Newton: "I do not know what I may appear to the world, but to myself I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the seashore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me" (Breebart et al., 2005).

²²³ While in *Lords and Ladies* he treats this idea (at least in this passage) relatively seriously, he makes fun of it again in *The Wee Free Men*, where the habitually ill-behaved Nac Mac Feegles don't like to reveal their names to strangers and are mortally afraid of finding them written down on paper – because then lawyers might use them against them.

²²⁴ The idea that belief shapes the god and not the other way round is echoed strongly in the discworld novel *Small Gods*, where e.g. the goddess of wisdom, when she appears in person, carries around a penguin – because an inept sculptor once portrayed her like that.

staying fiction vs. fiction becoming truth. After looking at the first few sentences of Granny's statement, one might ask whether Pratchett does not forget about the elves being belief-created entities themselves. But after reading the whole statement it becomes clear that he hasn't forgotten about it. As long as humans believe in "elves far away in fairyland", a country they might imagine as a rich, fascinating, and unreachable dreamland, everything is fine. But as soon as these creatures become more than a remote fiction and start to populate the human world (or a human world, e.g. the discworld), chaos and oppression must result. It is nevertheless strange, how the speaker of these sentences seems to grant the elves a stronger presence – in the way of becoming *real* on the disc-world – than the gods: elves seem to exist without people's belief creating them, they only need human belief to invade the human world physically: "Oh I imagine they exist anyway. They're *here* because people believe in them *here*" (315). Gods, on the other hand, seem to have to be created by belief, as it is described in detail in *Small Gods*. Without people who believe in him, the god will simply fade away.

Elfland

The Fairyland created by Pratchett is a land of permanent winter, a "land of ice" (7) and every time the fairies turn up on the discworld it gets cold and there is a smell of snow on the air. Other than snow, Pratchett's Fairyland does not have any outstanding features, hardly anything about the land itself is said, apart from the fact that there is a "permanent aurora" in the sky (134) and that there is a castle where the fairy queen lives (36) but these features are not elaborated on. The reason for this is probably that Pratchett intends to make his Fairyland a kind of desert – a cold desert, inhabited by cold, barren creatures, whose breath does not even show in the cold air, since it is apparently as cold as the surrounding air.

In *The Wee Free Men*, where Fairyland is another icy wasteland, another explanation is given – the country is basically a featureless grey mass which is only given shape through the imagination of the fairy queen – and snow does not require much thought: "If I was a world that didn't have enough reality to go around", Tiffany thought, 'then snow would come in quite handy. It does not take a lot of effort'" (*The Wee Free Men*, 197). It is not improbable that Pratchett found models for this kind of Fairyland both in folklore and literature.

There is for instance the Cailleach Bheur, "the blue-faced lean hag of the Highlands who personifies the season of winter" (Briggs 1976, 58). Pratchett's fairy queen does not have a blue face, neither is she portrayed as an old hag, nevertheless there might be connections. The Cailleach Bheur is seen as a personification of the winter sun (the Celtic calendar knew a winter

and a summer sun), who is reborn each year on All Hallow's Eve (a bit like Laurel in *Fire and Hemlock*). She goes around suppressing the growth of plants and calling down snow. Significantly, in the struggle between the two worlds, Pratchett uses the phrase "the place where summer and winter fought" (331), which, since at that moment neither one is winning, is characterised by rain and mist. In folk tradition, as in *Lords and Ladies*, winter is finally defeated: On May Eve, the Cailleach Bheur is supposed to turn into a stone, in the form of which she will remain until next Halloween. Briggs concludes: "One can guess that many lonely standing stones were once sacred to her" (1976, 59) and this is where one might draw the connection: In *Lords and Ladies* a stone circle guards one of the doorways into Fairyland. Only here the stones are not sacred to the Cailleach Bheur/fairy queen, rather they are designed as a way of keeping the fairies out because the stones contain magnetic iron and so the fairies can appear in but not come out of the stone circle.

One other source, this time literary, might be the White Witch of Winter in C.S. Lewis's *Narnia* books (though the sources for this character may have been folkloristic themselves). Jadis, the ruthless White Witch, has put the country of Narnia into an eternal state of winter and she has the power of turning people into stone. She is often accompanied by a pack of wolves – maybe that is where the grimhounds in *The Wee Free Men* come from. Unlike other witches, she is said to be non-human, being descended from Adam's first wife Lilith (one folk explanation holds that Lilith's children are what we now call fairies, so this seems to fit as well). Jadis likes to tempt children with sweets – a trick that is also employed by the fairy queen in *The Wee Free Men*.

There is, however, another aspect to Fairyland (which will not show up in *The Wee Free Men* – maybe due to it being not suitable for children?): An underground realm that is a sort of sauna, characterized by heat and steam and which is the dwelling-place of the fairy-king: "This is the other world of the elves" (298). However, "they don't talk about this one" (298) – though it is never quite explained why. Probably they are embarrassed about it because it does not quite fit their 'cool' image.

The fairies

In describing the elves, Pratchett uses many elements of traditional lore and modern popular ideas about them (especially Tolkien's picture of elves being noble, good creatures dedicated to singing and dancing) but all are suffused with a sense of biting satire: "We only remembers [!] that the elves sang. We forgets [!] what it was they were singing about" (130) – and the contents of their songs would probably have been rather bloodthirsty. The elves in *Lords*

and Ladies (and later in *The Wee Free Men*) are portrayed definitely unfavourably, as e.g. Norman Talbot sums up:

The most brilliantly sustained attack upon the prestige, morality and personal hygiene of the High Elves is Terry Pratchett's *Lords and Ladies* (1992). With a wittily eclectic extravagance incomparable among writers of comic fantasy, he presents lethally vicious Elves, ultimate aristocrats that dominate and despise the mortal world they use as a toybox, prey, and forced-labour pool. (1996, 104)²²⁵

Pratchett's elves are – relatively true to tradition – beautiful, cruel and haughty, but where the elves in other novels analysed here are at least somehow refined (and though cruel, they are often so only in a psychological way), Pratchett's elves are downright bad and brutal.²²⁶ However, Pratchett does not just depict bad fairies, in the opinions of his human characters about them he also portrays 'modern' ideas of nice, noble elves (as shaped especially by Tolkien's portrayal of them) – only to reject those emphatically.

Pratchett's elves are very cruel.²²⁷ They love hunting (animals and humans) and torture and kill small animals like fish, bees and rabbits just for sport (264, 305). More than once they are compared to cats – their behaviour towards Diamanda (one of the village girls) puts Magrat in mind of cats toying with a mouse (275, 279, 281) but there is more than one reason for this comparison: "pointy ears and hair you want to stroke. And they fascinate you. And when they are happy they make a pleasing noise" (275).²²⁸ In a rather sarcastic comment the elves are also compared to dwarves. Like the trolls, another species that does not get too much praise in classical fantasy, the dwarves of the discworld are portrayed in a relatively positive manner. Christopher Bryant comments: "Although both trolls and dwarves existed in concept before

²²⁵ This highly critical depiction of the elves starts with the device of denying them the status of persons by referring to every elf (except the queen) as "it": "'And I can hunt again,' it said" (8).

²²⁶ It is interesting, however, that Pratchett seems to differentiate between elves and fairies: For example, the Tooth Fairy is not like the bad elves from Elfland: "Very hard-working woman. I'll never know how she manages with the ladder and everything" (156). Fairy godmothers, on the other hand, are something completely different again, as can be seen in *Witches Abroad*: here, we find a human (a witch) who is a fairy godmother but who uses her power in a noxious way. Fairy godmothers are also mentioned in *The Wee Free Men*: Apparently it was one who turned the lawyer into a toad, who then warns Tiffany that fairy godmothers tend to "have a mean streak" (*The Wee Free Men* 81).

²²⁷ Stephens and McCallum think that "their behavior is amoral rather than immoral. [Pratchett] emphasises their otherness, their lack of human emotions and failure to act according to any human moral system. Rather than being immoral, in the sense of being wicked or evil, they are simply situated outside the human world, 'over there'" (1998, 266). I do not quite agree with this, in my opinion the elves are actually quite wicked, and, moreover, they are just not 'outside the human world'. "Outside", as Nanny Ogg explains (63), are the monsters from the Dungeon Dimensions, whereas 'over there' is yet something else, probably a hint at the traditional in-between position of the elves.

²²⁸ It is interesting to see how the other authors work with this animal image: the fairy queen in *Thomas the Rhymer* by Ellen Kushner is actually rather catlike – though here the playful aspects of cats are emphasised. Someone who uses cats in a quite contrary fashion is Diana Wynne Jones in *Fire and Hemlock*: Here the cat Mintchoc does not like the elves at all and shuns every human who has been in too close contact with them. In *The Wee Free Men*, on the other hand, the tom-cat Ratbag is portrayed as a cruel and scheming creature: "twitching occasionally as he disemboweled something in his fat cat dreams" (*The Wee Free Men* 61). He also pushes open the door of the sleeping-room, after Tiffany has dreamed of the dogs (who are seen as 'good' animals) and thus proves to be an intruder quite like the fairies.

Tolkien was writing, most fantasy writers since his time have based their depiction of these species on his books, and Pratchett exhibits a clear wish to break from this tradition” (2002, 34). So here the possibility of being cleft in two by a dwarf-axe suddenly appears as the desirable alternative to being tortured to death by an elf (294). Probably the main reason for the elves’ behaviour is that they have no empathy, no concept of what other creatures might be feeling.²²⁹

But they are not just unsympathetic to living creatures – they are wholly destructive towards objects belonging to others as well: “the inn was a wreck” (288) after the elves have been there, and “what they don’t take they smash” (290) also just for the fun of it: “they’d smash the world if they thought it’d make a pretty noise” (290). In their total ignorance of common rules of conduct (and combat), Pratchett’s elves are sometimes like destructive children (or like cool but mentally instable rock-stars?), which, however, does not help to make them more likeable.

They are, on the other hand, not stupid – which probably makes their destructiveness even worse.²³⁰ The fairy queen can read minds and is a master of psychological manipulation: “the minds of people was where elves were strong” (200). Their “strength lay in persuading others they were weak” (340) – which is a feature that Pratchett’s elves share with many of the other – less physically aggressive – fairyfolk found in the other novels (such as *Fire and Hemlock*, *Winter Rose*, *The Perilous Gard*, *Tam Lin*). The elves feel justified in subjecting every other living creature to their rule because they think of everybody as below them: “When they get into a world, everyone else is on the bottom. Slaves. Worse than slaves. Worse than animals even” (156). Reasons for this feudalistic world picture are given – one is that “humans are always slightly lost. It’s a basic characteristic. It explains a lot about them. Elves are never lost at all. It’s a basic characteristic. It explains a lot about them” (329). Pratchett’s elves seem to

²²⁹ The passage where Granny Weatherwax tries to explain this to King Verence is rather funny in its own self-referential way: “‘The thing about elves is they’ve got no... begins with m,’...Granny snapped her fingers irritably. ‘Manners?’ ‘Hah! Right, but no.’ ‘Muscle? Mucus? Mystery?’ ‘No. No. No. Means like... seeing the other person’s point of view.’ Verence tried to see the world from a Granny Weatherwax perspective and suspicion dawned. ‘Empathy?’” (157).

²³⁰ They are not stupid, except when it comes to music. This apparently fascinates them to such a degree that they become unable to act but just stand there and listen: “Singing attracted elves, but singing also fascinated them” (329). Thus it becomes possible for the Lancre Morris men (i.e. the craftsmen performing the play) to fool a whole army of elves with a song and dance, which keeps them absorbed until the dancers have reached relative safety (287, 329). The fairies’ love of music is proverbial in folklore and so is their tendency to ‘borrow’ musicians from the human world but in *The Wee Free Men* Pratchett offers an explanation for it that I have not yet encountered in folklore (where there *are* in fact fairy musicians): fairies cannot make music themselves (*The Wee Free Men*, 185). This is a characteristic which would of course fit into the picture of a sterile, uncreative people. However, there seems to be a difference between the elves in *Lords and Ladies*, who are able to sing beautifully (*Lords and Ladies*, 247) and the elves in *The Wee Free Men*, who are apparently unskilled in music even though they still like it. In Kushner’s novel, the fairies have musical instruments and play music themselves. However, Thomas thinks that something is lacking, considers it tuneless, thus echoing the idea of the fairies’ limited creativity.

navigate by a force like magnetism but probably not being lost refers not just to spatial orientation – they never seem to have any doubts concerning their whole self.

Elves are equipped with an enormous amount of self-esteem. No matter where they are, they are comfortable and even look beautiful all the while: “elves could make themselves at home on a wire” (324), and one elf is described as wearing “odds and ends of rags and lace and fur, confident in the knowledge that everything would look good on an elf” (309) – the rockstar cliché again? Their incredible confidence in their looks is something that contributes to their seeming superiority towards humans – in face of an elf, a human can only feel coarse and ugly: “And they were so beautiful. And you weren’t. You were always the one metaphorically picked last for any team, even after the fat kid with one permanently blocked runny nostril” (332).²³¹ Granny Weatherwax explains how, in her opinion, the glamour works: “‘They’ve got,’ she spat the word, ‘*style*. Beauty. Grace. That’s what matters. If cats looked like frogs we’d realize what nasty, cruel little bastards they are. Style. That’s what people remember” (158). Somehow one cannot resist feeling that Granny’s tirade against elves is somehow inspired by all those modern-day humans on earth who admire elves for the reasons just stated and identify strongly with them – e.g. in roleplaying games.²³²

Elvish beauty in Pratchett’s version, however, is an ambiguous thing, and here even more than in other novels, for most of the times when elves are described as beautiful, it is also hinted that there is something subtly wrong about that beauty. Elves may be tall and slender, fair-haired and have beautiful faces (135), but in Pratchett’s version there are some strange things about them. First of all, there is their smell. In *Lords and Ladies*, elves stink abominably: an elf “smells worse than the bottom of a goat’s bed” (140) – for this there does not seem to be a comparable model in folklore. It is also explained that their apparent beauty is just an effect of their glamour. When unconscious, an elf is not very remarkable: “just a long thin human with a foxy face” (155) and even when conscious, something about their features is strange: “There were eyes and a mouth in there somewhere, but everything else seemed to be temporary, the elves’ features passing across their faces like pictures on the screen” (266), a characteristic which appears also in *The Wee Free Men*. It seems that the elves do not only steal cattle and people, they also seem to be ‘borrowing’ human facial expressions, since they do not seem to have their own, or, if they have, those are probably not so nice to look at – at least the fairy queen’s face looks, when bereft

²³¹ In a similar, though less negative way the hero of Kushner’s *Thomas the Rhymer* feels coarse and earthy compared with the ethereal beauty of the elves that surround him. In contrast to the humans in *Lords and Ladies*, however, he does not really feel inferior, or at least not for long.

²³² I once asked somebody who is rather active in (live-) role-playing how people think about elves there and he said something like this: “Everybody wants to play an elf because elves are cool.”

of glamour, rather like something straight out of a UFO: “an almost triangular face, a tiny mouth, the nose hardly existing at all, but eyes larger than human eyes” (340). In describing the fairy queen as some kind of extraterrestrial, Pratchett is of course not far from some theories about fairies (Rojcewicz 1991, Purkiss, 2000b) that propose that stories about fairy abductions have been succeeded by stories of alien abduction, thus, at least in this respect, aliens are the successors of fairies.

In at least one respect, however, Pratchett’s elves are probably very different from aliens: they are extremely afraid of iron. This idea is of course based on the folk belief that iron keeps elves away but is extended by the author’s own interpretation. One elf explains how iron plays haywire with the elvish sense of direction which is so crucial to them: “It’s like being buried in the earth (...) no eyes, no ears, no mouth” (270). Thus iron is the ultimate weapon against elves and in order to torture them it is enough to use iron chains to tie them up.²³³ This elvish vulnerability explains why Pratchett’s dwarfs – who are portrayed as mortal enemies of the elves and would like to avenge themselves for the atrocities committed among them by elves (155) – love iron even more than gold (2). It is also the reason why the discworld witches of former times – who are depicted as guarding the country against elvish attempts at intrusion – are said to have had “minds like metal” (8), so elves had no chance. The elvish incompatibility with iron is carried even so far that they have green blood. On the L-space web-pages one finds the following explanation for this: “Since iron is anathema to elves, they obviously can’t have haemoglobin-based red blood. Copper-based (green) blood is used by some Earth animals, notably crayfish, so it’s an obvious alternative. Of course, it was *Star Trek* that really made pointy-eared, green-blooded characters famous...” (Breebart et al. 2005).

Consequently, a ring of stones with iron-content (and this is magnetic iron, something that seems to repel elves even more strongly, at least in *Lords and Ladies*, I haven’t found any parallels in folk belief) is placed around the spot where the border between the discworld and Elfland is easily passed, to prevent the elves from crossing over. That they cannot cross the border normally is shown when Esme Weatherwax summons the elf-queen for the first time in her life: “You can’t come out of the circle, can you?” (5). Somehow, mainly by means of the play being rehearsed by the craftsmen, they yet finally manage to get into Lancre and one of their first actions is to force the inhabitants of Lancre to overthrow the ring of stones (315).

²³³ Similarly, the devilishly fierce elf-horse becomes extremely tame when Magrat manages to climb it wearing a suit of (iron) chain mail.

Defeat of the elves

The elvish invasion, however, does not last very long. Admittedly, long enough to let a darkness reminiscent of that spread by the arch-villain Sauron in *The Lord of the Rings* enter the country: “an extension of something that had existed before there was any light to define it by its absence. It was unfolding itself from under tree roots and inside stones, crawling back across the land” (279). The invasion lasts long enough for the elves to wreck havoc everywhere, but not long enough for the elf queen to get a firm grip on the invaded country.

The elves are countered by the Lancratians in different ways. A group of townspeople forms a sort of army to battle the elves in a more conventional way, however, they are outnumbered by far. Granny Weatherwax tackles the elf-queen directly, ultimately challenging her to fight a psychological duel with her (333-8), similar to the one she has shortly before fought with one of the young would-be witches (only that there is a bit more at stake now). During the duel, a somewhat melodramatic conversation takes place that appears to be crucial to Pratchett’s (and indeed many of the other authors’) understanding of elves. Granny’s decisive advantage over the elf-queen is that she actually lives, which entails on the one hand that she ages whereas the elf-queen is ageless, but which also entails that she has had a chance to learn and change, to accept her imperfections, in short, to be human:

You call yourself some kind of goddess and you know nothing madam, nothing. What don’t live can’t die. What don’t live can’t change. What don’t change can’t learn. The smallest creature that dies in the grass knows more than you. You’re right, I’m older. You’ve lived longer than me but I’m older than you. And better’n you. (337)

She tries to threaten the queen with human development and the progress of civilisation since there are more humans now and many of them are rather ignorant of elves and “they’ve got iron in their heads” (334), meaning that the humans don’t much care about elves and are more or less immune to them. So, with the help of the townspeople, Granny hopes, the elves can be “reduced” (333), namely to the small and harmless creatures that (on earth) became so popular with Shakespeare:

“You meddled in a play,” said Granny. “I believe you don’t realize what you’ve done. Plays and books... you’ve got to keep an eye on the buggers. They’ll turn on you. I mean to see that they do.” She nodded amicably to an elf covered in woad and badly tanned skins. “Ain’t that so, Fairy Peaseblossom?”²³⁴ (334)

What Granny predicts here is of course just what happened to elves in popular belief after the sixteenth century, so the formidable elf warrior became indeed reduced to a plant-inhabiting tiny creature wearing petals instead of furs and skins.²³⁵

²³⁴ Peaseblossom is indeed one of Titania’s attendants in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

Granny's mental strength is, however, not sufficient to defeat the queen entirely, but it is enough to free Magrat from the glamour the queen has put on her. So after Granny has fought psychologically, Magrat takes over, wielding her (iron) battle axe, trying to defeat the queen physically (339-41). But before she has the opportunity to really kill the queen, someone else appears on the scene, called to the battle-ground by Nanny Ogg: The elf-king.

While the elf-queen is anthropomorphic – even though she is a shape-shifter – the elf-king looks a bit more exotic: half man and half stag he appears to be modelled on pictures of the 'horned god', a term used to describe a number of male nature gods of Celtic, Indian and Greek origin. Ironically, one of the figures subsumed under the name of 'horned god' is the English *Herne the Hunter* (probably connected with the Celtic *Cernunnos*). In *Lords and Ladies* the Horned One does not have a name, there is however, another figure, called "Herne the Hunted" who appears as the god of small hunted animals (and who is later on chased by the elves, though not by the horned king). Besides his antlers, the elf-king of *Lords and Ladies* does bear a few other traits that make an identification with Cernunnos/Herne possible: On the one hand, the fairy king is, like Cernunnos, rather obviously a symbol of masculinity – he lives under a group of burial mounds that – if viewed from the air – have the shape of male genitalia. On the other hand, the Horned One in *Lords and Ladies* seems to be a sort of deity for the witches – in conversation with Nanny Ogg he refers to himself as "your god" (303) and he also deplores that no one dances for him anymore (*ibid.*), which suits an identification with Cernunnos, who, according to a theory by anthropologist Margaret Murray, was the 'god of the witches', as she claims in her book of the same name (1931).

This god/king forms a complement to the elf-queen in many ways – while the queen is always depicted in an environment of snow and ice, the horned one lives in a world of heat and steam under the earth and while she is power-hungry and ambitious, he seems to regard things from a more relaxed point of view: Nanny and Casanunda meet him lounging in a sort of sauna and he apparently completely ignores his wife's plans of invading the human world, so Nanny judges that "he's brighter than she is. Or more lazy" (306). Only when urged (and blackmailed) by Nanny Ogg, does he come out of his hole to fetch his wife and her army. However, even he seems not quite without interest in having power over the human world: "One day he'll be back. When even the iron in the heads [of humans] is rusty" (307). Of all the elves, he is the only one who is portrayed with at least some sympathy, for Nanny Ogg confesses that she has always had

²³⁵ However, if the development that is foreshadowed here continues, then maybe the next elvish invasion of the discworld is probably due in the not too distant future, since people who think that elves are small flower creatures will probably not be wary of them since the elves seem no longer dangerous.

“a soft spot” (303) for this creature with its “voice (...) like chocolate” (304). However, the times where “people look up at the skyline at sunset and there he’ll be” (306) have not yet come and so the novel ends with “the silence of the elves” (374) on the “empty hillside” (ibid.), which might itself be a reminiscence to many fairy stories which end with the human finding himself back on the ‘cold hill side’ such as Keats’s sad knight in “La Belle Dame Sans Merci”.

The Wee Free Men

This novel is in some ways a companion-piece to *Lords and Ladies*. Set also on the discworld, the most significant difference between *Lords and Ladies* and *The Wee Free Men* is probably that the latter is a children's book. This means that in contrast to the multi-plot novel *Lords and Ladies* in *The Wee Free Men* the action centres around one main-plot, and the number of protagonists is reduced to a smaller number appropriate to the reading-abilities of younger (or less experienced) readers.

Plot summary/world system

This novel, too, is set on the discworld, however, the three witches of *Lords and Ladies* play only a very ancillary role (only towards the end and only two of them). The heroine of *The Wee Free Men* is nine-year-old Tiffany Aching, second-youngest child of a farmer, and a bit precocious for her age. She would like to become a witch but is doubtful about how to achieve this. Her great role model is her grandmother: an old-shepherdess, who, in her own ways, must have been something like a witch – even though she does not fulfil the ‘pointy hat and broomstick’-cliché – and who has died a few years before. At the time the action is set in, the discworld is once again threatened by an invasion of elves. This time the elves are entering the discworld in an area called “the Chalk” – modelled apparently on the Wiltshire region in England (Breebart et al. 2005) – which is the home of Tiffany and her family. Tiffany, a sensitive child, notices the signs that an impending attack of the fairies causes and tries to find out what is happening. It is interesting how the fairies' existence seems to be taken for granted in *The Wee Free Men*. In *Lords and Ladies* human belief in fairies was vital for them to exist in the human world (and they are dismissed as ‘old wives tales’ by the more ‘enlightened’ inhabitants of Lancre). In *The Wee Free Men*, it seems, the existence of fairies is never really questioned (although the question of how ‘real’ Fairyland is, is repeatedly asked by Tiffany towards the end). Maybe this is due to the heroine being a child, for whom the differences between reality and fiction are still less distinct and in acknowledgement of the intended younger readership.

Tiffany, however, is not a completely naïve child; on the contrary: she seeks enlightenment in the tent of a travelling teaching-witch called Miss Tick.²³⁶ The latter has been

²³⁶ It is interesting that the witch is named after the parasitic insect, which is made quite explicit, when Tiffany asks about the meaning of “Miss Tick”: “You mean blood-sucking parasite?” (33), even though the witch herself interprets her name a bit differently: “I *mean* it sounds like mystic” (33). This is curious in so far as the witches are later portrayed as enemies of the parasitic fairies, whose world is compared to a sheep-tick later.

aware of the danger also and, therefore, after advising Tiffany to wait since she is too young to defend the land, sets out for Lancre in order to fetch Granny Weatherwax and Nanny Ogg. During Miss Tick's absence, however, Tiffany feels forced to act since the fairy queen abducts her little brother Wentworth. Since Tiffany is endowed with a special acuteness, she manages to enlist a group of fairy-like creatures as helpers in her quest for her lost brother: the Nac Mac Feegles or "Wee Free Men". These are finger-long, blue men who live mainly on stolen cattle and alcohol. Tiffany catches some Feegles red-handed in stealing a sheep, and, to the Feegles' own surprise, forces them to bring it back. With some cunning – and some help from the Feegles (who are fierce enemies of the fairy queen) – she finally finds the way to Fairyland. Always in danger of being attacked by the fairy queen's strange creatures, Tiffany discovers her brother and also the son of the local baron, Roland, who had vanished many months before. Tiffany and the Feegles lead the two boys out of Fairyland, but a show-down involving a sort of duel between Tiffany and the fairy queen is needed to finally rid the land of elves. When Miss Tick eventually returns with the two Lancre-witches, Tiffany has already solved the problem and they recognize her as a great talent for the witching trade.

Intertextuality

The plot is similar to one of the plots in *Lords and Ladies*, the Tam Lin/Thomas Rhymer story: A male (child in this case) is abducted by the queen of fairies (even though here the motif is the fairy queen's fondness of children that prompts her to kidnap them, and not her desire to marry the kidnapped male as in *Lords and Ladies*). The rescuer is female, too, only that here it is the elder sister who feels responsible for the fate of her brother and not the bride-to-be who wants her groom back. It is a typical Tam Lin story in so far as the female is active, the male is passive, and the author goes so far as to even reducing the male hero to a toddler whose main motivation in life are sweets (the Tam Lin role is actually shared by little Wentworth and 14-year-old Roland, who, however, is not portrayed as much more intelligent). Similarly as in *Lords and Ladies*, the fairy queen harbours invasion plans and wants to take over the whole discworld and use it to withdraw energy and reality for her own country. Plans that, of course, have to be foiled.

As in *Lords and Ladies*, there are many intertextual references to songs and fairy stories.²³⁷ The two most distinctive ones are allusions to Child ballads. “Tam Lin”/ “Thomas the Rhymer” (mostly “Tam Lin”, though) provide parts of the main plot and another Child ballad, #38, “The Wee Wee Man”, provides the title.

The wording of “Thomas the Rhymer” is once directly echoed in the passage where Roland tells how he encountered a “fine lady on a horse with bells all over its harness” (226). Roland furthermore remembers: “[She] galloped past me when I was out hunting and she was laughing, so of course I spurred my horse and chased after her and...” (226) – either this is meant to be a child-appropriate, G-rated variation of the ensuing seduction scene of “Thomas the Rhymer” or it might be a reference to some versions of “Tam Lin”, in which he recounts how he was captured either as a child or fell off his horse when he was out hunting.

Apart from that a few rather small allusions to “Tam Lin” might be found: the colour of horses is mentioned and the colour of the horses is of some importance in “Tam Lin”: Tam Lin rides a white horse in the ballad and is known to Janet by this sign – Roland, also a captive in Fairyland, is first encountered on a white horse, too. Later there is a moment when “the queen changed shape madly in Tiffany’s arms” (292), this might recall the transformation-passage in “Tam Lin”.

Besides the ballads, there seem also to be traces of many other fairy-related stories. One might be reminded of stories, poems or ballads in which a boy or man called Roland or Rowland ventures (among other adventures) into Fairyland, e.g. Browning’s “Childe Rowland” or James Baldwin’s *Stories of Roland* (loosely based on the *Song of Roland*). Moreover, “Roland’s name suggests the ballad ‘Childe Rowland and Burd Ellen’, about a young boy who has to rescue his sister (and the brothers who had previously failed) from the King of Elfland. Of course, the [discworld] version [of Roland] is worse than useless“ (Breebart et al. 2005). However, Pratchett claims that he merely chose the name because it appeared old and ‘solid’ to him and with no intertextual links in mind (ibid.).

Another influence, and one exceptionally explicitly accounted for by Pratchett (mentioned in the afterword to the novel), is a painting by Richard Dadd, *The Fairy Feller’s Master Stroke* (1864). This provides the inspiration for one of the Fairyland-chapters in the book. But it can also be found as one of the illustrations in Tiffany’s book of fairy stories (63), thus illustrating Pratchett’s idea that Fairyland is the land where “all stories are real and all dreams

²³⁷ There are also, as usual in Pratchett’s books, a great number of references to modern pop-culture, such as the *Highlander* references. Maybe this is something that makes the book interesting for adults as well, since it gives them an opportunity to play a kind of ‘spot the reference’ game.

come true” (55) – even though the dreams there are mostly nightmares. (For a more detailed discussion of dreams and reality in Fairyland see below).

Other inspirations seem to come e.g. from the fairy tale of “Hansel and Gretel”, for old Mrs. Snapperly, a supposed witch, is suspected to have caught the baron’s son and put him in her oven – as punishment for this ‘crime’ (which never happened, as the reader later learns) she is turned out of her home and left to die as a beggar, an event that quite devastates Tiffany because she is convinced that Mrs. Snapperly never harmed anyone.

Another source is Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick*. This provides the whale imagery that shows up occasionally in the book (the Chalk area is compared to a huge whale once (15)) and that is connected to the ‘Jolly Sailor’ story, which plays a significant role in Tiffany’s escape from Fairyland.

Moreover, there is a small reference to J.M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan*. One chapter is titled “Lost boys”, which could be read as an allusion to the boys of Neverland, and, certainly, Roland and Wentworth, the ‘lost boys’ in this novel, would never have grown up if they had stayed in Fairyland, just as Peter Pan’s boys,

Furthermore, as already in *Lords and Ladies*, the *Narnia* stories by C.S. Lewis seem to have played a role in the appearance of the fairies’ country as a land of eternal winter and the appearance of the elf-queen as a white-complexioned, tall figure wielding evil powers. Maybe also the evil grimhounds, sent by the fairy queen to attack Tiffany, have been inspired by the pack of wolves that accompanies Jadis, the White Witch. But there are also folkloristic models for them, such as the church grims of English folklore (Briggs 1976, 75), a hint which is confirmed by a comment of the toad: “‘said to haunt graveyards!’ said a voice from [Tiffany’s] apron” (117) – and indeed “there is a widespread tradition that graveyards were guarded from the Devil and witches by a spirit that usually took the form of a black dog” (Briggs 1976, 75).

Finally, references to Shakespeare can be found, even though they are rather unobtrusive – the dream-shaping fairy queen might remind one of the dream-shaping Queen Mab as she is described in *Romeo and Juliet* (I, 4) and a parallel between the fairy queen to Shakespeare’s Titania is established when the queen’s quarrel with her husband is reported which has caused a number of natural disasters (201) as has that of Oberon and Titania (II, 1).

The witch-to-be: Tiffany Aching

The most important character in *The Wee Free Men* is certainly Tiffany Aching and it might be interesting to compare her to the witches in *Lords and Ladies* on the one hand and the girl-heroines of the other young-adult novels from my corpus on the other. Like Rois in *Winter Rose* or Katherine in *The Perilous Gard*, Tiffany is a bit of an outsider in her social group, i.e.,

her family, since is apparently smarter than her older sisters who are all content to be (or become) married to farmers and shepherds and wants become a witch. However, Tiffany does not want to be a witch because witches can do magic or have power over others (at least these are not her main motives) but in order to prove her story-book – which claims that witches are wicked old women – wrong (37). So her determination to do things differently becomes obvious quite early in the book. Another reason that motivates Tiffany's actions might be that she perceives herself as a rather ordinary-looking girl. With her brown hair and brown eyes she thinks she is not suited to be a beautiful blonde, blue-eyed fairy-tale princess: "Did the book have any adventures for people who had brown hair and brown eyes? No, no no..." (38). Moreover, (in a kind of compensation-process?) she has come to think of the princesses as rather stupid and therefore prefers to be a witch and clever.

That Tiffany is not a normal girl shows also in her reaction to the manifestations of fairy-tale creatures at the book's beginning. A water-creature named Jenny Greenteeth (a monster well-known in English folklore, cf. Briggs 1976, 242) tries to snatch Tiffany's little brother but instead of being frightened, Tiffany gets angry and thinks this is quite ridiculous and only meant to annoy her (14). It seems that she has quite a clear idea of what she expects the world to be and green monsters with soup-plates eyes are clearly not part of that.²³⁸ Tiffany is, moreover, quite like Katherine in *The Perilous Gard*, a scientifically minded girl. She looks up the name of the monster in her story-book – because that is actually where all the fairy monsters come from in *The Wee Free Men*: they have been thought up by adults to keep children away from certain dangers, such as water or unknown ground. Jenny is therefore rated (according to Miss Tick's classification) as a "Grade One Prohibitory Monster" (55) – just as Briggs calls her a "nursery bogey" (1976, 242). Moreover, when Tiffany ventures out to ask Miss Tick about the monster she is able to name exactly the size of Jenny's eyes, which are not just "like soup-plates" but "soup plates that are eight inches across" because "I measured a soup plate so I could be exact" (36). She is also a kind of little know-it-all, since she reads the dictionary from front to back and enjoys using difficult words – such as "gibbous moon" (62) and "susurrus" (13).

