

The Cultural Significance of Elves in Northern European Balladry

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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A central motif of the supernatural ballads is the journey and, as I come towards the end of my own special journey, I am conscious of what a huge debt of gratitude I owe to a small group of people— without whose unfailing support and positivity the expedition would have been only a hard trek, instead of the delightful experience it has proved to be.

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Abstract

The focus of this thesis is the supernatural ballads of northern Europe and, in particular, how we can understand a society through its literature. I take as my initial focus the ballads of Denmark (Chapters 2, 4, 5, 6), where supernatural beings of the elf-type are common, before proceeding to the wider northern-European context of Sweden (Chapters 3, 4, 5, 6), Iceland (Chapter 3 and 6), Germany (Chapter 3) and Scotland (Chapters 3 and 7), ranging from the earliest extant text of 1550 through to the nineteenth century to examine synchronic and diachronic changes and what they reveal of the cultures which produced them.

This study considers the ballad as pleasing and satisfying literature which does not exist in a cultural or historical vacuum. Close, comparative reading of the texts moves us towards an understanding of how the supernatural was used as a vehicle for considering identity and man's place in the world. The study analyses the recurring use of the supernatural ballads to establish social and national identities and to express ideologies concerned with gender and patriarchy.

The supernatural ballads demand that we look critically at our attitudes, perspectives, and assumptions. As well as examining the main concerns and motifs of the ballad versions, the thesis seeks to problematize our initial assumptions by re-examining the traditional readings and by looking at examples of non-traditional versions. Responses to the ballad stories from both high and low culture serve as a lens through which to analyse the ballads, so Virgil's consideration of the tale of Orpheus and Eurydice is examined along with Ibsen's own dramatic version of the Agnete story, and Matthew Arnold's poem on the same text.

This thesis also seeks to examine in what ways women are characterized in terms of their relation to men in a genre largely transmitted by women, in the early ballad and in the nineteenth century, to examine tentatively if there is evidence of women seizing the narrative in order to disrupt the dominant discourse.

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in the thesis:

<i>CT</i>	Geoffrey Chaucer: <i>The Canterbury Tales</i>
Child	<i>The English and Scottish Popular Ballads</i> , 5 volumes: English
<i>DfU</i>	<i>Danmarks folkeviser i udvalg</i> : Danish
<i>DgF</i>	<i>Danmarks gamle Folkeviser</i> : Danish
<i>DSL</i>	<i>Dictionary of the Scots Language</i>
<i>ÍF</i>	<i>Íslenzk fornkvæði (Íslandske folkeviser)</i> , ed. Jón Helgason: Icelandic
KJV	<i>The Bible</i> : King James' Version
<i>OED</i>	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
<i>PMLA</i>	Journal of the Modern Languages Association of America
<i>SMB</i>	<i>Sveriges Medeltida Ballader</i> : Swedish
TSB	The Types of the Scandinavian Medieval Ballad

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Chapter 1 Introduction

sed etiam nullam esse usquam tam delirantem aniculam, circa foculum domestici laris una cum vigilantibus ybernis noctibus fabellas Orci, seu Fatarum, vel Lammiarum, et huiusmodi, ex quibus sepissime inventa conficiunt, fingentem atque recitantem, que sub pretextu relatorum non sentiat aliquem iuxta vires sui modici ...

(Boccaccio, *De Genealogia Deorum*, xiv, 10)

But yet there never was so rambling an old woman, sitting up together with others on winter's nights around the fireside of the home, making up and reciting tales of Hell, or the fates, or witches and the like—of which the stories were full—who, beneath the surface of her tale, according to her limited powers, did not feel some meaning ...¹

The unknown has long held a fascination over the minds of the human race: belief in the supernatural of whichever type speaks to the unconscious, offers some answers but no certainty. It is a part of our humanity that we question what lies beyond our knowledge and, as with Boccaccio's old woman, dismiss the fantastic on the one hand, yet wonder if indeed there is some meaning to all these ballads and tales about elves, fairies, mermen and trolls.

The ballad genre at the centre of this thesis has its roots in medieval Europe. Fascination with the ballad has not been constant since that time, but has arrived in waves, in Scandinavia from the sixteenth century, for instance, with the popularity in courtly circles of albums, garlands and autograph books, and anthologies from 1591 onwards. A great folk and ballad revival took place across Europe in the nineteenth century, revitalizing the genre. The ballad lives on today largely within folk-song groups and societies scattered through countries as far apart as Scandinavia, Scotland and the United States, and spasmodically in pockets of England and Germany. Ballad scholarship continues, but increasingly its teaching is being squeezed out of the curriculum of both schools and university departments, particularly outside Scandinavia and America (Brown 2004: 64; Renwick 2001: xii). It is a contention of this work that if we are to maintain the study of

¹ All translations in the thesis are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

the ballad we must return to a study of the songs themselves and the concerns they communicate, the love, hatred and desire for revenge underpinning the narrative, which have provided the themes for much literature through the ages, whether written or oral.

Ballad scholarship of the last century, particularly the first half, was characterized by debate on authorship, origin, migration routes, and methods of composition, scholarship which has made a vital contribution to our understanding of the genesis and development of the genre. This aspect of ballad research, however, is outside the scope of this thesis. As early as 1965 Alan Dundes called for a new direction in ballad study (vii–ix); this was repeated in 1995 by Edmunds and Dundes (vi), by Roger Renwick in 2001 (ix), and again by Dundes in 2002 (382–83). Larry Syndergaard noted that ‘in 1961 Holger Nygard called for us to study the ballads seriously as literary art, but the thinnest chapters in books on ballads still tend to be those on the ballads as literature’ (1995: 58), this thirty-four years after Nygard’s call to arms. This thesis is written in response to these suggestions from ballad scholars that we should return to the aesthetic character of the ballads, to look at what they might suggest about those who listened and joined in, those for whom and about whom the ballads were composed. Dundes and the other like-minded scholars mentioned above have urged a move away from arguments about composition, oral-formulaic theories and dating, essential and valuable in their own right, in an attempt to return to the texts to see what can be discerned of the life, love, worries, and achievements of the societies which produced and sang the ballads. *Societies*: the plural is important. The northern European ballads still extant today are the products of many differing societies, in place and in time, from the Middle Ages through to the nineteenth century and beyond; consequently it should be stated from the outset that the ballads are polysemic: there can be no single meaning where the context for delivery constantly changes. I hope to return to the literary character of the ballad and its contextual, cultural meanings, rather than consider the ballad as a document to be categorized and sourced. Bertrand H. Bronson’s essays (collected in a single volume, 1969), argue in an impressive way that ballad tune and words are interrelated, each giving meaning to the other. Even though he emphasizes the futility

of divorcing text from music, I have not tackled accompanying music, as very much a topic outside my own expertise (though there is an examination of dancing in Chapter 2.4.1).

For a particular ballad to flourish, the singer must want to sing it over and over. Enjoyment is stimulated through an interesting narrative and stimulating mood, whether comedy, terror, drama, tragedy or pathos. The supernatural has long been a source of fascination—‘secrets of hidden worlds attract men’s minds and rouse fear or excitement’ (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 2003: 63)—but the ballads also speak of issues of gender, marriage, power structures, the impact of death within the family, each of which will be examined during the course of the thesis. I shall begin by defining the key terms of the title of the work: the ballad, the supernatural, and the geographical area covered.

1.1 *The northern European ballad*

It is perhaps unfashionable to offer a definition of the ballad genre, but I do so to provide a starting-point for discussion. One of the most accepted came from Gordon Hall Gerould, who defined it as ‘a folk-song that tells a story with stress on the crucial situation, tells it by letting the action unfold itself in event and speech, and tells it objectively with little comment or intrusion of personal bias’ (1932: 11). Pettitt added that it has little or no prefatory introduction, but goes straight into the action; similarly there is little description of actants or setting. It is dramatic in its focus on critical scenes which are delivered largely through dialogue (Pettitt 2012: 432). Both Pettitt and Gummere (1907) described the narrative mode as ‘leaping and lingering’: there is no preamble and little transition between scenes, but the key scenes are lingered over largely through use of dialogue and repetition patternings. Ballads are written in verse, Scandinavian ballads in two or three-line stanzas with four (or three) accented syllables to each line. In English-language ballads, four-line stanzas are the norm. Language change over time impacted on the old metrical system of iambs and anapaests, making for a freer rhythm, and often extended line lengths (Steenstrup [1891] 1968: 125–26). A refrain is common in Nordic countries, but not in Scotland or England.

We should now build on these definitions: neither communicates any concept of the variability and fluidity of the genre, the way the ballad adapts to singer, context and audience:

Sometimes serious, at other times parodic; sometimes sung, at other times read, individual redactions are highly influenced by the vessels of transmission—poet, exemplary performer, hack writer, the familiar yokel, the printer/publisher, the modestly lettered. At different times and in different places, the ballad concept takes particular forms, embeds particular content, in particular stylistic ways, often capturing popular taste and being subject to recurring, if fickle, popular reception to the fluid idea/vessel/form.
(Brown 2004: 69–70)

Mary Ellen Brown advises we should recognize ‘continuity and change’ (2004: 68) and Kvideland notes that tradition ‘is no longer regarded as an identifiable, separate product but as a dynamic, continuous process involving everyone’ (1991: 37). We are in danger of providing a definition of the genre and then slavishly adhering to it without reference to the fact that, because of its oral nature, we, as likely as not, do not have many (or even any) original texts on which to base a definition, and even the early texts that we do have are probably the result of many stages of change.

David Atkinson advises caution when we consider the cultures from which the northern European ballads were collected. The concept that these were the songs of a pre-literate rural working class is the product of the Romantic imagination, not equating to reality (Atkinson 2004: 41), though he concedes that neither is the ballad characteristic of the rising middle classes of the nineteenth century. While acknowledging the centrality of the oral transmission of ballads, Atkinson questions the primacy:

There is very good evidence, most of it from print, for the circulation of some of the standard repertoire of ballads and folk song in English over a period of some five centuries; and over the whole of that time the English-speaking world has consistently been a text-based world, in which oral and literate culture were inseparable and interdependent.
(Atkinson 2004: 43)

The ballad is characterized by fluidity and variation born of an oral tradition, and so its dynamic relationship with its audience, responding to local context, may not have been as reliant on oral tradition as has previously been thought. Atkinson suggests (above) that print copies of the ballads were more accessible than we had realised.

Composition

Authors of the ballads have remained anonymous: the ballad was celebrated and not the singer; nonetheless, ‘each ballad has its author and its moment of birth ... It will only exist at each moment of performance, and it will never be twice performed alike’ (Mitchell 1957: 28–29). The theory of monogenesis argues for composition by one author, whereas that of communal authorship deems that ballads grew out of communities. The Romantics saw the community as creator, as did critics such as Gummere (1908:13). Olrik (1939: 7) took the view that has remained most popular, that ballads were written originally by professional minstrels to fit a tune, and that different singers produced different variants, often adding their own introduction and changing details to fit the social context. Entwistle disagreed with the concept of a professional ballad-maker; he described him as ‘primus inter pares’ (first among equals), distinguished by his talent in singing, his ability to memorize lyrics and build up a repertoire, and by his creative ability (1951: 12). Details of individual performers gathered by Evald Tang Kristenson are discussed in Chapter 1.2.2. More recent debate concerns the ballad-singer’s memorization of his repertoire as opposed to improvisation or composition-in-performance (Vésteinn Ólason 1991: 116–138; Lord 2000: 101). A comprehensive survey of theories of oral composition can be found in part two of Sigurd Kvaerndrup’s *Den østernordiske ballade: oral teori og tekstanalyse* (2006).

There is no one text for each ballad type: ballads developed with each new situation. They were adapted for each context: detail may have been changed to reflect a local situation or character, or detail cut to fill time because the weather had turned cold or rainy and the dance had to be curtailed. The oral ballad itself was not a fixed form, but fluid and subject to change. Accuracy of memory, local events and traditions, and popularity of dance tunes would all affect the delivery of the folksong (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 2003: 64). The oral tradition itself is a thorn in the side of any critic intent on tracking down the origins, transmission, and date of the genre and individual songs within it, hence the lack of agreement amongst scholars; there can be no conclusive or definitive evidence. These debates, while interesting, have at bottom proved a distraction from the business of

understanding the meanings of the texts to their audiences, which this work seeks to address.

Grundtvig categorized the Scandinavian ballad types into five groups: the *riddervise* (knightly ballads), *historiske viser* (historical ballads), *kæmpeviser* (heroic songs), *Danske ridderviser* (Danish songs), and *trylleviser*, the magical songs which are to be the subject of this thesis. The *trylleviser* can be found in the second volume of Grundtvig's collection (*DgF*), numbers 33 to 95.

1.2 *The development of the ballad genre in northern Europe*

1.2.1 *The beginnings*

As a result of the expansion of trade routes between Scandinavia and the Mediterranean, the movement of scholars to and from the university in Paris, and perhaps even earlier Viking incursions on England, Ireland and France, new influences, social, cultural and religious, circulated in medieval Europe; thus ballads made their way through northern Europe. The routes are hotly disputed. P. M. Mitchell (1957: 26) believed the origin of the genre could be traced to Denmark somewhere around the end of the twelfth century, where it sat side by side with the neo-classical tradition. Stephen Mitchell (1991) outlined other arguments: Liestøl's placing the birth of the ballad in Norway (Mitchell 1991: 142–43); Einar Ól. Sveinsson in Iceland, seeing the sagas as the ultimate source of the ballad (Mitchell 1991: 143–44); while Svante Solheim and Ernst von der Recke considered the Faroes as the epicentre, though the latter, along with most other scholars, conceded Denmark may equally have been the birthplace (Mitchell 1991: 145).

In essence, early scholarship on the origin and migration of the northern European ballad can be summarised in the views represented by Grundtvig, Pineau and Doncieux: Grundtvig, that north-west France was the birth-place for most international ballads;² Pineau (1898: 183–207) that Viking-age Danish settlements in Normandy, Denmark and

² His views are further expressed in a letter to Sophus Bugge (13 July, 1875) published in *Maal og Minne* (1923:113–17).

Brittany were the common starting-points for the development of the ballad; and Doncieux's rather vague concept of the ballad wandering and evolving as it travelled through Europe.³ Grundtvig's theory held general sway into the twentieth century but the second half of the twentieth century heard new voices in the migration debate. Alfild Forslin, with specific reference to DgF 47, 'Elveskud' (which is one of the main texts of this thesis, see Chapters 2 and 3), took a different line from Grundtvig, concluding that the Breton *gwertz* (ballad) crossed the Channel to England (date unspecified), went north to Scotland and then migrated to west Scandinavia (1962: 83). Bengt Jonsson complained of Grundtvig's 'romantic and rather vague theory about ballads, created as they were "on the lips of the folk" at a time difficult to decide, and subsequently wandering around Europe in a way hard to demonstrate' (1992: 72), and of von der Recke's 'resigned attitude' in thinking that the question of the origins of the ballad may never be resolved (1992: 81). He also disagreed with Forslin. Jonsson himself had introduced a new narrative, suggesting a Norwegian origin for the rise of the ballad form in Europe (1992: 79), the ballad originating in Norway and going from there in one direction to the Faroes, Iceland and Scotland, and separately from Norway into Sweden and Denmark.

There is general agreement that the popularity throughout Europe of the culture of the French court with its various *chansons* and *lais* (of Breton origin and adapted into courtly poetry in the twelfth century by Marie de France and others) was the main inspiration for the development of the ballad culture,⁴ though Mitchell saw strong links between the ballad tradition and the Icelandic *fornaldarsögur* (1991:143). Prior argued that while ballads were fashionable in most countries in Europe in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the characteristics of the Danish ballads suggested an earlier date, the earliest in the thirteenth century (1860: x). Many major critics agreed (Axel Olrik, Knut Liestøl, Sverker Ek (Mitchell 1991: 140)), though Svend Grundtvig put the beginnings of the

³ George Doncieux, in G. Ernle: *Mélusine* vii: 5 (1894: 104). He traces the journey of the ballad from Italy, through Spain and Portugal, and also from Scandinavia along the Baltic as far as Czechoslovakia.

⁴ See Hodgart (1964: 75), Ólason (1991: 135), Grundtvig (1882: 177), Moltke Moe (1912: 8–10), and David Colbert (1989: 151).

Nordic ballad in the twelfth century (*DgF*, I: x–xi). P. M. Mitchell (1957: 32) was sceptical about claims for a medieval origin for all ballads, many of which could have been written as late as the nineteenth century; medieval manuscripts have not survived except in the smallest fragments, causing dating in many cases to be spurious, based on only circumstantial evidence. He firmly believed that *some* northern European ballads had their origins from the thirteenth century onwards, but that the majority originated from the end of the fifteenth century. Stephen Mitchell (1991: 141) cited linguistic analysis which dated the Nordic ballads a little vaguely to the ‘medieval’ period, but speculated that the ballad genre was well-established in Scandinavia by the fourteenth century and possibly earlier. David Colbert concluded that ‘it is the genre itself and not its individual members that derives from the Middle Ages’ (1989: 13) and was, therefore, critical of scholars (Steenstrup, for instance) in their search for archetypes and fixed texts (1989: 25).

1.2.2 *Denmark*

Early Modern Period

The origin, migration routes, authorship or date of a non-extant archetype for Scandinavian balladry are not the concern of this work. While research in these areas has been extensive over the decades, there are still gaps in our knowledge, understandably when dealing with oral texts. What we can speak about with far more certainty is the popularity of the ballad genre in Scandinavia through the early modern period and into the nineteenth century, the period covered in this thesis. As an example, within the corpus of *DgF* 47 ‘Elveskud’ we range from the sixteenth-century A text, through to the K* and L* versions collected by Evald Tang Kristensen in 1907. We shall begin in Denmark, a country central to this thesis, where early collecting ensured the largest repository of ballads amongst the Nordic countries.

Although chivalric romances migrated from France in the thirteenth century, Danish writers were slow to embrace this movement, until 1500, when three Old Swedish translations of French and German romances known as the *Eufemiavisor* were translated

into Danish (Holm 1993: 171–73). These and other stories of King Arthur became popular, but we know that the ballad too was enjoyed, initially equally amongst the *salons* of the aristocracy, the country gentry, and the peasantry who sang and danced to the ballad tunes within their own communities (Colbert 1992: 46, 68). While critics agree that the ballad genre has medieval roots (Rossel 1992: 48), our earliest documentation lies in song collections collated initially amongst the nobles and aristocracy. With the rise in literacy in the mid-sixteenth century, courtiers copied ballads into ‘poetry books’ for their ladies, and ladies encouraged friends to do the same in their ‘autograph books’ (Olrik 1939: 69). These then became the source materials for a range of pioneering spirits who wanted to ensure the survival of the body of ballads. Karen Brahe’s *Folio*,⁵ for instance, dates to the 1570s and is believed to have been acquired by Brahe from the noblewoman Margrethe Lange, who owned it probably from around 1583 until her death in 1622 (Rossel 1992: 41). Amongst Brahe’s collection of about two hundred folio manuscripts from the second half of the sixteenth century are some of the earliest Danish ballads. In this thesis, we look at five ballads (three in detail) to be found in Brahe’s collection: ‘Elveskud’, DgF 47A (Chapter 2); ‘Hr. Bøsmer i Elvehjem’, DgF 45A (Chapter 4.1.2); ‘Trollden og Bondens Hustru’, DgF 52A (Chapter 2.8); ‘Lady Isabel and the Elf -Knight’, Child 4 (‘Kvindemorderen’ DgF 183), (Chapter 7.3); and ‘Harpens Kraft’, DgF 40 (Chapter 6). Other collections of books and manuscripts, including the beautiful *Hjertebog* (*Heart Book*, 1553–55),⁶ *Hundredvisebogen* (*The Book of a Hundred Ballads*)⁷ published by Anders Sørensen Vedel in 1591, and *Collection Tragica* (1657–95) by Metter Gøya, were compilations mainly of Danish songs, but also included German and French poetry and ballads. Vedel was to be an inspiration for European antiquarian collectors in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, though the concept of ‘ladies of the landed gentry ... scouring the countryside for ballads’ (Colbert 1989: 40) may be a product of the Romantic imagination. He was what Kvaerndrup calls a ‘balladedigter’, a ballad-poet, referring to Vedel’s propensity for blending versions and

⁵ Odense, Landsarkivet for Fyn, (Karen Brahe E 1,1).

⁶ Copenhagen, Det Kongelige Bibliotek (Thott 1510 4o).

⁷ ISBN 87-7421-740-2 (facsimile).

filling gaps. He ‘delte ikke vor tids interesse for at gengive oral poesi så autentisk som muligt’ (did not share the concern of our own day in reproducing oral poetry as authentically as possible; Kvaerndrup 2006: 12). Peder Syv augmented Vedel’s collection of ballads in 1695. This new collection was constantly reprinted, and was popular not only in Denmark and Norway, where the spoken language was Danish, but also throughout Europe (Mundal and Wellendorf 2008: 129). Tunes were added by Rasmus Byerup in 1814, thus consolidating the collection’s influence (Colbert 1993: 30). We shall see the importance of the Syv anthology to the distribution of ‘Elveskud’ in Chapter 2.5.

The refrain in the Danish ballad often makes reference to dancing. Rossel describes a ‘dance craze that swept Denmark off its feet’ at some point in the thirteenth century (1992: 50–51) and, indeed, the Faroese ballads are still accompanied by dancing. By the seventeenth century, however, the traditional ballad accompaniment of dancing in a circle or chain was no longer fashionable in gentrified circles (Bø 1993: 33), and now the ballad was used to while away dark evenings or to accompany the ladies’ sewing and embroidery. Between 1660 and 1750, tastes began to change further as the elite lost interest in the ballad (Rossel 1992: 47) and by the eighteenth century the ballad had been rejected as worthless, even vulgar, in educated and literary circles (Rossel 1982: 3). While once the educated classes were responsible for ensuring the preservation of the ballads in their collections (Pound 1919: 368), they now embraced ‘art’ rather than ‘nature’ and had acquired new tastes in literature (Jansen 1992: 93ff). Culture diffused from the elite to the illiterate, however, and at the point where the status of the ballad at court started to decrease, the oral tradition retained its popularity in rural communities.

Broadside ballads, sold in the streets for as little as the equivalent of a half-penny, reinvigorated the popularity of the genre (Colbert 1993: 30), but by and large what had initially been embraced by the gentry and peasant-class alike was now alive only among the country people. Their traditions and life-style had changed little over two centuries, particularly so in the rural communities of Jutland where ballad-singing remained an oral tradition until well into the nineteenth century (Oirik 1939: 71) and is still maintained. The

rise (and fall) of the ballad in Denmark was repeated in other Scandinavian and European countries (Hustvedt 1930: 148).

The Nineteenth-century Ballad Revival

The first half of the nineteenth century saw huge political upheavals impacting on Denmark, and Scandinavia generally:

the rise and fall of Napoleon, Denmark's defeat at the hands of the allies, a Danish state bankruptcy (in 1813), the ceding of Norway to Sweden in the following year, revolutions elsewhere in Europe (in 1830 and 1848), the arrival of constitutional government in Denmark (1848), and the Danish-Prussian War (1848–50).

(Mitchell 1957: 125)

Superficially, the oral songs of the peasantry, who were unaffected and perhaps even unaware of political change, would seem to remain untouched, unfaltering in their traditions. Yet, despite this apparent conservatism, peasants' ballads might be more subversive than thought, a theme which will be taken up later in the thesis (Chapters 2.3 and 3.1.1, for instance). When they were faced with a national challenge in the eighteenth century, the instinct of the Danes was to return to the literature of their roots, to confirm their nationalism. At the beginning of the Romantic period, new interest was being shown in myth and national cultures, ballads and folksong. Between 1812 and 1814, Abrahamson, Nyerup and Rahbek published *Udvalgte Danske Viser fra Middelalderen (Selected Danish Ballads from the Middle Ages)* in five volumes. By the mid-nineteenth century, the National Romantic movement had taken a firm hold in Denmark as in the rest of Europe and collections of ballads, songs and tales in the villages and remote areas were given a new impetus (Smith-Dampier 1920: 6).

Svend Grundtvig

Nicolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig (1783–1872) published *Nordens Mythologi (Old Norse Mythology)* in 1808 while his son Svend (1824–83) focused on the need for a national collection of native ballads and folksongs. *Danmarks gamle Folkeviser (DgF, 1853–83)*, completed after Grundtvig's death in 1883 by Olrik and others; last volume published in

1973)) was hugely influential, achieving international acclaim and used as a model for Francis James Child's *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, written in five volumes between 1882 and 1898, and which provides the basis for analysis of the Scottish material in Chapters 3 and 7. Grundtvig did not simply produce an anthology, but a scholarly edition: the reader had access to his research via his introductory comments to each individual ballad, his scholarly apparatus, and through the number of versions and variants collected and printed. Grundtvig's subsequent collection of fifty-one ballads, *Danmarks Folkeviser i Udvalg* (*DfU*, *Selected Danish folksongs*), published in 1882, was followed by a second anthology of a further thirty-two ballads in 1909, edited by Axel Olrik after Grundtvig's death, each text intended to appeal to a different audience. The *DfU* version of 'Elveskud' is discussed in Chapter 2.7. While wanting to continue Grundtvig's work, Olrik had no intention of emulating the *grande oeuvre* by producing a scholarly edition; Olrik's focus was to build on Grundtvig's intention with *Danmarks Folkeviser i Udvalg* (1882) and bring ballads back to 'the people'.

Evald Tang Kristensen

While Grundtvig was collecting ballads, folktales, legends and songs were collected by folklorists fired not just by their love of songs and tales but by a determination to ensure records were in place for posterity before the tradition disappeared (Tangherlini 1994: 46). Over forty years in the nineteenth century, Evald Tang Kristensen collected three thousand ballads as well as tales, legends, proverbs and other folk material. Kristensen is significant not just for the size of his collection but for his methodology in that he interviewed his informants personally, showing interest in their life and that of the community and asking questions about the contexts of the singing which previous collectors had failed to ask (Tangherlini 2013: 36–39). My prosopographical research into the collective experiences of nineteenth-century women rural workers, for instance (see Chapter 2.3), enables a better

understanding of attitudes towards areas such as marriage, women's agency and power, and male authority.⁸

Shortcomings in the methodology used by Kristensen are generic to the history of such collections. He found his compilation was in some areas too late—many of the generation with the stories had already passed away—and he omitted to enquire after the performers of the ballads, information he would need to complete the full picture of the contexts of the ballads. In addition, where he did not interview informants himself, but asked for stories to be sent in, there was some considerable editing of the texts. He lamented these omissions:

Almost all of the folktales and legends sent to me approach far too closely—or flat out are—book speech. One discerns readily that it is a considerable lessening of the folktale's worth, and straight out a sin against it, when one dresses it in so artificial and ill-fitting clothes as book speech is. No, the oral account should be written down as accurately as possible and ideally with many excellent dialect words and turns of phrase, which old people are rich with, for it to be in the correct frame.

(Tangherlini 1994: 48)

The gender of the singers, copyists and collectors is recorded in this thesis where possible and relevant. Child expressed his own gratitude to the women who had maintained the ballad tradition in their singing, particularly to their children, who had contributed so much to his own collections (Rieuwerts 2002: 150). Of the forty-two versions of DgF 47 'Elveskud' collected by Grundtvig, for example, twenty-four were supplied by women (see Chapter 2.4). Kristensen reported that women were better able to memorize and sing the ballads than men as most could not read and so had better developed memories (Tangherlini 1994: 59). This role has not always been valued: when the ballad lost its popularity amongst the educated and fashionable, it became a 'gesunkenes Kulturgut', a sunken culture suitable only for the 'not overly-civilized' (Rieuwerts 2002: 153).

⁸ In his new study *The Anglo-Scottish Ballad and its Imaginary Contexts* (2014: 150), David Atkinson reminds us that the ballad is a kind of palimpsest, receiving imprints and re-workings from a series of singers and printings, whether anthologies or broadsheets. There can be no *one* version. The dangers of ascribing a named singer, therefore, with fully-researched background, is tantamount to suggesting there is an *author* and that the ballad is a 'finished' product. He recommends instead a genetic approach where possible, depicting the ballad as a process, rather than product.

1.2.3 *Norway*

The Norwegian ballad tradition will not feature in this thesis, but the history of ballad recording has followed comparable lines with that in Sweden and Denmark. Similarities in cultures and language, of course, made the movement of ballads across national boundaries easy. Warne (1996: 51) estimates the first ballad could be heard in Norway as early as 1300, but agrees with Gustafson (1961: 43) that the earliest extant examples date from 1570 to 1660. Handwritten songbooks appeared in Norway in the eighteenth century, but they were largely written in Danish. In a part of the world much marked by shifting boundaries and the sharing of monarchs, the Romantic revival's attempt to strengthen national feeling (Warne 1996: 53) following Norway's break from Denmark in 1814 (Rossel 1982: 7) gave rise to organized collections resulting in anthologies of national songs (Bø 1993: 33). The first major Norwegian compilation, *Norske Folkevisor (Norwegian Folk songs)*, appeared in 1854.

1.2.4 *Sweden*

This thesis considers Swedish-language ballads collected in both present-day Sweden and in Finland. Historically, Finland was a part of the kingdom of Sweden from the Kalmar Union until 1809, and was known as Sweden-Finland. The Swedish language ballad tradition in Finland was always strong; as in Iceland, but in a more multilingual context, it ran alongside and competed with other traditions which, in Finland, comprised a large corpus of songs, tales and riddles, some represented by the national epic *Kalevala* (Hustvedt 1930: 158). As in Denmark, compilations from the Renaissance through to the eighteenth century provide our earliest examples of ballads in Sweden (Rossel 1982: 6). The majority of ballads recorded are held in common with other Scandinavian countries, but about thirty-four are home-grown (Jansson 1993: 33). The earliest known informant is Ingierd Gunnarsdotter (1601–86) from Västergötland (Jansson 1993: 34; see Chapter 6.1.3), which indicates an early involvement from the peasant class.

The loss of Finland to Russia in 1809 occasioned a grand patriotic movement, which encouraged the Swedish government to initiate the collecting of folklore material for a national archive (Jansson 1993: 34). The *Götiska Förbundet* (Gothic Society), founded in 1811, advocated that a study of the nation's Gothic past could bring about a moral improvement, and so new national songs were written and old ones collected. The seminal collections of Swedish ballads are Geijer and Afzelius's *Svenska Folkvisor* (1812–14), containing ballads and melodies written down as early as the late 1700s; Arvideson's *Svenska Fornsånger* (1834–42); and the five-volume *Sveriges medeltida ballader* (SMB, 2001), a major, all-encompassing edition of Swedish ballads, their familiar tunes and provenances edited by Bengt R. Jonsson, Margareta Jersild and Sven-Bertil Jansson. The launch of the Swedish Literary Society in Finland in 1885 was instrumental in the collection of songs and tales from the Swedish provinces and in collating archival material, including eight thousand ballad texts and variants (Hustvedt 1930: 159).

1.2.5 *Iceland*

Stories of elves and trolls abound in Iceland. An early reference to elves can be found in the tenth-century *Kormáks saga* (Chapter 22), where they received sacrificial blood in a request for healing. In later sagas, for instance *Grettis saga Ásmundssonar*, *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*, and *Sigurðar saga þögla* (fourteenth, fifteenth, and late fourteenth centuries), *álfar* were listed among mainstream otherworldly creatures with potential for evil, like fiends, trolls and witches (Gunnell 2007: 119). Within the next two centuries, they were 'starting to take on their later internationally folkloric "elvish" form, slipping through solid walls, stealing children, luring innocent young men and women off safe moral pathways, and having recurrent problems with child-bearing' (Gunnell 2007: 120). Bishop Oddur Einarrson's account (1588) describes the daily life of the *álfar*, and the seventeenth century brought a number of further works, feeding beliefs of otherworldly beings in Iceland (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 2003: 91ff), in particular works by Bishop Gislí Oddsson and Jón lærði (2003: 96). Such tales continued into modern times (2003: 176).

The ballad with its tales of elves was, however, imported. Little is known of the provenance of the Icelandic ballads, about origin, singer, or date. Vésteinn Ólason noted that the tradition has been continued largely by women as it carried little prestige; he attributed the sympathy expressed in Icelandic ballads to this source (1982: 23). He proposed transmission routes to Iceland from Norway and the Faroes, and some direct from Denmark, with very few home-grown ballads. Regarding the age of the Icelandic ballad, he thought the first was *recorded* in the seventeenth century; Finnur Jónsson concluded they were brought from continental Europe between 1400 and 1525, and Liestøl from as early as the thirteenth century (Vésteinn Ólason 1982: 84–88). Even though Iceland made the ballad its own (Chapter 3.3), it was never to achieve the popularity evident in the other Nordic countries (Finnur Jónsson 1907: 409–10). As in Finland, ballads competed with other genres, here the sagas and the *rímur* (Entwistle 1951: 227). Vésteinn Ólason accounts for its ability to survive: its freer rhythms and use of language ‘add to the charm and exotic flavour of the ballads, where not only language but human emotions have a freer play than is common in Icelandic poetry from the period’ (1993: 32). The two standard collections of Icelandic ballads are Grundtvig and Sigurðsson, *Íslenzk fornkvæði* (1854–85), a compilation of both Scandinavian and native Icelandic ballads modelled on *DgF* and featuring sixty-six ballad types, and *Íslenzk fornkvæði (Íslandske folkeviser)*, edited by Jón Helgason (1962–81). This houses 110 ballad types within eight volumes, organized by the chronology of the manuscripts preserving them rather than by type. There has been no significant ballad collecting since (Espeland 2004: 13).

1.2.6 *The Faroe Islands*

If Hustvedt (1930: 172) is correct in his assertions, the Faroe Islands were the last of the North Sea ballad community to receive the ballad, their strongest link being with Norway; nevertheless their collection is significant, in size and in its very specific role in helping to establish a national identity, and in recording Faroese life and history in their own language. Collections started with Ole Worm in 1639 and Jens Christian Svabo (1821).

Grundtvig collaborated with J. Bloch to publish the sixteen-volume *Føroya Kvæði: Corpus Carminum Færoensium* (*Faroese Ballads: a Corpus of Faroese Songs*; 1876).

Isaacson sees a socializing function: their ballads transmit ‘Faroese identity ... [and] also give singers a chance to perform, with renown, and communicate key Faroese traditions and values’ (1993: 32). The Faroese ballads stand outside the main Nordic tradition in that they are multi-episodic and characterised by their extreme length, sometimes several hundred stanzas long. The Faroese continue to dance to the ballad.

While the ballad tradition remains a vital part of the islands’ identity, it is not a part of this study as the body of supernatural ballads is not as strongly represented here as in other northern European countries. We find CCF 153/A 48 ‘Nykura visa’ (‘Nøkkens Svig’); CCF 169/A 54 ‘Signild og dvörgurin’ (‘Jomfruen og Dværgekongen’); and CCF 154/A 63 ‘Ólavur Riddararós og álvamoy’ (‘Elveskud’) in the supernatural section.