But despite all her self-assurance and occasional cheekiness, Tiffany is also a lonely girl who is sometimes plagued by self-doubt: For example she thinks that it is impossible to become a witch when one is called Tiffany (11), and she is afraid that people might laugh at her.²³⁹

²³⁸ However, her world-picture is not yet so solidified that she does not see the monsters anymore. She perceives them (this is called "first sight" later on) but is nevertheless quite sure that they should not be there.

²³⁹ *Tiffany* is the English form of the Greek name *Theophania*, meaning 'manifestation of god' (Kohlheim 2007, 396). In *The Wee Free Men*, however, the name is given another meaning when the kelda explains that in her language "Tiffan" means "Land under wave" (138), a meaning that becomes significant when we learn that the

Moreover, she dreams of a school for witches with lessons in broomstick riding, magical meals and lots of new friends (59) – which might be an allusion to the *Harry Potter* novels, or to school novels in general. It is interesting, however, that Tiffany does not find the school throughout the novel and finally realises: “*This* is the school, isn’t it? The magic place. The world. Here. And you don’t realize it until you look” (303), which might be a criticism of the traditional school novel which present the school (no matter if it is a normal kids’ school or a wizard’s college) as some kind of romantic, magical place where different rules apply.²⁴⁰ However, given her present loneliness it is not really surprising that she longs for company of any kind and is therefore more curious than frightened when she discovers that she is being followed by a group of Nac Mac Feegles.

That Tiffany is a special girl is confirmed by the kelda of the neighbouring Feegle clan. She reveals to Tiffany that she has “first sight and second thoughts” (139), which means that the girl can see things that others cannot see (because they don’t expect them to exist, such as monsters in the river) and that she furthermore monitors her own behaviour and controls herself, which is certainly inspired by the phrase of ‘having second thoughts about something’. Pratchett also plays with the esoteric idea of ‘second sight’ which is condemned here as something inferior because in Pratchett’s interpretation it means that a person will only be “seeing what [they] expect to see” (140).²⁴¹ Later on, even third thoughts appear in Tiffany’s head – they are a kind of meta-thought, commenting on what Tiffany is thinking with her second thoughts.

The kelda is also the person who tells Tiffany that she is a witch after all, and that she must succeed her late grandmother and the dying kelda in guarding “the edges and the gateways” (140) of her country and prevent the fairy queen from intruding into this world. Thus she probably becomes something which Nanny Ogg is called in another discworld novel (*Thief of Time*, published in 2001): an *edge witch*. An edge witch is defined as “one who makes her living on the edges, in that moment when boundary conditions apply” (*Thief of Time*, 19). This is quite

Chalk country was once the bottom of an ocean, so that Tiffany is really an embodiment of her country and cannot be separated from it, a condition that is of great importance to all of Pratchett’s witches (compare Granny Weatherwax’s fight with the fairy queen in *Lords and Ladies*). Before she knows all this Tiffany thinks her name rather silly.

²⁴⁰ The school (or college) is indeed a magical place in Pamela Dean’s *Tam Lin* – both because there are fairies living there and because it is a kind of enchanted world for adolescents where they can move and experiment (almost) without being monitored by adults.

²⁴¹ Dieter Harmening defines *Second Sight* as follows: “Optische Halluzination, die der mit dem zweiten Gesicht Begabte im Gefühl wachen Bewußtseins erfährt und als bedeutsam empfindet, deren Sinn sich ihm jedoch zumeist erst bei Eintritt beziehbarer Ereignisse eröffnet. (...) Die Träger des Zweiten Gesichts betreiben häufig auch Hellsehen und Wahrsagen“ (2005, 477). (“An optical hallucination, which is experienced by the person gifted with second sight while awake and conscious and which is felt to be significant, but the meaning of which often reveals itself to him often only when an event that can be related to the vision takes place. (...) The bearers of second sight often practice clairvoyance and fortune-telling” my translation.)

in keeping with the theory (e.g. Purkiss 1998) of witches as persons dealing with liminal circumstances. It may also be a pun on “hedge witch”, nowadays often understood as a solitary nature-loving witch dealing in simple magic. Originally the term meant ‘hedge-rider’, referring to someone who crosses and re-crosses (physically or in spirit) the hedges that separated villages (= civilization) from wilderness (Duerr 1978).

Such a figure between wilderness is also Tiffany’s grandmother, Granny Aching, an old shepherdess, who seems to have been more at home with sheep than with humans during her lifetime. To Tiffany, however, she is a kind of heroine because of the ‘magic’ she performs on sheep. What seems like magic to little Tiffany is revealed as merely old shepherd-craft later on, but in the end Tiffany realises that her grandmother must have been a witch after all, and that practising magic tricks is not really what distinguishes a witch, as Miss Tick has explained early on: “Witches don’t use magic unless they really have to” (35). This seems a tenet that is central to the discworld witches also in other novels – not magic is the solution but the use of (often rather simple) tricks whose effect is usually psychological (Granny Weatherwax calls this technique ‘headology’ because it affects people’s heads). Similarly central seems the idea of the witch as a helper of the weak. There are stories also of Granny Aching, who supported the weak and the poor, for example helped them to obtain justice at the court of the local baron. For those readers familiar with the discworld-series it is clear that Granny Aching has many traits of Granny Weatherwax, even though she seems to have been a less haughty (and less obvious) type of witch.

The Wee Free Men is similar to *Lords and Ladies* in so far as the local witch, in her position as edge-guardian, has to defend the world from fairy-invasions. The initial problem, however, is that there is (officially) no local witch on the Chalk when the novel begins. Miss Tick, the travelling teacher-witch perceives that there is a “definite ripple in the walls of the world (...) probably another world making contact” (10) and is rather worried. However, she also perceives that there must be some kind of witch on the Chalk, (even though she does not know her) and this stops her from interfering at first. Pratchett’s witches are very conscious of their territories: “I can’t barge in. (...) not on another witch’s territory. That never, ever works” (10). As in *Lords and Ladies*, where Granny Weatherwax feels that Lancre is *hers* (and the king merely there for the sake of appearances) and therefore the fairy queen has no right to the land, there is, obviously also in *The Wee Free Men*, a close connection between the witch and the land. Miss Tick does not know it at that moment, but the witch she is wondering about, Tiffany, probably has even deeper connections to the land, since early on in the novel it is mentioned that there is an age-old connection between the land and the family of the Achings: “Her father

rented it from the Baron, who owned the land, but there had been Achings farming it for hundreds of years, and so, her father said (...), as far as the *land* knew it was owned by the Achings” (17). Tiffany too feels that the land belongs to her and that she has a responsibility for it – similarly as for her little brother Wentworth.

In both cases it is not a relationship characterised by fondness, rather by a sense of possession. (It is quite interesting how differently the sense of possession are viewed here and in *Fire and Hemlock* – while in *The Wee Free Men* it is a positive trait, in *Fire and Hemlock* it is the key to destruction.) With regard to possessiveness, the fairy queen later on observes: “‘Yes, that’s a very witchy thing, isn’t it,’ said the voice of the Queen. ‘Selfishness. Mine, mine, mine. All a witch cares about is what’s *hers*.’” (235). This selfishness, however, which the fairy queen presents as something negative, comes to be viewed as something truly positive by Tiffany by the end of the novel. She, who has been “brought up not to be selfish” (194), discovers that only her possessive feelings for her brother make her feel responsible for him at all. She does not rescue Wentworth because she loves him, but because she feels it is her duty to do so. She thinks of Wentworth as “*my* brother” (194) to whom nobody else has a right, least of all the fairy queen. Only her anger at an act of theft – and not so much sympathy for a poor kidnapped child – eventually enables her to confront and defeat the queen (217).

It is curious, however, how thus the queen of fairies becomes a sort of “prohibitory monster” like Jenny Greenteeth, since the reason for Wentworth’s disappearance might be read as follows: if you don’t look properly after your little brother, the fairy queen will come and take him away. This is also the explanation the queen herself offers to Tiffany: the little boy seemed to be lost, so she took care of him (235). It is remarkable how a book that on the one hand tries to be suspicious of doctrinal thinking (cf. Tiffany and the witches’ school) and teaching of morals (the monsters in the book meant to frighten children are condemned) is on the other hand a very didactic book that seems above all to want to teach children responsibility. It is also interesting how the little brother, who seemed rather incapable of progress at first – or maybe that is just Tiffany’s perspective – in the end has learned to be a bit less selfish and that the world consists not only of sweets, though this educational progress has been brought about probably not so much by Tiffany but by the rather rough treatment the NacMacFeegles submit the boy to.

For fear of little men: the Nac Mac Feegles

The NacMacFeegles are something extraordinary in Pratchett’s universe because they are relatively *likeable* fairies and not nearly as villainous as the rest. They themselves deny that they

are fairies at all (67), since to them a fairy is only something with wings: “I feel like a fairy wi’ the wings on” (113) is the comment of one of them when he is fitted with artificial wings. It seems that the Feegles have internalized the twentieth century prejudice that all fairies have wings. Interestingly, this is one of the very few instances where Pratchett seems to incorporate modern ideas of fairies without satiric comment, while on most other occasions he quite explicitly makes fun of the ‘cute’ (and often winged) fairies of the twentieth century, such as those in Tiffany’s story book: “They looked like a small girl’s ballet class that’d just run through a bramble patch” – which sounds a bit like the flower fairies of Cicely Mary Barker.²⁴²

I think, however, the Feegles should be labelled fairies after all. They have enough connections to other fairy creatures and according to Miss Tick they are even “the most feared of all the fairy races” (15) which seems a bit strange in retrospect since the Feegles turn out to be the ‘good guys’ in contrast to the really and truly bad elves.

Tiffany at first supposes that they may be brownies and tests this by putting out a saucer with milk but the test turns out ostensibly negative – the Feegles spill the milk (72). Moreover, the toad’s surprised cry “They *never* do chores! They’re not helpful at all!” (78) proves that they are quite different from the domestic brownies of folklore (and so it is all the more significant that they help Tiffany). That they are not brownies is probably also proved by the fact that people are afraid of them. When a house is infested by Feegles it is considered the best to just move out of it (88) – which is something that makes them appear related to boggarts. Boggarts, however, are a form of brownie after all, as Katherine Briggs explains: “It was indeed very easy to offend a brownie, either drive him away or turn him from a brownie to a boggart, in which case the mischievous side of the hobgoblin nature was shown” (1976, 46). It is said that if a household is tormented by a boggart, it might be best to leave this house for good, even though sometimes not even this guaranteed escape from the boggart.

The NacMac Feegles call themselves *pictsies*, a combination of the words *pixies* and *Picts*. While pixies are a group of fairies originating in Cornwall and famous for their inclination to lead travellers astray (which is a trait that does not seem to apply to the Feegles, even though other pixie-characteristics seem to fit (see below), the Picts were a group of tribes in Scotland

²⁴² The exception is the picture that shows the *Fairy Feller’s Master Stroke*, which to Tiffany seems like “the artist had been there ... at least in his head, Tiffany thought” (63-4) and indeed, the artist might have been there – Richard Dadd spent much of his life in a lunatic asylum and there is in fact an expression that a mentally deranged (or merely mentally absent) person is ‘away with the fairies’.

between Roman times and the 10th century – after the 10th century they became the Scots.²⁴³ And indeed, Pratchett’s pixie-like creatures are also miniature Scotsmen complete with kilts, woad tattoos, bagpipes and a distinctly Scots-like dialect. Also, as W.T.Abbott (2002) notices with regard to the first discworld-novel where the Feegles make an appearance:

In *Carpe Jugulum*, Pratchett plants a passing reference to the Highlander movies and television shows, as one of the Nac mac Feegle pixies yells out, “Dere c’n onlie be whin t’ousand!” (2), which, sounded out, translates into, “There can only be one thousand,” the number of pixies in their clan. The catch-phrase for the Highlander series, as most readers would easily recognize, is, “There can be only one” (*Highlander*).

The idea of having Scottish/Pictish fairies, however original it seems, might (as well as the name Pratchett gives the Feegles) have its origins in one of the Victorian theories about fairy origins, namely the theory of David MacRitchie:

The heart of MacRitchie’s argument was that the Finno-Ugrian or Mongol peoples (including the Lapps) were also the *Fians (the race preceding the Scots) and the Picts* [my emphasis; note also that the name of the kelda’s daughter is Fionn] of Irish and Scottish history, and that they had coexisted with the other inhabitants of England until at least the eleventh century. Skilled in medicine, magic, and masonry, they inhabited concealed underground earth houses – later known as fairy hills or fairy forts – and sophisticated chambered mounds. (...) Short, strong, and with skills in music and other arts, these “fairy” peoples, once all over Europe, were pushed back and ended up in Lapland where their descendants may still be found. Andrews, like MacRitchie, thought that pygmies had survived into the historical period. A ballad like “The Wee Wee Man”, with its description of a short, sturdy little creature, was evidence of their existence. (Silver 1999, 48)

This description fits the NacMacFeegles almost to the letter: They do indeed live underground, in a pre-historic grave-site, thus Pratchett blends in another superstition, namely that pre-historic cairns were the dwellings of fairies. They live there in apparent harmony with the original ‘inhabitant’: “Aye, there’s some ol’ dead kingie in the chamber next door but he’s nae trouble” (123). They are short and extremely strong: “one pictsie could lift a grown man” (103). The Feegles are also skilled in music, even though they mostly use it as a weapon. Their bards, called ‘gonnagles’, recite poems to scare off enemies: “When a well-trained gonnagle starts to recite, the enemy’s ears explode” (135). Tiffany learns that this is true when they are attacked by a host of tiny flying fairies with sharp teeth.²⁴⁴ A young Feegle aspiring to become gonnagle then recites a few lines and the biting fairies lose their heads and flee: “In Fairyland words *really* have power, Tiffany thought” (201), which seems a rather satiric rendering of the idea of word-magic. Gonnagles moreover play a bagpipe-like instrument called the mouse-pipes, which is apparently, due to the Feegles’ small size made out of mouse-skin – with ears still attached to it (135). This produces more or less the same effect as the Feegles’ poetry. That the Feegle-war-bards are

²⁴³ Their name, which means ‘the painted ones’ “may refer to their custom of body painting or possibly tattooing” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica Micropaedia* Vol. 9, 2002, 427). They were first noticed AD 297. In 843, the Pictish kingdoms were united with the Scottish kingdom, becoming Alba which in turn evolved into Scotland (428)

²⁴⁴ Their intention is to take some Feegles off to their nests, probably to feed them to their young ones (201). nineteenth century ‘cute’ nursery fairies were thought to have nests (e.g in Jean Ingelow’s *Mopsa the Fairy*) but were certainly not thought to be carnivorous.

called ‘gonnagles’, seems, according to L-Space-org to be “a reference to William Topaz McGonagall, Scotland’s Worst Poet (...), and also a *slight* exaggeration of the abilities accredited to bards in Celtic tradition. Note that the gonnagle [in *The Wee Free Men*] turns out to be called William” (Breebart et al. 2005).

The Child ballad “The Wee Wee Man” (#38) has also found its way into Pratchett’s description of the Feegles. The ballad tells of a human who encounters a mysterious bearded little creature who demonstrates extreme strength by lifting a huge stone. The little man takes the speaker on a journey to his home in a hill, which is characterized by walls of gold and filled with pipers playing and ladies dancing. However, after presenting his home, the little man disappears suddenly in a cloud of mist and the ballad ends. What Pratchett derived from the ballad is certainly his book’s title – with its separationist turn of *wee wee* (meaning ‘very small’) into *wee free*, alluding to the Feegles’ desire for independence.²⁴⁵ He probably also derived the idea of the gold-filled chamber (137) inhabited by the kelda, from the ballad, maybe also the idea of the Feegles’ extreme strength.

The fact that most of the Feegles are red-haired ties in with their likeness to Scots (or Celts in general) but is also in keeping with the image of a traditional pixie because according to Elizabeth Andrew: “The tradition would point to their being red-haired” (Andrew 1913, 12 as quoted in Silver 1999, 217). Similarly, K. Briggs confirms that pixies are usually red-headed (1976, 328).

They also have some traits that are typical both for pixies and also for goblins, e.g. their relative unattractiveness. Briggs reports that pixies are “generally thought to be homelier in appearance than the fairies” (1976, 328) while goblins are “small and grotesque in appearance” (ibid., 194). And indeed, the Feegles have “ugly” faces (100) and “their feet were large, dirty and half tied-up with animal skins to make very bad shoes” (89). The latter would especially fit the goblin cliché since those are said to have “large, unwieldy feet” (Silver 1999, 127). It may be surmised that the Feegles have characteristics also of dwarfs and gnomes since the images of dwarfs, goblins and gnomes became mixed up over the centuries. Carol Silver sums up: “What all share – is their grotesque materiality, their physical ludicrousness combined with their ‘primitive’ sexuality. Their assaults on women are rapes; perceived as disgusting phallic figures, they suggest the grotesquerie of the erotic” (1999, 128). The Feegles’ wish to make Tiffany their

²⁴⁵ According to Breebart et al. (2005), the first idea for the title was “For fear of little men”, an allusion to William Allingham’s poem “The fairies” – now only a passing reference to the poem can be found in the book, namely when Rob Anybody Feegle, the chief of the clan, tells how in former times the Feegles were ‘champion robbers’ of the fairy queen and humans would not dare come out of their houses at night: “People wouldnae e’en go a-huntin’ for fear o’ little men” (184).

new kelda – which implies that she has to marry one of their warriors – could be read as typical dwarf/goblin/gnome-behaviour.²⁴⁶ Silver explains how dwarves were almost always thought of as exclusively male (Silver 1999,124), which was believed to be the reason for their inclination to steal women and children. So for example in the fairy tale “Amelia and the Dwarfs” by Juliana Horatia Ewing (1870), the dwarfs are without women (save one old human servant) and want to keep the kidnapped girl Amelia until she dies: “their desire, by implication, is to mate with her” (Silver 1999, 125).²⁴⁷ The Feegles, too, seem to be lacking in women and therefore ask Tiffany to become their new leading female, even though here the arrangement is only temporary.

The Feegles say of themselves that they are rebels against anyone and anything (77), so it is not too surprising when it is later explained that they were expelled from Fairyland for their rowdy behaviour. “Stealin’ an’ drinkin’ an’ fightin’!” (91) are their favourite occupations, and indeed, they seem to steal anything that is not nailed down, they do not farm or keep cattle but live off stolen goods and animals. Their inclination to steal is typical of all fairies, because fairies “like all wild creatures, felt themselves to have a right to all human possessions, particularly food” (Briggs 1976, 158). However, it seems that in this case, the fairies help to keep whole flocks of sheep from harm and therefore think they are entitled to an occasional ewe as a reward (127-29). But more importantly, they will not steal from poor people (183), and this sort of Robin-Hood morality probably helps to let them come across as more or less amiable in contrast to the fairy queen, who plunders everybody.

The Feegles are relatively close to the fairies of folklore again in that they can be cruel to animals, for example in their methods of training birds of prey to serve them as vehicles for flying: “He just knocks them out wi’ his heid, and then he’s got a special oil which he blows up their beak (...) When they wakes up, they thinks he’s their mammy and’ll do his biddin” (160). However, in contrast to the fairies in *Lords and Ladies*, they never torture animals just for sport, but rather justifications for their behaviour are supplied. In the first case they need the animals as transport-vehicles, and when they beat up the cat Ratbag, the reason is the cat’s cruelty towards nesting birds, something which Tiffany hates very much – so the Feegles sort of behaviour-train him not to stalk young birds anymore.

²⁴⁶ Maybe even the figure of Hamish the aviator drilling into the earth head first when landing (112) could be read as a sort of caricature of a rather penetrating phallic figure.

²⁴⁷ A similar pattern might be found in “Snow White”, even though it seems that the dwarfs there are content to be celibate bachelors. But apart from having girls do housekeeping tasks for dwarfs, the two tales don’t have much in common, since Amelia is abducted by the dwarfs (who are variously called dwarfs, goblins or fairies) because she is an exceedingly spoilt little brat and only being made to work hard for the dwarfs eventually teaches her obedience.

Apart from that, it is typical for them that they can get in anywhere (whether in the real world or in dreams) and in their intrusiveness they are maybe not so different from the fairy queen who frequently intrudes into the human world.

Interestingly, in contrast to the dwarfs and goblins of folklore, the Feegles live in a sort of matriarchic society, where a tribe of hundreds of male Feegles (124) is led by one female (who is incidentally also the mother of most of them). The matriarch is called kelda, a word which, according to L-space.org is Gaelic for ‘source’ or ‘origin’. Daughters are extremely rare among the offspring, but if a daughter is born, she is destined to become kelda of a Feegle clan when she is grown, since male Feegles need someone who guides them, as they themselves are not bright enough: “I think all the brains is saved for the daughters” (143), the kelda observes. Maybe their slight dumbness contributes to their sympathetic image, since the elves (at least those in *Lords and Ladies*, but by implication also those in *The Wee Free Men*) are portrayed as exceedingly intelligent, which on the other hand makes them unbearably haughty.

In contrast to some other fairies, the Feegles age and die. However, their concept of life and death is quite a weird one, because they believe: “We’re the ones who’s deid” (119), while those who die in battle or of old age “go back to the land of the living” (120). Tiffany wonders about this and comes to the conclusion that “maybe the universe is a bit crowded and they have to put heavens anywhere there’s room?” (122). Therefore, Feegle heaven is apparently located on the discworld. Weird as the concept may appear, it is yet only a consequent realization of the theory that fairies are the spirits of the dead.

Typically for traditional fairies, the Feegles tend to obey contractual agreements, such as the one that the new kelda of a clan must marry one of the clan’s warriors. In the case of Tiffany, who is made temporary kelda after the old kelda’s death, this naturally poses some problems. Tiffany solves those by bending the rules so that the Feegles don’t have to break them but she can nevertheless avoid marrying one of them.²⁴⁸ In the area of verbal magic, there is also the traditional fairies’ sensitivity to the phrase “Thank you” – the Feegles can apparently bear to be thanked but Tiffany has the feeling they do not like it: “‘Er... thank you’, [Tiffany] said. No, that wasn’t right” (71).

In contrast to ‘normal’ fairies, however, they do not seem to be afraid of iron (while the grimhounds and Jenny Greenteeth are). But they are all the more afraid of hearing their own names spoken – which again links them to dwarfs, who, according to Carol Silver, were thought to be unable to abide the mention of their name (1999, 124). The Feegles believe that names are

²⁴⁸ She has to name the wedding day and chooses a day impossibly far in the future.

powerful – especially if they are written down in legal documents and used against them by lawyers (93). By the inclusion of this fear of lawyers, Pratchett manages to give a modern twist to the old idea of names as endowed with magical properties. (In a more traditional application of the idea Pratchett shows the Feegles afraid to name the fairy queen since she might hear her name and “come calling” (94).²⁴⁹ Similarly, Elspeth refuses to speak the word ‘fairies’ in *Thomas the Rhymer* and Polly’s Granny refuses to name ‘That house’ in which Laurel and her company live in *Fire and Hemlock*.)

The land “where all stories are real and all dreams come true”

“A little world where nothing grew, where no sun shone, and where everything had to come from somewhere else” (185). This statement sums up Pratchett’s Fairyland quite well. It is, as in *Lords and Ladies*, a land of eternal winter that does not even have a sun. The eternal twilight of Fairyland can be found in folkloristic accounts, too, the snow, however, does not seem a traditional feature, though it may be a creative realization of the desert mentioned in the ballad of “Thomas the Rhymer”: “until they reached a desert wide – and living land was left behind” (Child 37, Version C). As explained already with regard to Fairyland in *Lords and Ladies*, in *The Wee Free Men* snow covers the land because it is a land that has not enough reality to go around with – and snow is ‘easy’, requiring little imagination. There are trees that become more life-like only when someone approaches and “less like something Wentworth might have painted with his eyes shut” (194).²⁵⁰ While in *Lords and Ladies* Fairyland seems to be a little bit more substantial – at least there are e.g. elf-settlements on the snow – in *The Wee Free Men* the whole land seems to be maintained mostly by the imaginative power of its queen, and even the other elves seem to be thought-creatures of the queen. In *The Wee Free Men*, Elfland is once compared to a sheep tick (184) and later to a pirate ship (227) that boards other worlds in order to steal cattle, food and sometimes children because it cannot sustain itself, being a largely infertile world. Thus, in *The Wee Free Men* the idea of the “parasite universe” which had been introduced to characterise the fairies’ world in *Lords and Ladies* is echoed and driven even further.

²⁴⁹ In a humorous reminiscence to Tolkien the swords of the Feegles start to glow blue (94) whenever a lawyer is near – like the magical sword Sting carried by Bilbo and later Frodo Baggins in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, which glows blue when orcs are near.

²⁵⁰ The idea of humans as shapers (or namers) of earthly (or discly) life seems to be a persistent concern of Pratchett’s: In another discworld-novel chronologically situated between *Lords and Ladies* and *The Wee Free Men* (*Thief of Time*) he describes how a force called the ‘auditors’ would like to abolish humans because they make life so much more complicated – the auditors would like humans to “give up. Go back to being blobs in the ocean. Blobs are easy”: (*Thief of Time*, 17) – needless to say that in the end humanity prevails over such unimaginativeness.

However, the fairies – or at least their queen – seem to have one creative talent which is usually not ascribed to them in folklore: dreaming. Also (which seems more familiar) she has the ability to manipulate human dreams. In this she is a bit like Queen Mab in *Romeo and Juliet*, where Mercutio says to Romeo (who is recounting a bad dream): “I see Queen Mab hath been with you” (I., 4). The concept of dreams is of crucial importance for the kind of Fairyland described in *The Wee Free Men*. The key sentence here is probably that “somewhere all stories are real and all dreams come true” (55) – and this place is Fairyland. Such a sentence would probably usually be understood in a positive, wish-fulfilment sort of way. Pratchett, however, turns this idea upside down and so the dreams that come true here are mostly nightmares (114) and the stories such in which little children are snatched by horrible monsters.²⁵¹ The idea that Fairyland is the place where “dreams come true” is quite in keeping with the theory that fantasy is an expression of a society’s collective unconscious (cf. Rosemary Jackson 1981) since dreams, too, are classically judged to be a ‘window’ into the unconscious also (cf. dream interpretation studies by C.G. Jung and Sigmund Freud). Pratchett’s version of Fairyland is peopled by creatures out of nightmares, such as the many-limbed monsters the fairy queen sends after Tiffany, but also the grimhounds and the headless horseman, which have clearly identifiable models in folklore and literature (although it can be supposed that folk superstitions are a sort of mirror of the collective unconscious in any case). Furthermore, there are a number of strange people present at the nutcracking scene, who seem to be dream-creatures of the queen as well, such as the ‘bumblebee women’ or the nutcracker himself (in fact they are mostly inspired by Dadd’s painting).

Apart from the dream-creatures not many creatures live in Fairyland, it seems, even though it cannot be completely devoid of life – Tiffany perceives tracks in the snow: “tracks that could have been birds’ feet, rough round footprints that could have been made by anything, squiggly lines that a snake might make, if there were such things as snow snakes” (196). It seems that some creatures have crawled in from other worlds, and some have been snatched into this world on one of the fairy queen’s raiding-excursions: such as Sneeps, Roland, the stag Roland hunts once, but apparently also the dromes, which the queen keeps for her amusement.

The dromes are a speciality of *The Wee Free Men*, (and seemingly one that is not directly inspired by folklore or fairy tales), at least they are not found in *Lords and Ladies*. The dromes (a word which might be a combination of ‘dream’ and ‘gnome’) are creatures that catch people in dreams in order to try to tempt them into eating something in the dream. If the dreamer touches

²⁵¹ This might remind one of Lewis Carroll’s *Alice* books, where the wonderland creatures are also rarely very nice and sometimes downright murderous – even though nobody comes to serious harm in the end.

food or drink, he will be lost forever in the dream – dreamfood here acts like fairyfood – and after the dreamer has died of starvation – because dream food is not nourishing – the drome will devour him. The only way of escape is to discover the drome in the dream and to cut its head off. The only creatures who can touch dream food and drink unharmed are the Feegles, who, of course, claim for themselves that they can escape from anywhere (247). But maybe their resistance to the dromes has also something to do with the fact that they think of themselves as dead, which makes them hard to kill. The dromes are said to come from a very old, rather dismal world dominated by a dead sea and a red sun.

Another creature from a different world (the discworld?) is Sneeps, a little old man (whose appearance is modelled on one of the figures in Dadd's painting). He seems to communicate by telepathy, has apparently lived in the queen's realm for a very long time and for him the dire prediction that William the Gonnagle makes for human exiles in Fairyland has already become true: "Live in dreams for too long and ye go mad, ye can never wake up prop'ly, ye can never get the hang o' reality again" (187). Sneeps, as Roland reports, had the opportunity of returning to his own world but on arriving there found it impossible to live in and came back to Fairyland voluntarily. In this he resembles human captives in Fairyland as they are described in other novels – in Kushner's *Thomas the Rhymer*, Thomas also retains a certain otherworldly touch after he has returned even though he actually manages to live on earth again. Similarly, one of the short-stories in Silvia Townsend Warner's *Kingdoms of Elfin* describes how (apparently in contrast to the human captives in *The Wee Free Men*, for whom time passes extremely slowly while in Elfland) the changelings age and are then, after years of being spoilt and pampered, returned to the human world, where they usually end up as beggars since they cannot adapt to 'normal' life anymore.²⁵² A similar fate might have been in store for Wentworth, if he had stayed in Fairyland too long, so that after some decades the Tiffany's children could have looked out for "a wee sticky kid wanderin' the hills shoutin for sweeties, 'cos that [would have been] their Uncle Wentworth" (187). While in *The Kingdoms of Elfin* the whole fairy-folk is to blame for the sad end of the changelings, in *The Wee Free Men* it seems to be the queen alone who is responsible for almost ruining Wentworth, by indulging him and feeding him sweets all the time (something she also tries on Roland who is rather indignant since he feels much too old to be spoiled thus) when what he really needs is "love an' care an' people saying

²⁵² Susan Schoon Eberly (1991) explains how they might be a medical explanation for changeling beliefs: people with certain mental illnesses were said to have been touched by the fairies, thus a rationalisation for their behaviour and potentially early death was provided. She also assumes that even some kinds of solitary fairies might in reality have been people with mental retardations who lived apart from the village community (see also chapter two).

‘no’ to him sometimes” (141). But the queen seems rather sure that her treatment is right for children.

In fact, the fairy queen is very sure of everything and knows instinctively with which kind of appearance she can impress Tiffany. So she appears very tall, presenting to Tiffany a face framed by long black hair, with red lips and a white complexion (234) – an impressive façade. But nevertheless Tiffany thinks that somehow everything about the queen is “very slightly, wrong” (234) and quickly realizes why: “It’s because she’s perfect. Completely perfect. Like a doll. No one real is as perfect as that.” (234). The doll-likeness of the queen is probably intended to emphasise her inner lifelessness and infertility (as does her lack of humour (243), which is something that sets her apart from Laurel and the fairy queen in *Thomas the Rhymer*, who both have a certain – though sometimes rather brutal – sense of humour). For Tiffany the perfection of the queen is difficult to deal with. Faced with the queen’s spotless beauty Tiffany’s latent self-doubt and discontent with her own self come to the surface. The queen ruthlessly uses those self-doubts to try to manipulate Tiffany, as also the fairy queens in *Lords and Ladies*, in *The Perilous Gard*, and in *Fire and Hemlock* do:

And what there was about the Queen’s voice was this: it said, in a friendly, understanding way, that she was right and you were wrong. And this wasn’t your fault, exactly. It was probably the fault of your parents, or your food, or something so terrible you’ve completely forgotten about it. It wasn’t your fault, the Queen understood, because you were a nice person. It was just such a terrible things that all these bad influences had made you make the wrong choices. If only you’d admit that, Tiffany, then the world would be a much happier place (235)

However, Tiffany manages to find the queen’s weak spot – she confronts her with the assumption that no one really likes her and that she suffers from this. The idea that the queen needs probably the same as Wentworth – namely the said ‘love and care’ (and probably also people, for example a resolute husband, saying ‘no’ to her) seems a rather simple solution to break the balance of such a seemingly impenetrable enemy, but it works. Maybe this is because in her heart of hearts, this fairy queen is not superior and dangerous at all but “just a child that’s got old” (245), which seems to fit with queen’s rather immature behaviour towards children. It probably also fits Pratchett’s general idea of the elves as creatures who are incredibly old, but have never really learned anything (cf. Granny’s dialogue with the queen in *Lords and Ladies*). So Tiffany’s diagnosis seems to hit home. Suddenly the “queen’s face flickered” (237), similarly as the faces of the elves in *Lords and Ladies*, who just ‘project beautiful features onto a – without glamour – rather unspectacular face. And later on, when the queen’s glamour is broken for a moment, “Tiffany thought she saw... something. It was not much bigger than her, and almost human, and a little shabby and, just for a moment, shocked” (240). So the true shape of the fairy queen is rather unspectacular and almost pitiable.