1.2.7 *The German language tradition*

Folk ballad collections appeared in the German language much earlier than in other European countries, with the *Bergkreyen* in 1531 and the *Ambras Songbook* in 1582 (Anderson, Holzapfel and Pettitt 1982: 105), but what is even more significant is the number of melodies collected (Entwistle 1951: 243), firstly by Ludwig Erk and Franz Böhme (1877, 1893, 1895), and then a detailed examination by John Meier (1864–1953) who founded the *Deutsches Volksliedarchiv* (German Archive of Folksong). The eighteenth- and nineteenth-century German⁹ collections of *Volkslieder* (folk songs) were inspired by the anthologies of Peder Syv (Danish) and Scotland’s Thomas Percy, which had been so influential throughout Europe. J.G. Herder led the German ballad revival, publishing *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern* (*Voices of the Peoples in Song*) in 1778 (Chapter 3.5), influencing further collections such as Clemens and Brentano’s *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (1805–8), supposedly folk songs from the Middle Ages, but many rewritten or even composed

⁹ A term used for convenience in acknowledgement that it was not until 1871 and the final act of unification that the German Empire was created.

entirely by the editors (Entwistle 1951: 123). Jacob Grimm's exhaustive study *Deutsche Mythologie* (1835) gave the supernatural some legitimacy in its tracing of the beliefs of the old Teutonic tribes in close detail.

While Scott turned his hand to literary ballads in Scotland, Goethe was to lead the way in Germany (see Chapter 3.6). German ballads of the supernatural are fewer in number than in other north European countries (Entwistle 1951: 262) and required less communal involvement: no dancing and no refrain sung by the audience (1951: 199).

Within the Nordic countries in particular, we see more than just a cultural impetus behind approaches to ballad editions:

We [...] see that the collecting and editing of the Scandinavian ballads have had multifaceted cultural and partly political agendas: Grundtvig's Danish initiative as part of a pervasive patriotism; Landstrand, Bugge, and Moe's efforts in Norway and Svabo's efforts in the Faroe Islands to discover and cultivate a national identity apart from Danish hegemony; Afzelius' efforts, informed by the pandemic national-romanticism of the era and by membership in an international network of enthusiasts to produce a comprehensive Swedish collection. (Syndergaard 1995: 17)

There were two reasons behind these enthusiastic translations of ballads into the country's own language: not just a fervent desire to rediscover the past but also a need to establish each country's national identity through a collection of ballads in its own language, and not that of its political overlord.

1.2.8 *Scotland and England*

In the Romantic age, Scotland and England followed their European cousins in seeing not just romance in the ballad stories, but also a need to preserve ballads for posterity as evidence of their past. Two key names in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries are Thomas Percy, Bishop of Dromore (1729–1811), and James McPherson (1736–96), but more important to the current study is the contribution made by Walter Scott (1771–1832) and Anna Gordon Brown of Falkland (1747–1810), see Chapter 7.

Scottish ballad collectors such as Walter Scott and Robert Jamieson were anxious to ensure Scottish versions of the ballads were preserved as part of the national heritage after the Act of Union (1707). Inspired by Percy and by the enthusiasm of the German

poets and ballad collectors such as Goethe and Burger (Hodgart 1964: 149) and also by the ballads sung to him as a child by his grandmother and aunt, Scott began his own collection, but he insisted on only Scottish versions: ‘Scotland’s song rather than England’s “reliques”’ (Gilbert 2009: 2), including details of their Scottish provenance. *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* was published in three volumes between 1802 and 1803. It also sold well in Denmark, Sweden, Germany and North America, ensuring international recognition.¹⁰

A far bigger name in ballad collection belongs to the nineteenth century: Professor Francis James Child of Harvard University (1825–96), who compiled *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (published 1882–98), completed after his death by George Lyman Kittredge. This collection of 305 ballads and their variants from England, Scotland and North America was modelled on Svend Grundtvig’s *Danmarks gamle Folkeviser*, whose editor Child kept in touch with via letter and exchange of material. Like Grundtvig, Professor Child systematized his collection, putting versions and variants of each ballad side by side with headnotes and a record of their provenance, but unlike Grundtvig, Child took most of his texts from collections rather than individual ballad singers; it is not possible, therefore, to study the texts according to the gender of the singer. Ballad tradition in Scotland and England followed the same multiplicity of format as mainland European ballads: oral transmission, varying according to location, time and context; manuscripts; chapbooks and broadsheets; and various collections put together by enthusiasts and antiquarians, amateur and professional. Scottish and English ballads share the same characteristics as their Nordic cousins: a focus on narrative and action presented through dialogue; simple language, familiar phrases, fixed formulas and repetition; ballad metre and rhyme; no narratorial judgements or sentimentality. Refrains, an integral part of the Danish ballads, do not occur so frequently in Britain, where dancing in accompaniment to the ballads was not common (Hodgart 1964: 83). In a similar way to Scandinavia, a folk revival in the twentieth century in Scotland has ensured the ballad tradition continues.

¹⁰ www.walterscott.lib.ed.ac.uk/home.html accessed 16 October 2013.

1.3 *The 'function' of the ballads*

We can only surmise as to the reasons why the ballads were composed and remained popular for generations, but attempting to do so is a key concern of this thesis. Little that has ever been written (or sung) has had one function only, to entertain; our tales, songs and riddles, while composed overtly to provide entertainment, have all secondary functions. This section discusses the importance of functionalist interpretations in recent scholarship, as a precursor to the functionalist analyses of individual texts in the chapters to follow.

Zipes speaks of the socialization process of fairy tales and their authors: “‘secret agents’ of an education establishment which indoctrinates children to learn from fixed roles and functions within bourgeois society’ (1983: 46). We need only to look at authors in our own time who have used traditional fairy tales and ballad stories to promote a specific agenda to understand how the narratives can be employed to express criticism and to promote an alternative life-view. Angela Carter’s short story ‘The Erl-King’ (1979), for instance, is a vehicle to express feminist views, and Michel Tournier’s 1970 novel *Le Roi des Aulnes* (The Erl King) to communicate disturbing images of young people being ‘abducted’ into Hitler Youth during the Third Reich.

As the ballad is a product of so many societies, we cannot speak so easily of a reflection of *the* society in which it was sung and the way that society viewed the world; yet the core of the ballad changes little as it reflects the eternal concerns of love, death, revenge, loyalty and obedience. Folk tales and ballads also express not only how people were, but how they wanted to be, the ‘aspirations, needs, dreams and wishes of common people in a tribe, community, or society, either affirming the dominant social values and norms or revealing the necessity to change them’ (Zipes 2002: 7). We have representations, therefore, not only of the dangers of the supernatural (DgF 47, ‘Elveskud’; Chapter 2), but also portrayals of the defeat of the supernatural’s sway over the human (DgF 48, ‘Elvehøj’; Chapter 4); we see in some ballads women endowed with agency and power (Child 39, ‘Tam Lin’; Chapter 7), and men riding out in defence of right (DgF 34, ‘Hr. Tønne af Alsø’; Chapter 8.4). We shall examine how these enculturating functions have the effect of

drawing the community together, instilling a sense of identity by reinforcing its rules and expectations (Kvideland and Sehmsdorf 1991: 22). The aetiology of events was often ascribed to harsh landscapes which took on characteristics of the enemy, insisting on revenge if its rules were broken, theories strong particularly among scholars of Icelandic ballads and stories (Simpson 1972: 13; Jacobsen and Levy 1988: 34). In northern lands where villages were often remote and living conditions hard, especially in winter, ballads may also have had an escapist function (Bedell 2007: 15).

Wax and Wax look at the perception of the reality of supernatural beings even within a Christianized world, where each event ‘has its own chain of causation, in which Power, or its lack, was the decisive agency’ (1962: 183). The attempt to replace the belief that good and evil spirits were responsible for fortune and misfortune in the post-Reformation with the doctrine of God’s providence did not fully convince the populace, particularly in rural areas (Thomas 1971: 111). Thomas points to evidence of ‘living fairy beliefs’ collected into the nineteenth century (1971: 608). This brief introduction to the possible functions and meanings of the ballads under review will be revisited in the Conclusion (Chapter 8).

1.4 *Who were the elves? Towards a definition*

Supernatural tropes are central to this thesis, so we must as far as possible ensure a common understanding of the types we find in the ballads. The difficulty lies in the fact that responses vary according to culture and time: ‘meaning is potentially variable and individuated. That is, meaning may vary from context to context; additionally meaning may vary within a context from individual to individual’ (Brown 1984: 91) and may change over time. It is appropriate, therefore, to begin with an understanding of what we know about the elf in the Middle Ages.

While much of this thesis will refer to the *elf*-ballads of northern Europe, a quick survey of the ballads analysed reveals not just elves, but fairies, goblins, trolls, dwarfs and mermen. If we try to bring concepts of taxonomy inherited from Linnaeus to our

understanding of elves and fairies, we have an immediate problem (Ármann Jakobsson 2013). The supernatural was never meant to be understood nor its individual members classified, and neither did the European believers in the supernatural five hundred years ago have the same kinds of taxonomy as we do. What was not a man was otherworldly, so a ‘dwarf may well be an “elf” [...], a dwarf may be referred to as a troll or at least act like one, and the same figure may well be characterised as a troll, a giant (*jotunn, risi*) and even a man in the same source (the *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*)’ (Ármann Jakobsson 2013: 205–06).

Similarly,

in Old Norse, *álfr* is a far more unspecified term with a fairly broad meaning [...] the concept of *álfr* is much less constricted in the Middle Ages than in the days of Jón Árnason, and early twenty-first century elves are different still from the elves presented in the folk material of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

(Ármann Jakobsson 2013: 203)

In particular, the twentieth century depicts them as diminutive beings, while the folk ballads sing of creatures the same size as humans.

Alaric Hall (2005, 2007) and Karen Louise Jolly (1996, 1998) provide a full account of the origins of the Anglo-Saxon elf, while much of what we know about the Nordic *álfar*, *huldre folk* (hidden folk), and elves comes from folklorists like Thomas Keightley (1900). Terry Gunnell (2007) looks at *álfar* and *huldufólk* within the Icelandic tradition. We shall begin with Alaric Hall for a scholarly definition of the Anglo-Saxon elf, a word which developed out of the Old English *ælf* in the Middle English period (2007: 178–79). He goes back to Old English and Norse myth, finding evidence of the nature of elves in medical texts, charms and prayers, and seventeenth-century witchcraft trials. Hall points out that almost all extant sources of information on elves were written by Christians, the product of ‘a small, learned, clerical, male, Southumbrian and probably noble section of Anglo-Saxon society’ (2007: 18). He considers the representation of elves both within the Christian framework and outside it, noting three clear strands: texts equating elves with devils; texts which place elves within a Christian framework but with no satanic connection; and texts which acknowledge the existence of elves but do not place them specifically within the

Christian belief system.¹¹ We shall see (below) that Snorri Sturluson provided evidence for the first of these. His *dökkálfar* (dark elves) and *ljósálfar* (light elves) have been interpreted as devils in hell and angels in the heavens (Shippey 2005: 181). Karen Louise Jolly discusses how the gradual demonization of elves from amoral beings to demons fits into the ‘Good–Evil paradigm of the Christian moral universe’ (1996: 136) and the Christianization of folk traditions. Further evidence of the link between elves and the devil came in the witchcraft trials, and in the eighth- or ninth-century Royal Prayerbook which includes the imprecation ‘adiuvo te satanae diabolus aelfae’ (I conjure you, devil of Satan, of [an/the] ælf), concluding that ‘the Royal Prayerbook attests to the early association of *ælf* with Christian demonic beings, and probably its use specifically of Satan himself’ (Hall 2007: 72). For an example of the second category, elves as part of creation with no satanic characteristics, Robert Kirk’s *The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns and Fairies* (1691–2; further reference in Chapter 7) considered elves as created by God, and referred to in the Bible.¹² Outside of Scotland, we have the Icelandic *Tiðfordrif* (Jón Guðmundsson lærði, 1644), and the Old English poem *Beowulf*. Here elves are listed among the progeny of Cain when he was banished as a punishment for murdering his brother (Shippey 2005: 173):

Panon untydras ealle onwocon,
 eotenas ond ylfe ond orcneas,
 swylce gigantas, þa wið Gode wunnon
 lange þrage (ll. 111–14)

From there awoke all the ill-favoured creatures, ogres and elves and spirits from the underworld, and likewise the giants that long fought with God

There can be no mistake that, in the mind of the *Beowulf* author, elves are one of the misfits of God’s kingdom. In Hall’s third category, where there is ambivalence regarding the position of elves in the Christian cosmography and no link with the devil, we have the ballads. The elves intrude into a society which is Christian but they do not necessarily seem to be a part of it, whether demonic or as a force for good. In the ballads, female elves predominate: ‘this female dominance of the other world inverts the usual patterns of

¹¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elf>; accessed 01 July 2014.

¹² For instance ‘Then a spirit passed before my face; the hair of my flesh stood up. It stood still, but I could not discern the form thereof: an image was before mine eyes’ (Job 4: 15–16; KJV).

rulership in medieval English and Scottish society' (Hall 2007: 160), but as rulers they often present as peevish and vengeful.

Theories abound as to the elf's origin: fallen angels or sons and daughters of Eve, for instance (summarized in Einar Ól.Sveinsson 2003: 170–83). Trolls, living in lonely places, and elves, of human size and, other than living in hillocks, following parallel human lives, are to be found in the Latin treatise *Qualiscunque descriptio Islandiae* (1588), a description of Iceland probably written by Bishop Oddur Einarsson (Vésteinn Ólason 2003: 84). An outcome of the Renaissance, a more widespread understanding of classical literature, resulted in the conflation of classical deities and native British fairies. A well-known example would be Prospero's invocation of 'Ye elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes, and groves, And ye that [...] do chase the ebbing Neptune'¹³ (Cooper 2004: 177). Similarly, C.S. Lewis devotes a chapter of *The Discarded Image* (1970: 122–38) to an understanding of the *Longaevi* (long livers), described by Martianus Capella as 'dancing companies of *Longaevi* who haunt woods, glades, and groves, and lakes and springs and brooks; whose names are Pans, Fauns [...] Satyrs, Silvans, Nymphs',¹⁴ summarized by Lewis as 'Fairies' (1970: 122–23). He sees responses to the fairies varying with individual and time; Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, for example, was published in 1590 as a tribute to Elizabeth I and yet just a few years earlier a woman was executed for exploits alongside the 'Queen of Elfan' (Latham 1930: 16). Helen Cooper's study of the fairy mistress across the Middle Ages and Renaissance examines how she adapts for new genres and reading audiences: the 'single defining quality of the fairy monarch [...] is not sexuality but power: [...] which is primarily characterized by its arbitrariness' (2004: 178). The fairy queen of both 'Thomas Rymer' and 'Tam Lin' exercises this power, as we shall see in Chapter 7, but the female elves of the Scandinavian ballads tempt with their sexuality and can be resisted. Arbitrary power is there, of course; Hr. Oluf dies whether he dances or not (Chapters 2 and 3).

¹³ Shakespeare, *The Tempest* Act 5, Sc.1, 33–35.

¹⁴ Martianus Capella (1860), II, 167, p. 45.

More so than in the rest of Europe, the Nordic countries and Britain, especially Scotland, have a predominance of supernatural ballads (Buchan 1991: 142), and in Scottish ballads we are much more likely to meet fairies than elves, though both feature in Chaucer by the end of the fourteenth century. 'Faerie' (from the French *fee* and Latin *fata*), is found in the early fourteenth-century Auchinleck Manuscript, in the tales of *Sir Segarré*, *Guy of Warwick* and *Sir Orfeo* (see Chapter 6.1.4 for *Sir Orfeo*'s influence on 'Harpans Kraft'), though Wade suggests that, because of the multiple use of the word *faerie*, an earlier introduction into the language is possible (2011: 4). He deems that the less than serious, or even satiric, treatment of fairies on the stage by the late sixteenth century suggests 'any possibility of belief slides rather quickly down the socio-economic and educational scale' (2011: 5).

The folklorist Jeremy Harte's account of British fairies (2004), and Thomas Keightley's of Scandinavian elves (1900: 78–93) describe a race of supernatural beings who also have human form and imitate human existence. Hall concurs: 'It is unlikely that *aelfe* in early Old English were considered small, invisible or incorporeal. Although it is not conclusive, the early Old English evidence suggests corporeal anthropomorphic beings mirroring the human in-groups which believed in them' (2007: 67–8). Theories from folk culture abound, such as Keightley, who would seem to follow Snorri Sturluson (*Edda: Gylfaginning*, Chapter 17) in his division of the elves into Good (white) and Evil (black) Elves who live underground in small hills or under men's houses, but this is not a description we can apply to the elves of the Scandinavian or Scottish ballads. The singing of the Nordic elves can be heard and evidence of their dancing seen in the fields in the form of fairy-circles (*älvringar*). They follow an agrarian existence, fishing, keeping cows and sheep, occasionally straying into human territory and being spotted, especially by those born on a Sunday. Young female elves are irresistible to human men; wealth and beauty were characteristics of the race (Shippey 2005: 172–73). The ballads and stories that Keightley records of the interaction between the two worlds reveal how the elves would use human midwives, and would sometimes set up house and have children with humans (also

Einar Ól. Sveinsson 2003: 84). They would occasionally carry off humans who might, or might not, return after a few days or years, whole or distracted. Elves were known to abduct children in exchange for their own weakling babies (Chapter 3.6), but also could be generous in exchange for human kindness. Elves achieved success by means of temptations as well as by force (Shippey 2005: 171). As we shall see in the ballads, they were vengeful when thwarted and would kill, often with the *elveskud* (elf shot; Chapter 2.8), described by Hall as a stabbing pain (2007: 115). Early attestations that Anglo-Saxon elves could inflict pain, physical or mental sickness which could lead to death in humans, include the charm *Wið færstice* (against a stabbing pain) and Bald's *Leechbook* and *Leechbook III*, all tenth-century (Shippey 2005: 169–71). A recipe recorded in *Leechbook III*, lxi, reveals a need for protection against elves amongst other beings: 'Work a salve against elfkind [*ælfcynne*] and night-goers, and the people with whom the Devil has intercourse' (Jolly 1996: 159).

Songs about elves were composed and sung not just in the late medieval and early modern periods, but for centuries afterwards; there has always been a fascination with tales of the unknown (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 2003: 63). In many places there would still remain a communal belief— that elves might abduct careless villagers, for instance (Purkiss 2000: 68) — but also there was a sense that songs bound the community together. They enabled a communal response, to make work-time go faster (harvesting, for instance) and leisure-time enjoyable (Sharp 1907: 105). But communal entertainment was not the only function. This thesis will consider to what extent the community found meanings in the songs relevant to its own life and group. By the Scandinavian Reformation, the ballads were not so fashionable, yet we find the elves and their songs reinvented two hundred years on in other parts of Europe.

1.5 *Northern Europe*

The geographical area of study, northern Europe, encompasses Denmark, Sweden, Iceland, Germany and Scotland. Space, unfortunately, precludes an examination of the supernatural ballads of Norway and Finland, while those of the Faroe Islands tend to

belong to categories other than the supernatural. The initial focus of the study is on Denmark as the country with the richest attestations of ballads; Sweden is a natural companion as Denmark's cousin in the East Norse family, and Iceland provides a case-study from the West Norse group. Scotland moves us beyond the Scandinavian-speaking world, providing us both with ballads in the same tradition, like 'Clerk Colvill' (Chapter 3), and with others like 'Thomas Rymer' and 'Tam Lin' which cannot be found to the east (Chapter 7). With respect to Germany, the study has a particular focus on the treatment that Herder and Goethe accord to 'Elveskud' (Chapter 3).

The relationship between all of the countries listed above has from medieval times been characterized by shifting alliances and borders, and often enmity. The Swedish/Finnish alliance has been strong since the kingdom of Sweden expanded its territory to include what is now Finland in the twelfth century; similarly that between Norway and Iceland, following Norway's acquisition of the island in the thirteenth century. The Kalmar Union (1397–1520) brought together the three kingdoms of Denmark, Norway (including Iceland) and Sweden (including Finland) under a single monarch to block German expansionism, an alliance which was to remain in a different form, under the Oldenburg dynasty, until the nineteenth century. In 1809 Finland separated from Sweden when it was ceded to Russia, and in 1814 Norway from Denmark, only to be seized by Sweden. Finland and Iceland became independent states in the twentieth century (Erikson 2005: 5). Germany exerted an influence throughout Scandinavia on both political and trading fronts, and was an influential member of the Hanseatic League. This was a confederation of trading ports throughout northern Europe which operated between the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries, which was set up to defend mercantile and economic interests. It also facilitated the movement of culture and ideas through Germany, Denmark, Norway and the British Isles. Parts of Scotland had, of course, been under Norse control until into the Middle Ages. Alliances between Scandinavia and the British Isles were further strengthened through marriages between their royal houses. Margaret of Denmark/Norway married James III of Scotland in 1469, and Anne of Denmark became

the consort of James VI of Scotland (later James I of England) in 1589. Queen Anne married Prince George of Denmark/Norway in 1683. Individuals moved throughout Europe—there was a significant number of Aberdonians living in Bergen by the mid-seventeenth century, for instance (Lloyd 1967: 160)—and with this movement came cultural exchange.

It is little wonder, then, that ballads travelled so freely around Europe. Some ballads, like ‘Elveskud’ (DgF 47) can be found in each of the countries covered by this study, yet others, like ‘Tam Lin (Child 39), have not migrated beyond their original geographical boundary. This thesis is a study of a genre that has shifted easily through national boundaries, where it has established its popularity among the cultured, the non-elite and the curious in its endeavour to survive.

1.6 *Methodology*

The ballad-types have been chosen for their continued popularity, in terms of longevity, number of variants, and geographical spread. As I have indicated, the Danish ballad ‘Elveskud’ (DgF 47) can be found throughout Europe and has been influential in inspiring not only ballad versions in other countries, but also drama, prose works, music and painting. ‘Lady Isabel and the Elf-Knight’ (Child 4) is similarly well travelled. ‘Elvehøj’ and the Agnete ballads have achieved popularity in Denmark and Sweden, and in Chapter 6 we look at versions of ‘Harpens Kraft’ from Denmark, Sweden and Iceland. On the other hand, two ballads examined in Chapter 7, ‘Tam Lin’ and ‘Thomas Rymer’ are rooted in Scotland and are here to illustrate a tradition which examines the woman’s role in unusual detail.

All the ballads selected for this study are ballads of the supernatural. The ballads chosen for full analysis show a varied response to the supernatural, whether as all-powerful beings against whom all human response is futile (‘Elveskud’ in Chapter 2; ‘Clerk Colvill’ in Chapter 3), or who demonstrate a vulnerable side (‘Elvehøj’, Chapter 4; ‘Tam Lin’, Chapter 7). Other ballads, like ‘Agnete og havmanden’, (Chapter 5), and ‘Harpans Kraft’,

(Chapter 6), depict an other-worldly being who, according to the version, may or may not be invincible. Each chapter considers the role of the supernatural being in the ballad, and these thoughts are then brought together in the Conclusion. Space precludes a full discussion of others in this category such as ‘Hr. Bøsmer i Elvehjem’ (Chapter 4.1.2), ‘Hr. Magnus og Bjærgtrolden’ (Chapter 4.1.2), ‘Trolden og Bondens Hustru’ (Chapter 2.8), ‘Hr. Tønne af Alsø’ (Chapter 8.4), and ‘The Elfin Knight’ (Chapter 7.4) which are as important for what they contribute to the tradition but which have not achieved the popularity of the others.

All versions of each ballad-type have been examined and the more interesting selected for discussion. There is no general rule for this selection. I have not, for instance, focused on only the earliest or most popular versions (though only the A version of ‘Lady Isabel and the Elf-Knight’ is considered in Chapter 7 as this is the only one to include an elf). Close textual analysis of each case-study has been employed in the ballad’s original language; translations are my own. Each chapter (2 to 7) begins with a close reading which draws on different versions of the text under examination, rather than an initial focus on just one version. This comparative study is in line with the concept that there is no ‘best’ text or ‘right’ text, but that all are valid and worthy of study. The approach enables a breadth of understanding which is interesting in its own right as we occasionally see a selection of detail which reflects local interests or concerns. We see in Chapter 2.6, for instance, an elf trying to tempt a young man from a Danish community facing Sweden across a narrow strait with the offer of a fortress. This approach enables different versions to be used as a sort of critical commentary on each ballad. This broad analysis is then followed by close study of specific versions of the ballad-types, both traditional and non-traditional. On occasion I examine a text such as the version of ‘Harpans Kraft’ provided by Johanna Gustafva Angel, which stands outside the popular tradition but which is of interest nevertheless in its expression of contemporary thought; the edges of a tradition help us define the central ideas (Chapter 6.1.3). Laws’ observation that ‘the distinction made by scholars between Child ballads and all others is unknown to the folk’ (1957: 64) is apposite

here. These lesser known versions interrogate our concept of the ‘traditional’, and are as viable as their popular relatives. National versions have been compared to look for evidence of varying concerns or styles (though several of the Scottish ballads have no counterpart elsewhere).

In Chapter 2, the oldest (A) version of DgF 47 ‘Elveskud’ is examined alongside one selected by Peder Syv for his anthology presented for a popular audience and which is important as the version which then took the ballad around the scholarly literate communities of Europe. For comparison, I have included Grundtvig’s redaction of the ballad, a much longer version than the others and representative of how editors deemed folk-songs should be preserved. The ballads edited by nineteenth-century poets and scholars such as Oehlenschläger (1779–1850) and Grundtvig are, in general, rarely discussed. Their confections and additions were often seen as an impairment on the so-called ‘purity’ of the ballad (Chapter 2.6), but Grundtvig’s redacted version of ‘Elveskud’ is examined here as an example of a ballad re-written for a popular audience by one anxious to preserve the ballad for posterity. In Chapter 3, a case-study of an idiosyncratic version of the Swedish ‘Her Olof och Älvorna’ (SMB 290) demonstrates a conventional opening but with an ending featuring elements of the burlesque, which can be seen in no other version. Similarly in Chapter 5, which looks at the Agnete ballads, I have included DgF 38E; again this opens in a traditional way, but in the second half the ballad singer moves in a completely new direction by including revenant material. Scholars have tended to ignore ballads such as these which sit outside the main tradition as unworthy of analysis; this thesis considers them entirely valid as representative of ‘the fluctuating yet surprisingly constant operations of the minds and imaginations of the people that made and remade these ballads’ (Hustvedt 1930: 196).

A distinction between usage of the terms ‘version’ and ‘variant’ is required: I follow Entwistle (1951: 209) in the use of ‘version’ to refer to both the national type and its subtypes, which are given upper-case letters by Grundtvig and Child to denote their uniqueness, hence DgF 47A or Child 4C. The word ‘variant’ denotes a text with small

verbal alterations; a variant of a version is where there is only a minimal difference from the 'parent' version, perhaps a few words, and is indicated in the collections with a lower-case letter: DgF 47Db, for instance.

During the course of the thesis there has been a deliberate consideration of how women were responding to, and were represented in, the ballads. This particular angle is found in part in Chapters 2, 5, 6, 7 and 8. An examination of the representation of Oluf and the elf-maiden by women singers reveals some variations (Chapter 2.4), while the Scottish ballads (Chapter 7) foreground the women, who have much stronger and more important roles to play than in the Nordic ballads even if, at the end, they return to their traditional role. 'Harpans Kraft' is an interesting ballad in this respect in that its main focus ostensibly is the plight of a young woman in her approach to marriage, but this focus deftly shifts to the man's handling of it (Chapter 6). Johanna Gustafva Angel's version removes the man from the picture and the woman saves herself.

There is a danger in close examination of any literature where the critic presents an interpretation coloured only by the concerns of his own time. Each different society in each different country over five centuries has had its own responses to the ballads under discussion and, as it is not possible to chronicle or even know what responses to an oral tradition were, we must proceed with caution. With this in mind, I have included the responses of both high and low culture as a lens through which to analyse the ballads. I have looked, for example, at how Virgil's representation of the Orpheus story suits the Icelandic temperament (Chapter 3.3), and at how Ibsen used the ballad of 'Agnete og havmanden' as a vehicle for communicating nineteenth-century concerns (Chapter 5). Goethe's interpretation of 'Elveskud' (Chapter 3.6) would not only take an old story in a new direction, but was to be instrumental in the rise of the literary ballad in Germany. On the other end of the literary spectrum, the broadside ballad often sensationalized the material, prolonging the ballad's popularity in the towns (Chapter 4.1.2). The Conclusion (Chapter 8) looks at how the supernatural ballad continued to influence literature into the Victorian era and beyond, into the twentieth century.

1.6.1 *Contribution to knowledge*

The contribution to knowledge and understanding of the ballad made in this thesis lies in two areas: its close textual analysis of specific ballads, and its examination of gender roles, particularly in the Scandinavian examples used. Scholarly work on the ballads has laid down solid foundations on which to build new debate, but work particularly on the Nordic ballads does not concern itself on the whole with appreciation of the aesthetics of the genre, or of considering the sub-genre of the supernatural worthy of close study as a group.

Close textual analysis, which we have come to take for granted of literary texts, has not been the standard approach to the genre outside Scotland. There are three possible reasons: firstly, perhaps the vernacular, oral nature of the genre has discouraged students from considering ballads as possessing beauty and depth, as worthy of treatment as serious texts. Secondly, academic discussion has been dominated through the twentieth century by debate over transmission, authorship and age. Academics have been challenged to return to the text; as I have discussed at the beginning of this chapter, this is an attempt to do just that. And finally, the corpus of north-European ballads is large: perhaps breadth of study has forced out a narrow, focused approach. The focus of this thesis has been on close textual study. I have analysed in detail eight ballads in a total of sixteen national types, incorporating many versions within those types, thematically bound, and taken from throughout northern-Europe, supported by partial analysis of several other related ballads. The thesis represents the first detailed study of these supernatural ballads as a corpus, considering not just the earliest or best-known texts, but giving space to non-traditional examples, previously not considered worthy of study. These fall into two groups: versions like 'Harpans Kraft' Q, (Chapter 6.1.3) which encourages its audience to consider the position of women; and the ballad scholars' redacted versions, like Grundtvig's DfU version of 'Elveskud' (Chapter 2.7) which rarely receives even a mention in scholarly work.

One cannot read 'Tam Lin' (Chapter 7.2) and 'Lady Isabel and the Elf Knight' (Chapter 7.3) without a consideration of the role of the woman, who is central to each ballad. Outside of Scotland women, however, take a peripheral position, even in ballads

like 'Harpens Kraft' (Chapter 6), where the action is set in motion by the fears of the woman, and the resolution lies in an endeavour to protect her from the source of those fears. A contribution made by this thesis to ballad scholarship is the encouragement it offers the reader to reconsider the role of the woman as far more central than has been supposed hitherto. A consideration of how and whether women as performers were able to seize the narrative, either overtly as in the Angel example above (Chapter 6.1.3), or discreetly, is a central tenet of Chapters 2, 6 and 8, and is offered as a challenge to our perceptions of the portrayal of patriarchy and a re-vision of how the women's movement may have begun to impact on ballad performance in the nineteenth century or earlier.

This thesis is written in an endeavour to capture the intrinsic worth and occasional beauty of the ballad, and particularly to appreciate how it is a vehicle which will enable fuller understanding of the societies who sang and those who listened.

Chapter 2 The Danish ballad ‘Elveskud’

Elves and their magic are a popular feature of Nordic ballad literature. Denmark has the largest number of extant ballads in Europe (Steenstrup 1968: xii) and of attestations of ‘Elveskud’ in particular, maintaining a living tradition until well into the nineteenth century, and so it is in Denmark with DgF 47 ‘Elveskud’ that we shall begin to trace the fascination with elves around Europe.¹ The narrative of ‘Elveskud’ falls into three sections, not all appearing in every version. Herr Oluf is out riding one evening, inviting guests to his wedding to be held the following morning. He comes across a group of elf-maidens led by the elf-king’s daughter herself, who invites Oluf to dance. He declines, citing his imminent nuptials. The elf-king’s daughter will brook no refusal, so tries to tempt him into the dance with a variety of gifts. Whether Oluf dances or not varies in the different versions, but the elf will not be scorned and inflicts punishment on him, an elf-blow between the shoulder-blades which brings on sickness and death. The second section of the ballad sees Oluf return home to face his mother (or occasionally his father) who guesses that he has been dancing with the elves, and asks what information should be given to his fiancée when she arrives for the wedding. In several versions of the ballad Oluf now bequeaths his property to members of his family. The third part describes the arrival of Oluf’s fiancée, her grief at his absence, and her gradual recognition of the fact that he is now dead. The majority of the versions end with the death of not only Oluf, but also his wife-to-be and his mother.

2.1 *The popularity of ‘Elveskud’*

Early critics such as Grundtvig, Prior and Olrik² all agreed on an origin for the Oluf ballad³ in Brittany or northern France. In his *Danmarks folkeviser i udvalg* (1882), which will be referred to as *DfU*, Svend Grundtvig declared that this particular ballad,

¹ Forslin lists the following versions of ‘Elveskud’: Denmark (43), Norway (26), Iceland (23), Sweden (16), Brittany (7), Faroes (4), Scotland (3), England (2), U.S. (1) (1962: 7).

² Grundtvig (DgF IV: 874); Prior (1860:1, xix); Olrik (1939: 54).

³ The ballad type will be referred to as ‘the Oluf ballad’ throughout this work, but by its national title in analyses of specific versions.

foreligger fuldstændigst i en dansk Opskrift fra 1550, som her er lagt til Grund, og saa – i bretonsk Overlevering fra Nutiden. Sammenhængen hermed er sandsynligvis den, at Visen oprindelig har hjemme in Bretagne og der fra alt tidlig i 12te Aarh. er naat op til Norden, hvor den i rigt varierede Former har været en Yndlingsvisen indtil denne Dag
(1882: 177)⁴

By linking a Breton motif (the meeting with an elf- or fairy-queen at the outset of the tale) with the Danish version, Grundtvig assumed that not only was ‘Elveskud’ Breton in origin, but that all the other Danish ballads must have been too (DgF IV: 873).

The ballad ‘Elveskud’ (‘Elf-shot’; TSB A63) became popular in its own right in Denmark and Scandinavia as a whole, yet it was to achieve greater fame with a wider audience in the late eighteenth century when in 1779 Herder’s translation, entitled ‘Erlkönigs Töchter’ (‘The Erfking’s Daughter’), was published in his *Volkslieder*. This in turn inspired Goethe to write the literary ballad ‘Erlkönig’ in 1782 and its renown increased further when Schubert set the poem to music in 1815 (Chapter 3.6.5). ‘Elveskud’ was Grundtvig’s particular favourite; his research into the versions and variants of this ballad was published separately under the title *Elveskud, dansk, svensk, norsk, faerøsk, islandsk, skotsk, vendisk, bømisk, tysk, fransk, italiensk, katalonsk, spansk, bretonsk Folkeviser i Overblik* in 1881. Over forty Danish versions of the ballad ‘Elveskud’ feature in his *Danmarks gamle Folkeviser* (DgF), gathered from various locations in Denmark, most from central Jutland but also as far east as south Zealand. The longest, Version A, has 54 stanzas and the shortest full text (DgF 47Q), where all detail is pared away, has only seven stanzas. In Grundtvig’s *DfU*, a popular edition of folk ballads, just one text is given, with 79 stanzas, which is ascribed the date 1550 in Grundtvig’s introduction, the date of the base-text on which Grundtvig added detail found in other versions. This study will focus on three of the versions, chosen to provide evidence of texts produced at different times and with different intentions: an early text (DgF 47A) taken from a compilation made in the 1570s for the gentry (Chapter 2.6); one taken from an anthology collected from rural areas and published in the seventeenth

⁴ [‘Elveskud’] ‘is attested most completely in a Danish version from 1550, which is used here as the base-text and then in a Breton tradition from the present day on. The connection with this is in all probability that the original song belonged in Brittany from where it was taken up to the North early in the twelfth century where it has been a favourite song in richly varied forms until this day’.

century (DgF 47B; Chapter 2.5); and the third, the *DfU* version referred to above, the product of ‘improvement’ by a Romantic scholar in the nineteenth century (Chapter 2.7).

Myths, legends, songs and tales transmit the ideals, values, aspirations and fears shared by the community which circulates them, and it is the transmission of these stories from generation to generation that forms the basis of tradition (Lévi-Strauss [1955] 1963: 207). As stories are told by different tellers to different audiences at various times, they become different texts. What is important at one time may be omitted in the next telling as the story is adapted to express current concerns (Thury and Devinney 2005: 270). Through an analysis of these variations, we may be able to understand something of the cultural norms and meanings suggested by this ballad.

2.2 *An application of Buchan’s ‘framework’ to the ‘Elveskud’ versions*

David Buchan’s seminal work *The Ballad and the Folk* ([1972] 1997) showed little interest in date of composition and migration routes, instead refocusing on the people for whom and by whom the ballad (in general) is attested to have been sung. He examined in particular the north-east of Scotland, but it is useful to apply his observations to Scandinavian ballads. In this section I use Buchan’s approach as the basis for a survey of the main literary techniques used across the Danish Oluf ballad versions. Looking first at how the maker composed the ballad within the oral tradition, Buchan concluded that he learned not only stories but, as importantly, a traditional method of composition, using commonplaces or formulas and complex architectonic patterns ([1972] 1997: 53). Heavily reliant on both Lord (2000) and Olrik’s ‘epic laws of folk narrative’ (Dundes 1965: 129–41), he stated that performing and composing were components of the same synchronic act. Each performance is an ‘original text’ (Lord 2000: 52) in that songs were not learnt in their entirety as a fixed text, but instead the singer re-composed according to a method or set of guidelines which had been passed on and which he or she had intuitively assimilated. While Olrik’s laws date back to a paper originally presented in 1908, they are still seen as useful, though some controversy surrounds his concept of their being ‘superorganic’, where

the individual ballad-maker is controlled by rules in the composition (Dundes 1965: 130; Buchan ([1972] 1997: 55). Reasons given by anthropologists and folklorists for similarities between folk stories and legends found world-wide do not account for the similarity in words and small detail (Olrik, 1965: 131), but adherence to a set of rules would.

Buchan considered Olrik's laws useful as a means of codifying what is happening in the creative process, but applied his own framework to them. He saw unitary, binary and trinary forces at work, organizing and linking the material ([1972] 1997: 90–97, 105–16). Just as Buchan imposed his own framework on Olrik's laws, so the ballad-maker would superimpose his own creative ability and sensibility on traditional concepts of how the ballad should sound. The word *intuitively* (used above) is key to understanding this concept; there was no rule-book to follow. There was a regularity to all ballads within the genre, so just as carols have to sound like carols, epic songs like epics, and rapping like rapping, so the ballad-makers continued in a tradition.

An application of Buchan's framework to a selection of versions of 'Elveskud' enables us to see a commonality between the versions in structure and sound, and allows us to begin to understand what makes a ballad. We shall see also how the various ballad-makers have imposed their own ideas, in order to individualize, to respond to context, or even perhaps because of memory lapse. If we apply Buchan's basic story-telling pattern not to the ballads of Scotland but to 'Elveskud', we see that we need to make some allowance. He applies the formula Situation → Complication → Development → Resolution to Scottish ballads ([1972] 1997: 83), which largely fits with the 'Elveskud' versions, but here the initial Situation is telescoped. This initial Situation establishes the relationship of the two main characters before a third player threatens it (Complication). In the versions of 'Elveskud' the relationship between Oluf and his bride is implied as the ballad opens; there is no early appearance of the bride-to-be, only a reference to their wedding day; similarly in the Swedish versions (see Chapter 3.1). Compared with other national versions of the ballad, this is very brief. Typically, the Breton 'Gwerziou Breiz Izel', for instance, establishes the marriage of the Count and his wife over twenty lines; Lord Nann (also

Breton) is given eighteen lines with his wife before he stumbles upon the fairy; and the Scottish Clerk Colvill twelve lines of conversation with his wife in Child 42A and B, and eighteen to establish his relationship with his mother in 42C before he meets his ‘bonny maid’ (Chapter 3.4). The relationship between Oluf and his fiancée does, however, underpin the whole of the first scene as it is as much out of loyalty to his sweetheart that he does not take up the invitation as it is adherence to a moral code that only at one’s peril does one dance with the elves. The norm of including only three ‘emotionally interesting’ characters ([1972] 1997: 83) is stretched according to the version. There are four main characters in most versions of the ballad, Oluf, his mother, his bride and the elf-maiden, but only two are ever ‘on stage’ at the same time. Three of them carry the audience’s empathy, but the elf-maiden usually lacks emotional interest. She moves from one end of the emotional spectrum to the other, from seductive to possessed of violent anger, but the audience has difficulty finding any empathy with her, as fellow-feeling lies with Oluf or, more often, his fiancée.

The intensity of the role of the mother varies, from a lengthy interrogation of her son and a pastoral role with the bride-to-be (A, H, K, O, T, U, B*, E*, G*, H*, DfU) to that of a simple narrative agent, enabling the transition from one scene to the next, or from life to death (for example, 47T, where she has to tell Kirsten of Oluf’s fate). When her role is at its fullest she also lends emotional intensity to the death scene, representing all those suffering disappointment and the death of a child, and yet she is the one who must grieve quietly and die unceremoniously for the death of her son. She represents the moral code (where there is some moral ambiguity at times about Oluf’s behaviour) and enables the ballad-maker to bring it to the fore, and she lends credibility to the tale by giving local colour—her anxious wait in the courtyard for her son to return, for instance, and the marten pelt she wears in some versions, both to keep out the cold and as a sign of her social status and relative wealth. Her interrogation of her son as to his whereabouts that evening is a realistic mixture of concern for his welfare and insistence that he will tell her the truth of what he has been up to. Her ultimate concern to safeguard her family’s welfare (47R,

L*), even in the face of death, will ring true, and not just in the medieval or early modern world.

In line with Buchan's framework, there is a common voice across the Danish and Swedish versions (Chapter 3) in their depiction of the characters of the ballad and what they bring to both the narrative and the emotional narrative of the Oluf ballad. Buchan sees structure as intrinsic to ballad composition and breaks it down into three areas: stanzaic, narrative, and character structure work together to define units of action clearly and to ensure a single line of action which is not cluttered with too many characters (Olrík's Law of Two to a Scene—'das Gesetz der Scenischen Zweiheit'; 1965: 132). If we apply this to Version B we see stanzas arranged into three scenes, each with a narratorial framework. The narrator opens and closes the ballad and also introduces each of the scenes. A character enters only as another leaves, reducing complication for the audience and for the balladeer. The characters appear in pairs, each scene featuring a new character in dialogue with one from the previous scene: the elf-maiden and Oluf in the first scene, Oluf and his mother in the second, and the mother's meeting with the bride in the last. The three scenes in Version B are not equal in length, however: the first roughly equals the sum of the other two scenes. Fourteen out of twenty-five stanzas focus on the temptation of Oluf, five on the discussion between Oluf and his mother, and six are given over to the bride. The ballad-maker here clearly thinks interest for his audience would lie with the otherworldly, in magic and the supernatural, temptation and glamour—but which will only temporarily remove them far away from their humdrum, often harsh existence, as shortly Oluf will see himself fighting one of life's dangers and losing his life. Twenty-two of the forty-one complete (or almost complete) versions, however, lack this first section where temptations are offered by the elf-maid.

The balances, parallelisms, antitheses and appositions which Buchan finds aplenty in Scottish and English ballads ([1972] 1997: 89) are not as common in the Oluf ballad tradition. We have this verbal patterning at its best in DgF 47B*. A strong rhythm is set up early in the ballad, using repetition to build up to the main character:

der danser Elvermanden, der danser hans Kon’.

Der danser Elvermanden, der danser hans Kon’,
den Elvermands Søster hun danser alenn. DgF 47B* 2, 3

there dances the elf-man, there dances his wife,

There dances the elf-man, there dances his wife,
the elf-man’s sister she dances alone.

The balladeer depicts a forceful Hr. Ole using verbal parallelism and emphasis on ‘ikke’ (not): ‘Jeg det ikke tør, og jeg det ikke maa’ (I don’t dare do it, and I must not do it; DgF 47B* 5). Even his horse expresses concern in its own way, a not uncommon ballad motif: ‘Den sprang vel femten Gang’ femten Spring’ (It jumped probably fifteen times fifteen jumps DgF 47B* 8). In his guilt, Ole uses verbal reinforcement to make his parents believe him:

Min Hest den var ikke visse paa Ben,
jeg stødte mig af den Lindengren.

Min Hest den var ikke visse paa Fod,
jeg stødte mig af den Lindenrod DgF 47B* 11,12

My horse wasn’t sure on its legs,
I bruised myself on a linden tree branch.

My horse wasn’t sure of foot,
I bruised myself on a linden tree root

He then repeats the formula used to him by the elf, one repeated in most of the versions:

Og, hør, Ridder Ole ...

Og, hør, min kær Fader ...
Og, hør, min kær Broder ...
Og, hør, min kær Moder ...
Og, hør, min kær Søster...

And listen, Sir Ole ...

And listen, my dear father ...
And listen, my dear brother ...
And listen, my dear mother ...
And listen, my dear sister...

The balance in the stanza reinforces the pathos of the situation

Men næppe var Præsten kommen
før de lagde Ridder Ole paa Ligebaar. DgF 47B* 15

But scarcely had the priest come
Then they laid Sir Ole on his bier.

We see trinary forces at work in DgF 47Ø, for example. Ole is out issuing invitations to his wedding:

Han beder de Store, han beder de Smaa,
han beder det Barn udi Vuggen laae. DgF 47Ø 2

He asked the great, he asked the insignificant,
he asked the child lying in his cradle.

Repetition is used to reinforce a sense of unwarranted violence:

Den Elleqvinde gav ham Slagene fem,
Ret aldrig forvandt han eet af dem.

Og Elleqvinde gav ham Slagene ni,
Ret aldrig forvandt han eet af de. DgF 47Ø 6, 7

The elf-woman gave him five blows,
he did not expect any of them.

The elf-woman gave him nine blows,
he did not expect any of them.

Structure echoes meaning as the number of blows is delayed to the end of the line for dramatic emphasis. His mother expresses her concern:

Hvi est du saa mødig, hvi est du saa bleeg?
Forvist har du været i Elleqvinders Leeg.

Hvi est du saa broget, hvi est du saa blaa?
Forvist har du været i Elleqvinders Gaard DgF 47Ø 10, 11

Why are you so weary, why are you so pale?
Perhaps you have been in the elf-women's game?

Why are you so confused, why are you so blue?
Perhaps you have been in the elf-women's court?

With the insight of a mother who knows her own child, or who knows only too well the dangers around, she sees right to the heart of the problem. Pallor was regarded as an indicator of oncoming death (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 2003: 292).

Version P is remarkable for its lapse into the lyrical, unusual in a genre which traditionally makes little comment or judgement on the events recorded, though not unknown in later German ballads (Entwistle 1951: 199). The ending of the song goes beyond the carrying of the bodies into the yard; as there are three bodies, so are there three lilies growing by their graves.

Der gror tre Liljer paa Hr. Peders Grav,
den første er hvid, den anden er blaa.

[Den første er hvid, den anden er blaa,]

den tredje er som en guldspunden Traad.

Den første Lilje den er saa hvid,
[og det er for deres rene Liv.]

Den anden Lilje den er saa blaa,
Ja, det er for deres store Attraa.

Den tredje Lilje den er saa rød,
det var, for de begge fik saa hastig en Død. DgF 47P 18–22

There grow three lilies by Sir Peter's grave
the first is white, the second is blue.

[The first is white, the second is blue,]
the third is like golden-spun thread.

The first lily it is so white,
[and it is for their pure life.]

The other lily it is so blue,
yes, that is for their great desire.

The third lily it is so red,
that is because they both received so quick a death

The narratorial voice responds through the symbol of the lily, representing purity through its connection with the Virgin Mary, and death and consequent resurrection. This empathic subjectivity, though there is no identifiable narrator, is a tool used to manage audiences into a sentimental frame of mind.

A different mood is found in Version 47R which, as in 47L*, has an unusual twist towards the end. With his last breath Hr. Peder instructs his mother to fetch his chest 'imedens jeg uddeler Guld det min' (while I distribute my gold). The mother is immediately protective of her own: 'Du glemmer ej kjær Søskende din' (Don't forget your dear brothers and sisters). Using appositions in the form of 'Hus og Gaard ... Ager og Eng', the family's property and land, while his true love 'gaar alt jenn' til Bord' (goes all alone to the table) and 'hun gaar alt jenn' til Seng' (she goes all alone to bed), he then tries to get his brother to marry her, whose negative response out of fear of committing sin is capped by the girl's flat refusal to give her troth to two brothers.⁵ The sudden focus on money in the dying minutes

⁵ This attempt at transferring the bride-to-be to the brother of the dying or dead bridegroom is a motif which is not unusual in the ballads. In 'Ribolt og Guldborg' (DgF 82) Ribolt similarly refuses to pledge her troth to two brothers, while in 'Fæstemanden dør' (DgF 460), Mette accepts her dead groom's brother as a replacement—the only instance' in the Danish ballads of the fiancée accepting (DgF II: 440).

of the young master would be almost comedic if one did not have to acknowledge the fears of the mother, anxious her son will give away their livelihood. The significance of Version 47L* lies in the fact that our hero is still alive when his fiancée arrives. He too sends for his money chest. The incremental repetition and the description of the pattern inscribed on the rings slow the song down at a critical moment:

Og han gav hend' de Guldering' fem,
for Solen og Maanen stod skreven i dem.

Ja, han gav hende de Guldering' ni,
for Solen og Maanen stod skreven i di. DgF 47L* 23, 24

And he gave her the gold rings five,
with the sun and the moon engraved on them.

Yes, he gave her the gold rings nine,
with the sun and moon engraved on them.

At this point, his mother tells him off. She is 'vred' (angry), but as in Version 47R, he reminds her that his siblings have income in their 'Ager og Eng' (fields and meadows). This family fall-out over an inheritance brings a note of credibility and a wry smile at the moment of death.⁶

It is difficult to apply Buchan's framework rigidly across the versions, particularly where texts are incomplete. There is not such a neat fit as we find in its application to the Scottish corpus; nevertheless, it has proved a useful tool with which to analyse 'Elveskud' in its many Danish manifestations in our exploration of the collective, if unconscious, ideas underpinning the ballad. This section closes with a glimpse at the protective role of the mother, leading us on to examine more fully the portrayal of gender imbalance in the ballad.

2.3 *Gender in 'Elveskud'*

It is my contention that cultural norms expressed in stories and ballads reflect the values and attitudes of the community which produced them, and influence behavioural expectations of all who are, or wish to be, a member of the group. Ballads are arguably a part of a socialization process in their reflection, affirmation, and promotion of shared

⁶ This is a motif to be found in other ballads, 'Fæstemanden dør' (DgF 460), for instance.

beliefs, values and attitudes. This section examines how 'Elveskud' establishes patriarchal norms, but also how it complicates them, showing the complex roles ballads could have in the communities where they circulated. We see a depiction of a society in many ways unchanging from the first extant version of 'Elveskud' (1550) through to the nineteenth century, where the men are active and mobile and the women wait patiently at home. We shall examine the impact of first-wave feminism and the increased role of the woman in rural nineteenth-century Denmark, and search for evidence of both in the ballad. There is, of course, a woman in 'Elveskud' who is not human; possible readings of the elf-maiden are also examined in this section.

We see in 'Elveskud' a portrayal of the traditional power dynamics of a patriarchal society in its construction of what was regarded as gender-appropriate behaviours. It is Oluf who has the dominant role and who opens the ballad by leaving the house to go into the public sphere. He is psychologically and socially in a liminal position, on the threshold of his next life-stage, marriage, as we see him riding out from one cultural space to another, to invite guests to his wedding. Oluf has been given an identity, that of a man and knight, which must be tested if he is to maintain it (Feinstein 1986, 251), and this testing is to form the body of the ballad. In contrast, both human women in 'Elveskud' are defined in terms of their role in Oluf's life. Different hierarchies are at work: both gender and age. While there is some respect for his mother, the male supremacy of Oluf is evident. As we have seen, Oluf's mother waits in the courtyard for his return and then momentarily takes charge of the situation before she is forced into accepting his fate. After a cursory cross-examination to uncover the reason behind his condition, customary roles are resumed and her passivity returns. Oluf gives orders and his mother obeys them without argument or discussion of whether concealment of his death from his bride is the right course of action. Unlike the mother, the bride is individualised in some versions with a first name, but beyond that is defined purely by the wedding. She comes to Oluf's house to be married; she socializes with no-one, only wanting Oluf. She has no power or, apparently, right to receive truthful or immediate answers to her questions. He is the centre of her existence and when

he ceases to exist, so does she. Even when we bear in mind that a characteristic of the ballad genre is streamlined action, and that any mother might be expected to do whatever she could to comfort a son *in extremis*, and that a bride on her wedding-day would be anxious, nevertheless the ballad portrays a world where the women wait for, and on, the men. The stereotypes of two of the three women in the ballad are not negative in that they are not portrayed as thieving, lascivious or lazy as was not uncommon in prints, sermons and literature of the early modern period (Wiesner-Hanks 2008: 29); nevertheless, the ballad accords a subordinate role to the mother and wife: to question and support, with a love that is ultimately self-sacrificing, but impotent.

However, this portrayal of women as fitting into a patriarchal social framework is complicated by the elf-woman. As a result of their love and loyalty, and in their grief, the bride and mother join Oluf in death. Oluf's actions have rendered these women victims: they are unable to act, only to be affected, to the point of death. Men act; women have to live with the consequences or die as a result. But we have a very different picture of this third 'woman', the elf. An initial reading of her is of one ruled by desire, dominance and lasciviousness, who will not listen to reason, but the full picture is far more complex. In mainstream Lutheran thought, erotic love was considered a characteristic of evil as it worked against God-given reason to destroy one's previous self (Syndergaard 2009: 24). She is the Other and, if there is a positive to her role, it is to enable Oluf to understand himself, his own drives and desires. Following Lacan's theory of the Other, in order to preserve his identity the subject must reject the Other even though there is an overwhelming desire for it (McKinnell 2005: 32). Oluf knows he must not listen to the elf-woman, yet in some versions he cannot ignore his desire to dance to her tune. In its didactic role, the ballad warns young ladies 'of the dangers lurking in their own nature' (Jacobsen 1988: 77), that they embody sexual desires, that they are a temptation to men and, in the context of this ballad, that they should not try to imitate the behaviour of the elf-woman. The passive mother and bride are to be emulated as ones who establish appropriate behaviour and desire (Parsons 2004: 136).

While the elf mistress would not be recognised in our world-views as real, the idea of her clearly ‘both perpetuates and challenges the dominant ideology of the mid- to late medieval periods’ (Larrington 1999: 44). The relationship depicted in all versions of ‘Elveskud’ problematizes its surface binary assumptions that man is a rational being while womankind is governed by emotion. We must question the simple theory that the elf symbolizes sexuality, and factor in the man’s response. In fewer than half of the versions of ‘Elveskud’ is Oluf able to walk away from the elf-woman’s temptations (A, B, E, F, Oa, Ob, Oc, P, R, V, Z, Æ, Ø, B*, C*, L*, O*); he succumbs to her inducements and/or threats in the majority. Is the tension set up between Oluf and the elf in fact a critique not so much of the female supernatural being, but of the male who is not as rational and steadfast as he ought to be? When we remember, however, that the ballad is not composed about men in general, but focuses on a *young* man, who still has much to learn about his own sexuality and place in the world, we return to our original position of the ballad as a part of a socialization process, warning and advising against not so much the dangers out there as the dangers within.

Relationships in the ballads put the spotlight on social concerns: both male and female sexuality; honour and the ability to subdue and resist temptation; and the importance of a good marriage for producing children to continue the family line. For Mossin (1974), the central concern of ballads like ‘Elveskud’ is the family and in particular weddings, the means to reproduce the family. He interprets the dominant conflict as one between Oluf, representing culture, and the elf-maiden, representing nature. We cannot ignore a reading which concerns itself with the traditional dichotomy between nature and culture, even though it is not a meaning we can bring to the ballad today, but it is useful to consider what may have been a useful interpretation in its own time. Carol MacCormack sets it in its Christian framework: ‘Genesis [...] sets humans in opposition to nature and promises us dominion over nature’ (1980: 6).⁷ A political analogy is used to give man the authority to rule, a pattern of thought which took root in western civilisation (Leiss [1972]

⁷ A reference to Genesis where God talks about man’s relationship with the earth and the creatures on it. Man should ‘subdue it and have dominion over [it]’ (Genesis 1: 28 KJV).

1994: 34). Men, traditionally scientists, technologists, leaders and rulers have been associated with culture (or civilization), while women have been traditionally aligned with nature in their role as mothers and nurturers. They were seen as ruled by emotions and passions which required social boundaries (formulated by men) to rein them in (Jordanova 1980: 67). Mossin concludes that tragedy occurs when man refuses to acknowledge that he must come to terms with nature: the ballad ‘says that Oluf, and with him his family perish *because* Oluf rejects nature’ (1974: 36). Nature is needed for culture to be perpetuated; it is ‘an obstacle the individual has to face and defeat in order to secure the continued existence of the family’ (Jacobsen and Leavy 1988: 65). Jacobsen sees the elf as representing sexuality; until Oluf comes to terms with this part of his own nature (and that of his fiancée) he cannot function properly and must die. Sørensen’s psychoanalytical study of the ballads suggests their main concern is love and that they record the difficult time faced by some when the transition must be made from single state to married: ‘In the engagement situation we humans want to give ourselves and yet we fear—losing ourselves’ (1959: 201). Mossin builds on this, arguing that the demon within oneself provoking this fear is symbolized by the elf-maid who at once represents the fiancée and nature, the need to reproduce and continue the family (and human) line. If Oluf cannot face up to his sexuality in his relationship with his fiancée, there will be no continuance. Mossin concludes that ‘nature must be processed; until that time it is demonic’ (1974: 44). A natural extension of the idea that the elf represents Oluf’s sexuality would be to see the dance as metaphor for sexuality in action; however, it is then difficult to apply Mossin’s theory across all versions. While in the earlier DgF 47A and B versions Oluf immediately rejects any advances, in more than half of the subsequent versions of the ballad Oluf either immediately or ultimately dances with the elf. Whatever Oluf’s response to the elf-woman, whether he capitulates or escapes, he goes home to die. In conclusion, Mossin raises some interesting ideas. The concept is worthy of consideration that a young person on the threshold of sharing life with another must come to terms with an inner demon, which he seems to suggest is a kind of selfishness, but there is a weakness in that the theory cannot be applied

universally. Oluf dies whether he comes to terms or not with the elf; when we come to examine 'Elvehøj', the young man achieves an easier victory (Chapter 4).

Returning to the depiction of the mother and bride-to-be, while women are given a substantial proportion of the narrative space in 'Elveskud', they do not 'speak'; they provide no female commentary or expression of opinion on the action. If we consider the ballad alongside a genre not too far removed from the ballad, that of the fairy story, we see a very different scenario. Both genres started life as oral narratives told in the vernacular. When the fairy tale lay largely within the matriarchal domain of mothers and nurses, women and girls (Yolen 1977: 23), the central female characters, Cinderella and Red Riding Hood for instance, were assertive and feisty and could give any wolf a run for his money (Zipes 1983:30; Yolen 1977: 21). They articulated their own choices and ultimately survived. It was only when men saw an opportunity to publish the stories, they brought them into line with a patriarchal world where the girls looked pretty and did as they were told (Zipes 1983: 31). The fairy tales were not, of course, published purely for children, but expanding demand for stories for children offered further opportunity for the tales to be used as a socializing tool, as an integral part of the layering process of influences which affirm and disseminate cultural norms. Within the context of multiple interpretations, these literary tales perpetuated a shared cultural belief which largely reflected the patriarchal and bourgeois values of those who now produced them (Escarpit 1981: 39–40): girls must keep their opinions to themselves and suffer in silence until the men, attracted largely by their beauty and shoe-size, rescued them, after which they become bearers of their children. Under Perrault and other male editors,⁸ women were increasingly depicted as passive, private individuals (Yolen 1977: 21–26), remaining in the house like Rapunzel's mother, or in the tower like Rapunzel herself, while their men went in search of rampion, or ranged the countryside like the prince. The men had the power and were the rational, functional beings, while the ladies succumbed to their emotions. And when the power, mobility and action embraced by the men were given to a woman, that woman was a witch (Warner

⁸ We must not ignore the female authors who followed suit, such as Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont (1711—1780) whose *Magasin des enfants* (1757) upholds a male-dominant code in the tales and in the conversations concluding each tale.

1995: 168; Yolen 1977: 23). Similarly in the ballad genre, the witch's role is in many respects taken up by the elf-mistress, powerful, driving the action, making the first move; an outsider, a worker of magic and in league with the supernatural.⁹

As singers and preservers of the ballad-form, it might be imagined that women would be as eager to present something of their independence as were the early promulgators of the fairy tale, but there seems to be limited diachronic change in this area.¹⁰ Versions of 'Elveskud' collected over three hundred years have shown no clear attempt to portray human women as anything other than passive, despite the importance of women to the genre, and in contrast to the clear evidence of female independence in the fairy tale. The majority of ballads collected by Grundtvig came from rural settings; we should consider to what extent first-wave feminism impacted on settlements outside the towns during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Much work has been done by economists and historians on the economic and political aspects, but less so on social changes and the role of traditional texts in impeding or promoting these; however, Timothy Tangherlini includes a useful section in *Danish Folktales, Legends and Other Stories* (2013: 6–11). Prior to the turn of the nineteenth century,

rural society was undoubtedly male-dominated, as is shown by most of the sources from which our knowledge of the legal, economic and social conditions of Danish agriculture ... is derived. Women are scarcely mentioned save as companions of men on festive occasions or else where a corpse is to be escorted to the grave. (Dahlsgård 1980: 56)

Despite the publication in Danish translation in 1801 of Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, 'ladies' emancipation' as it was then known, remained on the back-burner until 1841 saw the publication of an article in support of emancipation in the periodical *Korsaren* and also the portrayal of the first liberated type of woman in Paludan-Müller's novel *Adam Homo* (Dahlsgård 1980: 75). From 1857 onwards, women began to

⁹ A more positive (as far as the ladies are concerned) interpretation of the fairies in fairy tales can be found in Zipes: 'there are clear indications in the tales created by Mme d'Aulnoy, Mlle L'Héritier, Mme de la Force, Mlle Bertrand and other women writers of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century that the fairies were regarded as symbolic representatives of female power in opposition to King Louis XIV and his nobles and to the Church' (1979: 28), in response to the absolutism of the king.

¹⁰ This statement applies to the supernatural ballads. Dianne Dugaw's excellent book *Warrior Women and Popular Balladry 1650–1850* (1989) examines ballads printed by less reputable printers as chapbooks and broadsides about women who, for the most part, dress as male soldiers in order to follow their loved ones into war.

make political inroads into the Danish constitution, but it was to be over a hundred years before full constitutional equality was achieved (Orfield 1953: 49–50). The nineteenth-century Danish man had full rights over his wife and workers; nevertheless the woman of the house was indispensable (Hansen 1982: 228). The hand of the rural woman was strengthened with the rise of dairy production and training for dairy-maids, attracting higher wages. When the grain crisis of 1876 forced more men to turn to dairy, women, who had become used to greater authority and the attendant self-confidence (Hansen 1982: 233), began to move into the towns.

As far as the ballads are concerned, one might expect that this brief period of increased female influence in the domestic and economic space might have resulted in the depiction of a power dynamic skewed from the traditional, of the portrayal of women who at least would be willing to continue the traditional tasks of wife and mother but who would also embrace the opportunity to advocate reason and be listened to, but this is not obvious. In ‘Elveskud’, for instance, we have a picture of a mother which changes little over three hundred years. Perhaps by definition women singers, upholders of the ballad-singing tradition, understood a greater importance in preserving the old texts than of changing them to reflect modern ideas. Perhaps their rural location was significant in that the new feminism movement (and education in general: Burke 1978: 251–53) made inroads into the villages more slowly than into urban communities. Perhaps the women who did not like the traditional society portrayed in, and upheld by, the ballads no longer transmitted them. Cultural hegemony challenged the female tradition of the ballad, and the tradition faded.

It is useful at this point to glance at changing attitudes in Europe to the ballad, and of the varied paradigms being offered in literature as an alternative to patriarchy. By the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, we have two distinct audiences for the ballad in Europe: the rural population, many of whom would have preserved the ballad tradition and continued to sing and dance to the ballad in public and within the home (and some of them would have sustained traditional beliefs in elves and magic, even if just *in case*), and

those who regarded their taste as more refined, who read the ballads as part of the post-Reformation and Romantic revival of indigenous literature and who were exposed to the new literary ballads as well as to early feminist ideas. Layered on this, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries we have come to a period where throughout Europe patriarchy was challenged in varied genres of literature in different ways. The following examples are offered as an indicator of the widespread nature of this change: the imagining of female utopian societies (for example, Sarah Fielding's *David Simple*, 1744); female characters were empowered, taking the initiative and roles normally associated with men (Marie-Jeanne l'Héritier's *L'Adroite Princesse*, 1695–98, for example); women were depicted as the stronger, superior sex (Amelia Lanier's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, 1611); and men were feminized (with the cult of sensibility, for example). First-wave feminism reached a peak in Denmark between 1870 and 1920. Early demands were threefold: for equality in marital rights and obligations, for the right of unmarried women to work in the public sector, and for women's entitlement to access higher education (Griffin and Braidotti 2002: 343). Success was achieved in all three demands, along with women's suffrage, in the revised 1915 constitution. An early proponent of feminist thought was novelist Mathilde Fibiger (1830–72), whose debut novel *Clara Raphael* (1851) spoke for many through the letters of Clara:

For første Gang i mit Liv føler jeg Sorg over at jeg ingen Mand er. Hvor fattigt og indholdsløst er ikke vort Liv imod deres? Er det med rette at de halve Mennesker ere udelukkede fra al aandelig Beskjæftigelse? Eller har virkelig Vorherre skabt os af ringere Stof end Mændene [...] saa vi maae lade os nøie med automatmæssigt at udføre det trivielle Arbeid, der er os anviist i Livet?
(p.23)

For the first time in my life I feel sorrow that I am not a man. How poor and empty are not our lives compared with theirs? Is it justifiable that half of humankind is excluded from all intellectual occupation? Or has the good Lord really made us of lesser stuff than men [...] so we must content ourselves mechanically to carry out the humdrum work assigned to us here in life?

The novel reflects the influence of new social groups which came into being as a result of the national disruptions of 1848–51. Clara moves to the country where she relates how her views on emancipation cause some animosity among the locals. Indeed, the rural populations of Denmark were not ready for such radical ideas in 1850, and the controversy

surrounding Fibiger's novel indicates that neither was much of the rest of Denmark.¹¹ Rural communities were relatively stable, little touched by the changing social, political and legal conditions. The traditional ballads flourished, bolstered by a lingering of the old beliefs, undisturbed by a Lutheran focus on improving literacy and education, and given legitimacy by post-Enlightenment celebration of folk-cultures in the search for national identities (Cameron 2010: 311). The Romantics re-created magic and supernatural worlds and 'superstition' was no longer a dangerous scourge to be rooted out by the Church and, while not actively encouraged, was nothing other than a 'necessary cultural ornament' (Cameron 2010: 312). If we examine the biographies provided by Evald Tang Kristensen of his female informants (Tangherlini 2013: 93, 139), we find women like Kirsten Marie Pedersdatter, a cotter's wife who lived in the same village for sixty-four years, only six miles away from where she was born, and Ane Marie Jensdatter who married a labourer and who had moved only three miles from her place of birth, both unlikely to be in the vanguard of modern feminist thought. It is improbable that we should find fundamental transformations in the ballads which would reflect radical feminist ideas.

Sweeping generalizations are dangerous, however. The non-elite were more intellectually diverse and perhaps complex than the elite, and the women, while rejecting or being ignorant of formal feminist models, surely would have engaged in banter, satire and some resistance to their men. The performance element of the ballad enables a delivery and reception which vary according to ballad-singer, audience, and occasion, whose function may shift between an act of resistance, a socialization 'script', and a good tune to accompany dance. If we are to look for any negative references to the menfolk, we must look for metaphorical meanings in the song communicating social and cultural messages. A difficulty to be faced by any woman ballad-singer who was aware of ideological changes challenging patriarchy would be the public arena of the ballad, whether the village dance or as entertainment in the village hall or inn. At a time when women found it difficult to speak openly and critically, how could one express dissatisfaction with the *status quo* in the

¹¹ Similarly Fredrika Bremer's novel *Hertha* (1856) and Camilla Collett's *Amtmandens datter* (1854–55) caused a stir regarding women's rights in Sweden and Norway respectively. See Robert L. Perkins (1999).

presence of men (Frith 1997: 105)? There is a fine line between attracting attention and attracting censorship (Chance 2007: 3). In a consideration of female troubadours, Matilda Bruckner writes: 'while silence becomes the metaphor of a suppressed female other, women's *prise de parole* signifies an act of empowerment, a self-empowerment that announces their entry into language and public spheres of social interaction, whether in oral or written exchanges' (1992: 867). Were women who wanted to change the discourse able to use it as a vehicle of resistance (Parsons 2004: 141)? Could they suggest a resistance to commonly-held values and attitudes through a non-vocalized portrayal of Oluf and the elf-maiden, through knowing looks, nods, winks, and raising of the eyebrows? Did they, in fact, achieve a dialogue between female singer and female audience not picked up on by the men? 'There is reason to think that men and women at times see, hear and report different things relating to the same event' (Bourguignon 1983: 62), but to what extent might there have been a deliberate attempt to convey attitudes and feelings to the 'sisterhood'? Karen Rowe thinks that 'in the history of folktale and fairy-tale, women as storytellers have woven or spun their yarns, speaking at one level to a total culture, but at another to a sisterhood of readers who will understand the hidden language' (1986: 57). While an open suggestion in a song or ballad that the way to gain submission from your man is by assuming the role of a siren may provoke male negative response, *encoding* the message would enable communication of values in a less overt way (Stewart 1993: 69). We must look again at representation of gender and at empowerment, especially in the nineteenth century versions reported by women (Chance 2007: 3), but also by men. Is it possible for the character of the elf-queen to be viewed other than as one who inflicted random death on knights in their prime? Could the female ballad-singer see qualities to be admired in the elf and be implicitly holding her up as a model to replace the age-old paradigm of female passivity?