And indeed, at the end Tiffany will pity her – a great mortification to the queen. That Tiffany feels this emotion on the one hand indicates that she has a gentle heart after all but on the other hand means that she feels superior to the queen at last. This development is also foreshadowed by an episode Tiffany remembers when she learns that the queen claims she stole her brother because she wanted “a little company” (236): A poor elderly woman living nearby had stolen a baby out of a cradle because she had no children of her own and desperately wanted one. The crime was discovered and court was held. Theoretically, a severe sentence should have been proclaimed on the old lady, but Tiffany’s grandmother secretly influenced the baron to let the woman go and urged people to be a bit nicer to the poor lady. At the end of the novel, Tiffany carries the defeated queen back into her own land almost gently. Certainly, she does not intend to be nice to her, exhorting her to “never come back. Never touch what is mine”, but nevertheless she feels sorry for her: “And then, because the thing [i.e., the queen] was so weak and baby-like, she added: ‘But I hope there’s someone who’ll cry for you. I hope the king comes back.’” (292). For *The Wee Free Men*’s fairy queen seems, in contrast to the queen in *Lords and Ladies* whom she otherwise resembles very closely, to suffer from loneliness. The separation from her king (note that in *Lords and Ladies* the king and queen are separated, too) has affected the whole country, as one of the Feegles explains: While the king was still around, Fairyland was not as cold as it is now, because “she was always happy then” (201). But apparently the couple quarreled and something reminiscent of Titania’s and Oberon’s quarrel in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* happened: “Forests destroyed, mountains explodin’, a few hundred deaths, that kind of thing” (ibid.). But while in Shakespeare’s play Oberon and Titania are reunited, the fairy-couple in *The Wee Free Men* stays separated:

And he went off to his own world. Fairyland was never a picnic, ye ken, even in the old days. But it was fine if you kept alert, an’ there was flowers and burdies and summertime. Now there’s the dromes and the hounds and the stinging fey and such stuff creepin’ in from their own worlds, and the whole place has gone doon the lavvy. (202)

Lonely and bored, it seems that the queen amuses herself with dreams. And, as Tiffany claims, she apparently believes in her own dreams and their reality – “so you never have to *think*” (243). The fairy in *The Wee Free Men* is thus very much like the fairy queen in *Lords and Ladies*, who never learns and never develops, while in contrast to them, Tiffany is thinking and learning all the time.

But even Tiffany’s seeming strength is at one time turned into a weakness by the queen: Tiffany, the queen claims, only dreams that she is a good and clever girl but in fact she has failed. The queen blames her that she is cold and heartless, and too sensible (it was sensible to take Roland and escape, thus leaving her brother behind, but not very nice): “that’s just your

excuse for not being really, properly human. You're just a brain, no heart at all" (277). Here, the fairy queen hits a soft spot of her human opponent, just like the queen in *Winter Rose* who makes Rois doubt her own humanity. Finally, however, Tiffany realises that the key to survival is not dreaming at all and not being lulled by the queen into thinking oneself inferior: "the secret is to wake up" (291). After that it is easy for her to defeat the queen physically and to push her back into her own country, even though now that the queen is weak, Tiffany cannot help pitying her (292). Here she is a bit like Kate in *The Perilous Gard*, who almost feels sorry for the elf lady she has defeated – but it seems that this is just the crucial difference between humans and elves – the ability for pity.

Summing up

The fact that Tiffany eventually pities the elf-queen makes her different from Granny Weatherwax, who stays an unforgiving enemy of the fairies throughout the whole of *Lords and Ladies*. With a view to the whole discworld series, it could be that the authors intends this character to become something like a successor to Granny Weatherwax – Tiffany is undoubtedly gifted as a witch but it could be that she will prove a friendlier and less haughty version of Granny. Her development throughout the two sequels of *The Wee Free Men* suggests as much – in *A Hatful of Sky* Tiffany has to learn to control her arrogance and in *Wintersmith* acquires a romantic love interest (Roland, the baron's son) but nevertheless this is mere speculation.

On the whole, however, it can be said for both Tiffany and Granny Weatherwax that they embody a similar set of values, which seems to be behind many other discworld novels as well. As I observed earlier in this chapter, a quite literally humanist position seems to be favoured in *Lords and Ladies* and *The Wee Free Men*. The author paints human beings (and allied races, such as dwarfs) with both their flaws and strengths as the 'good guys' and lets them emerge victorious from of their conflict with some supernatural opponent (the same is true for example for *Thief of Time* or *Carpe Jugulum*, where the discworld is threatened by vampires and by the so-called 'auditors'). The opponents, in this case the elves, are portrayed in such a way – immoral and brutal – that a full-fledged battle seems justified to beat them back into their own domain. Of all the novels examined here, *The Wee Free Men* and especially *Lords and Ladies* contain the largest amount of physical violence – however, they (and again, especially *Lords and Ladies*) are also the most satirical. In one scene in *Lords and Ladies*, elves are killed with a crossbow through a key-hole but the scene is almost comic rather than dramatic, since it is the usually rather inept Magrat who shoots them. The elves in *Lords and Ladies* are evil, no

question, but they are also ridiculed, for example their sense of dress is certainly an instance for satire. The effect of this is ambiguous, I think, for it serves to make them both less threatening (which is probably not what the author wanted to convey, given the repeated insistence of the witches that elves are *not* harmless) and less ‘cool’ (an effect he certainly intended).

Pratchett’s two novels are also noteworthy for their concern with the power of stories – this is an aspect also of other novels (e.g. *Fire and Hemlock*, *Thomas the Rhymer*, *Winter Rose*) but in *Lords and Ladies* and *The Wee Free Men* the attitude towards fictions seems especially ambiguous. While in TR and *Winter Rose*, story-telling bears more positive associations, in *Lords and Ladies* and *The Wee Free Men* invention is really a double-edged sword: on the one hand, human belief, stories and dreams have called elves and fairy-monsters into being (in *The Wee Free Men*) or at least have enabled them to enter the discworld (*Lords and Ladies*). Here fictions are dangerous. On the other hand, when at the end of *Lords and Ladies*, the elves are made part of a stage-play that presents them as small and insignificant, and it seems that this will considerably weaken their powers to invade the discworld in the future – here fiction can be used as a weapon against the elves.

13. *Winter Rose* (1996) by Patricia A. McKillip

The author

Patricia A. McKillip was born on February 29, 1948 in Oregon. She grew up with several brothers and sisters and her apparently rather harmonious family life is sometimes said to be a strong influence on her work, where the positive power of the family is an important theme.

McKillip holds an M.A. in English language and literature from San Jose State University and published her first two books in her last year as a student, in 1973. In 1975, she won the World Fantasy Award for *The Forgotten Beasts of Eld* and has in the meantime collected several more genre-specific awards. Up to now she has published more than 25 novels and about 30 short-stories. She lives in Oregon and, apart from writing, has all her life had a strong interest in music, at one time apparently even aiming to become a concert pianist, which might explain why music and its healing power are another recurring theme in her novels (in *Winter Rose*, however, it plays only a minor role). Another frequent issue is the hero's task to "be true to one's self and love others enough to set them free" (Lunde, 1999), which is the solution for problems in many of her novels, as it is also in *Winter Rose*.

Winter Rose was published in 1992 and in reviews it is especially praised for the beauty of its language, while it is sometimes criticised for a lack of plot or action. Critical works on Patricia McKillip's writing are not very numerous (the IBZ (*Internationale Bibliographie der Zeitschriftenliteratur*) yields three hits, the MLA bibliography eleven), and the few available monographs usually focus on her *Riddlemaster* trilogy.

Plot summary

Set in a remote village in an indefinite place and time (which could be England or maybe New-England as flora and climate appear Middle-European or North-American, the period probably being the eighteenth or nineteenth century), *Winter Rose* tells the story of Rois Melior.²⁵³ Rois is a young woman who lives with her widowed father Mathu, a farmer, and her

²⁵³ The references to time and geography which hint at the setting and the historical period are: Temperate climate with cold winters, farmers planting grain, orchards, a deciduous forest, briar roses, a village, a city, no automobiles, horses and carriages, no electricity, candles, but farmers' daughters who can read, an apothecary, a smithy, a sort of pub, ale, apple brandy, chicken pie. The novel could, however, just as easily be set in a fantasy world merely similar to earth. It is significant that there is never any mention of religion, a church, a priest or Christianity, which, if the story had been set in England or America would certainly have formed an important part of village life. The

older sister Laurel in an old cottage and one summer day observes a strange young man appearing (seemingly out of nowhere) in the neighbouring woods. The young man turns out to be Corbet Lynn, heir to the ruins of Lynn Hall, a kind of manor house nearby, which is rumoured to be under a curse.

Rois finds herself fascinated by the handsome Corbet and his mysterious past and tries to find out about the curse his grandfather is said to have placed on his descendants, while Corbet sets about restoring the old buildings and claiming his heritage. Many years before, Nial Lynn, Corbet's grandfather, had been murdered, allegedly by his own son Tearle. After Nial's death, Tearle had vanished and no one had heard from the Lynn family until Corbet's return.

Rois, however, is not the only one enthralled by Corbet. Her sister Laurel, though happily engaged to Perrin, a young farmer from the neighbourhood, also falls for the mysterious stranger and in the course of autumn detaches herself more and more from her fiancé. Winter arrives and Rois's doubts about Corbet grow – sometimes he appears perfectly normal but then Rois has visions of him where he is an otherworldly being and a subject and later on also captive of the queen of fairies. Both Rois and Laurel are in a state of confusion – Laurel because Corbet develops into someone who means more to her than her fiancé and who seems to return her affections and Rois because of unrequited love for Corbet and worry for her sister.

One winter night, Rois sleepwalks to Lynn Hall and watches a struggle between the fairy queen, Corbet's father and himself. In the course of the fight, Corbet's father, who seems to have crossed into Fairyland as a young man and lived there ever since, is killed and his corpse is cast out into the human world. The next morning, Rois is found sleeping at Lynn Hall next to the body of an apparent stranger (Corbet's father), while Corbet himself has disappeared.

The rest of the winter sees Laurel pining away for the vanished Corbet and Rois trying to figure out the story behind everything in order to save her sister. She has more dreams or visions, in one of which she offers herself as a bride to Corbet as a substitute for Laurel in a ghostly fairy wedding. It is not quite clear how this works to effect a change but afterwards Laurel, who had been close to death, regains her will to live and makes up with her fiancé. Corbet, however, remains untraceable.

He finally returns with spring, explaining that urgent family matters had called him away. It becomes never wholly clear if Rois's experiences were real or just the dreams of an over-imaginative girl, however, both she and Corbet have grown more mature during the time of his absence and the end sees them making at least a tentative attempt at a new friendship.

wedding of Crispin and Aleria for example is conducted on the village green and not in a church and there is no mention of a priest.

Instances of narrator destabilization

The whole story of *Winter Rose* is filtered through the eyes of Rois Melior, the first-person narrator, and it seems that Rois is not a very objective and probably even an unreliable or destabilised narrator (for Thomas Wörtche's concept of the destabilised narrator see chapter three). She is sometimes too imaginative and her love-interest in Corbet may prompt her to see things differently than an objective observer would. Moreover, sometimes her mind seems to be impaired by tiredness or illness, so what might be read as evidence of the supernatural could just as well have been a fever-vision. The following paragraphs will demonstrate how heavily the narration is coloured by Rois's subjectivity. Bold print indicates a device for destabilisation, underlined words indicate – apparently indubitable, in so far as this is possible – evidence for the supernatural.²⁵⁴

Very often, Rois's insecurity about Corbet's true nature is indicated semantically, simply by the verb "to seem", or "as if"-constructions (*modalisation* according to Wörtche):

- "That's how I saw him at first: as a fall of light, and then something shaping out of the light. **So it seemed.**" (2)
- "He didn't **seem** real to me, just something I dreamed on a hot summer day" (2)
- But on other occasions she thinks quite the contrary: "He **seemed** human enough" (21)
- However, not only Rois is unsure, also her sister Laurel's final statement about her affair with Corbet indicates uncertainty: "It **seems** so **like a dream**. **As if** someone had cast a spell over me. **I don't understand** what I was thinking." (248)

Furthermore, words like "perhaps", or "maybe" accrue when Rois and the villagers are trying out different explanations for Corbet's life-style and his disappearance:

- "**Perhaps** he was unnaturally tidy. Or **perhaps** he did not sleep there. **Perhaps** he did not sleep." (63)

²⁵⁴ I examine this aspect in that much detail only in regard to *Winter Rose*. In the other novels analysed here the question of the subjectivity of the narrator is never as crucial. Some do explicitly question the existence of supernatural occurrences or creatures (*Perilous Gard*, *Tam Lin*) or leave at least the reader in doubt while the protagonist seems not overly worried about the strangeness (*Fire and Hemlock*, *Queen of Spells*) but at some time the uncertainty is usually resolved in one way or another (admittedly, in *The Perilous Gard*, some doubt remains about the Guardian).

- **“Perhaps**, I thought **bemusedly**, he slept in the woodshed and kept his soap beside a stream. Or he slept, as he ate, at the inn. I left finally, having exhausted **conjecture** as well as his sparse evidence.” (64)
- When Nial Lynn is killed, his son Tearle seems to vanish without leaving a trace (he abandons his horse in the stable and leaves no tracks in the snow) and Rois tries to find explanations: **“Maybe** (...) he ran away before the snow fell. **Maybe** Nial Lynn’s heart gave out and he struck his head, falling. **Maybe** Tearle never killed him at all.” (95)
- When the villagers search the site of the crime “[t]hey found no secrets, no hidden doors or passages. But **no one could explain** the bruises around Nial Lynn’s throat, or the table on its side, or the wine bottle smashed against the far wall” (96).
- For most of the time Rois is convinced that she is indeed about to uncover a supernatural plot: **““Suppose** I am,’ I argued dourly. **“Suppose** I am the only one in this house making any sense at all. **Suppose** that everything I say is true, and everything I do is vital-” (114). But Laurel will not believe her.
- Towards the end, even Rois becomes unusually sceptical: **“Perhaps** there had never been anything at all to see” (250).
- Finally, when Corbet comes back and informs Laurel of his return beforehand in a letter, Rois cannot tell if the reasons for his disappearance had been supernatural: “Everything had happened; **maybe** nothing had happened. A man rebuilding his house had gone away in winter and returned in spring” (256).

Rois’s insecurity with regard to Corbet is reinforced by the fact that she does not always trust her senses and her memory:

- “I must have been a blur of shadow in his eyes” (2): the sun is blinding, what Rois thought she saw (Corbet taking shape out of nowhere) could have been merely a trick of the light.
- “Again I **could not see** his face, it seemed blurred with light. Then **I realized that he stood with his back to the rising sun**, and though light spilled everywhere around him, his face was in shadow” (20) – this would be the same effect as before – it is not Corbet who is of indefinite shape but only the sun which makes him appear so.
- At night in the wood, Rois begins to see faces (44), sees a gold ring fall into the leaves, takes it home but: **“I could not see it well”** (45). The next morning she discovers only a

dry leaf on her pillow – one explanation for this would be that there never was any gold, that Rois was hallucinating, the other explanation would be that it was fairy gold.

- Faced with this contradictory evidence, Rois is rather confused: “I **did not know**, anymore, what was true” (52). She thinks that maybe her nerves were playing tricks on her: “I made myself teas of camomile and vervain to soothe my thoughts” (52).
- At another occasion she thinks she sees the fairy queen again in a tree but: “when I opened my eyes again, there was **only a tree** standing in the snow, a white owl sleeping in the dark, airy swirl of its branches” (195).

Sometimes it is not really clear even why Rois is so obsessed with Corbet at all. She sometimes muses about this herself: “I **wondered** suddenly, intensely, what I knew, what I had stolen into his house to find” (63). But not only her sensitivity to the supernatural, also her jealousy of Laurel may influence her perceptions and what she believes:

- Corbet once tells Rois and her sister: “[Crispin]’s coming to talk to me about building that stable so that I won’t have to sleep with my horse all winter,” (87) which indicates that he is indeed sleeping in the woodshed, as Rois had speculated before. But Rois is sceptical: “I shook my head not believing his tale about Crispin and the stable. It was **only an excuse to come here alone with Laurel**” (87) – and Rois has surprised them during their rendezvous. But then there is a knock on the door, which the reader must assume is indeed Crispin (89). It is, however, never revealed who is at the door, since here the chapter ends and only from the beginning of the next one the nature of the caller can be inferred: “They had a few bright, chilly days to build that stable. I heard their hammering echo across the fields,” (90) so Corbet seems to have spoken the truth here.

Several times the distinction between a dream or a vision and Rois’s everyday reality is blurred, sometimes it is not clear if she is of sound mind or impaired by fever-hallucinations or madness:

- On the night when she vanishes in the wood for hours, her rescuers seek for rational explanations: “**Looks like** you fell into the brier roses, wandering around in the dark,” (101) Perrin assumes and remarks that Rois is feverish. Rois admits that she may have dreamed, and then it occurs to her that Perrin might think her mad for wandering around in the forest alone: “**Perhaps**, I thought dispassionately, I am” (102).
- At another occasion she goes to Lynn Hall, looks behind the tapestry there, thinks she sees the fairy queen and talks to her when Perrin comes in: “I recognized Perrin’s voice

before the **white mist** faded and **he caught me** and I could see his face. ‘Rois!’ He opened his cloak, tried to bundle me under it. ‘What are you doing back here? You’re like ice’” (169). Both the “white mist” and the fact that Rois is freezing and apparently weak on her legs might indicate another onset of the feverish illness she is suffering from for some time and thus another hallucination.

There are also a number of scenes where the distinction between dream and waking is blurred:

- On one occasion Rois falls asleep in a chair in the kitchen and dreams of Lynn Hall: “‘Go to bed Rois.’ Laurel said. **‘You’re dreaming.’** I nodded. But I was where I wanted to be now: in the dead of night, and I sat there listening until I heard everyone’s sleeping breaths. Then, barefoot, I crept outside, and made my way by lantern to Lynn Hall. (...) [She then imagines to be in Lynn Hall:] ‘Rois,’ [Corbet] said. ‘Don’t leave me here. Don’t leave me. Don’t.’ **‘Rois.’ I struggled to open my eyes, (...) Laurel stood over me,** one hand on my shoulder, a candle in the other. (...) I followed Laurel’s candle; a leaf still wet from the wood glowed briefly on the floor in its light, like a footprint from another world” (75). The appearance of Laurel and her candle suggest that Rois has dreamed, however, the appearance of the wet leaf suggests that this must have been more than just a dream.
- Another time Rois, not yet recovered from her fever, hallucinates that she is kissing Corbet when she is in fact standing at the other end of the room metres away from him. She is only woken by her sister’s voice: “‘Rois. Are you awake or asleep?’ ‘I don’t know.’ (...) ‘You’re **dreaming,**’ Laurel said” (109).
- Next time when Corbet visits, he brings wine, which tastes differently to everyone (which might be magic or mere subjectivity). When she drinks, Rois has a vision of how Corbet sees the world: everything is in shadow but Laurel, and even though she still hears the voices of her father and Laurel at the supper table they appear strangely altered. When the others notice her trance, they stir her out of her dream: “‘I’m all right’, I said. **‘The wine made me dream.’** ‘It’ll take you like that,’ our father said relieved, ‘on an empty stomach’” (120). Rois has been ill and thus the wine might indeed have had a strong intoxicating effect, which could be an explanation for her vision – otherwise the wine must have been magical.
- Corbet then commands her: “‘Finish the wine, (...) There are dreams and more in that.’ And so I did. And so I **dreamed his dream**” (125). Corbet may only have meant that the

wine will put her to sleep – but he might also have meant that it will induce visions. Indeed Rois has a detailed dream of Tearle and Nial Lynn (126-130), which, for once, is clearly identified as a dream: “I woke. It was still night” (130).

- But shortly after that she goes (or sleepwalks) to Lynn Hall:

And I rose and saw the light from Lynn Hall flickering like a star among the wind-harrowed trees. So I went there, walking through the wild storm, scarcely feeling it, finding my way by the light I watched, the lodestar in the screaming night. Winds shook me apart piecemeal, flung a bone here, a bone there. My eyes became snow, my hair turned to ice; I heard it chime against my shoulders like wind-blown glass. (135)

This description could be read poetically – merely meaning that it was bitter-cold – or literally, which would mean that Rois indeed undergoes some kind of metamorphosis. What follows is another encounter with Corbet, his father and the fairy queen, at the end of which Corbet’s father is killed. “I **woke** to the sound of Salish’s voice. What Salish was doing in my bedroom I could not imagine. Then I felt the hard, cold bed I lay on, and I lifted my head again, groaning, **making sense of nothing**. (...) I had been in Lynn Hall, I was still in Lynn Hall. I had lost Corbet in the wrong hall” (149). Salish finds Rois next to the body of a stranger – Tearle Lynn – and is naturally rather confused, but Rois tries to make up a plausible explanation: “I just came to see Corbet. I built a fire. I **must have fallen asleep** beside it, waiting” (150). Salish wonders where Corbet is and who the dead man might be and why Rois did not notice anything. The door is open, there are signs of a fight, the stranger is not dressed for winter, has no horse and no one can explain where he came from, unless he was really Corbet’s father expelled from Fairyland. (Later on, theories develop in the village: the stranger could have been a brother or a cousin of Corbet, the ghost of Tearle Lynn, or a complete stranger (187-88, 203).) Tearle Lynn’s presence in Lynn Hall seems quite strong evidence for the influence of the supernatural, however, apart from the **sleeping** Rois nobody was present when he came there and Rois is not a reliable witness.

- When Rois wakes up in her bed at home in the morning after her adventure at Lynn Hall, dried roses cover her room – and can actually only be explained as a warning from the fairy queen not to meddle any more in Corbet’s affairs.²⁵⁵ However, Laurel sees them too, but she does not even comment on them, she merely picks them up, tidying the room (154). Does this mean she has accepted the influence of the supernatural now? Or is she too distracted by the events of the night before to notice what she is doing?
- Rois’s father subsequently asks what happened: “‘Some stranger walked into [Corbet’s] house while he was away and dropped dead on his hearth? In the middle of a blizzard?’ ‘So it–’ I paused, trying to swallow my own tale. ‘That’s what it seemed,’” (160) – Rois

²⁵⁵ Rois is repeatedly associated with roses throughout the book – and the roses the fairy queen sends are dead.

- tries to keep the supernatural out of her explanation for her sceptical father and this unlikely tale is what remains.
- Later she goes to Lynn Hall again, watches the fire light up magically, finds herself in Elfland with Corbet and watches the fairy queen talking to her own dead mother. They wonder if Rois is human and Corbet tells her his family history, how his great-grandfather took a fairy lover and the fate of their descendants (213). On coming to herself again Rois **finds herself in Lynn Hall standing before the unlit fire** (218) – so this might have been merely another vision. But then she sees a white owl flying into the tapestry and becoming part of the threads – is this part of a vision or reality?
 - Laurel tries to make sense of Rois’s doings: “You don’t have enough to do, so you’re imagining things. Telling stories to yourself. About our mother, about me, about Corbet” (220). But here Laurel is no longer trustworthy either, since she is betraying herself: She claims that she is fine and simply waiting for Corbet to return (220, 224) when in fact she is rather ill.
 - On another occasion, Rois wakes and thinks she lies under leaves but this is only the quilt which covers her (220) – another example of how easily she slips between dream and reality.
 - Later she **dreams** of Laurel as Corbet’s bride when she watches at her sick-bed (228). She then seems to wake up, feeling the hard floor beneath her knees, opens the door and sees a horse shaping out of the storm, goes with the rider, marries Corbet herself_(or rather, rejects the marriage eventually) – but if this is merely another dream or reality is not quite clear.
 - Nial Lynn claims that all Rois ever does is dream up her rescue of Corbet, because he does not love her in the real world (239). Corbet tells her that he cannot love her (241) but that he will come back to help Laurel, and it seems that Rois now dreams again: “I held him though the winter dark, through all my **dreams** until I woke” (243). Then, finally: “I lay awake a long time before I opened my eyes” (244), and she is no longer in Lynn Hall but in her bed at home, while the “**dream** scattered piecemeal through my head” (245). It seems that now even Laurel is influenced by Rois’s dreams but apparently this finally heals her: “I had the strangest dream,” (245) Laurel claims and Rois is at first afraid that it has affected her in a negative way: “I had done nothing; I had **dreamed**, and even in my dream I had done nothing. **Or worse, none of it had been a dream**, and I had done nothing right” (246). But then Laurel demands something to eat for the first time in weeks and Rois is somewhat consoled.

- There seems to be one incident, however, where Rois is neither ill nor feverish and goes to seek Corbet at the secret well. She calls for him and he appears beneath the ice (181f.) – as captive of the fairy queen. This does not seem to be a dream because Rois later joins the search parties (sent out to look for Corbet) for a ride home. But apart from Rois no one else has seen Corbet in the well.
- Almost the only instance – apart from the dried roses – which provides clear proof of supernatural influence observed not only by Rois but by another inhabitant of the village (the apothecary) is the fact that Tearle’s body has aged several decades while he has been kept in the apothecary’s icehouse.

Summing up the evidence, *Winter Rose* is, according to Uwe Durst’s model probably a text belonging to the marvellous reality system after all because of the two or three incidences which cannot be rationally explained. However, the reader is kept in doubt much of the time (which would make it a kind of liminal fantasy according to Farah Mendlesohn), which differentiates *Winter Rose* from the other novels in the corpus where the hesitance about existence of fairies/the supernatural is much less pronounced or more quickly resolved (or where their existence is never even questioned (as in *The Wee Free Men*)).

Intertextuality

Winter Rose is less obviously intertextual than the other novels in my corpus, although influences e.g. from ballads and fairy tales can be found here as well. The most explicit influence is once again Child #39, i.e., “Tam Lin”, even though McKillip uses fewer elements of it than the other authors. One allusion is the family name of Lynn, even though here no Tam or Tom or Thomas appears – the three generations of Lynns mentioned here are named Nial, Tearle, and Corbet.²⁵⁶ Another parallel might be that the first encounter between Rois (taking the part of Janet) and Corbet (taking the part of Tam Lin) takes place near a well surrounded by roses in the vicinity of Lynn Hall, Corbet’s family home – and in some “Tam Lin” versions Janet encounters Tam while plucking roses near Carterhaugh (for possible symbolic interpretations of the rose see

²⁵⁶ A search for the possible etymology and meaning of the the Lynns’ names yields the following results: *Corbet* (also spelled Corbett or Corbitt) is a British surname deriving from Latin ‘Corvus’ = crow or raven, it was “probably a nickname for one with dark hair or complexion” (Reaney 1976, 83) – which does not really seem to fit for fair Corbet Lynn. *Nial* is the Gaelic form of Neil, meaning ‘champion’ (ibid., 248) – which seems rather ironic for Nial, who was feared and not loved by his fellow humans. *Tearle* is a Bedfordshire surname but also a Christian name which maybe derives from Old English *teart* = “stern, austere” (*Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* 1898, 974) – this might make sense in so far as Tearle is brought up in a rather stern and loveless way. But on the whole the choice of names for the male characters cannot easily be associated with any of their character traits.

below). However, the most important element from “Tam Lin” which McKillip uses is probably that of the young man held in captivity by the fairy queen, and the girl who is given the advice to hold fast to him in order to save him: “the wind said: You must hold fast to him” (113).

Otherwise McKillip departs rather far from the ballad. While in “Tam Lin” the information about Tam’s forefathers (varied as it is among the different versions) indicates that he is fully human, in *Winter Rose* the reader learns that at least four generations of Lynns have had dealing with fairies. The great-grandfather has a fairy-lover, the child of this union is Nial, Corbet’s grandfather, who is raised by the great-grandfather’s human wife. Nial then marries a mortal woman. Their child is Tearle, who flees to Elfland because he cannot bear the human world (and because he murders his father and has nowhere else to flee to). Tearle also marries a human woman, one who has strayed into Elfland – their child is Corbet, who is thus mostly human but apparently grows up at least partly in Elfland. In contrast to his father, Corbet longs for the human world and tries to make himself fully human by living in the human world, reclaiming Lynn Hall (with his father’s blessing, he says) and trying to love a human woman. This is not tolerated by the fairy queen and she therefore takes him captive. However, it becomes never clear whether the Lynns are actually lovers of the fairy queen or merely her subjects, so it is not quite obvious if she acts as a jealous lover or as a tyrannical queen. There is moreover apparently no teind for which Corbet would be needed, so Rois supposes that the queen keeps him “to see your beauty and your power when you look at him” (237) – she regards him as her own creation, an aspect which does not seem to play a role in the original ballad.

Moreover, there is no sexual contact between Rois and Corbet, and therefore no pregnancy involved in the main-plot. The motif of ‘pregnant woman saves her lover’ is, however, somewhat indirectly, included in *Winter Rose* nevertheless. One of the village girls, Aleria, is expecting a child. The father is the good-looking but womanising and lazy Crispin, the smith’s son. Aleria somehow manages to talk Crispin into marrying her and, as Jessica Greenlee observes, thereby both save each other (2001, 78): Aleria secures a future for her child and rescues her own respectability and Crispin, now having to care for a family, is forced to work for a living, thus becoming a valuable member of the community after all. There, however, the similarities to the ballad end – Crispin and Aleria have nothing to do with fairies, this domain is solely reserved for Rois and Corbet.

From the start, Rois feels that something is wrong with Corbet. She tries to pry him loose from his otherworldly chains but it becomes never quite clear if she really succeeds. Corbet does return by the end of winter but Rois never knows if her help enabled him to come back from Fairyland or if the reasons for his return are completely unconnected with her deeds. There is, as

mentioned above, no pregnancy involved, neither is a teind to hell mentioned, and, most important, the pattern is varied by the incorporation of Laurel, Rois's elder sister.

Here, as one internet reviewer ("Sur La Lune Fairytales" Discussion Board, 2005) remarked, one might see the influence of Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market" at work. As "Goblin Market", *Winter Rose* is a tale about two sisters. In "Goblin Market", one sister, Laura, succumbs to temptation (by tasting goblin fruit) and subsequently begins to waste away since she cannot get another taste of the fruit. The equivalent in *Winter Rose* would be Laurel falling in love with Corbet and Corbet suddenly vanishing without trace, which leaves Laurel pining for him. The second sister, Lizzie (in *Winter Rose* this would be Rois), must, in order to rescue her beloved sibling, go to the goblins (to Fairyland, respectively) and bring the forbidden fruit to her sister without tasting it herself. In *Winter Rose*, Rois struggles to find Corbet and bring him back for Laurel's sake and she tries to deny her own desire for him.

Apart from "Goblin Market" and the ballad of "Tam Lin", the latter of which is, however, never mentioned as a ballad, other ballads make a fleeting appearance as the characters sing them on winter evenings. Few of them are ever named, such as the (fictional) "Ballad of Pig's Trough Tavern" (6) or "the Mariner's Lay for His Lady" (7), others are just songs about "lovers parted on earth and reunited in the grave" (6) and have no title. Another allusion to the typical ballad language can be found in the description of Corbet's mare, the "horse the color of buttermilk" (1) which might be a playful allusion to the milk-white steeds not infrequently found in ballads (e.g. "Thomas the Rhymer").

Apart from ballads, there may be some allusions to fairy tales, e.g. in the repeated description of the briar roses near Lynn Hall, which are "white as snow, red as blood" (1). This sounds a bit like "Snow White and Rose Red" (although a bit more dramatic). But there might also be a connection to "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs", where the good queen wishes to have a daughter with skin as white as snow and lips as red as blood (and hair as black as ebony). The snow-and-blood symbolism can be found also in medieval romances, such as in renderings of the Percival-material by Chrétien de Troyes and Wolfram von Eschenbach, where Percival once happens upon three drops of blood upon a field of snow and falls into a kind of trance since the blood on the snow reminds him of the face of his beloved Blanchefleur (or Condwiramurs, as she is called in Wolfram von Eschenbach's work). Also in Shakespeare's *The Rape of Lucrece* Lucrece's beauty is associated with the colours red and white and with roses and lilies, respectively. Rois, however, does not quite conform to these traditional beauty ideals, since her skin is tanned (see below).

But the symbolism of the roses goes further, since the (winter) rose and its association with blood recur frequently in regard to the connection between Rois and Corbet. Rois once thinks she sees a rose floating in the secret well: "the rose as red as blood that bloomed in the

dark water, more beautiful than any living rose” (99). This could be read as a symbol for her desire, which she craves to fulfil, for later she claims that she wants to “drink the rose floating in the well” (109).²⁵⁷ Some time before, spying after Corbet in his rooms at Lynn Hall, Rois accidentally nicks her finger at his razor and later dreams that he has found her blood in his rooms and interpreted it as a kind of gift from her (74). Jessica Greenlee reads this as an indicator for the strength of her desire (2001, 83), probably along the lines of Rois being willing to make a present of her virginity to Corbet. Abigail Acland (2005) associates roses with female sexual anatomy and mentions also their traditional role as flowers of the virgin Mary in Catholic iconography (cf. also chapter on border ballads).

In *Winter Rose*, there is also a more direct connection between roses and blood (and desire): Rois tries to find out about Corbet’s true nature by going to the secret well near Lynn Hall that is covered with briar roses, knowing that this is a pathway to the fairy world. She drinks from the well and entangles herself in the rose-vines and then sees the fairy riders pass by, who tell her that, if she wants Corbet Lynn, she must hold fast to him (100). The next morning Perrin and Corbet find Rois, still stuck between the roses and bleeding from numerous wounds. They take her home but even though Corbet is worried about her, it is clear to Rois that he is still in love with Laurel and not with her. Her effort to get close to him by magic was therefore in vain and she has to pay for her folly with both physical and emotional pain (similarly as Polly in *Fire and Hemlock* is punished for her act of magical prying).