Let us consider what it is that women might admire. Carolyne Larrington reflects on the female audience of the fairy mistress stories to be found in the romance genre:

We may speculate that they enjoyed the fantasy of female autonomy, the capacity to own property and to bestow gifts freely, to choose a lover and hold the power of life and death

over him, and that the fantasy of keeping the beloved ever beside one, attentive and happy in the domestic sphere, would have been a compelling one. (1999: 44)

All this is directly transferable as a response to the elf-queen of 'Elveskud'. Living outside human society, she is not governed by society's rules. She reverses the traditional hierarchies: when she sees Oluf, she makes the first move. *She* chooses her man and *acts* on her fantasy; she has come to terms with her sexuality and does not deny this identity: she is a temptress. She has achieved the sovereignty which Chaucer's Wife of Bath so desperately desired. In most versions of 'Elveskud'¹² the elf-queen secures her man, yet whether he dances or not, she kills him. The reason why is not discussed or hinted at in the ballad. Does she exact the ultimate revenge rather than suffer the embarrassment of rejection? Is her jealousy too great to allow another woman to have what she cannot? Is it because he has trespassed into her territory? Or does she kill him simply because she can? Whether the man succumbs or not and despite his wealth and authority, she wields total power over him. Here is an empowered woman who refuses to be consigned to passivity or be subordinated, who outwits her man and, in fact, embodies many of the characteristics of a man. In the way that Bertha Rochester in *Jane Eyre* expresses the author's sense of 'hunger, rebellion, and rage' at her inability to articulate her feelings and opinions (Gilbert and Gubar 2000: 360), the elf-queen acts in a way that many women would like to imitate.

If the women found something to admire in the elf-queen, what about the men? Early audiences of the ballad would understand that the elf-maiden defines the manhood of Oluf in that she finds him worthy of desire but, by removing choice and power, she also diminishes that masculinity. She was an object to be desired—even Chaucer's Sir Thopas dreams his 'lemman' will be an 'elf-queene' (Robinson, ed. 1968: *CT*, 1. 1977), the ultimate fantasy particularly for knights of the lower orders for whom women of similar social status were often in short supply (Wade 2011: 137). She was a male fantasy of a temptress/dominatrice figure who would prove a rather more exciting partner than the passive woman held up as a model of a good wife (who weeps and faints, and isn't even accorded a name in many versions). To later audiences, who may or may not have ceased

¹² Versions C,D,Db,G,H,I,K,L,M,N,O,S,T,U,X,Y,D*,E*,F*,G*,H*,I*,M*,N*.

to believe in supernatural beings and who, with the popularity of psycho-analysis, turned the gaze inwardly, I would argue that she represents sexuality or Oluf's fear of sexuality in his unwillingness to dance (Jacobsen 1988: 46). The *femme fatale* image projected by the elf-maid was a popular theme of nineteenth-century Romantic literature, in England with poems such as Keats' 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' (1819), Heine's 'Die Lorelei' (Germany, 1824), La Motte Fouqué's 'Undine' (Germany, 1811), and Hans Christian Andersen's Santa in *Improvisatoren* (Denmark, 1835) and Naomi in *Kun en Spillemand* (1837). Certainly she is able to bestow wealth and, in some versions, power attained through this wealth.

Lloyd reminds us of the importance of riches to those who have none:

Poor people's songs are full of riches because deprived men and women take special delight in the 'conception of the impossible', in imagining a world of wonders where ships may have sails of silk and masts of gold [...] The magnificence of the classic ballads is often merely a reflection of the poverty of the ballad-singer and his audience, and a sign of their eagerness to create for themselves an atmosphere of magic, conjuring up an idealized world governed by its own laws and logic. (1967: 161)

The elf also represents an appeal to the basic instinct of greed in that she offers something for apparently nothing (Cooper 2004: 209).

2.4 *An analysis of 'Elveskud' according to gender of informants*

The next section examines closely variations in our attested texts of 'Elveskud' in relation to the gender of the informants. While the basic structure and story-line of 'Elveskud' has been maintained throughout all extant versions, the ballad has been subject to alterations, deliberate or as a result of mis-remembering. We should consider the possibility that these minor alterations came about as women singers have changed, added or removed detail to communicate an opinion or to reflect local contexts. But there must be a caveat: the science is inexact. An oral tradition, anonymous singers, and manuscripts known to be incomplete cannot produce right and wrong answers. While we sometimes know when informers are male or female, exact provenance for all ballads cannot be certain. Ideas can be explored, albeit only tentatively.

Grundtvig collected forty-three Danish versions of 'Elveskud'. Of these, we shall ignore three (the version recorded in *DfU* which is heavily redacted by Grundtvig himself;

DgF 47A* (no text); and 47K*, with only two stanzas), and treat M* and N*, each with only four stanzas, with caution. The two earliest texts are DgF 47 A (from Karen Brahe's collection, 1570s), and B (Peter Syv, 1695, who undertook some redaction: Grundtvig, 'Prove,' Part II, Vol. I, reprint edition of *DgF*: 30). These are both collections, with no evidence of gender of those who contributed.¹³ It will be useful to compare the remaining forty versions and variants against the Brahe text, used as a 'control' to chart changes made by women singers in particular which might suggest local attitudes and contexts. Brahe is used as it is Grundtvig's oldest text (but with no suggestion that it is his 'best' text, as was the 'prevailing scholarly sentiment' in the nineteenth century; Tangherlini 2013: 41). There is further difficulty in ascribing gender: Grundtvig records ballads collected from twenty-four women and sixteen men (including the D and O versions), but the remaining four cannot be included: three from collections and one a broadsheet.¹⁴ There are other variables affecting an attempt at comparing data, in particular the incomplete state of many of the versions (indicated on Table 2A; see Appendix) and the elliptical nature of the ballad where omissions are intentional to aid in streamlining the action. This renders close comparison a very inexact science, but it is useful to see if there are any trends which mark out the women singers from the men. The majority of the 'Elveskud' ballads in *DgF* were reported by women between 1844 and 1889, and over a slightly longer time by the men: 1813–89. The later start by the women may have been a result of a more conservative response to strangers asking to interview them and hear them sing. The average length of the ballads is almost identical for both men and women, with just one stanza different (so should not affect statistics). The longest individual ballad submitted by a woman is thirty-two stanzas (S and B*), and for the men thirty-five stanzas (E*), though the figures are not stable because some texts are incomplete. Geographically, ballads have been collected throughout Denmark, but two main clusters occur around Hejle/Jelling and around Hammerum, both

¹³ We shall include as separate texts the three variants of DgF 47O which came to Kristensen from two men and a woman, and similarly 47D, two variants, one from a man, the other from a woman.

¹⁴ In *DgF*, the headnote to each ballad version includes details of place and date of origin, along with names of the tradition-bearer and collector (where known and applicable). Thus, for instance, 47K reads 'Optegnet 1870 af Skolelærer E.T. Kristensen efter Ane Marie Kristensdatter, Grødde, Ikast Sogn, Hammerum Herred' (Recorded 1870 by teacher E.T. Kristensen from Ane Marie Kristensdatter, Grødde, Ikast parish, Hammerum town).

in Jutland (Table 2B; see Appendix). Statistically, ballads from a cluster will suggest a stronger trend than one from an isolated area, Version T, for example, from the far north of Denmark.

An early focus in 47A and B, ballads collected by Brahe and Syv, is on the temptations offered to Oluf to induce him to dance (see Table 2C). These promises of gifts are retained in only twelve subsequent versions with sometimes only the briefest reference. In the two early texts (A and B), Oluf holds out against the elf's request by refusing to dismount to dance. He further retains his integrity when he tells no lies to his parents regarding his encounter with the elves. In subsequent versions there is a radical change in his integrity, but his early probity is preserved particularly in the ballads sung by women. Oluf refuses to succumb to the elves' temptations or threats in 48% of ballads collected from women, compared with just three ballads collected from men (21%). If we consider Oluf's determination to resist a dance with the elf-maiden,¹⁵ the women record Oluf's refusal, his forcible removal from his horse by the elves, and dancing only when threatened with death in 48% of their ballads.¹⁶ The comparative statistic for the men singers is that Oluf will dance in these circumstances in 71% of the versions. Oluf ultimately dances in 79% of ballads from men against 52% from the women. The women portray a stronger willpower, while the male singers allow Oluf to listen to more offers of gifts and be threatened with death before he dances (43%). Succumbing immediately to the elves occurs in one ballad each from the men and the women singers, though there is a caveat. This is regarding DgF47 M* where within only four stanzas Oluf does dance following the promise of 'tre sølvslagne knive' (three silver knives), a promise which may have been misconstrued as a valuable gift and which turned out to be a threat. Similar ambiguous suggestions are not an unusual feature of a narrative intended to be streamlined, and can also be found in Version O, for instance. This analysis would seem to show that there is more of a chance of loyalty to his fiancée in the ballads sung by women. In

¹⁵ Versions not included here are Q and P* (both male singers), where there is no reference to dancing.

¹⁶ DgF47 M* and N* are included as, while short, there are no omissions up to this point in the ballads.

addition, there is some emasculation of his character when, during his dealings with the elves, Oluf is not allowed to dismount by himself, but is lifted on or off his horse by these supernatural women, in ten ballads sung by women, and seven by men. Five of these women and two men take the feminization of our hero a step further by lifting him by his 'Midje smal' (slender waist), a stock phrase which sits far more comfortably in descriptions of women in the romance genre. His 'hvide Hals' (white neck) is further example of another ideal of feminine beauty, found in four versions, two each from the men and the women. If we combine these three descriptors, they are used by approximately 48% of the women and by 50% of male singers.¹⁷ The majority come from the Hammerum district, suggesting a distinctive tradition in that area. This feminization may suggest a wry portrayal of the hero knight from some singers, but much of the evidence cited could be used to convey not so much gentle satire, as a less than perfect character with faults, with whom the audience, both male and female, could sympathise and who, it would seem, is accorded more sympathy by the women singers than the men. Detail included to attract this sympathy to Oluf can be found in several versions. The delineation of 'Ole' in 47E (informant, Fru Petersen), for example, clearly underlines his victim status. He rejects the proposition of the elf-maid who immediately inflicts disease upon him. The ballad-singer takes a few moments to describe the immediate effect: 'da falmer hans Haar og blegner hans kind' (then fades his hair and his cheek turns pale), a line re-emphasized when his mother questions the reason. He is then scrupulously honest in his responses to her; he does not disguise what has happened and accepts his fate. He must die, and quickly. The focus now shifts to the living. The sky responds to the mood of the scene: it is 'blev' (pale), an echo of the colour of Ole's cheeks as he rode home to his death. The Christian context is established as the priest is summoned and the bride poignantly puts her cross around Ole's neck. What she cannot now wear to her wedding will be worn in the grave, but this refuge in Christian symbols rather than in faith will not change the outcome: he cannot be saved. In the versions where Oluf is given a choice of lying sick for seven years or immediate

¹⁷ These percentages account for the ballads where a combination of these details is used.

death (H, M, Oa, Ob, Q, S, E*), economic reality comes to the fore. A selfless choice of immediate death, no doubt, but it is perhaps the men¹⁸ who appreciate he cannot be a burden on his family for seven years and so must elect immediate death.

Table 2C DgF 47 ‘Elveskud’: Oluf’s willpower regarding the dance, by male/female singer

Ballads not included: A (K Brahe) B (Syv collection) DfU (Grundtvig’s redaction) A* (no text) K*(2 stanzas) Q, P*, (no dancing)

Total no. of ballads = 44 Seven omitted = 37 Women = 23; Men = 14

(U): brackets indicate an omission between his refusal and his dancing

Categories	Women singers: Number / % of ballads	Ballads	Men singers: Number / % of ballads	Ballads
Oluf doesn’t succumb	11 48%	E; Ob; P; R; V; Z; Æ; B*; C*; L*; O*	3 21%	F; O; Ø
He is removed from his horse to dance	3 13%	N; S; D*	2 14%	M; E*
Dances only when threatened with death	3 13%	Db; G*; N*	0	
O rejects gifts once or more than once; then dances when threatened with death	0		6 43 %	D; H; T; Y; H*; I*
O rejects gifts once or more than once; then dances – no threat	5 22%	K; L; (U); X; F*	2 14 %	G; I
Immediately succumbs	1 4%	C	1 7%	M* (4 stanzas – implies he dances for gift [knives])

Spatial Clustering

Two main clusters for ‘Elveskud’

Sunds / Herning/ Ikast	K L M N O R S V X Y Æ D* E* F* O* (P*) 16
Jelling / Vejle / Horsens	D G* H* I* (K*) L* M* N* 8

¹⁸ Thirty-one per cent of men record this to 8% of women.

In the representation of the two human women in 'Elveskud', we have a slightly softer picture in the ballads submitted by female informants. The mother's upset at the state of Oluf on his return to the farm, her tears (C, Æ, O*), her 'blege Kind' (pale cheek, S), 'i ser saa sorgeful' (in looks so sorrowful, U) are only to be found in submissions from women.¹⁹ In three versions, all provided by women, Oluf's bride, out of love and loyalty, refuses to marry his brother (R, B*, O*). In Oluf's mother we hear the voice of reason in her (implied) warning regarding elves, which turns into concern in Versions R and L*, where there is anger too. Here Oluf on his death bed sends for his chest to ensure his bride inherits some of his possessions. In both of these versions (reported by women) we hear the concerns of the mother that her own children are not overlooked as the family wealth is distributed. If the elf-maiden's mix of murderousness and sex-appeal held no attraction, in the mother and the bride-to-be we have two women who wield no power, but who demonstrate admirable qualities and with whom many would identify. Research conducted on Scottish ballads and their singers by Lynn Wollstadt suggests that in their choice of ballads, Scottish women singers preferred ballads whose main male character was not a high-powered or wealthy leader, but who was vulnerable or fell victim to forces greater than himself: 'Desirable romantic partners are not the men who wield the most power; on the contrary, well-born and authoritative men are often depicted most positively when they are on their deathbeds' (2003:70).²⁰ Choice of ballads such as 'Lord Randall' indicates an outpouring of sympathy which, if longevity and number of versions and variants are attestations to popularity, Oluf in 'Elveskud' may also have received. This popularity would then suggest something about the lifestyle and choices of the women of rural ballad communities, a sympathy for men seen as fallible, perhaps flawed (if Oluf transgressed on the elves' territory or succumbed to temptation) where the male hero motif is inverted and women could take the moral high-ground, as in 'Tam Lin' (see Chapter 7). There is no overwhelming textual evidence that Danish women ballad-singers were grasping the

¹⁹ Evidence of the mother's upset can also be found in Version O, submitted by two men and one woman.

²⁰ A caveat must be added that twentieth century singers would be far more aware of feminist issues than their predecessors.

feminist nettle in both hands, evidence of which we shall see in Chapter 3 in Sweden; rather, if we may mix metaphors, they are dipping a toe in the water. The diminished power of the elf-maid in her inability to achieve an early victory over Oluf sends a clear message of approval in more women singers than men, but this is hardly an act which would count as subversive in relation to patriarchal structures.

There has to be an element of speculation, of course, in pursuing such levels of meaning. This evidence for women putting their own stamp on 'Elveskud' is hardly overwhelming, but could be more obvious in individual performance than in the body of ballads as a whole. Sometimes a nod, a wink, a tone of voice will convey as much or more than metaphor or a well-chosen word. However we define a 'feminist' text, we have to say that versions of 'Elveskud' will only begin to fit the definition if we consider the elf-woman as a representative of the aspirations of some women. Rural communities in contact with neither the literary nor feminist worlds may have been quite content with their lot. Socialization, the process of internalizing values and attitudes, accounted for the fact that many did not question the patriarchal *status quo* or know that life could be any different. As these songs reinforce contextual matters, ideologies and cultures, we shall see the representation of human women changing as we move to different ballads. Evidence of self-assertion, self-actualization and of shift in control in women protagonists in the elf ballads in the corpus of each country under review will be a focus in this work. Stories can only be changed if the community from which they come is willing to authorize that change (Gilbert 1994:129), but if women not only do not have a voice in that community but also have never had access to women's stories, they will not be sufficiently powerful to disrupt the dominant discourse (Parsons 2004: 142).

2.5 'Elveskud' Version DgF 47B

We shall begin our analysis of individual versions of 'Elveskud' with the version which today is reproduced the most, 47B, mid-range in length with 25 stanzas. It was numbered 87 in Peder Syv's 1695 collection *Et Hundrede udvalde Danske Viser (A Hundred Selected*

Danish Ballads), and was the only version known to scholarship until the 1840s (Dal 1967: 261), accounting for its popularity.²¹ The central character in Version B is Her Oluf; in other versions we have *Ridder* (Knight) Ole, Olef, Rolig, Volder, Peder and the epithet 'Liden' (Little) is occasionally used of both Oluf and his bride.

Version B presents all three parts of Oluf's story, the meeting with the elf-maidens and its outcomes.²² The first section (stanzas 1–14) takes us straight into the narrative, revealing Oluf on a journey to invite his friends to his wedding celebrations the following day. The dancers Oluf encounters are led by the *Eller-kongens daatter* (Elf-king's daughter) who advances from the group to address him. Version B is traditional in that she invites Oluf to dance; he refuses, his excuse being his forthcoming wedding. She proceeds to offer him incentives to dance, all refused until finally the *Eller-kongens daatter* inflicts punishment on him, the *elveskud* or elf-blow between his shoulders, with the promise of imminent death.

Table 2D

DgF 47 'Elveskud': Narrative pathways of Versions A, B and DfU

	A	B	DfU
Stanzas	54	25	79
Origin	Karen Brahe's Foliohaandskrift no 75 c. 1570s	Syv no. 87 1695	DfU Grundtvig's redaction 1882
Refrain	Huad hielper thett, wy quider! But what avails bemoaning?	Men dandsen, den gaar saa let gennem lunden But the dance, it goes so lightly through the groves	Men dansen den gaar saa let gennem lunden But the dance, it goes so lightly through the groves
Stage 1: Knight meets elves who invite him to dance	Dwarfs	Elf-king's daughter	Elves, dwarfs, elf-queen
They offer temptations	A	B	DfU
He refuses to dance	A	B	DfU
Punishment	Struck on cheek; blow on back	Blow	Hits him hard on heart
Stage 2: He arrives home	A	B	DfU

²¹ The ballad was also printed by Abrahamson, Nyerup, and Rahbek in 'Udvalgte Danske Viser fra Middelalderen' (1812–14), based on Syv's version, but with some revision (Steenstrup 1968: 200). The poet Oehlenschläger included a version of 'Elveskud' 47B in his collection of redacted folkeviser, *Gamle danske folkeviser* (1840), with an altered title ('Elverhæn') and some other changes. So until the mid-1800s, only the Syv version (plus Syv derivatives) was available.

²² The narrative is outlined in Table 2D.

He admits what has happened	No ref to elves; admits to being about to die	B	Lies; blood on saddle so mother knows where he has been
He asks his family to support him in his final hours	A		DfU
Bequests to family			DfU
Stage 3: The bride arrives	A	B	DfU
She is informed he is out with horse and hound	A	B	DfU
Detailed scene with anxious bride	A		DfU
Eventually told he is dead	By a page		By a page
Deaths	Groom and bride	Groom, bride and mother	Groom, bride and mother

He returns home to find his mother waiting. Their conversation about Oluf's predicament and pending death and how the mother will handle his bride on her arrival provides a brief second scene and moves them quickly into the third (stanzas 20–25). The bride enquires about the groom's whereabouts and is given the excuse previously agreed, that he is out with his horse and hound. The bride discovers his body and at dawn the following day a total of three bodies is taken into the courtyard: Oluf along with his mother and bride, who both have died of grief.

Version B moves quickly into the action. Economy and simplicity are important qualities: there is no ornate word-choice or imagery; action is key. The elves appear immediately, in stanza 2 in a dance with the daughter of the elf-king. Character delineation or development, and descriptions of natural or cultural background are avoided as they would be well-known to the audience (Dal 1967: 14) and would hinder forward-moving action. The noble subjects of the first ballads would have been acceptable to all classes (Mitchell 1957: 33): tales of heroes, knights, away at war with their ladies pining at home providing stories which promoted martial aristocratic ideologies for the gentry and a glimpse of glamour for the peasants. Oluf is described as *Her* or *Ridder*. 'Knight' does not have the same connotation as today: they were members of the landed gentry rather than the aristocracy (Steenstrup 1968: 14) and would still work the land and keep animals and

employ others to help. Oluf returns to his mother via the ‘borge-led’, the road to what was originally a fortified house.

This version begins with hope and potential: a young man on the eve of his wedding, a situation into which the elf injects jealousy and lust. In the initial exchange between the elf-king’s daughter and Oluf, the elf sets the agenda, and what seems to be politeness, or an awareness of Oluf’s face-needs, or phatic talk soon turns into the first of a series of mitigated imperatives:

Velkommen, Her Oluf, lad fare din fig.
Bi lidet og træd her i dandsen med mig DgF 47B 3

Welcome, Sir Oluf, let your desire loose.
Come and tread the dance with me

The distribution of turns is even but the power is not. The elf-king’s daughter invites Oluf to dance, an invitation he refuses without thought. Though he remains polite, Oluf recognises immediately that he should not join them and that there is danger inherent in such a confrontation. The elf-king’s daughter is a forerunner of the Romantic and Victorian literary *femme fatale* in the way that she holds out her hand to entice Herr Oluf into the dance and yet typical of the ballads in the three gifts she offers him.

2.5.1 *The dance motif*

The dance is significant; Danish ballads were set to dance music, which is not found in all other countries.²³ In her extensive overview of the Oluf-type ballads, Alfild Forslin remarked that the dance motif is specifically Danish and comparatively recent, though the invitation to dance can be found in the earliest versions of the ballad (Forslin 1962: 47). In twenty-three of Grundtvig’s versions, Oluf does succumb to the dance; in half of those only when threatened with loss of life. He dances all night until his boots fill with blood, whereupon he is put on his horse and sent home to die.²⁴ Yet while dance is a central motif in DgF 47, few have considered its meaning. We should reflect on what images the concept of dance would hold for the audiences of the ballad throughout its popularity. Dances of

²³ It is very unlikely, for instance, that the Child ballads were accompanied by instrumental music and dancing (Pound, 1919: 373).

²⁴ DgF 47C, D, Db, G, H, I, K, L, M, N, S, T, U, X, Y, D*, E*, F*, G*, H*, I*, M*, N*.

elves and fairies are a common motif in medieval and Renaissance literature (Hall 2007: 75). Evald Tang Kristensen provides a handful of first-hand testimonies to elf dancing (1892–1901: 16–18) and the Wife of Bath recalls ‘ladyes foure and twenty, and yet mo’ dancing ‘under a forest syde’ who magically vanish when approached. The motif persists as late as Milton, but these are not the orderly affairs reflecting the harmony of the cosmos, as described by Sir John Davies in his ‘Orchestra, or a Poeme on Dancing’ (1596).²⁵ Elf dancing is perhaps related to that defined as ‘this folysshe game’ by Sebastian Brant in his satirical poem ‘Das Narrenschiff’ (‘The Ship of Fools’ 1494) which states that dance was invented by the devil, so only evil can come of it:

Before this ydoll daunsynge both wyfe and man
Dispysynge god²⁶

There is no more memorable sight, even though tongue-in cheek, than that captured in ‘Tam O’Shanter’ (Robert Burns, 1790) where Old Nick himself played for the witches’ wild gyrations. Warnings not to join the fairy dance abound (Eason 2002: 69; Silver 1999: 168, 175). Linked with the dance of death, the *danse macabre*, this was believed to be a means of seducing the victim to his death by whirling him round ceaselessly until he expired at dawn and crossed to the other side. Depictions of the *danse macabre* are to be found amongst the frescoes in three Danish churches: Nørre Alslev in the south (see illustration, below); Egtved, near Vejle; and Jungshoved (now described as a dance with the devil); and also in Malmø and Ronnerby, which now belong to Sweden. The keynote of the *danse macabre* is believed to be ‘Sir, join the dance, thy hour has struck!’ (Clark 1950: 97), usually depicting representatives from the three estates, standing stock still while Death dances in a more animated way around them:

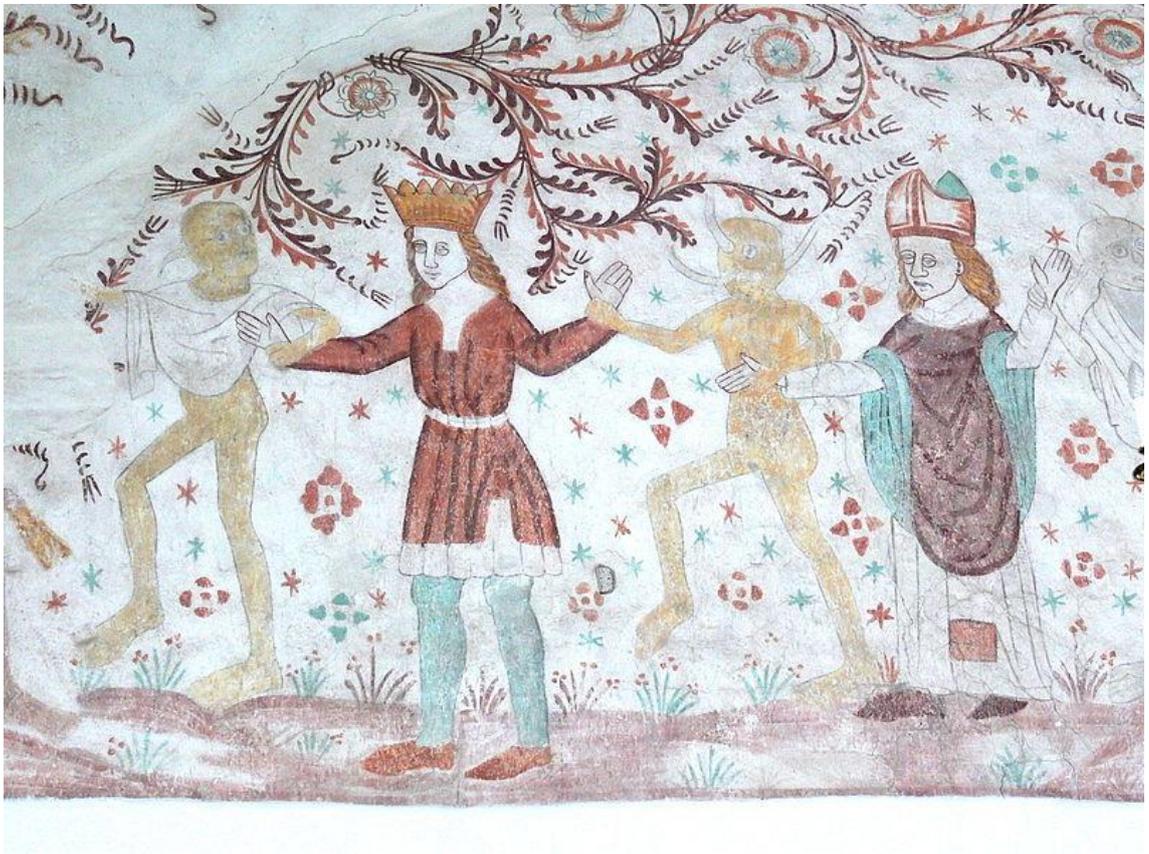
Death’s dance is irregular, erratic ... [It] appears as a tool for differentiation between the immoral, supernatural, demonic, and chaotic domain of death and the ordered world of the living that death disrupts. This dancing, moreover, is performed for the sake of the spectator, the viewer of the Dance of Death, who is not (yet) performing the dance, but is invited to contemplate it.
(Gerstman 2010: 67)

Lübeck’s Totentanz (1463 or earlier), paintings accompanied by a long descriptive poem,

²⁵ Geoffrey Chaucer, ed. Robinson (1968: 1.990ff; John Milton, ed. Bush (1969:1: 781-84).

²⁶ Sebastian Brandt ([1494] 1874:1, 293).

was translated into Danish in 1520, complete with woodcuts.²⁷ The Danes had their own *danse macabre*, *Dødedansen*, (*The Dance of Death*, published around 1555), which was laced with satire against the Catholic Church (Rossel 1992: 73). This dance to the death reminds of the phenomenon of Choreomania (also called the dancing plague and St. Vitus' dance), frenzied dancing lasting hours, days or even months, bouts of which have been recorded in various European locations, mainly between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries. Individuals caught up in this 'plague' were said to dance uncontrollably and die at the end of the paroxysm (Backman 1952: 154).



Fresco of the *Danse Macabre* from Nørre Alslev Kirke on the island of Falster, believed to have been completed by the Master of Elmelunde in the early fourteenth century

Dancing and singing have been key to celebrations in Denmark from early times. Here in 'Elveskud' we have a warning against dancing with elves in a ballad which would have been accompanied by dancing. The refrain in 47B calls attention to the counterpoint

²⁷ See Clark (1950): 82–83.

between the dancing of the elves in the text and the dancing enjoyed by the ballad participants to accompany the singing, ‘Men dandsen den gaar saa let gennem lunden’ (Lightly goes the dance in the greenwood). At some points in the text the refrain can be seen as a description of the action within the ballad and at some points as an ironic comment on Oluf’s refusal to dance, but it stands also as a reminder of the action of those participating. So was the problem with dancing—or with elves? The importance of the performance aspect of the text has already been discussed (Chapter 2.3 above); here we have a different aspect of performance, one in which all partake, but the dangers of which Oluf spurns. Throughout Europe in the Middle Ages, the subject of dance was a controversial one. While the Bible maintains a neutral stance towards dancing and the early Church embraced dance as a means of worship, attitudes became polarised, particularly during the post-Reformation when on the one hand texts such as Castiglione’s *Il Libro del Cortegiano* (1528) recommended that courtiers should embrace dancing as a means of improving their deportment and behaviour, while both Protestant and Catholic Churches showed strong opposition. In treatises on the Seven Deadly Sins, dancing was allied to two sins: to lust, as the social context of dancing could, it was believed, indeed lead to the stimulation of sexual appetites (Arcangeli 1994: 129–30) and to gluttony in terms of excess: depending on the context, dance leads to intemperate or inappropriate rejoicing (‘inepta laetitia’) and is sinful in no fewer than five ways, according to Antoninus (in *Summa Confessionalis*, [1472], 1564: 253). Dancing was considered by some to be an integral element of ‘paganism’; a fight against dance was, in fact, part of the struggle against the devil. Witches’ round dances, performed in worship to the devil, were an integral part of their Sabbath (Larner 1981: 152–54).

The *balladdans* came to Scandinavia from southern Europe. Dancers joined hands in a chain (long-dance) or circle (ring-dance), joining with the singer in the refrain (Bjork 2010: 481). After the Reformation in Denmark, the most influential church was Lutheran, which was less critical of the moral value of dance than was the Calvinist Church, even though it succeeded in abolishing dance in Iceland (Chapter 3.3). Luther compared ‘natural

music' with 'a square dance in heaven, with friendly bows, embracings, and hearty swinging of the partners' (Bainton 2009: 354) but another type of dance did not receive such approbation. While Luther can find no fault in the square or chain-dance, dances for couples were raising eyebrows in Europe. An early novel (published in 1771) describes the waltz, newly arrived in one German state:

But when he put his arm around her, pressed her to his breast, cavorted with her in the shameless, indecent whirling-dance of the Germans and engaged in a familiarity that broke all the bounds of good breeding—then my silent misery turned into burning rage
Sophie von La Roche (1991:160)

If this dancing amongst men and women is shameless, how much worse is a dance with the devil.

An understanding of the post-Reformation resistance to dance makes us read the text in a certain way: it brings to mind a diabolical image of Oluf dancing with the elves, much like the dance of witches, yet this negative image is problematized by our knowledge that the ballad was accompanied by music and dance, at least among the non-elite, and would frequently have been sung and danced within hearing of the church, even within the church-grounds (Gustafson 1961: 44). If we consider a possible psychological approach to the ballad, that Oluf may be portrayed as the object of the elf-maiden's love—and she certainly seems pleased to see him—and her envy when he reveals his attachment to another lady, then it is only a short leap to consider a reading of the dance as a symbol for some kind of erotic desire, perhaps even in both characters. Why does Oluf trespass on fairy territory when he is clearly aware of the dangers? Is he desirous of a sexual encounter with the elf? Bascom (1965: 29) concludes that folklore reveals 'man's frustration and attempts to escape in fantasy from repressions imposed on him by society, sexual or otherwise'. Is Oluf there for some kind of excitement, or merely because he has naively or unawares strayed into dangerous territory?

There follow three refusals to three temptations, rising from the least costly to the most expensive, employing incremental repetition to assist memorization, to build up suspense and to increase audience interest. The elf-king's daughter takes power from her longer moves in the exchange and from her questioning, which gives her the authority to

control the agenda and elicit a response. Over four lines she offers Oluf gifts suitable for a man of his background and status: ‘To bukkeskins støvle’ (two buckskin boots) fitted with ‘forgyldene spore’ (golden spurs)—signifying comfort, wealth and masterdom. The elf-king’s daughter (or the ballad-singer) does not give Oluf time to react before offering a silken shirt which has been bleached by the elf-queen in the moonlight. He offers positive resistance by refusing to react, stonewalling with the same words as before, so she tries harder. Her next offer is ‘et hored af guld’ (a golden helmet).²⁸ Oluf admits to temptation: ‘Et hored af guld kand jeg vel faa’ (I would gladly get a helmet of gold) but will not succumb. Her tone changes, the dialogue now creating a different atmosphere and predicting the rest of the action:

Og vil du ikke dandse med mig,
Sot og sygdom skal følge dig

DgF 47B 12

And if you do not want to dance with me,
Disease and illness will follow you

The elf’s tone becomes adversarial as her threat is swiftly followed by a blow between Oluf’s shoulders, worse than any he has felt before. He cannot respond this time. In an unwomanly fashion, she sets him up on his horse and tells him sarcastically to go home to his bride.

The next conversation in Version B is conducted in two adjacency pairs, brief and to the point. Oluf’s mother stands in juxtaposition to the elf-maid in her concern for her son and for the social consequences of what has happened. She notices his white cheeks, a common motif, and when she hears he has been at an elf-dance, enquires how she should explain his absence to his bride the following day; she knows he must die. Such is the belief that survival in such a circumstance is impossible, that there is no sentimentality, only a resigned acceptance of his imminent death. The words Oluf suggests she tell his bride are used in all versions:

I skal sige, jeg er udi lunde,
At prøve min hest og saa mine hunde.

DgF 47B 19

You have to say this, that I am in the groves

²⁸ Prior interprets this as ‘probably that which is still worn by the peasant women of Denmark and many parts of Germany [...] it is usually made of gold lace, and is a very costly ornament for women in that rank of life’ (1860, Vol. 2: 309).

Testing my horse and likewise my hounds.

In the versions where Oluf has danced, he returns home with blood oozing out of his boots and gives an excuse about his horse stumbling, but his mother always seeks out the truth. This is not so in Version B where we are presented with a degree of probity and filial piety in the main character: a refusal to be drawn in by the temptations of one outside the community and then total veracity when questioned by his mother. Oluf puts fidelity to his lady over material goods and his stoic acceptance of his fate lends him stature. The effect is to increase audience sympathy as he behaves according to well-defined social rules. There is more than one reading of his inclination to withhold the fact of his death from his fiancée: cowardice or an attempt to protect her from the harshness of life (depending on whether we consider Oluf a transgressor or a victim), though one feels it would only increase the shock to arrive at church for one's marriage to find the groom in a coffin. This 'don't tell' motif is not unusual in the ballads, which can, therefore, have the effect of watering down its impact. We find it in 'Hr. Jon og Fru Bodil', DgF 144, for example, where there is an attempt to hide the fact from Fru Bodil that her husband has been killed in war. In 'Elveskud', surely it is not intended that the truth will be concealed for ever from the fiancée, but in order to allow more time for the news to be imparted gently to her. The 'don't tell' motif aims to heighten the tension in the final section of the ballad where interest may be dissipating after the exit of the elf-maid and the death of the hero.

As the agony is drawn out for the fiancée, so the tragedy is heightened. She refuses out of love for Oluf to marry the brother instead. Loyalty would be admired in the community, but the didacticism, so important in this genre post-Reformation, is in fact subtly instilling behavioural norms of obedience and family into the young listeners. The narratorial intervention continues: 'thett wor stuor ynk at sie den nø' (it was a very pitiful thing to see that distress; st. 54), included not to individualize the narrator as a part of the text, but purely to engage the audience in a response to the bride's sorrow.

We know little about the two family deaths, and we do not need to; we have a sense of total loss, and a useful way of tidying up all loose ends and spare characters. Peere (1992: 58) interprets these final deaths as an example of how society deals with *mors*

repentina, ‘bad death’, one which is sudden. Psychologists advise that it is more difficult for the bereaved to deal with, especially in one so young, than a death expected because of illness or old-age, hence Oluf’s decision to hide his death by insisting on secrecy and having his mother tell an untruth. Peere’s argument that this would have impressed his social group who would be ‘accustomed to the communal negotiation of all individual crises’ is perhaps a little thin. This line of thought may have been applicable at one time in one society, but means little out of context. The ballad-singer leaves his audience with a sense of hopeless loss and defeat, which is not diminished, but even heightened by the fact that multiple deaths are not uncommon in the ballad genre.²⁹

There is in Version B a strong focus on potential which is ruined by fate; there is nothing that can be done. Even if you have a good standard of living, even if you have been brought up to have integrity by a caring family and are about to be married, all counts for nothing in the face of arbitrary fate. The key to this situation in B would seem to be Oluf’s rejection of the elf-maid, but this is not so in other versions where Oluf dances yet still dies. An examination of Version A will reveal some differences in focus.

2.6 ‘Elveskud’ Version DgF 47A

The oldest extant version, DgF 47A, on which the *DfU* version is based, was found by Grundtvig in Karen Brahe’s *Folio* (*Foliohaandskrift*),³⁰ dated to the 1570s (See Chapter 1). Language issues have contributed to the lack of popularity of Version A: some of the words are not easy to understand. Prior complains that Grundtvig had let his readers down in not providing glosses for obsolete words such as ‘bierigitt’ (*berget*), ‘huortt’ (*hvor*), ‘thalle’ (*tale*), ‘huosz’ (*hos*), ‘wyenebro’ (*vindebro*), ‘löffue’ (*leve*), ‘muoffue’ (*moder*), ‘stuooffue’ (*stue*) (1860: II, 301).

In Version A as in B, structure breaks the action into three separate scenes, but here we have a much stronger narratorial voice (but not identity). It is given fifty-one out of a

²⁹ Multiple deaths in response to the death of a loved one can be seen in, for example, ‘Ribolt og Guldborg’ (DgF 82) and ‘Det tvungne samtykke’ (DgF 75).

³⁰ Location: Københavns Universitet (Karen Brahe E1,1).

total of one hundred and four lines but action is conveyed without comment or judgement on the characters, action or outcome. It introduces each scene as before, but takes a particularly prominent role in closing the ballad. There is a very different focus in this version from A. Seventeen stanzas act out the temptation of Olleff, but he is allowed only four lines of speech to the elf-maiden's nineteen. Very often in the Danish ballad the narrative begins in the second or third stanza, where Stanza 1 can be quite lyrical, introducing character, setting or mood. We see this in Version A, which opens in a much more leisurely way than B:

Her Olleff rydder om volte,
Men lysenn dag ham tøgne

DgF 47A 1

Sir Oluf rode out at nightfall,
But it seemed to him there was a glow of day

For those living outside Scandinavia, the balladeer would seem to indicate not only time of day but also to imply that something unusual and unearthly is about to happen. Night-time is juxtaposed with a strange glow, suggesting all is not right, but this is perhaps a reference to the Nordic dusk, the changing rhythms of darkness and day which occur when the light is waning in countries of the north, as evidenced in this description from the Faroes: 'As the light fled everything got an enchanted glow, and all the other senses were sharpened as you couldn't rely on your sight' (Janakananda 1994: 5). The Danish audience would recognise the time of day: a liminal time between daylight and dusk in a liminal space, a space in between worlds. Liminality is a common theme of folk literature in Scandinavia: 'Peasant belief stressed the dangerous liminality of both dawn and dusk. This was the time when some supernatural forces and beings could be especially powerful' (Löfgren and Ehn 2007: 12). Here we have Olleff about to undergo a rite of passage, on the threshold of marriage, at dusk, a time between night and day, when he meets the elves on the outskirts of his own safe world as he trespasses into the threatening world of the supernatural. In this state of transition, man is at his most susceptible to the otherworldly.

To return to structure, all but one of the Danish versions have a refrain, with five having an internal refrain, sung after line one, in addition to the burden repeated at the end of each two-line stanza. Studies on the refrain by Steenstrup ([1891] 1961) and Hodgart

(1950) suggest one of its functions is to thump out the dance rhythm and, indeed, the majority of Grundtvig's versions have a reference to the dance in the refrain, commonly 'Men dandsen, den gar saa let gennem lunden' (But the dance goes so lightly through the grove; 47B). When there is an internal refrain, the lines are incremental:

Imen Dandsen gaar end saa let
Imen Dandsen gaar end saa let udi Lunden. DgF 47N and O

This is an *aide mémoire* for the audience who will join in singing the chorus. Olrik admires the way in which the refrain in this ballad is,

wonderfully interwoven with the narrative, depicting at one and the same time the circle of dancers beside the darkening wood, whose depths conceal all manner of sinister powers, and the actual dance of the elf-maids, as it beguiles the unsuspecting knight' (1939: 9)

While the refrain of Version B sets the audience up for the meeting of Oluf and the elves and the significance of the dance, that of Version A ('Huad hielper thett, wy quider!' What use is it, why lament?) expresses a different, more reflective mood, more suited to an aristocratic audience (who would not be dancing) than that which the popular Version B was collected from and catered for. It would seem to anticipate the conclusion of Olleff's encounter with the elves yet, in fact, it also comments on each successive stage as he progressively becomes embroiled in disaster: 'What use ... Why lament?' This refrain not only fulfils the functions of setting up the mood and foreshadowing the tragic outcome, but it also contributes to a theme of the ballad as it comments on the hopelessness of man's tragic predicament in the case of forces larger and more powerful than him.

For all the fluidity and variation within the ballad type of Sir Oluf, there is a rigidity within the versions regarding the structure of this opening exchange. Version B describes three elf-maids who each offer a gift. Version A is more detailed, taking eighteen stanzas where B spans fourteen. Here the 'immfru', maiden, who leaves the dance of the 'duerige', dwarfs (there is no systematic classification of elves and dwarfs; see Chapter 1.4), again tempts with three gifts, which now offer protection, wealth, and power, but which are different and described in greater, more tempting detail than the more homely gifts of 47B. She offers a speedy horse which could run to Rome in an hour, complete with a golden saddle; a coat of mail impervious to attack, along with a special sword; and furniture and a

drawbridge wrought of gold. The gifts offered are representative of a community different either in location or time from those in Version B: a more aristocratic audience. The majority of gifts offered in 47A suggest a society either threatened by battle or local skirmishes or one where prestige resides in martial accoutrements. In 47F, found in Fredensborg, facing Sweden across the Øresund, the elf-maiden fittingly offers a fortress and in 47Z, a ballad collected from the Randers Fjord, she offers seven ships. Through distancing and localizing of settings (Buchan [1972] 1997: 79), local colour enables the audience to recognise the world in which Olleff lives. The promise in 47A of a horse which could gallop to Rome and back in an hour contributes to the aura of magic. Rome conjures up a reminder of erstwhile sentiments: its pre-Reformation power and authority, and the early-modern humanist interest in the glories of Imperial Rome. In the post-Reformation years, once the stronghold of the Roman Catholic Church is broken, the symbol changes to reflect a different power: Denmark has rejected Roman Catholicism, and Rome was losing its authority.

The elf-maid is stronger than in 47A: she controls the exchange with nine stanzas, and she is fiercer in the punishment inflicted on Olleff, two blows this time, one on the cheek which draws blood and one on his back which renders him senseless. As in the other versions, she dismisses him, this time with a more explicit ‘*thú skalt icke leffue dag forven ien*’ (You shall not live beyond a day; 47A st. 17). This would seem to reflect a society more used to aggression, but even so, there is still a focus on gentlemanly behaviour.

The transition scene with his mother is brief: eight stanzas with three each to the mother and her son and a two-stanza introduction by the narrator. But twenty-nine out of the fifty-four stanzas are given to the outcome of Olleff’s temptation, with nearly as much narrative as dialogue. The narrator’s eighteen stanzas lead us through the final sorrowful scenes. Olleff is loving towards his family, even *in extremis*: ‘*Mynn kerr moder ... myn kerre broder*’ (My dear mother ... my dear brother), and shows concern for his bride. He has faced a choice, a major theme in all the versions. Here he makes the right decision; in others, he succumbs to temptation or to his fear of the supernatural. As with Version A, he

tells no lies; his unblemished character has the effect of increasing the sense of tragedy. If Olrik's Law of Contrast ('das Gesetz des Gegensatzes') is being followed here in the composition, the mother, in hiding the truth about her son's fate, initially takes on a contrasting tone to that of the bride. She becomes matter-of-fact and repetitive in stanzas 29 and 30, 'Thett er saa sieed paa thette her lannd ... Thett er saa sied paa denne ø' (That is thus the custom in this land... That is thus the custom all over this island) as she tries to give the impression that all is well. The bride, on the other hand, is surrounded with words and expressions of sadness: 'sorigen', 'sorig-fuld' and 'alle gred fruer saa saare' (all the ladies weep so sorely), so that 'hun war seg aff hiartett saa wee' (she was herself in the heart so pained). The traditions attendant on death (the priest, bells, shroud, bier and mourning) are juxtaposed and highlighted by the detail of life: description of the house and the trappings of the wedding, such as the bride's removal to the groom's house, the bridal torch and seat.

The two versions, A and B, would seem to be catering for different audiences. The more leisurely Version A, twice as long as Syv's Version B, allows more time for reflection and for building up a mood, from optimism to the tragedy which is to affect a whole family. Similarly, Version A's chorus ('Hvad hielper thett, wy quider') is much quieter and more thoughtful and refined than B's 'Men dandsen den gar saa let gennem lunden'. Version A devotes half of the ballad to the reaction of, and effect on, the young bride, reflecting the interests and sensibilities of its aristocratic audience, set against only four stanzas in B where Syv was providing for a popular audience. We next move to Grundtvig's redacted version where, in many ways, he was trying to provide all things for all audiences.

2.7 Grundtvig's literary version of 'Elveskud'

The fashion for redacting ballads by editors like Vedel continued into the nineteenth century (See 1.6), though not with universal approval. Popular editions of the ballads were published in the 1840s in Denmark by such as the poet Oehlenschläger, whose work was

criticised for its ‘mange selvstændige indgreb’ (many arbitrary insertions; *Fædrelandet* 1841: 729–30), and N.F.S. Grundtvig, equally unconstrained in approach. Svend Grundtvig, however, was striving to preserve ‘rent og uforfalsket’ (unadulterated and genuine) ballads for the reading world (Dal 1956: 364). The first volume of his seminal collection of ballads, *Danmarks gamle Folkeviser*, was published in 1853. His approach was almost scientific, presenting sources (date, place, singer and collector) alongside each version and variant. He initially seemed to reject the idea that ballads could be rewritten to ‘improve’ them, but then had a change of heart; Grundtvig recognized a new audience for whom ‘i den filologiske udgivelse ikke det eneste mål’ (the philological edition is not the only objective) Dal 1956: 364). ‘Næppe andre [...] (ihvertfald ikke Grundtvig selv) [...] fandt på, at DgF skulle bruges til familielæsning, ja specielt til damelæsning’³¹ Because of this perceived need for family reading, Grundtvig began to produce popular editions of the ballads.

Grundtvig believed that revisions of texts were better in the hands of a ballad-scholar than a poet like Oehlenschläger. In the late 1850s, his first redacted ballad for a non-academic audience appeared, and then in 1867 *Danske Kæmpeviser og Folkesange fra Middelalderen, fornyede i gammel stil*, a collection of twenty-five ballads, which he followed in 1882 with *Danmarks Folkeviser i Udvalg (DfU)*. He signalled his intention in a letter to Professor Child on 23 January 1883:

I have taken great liberties, but you will understand the purpose with that book to be entirely another one than when we edit the old texts with the greatest possible accuracy. The small volume has met with a very hearty welcome in the public, and you will admit that this is also an aim worthy of possessing: to advance a common interest in the old national poetry.³²

Grundtvig’s approach reveals two, if not three, hierarchies at work. While he acknowledges the ballads collected from villages in the Danish countryside, partly in response to the national surge in interest in the nineteenth century to home-grown literature, there was without doubt for him a hierarchy of ballad texts, with the manuscripts from the Danish aristocracy at the top and examples of living tradition much further down (Dal 1956: 365).

‘Hans Smag var ikke det 13de, men det 16de Aarhundredes; Textbehandlingen i Karen

³¹ Hardly anyone [...] (certainly not Grundtvig himself) [...] found that DgF could be used for family-reading, yes, especially for reading for ladies (Dal 1956: 364).

³² Correspondence between Grundtvig and Child can be found in Hustvedt (1930: 297).

Brahes Foliohaandskrift var [...] bleven hans ubevidste Ideal' (His taste was not the thirteenth century's but the sixteenth's; the treatment of texts in Karen Brahe's Folio Manuscript became [...] his unconscious ideal'; von der Recke 1897: 28). Grundtvig rejected some of Evald Tang Kristensen's collected ballads as he deemed they were not old enough, and all of his collected music as of 'little merit' (Tangherlini 2013: 41–42). In addition, Grundtvig (and probably other scholars) promoted a cultural hegemony in his assertion that editing and redaction produced far better results when done by academics, with the assumption that without this intervention and production of revised editions, the ordinary reading public would be incapable of enjoying the ballads. While on the one hand the nineteenth century liked to assert that the ballad genre was the poetry 'of the people', here the cultural elite are claiming that the capacity to understand the ballads fully belongs to them.

Grundtvig explains his *modus operandi* in the Foreword to *Danske Kæmpeviser og Folkesange* (1867), which we must assume still applied when he produced *Danmarks Folkeviser i Udvalg* fifteen years later: he was aiming for faithfulness to the whole but freedom in the detail to 're-present' (*genfremstille*) each ballad in a form which closely followed the original. He states that his sources are threefold: sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Danish manuscripts supplemented with records from 'Folkemunde' (the mouth of the people), and other Scandinavian ballad versions, used to fill out or improve what is impaired (*svækker*) in the original Danish. He states that he is aiming for 'en sprogform fra 1500' (a form of language from around 1500), for which in the 1867 text he will provide glosses to enable the less cultured to understand: 'It is good for all to know the old Danish words, and they are not too many to be easily learned' (1867: *Forord*, xi).

The DfU version of 'Elveskud' was a product of this redaction and augmentation, in that it brought together many of the versions of the ballad in one text of seventy-nine stanzas (see table 2E). It is half as long again as the next longest version, A, with fifty-four stanzas. The DfU version follows DgF 47A closely but has been lengthened and refined, probably with some notion of 'improving' it, which is quite possibly why modern critics

Table 2E Grundtvig's redacted version of 'Elveskud' (DfU): Sources

The table is intended to give a broad outline of how Grundtvig used earlier versions of DgF 47 'Elveskud' to write his longer, all-inclusive DfU version. It should be used with caution: where stanzas are the same or very similar in the earlier versions, one cannot tell with total accuracy which version Grundtvig has used, so the closest (and where more than one, the earliest) attestation has been chosen. The symbol ~ is used to indicate *almost the same as*

DfU	DgF 47		DfU	DgF 47		DfU	DgF 47
Refrain	A		28	28a: B16 b 28b ~ D18b		55	A36
1	A1		29	29a: U10a 29b: H* 15b		56	A37
2	A2		30	30a 30b: D 20b		57	A38
3	3a ~ C* 3a 3b ~ L 2b		31	B17		58	C20
4	A3		32	M16		59	C22
5	A4		33	K13		60	A40
6	A5		34	F10		61	A41
7	A6		35	A22		62	A42
8	B9		36			63	A43
9	A7		37	A23		64	A44
10	A8		38	O17		65	A45
11	A8		39	O18		66	A46
12	A10		40	O19		67	~ A47
13	A11		41	A24		68	A48
14	A12		42	A25		69	
15	A13		43			70	D29
16	A14		44	B20		71	A49
17	B12		45	A26		72	A50
18	H8		46	A27		73	A51
19	H9		47	A28		74	B23
20	20a ~ B*7a 20b		48	A29		75	75a ~ C26a 75b A52b
21	A16		49	A30		76	~ A53
22	Z6		50			77	A54
23	A17		51	H21		78	B24
24	B14		52	52a: H22a 52b ~ H22b		79	~ C29
25	A18		54	A35			
26	A19		53	A31			
27	B16		54	A35			

and editors have largely ignored it, as it demonstrates a concept which flies in the face of Grundtvig's own demand for purity of tradition and accuracy for the ballad editions which

he included in *DgF*. This version is clearly diverging from the oral tradition and attempting something new. Grundtvig the scholar was fashioning a longer nineteenth-century version by collating what he thought was the best detail from the earlier versions.

Version A tells both halves of Oluf's story but in DfU we find two extra details, absent from A (but which can be found in other versions). We assume Grundtvig's intention was to clarify some of the ellipses and telescoping of action of earlier versions and record as full a version as possible for his new audience and for posterity. Where oral versions can be rough around the edges and telescoped, Grundtvig has re-worded and elaborated. In this version we see the aristocracy, the 'Elvedronningen selv' (the elf-queen herself).³³ Grundtvig, whose preference was the manuscripts of the lower aristocracy, has chosen the most glamorous representative of the elves, from the elf-maidens, dwarfs and troll women representing the lower end of the elfin social scale. The same elfin temptations are offered in the first section but now there is more focus on Oluf's punishment, eight stanzas to Version A's four:

'Og vilt du nu ikke danse med mig,
Sot og Sygdom skal følge dig.

Hvad heller vilt du i Aften dø,
eller du vilt ligge syg syv Aar under Ø?'

'Langt heller ligger jeg i Morgen Lig,
end jeg vil ligge syv Vinter syg.'

Hr. Oluf bukker over Sadelbue,
saa red han gjennem den Elvelue.

Men hun slog ham mellem Hærde,
det han faldt neder til Jorde.

Hun slog ham over hans Hærde god,
at Slaget gjaldt i hans Hjerterod.

'Stat op, Hr. Oluf! Og rid nu hjem!
du lever ikke Dag foruden én.'

Hun løfte Hr. Oluf paa Ganger rød:
'Og rid du nu hjem til din Fæstermø!' DfU 17–24

'And if you do not want now to dance with me,
Disease and illness will follow you.

Which will you prefer – to die this evening
Or do you want to lie sick for seven years under an island?'

³³ The elf-queen can be found in four versions of *DgF*47: K, L, V and L*.

'I'd much rather lie as a corpse in the morning
Than I want to lie seven winters sick.'

Sir Oluf bends over the curve of his saddle,
Thus he rode through that elf flame.

But she hit him hard between the shoulders,
So that he fell down onto the earth.

She hit him hard on his good shoulders
That the blow resounded to the root of his heart.

'Stand up, Sir Oluf! And ride home now!
You will not live beyond a day.'

She lifted Sir Oluf onto his red horse:
'Now ride home to your fiancée!'

The word 'leve' (live) used in stanza 23 (above) is a modern variant of 'løffue' found in 47A, one of the words which Prior found so difficult to comprehend (1860: II, 301). Grundtvig has made this popular edition of the ballad easier for the ordinary reader to access by changing obsolete or dialect words into contemporary nineteenth century Danish despite his declaration that he would use the language form of around 1500. The Romantic scholar recording the old beliefs and fashioning a ballad no longer built for oral transmission, can now focus on the aesthetic and on managing a compassionate response from his readers by this focus on poor Oluf's punishment and suffering, and his courageous refusal to do as bidden, but rather take the consequences. Grundtvig selects from Version B the alliterative 'Sot og Sygdom skal følge dig' to convey the venom in the elf-maiden's voice in the sibilance captured in the words. Further alliteration and repetition in Oluf's reply of stanza 19 (above) convey contempt in his refusal to come under her power. We have here a more colourful world than that portrayed in 47A, where hands were white and cheeks had paled. Both colour and excitement are at their greatest in both versions in the gold of the temptation scene, but splashes of colour in the more literary DfU build up a picture for the reader which was not as necessary for the listening audience: the 'Ganger rød' (red horse), 'Bolstre blaa' (blue pillow), the gold and red gold 'Roser' (roses), the 'Skarlaget rød' (scarlet red cloth), the burning lights and the elf-flame.

In DfU, stage two (Oluf's return home to his death) sees Grundtvig's greatest divergence from Version A as he adds a scene not to be found in either 47A or B, where Oluf initially refuses to admit to his mother where he has been and also lies about his condition, the blood on his saddle and seeping out of his boots. Oluf does actually dance in twenty-three versions;³⁴ in DfU we see Oluf refusing to dance and so being threatened with disease or death. The elf hits him hard and he 'falder neder til Jorde' (falls down to the ground). He arrives home 'bleg en Kind' (pale in cheek) with blood dripping from his saddle, and finally admits 'jeg haver været i Elvkvindeleg' (for I have danced among the elf-maidens), the first reference to his miscreance. If this is Oluf trying to wriggle out of blame for his actions, then Grundtvig, borrowing lines from DgF 47 U and H*, deliberately changes our concept of Oluf as hero to one who is flawed. Perhaps in DfU we have a more subtle portrayal for a more discerning audience of a young man who is weak enough to succumb to temptation in the dance and then try to spare his mother's feelings on his return? Freud would see this dancing to his death as an example of *thanatos*, or desire for death (1949: 6), a drive which Freud says is present in all humans forcing them to enter into dangerous actions which could result in their own death. Oluf knows what the outcome will be, yet cannot but succumb to his passion.

In DfU and the longer versions of 'Elveskud', we have a picture of a supportive family structure as Oluf gives each member of his family a duty to carry out: his sister to make up his bed, his brother to fetch the priest, his father to support him. The stanzas are repetitive and readily remembered, particularly so as they appear in other ballad types:

Og i, min kjaere Soster ...
 Og i, min kjaere Moder ...
 Og i, min kjaere Broder ...
 Og i min kjaere Fader' '.

The use of repetition has an 'almost liturgical solemnity; and [...] help[s] to evoke the supernatural atmosphere which is an essential part of the best ballads' (Hodgart 1950: 32).

A change of tone and speed is more readily achievable when not sung as the accompaniment to dancing.

³⁴ These versions are 47C, D, G, H, I, K, L, M, N, S, T, U, X, Y, D*, E*, F*, G*, H*, I*, M*, N* DfU.

In this more leisurely DfU version, Grundtvig has time to extend the focus on the family and the impact of the son's death in the bequest to them, including his fiancée to one of his brothers.³⁵ There is a clear need to keep the fiancée within the family. *The Marital Economy in Scandinavia and Britain 1400–1900* (Maria Ågren and Amy Louise Erickson 2005) discusses the reasons why. Negotiations between the two families prior to a wedding would include the topic of the bride's marriage portion, made up of her *medgift* (dowry) and the promise of an inheritance (sometimes even an advance on her inheritance). Betrothal gifts, which might take the form of jewellery, clothes or trinkets, would have been given to the bride by the groom already (Ågren and Erickson 2005: 12). A family would have been loath to lose not just a daughter-in-law who would, they hope, bring continuance to the family line and a contribution to the labour force, but also the property she would bring with her, including the betrothal gifts. The family was primarily a vocational and economic unit. 'It was important for parents and kin [...] to preserve and control family fortunes' (Hanne Marie Johansen 2005: 35).

In DfU, Oluf turns to the wall and dies before midnight, where most texts focus on response to his death than on the death itself. In stage three, the longest section (as in A) we turn with great sympathy to the bride. Preparations for the wedding throw into sharp focus details of preparation for death. Local colour like the white linen and scarlet cloth used to cover the body, is used not just to help participants recognise their own social group but to suggest a need for order and structure which gives stability and a reference point when their social fabric is threatened.

Gender roles are more clearly defined in DfU. Olrik states that ballad women in general are true descendants of the self-reliant and plucky women of previous generations (1939: 28), and certainly not reminiscent of those depicted in medieval court poetry, but while steely, Oluf's mother is not the restorative figure that we have in Janet in 'Tam Lin' (Chapter 7.2). Her role is increased in DfU, but this is more to do with the increased length of the text than a mirror of the growing importance of the woman's position in society.

³⁵ Bequests to members of the family can be found in other ballads, expressed in similar or identical terms, 'Ribolt og Guldborg' (DgF 82), for instance.

There is no sense of protest or even any opportunity given her to save the man. In both A and B versions, the mother's role is minimal, but now she is without doubt the moral touchstone of the text. In her scene with Oluf she waits, listens, is concerned about her son's lack of well-being, and asks to whom his bride should be passed after his death. In stage three of both A and B, there is no reference to the mother until she lies (in A) about her son's whereabouts, and dies in B. Her stronger part in DfU is used to elicit information about the blood seeping from Oluf's saddle, and to give the ballad a moral framework in her protest about Oluf's lies and his involvement with the elves. As a preserver of texts, Grundtvig seeks to do just that rather than reflect in his redaction the cultural changes of the nineteenth century; that is not his aim. There is no evidence in DfU that he is an upholder of change or seeking to promote increased awareness of anyone's role in the wider society. He seeks to reflect in his ballad version what is in his sources and not in his world.

The woman who is given power in this ballad is depicted as otherworldly; in legends and fairy stories the woman with power would be branded a witch, and here too in the Oluf ballads she wields her power destructively. All three females are characterized by questioning and by their ability to provoke a response in a crisis: the elf-maiden asks Oluf to dance, his mother wonders what he has been doing to look so ill, and now his bride questions why he is not there to meet her, why people are busy around her but there is no sign of a wedding. The move to attract the listeners' sympathy for this grief is achieved in two ways in the DfU version: Grundtvig first focuses on the distress of the bride and then of those others gathered for the wedding, significantly using thirty-four stanzas (nearly forty per cent of the ballad) to do so. Grundtvig has an agenda different from that in 47A, in endeavouring to provoke an emotional response by emphasising the grief of those around her: they have 'sorrighfuldt Hjærte' (sorrowful hearts) and 'alle græder Fruer saa saare' (all the ladies cry so grievously) yet try to behave as though nothing is wrong. Secondly, when the bride is introduced into the poem, there is a feeling of empathy. Her youth is stressed immediately and she is personalized by giving her a name: she is *Liden* (Little) Kirstin. As

in Version A, there is a certain youthful naïveté about her lack of understanding of what is going on around her, but then Grundtvig supplements what he borrows from A. Unusually in a ballad, she turns to her Christian upbringing for support:

Herre Krist hjælp' mig af al min Klag'!
Nu brændter her Lys ved den klare Dag.

Herre Krist hjælp' mig af al min Nød!
Jeg frygter, Hr. Oluf han er død. DfU 51–2

Lord Christ, help me in all my lamenting!
Now here are burning lights in the bright day.

Lord Christ, help me in all my distress!
I fear that Sir Oluf is dead.

These two stanzas, where she implores Christ for support, have been taken from Version H with very little change: Grundtvig has strengthened stanza 52, line b, from 'Jeg tror saa vist, Hr. Peder er død' (I think so certainly, Hr. Peder is dead'; H22b) to 'Jeg frygter, Hr. Oluf han er død' (I fear ...). As in A, three stanzas are given over to Kirstin's final farewell to Oluf's body but the temporal clause inserted in DfU as she kisses him, 'hendes Hjærte det brast i same Stund' (her heart broke at the same moment) is declared by the narratorial voice with the confidence of an objective truth.

The last stanza provides sudden closure, with no comment or judgement. As he takes us into the following day for the final scene, Grundtvig uses the grief of Ingellid from A and the three bodies from B, but 'improves' on the latter:

Her Oluf og hans festemo,
Hans moder blef og af sorgen død DgF B 25

Herr Oluf and his betrothed,
His mother became dead from grief

This becomes:

Det ene var Hr. Oluf, det andet hans Mø,
Det tredje hans kjær Moder, af Sorgen var død. DfU 79

One was Herr Oluf, another his sweetheart,
The third his dear mother, from sorrow was dead.

The substance has not changed, but the parallelism and longer last line provide a more satisfying note of finality to the ballad.

The DfU version of 'Elveskud' is on the whole faithful to Version A from Karen Brahe's manuscript, in line with Grundtvig's stated preference, augmented with lines and

stanzas from other versions. Grundtvig, however, 'går ikke af vejen for at tildigte linier eller strofer for at udjævne to variantsteder, som en anden redaktør ville træffe et valg imellem' (does not shy away from re-writing lines or stanzas which another editor would choose between), what Dal refers to as a 'mosaik' effect (1956: 366). This must raise questions about the integrity of the resulting ballad. Grundtvig's prolixity is a result of this determination to include all detail from the sources and then invent more. The reference to riding through the 'Elvelue' (elf-flame, DfU 20), for instance, is not recorded elsewhere in the Danish corpus, but borrowed from the Norwegian, perhaps intending to convey a boundary between the two worlds which is at once alluring yet dangerous. It does not entirely work. It is yet another motif which, when piled on top of the others, only loses the intensity Grundtvig is striving to achieve. Grundtvig would seem to be assuming that the reader needs to be given every detail without which he would be unable to deduce for himself what is happening in the ballad. He loses spontaneity and vigour; the final effect dulls rather than excites.

The DfU version is characterized by an ability to see the inner life of characters, particularly Oluf's bride, and as such is influenced by the literature of the Romantics and the nineteenth century in general who shifted interest from society to the individual. While not imposing opinions upon his audience, he manages to suffuse this poem with empathy. We are reminded of Wordsworth's poems about the victims of society, 'Lucy Gray' (1798) and 'Michael' (1800), for example and, of course, Goethe's 'Erlkönig' (1782; see Chapter 3.6).³⁶ If we compare Grundtvig's blended version of the ballad with Versions A and B, we see an editor managing audience response through choice of detail, through choice of word-forms and through emphasis on sentiment, but the irony is, his attempt at preserving the ballad has largely been ignored by subsequent editors: Grundtvig's DfU version cannot be found in any major anthology.

³⁶ Wordsworth (1992); Goethe (1994).

2.8 *Further interpretations*

If we consider the story of Sir Oluf on a literal basis as a ballad about an individual's adventure and subsequent death, then we must recognise the elf-queen as a member of the faerie around whom tales, legends and songs have been constructed and absorbed into local tradition. Belief in elves ran through all echelons of society:

there exists a modern tendency to divide the [medieval Nordic] world along simple lines into a ruling élite, and on the other hand, an unlettered peasantry ... this view ... tends to assume, for example, that a medieval fisherman believed in and practised magic, whereas a monk did not. In all likelihood, both of them did.

(Mitchell 2011:19).

This is the point where metaphysics meets aetiology. Early societies did not accept the concept of chance, but needed a reason for an event (Mitchell 2011: 41). The 'magical world view' describes a world where no event is 'accidental' or 'random' but each has its chain of causation in which Power, or its lack, was the decisive agency' (Wax and Wax 1962: 183). You cannot, for instance simply and accidentally fall over; the mishap occurs because divine protection was not strong enough, or a malevolent power was dominant. Legends and beliefs such as that recorded in the ballad of Sir Oluf and the elves type bear an aetiological meaning. They are typical of harsh environments, encoding a threat to the individual and to society of a nature untamed before man had learned he could master some of the elements. They also provide a reason for an unexpected event, a death or disappearance, for example (Hutton 2002: 31); this atmosphere of fear and mystery is not to be found in ballads of southern Europe (Hay 1992: 43). They cover up inadequacy or failure in human behaviour: it is easier to put the blame on powers outside your own control than confess your own guilt. If we apply this to the ballad of Oluf and the elves, we see an underlying belief that the sudden death of a man in his prime and apparently healthy has to have a cause. That reason may have been a supernatural power who wanted him to swell an otherworldly kingdom or, if young and perhaps attractive as he is on the threshold of marriage, for some kind of sexual exploit. Alver and Selberg see *balance* as important if man was to survive in his relationship with other worldly beings:

In violating customs, people cross important cultural borders [...] In the border area between that which is perceived as right and wrong, the tradition of the supranormal

comes to the surface, and the consequence of going beyond society's norms is that the supranormal powers punish in different areas of life. If custom is followed, and one is considerate of the huldres, the result is that of achieving *balance* both with the hulder people and with fellow human beings [...] At the same time, violating customs leads to *misfortune—in the form of a loss of good luck*, having an effect on life's important areas.
(authors' italics; 1987: 41)

The function of *hulderfolk*—otherworldly creatures—in their relationship with humans is to regulate, and punish when necessary. A man struck down with illness or death was sometimes said to have been 'elf shot'. In writing about early-modern Scottish society, Alaric Hall agrees on these functions, that 'fairy-narratives were involved in demarcating boundaries and threats in Scottish society, and in providing modes of discourse for comprehending their transgression' (2005: 20).³⁷ He lists terms used to describe unexpected harm inflicted on a human by fairies: *elf-schot*, *fareis schot*, *elf-grippit* and *elf-shooting* which all appear in medical accounts, many of which occurred in the Scottish witch trials (2005: 21), as indicated also by Henderson and Cowan:

There are numerous references within the witch trial to animals, especially cattle and horses, being 'shot to dead', a term which implies a sudden attack of illness or death as a result of a fairy dart. Witches were also implicated for directing these particular assaults, with or without the assistance of fairies
(2007: 77)

From his research in the records of the Scottish witch trials, Hall concludes that by 1650 there was evidence of 'elf-schot' being used to mean a projectile issued by elves to inflict harm, and that six trial reports between 1576 and 1716 indicate 'beliefs that fairies caused ailments, especially internal pains, both in humans and livestock' (2005: 26–27). The Old English charm *Wid færstice* refers to 'gescot' (from which the word *schot* is derived), implying that it may be caused by the projectile of *ylve*. Thus we have 'two systems for the aetiology of illness—fairies and witches—[which] must have co-existed for centuries, and certainly did so throughout the witchcraft trials. But the evidence hints that over time, fairy-beliefs were incorporated into witchcraft-beliefs' (2005: 33). The evidence of DgF 47 would underpin this concept—Sir Oluf could indeed have been killed by elves—but it cannot be considered the main message of the ballad.

³⁷ In response to Henderson and Cowan (2007) and Purkiss (2001).