But the rose imagery can also be related to the dichotomy of wildness and civilization which pervades the whole book, for there are both ‘civilised’ garden roses (such as those growing in the garden of Lynn Hall) and wild briar roses (growing in the wood). This imagery also ties in with the incident mentioned above – for Laurel one day promises to make Rois “into a rose for Aleria’s wedding” (36), dressing her in a dusky pink dress and adorning her hair with roses. However, the rose Laurel is referring to is a garden rose and Rois cannot stand this condition for very long and runs into the wood to get away from society and civilization, losing shoes and decoration and tearing the dress. Later on, when she is again running wild in the wood, however, she is confronted by superhuman forces that lead her to spend the night tangled in the

²⁵⁷ There may also be an intertextual connection to the fairy tale of *Beauty and the Beast* – here, a father grants each of his daughters a wish and the youngest wishes for a rose. However, it is winter and only by chance the father finds a garden where there are still roses blooming. He plucks a rose and is assaulted by the Beast, the owner of the garden. The Beast makes the father promise that he will give his daughter in marriage to him in exchange for the rose. The girl is duly married to the Beast and eventually, through her love, frees the enchanted human caught in the Beast’s form from the spell laid on him (cited in Heinz-Mohr/Sommer 1988, 86). The rose is here interpreted as the girl’s awakening sexuality. Since she desires a rose of her father, interpreters assume that there are also incestuous tendencies, which do not appear in *Winter Rose*. But here, similarly a girl who is starting to become aware of her sexuality desires a rose in winter and eventually frees an enchanted human who is closely connected to the rose.

briar roses, so she realises that she cannot live in the woods either. Apparently, Rois can neither be a garden rose nor a wild rose, but can only be happy if she can partake of the attributes of both, being both independent and civilized.

There is also a symbolic connection between the rose, associated with Rois (e.g. through her name) and the ivy, which is closely associated with the fairy queen. Not only can the queen turn into ivy and half-strangle the captive Corbet with her vines (231), but after the spell of the fairy queen has been broken, Corbet finds that the roses in his garden are half-strangled by ivy – but still alive. Thus, the garden seems to reflect the battle between Rois and the fairy queen. Moreover, during the ghostly wedding ceremony in Fairyland, the fairy queen had declared: “Rois to wood, rose to ivy, maid to mortal man you will wed, in time and beyond time, and forever in my wood” (235) and at least her prediction of the rose wedding the ivy has actually come true.

Apart from the allusions to “Rose Red and Snow White” and “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs”, another fairy tale allusion might be found in the description of the fairy queen, who is, like so many other fairy queens, a kind of Snow Queen: “I am the dead of winter” (185). And as Andersen’s tale was identified by Diana Wynne Jones as one influence on *Fire and Hemlock* it might also have influenced *Winter Rose*, since here again the pattern of the girl hero having to rescue a male from his captivity in the Snow Queen’s realm is used and there is also a “sliver of ice” (237) mentioned, which the fairy queen has placed in Corbet’s heart thus preventing him from becoming fully human.²⁵⁸

Maybe also the character constellation of the two sisters has been inspired by fairy tales (where sisters such as Snow White and Rose Red, Goldmarie and Pechmarie, Cinderella and her stepsisters, etc. can be found). However, what Jessica Greenlee (2001, 76) finds remarkable is that there is no competition between the siblings as is often the case in traditional fairy tales. On the contrary, they try to understand each other and when it becomes clear to Rois that her sister is in love with Corbet she tries to discipline her own desire for him. Greenlee reads this as a sign that McKillip is trying to provide strong and likeable female characters, who show solidarity with their own sex and do not incapacitate themselves by struggles with other women. Interestingly, “Snow White and Rose Red”, which could have influenced the novel also in its rose-and-snow imagery, is also not a tale of competition but of two loving and harmonious sisters. Rose Red is the more outgoing and Snow White the more domestic sister: “Rose-red liked better to run about in the meadows and fields seeking flowers and catching butterflies; but Snow-white sat at home with her mother, and helped her with her house-work, or read to her when there was nothing to do” (Grimm 2001). So there might indeed be a connection to wild Rois and civilised Laurel.

²⁵⁸ In Andersen’s tale Kay, the little boy kidnapped by the Snow Queen, has a sliver from the devil’s mirror in his heart, which makes it turn to ice that can finally only be melted by his friend Gerda. In the fairy tale, however, the fragment from the mirror enters by accident and is not placed there by the Snow Queen.

Nothing like a rose: Rois Melior

Rois Melior is, like many other girl heroines in the novels discussed here, set apart from her environment, or at least from the other girls in her village by several traits of character. The most prominent one is probably her wildness. Rois, whose age is never clearly defined but who is probably somewhere between 16 and 20 years old, is a sort of tomboy – she loves to roam the woods in any kind of weather, preferably barefoot and with little attention to her dress, climbs trees and forages for herbs and fruits.²⁵⁹

She is clearly wilder than Janet, whose “rebelliousness must be quickly curbed, her position defined in relation to the male’s” (Greenlee 2001, 76): Janet must marry Tam Lin in order to stay a ‘good’ female heroine, while, Greenlee continues, “the unattached and independent woman in the tale is specifically labelled as not human, the Fairy Queen, an outsider who is rendered powerless” (ibid.).²⁶⁰

But in *Winter Rose*, Rois stays wild and thus partakes of the ‘non-humanity’ of the fairy queen. This is a pattern that is taken up by several of the “Tam Lin” adaptations: Rois feels not fully human, Tiffany is at one time accused that she is “just a brain, no heart at all” (*Wee Free Men* 277) and Kate sometimes feels bad because she does not fulfil the female ideal (embodied by her sister Alicia), either. However, while Pope has the traditional marriage ending and lets her heroine undergo a number of changes to make her suitable for marriage, McKillip and Pratchett let their ‘unfeminine’ heroines keep their freedom. So Rois refuses to ‘define herself in relation to the male’ i.e., Corbet, and no marriage concludes the novel, even though Corbet is clearly important in Rois’s search for identity.

From the beginning, Rois’s habits are regarded as eccentric by the villagers. But they tolerate her strangeness because they begin to comprehend that Rois is useful in her own way and that she is a source of help whenever healing teas or herb oils are needed. It seems as if Rois is on the way to become something like the village healer (complementing the work of the apothecary) and so it is probably in keeping with common stereotypes that Corbet asks her during one of their first encounters if Rois is a witch. Her surprise at the question, however,

²⁵⁹ Rois might also be in her early to mid-twenties, but it is hard to tell. She seems to be at a marriageable age, however, she must be several years younger than Laurel, who acted as a surrogate mother for her, and it can be assumed that Laurel, being a rather traditional woman, is getting married fairly early, so that she is probably no older than her mid-twenties, rather younger than that.

²⁶⁰ Martha Hixon, however, remarks that at least in one version of Child 39 (D), the girl hero, in this version named Margaret, “does not care for the traditional womanly role of sewing indoors during beautiful weather and would prefer the tomboy role of climbing trees” (2004, 74). I am not quite sure if that much can be inferred from “Fair Margret sat in her bonny bower, / Sewing her silken seam, / And wished to be in Chaster’s wood, / Among the leaves so green.” To be among green leaves must not automatically mean that one has climbed a tree, I think, one could also be sitting sedately under it.

implies that *Winter Rose* is probably set in a time where belief in witches is no longer very active among the populace (or in a place where it never was).

Like Kate, Tiffany and the other girl protagonists, Rois sometimes feels a bit inferior because of her otherness. First of all, because she is not as beautiful as her sister Laurel. With her black hair, yellow-brown eyes and dark complexion (which is “not fit for fairy tales” (2)) she sadly comments on the inappropriate choice of her name: “My name is Rois, and I look nothing like a rose” (1). Others, such as her sister’s fiancé, tease her because of her wild appearance, as she returns dishevelled from one of her trips in the wood: “you look like something conceived under a mushroom” (3). This might be read as a first hint at Rois’s fairy-like nature (think of a rougher version of flower fairies).²⁶¹ Rois is connected to mushrooms and mushrooms rings (also known as fairy rings) several times more in the novel: once she is surprised by Corbet while standing in a mushroom ring (32), furthermore, she is rather fascinated by them and even feels alike to them, thinking they are “ancient, wild things (...) [which] wandered everywhere. So did I” (31).

This last statement sums up Rois’s most prominent trait quite well – her absolute need for independence, which, coupled with her comparative ineptness when it comes to housewifely matters, worries her sometimes because she thinks it will make her unattractive for prospective husbands. She knows moreover that if she was dissatisfied with her domestic situation, she would “walk right out of the door, vows or no” (5).²⁶² She often wonders why this is so and has the feeling that she lacks something to “make her fully human” (5) but cannot fathom what exactly this might be – as she later learns, it is the readiness to care for others even in bad times. Before Corbet’s arrival, however, Rois’s concerns have been of a rather theoretical nature, since there has been no village boy who has succeeded in waking her interest. Only her father sometimes worries about “his failed daughter, his fey child” (47), while Rois herself is quite content with her life.

With Corbet, this changes. Laurel observes: “Rois you’re blushing” (24), when her sister tells her news about Corbet, and it becomes quite obvious soon that Rois has fallen in love with the mysterious stranger. Since she is a rather sensitive girl with a lively imagination, she thinks that she may have a special connection to Corbet, because she saw him first, before all others saw him. She has a feeling that she knows him better than others do, which is also why she is so intent on finding out about the curses that are rumoured to lie on him. It is sometimes hard to tell

²⁶¹ Greenlee claims that Rois has indeed been fathered by a fairy (2001, 81) – I am not quite sure, as other evidence points at her father being human. The question is never resolved.

²⁶² In this regard Rois is maybe similar to the legendary Melusina, who also leaves her husband behind when he insults her.

whether Rois's feelings for Corbet are merely the fancies of a young woman with a crush on a good-looking man or whether she is indeed endowed with a special kind of perceptiveness (cf. Rois as a destabilized narrator). Her character layout as a 'healer in the making', however, suggests that she may indeed have the ability to look beyond surfaces and Corbet confirms this more than once: "People see what they expect to see. Except for you. You simply see" (39). Later on he even confesses: "I could never pretend to you. You saw me too well" (184).²⁶³ But this ability is more a burden than a gift to Rois since she is unable to deal with what she sees: that Corbet is interested in Laurel and not in her, since she herself is too strange to be attractive to a man who has many strange character traits himself and who longs for normality more than anything else in the world.

As J. Greenlee observes, Rois is too close to the woods and wild nature to be a comfortable woman to have around. She is thus also too close to the fairy queen (Greenlee 2001, 78). And while to other men Rois's wildness might merely be irritating, for Corbet her connections to the supernatural must actually be frightening. Nevertheless, Corbet needs Rois to free him from the queen since she is the only one who, actually *because* of her similarity to her, can match her power. But despite his apparent need for her, Corbet frequently rejects Rois, which once leads the bewildered girl to ask: "Do you care for me at all? Or do you only need me?" (212).

One of the earliest consequences of Corbet's rejection is that Rois tries to be more civilized, staying in the house, doing needlework etc. Her unusual behaviour worries Laurel but Rois explains that she is merely "trying to be like you" (53). It seems that, here, Rois 'curbs' herself, it is not society that limits her (as is the case with Janet) but rather Corbet's expectations. It does not work, though, Corbet has eyes only for Laurel. But Rois thinks that her attachment to Corbet is not merely an infatuation, she thinks that it is much more fundamental. In a climactic situation in Fairyland she confesses to Corbet: "You are my shadow (...) You knew me before I knew myself (...) I need you." Corbet, it seems, provides her with a sense of identity and he is "making [her] human" (212), she thinks. But he is very reluctant about her feelings: "'You must be careful,' he whispered. 'You must be so careful. Even need is a path to her'" (184). This advice seems to recall the final scene of *Fire and Hemlock*, where Polly and Tom have to find a way around the fairy queen and discover that they must renounce need and desire in order to be free. The difference is that here Rois emphasizes how much *she* needs Corbet, while in *Fire and Hemlock*, it is clear that Tom needs Polly more than the other way round. But, as mentioned

²⁶³ This clear-sightedness might remind the reader of Tiffany's "first sight" (*The Wee Free Men*, 139), where the girl sees what is actually there and not what most other people expect to see.

above, the need in *Winter Rose* is present on *both sides*, though Rois is the one who voices it more openly while Corbet calls on Rois to help him only in her dreams.

But no matter what role her desire for Corbet plays in her search for him, at the very least Rois's dealings with Corbet and his strangeness have made her wonder about her own strangeness. Therefore, she starts to search for the mystery behind her mother's death and thus her own identity. When she confronts the fairy queen, the latter – apparently endowed with telepathic abilities – already knows why Rois is there: “You didn't come here for my name. (...) You came for yours” (214). In this statement, which recalls the references to name-magic in Kushner's *Thomas the Rhymer* (where the fairy lord Hunter tries to gain power over Thomas by calling him by his name), the fairy queen makes clear that she holds the key to Rois's knowledge about herself.

Her mother, that much Rois already knows, died of some strange, wasting illness (123) and Rois has begun to suspect, that, just like Laurel, she pined away for a lover from Fairyland. This seems indeed to have been the case, as Rois learns from her mother's ghost, which is conjured up by the fairy queen. Is the reason for Rois's special perceptiveness and her ability to follow Corbet into Fairyland therefore that she has fairy-blood herself? Tearle Lynn at least calls her “more than mortal” (144). Was her mother's lover from the otherworld Rois's father? For J. Greenlee it is clear that, to become ‘whole’, Rois must confront the question of her father and for her it is also clear that Rois is indeed of mixed ancestry: “Rois's mother had had an affair with a fairy lover in the woods, and he is Rois's father” (2001, 80). It seems to me, however, that this question cannot be answered conclusively. Rois's mother had a fairy lover, but it is not clear if she met him already before Rois was born or only afterwards. The fairy queen claims that only because she has fairy blood, Rois can enter Elfland at all, but Rois objects that she merely followed Corbet, just as her mother (who must have been an ordinary human) followed her elfin lover. Both Rois and the queen have their own motivations for arguing as they do. The fairy queen wants Rois to believe that she is not fully human, so that her feeling of inferiority may continue. Rois, however, desperately wants to believe that Mathu the farmer is her father and that she is a normal human being. It seems to me that she at last consciously decides for this option, whoever her biological father may be, declaring Mathu to be “my father in this world, in every world” (247).

Apart from the unsolved riddle of Rois' father, questions also remain with regard to Rois's apparent sacrifice when she agrees to marry Corbet in Fairyland in order to deflect the fairy queen's attention from her sister. In doing so she knows that she will make both Corbet and herself unhappy, quite like Kate would have done, had she accepted the charm of the fairy lady

at the end of *Perilous Gard*. Similarly as Kate, Rois would have known that her husband would not have taken her for her own sake: they “would still have been bound together by necessity rather than choice” (Greenlee, 2001, 81). But what *are* Rois’s motives for agreeing to this pact? Is it Laurel’s welfare? Or is it the desire to possess Corbet after all, no matter in what unhappy circumstances? This is again a question for which no definite answer can be found. But, however that may be, Rois and Corbet do not have to suffer from her decision, because, after the ghostly marriage ceremony, Rois decides to free Corbet from any bonds to her family, thus voiding the marriage spell and all claims Faery has had on Corbet. It never becomes quite clear, though, how this works (Rois decides to hold fast to him in order to set him free but the reader is not told any more) or how Rois knows what she must do.

Questions aside, the solution is one similar to that of *Fire and Hemlock*, that is, ‘love a person enough to let them go’. Rois’s deed indeed seems to free herself, Laurel and Corbet from their obsession with each other and moreover Corbet from his bond to the fairy queen. Laurel slowly recovers from her illness and is reconciled with Perrin, Rois gets over her infatuation with Corbet (at least temporarily) and Corbet himself is apparently free to come back to the human world. However, it seems that it is not the status quo which is restored since all participants in this love triangle have been changed by their experiences. Laurel has learned to appreciate her solid fiancé better than before. Rois has learned how to care for other people, and thus become more ‘human’ (she is now so civilized that she sews for her father and dresses as becomes her age and standing). And Corbet has apparently made his peace with his mysterious past and has decided to be more honest with his fellow human beings.

Thus, all signs seem to be set for a happy ending. Even though the end is relatively open, a reader might assume that there is a chance for Rois and Corbet to be friends or lovers after all, probably just as much or as little as there is for Polly and Tom in *Fire and Hemlock*. The two of them will have to deal with each other as human beings, with all the hazards this includes, but Jessica Greenlee thinks that their chances for a relationship are now much better than before. Rois has proved that she is not without power, while before she would probably have been only the admiring accessory of the charming Corbet. Corbet in turn has been through a process that has apparently prompted him to be less mysterious and close-lipped than before: “His eyes seemed stranger’s eyes, full of light that *now hid nothing*” (259, emphasis mine). So even though there is a sort of circular structure – in the end Corbet asks Rois once again, if she will help him with his garden, as he had done in the very beginning – the situation is by no means the same.²⁶⁴

²⁶⁴ Corbet also gives Rois back her mother’s wedding ring which she had lost in Lynn Hall – could this be an implicit joke on the ‘ring structure’ of the novel?

Friendship is possible, but under different conditions than before. As Jessica Greenlee puts it: “This new friendship might or might not end in marriage; if it does end in marriage, it will be a far more equal and fully informed marriage than is usually granted to fairy tale heroines; it will be a marriage of equals with Corbet fully aware of and accepting Rois’s position as both madwoman and angel” (2001, 84).²⁶⁵

The beautiful sister: Laurel Melior

In contrast to Rois, Laurel, the elder sister, is a good home-maker and also an apparently rather pretty young woman. “My sister, Laurel, is quite beautiful” (3), Rois observes. With her chestnut-brown hair, grey eyes and delicate complexion, she at least conforms more to the village’s beauty ideals than Rois. She is very popular in the neighbourhood – “everyone in the village loves her” (3) – and happily engaged to her childhood sweetheart Perrin. Laurel’s temper is much more sedate than Rois’s. After their mother’s early death she apparently had to take on responsibility early, managing the household and raising her younger sister without much help from the loving but otherwise busy father.

According to J. Greenlee, Laurel quite clearly represents the nineteenth century ‘angel in the house’ ideal (2001, 78) and, indeed, Laurel seems a sweet, simple, caring young woman. In contrast to Rois, she does not have any connections to the supernatural or even any great imagination.²⁶⁶ The unfamiliar rather frightens and worries her and so it confuses her all the more when Corbet makes her long for it. At first she refuses to acknowledge this at all. After Crispin’s wedding she, in her sensible way, tries to comfort Rois, who has, upon a spontaneous impulse, run away into the wood: “music suggests things that simply can’t be...Lovers wear too-familiar faces, and other faces promise other worlds” (48). This is meant to soothe Rois. But it is in fact describing just what Corbet Lynn has done to Laurel and perceiving this was exactly the reason that prompted Rois to flee from the wedding.

Even after Laurel admits to herself and others that she has fallen for Corbet, she sees this merely as a worldly love affair with no supernatural implications. Only when Rois declares that Corbet is in danger, she tries to humour her sister: “‘All right,’ she said. ‘I’ll suppose. Corbet is

²⁶⁵ The central tenet of Greenlee’s essay is that *Winter Rose* presents both two sides of the divided image of woman (deriving from nineteenth century literature and elaborated on by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1979)) – the ‘angel in the house’ (Laurel) and the ‘madwoman in the attic’ (fairy queen). In contrast to more traditional tales, in *Winter Rose* Rois is allowed in the end to reconcile both aspects in herself, thus finally becoming a ‘whole’ woman.

²⁶⁶ Why ‘normal’ Laurel is given a name that in another “Tam Lin”-adaptation (*Fire and Hemlock*) is the name of an undying fairy queen is never talked about. Rois is aware that her own name is connected to roses but if Laurel is aware that her name is connected to immortality and triumph is unclear. However, *Laurel* could also have more domestic associations: bay-leaves (i.e., laurel-leaves) are frequently used for cooking.

cursed and you are trying – by some peculiar means – to rescue him” (114). But she does not seem at all convinced.

After Corbet’s disappearance she completely loses the will to live, but it never becomes clear whether this is due to supernatural influences or whether Laurel would have reacted in the same way to any kind of unrequited love. One might, however, interpret an instance early in the novel as a kind of love charm cast over Laurel. During one of their first encounters, Corbet surprises Rois as she is digging up a mandrake root. He asks her what she is doing and then “he said her [Laurel’s] name softly to the mandrake root”, and his words “lilt and glide as if he spoke an unfamiliar language” (22). Of course this may be just a joke of Corbet and his strange pronunciation may be due to his being a foreigner to the region. On the other hand, this could also be a sort of incantation, all the more so as Laurel’s reaction strangely echoes that of Corbet: Laurel takes the mandrake root and asks: “Is this him?” (23), meaning Corbet. Mandrake roots were, during antiquity and the Middle Ages, believed to be potent love charms – Rois herself tells Corbet that they are used for “sleep” or “love” (21).²⁶⁷ Moreover, Laurel herself feels “as if someone had cast a spell over me” (248). So it might be possible that in their infatuation with each other something supernatural was involved after all.

As has been said before, after a time of serious (and mysterious) illness, Laurel recovers and Rois thinks that maybe her own excursions into Elfland may have played a role in this healing process. At least Laurel remarks how, during the night Rois frees Corbet from his bonds to Elfland, she had “the strangest dream” (245) and on waking she takes, for the first time in weeks, an interest in the life around her again. However, despite this short time when Laurel seems to believe in supernatural influence, she is soon her old sensible self again, making up with her fiancé and being barely able to understand what has happened to her. It seems that she never really believes Rois that Corbet was a prisoner of the fairy queen – and indeed, to her it must seem that everything was quite normal: Corbet finally writes her a letter that he had to go away on urgent family business and that he will come again soon – and so he does.

Fairy or human? Corbet Lynn

At first glance, Corbet may seem nothing more than the lucky heir of Lynn Hall – handsome, wealthy, and rather popular among the villagers, many of whom help him to rebuild his family home and whom he in turn helps in difficult situations (he supports for instance the

²⁶⁷ Cf. for example D. Harmening: “The magical uses of mandrake are almost unlimited: it talks and reveals the future, helps towards luck, honour, money and in court trials, it is helpful against illnesses and magical charms, protects from prison and injury. It was especially used in many ways as an aphrodisiac” (2005, 34, my translation). So the mandrake seems to be a means both against and for enchantment. Many more superstitions surround it, for example that the person who pulls a mandrake root out of the ground will die because the mandrake root then utters a deadly scream – given this legacy of superstitions the characters in *Winter Rose* deal rather rationally with mandrake roots: they have no fear of harvesting them and the apothecary uses them for medicine.

newly-weds Crispin and Aleria). But in the course of the novel, Corbet Lynn appears more and more shrouded in mystery and Rois later learns that he is indeed not a normal human being but has fairy-blood. However, Corbet tells Rois this during one of her dreamlike visits to Elfland and never confirms it before reliable witnesses, so the reader never has ultimate certainty if this explanation is true or merely Rois's fantasy. But Corbet is a mystery even to those villagers who never even think of fairies. Nobody knows where Corbet has spent his time before he appeared in the village. Moreover, the villagers wonder about the curse his dying grandfather – a kind of village tyrant – is said to have laid on his son and all generations of Lynns to come and speculate if Corbet will be befallen by the curse as well.²⁶⁸

The curse naturally incites Rois's curiosity, but even before that she is suspicious of Corbet. From the very beginning she believes that he is different. Before he appears in the village, she is the first one to see him, namely as "a fall of light"(2) – because he appears in a pool of sunlight while she is hidden in shadow. And so she comes think of him as "something that made itself in the summer wood" (11) – something non-human and supernatural. When she sees Corbet's eye-color on another occasion, it seems to match her expectations: "Pale green seemed to melt through me, and I thought: How could they be any other color?" (9). Rois seems to be quite aware that green is the typical fairy colour. Recovering from her first unexpected encounter with Corbet, Rois has moreover a feeling as though time had stopped for a moment. This feeling might well have been a result of Corbet's closeness of Fairyland, where different temporal laws operate. It might, on the other hand, simply have been the effect a good-looking stranger could have on a young woman unaccustomed to men. At first Rois furthermore cannot see Corbet's face clearly. The reason for this could be that his shape is in fact blurred. But it could also have been a mere effect of sun and shadow (see section on narrator destabilization).

When Corbet visits Rois and her family, she and her sister try to find out about Corbet's family and past, but he is rather secretive about both. He mentions that his mother came from a city, that she was wealthy and loved water of any kind. His father, he says, is "still living" (59) and at that time this appears to be true, even though Corbet does not reveal the details – his father is still alive, but in Fairyland. The villagers had so far assumed that the father must be dead because Corbet has taken up residence in Lynn Hall. Probably this way of dealing with the truth – not telling lies but letting others assume the wrong 'truth' – is an indication of Corbet's

²⁶⁸ In the course of the novel Rois discovers that every old villager remembers a different version of the curse and wonders: "Are there different truths, the way there are different curses? (...) Or is each curse a different truth?" (59) – another instance where the issue of several kinds of truth is touched upon (as for instance also in *The Perilous Gard*).

fairy nature, as it is one of the fairies' typical traits to tell the truth while communicating seemingly completely different facts.

At one time during the visit he plays a song on Laurel's flute, claiming that this is the only one he knows: "it was a song out of a forgotten kingdom, out of the deep, secret heart of the wood" (78). This would again hint at his fairy nature, especially since the song captures all listeners, even Rois's usually very down-to-earth father: "'it takes you,' he said, but did not say where" (79). Thus, even for those who do not suspect him of being more than mortal, Corbet is apparently someone who wakes a longing for the unfamiliar, making both Rois and Laurel yearn for "the glimpses he gave us of the world beyond our small lives, of a world even beyond that" (132).

Corbet, in turn, finds in Laurel something he himself seems to have hungered for all his life. Her normality and mortality and her seeming immunity to anything supernatural make her attractive to him. If his story about his fairy-origins is true, he has been brought up among everlasting but also somewhat unreal beauty and therefore yearns for the opposite: "I saw the longing for time kindle in his eyes" (118), Rois observes. Why his choice falls on Laurel, who is engaged to Perrin, and not on any other 'normal' (and maybe not yet betrothed) girl in the village is never quite explained. Why Rois is not his chosen one, however, is. She is simply too involved with the supernatural and not 'human' enough for Corbet to forget about his own past: "'You seemed to live in the borderlands of the world I tried to escape. You tossed your heart after every passing breeze. Even after light. You did not seem –' The word pushed through my throat like two hard stones. 'Human'" (212).

Corbet tells Rois in one of her dream-visions towards the end of the book that his great-grandmother was a fairy-woman, (213), and that he himself was raised by his father in Fairyland after his (human) mother's early death. But it is not clear how otherworldly he actually is (or if he is at all) – he works, dines and socializes with the villagers and blends in quite well. However, Rois suspects his non-human nature from the start and eventually so strongly that she comes to search for evidence of his (non-)humanity in his house, finding only another puzzle in his seemingly untouched rooms: "Perhaps he was unnaturally tidy. Or perhaps he did not sleep here. Perhaps he did not sleep" (63). Later on she gives up, having found no signs of secret doors into Fairyland in his lodgings but no sign that Corbet is really using his rooms either: "Unless he came and went through the chimney, I could see no hint of a life lived between worlds, only a life lived in an eccentric fashion for any world. Perhaps, I thought bemusedly, he slept in the woodshed, and kept his soap beside a stream. Or he slept, as he ate, at the inn" (64). (Later

Corbet himself makes a remark (87) that indicates that he indeed sleeps in the woodshed but Rois does not believe him.)

Corbet's supernatural abilities cannot be proven until much later, when Rois learns that he can really pass between the human world and Fairyland using passage-ways such as a well or a tapestry (in his rooms, after all). He also appears among the riders of the fairy queen: "I had seen his face, pale and alien and beautiful as the moon" (57). But at the same time, he is staying with Laurel and her father, who wait desperately for Rois's return (46). He has apparently the ability to be at two places simultaneously – or Rois has merely imagined seeing him among the riders. Weeks later, Rois encounters the riders again and asks the queen how she can win Corbet, and is told that she must hold on to him. She then falls into the rose vines and in the morning is rescued by Perrin and Corbet. When she regains consciousness, she wonders: "Had he been among those dark riders to hear my plea? Had he laughed with them?" (105).

Maybe he has, but he is nevertheless straining away from the fairy queen. He has, as he explains to his father, come to the human world to find love and humanity, which, despite their transitoriness, appeal to him more than timeless Elfland – providing him with "hope" (140) though for what exactly is not explained. His official reason for coming to Lynn Hall, however, the one he tells the villagers, is different: "'Land', he had said. 'For the land'" (67). But even though Corbet claims that he came with his father's blessing (59), his father and the fairy queen later on come to fetch Corbet back into their world. He has "lingered in the human world too long" (146) and the fairy queen fears that she might lose control over him. Corbet, living for months in his forefathers' earthly home, has started to think like a human being and is trying to turn himself mortal. To do so, however, he realizes that he needs Rois's help, even though he finds her uncanny and knows that he cannot give her what she expects of him in return. Later, Corbet admits the morally questionable nature of his plea: "I asked you for the impossible. I should never have done that. But I had no one else to turn to. (...) I'm sorry" (233). Like Thomas Lynn, he is in a dilemma – he needs Rois even though he does not love her, just as Thomas Lynn needs to use Polly even though she is an innocent child.²⁶⁹ Corbet's uneasiness about the

²⁶⁹ What Rois might gain in caring for Corbet even though he does not love her is acutely and cruelly summarized by Nial Lynn: "Even now you imagine you are here, trying to rescue someone you think you love, who in the waking world scarcely noticed you. He did not love you there, so you dream a world, where he must need you, where he must be grateful to you." (239). If Nial's interpretation was true then Rois would merely be clinging to a fantasy. However, his statement might also be a kind of test for Rois, testing her will to 'hold on' to Corbet. Nial's behaviour also resembles that of the fairy queen in *The Wee Free Men*, who tries to discourage Tiffany by telling her that her self-image of a clever, resourceful girl is merely the delusion of someone who does not want to admit his

situation shows that he probably has a kind of moral standard similar to that of humans and that for all his otherworldly touches the fairy queen has not succeeded in making him truly one of hers.

The dead of winter: Fairyland and the fairy queen

Fairyland in *Winter Rose* seems to be close to the human world but it is not a part of it as it is in *Fire and Hemlock*. There are apparently doors and passages into it, such as mushroom rings (232), wells (the secret well where Rois goes to find the vanished Corbet (181)) or even the tapestry in Corbet's room – it is therefore an open secondary world, in Nikolajeva's terminology. That a mushroom ring (true to its colloquial appellation as a 'fairy ring') can be a passage into Fairyland Rois learns only accidentally, when, half laughing about it, she steps into a mushroom ring with one foot and suddenly sees Corbet in the wood. He asks her "*where* are you going" (32, emphasis mine) (even though we do not know how much of a joke this is) and not "*what* are you doing" as might have been expected of someone seeing a grown-up woman behaving as childish as Rois. After the surprising encounter with Corbet, Rois reports how she went home, feeling rather strange and she wonders "if I had stepped between worlds, and had forgotten which I had come to and which I had left" (34). That Corbet's remark about the mushroom ring was probably more than just a joke is confirmed soon after, when he muses about drying up the secret well in order to secure the water supply for his manor. Rois is shocked that he does not care about the well but Corbet is convinced that nobody in *this* world really needs it, thus revealing that he has indeed connections to the otherworld: "'There are other places in the wood,' he said softly. 'Other places?' 'Doors. Thresholds. Places of passage. That little well is very pretty, but in this world it will not be missed'" (40).

McKillip's Fairyland seems intricately connected to the wood surrounding Lynn Hall. The wood is present as some kind of superhuman, living force, as for example when Rois wonders if her father is a supernatural being and expresses this as follows: "Am I your child? [meaning Mathu Melior](...) Or am I the wood's?" (189). Also in one of the supposed curses of Nial Lynn ("I bequeath all to the wood" (18)), the wood seems something more than just an accumulation of trees but has a personality. And indeed, the wood seems to have accepted his heritage, swallowing the ruins of Lynn Hall quicker than would have been normal for an

lack of humanity. In *The Wee Free Men* this is clearly a tactic of the fairy queen to make Tiffany feel inferior, as is typical for the elf-queens also in *The Perilous Gard* and *Lords and Ladies*.

abandoned building: “this went far too fast, as if the hall itself were cursed” (84).²⁷⁰ Later on Rois muses how Corbet’s father had long ago “opened a door and fled down a tangled path into the wood...His son could not find the way back” (96). Read in this context, the wood seems almost to be a synonym of Fairyland. This notion is also supported by Rois’s observation how her father’s cultivated and civilized “fields seemed yet another boundary between worlds” (152). It is indeed a boundary – between a world where Corbet’s father is cruelly killed for his disobedience to the fairy queen and Rois’s peaceful home, thus, in *Winter Rose*, Fairyland is more or less literally the place ‘beyond the fields we know’, as it is often called in the works of Lord Dunsany.

But the boundary is fragile – in Rois’s visions the wood intrudes into her home in the form of the fairy queen, who turns into ivy entangling Corbet. Rois realizes that humans are only weakly protected against the otherworld: “again I saw the frailness of our walls, how they could be broken by a thought, stone and board could sag like an old web under a vision” (130). Thus, “in the course of the book, Rois finds the woods and the house overlapping more and more” (Greenlee 2001, 82), until, it seems, she puts a stop to it by freeing Corbet.

Fairy creatures seem to be able to pass between the fairy country and the human world. At least Rois encounters more than once ghostly riders in the wood around Lynn Hall. (Even though it is – as usual in this book – not always quite sure how much of them is supernatural and how much of them is just a combination of the autumn winds and Rois’s imagination.) At any rate, the riders seem to be a kind of hunting party come to “carry away the dying, sweep the earth for the dead” (44), reminiscent of the wild hunt of folklore.

But they take not only the dead and dying: in one of her visions Rois sees the riders on the wind, beautiful, cold and masterful, how they tempt the unloved child Tearle to come with them: “*Come, the winds called. Come to us. This is not your true home. You belong elsewhere. You belong with us*” (129).²⁷¹ This is a recurring motif throughout the novels: elves take what humans apparently do not want, especially small children. A few examples: the fairy queen in *The Wee Free Men*, who has taken Tiffany’s brother claims that Tiffany does not love her brother, therefore the fairy queen has a right to him. Similarly, in *The Perilous Gard* Christopher wishes little Cecily away when he is within earshot of the fairy well – and shortly after, Cecily indeed vanishes. But the queen in *Winter Rose* has also a penchant for taking humans who do not want to stay in Fairyland, such as Corbet and Rois and keeping out others who long to go there –

²⁷⁰ This might recall Edgar Allan Poe’s “House of Usher”, where the manor of the Ushers seems to be reflecting the fate of the family. It collapses as soon as the last members of the family have died.

²⁷¹ This might recall also W.B. Yeats’s poem “The Stolen Child” with its refrain: “Come away, O human child”.

Nial Lynn, the half-fairy, grows up in the human world although he hates it and Tearle is eventually cast out of Fairyland as a punishment for defending his son.

The way to Fairyland is not easily found, it seems. However, now and again, mortals accidentally wander there, such as Rois's mother and Corbet's mother, although they may also have been lured into Elfland by their fairy lovers. At one time, a kind of circular journey is undertaken by Rois and Corbet, which echoes that to Hunsdon House in *Fire and Hemlock* undertaken by Polly and Tom. Rois and Corbet start out from Lynn Hall in the human world only to arrive at the equivalent of Lynn Hall in Fairyland: "We had gone everywhere and nowhere, we had ridden from Lynn Hall to Lynn Hall" (138). Even the emphasis on "nowhere" might thus not be purely accidental – in *Fire and Hemlock* "Nowhere" is a synonym for Fairyland.

McKillip's Fairyland reflects the human world, but is, in turn, either more beautiful or much more inhospitable than the human world (and thus not an indifferent twilight world as in many folkloristic accounts). On the one hand, the fairy queen can create a beautiful spring/summer country out of the winter wood: "I saw meadows and trees burning a young, fiery green, as if leaves had just opened, as if green itself had never existed before. I breathed heavy, golden air that might have pooled all summer over roses blooming in every colour on a hundred trees" (138). It seems to be a speciality of the fairy queen to let several seasons (all except winter) happen at once and to take the combined essence from them to make a stunning impression, presenting all the aspects of the wood that Rois loves:

Colors I had never seen in winter, colors I had never seen together in one season, every shade of green. I saw Corbet as the flames turned into gold. I stood on grass, feeling sunlight on my hair, my hands. I had not imagined any world he would have died to leave could be so beautiful. (...)

Spring, I guessed, seeing a bank of purple violets spilling down into a rill. Then I saw burdock as high as my shoulder, and blue vervain, and yarrow the rich ochre-gold of later *summer* light. And then I saw *leaves as golden as the yarrow*. The air smelled of violets, crushed raspberries, wood smoke. If I could have dreamed a world to escape the winter, I thought dazedly, it would be this timeless nowhere, in which green trembled like water, even in deep shadow, as if we stood at the bottom of a translucent pool. (210, emphases mine)

This might once again recall *Fire and Hemlock*, where, during the climactic scene in the garden, the seasons seem to merge as well. While it is November in the human world, Polly comes into an autumn garden where roses bloom and summer heat prevails. As Laurel in *Fire and Hemlock*, the fairy queen in *Winter Rose* has the power to form her whole kingdom according to her mood: "her strong creativity can be seen in her ability to shape spring out of winter, call roses into being and rebuild the old Lynn mansion" (Greenlee, 2001, 78). For the inhabitants of Elfland, the seasons created by the queen seem to be real: Corbet's father wonders why Rois is shivering when she comes to Elfland and Corbet explains that "in her world, it is still winter" (140). Later, Tearle is wearing only summer clothes when he is cast out into the human world, which is

caught in the grip of winter. But to humans from outside, the wonderful land that the fairy queen creates seems to be merely an illusion, as Rois realizes: “I saw winter beneath that scent, that green; I felt it just beneath my skin” (138). And indeed, Corbet later warns her not to trust the queen’s illusions of summer: “It’s one of her faces. One of her expressions. You’ve seen others; don’t lose your heart to this one. (...) She lies like the moon lies, a different face every night, all but one of them false, and the one true face as barren and hard as stone” (211). If Corbet is right, then the fairy queen is just like the one in *The Wee Free Men*, who can also create a dream of summer when in fact her country is a land of eternal winter where almost nothing lives and grows and therefore, as Greenlee observes, “her link to death is equally strong” (78). Indeed, Fairyland seems populated mostly by lost humans and human ghosts (e.g. Rois’s mother and Nial Lynn), other fairies than the queen are hardly ever seen by Rois on her visits there. They must exist – at least the different fairy lovers who have had affairs with members of the Lynn and Melior families hint at their existence. But in contrast to most of the other novels, where a whole fairy court is present, here the queen’s subjects hardly ever appear.

“Timeless nowhere” (210) is the expression Rois once uses to describe Elfland, and indeed, time, as in most folkloristic accounts of Elfland, passes differently there, as the fairy queen observes: “Time pools here, it has nowhere to go” (215).²⁷² Therefore, Rois feels that, once back in her own world she “moved back into time” (45). Humans in Elfland do not seem to age, at least Corbet’s father looks still like a young man, even though he must be in his late fifties and, when he is found dead in the human world, his true age shows only after the elf-queen has withdrawn her spell (255).

The queen who holds such power over her land and her inhabitants is, as most of the other fairy queens in the novels, beautiful, cold and cruel. She has “a pale moonlight face chiseled of ivory and ice and night” (44), long dark hair and pale blue eyes. She seems indeed to be an embodiment of winter: “winter followed her” (145). On one occasion she appears as a kind of snow queen in a fur-coat made of living enchanted animals in their winter whites. Coldness is also her furthest character trait. Without hesitation she kills Tearle Lynn, when he dares to speak up for his son and casts his body out into the human world while at the same time trapping Corbet in Fairyland – thereby cruelly putting both men in the world they respectively most hate(d). She moreover keeps the ghost of Rois’s mother (who has died longing for her otherworldly lover from the wood) eternally waiting for this fairy lover. She also has the effect that most other fairies have on humans – intimidating them and making them want to turn into

²⁷² This is similarly formulated by T. Pratchett in *Lords and Ladies* with regard to ‘parasite universes’, of which Elfland is one: “there are also stagnant pools, universes cut off from past and future” (111).

something insignificant. Rois, for instance wants to “crawl among the shadows in the chimney” (145) when faced with the fairy queen.

She has also the power of entangling her prisoner Corbet in ivy vines and preventing him from speaking to Rois by turning his words into leaves. This kind of punishment might remind one of the end of the version of “Tam Lin” used by Pamela Dean for her *Tam Lin*, where the fairy queen regrets that she has not turned Tam ‘into a tree’ while she still had power over him and Janet Carter ponders about the cruelty of such a transformation: “wood, a slow vegetable life rather than a swift animal one; a kind of blindness; a kind of deafness; and a kind of death of the heart” (*Tam Lin*, 450). It might also recall Thomas the Rhymer’s situation after the loss of his voice in Ellen Kushner’s version of the tale, where words and having a voice are of such crucial importance.

The fairy queen’s coldness and cruelty are reflected in Nial Lynn, the half-fairy, who treats both humans and animals with disdain and cruelty and who, to Rois, appears as “cold as iron in an icehouse” (82). But even though the fairy queen is presented as truly evil, the end does not see her defeated, as *The Perilous Gard*, *Lords and Ladies* and *The Wee Free Men* do, rather, she “remains alive and powerful” (Greenlee 2001, 81), even though Rois and Corbet are by then probably safely out of her reach.

Summing up

Winter Rose differs from the other novels in my corpus in so far as the ‘reality status’ of the elves is never really ascertained, while in the other adaptations this question is sooner or later resolved. As I have tried to show in the section about narrative destabilization, again and again doubt is cast as to whether Corbet’s entanglement with the fairy queen was real or merely Rois’s fantasy. There are, as I pointed out, a few hints that seem to argue for a ‘marvellous’ reading of the text (in Todorov’s sense) but to the end, Rois herself remains unsure if she has really freed Corbet from the thrall of the elf-queen or if he has just been away on worldly business during winter and has now naturally returned with spring. *Winter Rose* is therefore, I think, with *The Perilous Gard*, one of two novels in my corpus which could be called *fantastic* in Todorov’s understanding of the word.

As in almost all other “Tam Lin”-novels, the elves are portrayed as cold and cruel creatures. In contrast to most of the other novels there are no alleviating touches of humour or satire or grudging admiration of the human protagonist for the elves. McKillip’s fairy queen is serious – and she is evil.

Nevertheless, against her own intentions, the queen eventually does some good, making the heroine find out about her origins and identity and giving her the opportunity to prove herself valuable with her own special abilities – only Rois could have freed Corbet and she succeeds in doing so. As most of the other adaptations the involvement with Fairyland helps the heroine to develop and grow more mature, to know herself better and ascertain her identity. It seems that here also the male protagonist undergoes some kind of development (towards greater honesty), which applies also partly to the other male protagonists of the adaptations.

Winter Rose departs far from the original ballad of “Tam Lin” – many elements (e.g. the pregnancy, the teind, the Halloween ceremony) are omitted. Moreover, the novel seems to contain no elements of “Thomas the Rhymer” at all, maybe this is one of the reasons why the elf-queen comes across as so disagreeable.

Winter Rose differs from both “Tam Lin” and most of the other adaptations (except *The Perilous Gard*) in its inclusion of the heroine’s sister, which introduces a complication since the Tam Lin-figure falls in love with the sister and not with the girl representing Janet. The development of this conflict and the heroine’s search for a solution to this problem constitutes much of the plot and the resolution resembles that chosen by Diana Wynne Jones for *Fire and Hemlock*: not holding on is the key but letting go and grant a person the freedom to make his (or her) own choices.

Regarding choices, it would certainly be interesting to know why the authors of the different adaptations have chosen to adapt the ballads at all and why they have done it the way they have. I think my study may already have provided a few clues as to the ‘why’, even though its focus was actually more on the ‘how’. As *Winter Rose* is the last novel in my corpus it will now be the task of the last chapter to sum up my findings about the ballad adaptations and to come to a few more conclusions concerning their authors’ creative choices.

14. Conclusion

Different novels – different worlds

Now that ten ballad adaptations have been considered (only eight of them in detail but I will include Catherine Storr's *Thursday* and Janet McNaughton's *An Earthly Knight* in the final discussion) it remains for me to ask some final questions. For instance how different can ten novels be that tell – simply said – the same story? The answer is: quite different. The great degree of variety presented by the retellings is due to a number of reasons, each of which shall be considered here at least briefly.

First of all, and probably most obviously, the authors use a great variety of temporal and spatial settings for their retellings: from twelfth century Scotland, and therefore as close as possible to the 'real' story, to 1970s USA – and thus far removed in time and space from the original setting.

Secondly, the idea of magical space is employed differently, including the whole range of Maria Nikolajeva's world-system-possibilities, from merely implied secondary world to fully developed and autonomous closed secondary world, as has been discussed in chapter three. In regard to Farah Mendlesohn's four types of fantasy, which correspond roughly to three of Nikolajeva's typology, (implied secondary world = intrusive fantasy, open secondary world = portal fantasy, closed secondary world = immersive fantasy) the case is slightly more complicated. Considering the functional implications that Mendlesohn associates with the different kinds of fantasy, Nikolajeva's terms do not always completely match Mendlesohn's. Let us reconsider:

I classified *Thursday* as a novel featuring an implied secondary world (\approx intrusive fantasy). As Mendlesohn postulates for this kind of fantasy, it has a 'normalising' ending: the fairies' intrusion into the human world is fought back. To be accurate, however, one would have to classify *Thursday* as both an intrusive and a portal(-quest) fantasy, for *Thursday* goes to Fairyland, albeit not on a quest, and in the end comes back (only the reader does not accompany the traveller on his journey, since the story is told from Bee's point of view). The question, however, of the novel's didactic character, which is ascribed to portal-quest fantasies by Mendlesohn, is difficult to answer. We do not know if *Thursday* has learned anything during his time in Fairyland. We know, however, that Bee has, to a certain extent, emancipated herself from her parents by her decision to stay out the whole night on the bomb site without telling anybody. But she has not left this world. However, one might classify the wasteland as a kind of place that

is set apart from this world and thus also Bee would have taken a trip through a portal, fulfilled her quest of rescuing Thursday, and indeed have returned changed by her experiences.

The Queen of Spells I put into the category of “open secondary world”, thus it would be a portal-quest fantasy according to Mendlesohn. Its ending is typical for portal fantasies, as the human heroes, their task fulfilled, come back to the normal world. But how about the didactic character? It seems that the character traits that enabled Janet to save Tom Linn (self-confidence and endurance) have been typical for her even before she went off to Fairyland. Their importance and value has merely been confirmed and no great change has taken place. Thus maybe not all portal-quest fantasies are necessarily didactic.

The didactic hypothesis, however, certainly holds true for the next novel in question. *The Perilous Gard* involves an open secondary world and is clearly a portal-quest fantasy: the human protagonist vanishes into Fairyland, carries out her mission, returns to the normal world in the end and has been thoroughly changed by her time in the otherworld. But *The Perilous Gard* has elements of intrusive fantasy, too, as the supernatural characters that have meddled in human lives are defeated and their world is destroyed.

For *Fire and Hemlock* the equation of an open secondary world setting with the portal fantasy concept works, too – at least in my opinion. Mendlesohn, however, has placed this novel in the category of “liminal fantasy”, but I think this category stands somehow apart from the others, as it does not make a statement about the world-model but rather about the reality status of the text. Therefore, it seems, a text can be both a liminal fantasy plus any of the three other types and *Fire and Hemlock* could then probably be read as a liminal portal-quest fantasy. The didactic character is present even though Polly learns her quest-lessons partly through growing up in a ‘normal’ human environment and only partly through confrontations with the supernatural Leroy. As indicated in chapter three, however, I was not quite certain if *Fire and Hemlock* can really be called a fantasy about an open secondary world, as the elves there are so much an integral part of the human world and do not really inhabit a different country. But *Fire and Hemlock* also works as an *intrusive fantasy* – Laurel and her crew are defeated in the end – at least for the time being. I therefore would suggest that mixed forms of fantasy are probably not uncommon, even though this might slightly limit the distinguishing power of Mendlesohn’s typology.

One novel where the equation “open secondary world = portal (without quest) fantasy” certainly works is *Thomas the Rhymer*. In fact, I would say this is the only ‘pure’ portal fantasy in my whole corpus, since here no defeat and/or banishment of the otherworldly characters is included. *Winter Rose* is also a portal fantasy – and one with a quest, complete with didactic

background (Rois finds out a lot about herself while in Elfland), but one which again has aspects of intrusive fantasy, with the fairy queen appearing e.g. in Rois's house and being pushed back to her limits in the end.

Tam Lin, on the other hand, is a more complicated case – I called it a fantasy with an implied secondary world since Elfland is never seen. The proposed equation with intrusive fantasy works to a certain extent here, however, the intruders are actually not driven back into their own world but remain at Blackstock: one victim has been freed from their clutches but they will continue their assaults on humanity.²⁷³ Brian Stableford observes in regard to newer kinds of intrusive fantasy:

It is arguable that from the moment the intrusive element appears, the simulacrum [of the 'real' world, i.e. the regular reality system of the text] has already been transformed – and that normality cannot possibly be restored to it, because the possibility of further intrusions can no longer be ruled out. The history of intrusive fantasy clearly exhibits a growing awareness of this argument and its consequences. (2005, liii)

Much the same seems to be true for *An Earthly Knight*. For these two novels, Mendlesohn's assumption that intrusive fantasy is usually not as didactic as portal fantasy seems to work as well: neither Janet Carter nor Jeanette Avenel are greatly changed by their experiences, instead merely their prominent character traits are strengthened.

Finally, both novels by Terry Pratchett are mixed types again, and, strictly speaking, they are a mixture of not only two three of the four types described by Mendlesohn: intrusive, portal and immersive fantasy. They are set in an autonomous, closed secondary world (immersive), another, 'tertiary', world tries to intrude (intrusive), characters have to go into the tertiary world to rescue loved ones at least some of them are changed by their experiences (portal-quest).

To sum up: all types described by Mendlesohn can be found in the ballad retellings, albeit often as mixed forms. The fact that often a blend of intrusive and portal fantasy can be found here is of course caused by the source material. "Tam Lin" is about fighting back the elves. But no actual trip to Elfland is involved, as the elves can be encountered on earth – it is some kind of intrusive fantasy. However, it seemed as if this was not enough for many authors – therefore, in their versions the rescue of the Tam Lin figure involves a trip to Elfland, often characterised by journey-elements borrowed from "Thomas the Rhymer", a typical portal (without quest) fantasy (even though here the postulated change of the protagonist can only be deduced from the versions that let him return as a prophet).

This observation finally brings me to the third reason for the novels' variety: the differing extent to which they use either "Tam Lin" or "Thomas the Rhymer", the two pre-texts on which

²⁷³ *Tam Lin* can probably also be categorised as a work of liminal fantasy according to Mendlesohn, as it takes a considerable amount of narrated time until the heroine (and the readers) become aware of the fact that Blackstock is populated by elves.

the attention of this study was placed. Their focus ranges from merely using the basic plot pattern of fairy abduction (as in Pratchett's fairy novels) to a rather close retelling (with many elaborations, though) of one ballad in particular, as in Kushner's *Thomas the Rhymer*. It is interesting to note that, with one exception, "Tam Lin" is the dominant source for the plot, while the second ballad is used more decoratively, providing details of the queen's outward appearance or about how Elfland can be reached. This constellation is, however, probably not so surprising after all – "Thomas the Rhymer" does not have a real conflict, it is mostly descriptive and not really plot-driven. It does therefore not create much narrative tension, whereas "Tam Lin" provides several conflicts and moreover a climactic resolution. This lack of conflict (or even of closure, as version A and B end rather vaguely, with Thomas apparently still in Elfland) was probably one of the reasons that prompted Ellen Kushner, the author of the one Child #37-centred retelling, to include several other ballads in her novel (including "Tam Lin", though this plays only a minor role).

Therefore, fourthly, the inclusion of additional pretexts of course shapes the retellings as well. Additional pre-texts can be other traditional ballads (often from the Child collection), folktales, fairy tales, or other folk songs. But as far as allusions are concerned, 'folk' literature is not the only source. Literary references range from Homer over Shakespeare to T.S. Eliot and Christopher Fry. Thus, 'high' literature has been incorporated as well as 'low'. In some of the novels (especially *Lords and Ladies* and *The Wee Free Men*) also modern popular culture has been a considerable source of influence.

But the topic of fairy abduction, which was part of folk belief before it became a subject for literature, of course offers itself for the inclusion of yet another type of pre-texts, namely folkloristic accounts. Apart from using a broad range of literary sources, all authors also seem to have more or less exhaustively researched the folkloristic aspects of fairy beliefs. The ballads themselves do not provide very detailed material in regard to the character of the fairies but as the authors were apparently intent on thoroughly grounding their narrations in the old and rich fairy tradition of the British Isles they have obviously used a wealth of secondary sources. However, they often do not just take an element from folklore and incorporate it into their novel just as it is. Rather, they use a certain element of folk belief as a starting point to develop their own original ideas on. One example might be the use of the belief that 'cold iron' is noxious to fairies in *The Perilous Gard*, *Lords and Ladies* and *Fire and Hemlock*.

In *Lords and Ladies*, Terry Pratchett uses this element in a rather unobtrusive, subtle way, by giving his elves green blood. The author's decision to include this detail might, as Leo Breebart remarks, be grounded on the fact that red blood contains haemoglobin, is therefore iron-

based, and, consequently, would be harmful to elves: “Copper-based (green) blood is used by some Earth animals, notably crayfish, so it’s an obvious alternative” (Breebart et al, 2005).

Similarly inconspicuous is Diana Wynne Jones’s use of the idea in *Fire and Hemlock*. Here Charles Lynn, Thomas Lynn’s older brother who had almost been a victim of the fairy queen but managed to strike a deal with her to be exchanged for his little brother, is hiding under an assumed name in a small town as the owner of an ironmonger’s shop. Maybe the choice of business is merely coincidence but, given the author’s usual attention to detail, it could just as well also be another use of the ‘iron protects against fairies’-motif (even if the iron here is only verbally present, in the shop’s title).

Quite a different and more obvious use of the motif is made by Elizabeth Marie Pope in *The Perilous Gard*. Here Kate is given an iron cross as a present by a superstitious village woman to protect her from the fairies. The cross does indeed protect her but not because of any magic effect of iron on elves – it does not have one, apparently, at least it does not prevent the fairies from abducting Kate. But later one of the bars of the poorly made cross comes off when Kate clutches it tightly and the pain from the wound prevents her from falling victim to the fairy queen’s attempt to hypnotise her.

As these examples show, all three authors have taken an element of traditional belief and transformed it imaginatively to suit the internal logic of their particular novels. There are of course many more examples for this (the fairy court as a college department in *Tam Lin*, the humorous take on naming magic in *The Wee Free Men*, etc.) and one might almost say that these new interpretations of traditional elements of fairy lore are a constitutive element of almost all the adaptations examined here.

To conclude this reconsideration of the novels’ variety let me briefly sum up my findings: due to a number of reasons the same source material has produced a range of diverse outcomes, or, to use the terminology suggested by J. Stephenson and R. MacCallum: the authors’ varying mix of the strategies of *elaboration* and *combination* (cf. introduction-chapter) results in very different products. As discussed in chapter three, even genre boundaries are breached, if one applies the definitional model of Todorov/Durst. According to this model, one might place the larger part of the texts in the realm of ‘marvellous’ literature. Another, smaller part (actually only *The Perilous Gard* and *Winter Rose*) would have to be placed in the realm of ‘fantastic’ literature in its narrow sense since in these novels the hesitation about the intrusion of a different reality system is never conclusively resolved.

So these are some of the reasons for differences among the ballad retellings examined in this study. But what are the common traits? After all, they do tell essentially the same story (or

stories). Common traits mainly seem to lie in the basic plot pattern and the character constellation, including the dynamics resulting from them: on the one side are the humans (usually one male and one female are treated as central characters, the exception here is probably *Lords and Ladies* with its three female main characters). They are supported by a range of (foster-) parents, siblings, friends, classmates, neighbours etc. On the other side are the elves, among whom usually a female leader is singled out, sometimes accompanied by a male consort and often supported by a whole court of other elves. This produces some kind of triangular constellation from which much of the novels' narrative tension is derived.

Beautiful, cold and cruel: the elves

The most exotic part of this character constellation are certainly the elves – and in their portrayal a great many similarities can be found. What are the reasons for this? First of all, the ballads provide some decisive clues in regard to appearance and character (e.g. beauty, green clothing, love of music, sexual interest in humans, willingness to sacrifice a human rather than an elf for the teind, ability to do magic). But it also seems as if the additional folkloristic material used by the authors points, despite its great inter-regional variety, at certain typical traits which constitute 'elvishness' and which the novels aim to recreate (longevity or immortality, lack of feelings, feudalistic structures, wealth, etc.).

There are, however, also aspects which do not seem part of the ballad(s) and neither part of well-known folkloristic sources – where do those come from? Here one might take into account the work of other fantasy authors, such as for instance J.R.R. Tolkien or C.S. Lewis. The authors use these in different, often contrary ways. They may incorporate ideas into their work, for example Fairyland as a land of eternal winter, possibly inspired by Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (or maybe also by Oscar Wilde's short-story "The Selfish Giant"). But they may also work consciously against them – the best example here would be the idea of noble-hearted elves created by Tolkien and satirised by Pratchett. Finally, it might also be possible that the authors (as the publication dates of their ballad novelisations span the not inconsiderable period of 35 years) have influenced each other, for example in regard to the prevailing tendency to give their elves the skill of psychological manipulation. Another example might be the spell-breaking in the final scene – here Patricia McKillip (1996) could have been influenced by Diana Wynne Jones (1984) since both have opted for 'letting go' instead of 'holding on' as the final solution.

Since the depiction of the elves constitutes one of the core interests of this study, I would like to recapitulate the most important similarities and exceptions to common trends and compare them to the typical characteristics of fairies as presented in chapters two and four. I will moreover point out how the similarities in the novels converge on a number of central thematic issues.

First of all – what kind of fairies or elves are presented in the novels, how do they correspond to the fairy typology presented in chapter two. In keeping with the ballad models most of the novels limit themselves to the depiction of ‘heroic fairies’, humanoid creatures living socially in aristocratically organised societies. There are only few exceptions – in *Thomas the Rhymer* some of the elves are non-anthropomorphic, having e.g. wings or antlers or being of dwarfish stature, in *Lords and Ladies* the elf-king has the upper body of a man and the legs and antlers of a stag. Furthermore, the Nac Mac Feegles in *The Wee Free Men* are not heroic fairies but seem to be a mixture of pixies, gnomes and dwarfs, similarly as Billy Blin (a social fairy of the hobgoblin kind according to K. Briggs (1976, 23)) in *The Queen of Spells* is presented as a dwarfish creature.

Where do the elves come from? Do the novels make any assumptions as regards their origin – are they fallen angels, dwindled gods, spirits of the dead or a separate life form? Here the picture is also fairly uniform, with nevertheless a few debatable points. In most of the novels the fairies are – at least this seems to be tacitly assumed – a separate form of life, a species of their own. It is nowhere stated that they are fallen angels, yet the fact that they have to pay a teind to the devil (or some kind of demonic power) in *The Queen of Spells* and *Tam Lin* indicates that at least here they are somehow in between heaven and hell. In *The Perilous Gard*, they are presented as (apparently human) worshippers of old Pagan gods, at least Kate tries to explain their presence by this theory, which closely resembles a body of theory used by Victorian folklorists. The same vagueness applies for the association of fairies and the dead. Only in one case a connection between the fairies and the dead is explicitly mentioned: the Feegles in *The Wee Free Men* claim that they *are* dead and that the discworld is their heaven. In a few of the other novels the connection between the fairies and the deceased is at least alluded to: in *Winter Rose* human ghosts dwell among the elves and the fairy host comes to “carry away the dying” (44). Similarly, in *Thomas the Rhymer*, long-dead human lovers (who are apparently not ghosts, at least they are never called thus) dwell in Fairyland as well as human ghosts in the form of animals. The Guardian in *The Perilous Gard* seems to be some kind of living corpse, even though this is hinted at only at the very end of the book and never definitely confirmed, while Mr. LaMort in *The Queen of Spells* appears at first like a personification of Death but then turns

out to be merely a kind of skeletally thin circus artist. The fact that the connection of the fairies and the dead is toned down so much (or treated humorously as in *The Wee Free Men*) might be due to the fact that many of the novels are aimed at younger readers. Maybe another reason is the tendency that the heroic fairies of tradition are usually less strongly connected to the dead than many other kinds of fairies such as pixies, banshees, or knockers.²⁷⁴

Another aspect which is treated almost identically in the different adaptations is the fairies' preference for the colour green for which the authors could have taken both the description of the fairy in "Thomas Rhymer" and various accounts from folklore as models. A side-aspect of this – which is handled differently by the different authors – is the suitability of green clothing for humans. Polly Whittaker in *Fire and Hemlock* avoids it 'for superstitious reasons' but she is apparently the only character thus inclined. Janet Carter in *Tam Lin* wears green all the time. Janet Carter in *The Queen of Spells* also owns a much-loved green dress and in *Winter Rose*, Rois is instantly recognisable to Corbet Lynn because of her green cloak, Kate in *The Perilous Gard* is even mistaken for a fairy once because of her green cloak, even superstitious Elspeth in *Thomas the Rhymer* accepts green ribbons as a courting gift from Thomas. It seems, therefore, that most novels use the idea of green as the favourite fairy colour (followed by red) but also follow the model of Janet in "Tam Lin" in making their heroines wear green clothes, even though this contradicts the widespread superstition that green clothes are unlucky because they might arouse the fairies' jealousy. Most of the characters in the novels (apart from Polly, who, however, does not seem to be very clear about it either) do not seem aware that wearing green is traditionally considered a provocation to the fairies, however, it might be that the authors have chosen to make their protagonists wear green to foreshadow their future involvement with the world of elves.

The 'greenness' characterising the fairies in the ballad-adaptations, however, does not necessarily make them especially ecologically inclined creatures, in contrast to many other literary fairies as they are presented especially from the nineteenth century onwards. The topic of ecology (i.e., elves as symbols for unspoiled nature) is probably most prominent in *Winter Rose*, where Fairyland is equated with the wild and unexplored depths of the forest. Similarly, though less prominently stated, in *An Earthly Knight* the forest is the realm of the fairies. The topic is also touched on in *Lords and Ladies*, where the elf-queen wants the kingdom of Lancre to stay uncultivated while Granny Weatherwax argues that the land loves to be domesticated because

²⁷⁴ K. Briggs observes that "one of the various origins ascribed to the Pixies and Piskies all over the West Country is that they are the souls of unchristened children" (1976, 330). A Banshee is characterised by Briggs as "an Irish death spirit" (ibid. 14) and thought to announce deaths in the family while the so-called knockers are spirits of the Cornish tin mines and were "thought to be the ghosts of Jews who worked in the mines" (ibid., 254).

human cultivation gives it an identity. Another hint at the elf-nature-connection occurs in *The Perilous Gard*, where the Lady begs Kate to save the elves' sacred tree, which Geoffrey Heron (as a representative of economic and intellectual progress) wants to cut down. In other novels, however, the elves are rather civilised or even urbanised (*Fire and Hemlock*, *Tam Lin*, *Thomas the Rhymer*), while no definite statement can be made about the relationship between elves and nature in *Thursday* and *The Queen of Spells*.

But no matter if close to nature or urban, almost all the elves in the novels are still representatives of the 'good old days' in so far as they live in a rather old-fashioned, feudalistic society-system. True to the ballad model and folk tradition, almost all ballad adaptations (with the exception of *Thursday*, where the fairies are only mentioned as a collective) feature a fairy queen and her court, even those adaptations that place the action in a twentieth century setting. In *Fire and Hemlock* the elves are members of the British upper class, very rich, cultured, and moving in exclusive circles. In *Tam Lin* the author places the elfin court in a setting which is probably as feudalistic as it can get in the democratic USA: a university (though not a very conservative one), where the elf-queen doubles as head of the Classics department, ruling somewhat despotically over her court made up of students and teaching staff. In contrast to renderings by Tolkien and others, however, the aristocratic microcosm of the elves is mostly not portrayed favourably. The world of humans is in the end usually the better world, even if it is not perfect and sometimes not even very democratic either. The "corrupt and despicable" (*Tam Lin* 356) Classics department in *Tam Lin* is contrasted with the relatively harmonious world of the rest of the college. The illusionary country of the elf-queen in *Winter Rose* is juxtaposed with Rois's peaceful rural world. The tyrannical rule of the elf queen in *Lords and Ladies* is compared unfavourably with the quasi-democracy represented by King Verence. *The Perilous Gard*, however, presents the austere community of fairies as not very attractive but also shows the chances and dangers inherent in being a member of the court of a human queen, namely despotic Queen Mary Tudor. *Thomas the Rhymer* also includes a rather balanced depiction since both the elfin court and the human court are ruled by intricate codes of behaviour and Thomas, even though he is a favourite of the respective rulers, is at a precarious position at both of them.

The elf-queens who rule over the otherworldly courts may sometimes be tyrants (*Winter Rose*, *Lords and Ladies*, *The Wee Free Men*, etc.), in other novels they are more gentle rulers (*Thomas the Rhymer* or *The Perilous Gard*) but they are invariably presented as absolute monarchs, at least there is no mention of any kind of elf-council or similar which the queen could be answerable to. As there is no mention of an elf-king in the ballads, most of the novels also accordingly present the elf-queen without a consort. Only *Fire and Hemlock* has Morton

Leroy as Laurel's husband, *Lords and Ladies* features 'the Horned One' as king of the elves and in *The Wee Free Men* an elf-king (now absent from Elfland due to marital discord) is mentioned. *The Perilous Gard* features the mysterious Guardian of the Well, who is, however, never treated as a ruler and consort of the Lady but rather presented as something like a high-priest, who conducts the religious ceremonies of the fairy community together with the Lady. But even in those novels where the elf-queen has a companion, she seems to be the greater power, the real ruler, or at least the more active part of the couple, as in *Lords and Ladies*. This is quite in keeping with the presentation of powerful fairy ladies in medieval romances and Romantic poetry and probably reflects the liking of modern female fantasy authors for strong female characters. The fact that the self-confident elf-queens are usually the villains of the story, however, appears slightly incongruous in this context – but this issue shall be discussed in more detail later on.

The traditional idea that an encounter with the fairies can help a human towards greater wealth and social ascent is not mentioned at all in the novels – unless one counts the gift of prophecy in Ellen Kushner's *Thomas the Rhymer*. But as the novel tells in some detail, this is at first more a burden than a blessing for Thomas and only by and by he learns how to use it and how to gain wealth through it. The relative unimportance of this aspect that is rather popular in folklore is probably due to the fact that the story structure of "Tam Lin", the dominant force in shaping the plots of the adaptations, does not intend the hero to return to the human world (no matter if with or without elvish blessings) at all.

The fact that the elves in "Tam Lin" intend to murder Tam (or at least allow to let him be killed by the devil) is, I think, one of the most important aspects that influences the portrayal of the elves in the adaptations and makes them different from many other elves in literature. The elves of the ballad adaptations are very often the villains of the story. This critical depiction is a rather far cry from the idealised elves in contemporary heroic fantasy and the cute fairies or benign fairy godmothers found in much children's literature from the nineteenth century onwards. In their moral ambivalence or even malignity, the elves in the novels examined here are thus closer to folklore than many literary elves have ever been.

The elves depicted in the ballad adaptations are, at best, alien and impossible to understand, they are "Linear A", as Thomas in *Tam Lin* puts it: "They're not evil; even that is comprehensible; people can be evil. They're foreign. They're like Linear A. They look like they ought to mean something but you can't tell what it is" (434). Such a critical (but still somehow balanced) portrayal can be found in *Tam Lin*, *Thomas the Rhymer*, *The Perilous Gard* and *The*

Queen of Spells. Here the elves are strange and often cruel but in their own way also wise and at times even friendly or loving towards humans.