We do not know when the story of Oluf and the elves came into Scandinavia but it seems both to tap into and reinforce an already established pre-Christian belief- and value-system (Tangherlini 1994: 16). Christianity came to Denmark before 1000 AD, and within a couple of centuries the pantheon of Nordic gods was virtually forgotten, but the underworld of elves, trolls and dwarfs was more enduring in the imagination (Entwistle 1951: 211). Denmark only slowly accepted Christianity (Filotas 2005: 14); in DgF 47 we see an incomplete integration of two areas of belief, and a tension as religiously-coded behaviours, which are the mark of the human, seem to be completely ineffectual in the face of old beliefs (Tangherlini 1994: 321). The narrative of the Scottish ballad ‘Thomas Rymer’ is underpinned by this co-existence of the two codes (see Chapter 7.1). Christianity is edging in to give some sort of support for the bride and protection to Oluf on death in the form of the priest and the cross worn by the bride and then transferred to his neck, but there is never a thought of invoking God to protect him from death. Christian and non-Christian symbols sit side by side, just as did the two belief systems for centuries (Jacobsen and Leavy 1988: 42) with no suggestion that this is incongruous. In his work on transitions in mythologies particularly in Finno-Karelian and Germanic traditions, Frog finds that figures such as Jesus and the Virgin Mary, while,

associated with a different ideology were comparably significant, yet in spite of their epics being maintained in parallel with epics of vernacular figures by the same singers for the better part of a millennium, they did not find places with vernacular gods in common epics. (2013: 74)

Significant figures from Christian and non-Christian mythologies were unlikely to be featured by any singer within the same song. Frog writes not so much about syncretism but the fact that individuals within the community would follow two traditions which were kept separate without any cause for concern. On the whole it is unusual to find references in the supernatural ballads to Christianity; within the Danish corpus of DgF 47, however, there are twenty-three versions³⁸ where Oluf asks for the priest to be sent for, and thirteen³⁹ where he arrives to administer the last rites, in the most part too late to give any comfort to Oluf before he dies. Four versions record a brief prayer from either Oluf or his bride (H, P,

³⁸ DgF 47A, E, H, I, K, L, N, O, P, Q, R, S, T, V, Æ, Ø, B*, D*, E*, H*. I*, L*, DfU.

³⁹ DgF 47E, H, K, L, M, O, P, Q, S, Æ, B*, E*, DfU.

E*, DfU). The presence of the priest (either called for or actual) is significant as a whole, but ineffectual. His force for good fares badly in comparison with the elves' ability to inflict harm. The Church seems unconcerned at the persistence of belief in elves: it moved against witches, but never saw a real threat in local superstitions about the elves. Frog's research indicates that Finno-Karelian culture 'did not necessarily see vernacular mythology as "un-Christian"' or contradictory with Christianity (2013: 58).

As education improved, communities shifted, the Church took a stronger hold and scientific scepticism dismissed the old beliefs, then elves, trolls and dwarfs came to denote threats from outside the community, identified as something going wrong, as representative of a different order with different rules (Giolláin 1991:201). For a long time the only threat to the homogeneous rural Danish community would be their harsh existence (Tangherlini 1995: 34), but as time moved on with the influx of new communities, the elves take on a new identity, which we can see from modern readings of elf stories. In the second half of the twentieth century there was (from the point of view of the dominant, white Danish culture) a new Other, a different threat which began to challenge Danes' perceptions of their culture and tradition: incomers from Southern Europe and Asia (Tangherlini 1995: 34). The immigrants were perceived by many to be different, in appearance and language, and brought their own culture and ethics. Interpretations of traditional ballads about other beings carrying off humans have taken a different turn: the superhuman actants have been replaced by human. Niels Ingwersen gave an account of a class's interpretation of the folktale 'The Girl who was Taken' (1995: 77). Here Guro is snatched by the *huldre*, a seductive inhabitant of the forest, and taken into the mountain where she is so well-treated, she decides to stay. She sends a message to her parents to throw away her shoes, the last vestige of her existence which they have kept, so she can give herself wholly to her new life. Interpretations of the cultural meanings of the tale—that one should not look back and that all should move on when a new situation presented itself—were supplemented by one student who applied a different historical context to the story:

Thousands of Norwegians in the latter part of the nineteenth century left their homes to emigrate to America. If you make the choice of leaving forever, as those immigrants did, it is pointless, or perhaps even destructive, to retain strong memories of those left behind, or

for those left behind to cling to the memories of the émigrés. So the story makes a very clear point; it asks those left behind to abandon any hope of a reunion with the person who has left and to accept the fact that the person is now much better off in her new world. (Ingwersen 1995: 78).

This is a similar reading to her class mates' but she has applied a new historical context, which is how the ballad genre traditionally re-invents itself.

In a similar vein, Tangherlini (1995: 50) sees the theme of the outsider elf-folk's desire to infiltrate the inner community of the village by way of poisoning, and by sexual liaisons often thwarted by refusal or impotence, in a modern story from Århus. A group of young men are out on the town drinking and looking for girls. One cannot believe his luck when he picks up a beautiful Greenlander. He takes her back to his bed but he has drunk so much that he immediately falls asleep. The following morning finds the girl gone, but with a gift in his fridge—a plate of her own excrement. Here is inversion of the old tale in that the Other is now the object of seduction and, faced with this temporary impotency, she substitutes what should have been a vaginal response with an anal one. While we see a cousinship in the ballads—without doubt Sir Oluf, Tam Lin, Lord Nann and Clerk Colvill are related—there is a socio-centricity and ethno-centricity which mark them out (Tangherlini 1995: 35) and which exclude anyone representative of the Other.

In a further reading, we should consider Oluf as representative of the rural population of Denmark, suffering a harsh existence and a lack of empowerment. Whichever choice he makes, whether to be seduced by the elf-maiden or retain his integrity, he will be defeated; the odds are stacked against him. Burdened by the estate authorities, taxes, weather, poor soil, plague and murrain, falling prices reducing income, overwork—like Oluf, the working population could not determine their own outcome. The romance of the supernatural world would allow the villagers a glimpse of the Other, initially glamorous perhaps, but even the joy of dancing brings with it 'Støvler fulde af Blod' and unavoidable death. Escapism is accompanied by an acknowledgement of hardship; the Danes would face up to their hardships through song and dance.

We have discussed the nature/culture theory earlier (see 2.3); it is not, of course, rejected in its entirety. The concept has a strong part to play in the supernatural ballads.

Each of the ballads to be analysed depicts a world in which specific areas are inhabited by humans, others by supernatural beings, and passages in between, liminal places, where man (or woman) is at his most susceptible. The ballad where this notion is strongest, and which helps us understand the concept of keeping the rules and not straying onto the other's territory is DgF 52 'Trolden og Bondens Hustru' ('The Troll and the Farmer's Wife', TSB A14), found in Karen Brahe's *Foliohaandskrift* (1570s). It tells the tale of a farmer who comes to settle on an island where his cutting down of trees to build his farm and hunting game for food upsets the local inhabitants, trolls. Settlers needed to employ a degree of caution, unaware as they were of the local otherworldly inhabitants (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 2003: 183). Civilization encroaches upon nature without any form of sacrifice, and nature objects, demanding the farmer's wife sacrificially in exchange for his violation of the trolls' space. In its focus on man's struggle with the forces of nature, 'Trolden og Bondens Hustru' puts flesh on the bones of the initial conflict in 'Elveskud'. This struggle between the elves and man, urbanization, construction, expansion, reveals another side to the Nature/Culture debate. Valdimar Hafstein looks at modern accounts of beliefs that attempts at building in Iceland have frequently been resisted by the local elves (2000: 87–104), where planners will divert construction work to avoid removing boulders or building in places where the *huldufólk* are believed to live (Pilkington and Gunnell 2011:21–2). If we can see that modernity, characterised by urban sprawl is, in fact, riding roughshod over traditional values and culture, then in time the latter will be eradicated and 'if changes are not abandoned, catastrophe will ensue' (Hafstein 2000: 101). In this argument, the elves (and the trolls in 'Trolden og Bondens Hustru') are not the Other, but the forces of modernity are. If we argue that the elves must not be brought into man's space or culture, neither can man expect to encroach on their space with impunity. Social change is the transgressor, according to this philosophy, and suddenly the elves— representing rural tradition—become the good guys.

The Danish 'Elveskud' paints a picture of man facing a fate which is inexorable in its intensity, and unremitting even when undeserved. In Chapter 3, we turn to consider

other national-types of the Oluf ballad, to be found in Sweden, Iceland, Germany and Scotland and consider the concept that the threat posed by the elves may represent a part of one's psyche, an inner fear or anxiety.

Chapter 3 Further afield: The Oluf ballad in Sweden, Iceland, Scotland and Germany

This chapter leaves Denmark behind to examine the same ballad, that of Oluf and the elves, but now elsewhere in northern Europe, in Sweden, Iceland, Germany and Scotland. The transmission routes have been disputed; there is an agreement, however, that the ballad developed on the mainland first before moving to Iceland and the Faroes (Rossel 1982:3). The family resemblance in the Oluf ballads of each of these countries is strong, but we shall also find significant differences. The movement of traders, students, the upper classes and others facilitated a sharing of songs and ballads, and the history of shifting borders and alliances in Scandinavia to some extent accounts for the close resemblance of their ballads to each other, but brings its own problems if we are using the ballads as an insight into early modern culture. Ballad versions that we attribute today to Sweden, for instance, may have originated in a part of that country that was once ruled by Denmark.

As in the previous chapter, the oldest recorded example of the national type of each ballad is examined, and then similarities and differences charted as the ballad develops. Versions which depart from tradition and are often quirky in their choice of detail are given space as in their own way, they demonstrate a response to the theme which we must assume was relevant within a certain context. The untraditional very often helps us to define the tradition. The very fact that they stand outside the 'norm' often results in their being ignored by ballad scholars who, on the one hand, agree that the A version should not necessarily be regarded as the earliest and, therefore, the single best text most worthy of study and, on the other, focus on these same versions for the purpose of critical study. If that were the policy here, we should miss, for instance, the entertaining Swedish Version O of the Oluf ballad with its trolls and multiple priests and, in Chapter 6, the proto-feminist version of 'Harpans Kraft' from Johanna Gustafva Angel which virtually excludes the male protagonist. The guiding principle underpinning this work is that even though all may not be equally aesthetically pleasing, nevertheless all versions have validity.

As we continue to follow the exploits of Oluf and the elf-maiden, we shall see the family relationship to the Danish ballad is clear in the Swedish version, in Herder's translation from Danish to German and also in the Icelandic 'Kvæði af Ólafi liljurós', though the latter makes adaptations not to be found in the Continental versions. We shall see the ballad beginning to open out, however, in 'Clerk Colvill', and in a very exciting way in Goethe's interpretation of the tragedy, 'Erlkönig'. The Oluf ballad is well represented also in other parts of Scandinavia, in Norway and Finland, but space precludes an examination of these versions here. Grundtvig's overview is a starting-point for the scholar who wishes to work more extensively on the eastern Scandinavian ballad (II: 409–12), and also Kværndrup (2006). The following provide useful discussions: Syndergaard (1995); Chesnutt (1992) on the Faroese ballad; Beyer (1956) on the Norwegian; and Entwistle's *European Folk Ballads* (1951). The Nordic east and west are represented by Swedish and Icelandic versions of the Oluf ballad, and Herder and Goethe feature as it is Goethe's 'Erlkönig', particularly as set to music by Schubert, which was responsible for its widespread and continued popularity through Europe and which in turn affected the status and collection of ballads later in Scandinavia. The ballad's Scottish analogue, 'Clerk Colvill', is a starting point for a comparative study of Scottish and Scandinavian ballad traditions in Chapter 7.

We begin with the Swedish analogues to the Danish ballad 'Elveskud' which can be found in the Swedish corpus as 'Her Olof och Älvorna'. Our central text for the study of the Swedish versions is *Sveriges medeltida ballader* (1983–2001), edited by Bengt Jonsson, Margareta Jersild and Sven-Bertil Jansson, which will be referred to as *SMB*.

3.1 'Her Olof och Älvorna'

We are beginning to understand from reading the Danish version of the ballad of Oluf why young people were advised to avoid elves. The Swedish elves of SMB 29 'Her Olof och Älvorna' share many familial characteristics with their Danish cousins, but are often swifter to move to revenge. *SMB* records seventeen versions and variants of 'Her Olof och

Älvorna', of which we shall discount Version G (one stanza); the remainder vary in length from nine to twenty-five stanzas. The oldest recorded by Jonsson was collected in Västergötland and is dated from the 1670s. With the exception of Version A, nearly all SMB 29 texts are nineteenth-century from widespread locations across southern Sweden; N and probably O are from the early 1900s. The three basic episodes found in the Danish versions are not to be found in SMB 29A, which includes only Olof's temptation, his refusal to dance and subsequent lies about his whereabouts, but they are present by the B version, collected in Småland in 1810. They are Olof's encounter with the elves, his return to his family, and the responses to his death, focusing on his bride. In essence the narrative varies little in the Swedish, with the exception that Olof is unlikely to dance. We see his dancing in only one version, J, whereas in the Danish corpus Olof dances in response to either threat or temptation in about 61% of the versions. While his impending wedding is implied in his journey, its purpose being to invite friends to his nuptials as in the Danish versions, it is not as clear at the outset of most Swedish versions, though it is specified in M: 'Her Olof han rider ... Att bida uppå sit Bröllops folk' (to bid people to his nuptials), and in C, where he goes out to collect his 'brudmän'. His fiancée and wedding day are then quickly used as an excuse not to dance.

Olof's susceptibility is still key: as a young man on the threshold of a life-changing experience, out riding in the early morning as light is dawning (A, C, D, G, H, J, O), or late at night, midnight (M, N), approaching or crossing the boundary where his community meets that of the elves (the mountain in A, H, O; the forest in L; and the beach in M), he is in a liminal temporal, geographical and psychological space. It is here that Olof sees and hears the elves dancing. Consistently he is spoken to by a beautiful elf;¹ here there is some variety: *Elfven* or *Elf-quinna* (an elf or elf-maid in C, E, G, H, I, K, L), *Elfkungens dotter* (the elf-king's daughter in A, M, O), *Elfdrottningen* (the elf-queen herself) in N, and *Kärngen* (an old woman) in F. Of interest in B and J, Olof is met by *jungfru*, maidens, suggesting that a process of rationalization may be in place, removing the supernatural from the narrative.

¹ The Danish version also features dwarfs (DgF 47A and H), and three troll women (47I).

All of them extend a hand to him to draw him into the dance. In Version D, the whole elf family (father, mother, brother, sister) tries to tempt him. The wildness of the elf-maiden is suggested by her ‘utslaget hår’ (unbound hair A, O), a description transferred to Kjerstin in H where it suggests her grief and wretchedness upon finding her fiancé dead, and to Kirstin in Version K where it is now used by the prospective mother-in-law to express disapproval of her son’s choice of wife. This disapproval may also result from the idea that unbound hair (as with the merman’s injunctions to Agnete not to let her hair down in some versions of the Danish ‘Agnete og Havmanden’, DgF 38; Chapter 5.1) suggested eroticism (Jacobsen and Leavy, 1982: 73) or eroticism *and* wildness (Simonsen 2004: 243).

In the earliest recorded version (A), Oloff’s reason for not dancing would have been particularly provoking to the elf-king’s daughter. He cannot dance as he is to be married the following morning, the traditional response, but this is preceded by ‘min Fästemö haar thet förbudit Migh’ (my fiancée has forbidden me; A 5). The picture is of a young man already under the thumb of his future wife, or of a wife-to-be who understands all too well her prospective husband’s weaknesses; neither is an appealing trait in the young man. We find this injunction in one other version only, O, but in neither version do we subsequently meet the fiancée in order to test out our theory. In A we have only the first two scenes of the traditional narrative. Table 3 shows that in the Swedish versions, the interest has shifted away from an analysis of temptation, as those temptation scenes which are common in Danish versions are rarer here. In only two Swedish versions are gifts offered to lure Olof into the dance. In Version K (from Östergötland), and in Version M (of unknown provenance, probably from mid-1800s, found in a folk-lore collection) the elf-king’s daughter appeals to a perceived need for power, attractiveness and wealth in her offer of ‘två gyldene Sporrar’ (two gold spurs), ‘en Skjorta af Siden så hvit och ren’ (a silk shirt so white and clean), bleached by her mother in the moonlight, and ‘en hop af Dukater’ (a heap of ducats). Olof’s refusal is met with ‘ett slag uppå hans kaft / Det slaget glömmes ej så lätt’ (a blow on his jaw, the kind you don’t forget so easily, M10). Swedish Version M

compares closely with Peter Syv's Danish Version B in structure and detail.² The elements of golden spurs and silk shirt bleached in the moonlight by the elf-queen would appear to feature in no other Danish or Swedish version. Version M's reference to a blow is repeated in only two other versions, H (a blow), L (a knife). The generic title given to the Swedish corpus of Olof ballads in *SMB* makes no reference to the *elveskud* (elf-shot) of the Danish ballads and neither do any of the individual titles where recorded.

TABLE 3 'Her Olof och Älvorna' – Swedish versions

SMB 29 version	Place collected	Gender and date collected	Length	Episodes									
				1B	3	6	7	8	9	10			
A	Västergötland	F 1670	15	1B	3	6							
B	Småland	F 1810	17	1B	3			7	8			1	
C	Östergötland	F 1810	20	1B					8				
D	Östergötland	1810–13	16		3				8	9	10		
E	Östergötland	F 1812	20	1B					8	9	10		
F	Småland	F 1810s	18	1B					8	9	10		
G	Uppland?	M 1810s	1										
H	Värmland/Dalsland	M 1810s	21	1C	3	5			8	9	10		
I	Uppland	1840	9		3				8	9			
J	Östergötland	1836	19	1B		4	6		8		10		
K	Östergötland	F 1840s	21	1A/ 1B	3			7	8		(10)		
L	Närke	F 1800s	12	1C	3			7				10	
M	Folklore collection	1800s	20	1A/ 1B	3	5			8	9	(10)		
N	Blekinge	F 1909	16		3				8	9	10		
O	From a song booklet	1910	25	1B			6	7				(10)	

Episodes

1A	Olof is tempted by the elf-woman		
1B	Olof is threatened by the elf-woman	6	He lies about his whereabouts
1C	Olof immediately punished (no threat)	7	He gives instructions to his family
2	He dances without hesitation	8	The Bride episode
3	He refuses to dance	9	The bride is not to be told the truth
4	He refuses to dance, but finally dances	10	The deaths are recorded
5	He is truthful to his parent about his whereabouts	(10)	indicates only one death at the end of the ballad, that of Olof

Olof succumbs to the dance in more than half of the Danish versions but, other than in SMB 29J, it is clearly not a Swedish tradition. Are Swedish men made of sterner

² SMB 29 Version M probably dates from the mid-1800s (*SMB*: Jonsson's introduction to ballad: 425). Jonsson's reference to its 'okänd proveniens', unknown provenance, could reflect an uncertainty regarding the version's origins, or a suspicion of borrowing. Its closeness to the Danish version 47B in Syv's collection is noted.

stuff than Danish, or more obedient to what they have been taught where elves or loose women are concerned? In the three D variants and in Version F there is a removal of the erotic in that invitations to dance are made by an elf *family* (father, mother, brother and sister in Da and Dc; father and mother in Db) and by a 'kärng' (an old woman) in F. Instead of the Danish focus on temptation, the nineteenth-century Swedish interest lies in the way that the removal of the temptation scenes brings the juxtaposition of three central conversations in the ballad into sharper focus. Olof is desired by two women, the elf-maid and his bride-to-be, but the initial contrast is set up between the elf and Olof's mother. The elf is ruthless. The lack of temptation and seduction in all but Versions K and M results in a characterization which is the epitome of harshness. We do not see the attraction of temptation or sin. This throws the love and anxiety of the mother into sharp relief: she is welcoming, comforting, and reassuring (A, B, C, F, I, J, M, O), everything the elf-woman is not.

The mother shows a different side, however, in Version K which is written in the same tradition as Danish Version L*.³ The two ballads begin differently: in SMB 29K, the elf tries to tempt Herrman into the dance with a 'röda gullskrin' (red-gold casket), which he refuses twice. The telescoping of the action leads us to believe his refusal has resulted in his return home, sick, having been cursed by the elf. He is preparing for death when the bride, Kerstin, arrives. Herrman's mother is instructed by her son to entertain this woman who has just come into the courtyard with her red-gold crown and streaming hair, which brings about a shift of focus onto the bride. Herrman gives her a 'röda gullskrin'—a coincidence, or the same red-gold casket offered him by the elf, and so evidence of his dancing and guilty conscience? This is something he does not want to waste in the econocentric world of the *riddar*-class, where the main concern is to provide means to live. The structure now corresponds with that of the Danish ballad. To his mother's consternation, he gives her further presents, a red-gold crown and a dress of gold. She remonstrates, conscious that he is giving the family wealth away (after all, she did arrive wearing a gold crown): 'Skänk

³ SMB 29K was collected in Östergötland in the 1840s. The southern and western coastal regions remained under Danish rule until the seventeenth century. DgF 47L* was collected in 1881 from Viborg-Eggen.

något åt dina syskon små!' (Give something to your small brothers and sisters!), but Herrman paints a pathetic picture of Kerstin in the same way as DgF 47L*:

Mina syskon de har båd' åker och äng,
Men liten Kerstin skall bädda enkesäng. SMB 29K 20

My siblings, they have both field and meadow,
But little Kerstin must sleep alone.

The words of the Danish ballad:

Min' Søskend' har baade Ager og Eng,
min unge Brud kommer ej med mig i Seng. DgF 47L* 27

My siblings have both field and meadow,
My young bride comes not with me to bed.

His siblings are already well provided for; the young man must now ensure support for his fiancée, in defiance of his mother. In economic matters, the man was the decision-maker, yet we see his heart rule over the mother's colder economic sense and determination that the family should not lose any more.

Not all the Swedish versions record the three basic scenes of the Danish narratives (see table 3). The transition section of the Swedish versions falls into the same pattern as the Danish: either a brief interlude where Olof explains to his mother that he has met with the elves or where Olof asks for his family's support in his dying hours. Versions A, J and O see Olof lying about his injuries which he alleges were sustained from tree branches. Versions D, E and N telescope the action, omitting Olof's conversations with his family (minimalized also in H and J to two or three stanzas each, giving Olof just enough time to confess to his mother (H) or lie to her about his injuries (J)). The final scene of the ballad, where the bride arrives ready for her wedding is extensive in some versions, half of the ballad or more in E and N. While the bride in the Swedish ballad is anxious about her fiancé, she is on the whole a little more overtly robust and stoical than her Danish counterpart, who cries (DgF 47A, C) and faints (DgF 47P, S, U, D*). When told by Olof's mother that he is out hunting, her standard response is:

Älskar han mera de hjortar och hind
Än han älskar aldrakarasten sin? SMB 29B 13

Does he love deer and hind
More than his most loved one?

Evidence of upset, however, is communicated more fully in Version H with her unbound hair and inability to settle:

Liten Kjerstin hon gångar bade ut och in,
Och allt så blef hon så bleker under kind. SMB 29H 19

Little Kerstin, she goes both out and in,
And she becomes so white on her cheek

Version C, collected by Beata Memsén, a woman from Östergötland in the early 1800s, gives us the most tender picture of the unnamed *jungfrun*, over five stanzas, as she runs up to the loft looking for Olof, in ‘silkesstrumpor och silverspända skor’ (silk stockings and tight silver-bound shoes). Her fragility is suggested through her fingers ‘bade mjuka och små’ (both soft and small) trying to open the lock when her plaintive cry to Olof has failed to raise him. Finally she ‘la’ sitt hufvud till Herr Olofs bröst’ (lays her head on Olof’s breast) and then ‘hon tog sin silverbodda knif / och den stack hon uti sitt unga lif’ (she took her silver-studded knife and she struck out her young life). Generally, however, we find an unsentimental account of the bride and her questions, with the occasional pale cheek used to suggest distress. While arranged marriages were common when the earliest versions of the ballads were composed— not until the nineteenth century were there regular instances of marrying for love (Jacobsen and Leavy 1988: 75) — yet in the ballad, the tradition remains that the bride should die of grief at the end along with the mother, suggesting the existence of love as a basis for marriage.

3.1.1 *SMB 29O*

Untypical of both Swedish and Danish ballad endings is SMB 29O, the latest in Jonsson’s collection, found in a handwritten song booklet in 1910 in Nyland and, according to the transcriber, originating from 1850 or 1860. The first eleven stanzas would seem to be modelled closely on Version A or Steffen no. 11, but the ballad singer takes a complete flight of fantasy after that by including elves, a ‘svarta troll så ful ock fal’ (black troll so ugly

and horrible) and multiple priests.⁴ Version A closes as Oloff returns home and before he dies; the author of Version O has decided to ‘finish’ the ballad. Here we see the late nineteenth-century redactor’s attempt to preserve for posterity elements of the oldest version (A), but also to include folk traditions which, presented altogether, are alien to the ballad. The singer embraces a world inhabited by several otherworldly creatures, the elves and goblins in the dance, and later in the ballad he records a belief about trolls:

kära min broder slap hasten i äng,
Lag stål uti sadel ej troll tager de SMB 29O 14

My dear brother, turn the horse out into the meadow,
Lay steel on the saddle so that no troll takes it

The protective function of iron and steel against trolls was common knowledge throughout Europe (Henderson, 2000: 66). At this point, the ballad descends into melodrama as a dramatic turn of events reveals the power of the supernatural world. The audience is lulled into a false sense of security, expecting one of the two traditional endings leading to three deaths, when Olof announces that the following day will see his wedding ‘med elfvorna’ (with elves). His bier is still required as ‘i morgon skall jag till elfkungen gå’ (in the morning must I go to the elf-king). The elf-king appears in person to take his ‘kär mågen’ (dear son-in-law) back to the foot of the mountain where ‘han lofte taga min dotter emot’ (he promised to take my daughter[’s hand in marriage]). We assume he can do that only in death.

This is the only version of SMB 29 in Jonsson’s collection where the singer imagines the church reclaiming the soul of Olof, though the singer’s intentions are only to be guessed at. Olof’s bed has just been splashed with holy water when in walks the priest ‘i kappa röd med klockeklang ock rökelse’ (in red gown with bells and incense), the clanging of the bells reflected in the succession of /k/ sounds. His words are designed to chill the heart of the elf-king:

du svarta troll så ful ock fal,
du skall neder till dödsens dal SMB 29O 21

You black troll so ugly and vile,
You must go down to the valley of death

⁴ R. Steffen: *Svenska folkvisor* (1901), a school and popular edition of the Swedish ballads.

The hard dental stops and the softer, though no less deadly fricatives hammer home the curse and the insult. If this is not sufficient, the priest in red is followed by one in a black gown who repeats the troll insult in cursing him ‘till helfvetet neder’ (to deep hell). Taking a cross, he blesses Olof, who lies pale on his bier, with a suggestion in the final line that the Church has been victorious: ‘ej elfvakung mer sjölen får’ (the elf-king could get no more his soul). The Church could not save his life, but perhaps it saved his soul?

SMB 290, as collected by Svensson, is in Swedish but reported to be from Finland. The headnote suggests this is a conscious re-working⁵ of the ballad, and one certainly outside the tradition of the Olof ballad-type, but by allowing it space in *Sveriges Medeltida Ballader*, Jonsson is giving it some validity. In *Svensk Balladtradition* (1967), he questions the authenticity of the texts supposedly originally found in *Mäntsälävisboken* (published in 1850–60s), suggesting they were, in fact, adapted from Steffan’s collection. By the publication of *Sveriges Medeltida Ballader*, there is now no mention of *Mäntsälävisboken*, despite a defence of it by Otto Andersson, who published the version in *Finlands Svensk Folkdikning*, (1967: V, *Folkvisor. Den alder Folkvisan*, No. 10). Forslin also expresses scepticism (1962: 54–55); we feel she had this ballad in mind when she referred to ‘de senaste århundraden frätande krafter’ (the last century’s corrosive forces; 1962: 54). She too attributed this version to Finland, yet ‘prästen “med klocke klang och rökelse” är en ingalunda ovanlig bifigur i dansk tradition’ (the priest ‘with bell and incense’ is by no means an unusual supporting character in the Danish tradition). She confessed difficulty in expressing an opinion on the version:

med avseende på str. 1-16 äger påtaglig överensstämmelse med 1600-talstexten A, men som sedan går helt sin egen väg och i stela formelstrofer återspeglar dels vidskepligt, dels katolsk-färgat stoff. Det svårt att uttala sig om en variant av så särpräglad art
(Forslin 1962: 54)

with regard to st. 1-16, they comply substantially with the seventeenth-century oral text A, but then [it] goes completely its own way and in rigid formulaic stanzas reflecting partly superstitious, partly Catholic tinged material. It is difficult to comment on a variant of such a peculiar form

She found the juxtaposition of the elf-king and priests towards the end of the poem symbolic of the conflict between ‘representanter för hedendom och kristendom’

⁵ ‘sannolikt en bearbetning’—redaction and extension.

(representatives of heathendom and Christianity; 1962: 55). Whether the ballad's strange and non-traditional ending was composed to inject some reference to the efficacy of Christianity in this struggle between the dark forces and the light or whether simply to provide a dramatic ending in a deliberate attempt to spice up the traditional story, we can only guess. The Catholic Church does seem to be identified in the reference to bells, incense and robes, though this would seem unlikely, or perhaps satirical, in a mid-nineteenth century (post-Reformation) ballad. In the versions of 'Her Olof och Älvorna' which stand inside the Swedish tradition, there is very little reference to the Church or Christianity,⁶ and no physical presence of a priest as we find in the Danish corpus. When we move to the Icelandic version, the Christian theme is taken very seriously.

3.2 *'Her Olof och Älvorna' and 'Elveskud'*

These non-traditional versions of the Her Olof ballad still maintain the portrayal of a race of elves who are ruthless in fulfilling their desires. Nygard's argument that elves from the north are not murderous (1958: 23) clearly cannot be applied to the Danish or Swedish variety, though we shall return to it in Chapter 7 in an analysis of some of the Scottish supernatural ballads. It is interesting, though, to compare the depiction of elves in the Nordic ballads with that in the folk tales of the same area.⁷ Here they are seen often to cooperate with the human community, to reward men with gifts or wealth for favours shown, to require human midwives to help deliver their children, to fall in love with (and marry) humans. And yet in the Nordic ballads, there is no sense of kindness.

Drawing on what we know of DgF 47 'Elveskud', it is possible to conclude that the differences in SMB 29 'Her Olof och Älvorna' are presenting a different 'message'. The general telescoping in stage one of the Swedish versions results in:

- a less alluring elf-woman as the temptations are removed;
- more of a focus on punishment, by moving quickly to it;

⁶ The bride's greeting to her mother-in-law 'Guds fred' (God's peace) in F11, H13; the elf's threat in H6 that a priest cannot help Olle; requests for a priest to be brought in K9, L9; and a short prayer uttered by the bride when she finds Olof's body: 'Gud gifve du vore lefvande' (God allow that you were alive, J17).

⁷ See Boos (1984), for example.

- the suggestion, therefore, of a harsher existence;
- a more two-dimensional rendering of Olof and the elf as little time is spent with them;
- no dancing. The point that the Eastern and Western extremes of the ballad both avoid dancing may suggest that these are the more innovative forms, surviving on the periphery, with the Danish dancing-versions an innovation arising in the centre.

Taken together we can interpret in two ways: a more conservative, perhaps a family audience, who require a focus more on right-living and less on seduction; and a clearer emphasis on Olof's inability to come to terms with whatever the elf may represent. The marriageable status of Olof is maintained; if the elf represents sexuality (Olof's own or his fiancée's), or his own fears, he cannot face up to it, rejecting it without hesitation. He cannot control the elf (just as in the Danish ballad) but neither can he respond in any way. Read as a companion-piece to SMB 31 'Älvefärd' (see Chapter 4), we see an ability to control nature in one, but not in the other, thus leading to further death and non-continuance of the dynasty. In the Danish supernatural ballads 'men are never rescued [...] they are either lost forever or free themselves through their willpower and strength' (Jacobsen and Leavy 1988: 92). The structure of the Swedish ballad 'Her Olof och Älvorna' moves us on a little faster⁸ than the Danish to the inexorable end of those without the strength or know-how to resist.

3.3 'Kvæði af Ólafi liljurós'

We know little about the background of this ballad-type in Iceland, or the versions of it. Grundtvig and Sigurðsson feature one version of 'Kvæði af Ólafi liljurós' with full textual notes and make reference to twelve other versions (A–M). Jón Helgason includes sixteen versions of the ballad in his collection. We shall begin with Version A, to be found in both editions.

⁸ The average length of the Swedish version is shorter than the Danish (eighteen stanzas to twenty-three); this cannot be an absolute truth, however, as we do not have the complete versions of many texts.

The rapacious elf-queen of Denmark and Sweden, determined to seduce Oluf to ‘dance’ with her, traditionally wheedles and tempts and kills whatever his response. The elf-maiden of the Icelandic version of the ballad, ÍF 1 ‘Kvæði af Ólafi liljurós’, does not disappoint. The Icelandic versions lack material found in the Scandinavian ballads, beginning with the omission of Ólafur’s impending wedding. Vésteinn Ólason (1982: 112) has a valid point when he uses this as grounds to dispute Sørensen’s theory that elven aggression was caused by jealousy of an impending wedding and, that as the theory does not fit here, it should be discounted elsewhere (1965: 163–4). A picture of the rugged Icelandic countryside opens the ballad: ‘Ólafur reið með björgum fram’ (Ólafur rode forward along the rocks), where he is met by four elf-maidens displaying wealth in the form of a silver cup and belt, and one with her hair ‘gulli snúið’ (braided with gold). The Icelandic singer has made the ballad Iceland’s own in the refrain, which reminds us we are in the land of volcanoes, recording a stirring as nature witnesses the meeting of our hero and the elves:

—rauður login brann— ...

—þar lá búinn byrðing undan björgunum fram. ÍF 1A 1

—The flame burned red— ...

— there the fair wind strikes out off the cliffs.

Fire gives light and heat, but also can destroy. In a discussion of symbols in Icelandic folktales, Einar Ól. Sveinsson saw the fire as a warning:

Volcanic fire is associated with magic and evil creatures [...] All these kinds of light contain something of the nature of darkness and night; these phenomena symbolise what is evil and of ill omen, or at least doubtful and ambivalent’ (2003: 292)

It contrasts with the light image in ‘Hr. Bøsmer i Elvehjem’ (DgF 45) where Bøsmer’s comparison of the elf-queen with a bright candle is a suitably domestic image which suggests romance, but also, by implication, darkness and ultimate extinction. ‘Kvæði af Ólafi liljurós’ is imbued with much more of a sense of impending doom right from its opening.

The fourth elf issues an invitation, not to dance in the Icelandic version (where dancing had been banned by the Lutheran Church), but to go into their house ‘og drekk hjá

oss' (and drink with us). As we expect from the main Danish and Swedish traditions, Ólafur's refusal is decisive, but instead of his excuse that he is to be married shortly, we have a reference to his Christian beliefs:

Eg vil ei með álfum búa,
heldur vil eg á guð minn trúa

ÍF 1A 7

I don't want to live with elves,
rather I want to believe in my God

The elf-maiden attempts to gain his trust:

Þó þú vilir með álfum búa,
samt máttú á guð þinn trúa

ÍF 1A 8

While you want to live with the elves,
you can still believe in your God

She understands her victim. No worldly temptations will seduce this man, but the (implicitly false) promise that he may retain his faith might. In the place of the wedding narrative, the Icelanders have substituted Christian references: it is not his fiancée who is important to Ólafur, but instead his God. In his very comprehensive survey of the Icelandic ballads, Vésteinn Ólason concluded that this replacement 'spoils' the ballad (1982: 113), but the ballad is not a fixed entity. 'Tradition is no longer regarded as an identifiable, separate product but as a dynamic, continuous process': here Kvideland acknowledges the need for change and renewal (1991:37); the ballad-singer has forged the song anew to reflect the priorities of his society.

There follows a strange hiatus in the action, a weakness in the narrative where the elf-maiden instructs Ólafur to wait for her while she walks 'i græna lund' (into a green grove), an excuse for her to go to a chest and arm herself. She conceals a sharp knife under a cloak. Ólafur's refusal triggers a desire for revenge, after one last subterfuge:

Þú munt ei svo héðan fara,
að þú munir oss kossinn spara.

ÍF 1A 12

You will not so go from here,
unless you spare us a kiss.

The sibilance of 'oss kossinn spara', underlined by the internal rhyme, is enticing, but also hinting at the elf-maiden's evil. As Ólafur leans over the horse's pommel and kisses her

half-heartedly, the ballad returns to echo the Danish narrative:⁹ in a dramatic shift in tone, she inserts the knife under his shoulder-blade and into the roots of his heart. Lines are lengthened as she deliberately plans his demise (sts. 12–14), followed by the shortened lines of stanza 15 which slow the rhythm so the audience can share Ólafur's distress:

Hún lét honum sviða
sára sax með síðu

Ólafur leit sitt hjartablóð
undir fæti á fola stóð

ÍF 1A 15, 16

She made in him smart
a painful dagger in his side.

Ólafur saw his heart's blood
under his colt's foot it stood

The reason for Ólafur's agreeing to the kiss is not examined—a moment of weakness which is summarily punished, or an attempt at diffusing possible aggression. What the inclusion of the kiss does is keep temptation and the need to resist in sharp focus. The parting kiss motif can be found also in Child 68 'Young Hunting', especially Version C, and Scandinavian ballads, like the Danish 'Frillens Hævn' (DgF 208), and the Swedish version, 'Frillans hämnd' (SMB 208).

Other than the absence of a fiancée, the ballad closes with little difference from its other Scandinavian counterparts: the dash home to mother, her cross-examination, Ólafur's confession and instruction to his mother to make up his bed and sister to dress his wound. By the time the mother has led him to the loft and laid him down, he is dead; his sister and mother follow him to the grave. Because there is no fiancée in the Icelandic versions, there is a tendency to finish suddenly upon Ólafur's death, without the psychological drama of the fiancée, agonizing over his absence.

Most of the Icelandic versions of 'Kvæði af Ólafi liljurós', also called 'Ólafs kvæði' and 'Ólafur og álfamær', are remarkably similar, which is perhaps to be expected from a small island with few sizeable settlements, but the version in LBS 1221 4to¹⁰ deserves

⁹ Critics are in general agreement that the ballad had moved from the mainland to Iceland. See Vesteynn Ólason (1982: 114) for an overview.

¹⁰ Páll Eggert Ólason (1918–37), I, 477 [no. 1544].

mention. It follows much the same pattern as the standard ballad type, but the ending is surprising in its shift of mood:

Þegar sól á fiöllum skein
Ólafur kiendi sitt daudamein.

Þegar sól á fiöllum gá
Ólafur daudur i sænginni lá

Þá vard meiri grátur
enn það væri hlátur.

Version LBS 1221 22, 23, 24

When the sun shone on the mountains
Ólafur felt his death-harm.

When the sun goes over the mountains
Ólafur lay dead in his bed

Then there was more weeping
Than there was laughter.

The poetry of the going down of the sun reflects Ólafur's death, but the word 'hlátur' (laughter) sits uncomfortably as the final word of the ballad. It is perhaps meant as a simple reminder of the innocent happiness which has passed with Ólafur's life. In a different way Version M, collected in 1850, is one of only a small handful which differ from the earliest in its final focus. The penultimate stanza brings to a close the story of Ólafur with his death but finishes with an expression of faith:

Vendi eg mínu kvæði í kross,
sánkte Mária sje með oss

ÍF 1M 25

I turn my song to the cross,
may Holy Mary be with us.

In the same version, the first elf-maid is introduced not with golden hair, but as the one who 'var ekki Kristni kær' (was not dear to Christianity). Ólafur's reason for his refusal to live with the elves is not uncommon, however, and similar to that in Version A: 'heldur vil ég á Krist minn trúá' (rather will I believe in my Christ). Any new references to Catholicism (here Holy Mary) were outlawed in post-Reformation Iceland (Vésteinn Ólason, 1982: 105), but traditional lyrics were rarely altered.

The Icelandic ballad promotes piety: faith in God when faced with temptation and death, and family loyalty, and it is a faith that sounds more personal than the knee-jerk request for the attendance of the priest which we find in the Danish versions and in

Swedish Version K. In this ballad we see faith in action, and a continued belief in the need for God's help in the face of darkness and a hostile environment. The citing of Christian belief as a reason for not getting involved in a bad way of life features in all the ballad versions and in most two or three times; this, along with the song to Mary at the end of the Icelandic version M, acknowledges a need felt in Iceland for succour and protection, not present in the Continental versions.

3.4 'Clerk Colvill'

We move to the British Isles to continue our examination of the otherworldly temptress, now in the form of a mermaid in Child 42 'Clerk Colvill'. Child records three versions, the oldest, B, dated 1769 and recorded in Herd's *Ancient and Modern Scots Songs*. Version C was found in *Notes and Queries* (submitted by W.F.; 1871:Vol. 44, 510) and is, according to Child, 'corrupted'.¹¹ Child and others note the ballad's similarity to the German poem recording the fate of the Knight of Staufenberg (dated about 1300) and the strong family resemblances to DgF 47 'Elveskud' are clear. Though their fate is identical, the heroes of the German and Scottish ballad are, however, of a very different calibre.

'Clerk Colvill' is a tragic tale of inconstancy and revenge, and is told through a series of dialogues which illustrate the hegemony of power within the family. Versions A and B open with Clark Colven and his 'gay ladie' (A) and Clerk Colvill and his 'lusty dame' (B). The ballad juxtaposes two relationships. The first one, between a generous Clerk Colvill and his wife, for whom he has bought a belt costing fifteen pounds, would seem to be a relationship characterized by distrust. We shall see in 'Tam Lin' (Chapter 7) a general warning to all girls to be wary of the faerie, but here it is much more personal as Clerk Colvill's lady voices her suspicions:

O hearken weel now, my good lord,

¹¹ W.F. states: 'The following is taken down from the recitation of a lady in Forfarshire, and I have reason to believe that it is originally from the same source as that from which Scott, and especially Jamieson, derived many of their best ballads'. Child adds: 'This source should be no other than Mrs. Brown, who certainly may have known two versions of Clerk Colvil'. Child's 'corrupt' judgement refers to the introduction of the mother at the beginning of the version, a blend of two other ballads (Child 1: 372).

O hearken weel to what I say;
 When ye gang to the wall o Stream, [well]
 O gang nae neer the well-fared may. [good-looking maiden]
 Child 42A 2

Colvill's immediate response is to defend himself robustly against her insinuation:

O haud your tongue, my gay ladie,
 Tak nae sic care o me;
 For I nae saw a fair woman
 I like so well as thee. Child 42A 3

In all three versions Colvill immediately ignores her injunction and rides forth to the very place his lady has warned him against, 'nought minding what his lady said' (B, 4). He does not have the integrity or loyalty shown by Hr. Oluf in 'Elveskud', who refuses to dance with the elves because of his imminent wedding. The wife here has a smaller role than in 'Elveskud'. She is not a rounded character and is not even accorded a name,¹² her function being to remind her husband of cultural expectations. This second scene reveals a different relationship. The 'well-fared may' is present, washing a 'sark o silk' for Colvill. Gerould is convinced of history between the two: 'clearly the hero has been the lover of a water-sprite of sorts, and has broken with her to marry a mortal woman' (1957: 21). She is identified as a mermaid immediately in Versions A and C, but this information is withheld until the end of the ballad in Version B. There is no clear evidence in these versions that Colvill and the mermaid have met before, nor even that in B he knows she is a mermaid until her identity is revealed in Stanza 9, though he does know that she is 'aye' (always) washing (A5).

Ellipsis reveals Colvill's disloyalty to his wife and hypocrisy that he would never look at another woman:

He's taen her by the milk-white hand,
 He's taen her by the sleeve sae green,
 And he's forgotten his gay ladie,
 And away with fair maiden. Child 42A 6

An omission occurs in all three texts at this point, after which a conversation is recorded which is very different from that with his wife. The mood of the ballad changes with a dramatic cry of pain from Colvill. Within four (B) or five stanzas (A), the mermaid has inflicted what we assume is revenge on him:

¹² Oluf's bride is named in twelve versions.

'Ohon, alas!' says Clerk Colven,
'And aye sae sair's I mean my head!' Child 42A 7

The mermaid suggests a remedy: he is to cut a bandage from her shirt and wrap it around his head and the pain 'ye'll never feel nae mair' (A8), though the mermaid's words are far from honest:

And merrily leugh the mermaiden,
'O win on till you be dead' [will] Child 42A 7

The bandage has the opposite effect in both A and B:

'O sairer, sairer akes my head;'
'And sairer, sairer ever will,'
The maiden crys, 'till you be dead.' Child 42B 8

Colvill tries to exact his own revenge, drawing his 'trusty' (A) or 'stunning' (B) blade to kill her, but the things of his world cannot be trusted, whether his word to his wife (stanza 3) or now his sword, which is ineffectual against such an adversary:

But she was vanishd to a fish,
And swam far off, a fair mermaid. Child 42B 9

The ballad then moves swiftly to a close, in the same manner as 'Elveskud'. The third and final scene sees Clerk Colvill return home to issue final instructions to his mother, to make his bed (A, B), braid his hair (B); to his lady, to lie him down (A); and to his brother to 'unbend' his bow (A) or take his sword and shield (B), 'for I have seen the false mermaid', still not recognising his own fault (B). This lack of self-knowledge is key to his demise. It is significant that when Hr. Oluf in 'Elveskud' returns home with similar demands of his family, he commands a more sympathetic audience, as we have seen him in conversation with his mother and fiancée who show evident love and concern over his fate.

Version C ('Clerk Colin') 'from the recitation of a lady in Forfarshire' makes no reference to the wife, substituting an opening dialogue between Colin and his mother who now is the recipient of his generosity: a necklace and a belt each costing fifteen pounds. This version reveals a history between Colin and the mermaid. His mother, representing the older generation, issues loving advice and warnings:

Forbidden gin ye wad be, love Colin,
Forbidden gin ye wad be,
And gang nae mair to Clyde's water,
To court yon gay ladie. Child 42C 2

Colin is the wilful son who will not listen, telling his mother to mind her own business:

Forbid me frae your ha, mother,
Forbid me frae your bour,
But forbid me not frae yon ladie;
She's fair as ony flour. Child 42C 3

He continues in the same vein ('Forbidden I winna be [...] I maun go') for a further stanza. He leaves 'as fast as he could win' to visit a liminal spot by the water 'by the lee licht o the moon'. As in Versions A and B, here he sees the mermaid washing 'silk upon a stane'. The very prosaic task of washing clothes has caused some discussion, summarized in Parker (1947: 266–70) and is discussed in more detail in Chapter 7 with reference to 'The Elfin Knight' but, in short, we have here a love token. Child sees the shirt as a betrothal gift (Child 5: 284), reminiscent of the silk shirt bleached in the moonlight and offered by the elf to Oluf in five versions of DgF 47. The giving of such a gift indicates the giving of the maiden's love.

We assume Colin accepts the mermaid's invitation:

Come down, come down, now, Clerk Colin,
Come down an [fish] wi me;
I'll row ye in my arms twa, Child 42C 7

The final scene begins in a way similar to A and B, with a request for his mother, sister and brother's assistance, but here there is a continuation for three stanzas. As Colin is lying in his bed he is visited by the mermaid:

Will ye lie there an die, Clerk Colin,
Will ye lie there an die?
Or will ye gang to Clyde's water,
To fish in flood wi me? Child 42C 10

The choice given to Oluf of immediate death or seven years' sickness can be found only in the Danish and Swedish versions. The Norwegian, Icelandic and Scottish (C) ballads give a choice of death or living with the elf or mermaid, as here in C. Her tone of voice will be dictated by the singer: scornful, threatening or cajoling. Colin makes the same decision as Hr. Oluf in the 'Elveskud' tradition:

'I will lie here an die,' he said,
'I will lie here an die;
In spite o a' the deils in hell
I will lie here an die.' Child 42C 11

Colin claws back some nobility in his final decision to reject the mermaid and spurn ‘the deils in hell’.

The story is one of just desserts in the A and B versions: Clerk Colvill is glib in his attitude to his lady and inconstant to both her and his mermaid-lover, so must pay, though the payment is a harsh one. He deliberately goes out in search of an extra-marital sexual experience despite warnings, in a way similar to Hr. Bøsmer (DgF 45), even though he too has been warned of the danger of so doing. As the elf-maiden will brook no rivalry in ‘Elveskud’, neither will she here and, in a display of strength, swiftly dispatches Colvill. The wife or sweetheart does not feature in Version C, and so the mermaid’s lust for revenge is absent. We need to take the summary of the ballad’s theme provided by Nicolaisen a little further:

Thematically, Child 42 gives a clear warning that it is risky, often fatal, to mess around with supernatural lovers and that one ignores advice, even strong pleading by one’s wife or one’s mother, to one’s peril when it warns against placing oneself under the spell of such a creature. Born out of human jealousy such warnings may be but they are nevertheless worth listening to, for any passionate contact with the other world literally spells trouble. (1992:34)

Nicolaisen argues a theme of jealousy, but in Version C it is not that of the mermaid for the wife (who is no longer in existence), but jealousy of the parent for the son’s lover. The warnings prove right; this love is indeed dangerous, but jealousy of the mother for the mermaid does not explain the death of the son. This version of the ballad is not as artistically satisfying because of this lack of a reason for the killing of Colin.

Child 42 presents us with a world where the human woman is completely marginalized. Her functions are depicted as little more than to be attractive to her man and to provide him pleasure. There is an acknowledgement of her role as the angel in the house¹³ in her attempts (as a young woman or a mother) to instil right behaviour in Colvill, but she is ignored. We shall see in Chapter 7 in our examination of ‘Tam Lin’ and ‘Lady Isabel and the Elf-Knight’ that elsewhere there is opposition to attempts at marginalization, but here, the wife and mother have no voice. The supernatural woman in ‘Clerk Colvill’, however, holds the power and is characterized by her selfish desire; she is one whose will

¹³ An expression popularized by Coventry Patmore in the second half of the nineteenth century to depict the Victorian ideal of femininity: selfless devotion to husband, family and household.

must be obeyed and who will brook no disobedience. There is no sharing of knowledge or guidance as we shall find in Chapter 7 in ‘Thomas Rymer’ (Child 37), no kindness as in ‘Allison Gross’ (Child 35), but rather the desire of the elf-queen to wield power as in ‘Tam Lin’ (Child 39; Chapter 7) and ‘Elveskud’ who, once scorned, seeks immediate revenge.

Colvill is characterized by what E.M. Forster would many years later call an ‘undeveloped heart’, an inability to reach out beyond himself (1936: 4–5). Even at the end, Colvill expresses no remorse, but is still central, issuing orders. The man’s sexual encounter with the supernatural both defines his masculinity (Purkiss, 2000: 134) but also reduces it from the heroism which Oluf or Janet or Lady Isabel displays in a similar situation. Clerk Colvill knows that the cost in family terms will be high if he persists:

Forbid me frae your ha, mother,
Forbid me frae your bour,
But forbid me not frae yon ladie;
She’s fair as ony flour.

Forbidden I winna be, mother,
Forbidden I winna be,
For I maun gang to Clyde’s water,
To court yon gay ladie.

Child 42C 3, 4

The relationship (with his wife) which is expressed in material terms is as likely to be unsuccessful as the one with the mistress who is ‘erotically aggressive in courting’ (Syndergaard 2009: 24), who inhabits the liminal water realm, insubstantial and constantly in flux, suggesting an unfulfilled passage into another state with the danger of attendant death. His choice is ‘annihilation as he was, in the bosom of his family, or annihilation in a destructive erotic, in the bosom of his mermaid’ (Syndergaard 2009: 25). This is a ballad of the same type as that of Hr. Bøsmer, one of undeserved violence where the human is kidnapped, here killed, because he had interfered with the other world and had not the ability to save himself.

In one respect, ‘Clerk Colvill’ is a companion piece to other Scottish ballads in that, along with ‘Tam Lin’ and ‘Lady Isabel and the Elf-Knight’, there is a focus on varying abilities to cope with entry into the world of both erotic love and emotional maturity. The young people under scrutiny uphold the right to determine their own future but are often

destructive (of others or of self) in the process. The need for sexual fulfilment is a driving-force in all the protagonists, but where linked with intelligence (as in ‘Lady Isabel and the Elf-Knight’ and ‘The Elfin Knight’) or canniness (‘Thomas Rymer’), all in Chapter 7, is most successful. The ballads depict life as a search, for oneself and one’s sexuality—Syndergaard refers to the need to find a path through ‘the wilderness within us’ (1993: 137). Clerk Colvill remains in the wilderness.

3.5 *The German response*

Herder

‘Clerk Colvill’ was not to achieve the popularity of ‘Elveskud’. While the streamlining of action brings some mystery, in particular regarding the back-story of the protagonist and the mermaid, this ballad did not attract the huge outpouring of empathy which ultimately Goethe would achieve in his German literary version of the ballad, for not just one, but two characters. This is perhaps an unfair comparison to make, but it is one which reflects the shift from oral song sung on public occasions and (in Europe) accompanied by dancing, to the Romantic period where pathos, emotion, a sense of mystery, and concern for the individual would change the focus of the old ‘Elveskud’ ballad. Before we look at ‘Erlkönig’, we shall turn to the poet and translator who brought the Danish ballads to what is now Germany, Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803).

Herder was a key figure in the eighteenth century enthusiasm to transmit folksongs from around the world. He was inspired by Syv’s collection of ballads (1695), publishing a translation of songs from all over Europe in *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern* (*Voices of the Peoples in Song*), which came out in 1778, and was informally known as *Volkslieder* (*Folk Songs*). Robert Clark believes *Volkslieder* achieved two purposes: it was seen as a major contribution to German national literature and it took a lead in suggesting a more sympathetic approach to the vibrant yet unsophisticated ways of life of societies deemed less advanced than Germany (1955: 253); Herder looked to the traditions of several European countries in his translations. Volume 2 (1779) followed quickly on the success of

the first and contained 'Erlkönigs Tochter', a translation by Herder of 'Elveskud', which was later to inspire Goethe to write 'Erlkönig', encouraging him to turn away from Classical culture and sentimentalism to discover and build upon this Teutonic tradition. The discussion of the confusion of 'elf' and 'alder' in the title is well documented (Williams 2001: 86, for example). Herder's translation of the Danish ballad bore the title 'Erlkönigs Tochter' (Alder King's Daughter), either failing to distinguish between the Danish for 'elf' and 'alder', or deliberately identifying the spirit as a woodland demon. In the Danish ballad, the elf who endeavours to seduce humans is female, an 'ellerkone' ('Elfenweib', female elf), not an 'ellerkonge' ('Elfenkönig', Elf-king). Herder assumed the ellerkone was the daughter of the Erlking, which Goethe chose to retain, taking a new direction from the Danish ballads.

Rather than the oldest, much longer version of DgF 47, Herder chose Danish Version B for translation into German: it was readily available in Syv's collection, and has remained the most popular since in terms of its longevity and geographical spread. With twenty-five stanzas, it was a manageable length, and was structurally balanced: all stages of the story were present, featuring both the dance and its consequences. Herder's awareness of the Enlightenment's requirement that literature should have an element of didacticism was satisfied (Clark 1955: 259): there is a clear cultural message couched in this version regarding what would have been expected of a young man, alongside a warning of dangers to be avoided. Herder chose to keep the refrain, which became 'Aber der Tanz geht so leicht durch den Hain' (But the dance goes so lightly through the grove); in addition, the backcloth of the dancing elves and the call to dance are prominent: 'tanzen' or 'tanz' is used on ten occasions in the stanzas of the first half of the poem where the Erlking's daughter is trying to tempt Herr Oluf into action. Herder follows Danish B closely through the temptation scene; important in the German version is not just *what* the elf offers him, but the manner in which she does it. Herder chooses her words carefully to give them a particular phonological patterning: a high incidence of bilabials and labio-dentals, fluid

alveolars, especially with /l/, and a breathy sound in the voiceless glottal fricative /h/. She is pulling out all the stops! Consider:

Ein Hend von Seide so weiß und fein,
Meine Mutter bleichts im Mondenschein (st. 3)

A shirt of silk so white and fine,
My mother bleaches in the moonlight

and here, some teasing dental stops follow the early breathy sounds: 'Hör an, Herr Oluf, tritt tanzen mit mir' (Listen, Herr Oluf, tread the dance with me). The mix of anapaests with iambs in many of her lines gives a gentle, wheedling sound to her voice. Oluf is given a gruffer sound, with a greater predominance in his words of harsher velar sounds, especially /g/, and the velar fricative /x/.

When Oluf refuses to succumb, we can hear the fury in the strong velars and alveolars of the Erlking's daughter: 'Soll Seuch und Krankheit folgen dir' (May sickness and disease follow you), before she strikes him in the heart inflicting pain such as he has never felt before, as with the Danish 'elveskud' (elf-shot). He is described as 'bleichend' (colourless), underlined again five lines later in the words of his mother, our attention drawn by the alliteration 'Wie ist deine Farbe blaß und bleich?' (How is your colour wan and pale?). The word 'bleichts' has already been used in the ballad to describe the action of the Erlking's wife, bleaching the silk in the moonlight. We know for certain now that Sir Oluf belongs to the other side. Within four lines Oluf has ridden out into the forest where his bride finds him dead, the two spondees (as in the end of Goethe's poem) chosen for their feeling of finality: 'und er war tot' (and he was dead).

The supreme irony of a study in translation, of course, is pointed out by Larry Syndergaard (1995: 51): we are disturbed when an editor, here Herder, sets out to 'improve' on an older text rather than reproduce it verbatim for the new audience, but the ballad text is, by the nature of the genre, fluid. We do not know how many times the Danish ballad had changed before it came into Herder's hands. The attitude of many a Romantic editor that 'these [folk] who [...] are not poets enough [...] really do want a little Art to shape them' (Edward Fitzgerald, quoted and adapted by Syndergaard, 1995:50) lies behind the 'enhancements' inflicted on the popular songs. In the belief that the art of the professional

poet is needed to embellish the rough verse of the ‘folk’, Herder was no different from editor-poets such as Walter Scott, Matthew Lewis and Grundtvig himself (in the example analysed in Chapter 2, for instance), but we must remember that in this specific case, there is a real concern on the translator’s part for the language into which he is translating. Herder is not so much trying to improve on the details of the narrative—his interpretation, in fact, stayed remarkably close to the original Danish ballad—but he was conscious that his own language had for some time not been regarded as one fit for conveying finer feelings (Ergang 1966: 171). During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the language of the court and the universities in Germany was Latin, gradually being replaced by French. Möser and Herder were at the vanguard of a movement which endeavoured to promote a national voice and pride in the German language and its literature (Ergang 1933: 179–83). Herder was determined to show that German was as capable as French at expressing finer feelings. He wrote in *Fragmente* (1766–67):

The translator has to be a creative genius himself if he wants to be of service to his author and his language [...]

Too lax a translation, which our surveyors of art are in the habit of calling free and natural, sins against both: it does not do well by one language, it does not bear fruit in another. Too adaptive a translation is a much more difficult enterprise, even though light, frivolous minds decry it as servile: it does well by its languages and is rarely awarded the recognition it deserves [...] German alone could possibly find a middle way between paraphrase and schoolboy translation—for that is what most French translations are.

(Lefevere (trans.) 1977: 31, 33–34)

While ostensibly staying faithful to the original, Herder also manages to enhance it, in ways described above. His verbal patterning moves the traditional ballad towards a new literary genre.

As well as the changes (largely to appeal to aesthetics) noted above, Herder omitted the final stanza of Danish B, which records the death of all three humans:

Hr. Oluf og saa hans fæstemø,
Hans moder blev og af sorgen død

We do not know if Herder had access to DgF 47A (where the final focus is on the anxiety and then grief of the fiancée), but if so he has shifted the emotional core of the ballad for the German audience. None of the sentimental description (which occupies a substantial

part of the other Danish versions of the ballad) and which apportions some heroism to the character of Oluf's sweetheart and raises sympathy, is present here. If we consider additions, however, Herder does portray Oluf as 'bleichend' (colour faded from his face, 'bleached') and his mother as 'ziffernd' (trembling), neither of which is found in the Danish B. He also downgrades the family socially, seeing them live in a mere 'Haus' as opposed to a 'Borg' (a small castle or stronghold), belonging to the middle or upper-middle class. We see here some attempt at levelling in Germany. Nineteenth-century Romantic sentimentality saw the ballad as written by *das Volk* about *das Volk*, and so characters in this ballad are peasants rather than aristocracy. We should consider as an example of this trend an anthology of poetry written in England but enormously influential throughout Europe, Wordsworth and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* (1798). Wordsworth's declared object was,

to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible in a selection of language really used by men, and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect
(Preface, Second edition, 1800)

Goethe had already written 'Erlkönig' when this was published, but Wordsworth articulates the aim of embracing the individual in line with European Romanticism. Poems such as 'The Idiot Boy', 'Simon Lee' and 'Goody Blake and Harry Gill' present the reader with ordinary people, often in conversation using simple language with which to deal with the pathos of their life. Herder was key in introducing Goethe to poetry and song where the focus was on ordinary people in language that was not artificial.

3.6 *Goethe*

Influenced by Herder's enthusiasm, the poet and dramatist Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) turned from the neo-classical tradition to develop an interest in the oral, the folk-song and ballad (Williams 2001: 68). Added to this was a fascination with the supernatural. Bettelheim relates how the young Johann's imagination was fired by the fairy stories told him by his mother so, when he came under the influence of Herder, he too began to collect tales and songs from the local villages and also to work on a translation of Percy's *Reliques* and on *Ossian* (Bettelheim 1991: 153). Goethe's contribution to the history

of the genre was that he took the popular ballad and made a literary masterpiece of it. Starting from Herder's translation, 'Erlkönigs Tochter', he wrought a completely different composition: 'Erlkönig' (Elf-king), which was written in 1782.

'Erlkönig'

Goethe opens his poem with a dramatic scene where a child is riding home with his father on horseback, at night-time. The son is filled with terror: the Elrking has arrived, enticing the boy to leave his father and go with him. Parallels with 'Elveskud' are clear in the temptation and abduction of a male by supernatural forces, but this time it is a child. In 1782 Goethe is tapping into not just the ballad tradition, but also the enduring beliefs about fairies, elves, goblins and corrigans stealing, or being left, human babies. Diane Purkiss describes an early modern Europe where unwanted babies 'were occasionally left "for the fairies"', a euphemism for child abandonment' (2003: 87). Parents struggling to cope with, or even accept, a baby or child who was sickly or deformed would take refuge in a reason for the abnormality or the death of the child. Children who died had been abducted by the fairies; weak or poorly-developed ones had been left as changelings, the parents' own healthy baby taken to swell the kingdom of the elves (Silver 1999: 59–88). It is so much easier to lay the blame or responsibility elsewhere:

Myth and legend [...] were not only exploited to afford people relief in illness or amusement and compensation in leisure; they allowed men to deceive themselves and others, to distort their experience, to take refuge in fantasy and prejudice; they confirmed and legitimized accusation, revolt and escape. (Devlin 1987: 215)

This communal self-deception undoubtedly gave some relief to the parents and enabled an acceptance in their social group who would otherwise condemn their feelings of disappointment, revulsion or rejection of their offspring (Harte 2004: 108ff).

In Goethe's 'Erlkönig', the drama and fear are more vivid than in the popular ballad versions. The poet thrusts us *in medias res*, much of the action delivered through dialogue. There are four voices: the boy, his father, the wheedling words of the Erlking, and the narrator whose words frame the conversation between the other three. In the opening stanza of 'Erlkönig' the narrator draws the reader in by addressing him directly:

Wer reitet so spat durch Nacht und Wind?

Who rides so late through night and wind?¹⁴

There is no explicit 'I' or 'you', but the interrogative implies a narratorial 'I'. Although 'Erlkönig' is a literary ballad, the poet is employing some techniques, like repetition and use of the present tense, which characterise the oral ballad and which keep it close to vernacular usage. The narrator establishes briefly the locations, detail given only when necessary to build up an atmosphere of fear. The temporal and geographical locations are imprecise. We know that it is a dark and windy night and the journey home (l.31) moves over a misty plain ('Nebelstreif', l.8), through old, grey willow trees ('dürren Blattern', l. 16 and 'alten Weiden so grau', l. 24). Some of the magic of the *naturmagische* ballads¹⁵ is down to their liminal settings and to some form of trans-liminal exchange. In 'Erlkönig' we have a domestic tragedy which crosses into the supernatural, a child on the threshold of death, on the shore ('an dem Strand') of another kingdom. The journey in another of Goethe's ballads, 'Willkommen und Abscheid', takes place on the wild moors between places of civilization, at twilight when Nature is not distinct, but clothed in mist ('Nebelkleid'), the moon hanging in the sky and black Night waiting on the mountain top ('Und an den Bergen hing die Nacht'). The protagonist of 'The Fisher', like the boy in 'Erlkönig', communicates with the 'other side'. He too stands between two worlds, on the bank between land and water, life and death, looking into the water where the sun and moon bathe, they too having crossed into another world. Influenced by Ossianic poetry, the state of liminality presents the reader with a world poised on the threshold between two conditions, a time of magic. This state of inbetweened-ness heightens the poet's or the character's ability to receive truths or secrets, and prepares the reader also to respond not with reason but with heightened emotion (Leersson 2003: 3).

¹⁴ A literal translation is provided. Scott's translation which, while it is loose in areas and does not capture Goethe's language techniques, renders atmosphere and ballad rhythm perfectly. See: Scott, Walter, *An Apology for Tales of Terror* <http://www.walterscott.lib.ed.ac.uk/works/poetry/apology/text.html> accessed 14 May 2014.

¹⁵ *Naturmagische* is a term coined by Paul Ludwig Kämpchen (1930) in reference to a small group of Goethe's early ballads, including 'Erlkönig', 'Der Fischer' and 'Gesang der Elfen' where the magic of nature and water has taken on a special significance.

The poet universalises the experience about to unfold in 'Erlkönig' by naming neither place nor characters, but he does begin to reveal salient characteristics of the father. Three separate details in stanza one convey a clear and important impression of the security he affords his son in his role as protector: the father holds the boy 'wohl in dem Arm' (securely in his arms), an idea reinforced by Goethe twice in line four:

Er faßt ihn sicher, er halt ihn warm

He holds him safely, he keeps him warm

The contrast between this and the harshness of the environment ('Nacht und Wind') is brought out more strongly in Matthew Lewis's translation:

Who is it that rides in the forest so last,
While night frowns around him, while shrill roars the blast?
The father, who holds his young son in his arm,
And close in his mantle has wrapped him up warm. ([1801] 2010: 21)

His personification of night in one line as forbidding and aggressive is offset by the two lines devoted to the protection offered by the father.

The rhyme 'Wind'/'Kind' occurs three times during the poem to keep the child's fragility in the reader's mind. Immediacy is achieved as Goethe now goes straight into dialogue, another feature of the oral ballad. The narrator disappears behind the dialogue to ensure there can be no interpretation. The son has reacted to the arrival of the Erlking by hiding his face in alarm. His fear is captured in the irregular rhythm of line six, in the spondee at the beginning and again, thumped out in the first two syllables of the word 'Erlkönig': 'Siehst, Vater, du den Erlkönig nicht?' (See, Father, you not the Elf-King?). In the following line, 'Den Erlenkönig mit Kron und Schweif?' (The Erlking with crown and cloak?), the elision of 'mit Kron' und Schweif' replicates the child's breathlessness. He recognizes power in the crown the king is wearing, and the desire to hide the truth under the metaphor of the cloak, but the father either wilfully misinterprets to comfort the child or perhaps sees only the fairy tale of the nursery and applies a logical explanation: 'er ist ein Nebelstreif' (it's only a wisp of mist).

Dramatic question and answer form the structure of the poem. The length and position of the turns in the dialogue establish the power of the Erlking. The father and son

share stanzas (stanzas 2, 4, 6), where the Erlking stands separate, interposing with stanzas of his own (3, 5). There is a shift in tone as we now hear the words of the Erlking to the child. He appeals to his senses, enticing, promising different pleasures: games, beautiful flowers, garments of gold, offering a warm and colourful environment. This is in stark contrast to that of his father's world: the foggy, withered greys of the night which ironically are more disturbing than the Erlking's home, masquerading as shifting, malicious supernatural figures prefiguring ultimate death. The sibilance of the Erlking's whisperings caresses the child:

Gar schöne Spiele spiel'ich mit dir!
 Manch'bunte Blumen sind an dem Strand (ll. 11, 12)

Many a beautiful game I'll play with you!
 Many colourful flowers are on the beach.

The older and wiser reader associates the /s/ and /ʃ/ sounds not only with the icy wind but with the sound of evil, the hissing of the serpent.

The child becomes more insistent in his repetition: 'Mein Vater, mein Vater' (My father, my father). The 'und' which follows expresses disbelief that his father cannot see what he can—and there are no soothing sounds in the fricative and plosive consonants and the consonant combinations of his response:

Sei ruhig, bleibe ruhig, mein Kind;
 In dürren Blättern säuselt der Wind ll. 15, 16

Be calm, stay calm, my child;
 In the dry leaves the wind is rustling

We note that the boy now drops the definite article, moving from 'den Erlenkönig' to simply 'Erlenkönig' as he becomes worryingly familiar with him. The father listens, but again dismisses the child in his explanation that the child imagines the words of the Erlking in the sound of the rustling of the withering leaves (which, of course, herald death). The Erlking tries again, his words designed to charm with the warmth and delight to be provided by the female elves of this new world; there is no mention in the poem of the gentler sex in the old. The reader is unsettled: this is a secret and private kingdom which the Erlking dominates, where no-one but the child can hear the words of seduction, so no-one can defend him.

panic at the end, presents a terrifying experience which, in this concentrated form, moves relentlessly to the tragedy it records, working like all the best poetry in universalizing the experience. The greatness of the poem (which mimics the ellipsis of the older ballad) lies also in the way Goethe presents a situation and leaves its interpretation open to the reader. He does not tell us one way or the other whether the child is in fact ill. If it is accepted that the Erlking's visit is a harbinger of death, then once the father accepted the truth of what his son was saying, he knew the danger. The Erlking had sung.

3.6.1 *Goethe's re-shaping of Herder's ballad*

Herder and Goethe's poems belong to the *naturmagische* category of ballads, but where Goethe wrote a literary ballad, Herder's very much replicates the popular, oral tradition, where repetition and fixed formulas are important and where action is compressed and streamlined through to a dramatic and tragic conclusion. Goethe borrowed the motif of the journey and the supernatural solicitings, three in each poem, each offering temptations appropriate to the recipient. Each poem deals with one single situation and its aftermath, related through a high proportion of dialogue, for immediacy.