At their worst, however, the elves are downright villainous and evil and no mitigating positive aspects are mentioned. This is especially the case in Pratchett's novels, but also in *Fire and Hemlock*, *Winter Rose*, and *An Earthly Knight*. In these novels the elf-queens are simply evil and their courtiers, in so far as they are mentioned, either silently accept this or even take part in the various cruelties (e.g. the marauding elf-knights in *Lords and Ladies* or the mysterious riders in *Winter Rose* who taunt Rois or Morton Leroy in *Fire and Hemlock* who tries to kill Polly to prevent her from freeing Thomas Lynn).

Sometimes the elves are physically brutal, as in *Lords and Ladies*, but more often their violence is psychological. One of the worst examples here is the elf-queen in *Winter Rose*, who keeps the ghost of Rois's mother eternally and in vain waiting for her fairy lover, lets Corbet's father die in the human world (which he hates), prevents Corbet (who craves for it) from returning there and makes Rois doubt her own humanity. One central skill of the malevolent elves which can be found across most of the adaptations is their talent to influence the human mind – as Terry Pratchett puts it: “the minds of people was where elves were strong” (*Lords and Ladies*, 200). Laurel in *Fire and Hemlock*, the Guardian in *The Perilous Gard* and the fairy queens in Pratchett's novels and in *Winter Rose* – they all are able to induce a feeling of inferiority in their human victims (making them aware of their faults and imperfections) and to use the humans' ensuing embarrassment and dejectedness for their own ends. And even in *Thomas the Rhymer*, where the elf-queen is probably not intending to do Thomas any harm, the hero, faced with the queen's court for the first time, has the feeling that he is an inferior creature compared to all the beautiful, ethereal elves. In *Tam Lin* the feeling of inferiority is also mentioned: Janet feels instantly suspicious of Melinda Wolfe but then checks herself, wondering if she is prejudiced because “Wolfe made her feel grubby” (22).²⁷⁵ There is no model for this behaviour of the elf-queens in the ballads and the idea that the elves use attacks on human self-assurance as weapons is not known to me from folkloristic models either. It could, however, be derived from the image created of heroic fairies in folklore and literature which seems to place them on a level definitely higher than mere mortals. Probably J.R.R. Tolkien's portrayal of haughty, aloof elves has also something to answer for here. In their tendency to use mind-reading and mind-bending as techniques for manipulating humans, the elves of the ballad adaptations are probably similar to another fantastic species, namely vampires. These, however, also only

²⁷⁵ With regard to Melinda Wolfe, however, it is never quite clear if she is really an elf or merely an abducted human who has acquired some of the skills of the elves.

acquired their psychic powers in the nineteenth century (with the help of Victorian novelists) and had not been equipped with them in their more folkloristic version either (see chapter two).

Another common issue which could have been inspired both by Tolkien and by the ballads and other traditional material alike is the outward appearance of the elves. They may differ a little or a lot in other respects – in this all the ballad adaptations seem to be of the same opinion: elves are beautiful. Especially the elf-queen is invariably described as an extraordinarily attractive woman, who is mostly tall, slender, dark-haired, and pale, with blue or green eyes and exquisitely cut features. Significantly, however, the figure for identification is usually not the stunning elf-queen but the usually rather ordinary-looking human heroine, indicating that ‘inner values’ are apparently favoured over mere outward appearance by the authors.²⁷⁶

It is also significant and in keeping with the authors’ apparent suspicion of too much beauty that the elves’ good looks are often of a somewhat oscillating quality: they are shape-shifters, especially in Terry Pratchett’s novels, but to some degree also in *Fire and Hemlock* and *Thomas the Rhymer*. It seems that the authors thereby want to draw attention to the fact that facades can be deceptive and the instability of elvish beauty becomes thus also an indication of the villainous nature that usually lies behind it. In other words: they may appear glorious at first but at closer inspection give themselves (and their rotten moral core) away. In *Lords and Ladies* for instance the attractiveness of the elves is marred by the fact that the elf warriors smell terribly and that they moreover lose their good looks when they cannot sustain their glamour any more, for example when they are asleep, unconscious or confused. The elves in *Lords and Ladies* and also *The Wee Free Men* are, it seems, merely a sort of living screen, able to project the beauty ideals (which they read in the minds of humans) onto their own actually rather unremarkable or even ugly (“foxy” *Lords and Ladies*, 155) faces.

In other adaptations, the elves do not lose their beauty but their description is often coupled with attributes of coldness and hardness, so that they remind the human protagonists of ice or stone statues (e.g. in *The Perilous Gard*, *Tam Lin*, *Winter Rose*, *Fire and Hemlock*), which subtracts from their dazzling appearance. The association with cold, ice, winter and stone is also used in a wider context in several novels, where the whole of Elfland is presented as a winter country (*The Wee Free Men*, *Lords and Ladies*, and to some extent *Winter Rose*) or a labyrinth of rock-caves (*The Perilous Gard*). Connected to their coldness and hardness is usually the motif that the elves or Elfland are in some way incomplete, lacking life, reality or creativity, which is

²⁷⁶ Exceptions to this tendency are *Fire and Hemlock* and *Thomas the Rhymer*, whose human heroines are described as pretty or handsome.

another of the crucial issues common to almost all ballad adaptations (and one not found in this form in the ballad models).

Elfland itself, if it is described as a separate world, is in most cases an incomplete, cold country where either (almost) nothing grows and lives (*Lords and Ladies*, *The Wee Free Men*, *The Perilous Gard*) or as a green country but one where animal life is missing (*Thomas the Rhymer*). An exception here would be Ipcar's *Queen of Spells* where Elfland is described as the "Green World" because it is full of plant life, and which is also otherwise a country of great beauty.²⁷⁷ This tendency to make Elfland a barren country contrasts with the descriptions of Elfland found in the Child ballads which imply that Elfland is a kind of paradise: "Once travellers, reluctant or otherwise, have reached Elfland, they invariably find it to be a land of stunning beauty and compelling mystique: a sort of subterranean Elysium" (Henderson 2000, 60). It seems that in this respect most of the modern authors have drawn from other sources than the ballads, for instance folkloristic accounts or literary fantasies such as Andrew Lang's *Gold of Fairnilee*, where Elfland is just a shadowy echo of the world of humans. Sometimes, in the novels, it assumes the shape of a beautiful summer world, such as in *Winter Rose* or *The Wee Free Men*, however, this usually turns out to be merely another instance of glamour, hiding the land of eternal winter beneath it.

Because of the barren nature of their land, the elves in *The Perilous Gard* depend on supplies of food they buy from the human world, while in *The Wee Free Men* they regularly raid other worlds for food and captives. In *Thomas the Rhymer*, Elfland seems self-sustaining but nevertheless all elves must come to the human world now and then if they want to go on living, while the elves in *Fire and Hemlock* require human sacrifices to sustain the life force of their rulers. This dependence on humans or the human world is an aspect also frequently found in folklore.²⁷⁸ Here elves often also require human assistance, even though the focus in folklore is usually on children and childcare – due to their own low fertility (and apparent lack of skills in midwifery) elves steal human babies and abduct human midwives and wet-nurses.²⁷⁹ The second kind of humans especially sought after by the elves in folklore are musicians and this is again part of some of the ballad adaptations (usually those that use elements from "Thomas the Rhymer", such as *Thomas the Rhymer*, *Thursday*, *Tam Lin*, *Fire and Hemlock*, *The Perilous*

²⁷⁷ Nothing is said about the fauna of the Green World – however, in contrast to *Thomas the Rhymer*, it is never stated that it is nonexistent.

²⁷⁸ For William Butler Yeats this dependency is mutual: elves need humans to do physical actions – while men seek the wisdom of the elves for their own spiritual growth (cited in Hirsch 1986). In folklore this does not seem to be a popular motif, rather, humans who enter into dealings with the fairies usually hope for material compensation.

²⁷⁹ In some of the adaptations, children are abducted, too: Cecily in *The Perilous Gard*, Wentworth in *The Wee Free Men* and young Tom Linn in *The Queen of Spells*.

Gard). But it is not always clear if the elves steal human musicians because they consider their own music inferior or merely because they want to enlarge their own repertoire (in *The Wee Free Men* though, the case is clear: elves cannot make music at all, which adds to their unfavourable portrayal).²⁸⁰

Surveying what was said in the preceding paragraphs, the central tenet expressed by all these metaphors of coldness, stoniness and barrenness mentioned above seems to revolve around elvish immortality vs. human mortality. While immortality may at first glance appear desirable, all authors manage to show the downsides of the elves' nature and eventually present their mortal heroes and heroines as superior to the elves – superior because of their very mortality, transitoriness and dependence on time. It seems that all authors associate the never-ending or at least supernaturally long life of the elves with stasis and staleness and contrast it with the short, difficult, trivial but so much more intense and rewarding life of their human protagonists.²⁸¹

On the whole it seems as if their longevity or immortality is both the greatest strength and weakness of the elves. On the one hand, it is almost impossible to defeat them once and for all. In almost all adaptations the escape of the male protagonist is presented as one of the few exceptions in a long line of human sacrifices or human additions to the elfin court. It is implied that the circle is by no means broken and that the elves will be back sooner or later, only in *The Perilous Gard* they seem to be vanquished for all times. On the other hand, the immutability implied in their immortality leads to a certain mental inflexibility among the elves, which is very often the decisive weak spot that eventually allows the human heroines to steal back their lovers, friends or brothers from the elf-queens. Their ability to learn and to sometimes travel painful and unusual paths is mostly what enables the girl-heroines to overcome the enchantments of the fairy queens. Polly and Rois are willing to release the men they love, in Kate's case it is her suspicion of grand and beautiful things that saves Christopher, while Granny Weatherwax/Magrat and Tiffany defeat their elf-queens by trusting in their own flawed but adaptive personalities. The elf-queens are often too sure of themselves and too used to success and so they underestimate their human opponents. Here a typical fairy tale motif seems to be at work: the humble but clever hero

²⁸⁰ This constitutes one of the differences between *Lords and Ladies* and *The Wee Free Men*: In the former William the gonnagle claims that "fairies can't make music" (185) while in *Lords and Ladies* they sing quite well: "It was, without doubt, the most beautiful sound Magrat had ever heard" (247).

²⁸¹ It is interesting how this idea – a never-ending (or at least very long) life meaning a less intense life – is echoed in much of folklore and fairy literature. One of the few writers to oppose this idea is C.S. Lewis, who has described the heroic fairies in the following terms: "Their life is, in one sense, *more* 'natural'—stronger, more reckless, less inhibited, more triumphantly and impenitently passionate—than ours. They are liberated from the beast's perpetual slavery to nutrition, self-protection and procreation, and also from the responsibilities, shames, scruples, and melancholy of Man" (1964, 134).

defeats the arrogant (supernatural) villain who has abandoned caution because he (or she) misjudges the unassuming hero's strength and cunning.

To sum up the impressions gathered by analysing the novels of my corpus I think one topic comes across as central: the seeming perfection of the elves is contrasted with the imperfection of humans, especially the human heroines of the novels. Interestingly, however, and contrary to much of contemporary formula fantasy fiction, in spite of all their superiority the elves do not carry off the price in the novels analysed here. Their beauty, longevity/immortality and superior skills in most areas are juxtaposed with the clumsiness, ordinariness, lack of charm and sometimes also lack of courage in their human opponents and nevertheless in the end in almost all adaptations the human girl emerges from the combat as the winner (maybe with the exception of Elspeth, who has to let Thomas go in the very end).

The reason for this is probably that most of the authors are writing for an audience of young adults, presumably largely made up by female readers and thus the figure for identification will be the girl-hero. This leads me to next point in my discussion – the depiction of the Janet-character in the ballad adaptations.

The spunky heroine: the Janet-figure

No matter if called Janet or Jenny, Kate, Rois, Tiffany, Polly or Bee – the Janet-character in the ballad-adaptations is usually a headstrong, self-confident girl, conforming largely to the prototype supplied by Child #39. As has been pointed out in preceding chapters, this – the “spunky heroine” (Greenlee 2001, 75) – is probably one of the main reasons for “Tam Lin's” popularity among modern authors. In addition to spunkiness, however, and probably in order to make their characters more interesting and credible, most authors have chosen to equip their Janet-characters with some kind of flaw or unfavourable environmental condition which sets them apart from their peers. Therefore the Janet-figure is often either clumsy or tomboyish or too clever for her age, to name just a few flaws. This idea of starting out with an imperfect hero of course opens the up the possibility to make the novel not only one of adventure but also one of development, as the different flaws will either be purged out by the character's time in Elfland or acknowledged and accepted by her at the end of the novel. Thus one could probably say that in their characterisation of the Janet-figure as adventurous and self-assured, the authors stay relatively close to the ballad but combine this ballad motif with a character-layout typical for a Bildungsroman.

It is, however, remarkable how liberally most authors treat two important plot elements closely connected to Janet, namely the elements of interdiction and transgression. Janet is (at least in some versions of the ballad) warned against going to Carterhaugh but she disregards this interdiction. Moreover, she has sex with Tam Lin, even though she is not married to him yet, which is, given the moral codes prevalent at the time of the ballad's origin, clearly a transgression of social rules.

Now, curiously enough, only about half of the adaptations, no matter what century they are set in, keep the interdiction and still fewer the transgression, namely the sexual relationship between Janet and Tam. In fact, the only novels that include the sexual transgression and the ensuing pregnancy are *The Queen of Spells*, *Tam Lin*, *An Earthly Knight* (and to a certain extent also *Thursday*, even though here events are described relatively vaguely and there is probably no actual sexual contact – but Bee's behaviour is perceived as a transgression by herself). This omission of this central plot element is an old phenomenon. As Martha Hixon and John Stephens/Robyn MacCallum observe, the retellings for children usually omit this aspect as well, e.g. the “ameliorated versions” (Stephens and MacCallum 1998, 222) of Joseph Jacobs (1894), Ruth Manning-Sanders (1959), Rosemary Minard (1975), Ethel Johnson Phelps (1978), Alison Lurie (1980) and Gordon Jarvie (1992). The reason for this coyness, Hixon remarks, probably “lies within the constraints of what has been considered morally acceptable reading for children, strictures that held sway throughout much of the twentieth century: strong-minded and independent female characters are acceptable, but pregnant ones are not, especially not ones that have conceived out of wedlock” (2004, 79).

It is, however, curious that two of the novels that *do* include Janet's pregnancy are young adult novels, while of the three adult novels that centre on Child #39 (*Winter Rose*, *Lords and Ladies*, *Tam Lin*) only one (*Tam Lin*) includes this element. Instead, the other two adult novels use a ‘trick’ also employed by some of the adaptations for younger readers (*The Perilous Gard*, *Fire and Hemlock*, probably *Thursday*): the (probable) sexual relationship between the Janet and the Tam character is situated after the end of the novel. *Fire and Hemlock* even lets Polly tell the story in retrospect and “this attempt to retrieve lost memories is narratively functional, and conveniently reunites Polly and Tom when she is old enough for an adult relationship” (Stephens and MacCallum 1998, 225).

But what is the reason for the omission in the adult novels? Could it be that a pregnant heroine is just not very attractive for a story of romance and adventure? Did the authors want to idealise the motivation of the Janet-figure, who now mostly rescues her male companion out of

love and not because she urgently needs a father for her child?²⁸² Hixon assumes that this wish for idealisation is the reason for the change in many adaptations, which suggests that maybe the retellings are more conservative in character than they may appear at first glance. Stephens and MacCallum observe how retellings that keep the interdiction and pregnancy element can question the social foundations of the taboos imposed on Janet (i.e., the patriarchal control of female sexuality) but it seems that most of the adaptations are not overly interested in doing so. Dean's *Tam Lin*, one of the few to keep the transgression, even handles this question really harmoniously, since Janet's parents both readily offer to help her with the prospective grandchild and to take care of it if Janet wants to go to graduate school. If there is a critique of patriarchal (or parental) control involved at all, it is in those novels where the heroine feels powerless because she is a (female) child or teenager, who has no sovereignty over her own life, for example in *The Perilous Gard*, *Fire and Hemlock* and *An Earthly Knight*.

Another issue of transgression also seldom mentioned in the novels (and actually only in those where the pregnancy-plot is kept) is the dispute between Janet and Tam about Carterhaugh and its surrounding lands. In the ballad Tam reprimands Janet for trespassing on his land and Janet claims that the land is actually her own, given to her by her father. This dispute is found in *An Earthly Knight*, where Jeanette's father has taken over the land of the Lynns' after Tam's parents have died and where the ruined hall of Carterhaugh is promised to her as a dowry. Similarly, in *The Queen of Spells*, Janet's father has bought the old Carter farm and surrounding lands after the death of Tom's grandparents and promised them to Janet as a wedding present. Three other novels where land plays a role are *Winter Rose*, *Lords and Ladies* and *The Wee Free Men*. But in *Winter Rose* the land and Lynn Hall are indubitably Corbet's – the dispute here may be between him and the wood (and thus the fairy queen) but definitely not between him and Rois – who does trespass on his lands but Corbet does not mind. Likewise, in *Lords and Ladies* the dispute about the land is between the elves and the king, or, respectively, the whole population of Lancre. The same is true for *The Wee Free Men*, where the elf-queen wants to invade the country and Tiffany, who identifies with the Chalk, defends it.

The reasons for this change or omission are hard to make out. In some cases (*Fire and Hemlock*, *Thursday*, *Tam Lin*) a quarrel about land would probably just not have fitted into a twentieth century background. In other cases the distance to the ballad (*Lords and Ladies*, *The*

²⁸² In this respect, the ballad itself is a bit ambiguous: Of course Janet desperately needs a husband, which makes her rescue of Tam a rather pragmatic deed. On the other hand, some versions suggest that she could have married one of her father's knights in order to secure her respectability. If she had done so, she would have saved herself at lot of effort. But she has apparently set her mind on Tam Lin, and in many versions also praises him before others, therefore something like romantic love seems to be involved after all.

Wee Free Men) is generally relatively high, only the basic plot pattern has been taken over (or, as in *Thomas the Rhymer*, Child #39 is only a minor influence). Which leaves *Winter Rose* and *The Perilous Gard* as novels that are both set in a more or less rural past where the ownership of land was definitely an issue. But apparently this topic did not fit the narrative aims of the authors and so they made use of their artistic licence and omitted or changed this motif.

The abducted boy: the Tam/Thomas-figure

While there is only one model for the female human character (Janet from “Tam Lin”) there are actually two possible models for the male part, namely Tam Lin and Thomas the Rhymer, in most of the ballad adaptations. It is interesting how differently the various retellings handle this issue. There is one group where the main male character is a mixture of Tam and Thomas. This applies to Thomas Lynn in *Fire and Hemlock*, Thursday in *Thursday*, and Tom Linn in *The Queen of Spells*, who are all musicians captured by the fairy queen and rescued by girls. In most others the roles are divided among different characters (e.g. Christopher and Randal in *The Perilous Gard*, and Thomas Lane and Nick/Robin in *Tam Lin*). In a third group no character can be found that could be called a Thomas Rhymer figure (*The Wee Free Men*, *Winter Rose*, *Lords and Ladies*, *An Earthly Knight*) and there is of course one novel, where the character is Thomas the Rhymer and has only very slight traces of a Tam Lin about him.

The male protagonists of the ballad adaptations are almost all similar to the ballad model in that they are more passive than the Janet-figure, an impression which is strengthened by the fact that most of the novels (except *Thomas the Rhymer* and *Lords and Ladies*) are exclusively told from the point of view of the female protagonist.

The men and boys of the adaptations are different from the ballad model because they are hardly ever seducers (the closest to the ballad is Tom Linn in *The Queen of Spells*, while in *Tam Lin*, *An Earthly Knight* (and *Thursday*) the Janet-character takes the lead in the seduction-scene), a fact which makes the male heroes of the ballad adaptations even more passive but also more morally virtuous.²⁸³ There are however, possibilities for the men to be active in other ways, namely by trying to free others (*The Perilous Gard*) or themselves (*Fire and Hemlock*, *Winter Rose*, *An Earthly Knight*, partly *Tam Lin*) from their captivity and by seeking to enlist the Janet-figure’s help for their undertaking. In order to make the Janet-figure help them, however, the Tam-character sometimes has to behave in a morally questionable way, e.g. Thomas Lynn who uses Polly’s friendship without her knowledge and Corbet Lynn who uses Rois’s sympathy even

²⁸³ Admittedly, Corbet Lynn in *Winter Rose* has set his heart on Laurel, the heroine’s sister, and has apparently no qualms about estranging her from her fiancé, so he is not really virtuous after all.

though he merely likes her but loves her sister. However, in contrast to Tam in the ballad, who does not seem to have any qualms about his doings, those characters are aware that they are moving close to moral boundaries and towards the end claim that they regret their actions. Similarly, Thomas Lane, one of the few Thomas-figures who actually gets his Janet with child, is plagued by his conscience because in Dean's *Tam Lin* the pregnancy of the girlfriend is one of the prerequisites for the rescue to work. But Thomas knows how other girls have reacted when they learned that they had been thus used by their lovers and has decided not to try this option. He does, however, try to influence certain 'environmental conditions' (spending a lot of time with Janet, seeing particular stage plays) that might induce Janet to go to bed with him. When she eventually does just this he takes her to a place where he knows that her contraceptive pills will probably not work. He has thus found a way to provide himself with a pregnant girlfriend without actively seducing his Janet. But as the chances for this plan to work are actually not very high, it seems that he would also have quietly accepted his death and Janet's willingness to rescue him is apparently a joyous surprise but not something he has really struggled for very hard, which makes him appear a rather fatalistic figure after all.

The character layout of the central figures both in Child #39 and the adaptations thus results in a sort of reversal of the 'damsel in distress'-scheme, for in the "Tam Lin"-stories the passive male has to be rescued by the active female, which, as the 'bad guy' in these novels is also always female, leads to the (at least in fantasy literature) slightly unusual climactic situation of a showdown between two women.

Woman against woman

Interestingly, this – the central conflict being carried out by two women – is an aspect that the authors have not changed, even though they are otherwise not averse to considerably altering the material of the ballads, as the common omission of the pregnancy-element shows. What could be the reasons for this? In the following section I want to discuss several hypotheses concerning this phenomenon.

Certainly, the main model, "Tam Lin", features a demonic woman as the central initiator of the ballad's action. In chapter five I have indicated possible reasons for her depiction as a demon, the most important being probably the split image of women into evil temptress (fairy queen) and good mother-figure (Janet) which has pervaded much of occidental fiction since the advent of Christianity. But these considerations concern the centuries-old original. What about the modern retellings? The authors could just as well have incorporated a fairy queen who

eventually takes pity on Tam as the probable teind and takes him back to the human world – there is even source material that provides this option: the romance of “Thomas of Erceldoune”. By doing so, they would of course have deprived themselves of the final climactic scene. But the teind could just as well have been exacted from a male fairy ruler. An elf-king could have chosen Tam as the sacrifice and thus there would have been no necessity for a battle between two women, which can easily come across as a kind of cat-fight with all its negative implications. So why does the elf-villain not undergo a sex-change?

One reason could be that the authors of the ballad adaptations are just not as innovative as they seem. They may wish for a strong female protagonist (Janet) but a woman who has almost unlimited power over death and life, who can fulfil all her personal desires by magic and who is willing to sacrifice a former lover if the occasion calls for it, is apparently suspicious and must therefore be condemned. It might be useful here to recall Bea Lundt’s observations on the portrayal of Melusina and related figures from Fairyland as it developed over several centuries (cf. chapter four). Lundt assumes that the changing presentation of Melusina and others – from the generous queen of Fairyland (as in the Breton lais from the twelfth century) to the demon from hell who brings destruction to her lovers (e.g. in *Melusine* by Thüring von Ringoltingen in the fifteenth century) – is connected to the changing perception of gender relations. According to Lundt, the stories where fairy women are portrayed favourably served as a kind of thought-experiment, portraying an equality of man and woman that was in reality not possible during that time. On the other hand, the stories where Melusina is portrayed as a demon are read as expressions of male fears of female domination that, Lundt claims, were rising throughout the thirteenth to fifteenth century. However, can this model, developed for medieval texts mainly written by men, be applied to twentieth century adaptations of medieval/early modern ballads written largely by women?

If one employed Lundt’s interpretation, then this would imply that even female twentieth century writers are afraid of female dominance – an assumption which is very probably wrong or at least a gross oversimplification. However, such a reading would at least tie in with the popular prejudice that women will never really be able to attain power because they prefer to locate the enemy in their own camp. If this was indeed the attitude hidden behind the unfavourable portrayal of the fairy queen then this would add a rather conservative morale to the authors’ apparently emancipation-friendly tales.

But of course to suspect the authors of hidden conservatism is pure speculation. I think just as viable is the hypothesis that the fairy queen is regarded as more or less gender-neutral by the authors and condemned as an unnatural creature because she abuses her power and not

specifically because she is a *woman* who abuses her power. The descriptions of many fairy queens in the novels, however, seem to argue against such a reading. The fairy queens usually come across as quite feminine – and sometimes even as rather bitchy. Although, interestingly, they do so most strongly in the two novels written by the only male author in my corpus: in Terry Pratchett *Lords and Ladies* the final duel is even compared to a fight between two queen bees – which is probably not too far from a literal cat-fight.

Another possible interpretation could be that the authors are not conservative at all but so progressive that they want not only a female hero but – assuming equal rights for all – also a female villain. The question here would then be: do the authors sympathise with their evil fairy queens? Are they presented in a way that readers might identify with them, might perceive them as the real heroes of the work, as for example Satan in *Paradise Lost* has sometimes been perceived by critics? Reconsidering the portrayal of the elf-queens across the novels, I would, however, say that this is not the case.

A fourth assumption concerning this puzzle could be that the writers have chosen to make their fairy queens evil because they were consciously working against the ‘noble elf’-image created by Tolkien and also against the idea of cute nursery fairies. It might be interesting here to take into account what Nicola Bown has observed about the relationship between the cute Victorian fairies and Victorian women, for Bown claims that the latter, in contrast to the men, were not very enthusiastic about fairies. As a possible reason for this, she suggests that the fairies can be read as embodiments of an infantile, ‘cutified’ femininity. She observes: “the word fairy-like seems a perfect epithet of that ideal of Victorian femininity which required that women be diminutive in relation to men, magical in their unavailability, of delicate constitution, playful rather than earnest” (2001, 14) and goes on to ask: “Why should women be interested in a figure which offered them only an image of femininity from which so many were struggling to escape?” (ibid.). Maybe modern women are still sometimes struggling to escape similar ideals. And maybe the distaste for nice fairies among modern female authors who write for a young adult or adult female audience can partly be explained by this argument, too.²⁸⁴

Yet another hypothesis is suggested by the fact that almost all of the novels examined here are coming-of-age novels. In this context the fairy queen could be interpreted, in an archetypal reading, as an embodiment of the darker side of the human heroine’s personality, a kind of Shadow-figure in the Jungian sense (the Shadow is usually of the same sex as the hero) that has to be overcome and must finally be integrated into the personality in order to advance

²⁸⁴ In children’s literature, on the other hand, there are still very many cute fairies around. At least this was the impression one could gain at the 2007 book-fair in Frankfurt.

the individuation process. I think this reading is justified for example for *Fire and Hemlock* and *Winter Rose*, where both heroines have personality traits they share with their respective fairy queen: Polly is at one time tempted to be just as possessive as Laurel and Rois has something of the wildness, independence and also possessiveness of the fairy queen in *Winter Rose*. Both girls become aware of this throughout the story, and this awareness of their own faults eventually helps them to bring the plot to a happy conclusion. Also in Pratchett's novels the heroines have traits of the fairy queen. Tiffany Aching in *The Wee Free Men* is sometimes too cognitive and 'heartless' so that the fairy queen suggests that she is not wholly human and young Esme Weatherwax in *Lords and Ladies* appears similarly ambitious and power-hungry as the fairy queen she meets. For both of Pratchett's heroines their special characteristics are important in fighting their respective fairy queens. Tiffany realises that by being reasonable and clever and not letting herself be overcome by emotions she can serve her fellow human beings quite well and be a valuable member of the community. In the case of Granny Weatherwax the fact that she has all her life resisted the temptation to abuse her power is what makes her better than her enemies (such as the fairy queen in *Lords and Ladies*, or, in another discworld novel (*Witches Abroad*), her own sister, a witch who has become an evil fairy-godmother). Maybe the Jungian reading works also to some extent for *The Perilous Gard*, even though the aspect of elvishness that Kate finally integrates into her own personality (namely self-discipline) is not one that is socially undesirable, as is usually the case for the aspects that the Shadow embodies. But perhaps the fact that Kate in the end has gained self-discipline without driving this to excess (which would otherwise have ended in the 'stoniness' and inflexibility of the elves) is also a way of overcoming a Shadow. It is uncertain if this reading can be applied also to the rest of the novels (*Tam Lin*, *Thursday*, *An Earthly Knight*, *The Queen of Spells*), since they allocate less space to the character development of the heroine through her confrontation with the elves.

Yet another, more psychoanalytically influenced interpretation, which also fits the context of the young adult novel, is one where the fairy queen could be read as a 'bad' mother-figure, who competes with the young girl for the love of a young man (the son-figure), thus producing a character constellation with oedipal associations. Especially for *Fire and Hemlock* the idea of reading the fairy queen as a sort of evil mother is probably not too far-fetched, as Laurel is indeed portrayed as a kind of supernatural version of Polly's already 'bad' mother Ivy. The oedipal aspect is supported by fact that Laurel also acts as a kind of surrogate mother for Thomas, who once claims that Laurel more or less adopted him (288). A similar reading might work for *The Wee Free Men*, where the fairy queen wants to be a kind of mother for Wentworth and even though no romantic love relationship exists between the little boy and his older sister,

there is certainly a rivalry between Tiffany and the fairy queen for the ‘possession’ of Wentworth. But also for the other novels such a reading might make sense, given the fact that many of them are written for a presumed audience of adolescent females for whom a certain type of older and socially superior woman may constitute a kind of rival also in real life (the mothers of their boyfriends for instance). In this context the defeat of the fairy queen and the victory of the Janet-character may be read as a kind of wish-fulfilment scenario for young female readers.

Considering all these possible motivations for the authors to let Janet fight out a duel with the fairy queen, I think the psychological interpretations especially plausible, especially given the important role the fairies generally play for the psychological maturation of most of the human protagonists in the novels. In this, the fairies do indeed fulfil the role of boundary guardians that has been ascribed to them by some researchers of fairy folklore, e.g. Diane Purkiss who claimed that the “fairy presides over the borders” (2000b, 4), displaying a preference for appearing in situations of transition, such as “birth, childhood and its transitions, adolescence, sexual awakening, pregnancy and childbirth, old age and death” (ibid.). Purkiss also calls fairies “gatekeepers” (ibid.) and as such it makes sense that the gate-keeping fairy in the Tam Lin-stories, that is, the fairy queen, has to be overcome by the heroine before she can fully enter into a new stage in her life, namely adulthood.

Truth and fiction

The discussion of transitions and boundaries eventually leads me to another central issue that is common to many of the ballad adaptations, namely the debatable boundary between truth and fiction, and closely related to this, the power inherent in stories and storytelling. Therefore, I’d like to reconsider how this topic is treated in the various retellings.

The elves, for instance in *The Perilous Gard* and *Fire and Hemlock*, are very skilled in bending the truth so as to make it fit their own aims, a trait typical for them also in folklore: elves do not lie but they may tell you the truth in such a way that you misunderstand it completely. A possible implication of this would once again tie in with the fact that most of the novels in question here are written for a young adult audience – the protagonists have to learn that the world is much more complex than they had imagined it in their rather naïve child’s or teenager’s world-view and that ‘truth’ is often a relative and subjective and not an absolute category.

In *Winter Rose* Rois discovers the relativity of truth in the different curses that the villagers think have befallen Lynn Hall, which all turn out to be true in their own way. She also learns about the subjectivity of truth by pondering about the different possible explanations for

Corbet's disappearance: has he really been in Elfland as a captive and was rescued by her or has he merely been away over the winter to clear up some unresolved but totally unmagical family problems in the human world? By learning to accept that the second, rather mundane, explanation is just as probable as her own explanation, which involved a lot of magic and heroism, Rois probably also learns to better differentiate between dreams and reality. She has to leave her own dream-world, where her supernatural abilities help her acquire what is barred to her in 'normal' life. In this, *Winter Rose* could maybe be seen as a clear embodiment of one of Gerhard Haas's postulated functions of fantasy, where fantasy works as a substitute for a reality that is denied to the reader (2006, 28) – only that in this case it is not the reader who escapes into a fantasy world but a character in a novel (who of course takes the reader with her on her trips to fairyland).

A second, related, issue is the power of fiction and storytelling. In *Thomas the Rhymer*, *Lords and Ladies* and *The Wee Free Men* Fairyland is the country where 'all stories are real' and 'all dreams come true' – although these sayings are interpreted in quite contrary ways. While in *Thomas the Rhymer*, Thomas encounters human figures from legend and romance in Elfland and is fascinated by their presence, in *The Wee Free Men* all the cautionary tales told to children about terrible monsters have become true in Fairyland and all kinds of horrible creatures from nightmares are reality there. This could simply be read as the authors' dissimilar reflection of the idea that Elfland is just as good or bad as people imagine it. But the fact that the monstrous fairy creatures thought up by careless adults also threaten the human world probably also emphasises Pratchett's general "concern with the uses and misuses to which fictions can be put" (Stephens and MacCallum 1998, 261).

This is played on also in *Lords and Ladies* – but in a reverse fashion. At the end of this novel, Hwel, the playsmith – a sort of discworld equivalent to Shakespeare – turns the events surrounding the fairy invasion in Lancre into a play. This play resembles *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, complete with tiny, harmless elves the size of peas' blossoms, thereby executing modern humans' revenge on the elves: "He left out all the bits that wouldn't fit on a stage, or were too expensive, or which he didn't believe" (*Lords and Ladies* 374). In both *The Wee Free Men* and *Lords and Ladies* the creatures of fancy threaten to overtake the world but in *Lords and Ladies* they are also defeated by the help of fancy – men will imagine elves as tiny and tiny they will become.

The perilous power of making stories shape reality attributed to humans in Pratchett's novels is a talent of the elf-queen in *Fire and Hemlock*. Or at least it is the dubious gift she bestows on Thomas Lynn. Together with Polly he innocently invents the most unlikely stories,

not knowing that they will come true in a distorted fashion and turn against him. Since Polly and Thomas Lynn for a long time do not know about this warped gift, they cannot use it against Laurel.

On the other hand, storytelling is not only presented as dangerous throughout the novels, it often also has a kind of healing or helping function – only by reconstructing the story of Thomas Lynn can Polly go on her quest for him. It also seems that, by telling her story, Rois in *Winter Rose* gains self-confidence, at least Jessica Greenlee thinks as much:

Rois both has and tells her own story. ‘Tam Lin’ itself is, like many other ballads, told by an impersonal, outside narrator; Janet’s tale is told, but her voice is never heard. *Winter Rose* on the other hand, teaches the importance of a woman speaking. Not only does she tell the story, it is apparent during the story that her voice has been important. As events unfold, Rois questions those around her in search of the truth, a truth that ultimately leads her to freedom. She is a woman who has found and uses her voice. (2001, 84)

The importance of having a voice is also emphasised in *Thomas the Rhymer*, where Thomas quite literally gives up his voice in order to help a fellow human captive in Fairyland. On him, the already very self-assured, confident young man, this has a chastening but eventually also positive effect, since it teaches him patience. Looking at this pattern from a gender-perspective, one might say that Rois and Polly assume the traditionally masculine position of the person who speaks out while Thomas temporarily takes on the meek and mute role of the traditional female – and the encounter with the fairies serves as a kind of catalyst to bring about these changes.

Another aspect of this topic is how much fictions can shape not only the already imaginary land of the elves but also human life. In *The Perilous Gard*, Kate has to learn about this the hard way, when she hears how Master John means to account for her disappearance: by using an invented story how Kate had eloped with Christopher that would moreover have made them appear like thieves and kidnappers. Master John is of course prevented from telling this tale but now Geoffrey Heron uses it in modified form for explaining John’s disappearance instead – the villain is hoist by his own petard, that is, his own story, similarly as the elves in *Lords and Ladies* who have “meddled in a play” (333). Kate is rehabilitated and, as Randal makes a ballad out of her adventures, her experiences are even idealised, thus taking on quite a different status of unreality. A similar fate probably awaits Thomas in *Thomas the Rhymer*, at least the fairy queen once asks him if he would like ‘to be a song himself’ and of course, as the readers know, he indeed becomes one over time. In these latter two examples the authors seem to make a kind of meta-fictional joke and execute a sort of spiral movement: telling the reader how the source material on which they have based their story on is produced as a result of the story they have just told.

Summing up, it can be said that in their games with truth and fiction, the authors address an issue which is also a crucial aspect of ‘classic’ fantastic literature (in its narrower sense): the question of what constitutes reality. This is an aspect which has been emphasised by researchers of fantastic literature as one of the important issues that – in their opinion – make fantastic fiction in its narrower sense somehow superior to mere ‘marvellous’ fiction which, according to them, never raises any doubts as to what is real and what is fantasy. I think that this position is not quite justified as the fantasy novels examined here do indeed often reflect authorial concerns about the nature of reality. In contrast, however, to the ‘classic’ fantastic texts (written between the eighteenth century and the beginning twentieth century), which often echo a certain anxiety about the fact that reality is not wholly graspable by human senses the late twentieth century authors of fantasy fiction seem to have accepted this problem and use it more playfully. As Faye Ringel observes about Jones, Ipcar, Dean, Kushner and Pope: “If one thing unifies these disparate writers, it is the knowledge that they are heirs of William Morris and J.R.R. Tolkien. We may justly call the highly conscious fantasists, with academic training in literary theory and wide reading in and out of the genre, post-modernists” (1999, 199). Therefore, it seems that the 1960s and 1970s, the time when many of the authors in question grew up and received their academic training, have provided them – in addition to their liking for folk-music, a 1960s heritage which has already been variously commented on in this study – with a certain dose of post-modern thinking, including a willingness to treat questions of reality and fictionality in a playful manner.

In contrast to their authors, not all of the characters in the ballad-adaptations are fond of ballads, which leads me to a final point in my discussion, the role of (folk-)music. Polly, Kate and Pamela Dean’s Janet Carter care little for ballads (even though they at least know of their existence). Because of their indifference towards the traditional ballads it takes them much longer to figure out what has happened to their male companions Tom, Christopher and Thomas than it would have taken a person familiar with the ballad material. But when they eventually realise the significance of the ballads, especially “Tam Lin”, they use them consciously as a guide for their own actions, as does also Magrat in *Lords and Ladies*, who dimly remembers “a folksong about a situation just like this” (277).

Maybe the topic of folk-music has received too little attention in this study, whose focus was placed elsewhere. But to round off this discussion of a variety of novels that are all based on two or more pieces of traditional song, I would like, briefly, to consider the role of music in the novels in question.

Even though it is seldom at the centre of attention, music and its effects nevertheless play a role in most of the ballad-adaptations examined here. One reason for this is of course that a love of music is traditionally associated with the elves and, using the main motif from “Thomas the Rhymer”, the authors often make their elves abduct especially musically talented humans (in *Thomas the Rhymer*, *Tam Lin*, *Thursday*, *Fire and Hemlock*, *The Perilous Gard*, *The Queen of Spells*).

Music is often presented as an ambiguous force. On the one hand, it attracts the elves and is therefore potentially harmful to mortals who may be taken to Fairyland because of their musicality. On the other hand, it is also simultaneously presented as a source of positive energy for the humans, especially in *Fire and Hemlock* and *Thomas the Rhymer* (partly so also in *The Queen of Spells* and *The Perilous Gard*) where music is comforting and sustaining for the human singers/players and their human listeners. In *Fire and Hemlock* it is probably even the force that enables Thomas Lynn to strive away from the fairy queen in the first instance, since it gives him an aim in life and a way of earning his living independent of Laurel. A similarly ‘healing’ force is attributed to music in *An Earthly Knight*, where the appearance of the wandering harper gives Jeanette’s sister’s life new meaning (although in this novel music is completely dissociated from the elves).

The elves’ proverbial love of music that is part of so many retellings can also be used satirically, namely in Pratchett’s novels. Here music serves as a weapon against the elves (similarly as storytelling). In *Lords and Ladies* the supernatural creatures are too fascinated by songs to do anything but listen and are therefore easily attackable. In *The Wee Free Men* the idea of music as a weapon is taken even a step further, since the Nac Mac Feegles have war-bards who scare off enemies of all kinds by playing high-pitched music and reciting poetry at them.

On the whole, the musical origin of the source material is thus, if often indirectly, usually acknowledged in the retellings. In fact, there is no novel in my corpus where music does not appear, in one way or the other. Therefore, I think my initial fantasy picturing the authors of the retellings as something like modern minstrels is maybe not too far-fetched after all.

And the fact that the authors are all, like Kushner’s minstrel Thomas, “robbing dead men’s songs” (15), does, as I have tried to point out in my study, not subtract from their novels’ qualities, diverse as they may otherwise be. It may, on the contrary, have the effect of keeping a very old form of literature alive in the minds of modern readers and therefore I would like to conclude with the positive assessment that Faye Ringel gives in regard to contemporary ballad retellings:

Whether in the form of novels, comic books, or even more up-to-date technology, in these texts, the ‘thefts’ of traditional ballad plots and tropes do not impoverish but enrich, just as Tom o’Bedlam’s songs enrich *King Lear*. Perhaps the novels and comic books will introduce traditional narrative song to a new generation who grew up thinking that a ballad is what the band plays for slow dancing. In turn, these lesser known writers of the fantastic deserve the attention of those who need no introduction to the ballad tradition. (1999, 207)

I have certainly given my attention to at least a handful of those lesser known writers and hope that this study can in its own way contribute to making the ballad and its adaptations in fantasy literature – this mixture of genres that reaches so far back in time but has apparently not stopped fascinating the literary imagination – a topic worthy of further scholarly investigation.

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16. Appendix

“Tam Lin” and “Thomas the Rhymer”

Child 37 A

True Thomas lay on Huntly Bank
A ferlie he spied wi' his ee
An' then he spied a lady bright
Come ridin' doun by the eildon tree

Her shirt was o' the grass green silk
Her mantle o' the velvet fine
At ilka tet o' her horse's mane
Hung fifty siller bells and nine

True Thomas he pu'd aff his cap
And louted low doun tae his knee
All Hail, thou mighty Queen of Heaven
Thy peer on Earth I never did see

O no, o no, Thomas, she said
That name does not belong to me
I am but the Queen of fair Elfland
Hither come to visit thee

Harp an' carp, Thomas, she said
Harp an' carp along with me
And if you dare to kiss my lips
Sure of your body I will be

Betide me weel, betide me woe
That wierd sall never daunton me
Syne he has kissed her ruby lips
All underneath the eildon tree

Now ye maun go wi' me, she said
True Thomas, ye maun go wi' me
An' ye maun serve me seiven years
Thro' weel or woe, as chance may be

She's mounted on her milk white steed
An' ta'en True Thomas up behind
Oh whenever her bridle rang
The steed flew swifter than the wind

But Thomas, ye maun haud yer tongue
Whatever ye may hear or see
If word ye speak in Elflinland
Ye'll never get back tae yer ain countrie

Syne they came tae a garden green
She's pu'd an apple frae a tree
Take this for wages, True Thomas
Ye'll have the tongue that never can lee

They rade on an' further on
The steed flew swifter than the wind
Till they reached a desert wide
An' livin' land was left behind

Licht doun, licht doun, Thomas, she said
An' lean yer head upon my knee
Abide and rest a little space
And I will show you ferlies three

See ye not yon narrow road
So thick beset wi' thorns and briars
That is the path of righteousness
Tho' after it but few enquires

An' see ye not yon braid, braid road
That lies across the lily Leven
That is the path of wickedness
Some call it the road tae Heaven

An' see ye not yon bonnie road
That winds aboot the fernie brae
That is the road tae fair Elfland
Where thou and I this night maun gae

Child 37B

As Thomas lay on Huntlie banks--
A wat a weel bred man was he--
And there he spied a lady fair,
Coming riding down by the Eildon tree.

The horse she rode on was dapple gray,
And in her hand she held bells nine;
I thought I heard this fair lady say
These fair siller bells they should a' be mine.

It's Thomas even forward went,
And lootit low down on his knee:
'Weel met thee save, my lady fair,
For thou'rt the flower o' this countrie.'

'O no, O no, Thomas,' she says,
'O no, O no, that can never be,
For I'm but a lady of an unco land,
Comd out a hunting, as ye may see.

'O harp and carp, Thomas,' she says,
'O harp and carp, and go wi me;
It's be seven years, Thomas, and a day,
Or you see man or woman in your ain countrie.'

It's she has rode, and Thomas ran,
Until they cam to yon water clear;
He's coosten off his hose and shon,
And he's wooden the water up to the knee.

It's she has rode, and Thomas ran,
Until they cam to yon garden green;
He's put up his hand for to pull down ane,
For the lack o food he was like to tyne.

'Hold your hand, Thomas,' she says,
'Hold your hand, that must not be;
It was a' that cursed fruit o thine
Beggared man and woman in your countrie.

'But I have a loaf and a soup o wine;
And ye shall go and dine wi me;
And lay yer head down in my lap,
And I will tell ye farlies three.

'It's dont ye see yon broad broad way,
That leadeth down by yon skerry fell?
It's ill's the man that dothe thereon gang,
For it leadeth him straight to the gates o hell.

'It's dont ye see yon narrow way,
That leadeth down by yon lillie lea?
It's weel's the man that doth therein gang,
For it leads him straight to the heaven hie.'

* * * * *

It's when she cam into the hall--
I wat a weel bred man was he--
They've asked him question[s], one and all,
But he answered none but that fair ladie.

O they speerd at her where she did him get,
And she told them at the Eildon tree;

Child 37C

TRUE Thomas lay on Huntlie bank,
A ferlie he spied wi' his ee,
And there he saw a lady bright,
Come riding down by the Eildon Tree.

Her shirt was o the grass-green silk,
Her mantle o the velvet fyne,
At ilka tett of her horse's mane
Hang fifty siller bells and nine.

True Thomas, he pulld aff his cap,
And louted low down to his knee:
'All hail, thou mighty Queen of Heaven!
For thy peer on earth I never did see.'

'O no, O no, Thomas,' she said,
'That name does not belang to me;

I am but the queen of fair Elfland,
That am hither come to visit thee.

'Harp and carp, Thomas,' she said,
'Harp and carp along wi me,
And if ye dare to kiss my lips,
Sure of your bodie I will be.'

'Betide me weal, betide me woe,
That weird shall never daunton me;'
Syn he has kissed her rosy lips,
All underneath the Eildon Tree.

'Now, ye maun go wi me,' she said,
'True Thomas, ye maun go wi me,
And ye maun serve me seven years,
Thro weal or woe, as may chance to be.'

She mounted on her milk-white steed,
She's taen True Thomas up behind,
And aye whenever her bridle rung,
The steed flew swifter than the wind.

O they rade on, and farther on--
The steed gaed swifter than the wind--
Untill they reached a desart wide,
And living land was left behind.

'Light down, light down, now, True Thomas,
And lean your head upon my knee;
Abide and rest a little space,
And I will shew you ferlies three.

'O see ye not yon narrow road,
So thick beset with thorns and briers?
That is the path of righteousness,
Tho after it but few enquires.

'And see not ye that braid braid road,
That lies across that lily leven?
That is the path of wickedness,
Tho some call it the road to heaven.

'And see not ye that bonny road,
That winds about the fernie brae?
That is the road to fair Elfland,
Where thou and I this night maun gae.

'But, Thomas, ye maun hold your tongue,
Whatever ye may hear or see,
For, if you speak word in Elflyn land,
Ye'll neer get back to your ain countrie.'

O they rade on, and farther on,
And they waded thro rivers aboon the knee,
And they saw neither sun nor moon,
But they heard the roaring of the sea.

It was mirk mirk night, and there was nae stern
light,
And they waded thro red blude to the knee;
For a' the blude that's shed on earth
Rins thro the springs o that countrie.

Syne they came on to a garden green,
And she pu'd an apple frae a tree:
'Take this for thy wages, True Thomas,
It will give the tongue that can never lie.'

'My tongue is mine ain,' True Thomas said;
'A gudely gift ye wad gie to me!

I neither dought to buy nor sell,
At fair or tryst where I may be.

'I dought neither speak to prince or peer,
Nor ask of grace from fair ladye:'
'Now hold thy peace,' the lady said,
'For as I say, so must it be.'

He has gotten a coat of the even cloth,
And a pair of shoes of velvet green,
And till seven years were gane and past
True Thomas on earth was never seen

Child #39A

The English and Scottish Popular Ballads, 1882-1898 by Francis James Child

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

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

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

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,
A rose but only twa,
Till upon then started young Tam Lin,
Says, Lady, thou's pu nae mae.

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

"Carterhaugh, it is my own,
My daddy gave it 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 broded 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 came the fair Janet,
The flower among them a'.

Four and twenty ladies fair
Were playing at the chess,
And out then came the fair Janet,
As green as onie glass.

Out then spake an auld 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 bairn on whom I will,
I'll father none on thee."

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

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

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

"The steed that my true love rides on
Is lighter than the wind,
Wi siller he is shod before,
Wi burning gowd behind."

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

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,
A rose but only twa,
Till up then started young Tam Lin,
Says, Lady, thou pu's nae mae.

"Why pu's thou the rose, Janet,
Among the groves sae green,
And a' to kill the bonny 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?"

"Roxbrugh he was my grandfather,
Took me with him to bide

And ance it fell upon a day
That wae did me betide.

"And ance it fell upon a day
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 do 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 feard it be mysel.

"But the night is Halloween, lady,
The morn is Hallowday,
Then win me, win me, an ye will,
For weel 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 Cross they maun bide."

"But how shall I thee ken, Tam Lin,
Or how my true-love know,
Amang sa 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 gloved, lady,
My left hand will be bare,
Cockt up shall my bonnet be,
And kaimed down shall my hair,
And thae's the takens I gie thee,
Nae doubt I will be there.

"They'll turn me in your arms, lady,
Into an esk and adder,
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,
And ye shall love your child.

"Again they'll turn me in your arms
To a red het gand of airn,
But hold me fast, and fear me not,
I'll do you nae harm.

"And last they'll turn me in your arms
Into the burning glead,
Then throw me into well water,
O throw me in with speed.

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

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

At the mirk and midnight hour
She heard the bridles sing,
She was as 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.

Sae weel she minded what he did say,
And young Tam Lin did win,
Syne covered him wi her green mantle,
As blythe's a bird in spring

Out then spak the Queen o Fairies,
Out of a bush o broom,
"Them that has gotten young Tam Lin
Has gotten a stately-groom."

Out then spak the Queen o Fairies,
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 bonniest knight
In a' my companie.

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

Version B

I forbid ye, maidens a',
that wear goud on your gear,
To come and gae by Carterhaugh,
For young Tom Line is there.

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

But Janet has kilted her green kirtle
A little above her knee,
And she has broded her yellow hair
a little above her bree,
And she has gaen for Carterhaugh,
As fast as she can hie.

When she came to Carterhaugh
Tom Line was at the well,
And there she fand his steed standing,
But away was himsell.

She hadna pu'd a double rose,
A rose but only twae,
Till up then started young Tom Line,
Says, Lady, thou 's pu nae mae.

Why pou's thou the rose, Janet?
Why breaks thou the wand?
Why comest thou to Carterhaugh
Withouthen my command?

Carterhaugh it is is my ain,
My daddy gave it me;
I'll come and gae by Carterhaugh,
And ask nae leave at thee.'

Janet has kilted her green kirtle
A little aboon her knee,
And she has snooded her yellow hair
a little aboon her bree,
She is on to her father's ha,
as fast as she can hie.

Four and twenty ladies fair
Were playing at the ba,
And out then came fair Janet,
The flowr amang them a'.

Four and twenty ladies fair
Were playing at the chess,
Out then came fair Janet,
As green as ony glass.

Out spak ani auld grey-headed knight,
Lay owre the castle wa,

And says, Alas, fair Janet,
For thee we'll be blam'd a'.

'Had your tongue, you auld grey knight
Some ill dead may ye die!
Father my bairn on whom I will,
I 'll father nane on thee.'

Out then spak her father dear,
He spak baith thick and milde;
'And ever alas, sweet Janet,' he says,
'I think ye gae wi childe.'

'If that I gae wi child, father,
Mysell bears a' the blame;
There 's not a laird about your ha
Shall get the bairnie's name.

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

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

When she came to Carterhaugh,
Tom Line was at the well,
And there she faund his steed standing,
But away was himsell.

She hadna pu'd a double rose,
A rose but only twae,
Till up then started young Tom Line,
Says, Lady, thou 'a pu na mae.

Why pu's thou the rose, Janet,
Out owr yon groves sae green,
And a' to kill your bonny babe,
That we gat us between?

'O tell me, tell me, Tom,' she says,
'For's sake who died on tree,
If eer ye were in holy chapel,
Or christendom did see.'

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

'Ance it fell upon a day,
A cauld day and a snell,
When we were frae the hunting come,
That from my horse I fell.

'The Queen of Fairies she came by,
Took me wi her to dwell,
Evn where she has a pleasant land
For those that in it dwell,
But at the end o seven years,
They pay their teind to hell.

The night it is gude Halloween,
The fairie folk do ride,
And they that wad their true-love win,
At Miles Cross they maun bide.'

But how shall I thee ken, Thomas,
Or how shall I thee know,
Amang a pack o uncouth knights
The like I never saw ?'

'The first company that passes by,
Say na, and let them gae;
The next company that passes by,
Say na, and do right sae;
The third comptny that passes by,
Then I 'll be ane o thae.

Some ride upon a black, lady,
And some ride on a brown,
But I ride on a milk-white steed,
And ay nearest the town :
Because I was an earthly knight
They gae me that renown.

'My right hand will be glovd, lady,
My left hand will be bare,
And thae's the tokens I gie thee,
Nae doubt I will be there.

'Then hie thee to the milk-white
And pu me quickly down,
Cast thy green kirtle ovr me,
And keep me frae the rain.

'They'll turn me in thy arms, lady,
An adder and a snake;
But hold me fast, let me na gae,
To be your warldly mate.

'They'll turn me in your arms, lady,
A grey greyhound to girn;
But hald me fast, let me na gae,
The father o your bairn.

They'll turn me in your arms, lady,
A red het gad o iron;
Then hand me fast, and be na feard,
I'll do to you nae harm.

'They 'll turn me in your arms, lady,
A mother-naked man;

Cast your green kirtle ovr me,
To keep me frae the rain.

'First dip me in a stand o milk,
And then a stand o water;
Haud me fast, let me na gae,
I'll be your bairnie's father.'

Janet has kilted her green kirtle
A little aboon her knee,
And she has snooded her yellow hair
A little aboon her bree,
And she is on to Miles Cross,
As fast as she can hie.

a The first company that passd by,
She said na, and let them gae;
The next company that passed by,
She said na, and did right sae;
The third company that passed by,
Then he was ane o thae.

She hied her to the milk-white steed,
And pu'd him quickly down;
She cast her green kirtle ovr him,
To keep him frae the rain
Then she did all was ordered her,
And sae recovered him

Out then spak the Queen o Fairies,
Out o a brush o broom:
"Them that hae gotten young Tom Line
Hae got a stately groom.'

Out then spak the Queen o Fairies,
Out o a bush of rye:
that has gotten young Tom Line
the best knight in my company.

' Had I kend, Thomas,' she says,
A lady wad hae borrowd thee,
I wad has taen out thy twa grey een,
Put in twa een o tree.

'Had I but kend, Thomas,' she says,
I Before I came frae hame,
I had taen out that heart o flesh,
Put in a heart o stane.'

Version C

She's prickt hersell and prind hersell,
By the ae light o the moon,
And she's awa to Kertonha,
As fast as she can gang.

`What gars ye pu the rose, Jennet?
What gars ye break the tree
What gars you gang to Kertonha
Without the leave of me?'

`Yes, I will pu the rose, Thomas,
And I will break the trees
For Kertonha should be my ain,
Nor ask I leave of thee.'

`Full pleasant is the fairy land,
And happy there to dwell;
I am a fairy, lyth and limb,
Fair maiden, view me well.

`O pleasant is the fairy land,
How happy there to dwell!
But ay at every seven years end
We're a'dung down to hell.

`The morn is good Halloween,
And our court a' will ride;
If ony maiden wins her man,
Then she may be his bride.

`But first ye'll let the black gae by,
And then ye'll let the brown;
Then I'll ride on a milk-white steed,
You'll pu me to the ground.

`And first, I'll grow into your arms
An esk but and an edder;
Had me fast, let me not gang,
I'll be your bairn's father.

`Next, I'll grow into your arms
A toad but and an eel;
Had me fast, le me not gang,
If you do love me leel.

`Last, I'll grow into your arms
A dove but and a swan;
Then, maiden fair, you'll let me go
I'll be the perfect man.

Version D

O all you ladies young and gay,
Who are so sweet and fair,
Do not go into Chaster's wood,
For Tomlin will be there.

Fair Margret sat in her bonny bower,
Sewing her silken seam,
And wished to be in Chaster's wood,
Among the leaves so green.

She let her seam fall to her foot,
The needle to her toe,
And she has gone to Chaster's wood,
As fast as she could go.

When she began to pull the flowers,
She puud both red and green;
Then by did come, and by did go,
Said, Fair maid, let aleene.

why pluck you the flowers, lady,
Or why climb you the tree ?
Or why come ye to Chaster's wood
'Whithout the leave of me ? '

I will pull the flowers,' she said,
Or I will break the tree,
For Chaster's wood it is my own,
I'll no ask leave at thee.'

He took her by the milk-white hand,
And by the grass green sleeve,
And laid her low down on the flowers,
At her he asked no leave.

The lady blushed, and sourly frowned,
And she did think great shame;
Says, ' If you are a gentleman,
You will tell me your name.'

'First they did call me Jack,' he said,
' And then they called me John,
But since I lived in the fairy court
Tomlin has always been my name.

So do not pluck that flower, lady,
That has these pimples gray;
They would destroy the bonny babe
That we've got in our play.'

O tell me, Tomlin,' she said,
And tell it to me soon,
Was you ever at good church-door,
Or got you christendoom ?

O I have been at good church-door,
And aff her yetts within;
I was the Laird of Foulis's son,
The heir of all this land.

But it fell once upon a day,
As hunting I did ride,
As I rode east and west yon bill
There woe did me betide.

drowsy, drowsy as I was!
Dead sleep upon me fell;
The Queen of Fairies she was there,
And took me to hersell.

The Elfin is a pretty place,
In which I love to dwell,
But yet at every seven years' end
The last here goes to hell;
And as I am ane o flesh and blood,
I fear the next be mysell.

The morn at even is Halloween;
Our fairy court will ride,
Throw England and Scotland both,
Throw al the world wide
And if ye would me borrow,
At Rides Cross ye may bide.

You may go into the Miles Moss,
Between twelve hours and one;
Take holy water in your hand,
And cast a compass round.

The first court that comes along,
You'll let them all pass by;
The next court that comes along,
Salute them reverently.

The next court that comes along
Is clad in robes of green,
And it's the head court of them all,
For in it rides the queen.

And I upon a milk-white steed,
With a gold star in my crown;
Because I am an earthly man
I'm next to the queen in renown

Then seize upon me with a spring,
Then to the ground I'll fa,
And then you 'll hear a rueful cry
That Tomlin is awa.

Then I'll grow in your arms two
Like to a savage wild;
But hold me fast, let me not go,
I 'm father of your child.

Then I'll grow in your arms two
Like to an adder or a snake;
But hold me fast, let me not go,
To be your worthy maick.

I'll grow into your arms two
Then like iron in strong fire;
But hold me fast, let me not go,
Then you'll have your desire.'

She rid down to Miles Cross,
Between twelve hours and one,
Took holy water in her hand,
and cast a compass round.

The first court that came along,
She let them all pass by;
The next court that came along
Saluted reverently.

The next court that came along
Were clad in robes of green,
With Tomlin, on a milk-white steed,
She saw ride with the queen.

She seized him in her arms two,
He to the ground did f a,
And then she heard a ruefu cry
'Tomlin is now awa.'

He grew into her arms two
Like to a savage wild;
She held him fast, let him not go,,
The father of her child.

He grew into her arms two
Like an adder or a snake;
She held him fast, let him not go,
He was her earthly maick.

He grew into her arms two
Like iron in hot fire;
She held him fast, let him not go,
He was her heart's desire.

Then sounded out throw elphin court,
With a loud shout and a cry,
That the pretty maid of Chaster's wood
That day had caught her prey.

' O stay, Tomlin,' cried Elphin Queen,
'Till I pay you your fee;'
'His father has lands and rents enough,
He wants no fee from thee.'

'O had I known at early morn
Tomlin would from me gone,
I would have taken out a heart of flesh
Put in a heart of stone.'

Version E

Lady Margaret is over gravel green,
And over gravel grey,
And she's awa to Charteris ha,
Lang lang three hour or day.

She hadna pu'd a flower, a flower,
A flower but only ane,
Till up and started young Tamlin,
Says, Lady, let alane.

She hadna pu'd a flower, a flower,
A flower but only twa,
'rill up and started youna Tamlene,
Atween her and the wa.

'How daur you pu my flower, madam?
How daur ye break my tree?
How daur ye come to Charter's ha,
Without the leave of me?

'Weel I may pu the rose,' she said,
'But I daurna break the tree
And Charter's ha is my father's,
And I'm his heir to be.'

'If Charteris ha be thy father's,
I was ance as gude mysell;
But as I came in by Lady Kirk,
And in by Lady Well,

Deep and drowsy was the sleep
On my poor body fell;
By came the Queen of Faery,
Made me with her to dwell.

But the morn at een is Halloween,
Our fairy foks a' do ride;
And she that will her true-love win,
At Blackstock she must bide.

First let by the black,' he said,
'And syne let by the brown;
But when you see the milk-white steed,
You'll pull his rider down.

You'll pull him into thv arms,
Let his bricht bridle fa,
And he'll fa low into your arms
Like stone in castle's wa.

They'll first shape him into your arms
An adder or a snake ;
But hold him fast, let him not go,
He'll be your world's make.

They'll next shape him into your arms
Like a wood black dog to bite

Hold him fast, let him not go,
For he 'll be your heart's delight.

'They'll next shape [him] into your arms
Like a red-het gaud o airn;
But hold him fast, let him not go,
He's the father o your bairn.

They 'll next shape him into your arms
Like the laidliest worm of Ind;
But hold him fast, let him not go,
And cry aye "Young Tamlin."

Lady Margaret first let by the black,
And syne let by the brown,
But when she saw the milk-white steed
She pulled the rider down.

She pulled him into her arms,
Let his bright bridle fa',
And he fell low into her arms,
Like stone in castle's wa.

They first shaped him into arms
An adder or a snake;
But she held him fast, let him not go
For he'd be her world's make.

They next shaped him into her arms
Like a wood black dog to bite;
But she held him fast, let him not go
For he'd be her heart's delight.

They next shaped him into her arms
Like a red-hot gaud o airn
Buit she held him fast, let him not go,
He'd be father o her bairn.

They next shaped him into her arms
Like the laidliest worm of Ind;
But she held him fast, let him not go,
And cried aye "Young Tamlin" .'

The Queen of Faery turned her horse about
Says, Adieu to thee, Tamlene!
For if I had kent what I ken this niight I see
If I had kent it yestreen,
I wad had taen out thy heart o flesh,
And put in a heart o stane.

Version F

She's taen her petticoat by the band,
Her mantle owre her arm,
And she's awa to Chester wood,
As fast as she could run.

She scarcely pulled a rose, a rose,
She searse pulled two or three,
Till up there starts Thomas
On the Lady Margeret's knee.

She 's taen her petticoat by the band,
Her mantle owre her arm,
And Lady Margeret's gane hame agen
As fast as she could run.

Up starts Lady Margeret's sister,
An angry woman was she:
If there ever was , 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.'

She took her petticoats by the band,
Her mantle owre her arm,
And she's gane to yon kirk-yard
As fast as she could run.

She scarcely pulled an herb, an herb,
She scarce pulled two or three,
when up starts there Thomas
upon this Lady Margret's knee.

How dare ye pull a rose? ' he says,
How dare ye break the tree?
How dare ye pull this herb,' he says,
To scathe my babe away?

This night is Halloweve,' he said,
Our court is going to waste,
And them that loves their true-love best
At Chester bridge they'll meet.

First let pass the black,' he says,
And then let pass the brown,
But when ye meet the milk-white steed,
Pull ye the rider down.

'They'll turn me to an eagle,' he says,
'And then into an ass;
Come, hold me fast, and fear me not,
The man that you love best.

'They'll turn me to a flash of fire,
And then to a naked man;
Come, wrap you your mantle me about
And then you'll have me won.'

She took her petticoats by the band,
Her mantle owre her arm,
And she's awa to Chester bridge,
As fast as she could run.

And first she did let pass the black,
And then let pass the brown,
But when she met the milk-white steed,
She pulled the rider down.

They turned him in her arms an eagle,
And then into an ass;
But she held him fast, and feared him not,
The man that she loved best.

They turned him into a flash of fire,
And then into a naked man;
But she wrapped her mantle him about,
And then she had him won.

O wae be to ye, Lady Margaret,
And an ill death may you die,
For you've robbed me of the bravest knight
That eer rode in our company.'

Version G

Take warning, a' ye ladies fair,
That wear gowd on your hair,
Come never unto Charter's woods,
For Tam-a-line he 's there.

Even about that knight's middle
O' siller bells are nine;
Nae ane comes to Charter wood,
And a maid returns again.

Lady Margaret sits in her bower door,
Sewing at her silken seam;
and she lang to gang to Charter woods,
To pou the roses green.

She hadna poud a rose, a rose,
Nor broken a branch but ane,
Till by it Came him true Tam-a-line,
Says, Ladye, lat alane.

O why pou ye the rose, the rose?
Or why brake ye the tree?
Or why come ye to Charter woods,
Without leave askd of me?

I will pou the rose, the rose,
And I will brake the tree;
Charterwoods are a' my ain,
I'll ask nae leave o thee.'

He's taen her by the milk-white hand,
And by the grass-green sleeve,
And laid her low on gude green wood,
At her he spierd nae leave.

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

She turnd her right and round about,
To spier her true-love's name,
But naething heard she, nor naething saw,
As a' the woods grew dim.

O Seven days she tarried there,
Saw neither sun nor meen;
At length, by a sma glimmering light,
Came thro the wood her lane.

When she came to her father's court,
As fine as ony queen;
But when eight months were past and gane,
Got on the gown o' green.

Then out it speaks an eldren knight,
As he stood at the yett:
'Our king's daughter, she gaes wi bairn,
And we'll get a' the wyte.'

'O had your tongue, ye eldren man,
And bring me not to shame;
Although that I do gang wi bairn,
Yese naeways get the blame.

'Were my love but an earthly man,
As he's an elfin knight,
I woudna gie my ain true love
For a' that's in my sight.'

Then out it speaks her brither dear,
He meant to do her harm :
'There is an herb in Charter wood
Will twine you an the bairn.'

She's taen her mantle her about,
Her coffer by the band,
And she is on to Charter wood,
As fast as she coud gang.

She hadna poud a rose, a rose,
Nor braken a branch but ane,
Till by it came him Tam-a-Line,
Says, Ladye, lat alane.

O why pou ye the pile, Margaret,
The pile o the gravil green,
For to destroy the bonny bairn
That we got us between?

O why pou ye the pile, Margaret,
The pile o the gravil gray,
For to destroy the bonny bairn
That we got in our play?

For if it be a knave-bairn,
He's heir o a' my land;
But if it be a lass-bairn,
In red gowd she shall gang.

If my luvè were au earthly
As he's an elfin rae,
I coud gang bound, love, for your sake,
A twalmonth and a day.,

Indeed your love's an earthly
The same as well as thee,
And lang I've haunted Charter wood
A' for your fair bodie.'

'O tell me, tell me, Tam-a-Line,
O tell, an tell me true,
Tell me this night, an mak uae lie,
What pedigree are you?'

'O I hae been at gade church-door,
An I've got Christendom;
I'm the Earl o' Forbes' eldest son,
An heir ower a' his land.

'When I was young, o three years old,
Muckle was made o me;
My stepmother put on my claithes,
An ill, ill sained she me.

'Ae fatal morning I went out,
Dreading nae injury,
And thinking lang, fell soun asleep,
Beneath an apple tree.

Then by it came the Elfin Queen,
And laid her hand on me;
And from that time since ever I mind.
I've been in her companie

Elfin it's a bonny place,
In it fain woud I dwell;
But ay at ilka seven years' end
They pay a tiend to hell,
And I'm sae fou o flesh an blude,
I'm sair feard for mysell.'

'O tell me, tell me, Tam-a-Line,
O tell, an tell me true

Tell me this night, an mak nae lie,
What way I'll borrow you ?'

The morn is Halloweven night,
the elfin court will ride,
Through England, and thro a' Scotland,
And through the world wide.

O they begin at sky setting,
Rides a' the evening tide;
And she that will her true-love borrow,
[At] Miles-corse will him bide.

Ye'll do you down to Mile Course,
Between twall hours and ane,
And full your hands o holy water,
And cast your compass roun.

Then the first an court that comes you till
Is published king and queen;
The next an court that comes you till,
It is maidens mony ane.

The next an court that comes you till
Is footmen, grooms and squires;
The next an court that comes you till
Is knights, and I'll be there.

"I Tom-a-Line, on milk-white steed,
A goud star on my crown;
Because I was an earthly knight,
Got that for a renown.

And out at my steed's right nostril,
He'll breathe a fiery flame ;
Ye'll loot you low, and sain yoursel,
And ye 'll be busy then.

Ye'll take my horse then by the head,
And lat the bridal fa;
The Queen o' Elfin she'll cry out,
True Tam-a-Line's awa.

'Then I'll appear in your arms
Like the wolf that neer wood tame;
Ye'll had me fast, lat me not go,
Case we neer meet again.

Then I'll appear in your arms
Like the fire that burns sae bauld
Ye'll had fast, lat me not go,
I'll be as iron cauld.

Then I'll appear in your arms
Like the adder an the snake;
Ye'll had me fast, lat me not go,
I am your warld's make.

Then I'll appear in your arms
Like to the deer see wild;
Ye'll had me fast, lat me not go,
And I'll father your child.

'And I'll appear in your arms
Like to a silken string;
Ye'll had me fast, lat me not go,
Till ye see the fair morning.

'And I'll appear in your arms
Like to a naked man;
Ye'll had me fast, lat me not go,
And wi you I'll gae hame.'

Then she has done her to Miles-corse,
Between twall hours an ane,
And filled her hands o holy water,
And kiest her compass roun.

The first an court that came her fill
Was published king and queen;
The niest an court that came her till
Was maidens mony ane.

The niest an court that came her till
Was footmen, grooms and squires;
The niest an court that came her till
Was knights, and he was there.

True Tam-a-Line, on milk-white steed,
A gowd star on his crown;
Because he was an earthly man,
Got that for a renown.

And out at the steed's right nostril,
He breathd a fiery flame
She loots her low, an sains hersell,
And she was busy then.

She's taen the horse then by the head,
And loot the bridle fa;
The Queen o Elfin she cried out,
'True Tam-a-Line's awa.'

'Stay still, true Tam-a-Line,' she says,
'Till I pay you your fee:'
His father wants not lands nor rents,
He'll ask nae fee frae thee.'

'Gin I had kent yestreen, yestreen,
What I ken weel the day,
I shoud taen your fu fause heart,
Gien you a heart o clay.'

Then he appeared in her arms
Like the wolf that neer woud tame;
She held him fast, let him not go,
Case they neer meet again.

Then he appeared in her arms
Like the fire burning bauld
She held him fast, let him not go,
He was as iron cauld.

And he appeared in her arms
Like the adder an the snake;
She held him fast, let him not go,
He was her warld's make.

And he appeared in her arms
Like to the deer sae wild;
he held him fast, let him not
He's father o her child.

And he appeared in her arms
Like to a silken string;
She held him fast let him not go,
Till she saw fair morning,

And he appeared in her arms
Like to a naked man
She held him fast, let him not go,
And wi her he's gane hame.

These news hae reachd thro a' Scotland
And far ayont the Tay,
That Ladv Margaret, our king's daughter
That night had gaind her prey.

She borrowed her love at mirk midnight
Bare her young son ere day,
And though ye 'd search the warld wide
Ye'll nae fand sic a may.

Version H

I forbid ye, maidens a',
That wears gowd in your hair,
To come or ganu by Carterhauah,
For young Tam Lane is there.

I forbid ye, maidens a'.
That wears gowd in your green,
To come or gang by Carterhaugh,
For fear of young Tam Lane.

'Go saddle for me the black,' says Janet,
Go saddle for me the brown,
And I 'll away to Carterhaugh,
And flower mysell the gown.

Go saddle for me the brown,' says Janet,
'Go saddle for me the black,
And I'll away to Carterhaugh,
And flower mysel a hat.'

She had not pu'd a flowr, a flowr,
A flower but only three
Till up there startit young Tam Lane,
Just at bird Janet's knee.

'Why pullst thou the herb, Janet
And why breaks thou the tree?
'Why put you back the bonny babe
That's between you and me

'If my child was to an earthly man,
As it is to a wild buck rae,
I would wake him the length of the winter's night
And the lea land simmer's day.'

The night is Halloween. Janet,
When our gude neighbours will ride,
And them that would their true-love win
At Blackning Cross maun bide.

Many will the black ride by,
And many will the brown,
But I ride on a milk-white steed,
And ride nearest the town:
Because I was a christened knight
They gie me that renown.

'Many will the black ride by,
But far mae will the brown;
When ye see the milk-white stead,
Grip fast and pull me down.

Take in yer arms, Janet,
An ask, an adder lang
The grip ye get ye maun haud fast,
I'll be father to your bairn.

Take me in your arms, Janet,
an adder and a snake ;
The grip ye get ye maun haud fast,
I'll be your warld's make.'

Up bespak the Queen of Fairies
She spak baith loud and high:
Had I kend the day at noon
Tam Lane had been won from me,

I wad hae taen out his heart o flesh,
Put in a heart o tree,
That a' the maids o Middle Middle Mist
Should neer hae taen Tam Lane frae me.'

Up bespack the Queen of Fairies,
And she spak wi a loud yell:
Aye at every seven year's end
We pay the kane to hell.
And the koors they hae gane round about,
And I fear it will be mysel.'

Version I

I forbid ye, maidens a',
That wear gowd on your hair,
To come or gae by Carterhaugh,
For young Tamlane is there.

'There's nane that gaes by Carterhaugh
But maun leave him a wad,
Ether gowd rings, or green mantles,
Or else their maidenheid.

'Now gowd rings ye may buy, maidens,
Green mantles ye may spin,
But, gin ye lose your maidenheid,
Ye'll neer get that agen.'

But up then spak her, fair Janet,
The fairest o' a' her kin :
'I'll cum and gang to Carterhaugh,
And ask nae leave o' him.'

Janet has kilted her green kirtle
A little abune her knee,
And she has braided her yellow hair
A little abune her bree.

And when she came to Carterhaugh,
She gaed beside the well,
And there she fand his steed standing,
But away was himsell.

She hadna pu'd a red red rose,
A rose but barely three,
Till up and starts a wee wee man,
At lady Janet's knee.

Says, Why pu ye the rose, Janet ?
What gears ye break the tree ?
Or why come ye to Carterhaugh,
Withouten leave o' me ?

Says, Carterhaugh it is mine ain,
My daddie gave it me;
I'll come and gang to Carterhaugh,
And ask nae leave o' thee.

He's taen her by the milk-white hand,
Among the leaves sae green,
And what they did I cannot tell.
The green leaves were between.

He's taen her by the milk-white hand,
Among the roses red,
And what they did I cannot say,
She neer returnd a maid.

When she cam to her father's ha,
She looked pale and wan;
They thought she'd dreed some sair sickness,
Or been with some leman.

She didna comb her yellow hair
Nor make meikle o' her head,
And ilka thing that lady took
Was like to be her deid.

It 's four and twenty ladies fair
Were playing at the ba;
Janet, the fairest of them anes,
Was faintest o' them a'.

Four and twenty ladies fair
Were playing at the chess
And out there came the fair Janet,
As green as any grass.

Out and spak an auld grey-headed knight,
Lay oer the castle wa:
And ever, alas I for thee, Janet,
But we'll be blamed a'!

Now hand your tongue, ye auld grey knight,
And an ill deid may ye die !
Father my bairn on whom I will,
I'll father nane on thee.'

Out then spak her father dear,
And he spak meik and mild
And ever, alas I my sweet Janet,
I fear ye gae with child.'

And if I be with child, father,
Mysell maun bear the blame;
There's neer a knight about your ha
Shall hae the bairnie's name.

And if I be with child, father.
'Twill prove a wondrous birth,
For weel I swear I'm not wi' bairn
'To any man on earth.

If my love were an earthly knight,
As he's an elfin arey,
I wadna gie my ain true love
For nae lord that ye hae.'

She prinkd hersell and prinnd hersell,
By the ae light of the moon,
And she's away to Carterhaugh,
To speak wi' young Tamlane.

And when she cam to Carterhaugh,
She gaed beside the well,
And there she saw the steed standina,
But away was himsell.

She hadna pu'd a double rose,
A rose but only twae,
When up and started young Tamlane,
Says, Lady, thou pu's nae mae.

Why pu ye the rose, Janet
Within this garden grene,
And a' to kill the bonny babe
That we got us between

The truth ye'll tell to me, Tamlane,
Aword ye manna lie;
Gin eer ye was in haly chapel,
Or sained in Christentie

The truth I'll tell to thee, Janet,
A word I winna lie ;
Aknicht me got, and a lady me bore
As well as they did thee.

Randolph, Earl Murray, was my sire,
Dunbar, Earl March, is thine;
We loved when we were children small
Which yet you well may mind,

When I was a boy just turnd of nine,
My uncle sent for me,
To hunt and hawk, and ride with him,
And keep him compani.e

There came a wind out of the north,
A sharp wind and a snell,
And a deep sleep came over me,
And frae my horse I fell.

The Queen of Fairies keppit me
In yon green hill to dwell,
And I'm a fairv, lyth and limb,
Fair ladye, view me well.

Then would I never tire, Janet,
In Elfish land to dwell,
But aye, at every seven years,
They pay the teind to hell;
And I am sae fat and fair of flesh,
I fear 't will be mysell.

This night is Halloween, Janet,
The morn is Hallowday,
And gin ye dare your true love win,
Ye hae nae time to stay.

The night it is good Halloween,
When fairy folk will ride,
And they that wad their true-love win,
Miles Cross they maun bide.'

But how shall I thee ken, Tamlane ?
Or how shall I thee knaw,

Amang so many unearthly knights,
The like I never saw ?

The first company that passes by,
say na, and let them gae ;
The next company that passes by,
say na, and do right sae ;
The third company that passes by,
Then I'll be ane o thae.

First let pass the black, Janet,
And syne let pass the brown,
But gript ye to the milk-white steed,
And pu the rider down.

I'll ride on the milk-white steed,
On the side nearest the town;
because I was a christend knight,
they give me that renown.

My right hand will be gloved, Janet,
my left hand will be bare ;
-And these the tokens I gie thee,
Nae doubt I will be there.

'They'll turn me in your arms, Janet,
An adder and a snake
But had me fast, let me not pass,
Gin ye wad be my maik.

'They'll turn me in your arms, Janet,
An adder and an ask ;
They'll turn me in your arms, Janet,
A bale that burns fast.

'They 'll turn me in your arms Janet
A red-hot gad o airn ;
But haud me fast, let me not pass,
For I'll do you no harm.

'First dip me in a stand o milk,
And then in a stand o water
But bad me fast let me not pass,
I'll be your bairn's father.

'And next they'll shape me in your arms
A tod but and an eel
But had me fast, nor let me gang,
As you do love me weel.

They'll shape me in your arms, Janet,
A dove but and a swan,
And last they 'll shape me in your arms
A mother-naked man;
Cast your green mantle over me,
I'll be myself again.'

Gloomy, gloomy, was the night,
And eiry was the way,

As fair Janet, in her green mantle,
To Miles Cross she did gae.

About the dead hour o the night
She heard the bridles ring.
And Janet was as glad o that
As any earthly thing.

And first gae by the black black steed,
And then gaed by the brown;
But fast she gript the milk-white steed,
And pu'd the rider down.

She pu'd him frae the milk-white steed,
And loot the bridle fa,
And up there raise an erlish cry,
He's 'won amang us a'

They shaped him in fair Janet's arms
An esk but and an adder;
She held him fast in every shape,
To be her bairn's father.

They shaped him in her arms at last
A mother-naked man,
She wrapt him in her green mantle,
And sae her true love wan.

Up then spake the Queen o Fairies,
Out o a bush o broom:
She that has borrowd young Tamlane
Has gotten a stately groom.,

Up then spake the Queen o Fairies,
Out o a bush o rye :
She's taen awa the bonniest knight
In a' my cumpanie.

But had I kennd, Tamlane,' she says,
A lady wad borrowd thee
I wad taen out thy twa grey een,
Put in twa een o tree.

Had I but kennd, Tamlane,' she says,
Before ye came frae hame,
I wad taen out your heart o flesh,
Put in a heart o stane.

Had I but had the wit yestreen
That I hae coft the day,
I'd paid my kane seven times to bell
Ere you'd been won away.'

Version J

The maid that sits in Katherine's Hall,
Clad in her robes so black,
She has to yon garden gone,
For flowers to flower her hat.

She had not pulled the red, red rose,
A double rose but three,
When up there starts a gentleman,
Just at this lady's knee.

Says, Who 's this pulls the red, red rose
Breaks branches off the tree?
Or who's this treads my garden-grass,
Without the leave of me?

" Yes, I will pull the red, red rose,
Break branches off the tree,
This garden in Moorcartney wood,
Without the leave o thee.'

Hae took her by the milk-white hand
And gently laid her down,
Just in below some shady trees
Where the green leaves hung down.

"Come tell to me, kind sir,' she said,
" What before you never told ;
Are you an earthly man?' ' said she,
A knight or a baron bold?'

'I'll tell to you, fair lady,' he said,
I What before I neer did tell;
I'm Earl Douglas's second son,
With the queen of the fairies I dwell.

"When rifling through yon forest-wood,
And by yon grass-green well,
sudden sleep me overtook,
And off my steed I fell.

" The, queen of the fairies, being there,
ade me with her to dwell, '
And still once in the seven years
We pay a teind to hell.

" And because I am an earthly man,
Myself doth greatly fear,
For the cleverest man in all our train
To Pluto must -o this year.

"This night is Halloween, lady,
And the fairies they will ride
The maid that will her, true-love win
At Miles Cross she may bide.'

"But how shall I thee ken, though, sir?
Or bow shall I thee know,

Amang a pack o hellish wraiths,
Before I never saw?

" Some rides upon a black horse, lady,
And some upon a brown,
But I myself on a, milk-white steed,
And I aye nearest the toun.

"My right band shall be covered, lady,
My left hand shall be bare,
And that's a token good enough,
That you will find me there.

"Take the Bible in your right hand,
With God for to be your guide,
Take holy water in thy left hand,
And throw it on every side.'

She 's taen her mantle her about,
A cane into her hand,
And she has unto Miles Cross gone,
As hard as she can gang

First she has letten the black pass by,
And then she has letten the brown,
But she 's taen a fast bold o the milk-white steed,
And she's pulled Earl Thomas down.

The queen of the fairies being there,
Sae loud she 's letten a cry
The maid that sits in Katherine's Hall
This night has gotten her prey.

'But hadst thou waited, fair lady,
Till about this time the morn,
He would hae been as far from thee or me
As the wind that blew when he was born.'

They turned him in this lady's arms
Like the adder and the snake;
She, held him fast; why should she not?
though her poor heart was like to break.

They turned him in this lady's arms
Like two red gads of airn;
She held him fast; why should she not?
She knew they could do her no harm.'

They turned him in this lady's arms
Like to all things that was vile;
She held him fast; why should she not?
The father of her child.

They turned him in this lady's arms
Like to a naked knight;
She 'a taen him hame to her ain bower,
And clothed him in armour bright.

Version K

Ledy Margat stands in her boor-door,
Clead in the robs of green;
She longed to go to Charters Woods,
To pull the flowers her lean

She had not puld a rose, a rose,
O not a rose but one,
Till up it starts True Thomas,
Said, Ledy, let alone.

"Why pull ye the rose, Marget?
Or why break ye the tree?
Or why come ye to Charters Woods
Without the leave of me?'

" I will Pull the rose,' she said,
I And I will break the tree,
For Charters Woods is all my own,
And I'll ask no leave of the.'

He's tean her by the milk-white hand,
And by the, grass-green sleeve,
And laid her lo at the foot of the tree,
At her he askt no leave.

It fell once upon a day
They wer a pleaying at the ba,
And every one was reed and whyte,
Ledy Marget's culler was all awa.

Out it speaks an elder man,
As he stood in the gate,
Our king's daughter she gos we bern,
And we will get the wait.'

If I be we bem,' she said,
I My own self beer the blame!
There is not a man in my father's court
Will get my bern's name.'

" There grows a flower in Charters Woods,
it grows on gravel greay,
It cold destroy the boney young bern
That ye got in your pley.'

She's teen her mantle her about,
Her green glove on her hand,
And she's awa to Charters Woods,
As fest as she could gang.

She had no puld a pile, a pile,
O not a pile but one,
Up it startid True Thomas,
Said, Ledy, let alean.

" Why pull ye the pile, Marget,
That grows on gravel green,

For to destroy the boney young bern
That we got us between?'

" If it were to an earthly man,
As [it is] to an elphan knight,
I ould walk for my true-love's sake
All the long winter's night.'

" When I was a boy of eleven years old,
And much was made of me,
I went out to my father's garden,
Fell asleep at yon aple tree:
The queen of Elphan she came by,
And laid on her hands on me.

" Elphan it's a boney place,
In it fain wid I dwelt;
But ey at every seven years end
We pay the teene to hell:
I'm so full of flesh and blood
I'm sear feart for mysel.

"The morn's Hallow Even's night,
When a' our courts do ride,
Through England and through Irland,
Through a' the world wide:
And she that would her true-love borrow
At Miles Corse she may bide.

" The first an coart that ye come till,
Ye let them a' pass by;
The next an court that ye come till,
Ye hile them reverently.

"The next an court that ye come till,
An therein rides the queen,
Me upon a milk-whyte steed,
And a gold star in my croun
Because I am a erle's soon,
I get that for my renoun.

"Ye take me in vour armes,
Give me a right sear fa;
The queen of Elphan she 'l cry out,
True Thomas is awa!

First I 'I be in your armes
The fire burning so bold;
Ye hold me fast, let me no pass
Till I be like iron cold.

'Next I 'I be in your armes
The fire burning so wild;
Ye hold me fast, let me no pass,
I'm the father of your child.'

The first court that came her till,
She let them a' pass by;

The nex an court that came her till,
She helt them reverently.

The nex an court that came her till,
And therein read the queen,
True Thomas on a milk-whyte steed,
A gold star in his croun;
Because he was a earl's soon,
He got that for his renoun.

She's tean him in her armes,
Geen him a right sore fa;
The queen of Elphan she cried out,
True Thomas is awa!

He was into her armes
The fire burning so bold;
She held him fast, let him no pass
Till he was like iron cold.

He was into her armes
The fire burning so wild;
She bald him fast, let him no pass,
He was the father of her child.

The queen of Elphan she cried out,
An angry woman was she,
Let Leady Marget an her true-love be,
She 's bought him dearer than me.'

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²⁸⁵ The bibliographies' formatting is that given to them by their authors.

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Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Nicht alle Werke, die in den Buchhandlungen die Fantasy-Regale füllen, beschäftigen sich mit der Erschaffung neuer phantastischer Welten – einige erzählen auch einfach alte Geschichten neu. So ist seit den frühen siebziger Jahren im anglo-amerikanischen Raum eine überraschend große Anzahl an Romanen erschienen, denen allesamt eine bzw. zwei eng verwandte schottische Balladen („Thomas the Rhymer“ und „Tam Lin“) als Vorlage dienen. Die vorliegende Arbeit untersucht eine Auswahl dieser Romane in vergleichender Perspektive.

Der erste Teil der Arbeit (Kapitel 2 bis 5) beschäftigt sich mit Feenglauben und Feenliteratur im Allgemeinen, während der zweite Teil (Kapitel 6 bis 13) sich in chronologischer Reihenfolge der Analyse einzelner Romanadaptionen widmet und ein abschließendes Fazit die in den einzelnen Kapiteln gewonnenen Erkenntnisse im Vergleich darstellt.

Da im Ausgangsmaterial Elemente keltischen Volksglaubens – nämlich der Glaube an Feen oder Elfen, die Menschen in ihr Reich entführen – eine zentrale Rolle spielen, beginnt meine Arbeit mit einem volkskundlichem Kapitel, in dem die Grundlagen und mögliche Ursprünge des Feenglaubens, vor allem in Ländern mit keltisch geprägter Kultur, beleuchtet werden. Da in der Literatur oftmals beträchtliche Begriffsverwirrung bezüglich Elfen, Feen und mit ihnen verwandten Figuren des Aberglaubens besteht, werden auch einige dieser Figuren, wie zum Beispiel Elementargeister und Trolle kurz vorgestellt und ihre Unterschiede zu den Feen und Elfen herausgearbeitet.

Um neben einer Einführung in die volkskundlichen Grundlagen auch eine Verankerung der Arbeit in aktuellen literaturwissenschaftlichen Theorien zu gewährleisten, beschäftigt sich das nächste Kapitel damit, einen Überblick über Theorien der fantastischen Literatur zu geben. Vorgestellt werden eher strukturalistische und eher funktionale Ansätze, die sich chronologisch zwischen J.R.R. Tolkien (1948) und Farah Mendlesohn (2005) bewegen. Unter den strukturalistischen Ansätzen bildet Tzvetan Todorovs These von der fantastischen Unschlüssigkeit die Grundlage, die ich jedoch um neuere Ansätze wie etwa den von Uwe Durst ergänze. Aus den funktionalen Ansätzen lassen sich meiner Ansicht nach zwei Hauptthesen ableiten, nämlich einerseits: fantastische Literatur erfüllt eine eskapistische Funktion und andererseits: fantastische Literatur spiegelt Prozesse der psychologischen Reifung wider, hat also eine entwicklungspsychologische Funktion.

Um die zeitgenössischen Bearbeitungen der frühmodernen Balladen literaturgeschichtlich einzuordnen, wird im darauf folgenden Kapitel die Geschichte der literarischen Bearbeitungen des Elfenstoffes vom Mittelalter bis ins späte 20. Jahrhundert nachgezeichnet. Es werden generelle Darstellungstrends sowie ihre kulturgeschichtlichen Hintergründe geschildert und an beispielhaften Werken (vor allem) aus der englischsprachigen Literatur illustriert. Vor allem der Wechsel in der Darstellung elfischer Moral hat sich hier als interessanter Aspekt erwiesen. Hier lässt sich eine Entwicklung von, stark vom Volksglauben beeinflussten, sehr ambivalenten mittelalterlichen Elfenfiguren über satirisierte, verkleinerte und schließlich im 19. Jahrhundert zu Blumenelfen verniedlichte Gestalten zurück zu wieder durchaus bedrohlichen, oft amoralischen Elfen in Fantasyromanen des ausgehenden 20. Jahrhunderts beobachten, die auch in den untersuchten Balladenadaptionen zu finden ist.

Das daran anschließende Kapitel widmet sich der ausführlichen Darstellung des Ausgangsmaterials, der zwei Balladen, die als Nummer 37 bzw. Nummer 39 in der umfassenden Balladensammlung von Francis James Child zu finden sind. Hier werden Entstehungsgeschichte der traditionellen Ballade im Allgemeinen und von Child Nr. 37 und 39 im Besonderen, Varianten, Symbolik und Besonderheiten dieser zwei so genannten „Border Ballads“ näher beleuchtet. Traditional ballads sind erzählende Lieder, entstanden wahrscheinlich im späten Mittelalter, schriftlich festgehalten wurden sie jedoch erst im 18. Jahrhundert. Sie stehen zwischen Mündlichkeit und Schriftlichkeit, Lied und Gedicht, enthalten lyrische und dramatische Elemente. Thomas the Rhymer and Tam Lin zählen darüber hinaus zur Gruppe der sogenannten border ballads. Dies hat nichts mit ihrem Inhalt – dem Überschreiten der Grenzen zwischen dem Menschen- und dem Elfenreich – zu tun, sondern mit ihrem Ursprungsort, der schottischen Borders-Region,

Um im Folgenden den Übergang vom eher allgemeinen Teil in die spezifischen Analysekapitel zu schaffen, befasst sich das nächste Kapitel mit den Kriterien, die für Auswahl von acht Romanbearbeitungen des Balladenstoffes entscheidend waren, sowie mit einigen nicht für die eingehende Analyse ausgewählten Bearbeitungen, die für Vergleichszwecke kurz zusammengefasst werden. Ausgewählt wurden acht Balladenadaptionen in Romanform, die zum Teil für Jugendliche und zum Teil für Erwachsene geschrieben wurden und jeweils eine ausreichende Menge Material in punkto Elfendarstellung bieten.

Die sich anschließenden acht Analysekapitel beschäftigen sich jeweils schwerpunktmäßig mit einer (in einem Fall auch zwei) Balladenadaptionen in Romanform.

Die Kapitel sind nach der Reihenfolge der Veröffentlichung der jeweiligen Romane angeordnet und analysieren die folgenden Werke:

- Dahlov Ipcar: *The Queen of Spells* (1973)
- Elizabeth Marie Pope: *The Perilous Gard* (1974)
- Diana Wynne Jones: *Fire and Hemlock* (1984)
- Ellen Kushner: *Thomas the Rhymer* (1990)
- Pamela Dean: *Tam Lin* (1991)
- Terry Pratchett: *Lords and Ladies* (1992) und *The Wee Free Men* (2003)
- Patricia McKillip: *Winter Rose* (1996)

Alle Analysekapitel sind nach einem ähnlichen Schema strukturiert: Nach kurzer Vorstellung des Autors folgt eine ebenfalls eher kurze Zusammenfassung der Romanhandlung. Da alle Romane in mehr oder weniger hohem Maße intertextuell sind, werden daraufhin mögliche Einflüsse und die zahlreichen intertextuellen Anspielungen in den Werken untersucht. Besonderes Augenmerk wird dabei natürlich auf die Verarbeitung der zwei Child-Balladen „Tam Lin“ und „Thomas the Rhymer“ gelegt. Bei einigen Werken, die der Todorovschen Definition der klassischen Fantastik nahe kommen, beschäftige ich mich außerdem noch mit den im Text vorliegenden Realitätssystemen. Da nahezu alle untersuchten Romane ähnliche Hauptcharaktere aufweisen (junges Mädchen, junger Mann, Königin der Elfen) untersuche ich in den Analysekapiteln im Weiteren diese Figurenkonstellation. Besonderes Augenmerk gilt hier aber nicht nur der Königin der Elfen, sondern auch der Darstellung ihres Volkes und, sofern es beschrieben wird, der Darstellung des Elfenreiches und den folkloristischen Einflüssen, die sich in den Beschreibungen und Charakterisierungen finden lassen.

Im letzten Kapitel diskutiere ich die in den Analysekapiteln gewonnenen Erkenntnisse – zusammenfassen ließen sich diese wie folgt: Trotz der großen zeitlichen und geographischen Bandbreite der Schauplätze (vom mittelalterlichen Schottland bis zu einem US-College in den 1970er Jahren) sind sich die Romane doch oft erstaunlich ähnlich, vor allem in der Darstellung ihrer Hauptfiguren. Die weibliche Heldin ist im Allgemeinen jung, intelligent, oft eigenwillig und selbstbewusst und oft durch eine bestimmte negative Charaktereigenschaft oder Umweltbedingung anders als ihre Altersgenossinnen. Nahezu alle Romane (Ausnahmen sind Kushners TR und Pratchett's LL) werden aus der Perspektive der weiblichen Hauptfigur, die der Figur der Janet aus der Ballade entspricht, erzählt. Dies führt dazu, dass die männliche Hauptfigur, die entweder mit Tam Lin oder Thomas dem Reimer oder auch beiden gleichzeitig entspricht, weniger stark im Zentrum steht und oft auch durch

eine gewisse Passivität gekennzeichnet ist – was natürlich auch den Balladenvorbildern entspricht: sowohl Tam als auch Thomas sind eher passiv und lassen sich von weiblichen Figuren rauben bzw. retten.

In Folge dessen ist die zweite aktive Figur in diesem Figurendreieck ebenfalls eine Frau – die Elfenkönigin. Auch in ihrer Darstellung lassen sich in eigentlich allen Romanen große Gemeinsamkeiten finden: Sie ist attraktiv und grausam, kühl und oft auch überheblich, wobei es diese letzte Eigenschaft ist, die es in der Regel der menschlichen Heldin erlaubt, ihren Geliebten, Freund oder Bruder aus den Fängen der Elfen zu befreien. Insgesamt werden die Elfen in den Romanen deutlich unsympathisch geschildert. Sie sind eine Rasse schöner, (fast) unsterblicher, oft übernatürlich intelligenter und mit magischen Fähigkeiten begabter Wesen, doch sind sie auch kalt, grausam und vollkommen fremdartig und unverständlich für die Menschen, die mit ihnen in Kontakt kommen. Gespiegelt wird diese Charakterisierung in der Darstellung des Elfenreiches, das auffällig oft ein Land ewigen Winters ist oder dass sich zumindest dadurch auszeichnet, dass dort im Gegensatz zur Welt der Menschen irgendetwas fehlt – zum Beispiel die Fauna oder auch einfach Licht und Wärme.

Durch diese Darstellung möchten die Autoren vermutlich erreichen, dass die Sympathien des Lesers bei den menschlichen Charakteren liegen, insbesondere bei der weiblichen Heldin, und die Niederlage der Elfenkönigin als verdient empfunden wird. Die Gründe für die negative Darstellung der Elfen sind wahrscheinlich vielfältig, eine Hypothese, die viele Facetten zusammenfasst wäre jedoch, dass die Autoren eine buchstäblich ‚humanistische‘ Agenda verfolgen. So lässt sich vermuten, dass die Moral, die sie ihrem, oft jugendlichem, Publikum vermitteln möchten in etwa so lauten könnte: Auch wenn man nicht perfekt ist, Fehler hat, kurz, menschlich ist, sollte man in sich selbst vertrauen und sich nicht durch vermeintlich überlegene Gegner einschüchtern lassen.

Auch in Richtung Gender-Diskurs scheinen viele der Autoren eine Aussage machen zu wollen. Sie zeichnen ihre Heldinnen als ‚starke Mädchen‘, die sich aktiv für andere einsetzen und in einer Umkehrung des ‚damsel in distress‘-Schemas einen Mann aus der Gefangenschaft der Elfen retten. Die zumindest teilweise eher offen gehaltenen Enden der Romane deuten außerdem darauf hin, dass die Heldinnen, auch nachdem sie ihren Liebsten zurück gewonnen haben, sich nun nicht, wie so oft im Märchen der Fall, auf die klassische Frauenrolle zurückziehen werden, sondern dass sie in der Beziehung zu ihren Männern die Rolle eines gleichwertigen Partners einnehmen möchten. Insgesamt möchte ich die untersuchten Romane aber nicht als feministisch bezeichnen, da sie hierzu doch eher zu konservativ sind, was sich meiner Meinung nach vor allem darin zeigt, dass die einzige Frau

im Roman, die wirklich über Macht verfügt – nämlich die Elfenkönigin – am Ende die Verliererin ist.

Insgesamt könnte man die untersuchten Werke als Romane bezeichnen, die einen mittleren Weg gehen: Auf der einen Seite, da sie sich zwar emanzipationsfreundlich geben und selbstbewusste Heldinnen haben, allerdings doch auch noch durchaus konservative Elemente aufweisen. Auf der anderen Seite, da sie innerhalb des Fantasy-Genres eine Art Mittelposition einnehmen – weder handelt es sich hierbei um literarisch sehr komplexe ‚Hochliteratur‘ noch kann man sie als trivialen Fantasy-Trash abtun. Vielmehr sind sie eher Unterhaltungsliteratur mit einem gewissen literarischen Anspruch, bei denen aber das Erzählen einer ‚guten Story‘ eindeutig im Vordergrund steht.

Obwohl die von mir analysierten Autoren und ihre Romane, gerade auch im Rahmen einer interdisziplinären Untersuchung, die Aspekte der Volkskunde und der Balladenforschung einbezieht, sich durchaus als lohnenswerte Studienobjekte erwiesen haben, gibt es sehr wenig Sekundärliteratur über sie. Ich denke jedoch, dass sich das ändern sollte und hoffe, dass meine Arbeit hier einen Beitrag leisten kann.