Beyond these similarities both with Herder and with the oral tradition, Goethe has reshaped the ballad. His decision to focus on a child has a profound effect on his reader. Herr Oluf attracts sympathy through his loyalty to his bride, his fearful acceptance of his fate and by means of the terror of his mother, but identifying him has the effect of making the reader less alarmed. Goethe chooses not to identify his child; he universalizes. This could be *any* child in danger of unexplained and inexplicable death, which speaks to us more personally, the parent's worst nightmare.

Goethe piles on agony by recording the fear in the voice of the child and the terror of the father as he approaches belief at the end of the poem. He invokes a dark and threatening atmosphere which possibly conceals terrors of which we have no experience. The re-modelling of the ballad has recorded a shift from acceptance of fate in the early

modern mind to fear for a child's life and the incipient blame we attach to the sceptic, rational father.

By moving the target of the supernatural threat to a boy, Goethe then had to consider the role of the Erlking's daughter. The substitution of a male Erlking moves the poem to a different level. In Herder's translation, as is typical of the ballad genre, there is no post-mortem, no moralizing, no didacticism, no religious background that we find in the Icelandic version, no warning to the reader. Goethe, on the other hand, in a much more sophisticated way, invites his reader to consider different readings of his text. As in the Danish ballad, the child might have been killed by the Erlking as a reprisal for being rejected. Alternatively, the child was perhaps actually ill, the Erlking appearing to guide him to the delights of the after-life. Goethe may further be asking his readers to consider that the child may have been merely hallucinating, with the Erlking only a projection of his illness, or even that the poem is simply an allegory to illustrate the superiority of the life of the imagination over that of reason. Goethe imbues his poem with a potential for rationality that does not feature in Herder. When the elf strikes Herr Oluf, we have to believe; we are not required to in Goethe. We understand the motivation in Herder whereas Goethe deliberately keeps us wondering; Goethe makes the reader *work*. The strength of the poem lies in the fact that the poet poses questions but does not suggest an answer. Over two hundred years on from its birth, the poem is still capable of evoking strong emotion through these varied readings. Goethe has taken a popular ballad and rendered it into one far more sophisticated and terrifying, not because the variants of the ballad or Herder's translation of 'Elveskud' were badly written but because the poets' aims were different. Herder was a translator and enabler and Goethe built upon that. Inspired by his model, Goethe created a new literary ballad which gave him liberty to layer a greater poetic sophistication and subtlety onto the strengths of the old genre.

3.6.2 *A cultural analysis of 'Erlkönig'*

We next move beyond the poem to try to understand its place in eighteenth-century German thinking and the ways in which the poem might have appealed to Goethe's audiences. I present four readings of the poem: (1) considering 'Erlkönig' as an expression of the schism between reason and the imagination (Dye 2004: 136); (2) the theme of problems with perception; (3) homo-eroticism; and (4) a psycho-analytic reading. Goethe's audience was made up of children as well as adults, so 'Erlkönig' was read on several levels.

(i) *The supernatural, imagination and reason*

A common interpretation (Hartman 1975: 403) is that Goethe is asking us to consider the existence of supernatural powers and their occasional presence in our world in a way similar to Wordsworth in 'There was a Boy' and 'The Ruined Cottage', and Coleridge in 'The Ancient Mariner'. Goethe has written a ghost story, presenting us with a child who experiences the other-worldly intruding into his own world and whose spirit is abducted to swell the ranks of the elves or, as with Shakespeare's Oberon, to serve the elf-king.¹⁶ There was still widespread belief throughout eighteenth-century Europe of the existence of fairies who stole children. In the poem, the child goes not of his own volition to escape from the harsh human world to the golden realm of the fairies: Goethe is at pains in the narrative frame to portray a father who is not feckless, reckless or uncaring, but rather one who, while he attempts to comfort and dispel fear, is insensitive to the imagination of the child. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78) promulgated the idea that the child was closer to nature and so might 'know' more than adults, who had been mis-educated—an idea which a few years later was to become a central tenet of Romanticism and which would find arguably its greatest poetic expression in Wordsworth's 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality' (1804, published 1807). Goethe's 'Erlkönig' in this respect prefigures the Romantics: the depiction of a child whose awareness is heightened and who

Beholds the light, and whence it falls ...
[...] At length the man perceives it die away,

¹⁶ William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Act II, sc.i, ll.120–21.

And fade into the light of common day. (Wordsworth's 'Ode', 70, 76–7)¹⁷

The child sees and hears what the father does not or cannot, and Rousseau and the Romantics will tell us that we must listen to the child. It is conceivable that the father in Goethe's poem represents the voice of reason and the child, that of the Imagination. The father is convinced he is the one, and the only one, who can see clearly and interpret correctly. But ultimately, says Goethe, reason is the loser: it cannot calm fears; it cannot understand anything it cannot personally experience. Joep Leerssen (2003: 1–3) takes this idea and builds on it, defining Goethe's poem as an *aisling* or vision poem in the Gaelic tradition.

But we could choose to believe that the father is right in his assessment of the situation: the son has an over-fertile imagination which ultimately confounds him. We have much evidence to show that while Goethe was writing at the time of the Enlightenment, belief in the supernatural was common not only among rural peasants in Europe still practising non-Christian rites, but among townsfolk also. The Christians too had their own supernatural experiences: even in nineteenth-century Europe we have regular accounts of strange sights: a holy man lifted up before the eyes of his congregation, the sick being cured by relics, holy statues opening their eyes (Lecky 1893: 141–42). Orthodox religion, with its own otherworldly beliefs, blended with what the Enlightenment elite might call 'irrational superstition', regardless of the exhortations of Rationalism (Devlin 1987: 1).

(ii) *Problems of perception*

It was commonly believed that hallucinations resulted from, and were used as an excuse for, fear of the environment (Devlin 1987: 80). Dark nights, strange sounds, mysterious movements in the shadows caused the traveller to fear and perhaps hallucinate, more so if he were already ill or frail or intoxicated. Accounts of supernatural beings enabled the individual to externalise his fear and save face, using what Judith Devlin calls an 'inherited language', a common response used by mankind over the centuries (1987: 80). As

¹⁷ cf also Wordsworth's 'We are Seven' for further reference to his belief in the child's heightened sensibility.

childhood is a time of belief that all objects can come alive and all creatures speak and act as humans, whether whomping willows or monsters under the bed, so animism is a possible interpretation for the boy's fear and need for reassurance from his father (Simpson 1998: 39). This does not, however, explain the boy's death. Hartman considers that the opening line 'Wer reiset so spät durch Nacht und Wind?' implies a reason for the child's death: it is in punishment for their 'trespassing on ghostly ground' (1975: 406). Picking up on the significance of the wind, Vanhese (1999:112) notes that 'les âmes des morts, auxquelles il faut associer les elfes noirs,¹⁸ vivent dans le vent' and that 'des demons du vent [...] apportant et la fecondité et la mort.'¹⁹ Associations with death begin to stack up quite quickly even at the beginning of the poem. Dye too examines the idea that the father might in fact be the Erlking's target (2004: 141), that the boy might have been taken to make him suffer, but the weakness in his argument lies in the lack of explanation.

While building on earlier tales of the elves, Goethe deliberately focuses not on the adult male human, but on the vulnerable child. James Boyd concludes from the first stanza that this must be the case: the boy is so ill that he imagines himself being drawn into an old elf superstition in his 'death-agony' (1961: 174). Yet if we are to consider that the boy was, in fact, frail or ill and that the Erlking was nothing but the product of a beleaguered mind or febrile imaginings, the poem must lose some of its force. It would have taken one syllable for Goethe to suggest this (perhaps *schwach*, frail), but he chose not to be specific and so retain the magic. The traditional ballad would never reveal all the action and for the purposes of drama and to convey a sense of urgency, we must assume some ellipsis in the poem: we do not understand what has happened to the boy, nor are we meant to; the poem is not concerned with the rational. Boyd then reconsiders very briefly: he suggests that perhaps we do wonder ultimately whether the elves 'played a part after all'. It is my contention that the father does finally accept his boy's fear: by the final stanza he is 'horrified' ('grauset's'); he rides full of 'Not' (dread); he knows that something has

¹⁸ Vanhese's 'elfes noirs' are reminiscent of Snorri Sturluson's dark elves 'blacker than pitch' in 'Gylfaginning' (*Edda* [c. 1220] ed. Faulkes 1987: 19–20).

¹⁹ 'the souls of the dead, with which we must associate the Black Elves, live in the wind' and 'the demons of the wind [...] bring both fecundity and death'.

happened. The narrator is subtly directing us too to a realization of the removal of the boy's spirit to be the plaything of the elves.

(iii) *Homo-eroticism*

We must also consider a third reading, that of the attempted abduction of a child for sexual purposes. Few commentators have until recently overtly tackled the suggestion of perversion in the poem. Fairley in 1932 is unwilling to go into detail: he believes it is 'hazardous to press it—but idle to deny its legitimacy' (1932: 203). Boyle amplifies, focusing on the line 'Ich liebe dich, mich reizt deine schöne Gestalt' (I love you; your beautiful form entices me, l. 25): the elf's expression of love, followed by a threat of force if the child will not submit. He says that the Erlking's direct speech to the boy of love which can only be 'perverted lust' is the 'most terrifying erotic poem' of Goethe's lifetime (Boyle 1991: 339f). Martin and Erica Swales (2002: 31) reflect on a line that others find relatively innocuous: 'und wiegen und tanzen und singen dich ein' (and rock and dance and sing you to sleep, l.20). They are unremitting in their condemnation of the Erlking: 'This is very close to an act of rape.' The repeated 'und', they feel, is indicative of the build-up of sexual passion while 'the wickedly ambiguous force of 'wiegen' and the compound form of the verb with 'ein' [...] suggests enveloping, cocooning to the point of self-abandonment (perhaps to orgasm, sleep or death)', in my view, a somewhat extreme interpretation, perhaps. 'Reizen' (l. 25 above) translates as 'to attract' but it can have slightly seedy sexual overtones. The Erlking is definitely 'getting his kicks' to a degree here in his contemplation of the supposed delight of what he intends to do and in many ways can be compared with the Pied Piper of Hamelin, luring the imaginative child away with promises of delight and pleasure. The disturbing thing is that there is nothing we can do about it: forbidden sensuality is abroad in the world and it will use force to prevail.

(iv) *A psycho-analytic interpretation*

Ellis Dye (2004: 2) suggests that the association of love and death in the poem links with Freud's work on the Eros-Todestrieb opposition (post-Freudian: Eros-Thanatos). He puts the poem in the genre of the *Liebestod*, in the tradition of the myths of Venus and Adonis,

Hero and Leander, Orpheus and Eurydice, Admetus and Alcestis, Protesilaus and Laodamia, Pyramus and Thisbe, and Tristan and Isolde (Dye 2004: 17). The lover achieves ecstasy in dying to himself and giving himself to another. This (and Goethe's 'Der Fischer') are *Liebestods* with a twist as there would appear to be only one death: the beloved dies but, in fact, in each poem the lover is already dead. One must question the state of ecstasy to be achieved, unless we concede that it is embraced by the description of the better place the child and the spirit will go to, or by the sexual act, though perhaps one-sided. Dye considers also that the child's death might be conceived as a *Lustmord*, but denies that it is tragic, since a tragedy must be 'comprehensible' (2004: 141). If he means by that that the meaning of his death cannot be grasped intellectually, indeed we struggle to find a reason. But if it can be grasped by the senses, then it certainly is a tragedy, as evidenced by our emotional response to the poem.

Where Ellis Dye sees the Erlking as a lover in a *Liebestod*, Simpson in an application of Freudian thought to the poem sees him as an alternative father-figure (1998:42). He has his own family—daughters and a wife—and offers a more attractive life than the grey world (and absent mother? Swales and Swales 2002: 30) of his present life. The fathers are doubles and opposites, rivals for the affection of the boy. His real father shows love and concern; the Erlking too loves ('Ich liebe dich') but in a disturbing way, tempting, luring the boy, but also threatening. James Simpson goes on to suggest the Oedipus complex could be in play, that by trying to attract the boy with offers of a mother and sisters, he 'calls up and apparently sanctions the very feelings towards mother and sister for which a male child, according to Freud, has come to fear a dreadful punishment—castration' (1998: 43). He uses Freud's compromise formation (Freud [1933] 1991: 429) to analyse the reader's pleasurable response to the poem: Goethe provokes increased sexual excitement in his audience as he suggests where the Erlking wants to go with this relationship, counterbalanced by fear and dread.

(v) *Public reception*

The hints of perversion, lust, and homoeroticism lie not far beneath the surface of 'Erlkönig', yet for some time this was a standard poem to set in German schools as an exercise in rote-learning. Similarly in France, the poem 'a toujours été pour l'écolier français abordant la langue et la littérature allemandes le poème allemande par excellence'²⁰ (Tournier 1986: 118). Perhaps there has been a sea-change in our understanding of the poet's intention or, because the poem was regarded as a classic, the underlying questionability of its suitability for young people was overlooked. We should consider the idea that the poem gained acceptance as it is bigger than just one interpretation. There is evidence of some repression of this aspect of the poem's meaning. Busoni, in his translation into French 'efface purement et simplement ce passage'²¹ (Vanhesse 1999: 111), and Géraud, championing the rationalism of the Enlightenment, is adamant that 'Erlkönig' 'fait le mal sans aucun motif raisonnable ... tout cela est absurde, mal conçu, mal imaginé, et par conséquent ne saurait offrir le moindre intérêt'²² (Géraud 1818: 356). If we consider public reception to 'Erlkönig' during Goethe's lifetime and following his death, we see little adverse response. His work in general and especially the emotional intensity of *The Sorrows of Young Werther* and *Faust* became increasingly popular both in Britain and across the Atlantic with the rise of Romanticism. Goethe's poems, especially his ballads, began to be translated with 'astonishing frequency' from 1820 onwards (Simmons 1919: 104ff). There was a steady stream of references to and translations of 'Erlkönig' in British periodicals in the hundred years following its composition,²³ with a particular spate in 1859 following the publication of a new translation of Goethe's poems and ballads by W. Edmonston Aytoun and Theodore Martin (1858).

Gibbs has counted in the region of a hundred musical settings of the poem (1995: 115–35) including those of Loewe, Schubert, Beethoven, Reichardt and Zelter. A music

²⁰ 'has always been for the French school-child tackling German language and literature the most excellent German poem'.

²¹ 'purely and simply deleted this passage'.

²² Erlkönig 'does harm without reasonable grounds ... this is absurd, poorly conceived, hard to imagine, and therefore cannot offer the slightest interest'.

²³ Anon., (1807: 206); Anon., (1892: 60); T.J.A., (1834: 221), for instance.

review published in 1892 comparing Schubert's and Loewe's settings, recalled Schubert's address to the young boy 'in tones so caressing and sweet that we scarcely understand how they could have alarmed him. Loewe's voice of the Erlking fascinates, intrudes, forces, and the boy succumbs to the magic spell at once' (Anon., 1892: 60). Alongside the idea that this was a poem included in German schools' curriculum for generations for rote-learning, we read in 1844 that the poem was 'a kind of assay-piece for aspiring German students to thump and hammer at will' (Anon., 1844: 63) and it was also included in the *First Reading Book* by A. Sonnenschein and J. S. Stallybrass (1875), aimed at children and adults. The popularity of the poem in the nineteenth-century and its recommendation to young people are an indicator that the reading favoured by Boyle, and Swales and Swales was either not understood or suppressed in the light of Goethe's brilliance. The four possible readings outlined above are so cleverly handled that interpretation is left open to the reader's imagination, with perhaps a different meaning each time we come to it.

3.7 *The dark world of 'Erlkönig' and the Oluf ballads*

In 'Erlkönig', Goethe moves us into a world of unrelenting darkness, where malice makes itself seem attractive (Ingwersen 2005: 63) and humans have no control over their fate. The mood of 'Erlkönig' might have been lighter had the inspiration been only Herder's 'Erlkönigs Tochter', but in 'Erlkönig' and the other *Naturmagische* ballads, Goethe seems to be responding not just to folk stories of supernatural beings who lure people to their deaths, but also to local incidents. Both 'Der Fischer' and 'Erlkönig' were written following the suicide by drowning in 1778 of Christel von Laßberg in the River Ilm near to where Goethe was living, which he took to heart as she had a copy of *Werther* in her pocket (Williams 2001: 85). Prior to writing 'Erlkönig', it is reported that one windy night Goethe and his friend saw a man on horseback galloping by with a bundle in his arms. It transpired he was carrying his sick child to the doctor (Boyle 1991: 339). The year 1782 was not a good one: not only was Goethe becoming increasingly frustrated in his work for Karl August and considering leaving the Weimar court, but it was also the year that his father died (Williams 2001: 21).

The 'Elveskud' group of ballads at least *begin* with the prospect of a happy future for the young man about to be married, but for Goethe existence was much bleaker, with nothing to sustain, whether family or religion. Our concluding remarks in Chapter 8 will look at the common denominator of the expression of *potential*. Man continues to face his demons but we find some hope in other Scandinavian and Scottish tales; here, in Goethe's vision, facing the demons becomes even more harrowing as a child is put in that position and as the ballad becomes the property not so much of the community, but of the individual. In terms of longevity, geographical spread, and numbers of versions, the Oluf ballad's popularity in northern Europe is clear. An exciting narrative, a good tune, and the need to partake in a shared experience are fundamental to this popularity. Potential for happiness, which must have been important particularly to women singers, is removed from Goethe's ballad as is the singer, and reading the literary ballad becomes a personal experience. But fear of the unknown experienced in the oral ballads pervades 'Erlkönig', becoming almost tangible in its intensity. In the ballads 'the basic initial fear is never groundless [...] happiness is unstable and short-lived and is accompanied by the fear of loss' (Vésteinn Ólason 1988: 66). Happiness is replaced by fear. In 'Erlkönig', just as German fairy tales began to depict a crueller world when their audience became adult (Houliind 2001: 3), so as the audience and format change in Goethe's hands, the starkness and fear become palpable.

Andersen (1991: 32) quotes ballad-singer Stanley Robertson on the socialization function of ballads, 'teaching you morals ... how to prepare yourself ... how to get yourself out of certain situations ... a practical function'. This didactic intent was also one of the functions of fairy tales from the late seventeenth century, but there is a difference. We would expect a clear link between conduct and consequence, but in the Oluf ballad-type, while there is an implicit recommendation of certain moral stances such as honesty and loyalty, the ultimate outcome for Sir Oluf is an end to life. The ballad does define acceptable behaviour, upholds the status quo and is concerned particularly with human relationships, but we shall never know if it was composed with a specific meaning in mind.

Its audiences would bring to each performance their own meanings as fitting their own existence. It records something of the harshness of life (and death) consequent on the fatalistic turn of mind, evident in the characters of the song, but also shared by its audience. Each of the characters shows an acceptance of his or her fate, with no power to influence the future; Goethe removes the acceptance and increases the tragedy. The actions recorded by the traditional ballads are free—Oluf is given a choice, but he moves forward to an inevitable end; there is no self-determinism here. The ballads deal with an existence which is not necessarily fair but which has to be accepted. They define the role of the mother and wife: to question and support, with a love that is ultimately self-sacrificing, but which could not change anything. We have some respite in Chapter 4, however, as we move to a survey of a ballad-type featuring a young man whose determination to outwit the elf-woman achieves some success.

Chapter 4 ‘Elvehøj’ and ‘Älvefärd’: companion ballads to ‘Elveskud’

Chapter 4 continues with a ballad about a young man on a journey who by chance meets up with elf-maidens, enticing him to dance. If we take ‘Elveskud’ and give it a happy ending, then we almost have the Danish ballad ‘Elvehøj’ and its Swedish equivalent, ‘Älvefärd’. Much of the interest lies in how the young man who is the hero of this ballad achieves supremacy over the elf-maidens where Oluf could not. Grundtvig considered this to be one of the most beautiful ballads, its lyricism accounting for its international fame: ‘Med Rette er denne Vise bleven regnet mellem vor Folkedigtningens skjønneste Blomster og har opnaaet stor Berømmelse baade inden- og udenlands’ (Rightly this ballad has been counted among the most beautiful flowers of our people’s poetry, and has achieved great fame both at home and abroad; *DgF* II: 105). Yet it is a ballad which has not quite captured the imagination as did ‘Elveskud’, even though it has travelled widely. The Danish version was translated by Herder into German (1774), and into English by Jamieson (1806) and by Lewis from Herder (1801), in the process upgrading the poor young man to a knight, with a warning about travelling home from court at night dressed in gold and silver. King VI of Denmark commissioned J. L. Holdberg to write a play, ‘Elvehøj’, for the wedding of his daughter in 1828 which continues to be performed at the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen. While Holdberg took his basic idea from the ballads ‘Elvehøj’ and ‘Elveskud’, he focused on elfin activities within the elf-mound rather than on the narrative of the ballads. Hans Christian Anderson wrote a fairy tale in 1805, ‘Elvehoi’, and the celebrated elfin mound has now become a tourist spot in Stevns, Denmark.¹ It is probably an early Bronze Age burial site, but it is best known for its connection to the ballad.

This chapter looks firstly at the Danish and then the Swedish versions which, while few in number, show significant differences both within and between the national types. What is of particular interest in this ballad is the variety of style within each version:

¹ http://www.kulturarv.dk/1001fortaellinger/da_DK/elverhoej; accessed 26 August 2013.

besides the narrative, the ballad incorporates a lyrical section, an admonitory stanza, and an opening in the first person. The chapter will consider the variations in the Danish ballad first, and then the Swedish and, in the Swedish discussion, will look at the symbolism of the cock-crow.

The narrative pathway of each national corpus is outlined in Table 4. The note below the table highlights the divergences between the versions: the events integral to the Danish version which are not found in the Swedish.

Table 4 A comparative table of narrative pathways in Versions A, B, C of the Danish tradition, and Versions A and C of the Swedish corpus

Narrative Pathways	Sw A	Sw C	Dan A	Dan B	Dan C
Frame: young man introduces himself.	A	C	A		C
Young man, resting head on elf-hill, approached by elf-maidens.	A	C trolls	A	B	C
They waken him and invite him to dance.	A		A	B	C
One elf sits on a golden chair.			A		
She sings the most beautiful song, enchanting all around her:	A	C	A	B	C
• affecting the stream and the fish, the birds	A		A	B	C
• the wild animals,	A		A		
They invite him to stay with them, offering inducements.		C		B	C
He sits by while the dancing continues, refusing to interact.	A		A	B	C
The elves threaten to kill him if he does not stay with them.				B	C
A maiden brings him a drink, advising him not to partake. He obeys, offering to rescue her from the elves. She tells him that is impossible.			A		
He says God has come to his help by sending the dawn to waken the cockerel; otherwise he would have ended up in the mountain with the elves.	A luck	C	A	B	C
Advice to young men not to linger by an elf-hill.			A	B	C

Table 4: Swedish B, with only four stanzas, is not included.

The table shows two significant areas of divergence: the threat of death to be found only in Danish Versions B and C, and the introduction of the young man's sister (Danish Version A only). Additionally, the Danish B variants begin with the narrative and not the opening frame of all other Danish and Swedish versions.

4.1 *'Elvehøj'*

Grundtvig records five versions of DgF 46 'Elvehøj', TSB A65, four of them from sixteenth-century collections, and makes reference to others in the nineteenth century.

Grundtvig took Version A from one of the earliest Danish ballad manuscripts, Jens Billes

Visebog (known to Grundtvig as Sten Bille's Haandskrift). The manuscript dates to the mid-sixteenth century, but Steenstrup places the text earlier, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, citing as evidence the forms of speech used, the lyrical elements and the domestic rather than epic scope of the narrative ([1891] 1968: 62). The sources of the B variants are listed as Ba from Langebeks Foliohaandskrift Nr. 61 (1610); Bb from Reenberg's Haandskrift Nr. 132 (1700); Bc from Thotts Foliohaandskrift Nr. 132 (1750; dates of manuscripts vary); Bd (Vedel II Nr. 9, 1591) and Be (Queen Sofie's Visebog Nr. 16, 1584–98). All the B variants are scribal copies, aligning line-for-line with each other, with differences only in minor details and spelling. Version C, collected in West Jutland by E.T. Kristensen between 1868 and 1877, again with a change in occasional detail and with updated spelling, would seem to be based on the 46B variants.

While 'Elvehøj' sits in Grundtvig's collection as a companion piece to 'Elveskud', its emotional core is more restricted. In the oldest version, DgF 46A, the story is told within eighteen stanzas of a chance meeting of a handsome youth and three elf-maidens. The ballad differs from 'Elveskud' in several essential details: all versions are written in first person narrative, have a happy ending, and finish with a stanza devoted to advice for other youths, all of which, according to Dal (1967: 262) are indicative of composition in the late Middle Ages. The tone of this ballad in all its versions is more lyrical than 'Elveskud'. Versions A and C include a stanza preliminary to the action, where the hero of the ballad introduces himself and the purpose of his journey, while the B variants go straight into the narrative. The use of this frame-narrative in A and C with an introduction to contextualize, and its final words of advice, provides a more satisfying structure. The elf-maidens target a 'fauer' (fair) man again, but this time of lower status than Oluf; he describes himself in A as 'fattiig' (poor) and addresses his advice to the 'unger-suendt', a 'svend' being a fellow or journeyman. We assume that he has strayed into elfin territory, again 'rossens lundt', the rose's grove. Oluf (DgF 47) is on his way to invite people to his wedding; the young man here is vaguer. He is riding 'att gillye' (to a party, A), and 'til Hov' (to the manor, in C). Spatial and temporal settings are liminal as is the protagonist's own condition: he is in the

wilderness, between places of civilization and culture, close to a mountain inhabited by elves, trespassing outside his own space, just before dawn in all versions, and on the verge of sleep. In need of rest, he unwisely lays his head down on 'en høff' (a hill). As his leaden eyes close, three 'iomffruer' (young ladies) arrive, not identified yet in Version A as elf-maidens:

ther kom tre iomffruer ganngindis ther udt,
thi willed gerne met mig talle DgF 46A 2

three maidens arrived, walking out of that place
they would like to talk to me

While there is no reference to the mountain out of which they emerge in Variants A, Bd, Be and C, the allusion instead to 'Elvehøj' (elfin-hill) is an early indicator of the supernatural to come.

The calling forth of emotions is central to the experience of fiction and contributes to its popularity and longevity. The emotional core of Version A is the most complex; it is interesting to see how this is achieved. The audience is invited to identify with the protagonist as the narrative is told in the first person, and to appreciate the beauty of the lyrical section and the well-balanced structure ending in surprise. Only here do we have an episode at the end of the ballad where the protagonist is rescued by his sister, who appears as a maiden with a drink. She advises him to pretend to drink, and he obeys. He offers to rescue her from the company of elves, but she tells him this is impossible. We understand his dilemma, the choice between maintaining his integrity or death, but does the ballad enable sympathy? Curiosity and interest are aroused in the first section: we recognise how this *poor* man could see the attraction of the elf-maidens as a 'stoll aff guldt' (golden chair, A) is brought out, but the desire is not one-way: they have wealth but need something of the human too. He is 'eenn fattiig unnger-suenndt', both poor and young and possibly, therefore, inexperienced, and now the focus of elf attention and not, apparently, seeing any need to escape.

A show of power closely follows on this show of affluence. The elf-maidens' supernatural might is confirmed in all versions when their invitation to dance is enhanced

by a song which holds the natural world in thrall. There is a stillness in Version A in deference to the elf-maiden:

thi stride stromme thi stillediiis ther-vedtt,
som før woer vonntt att rynne DgF 46A 6

the rushing stream calmed thereby,
that before was wont to run

Her singing calms the stream, its fish and the wild animals in the vicinity, inspiring a breathless anticipation in the audience; conversely in Variants B and C Nature responds energetically:

Alle de Fiske, i Floden vaare,
de legte met deris Hale:
Alle smaa Fule, i Skoffuen vaare,
Begynte at quidre i Dale DgF 46Bd 6

All the fish that were in the river,
they played with their tails:
All the small birds, that were in the wood,
Began to sing in the valley.

The maiden's singing makes the fish flip their tails in joy and the birds in the wood sing or spread their wings. The dance begins, but in all versions our young man cannot be tempted: he does not move,

Oc støtte sig paa sit Suerd. DgF 46Bd 9

And rested on my sword

He conforms to the inertia he sees in the environment around him (A), but not in compliance to its acts of homage. He will not anger the elves by attempting escape, but now remembers what he has been taught: he maintains a stoic silence while displaying in his sword a sign of manhood and power. Lavater in his treatise *De Spectris, Lemuribus, et magnis atque insolitis Frigoribus* (Geneva, 1575), warned men about not speaking to members of the other world: 'Ne venias in colloquutionem cum illis spiritibus, ne interrogas eos quid vel reddendum, vel faciendum, vel quid futurum fit. Ne quaeras qui sint' (III, vii: 218) (You should not enter into conversation with those spirits, neither ask them what must be yielded or done, or what the future will be. Do not ask who they are). Kvaerndrup sees the youth's silence as an indication of his courage: 'dette svarer til ungersvendens heroisk tavse

modstand' (this represents the young man's heroic silent resistance'; 2006: 98). A drawn sword is frequently symbolic of erotic potential or involvement (Jacobsen and Leavy 1988: 73). Here the young man rests on his sword which symbolically remains not in use to denote his resistance to temptation. In response, feminine allurements are ditched and the threats we saw in 'Elveskud' take their place: if he will not communicate, the weapon on which he is so reliant will 'legge thi hierttt y dualle' (put your heart to sleep). There is no similar threat of death in Version A, where the focus at this point in the ballad is thrown on the sister. Here, the young man refuses to be moved, until he sees a maid he recognises carrying a silver bowl of mead, and it is she who will rescue him:

'Thu ladtt hannom saa løstelliig tiill mundtt,
 thu ladtt hannom att brystiitt rynnnde' DgF 46A 12

'Put it so cunningly to your mouth,
 let it run down your chest'

It is her advice to spill the elfin mead which saves him from an eternity with the elf-queen under the mountain. His (sham) quaff causes an immediate response in the elf who claps her hands in joy as, in line with Classical underworld myths, the taking in of food or liquid damns the respondent to an eternity beneath the earth, or induces forgetfulness, as also in 'Hr. Bøsmere i Elvehjem'. But it is a woman's cunning rather than his own brawn that helps the youth to an escape which he could not have effected without her. The shock to the audience, however, is that escape is not as easy as it looks: the woman is his sister, who is now a member of the elfin crew. He offers, in turn, to rescue her, but she has made her commitment to the other side. In the streamlined ending of Version A there is no time for poignancy at the realization firstly that his sister has been trapped by the elves, and secondly that she has saved his life but he cannot do the same for her. The cock awakens, and the rest is implied.

If we consider the ballad versions as two groups, structurally and thematically there is a marked difference between Version A and the others. The sister motif in A is not repeated, and the maidens are quickly identified as elves in the remaining ballads, and so they have to make more of an effort to persuade the young man to join their company than

when he was unaware of their identity. The enchantment of nature is followed by a series of the kinds of attempts at temptation traditionally linked with elves. They here offer gifts of power and intellect, and the opportunity for wealth, in an effort to persuade him to join their dance, with all that may entail. If he will stay with them, they will teach him to read runes and to tie wild animals to the oak tree and be able to make the dragon fly up from its hoard of gold. A verbal response is demanded; refusal to speak to the elf-maids will result in a need for greater sword-power than the protagonist has on show, but the young man will be aware of the taboo forbidding violence towards women. The ballads in this group move quickly to their close, with no sister to advise, but instead divine intervention. The dance begins, but 'Elvehøj' avoids tragedy: the young man faced with abduction into the mountain (in all versions) is again miraculously saved but in a way different from Version A: he attributes his deliverance to God, who sent dawn and the cockerel to herald it, banishing the shadows and the elves with them. This swift movement in the B and C versions from the lyrical section to the threat to the young man's life as he refuses to comply, followed by the awakening of the cock, provides dramatic intensity of a different type from the ending tinged with sadness and then denial that characterizes the A version.

4.1.1 *The ballad's relationship with its audience*

The final stanza of all five versions concludes with advice aimed at every young man who rides out on his master's errands that he should not linger nor sleep below the elfin hill where the speaker fared so badly, a direct address which is unusual within the ballad tradition. We expect an impersonal narrative with no (or very little) intrusion from the narrator. Here we have a ballad in which the singer uses an agent within the text to tell the story in the first person, while he remains outside the narrative, imparting no direct judgement. Our narrator is highly intrusive in 'Elvehøj', for very particular reasons. The ballad becomes the product of a particular consciousness in order to enable the performer to enforce more strongly the advice at the end. It insists on emotional engagement on the audience's part, promoting empathy and enabling greater psychological insight—which in

turn give greater weight to the advice given. The character of the youth is sharply delineated. He sets himself up in clear contrast to the elves. What they have is denied to him: gold, power, social integration and control of the situation as suggested by the motif of the square- or round-dance. They have their sweethearts; he is alone, standing forlornly with head on hand. But his honesty appeals to the listener: he admits (twice) to poverty in version A, and an inability to read and write suggested in B, C, both implying a low social order, in contrast to Sir Oluf. He also promises openness to his audience: ‘thett will ieg for sanndingenn siige’ (this I say to you in truth; A), but this has become pretty much a commonplace in the ballad form and works, like repetition, primarily to allow time for the singer to remember his next line. With ‘thett will ieg for sanndingenn siige’, the young man needs to impress on his audience the seriousness of his message. His tale of lying down to sleep on an elf-hill and subsequently being desired by a beautiful and rich elfin-girl is even more unlikely than being caught by elves when journeying at night (as in ‘Elveskud’), particularly as the ballads contain warnings about the elves and their territory. The singer of Version A draws the listeners’ attention to the idea that behind this fiction is a moral that young men would benefit from listening to: that a serious disregard for distractions of this type is the way to success.

4.1.2 *The presentation of the young man and its message for all young men*

Suggestion of vanity in the young man—all three versions agree he is young and presentable (‘fauer’ and ‘skjønen’)—is avoided as the words are put not into his own mouth but reported in the address of the beautiful elf-maiden. While he appears to be resolute in his determination not to be seduced, the lyricism in his description of those who are, underlined by incremental repetition (which is much more in evidence here than in ‘Elveskud’), indicates some impact on him as well as on nature. He is rewarded for his altruism and courage in his desire to save his sister (Version A), and for his apparent helplessness (had God not helped him, he would have been destined to spend the rest of his days with the elves) and for his honesty (all versions). Where the elves have appealed to

possible greed in ‘Elveskud’, it is to need here, so making their offers more difficult to reject. His instinct towards his sister is sound: to believe her, to act on her advice, and then to try to save her. His simple faith (in all versions) is rewarded. Stanza 17 (A) seems, however, to record his denial of his sister’s part in his rescue, perhaps as a consequence of his realization that she is now a member of the elfin crew. We note that he attributes his being saved not to dawn, but to God’s sending the dawn. Ultimately in Version A, glory has been removed from the woman who has sacrificed her human nature, and instead given to Nature and God who made the cock to crow.

The ballad challenges the behaviour of youth, through direct address and through example of one who stoically refuses to be tempted and one, his sister, who succumbs. The focus is moved to the didactic: evil is attractive and, once things go wrong, you can try to run to the ends of the world to escape, but you are always brought back, expressed poignantly and lyrically in Version A:

Tu før miig alldrig saa lanngtt aff leedtt
oc indtt-tiill werdizenns ennde:
ieg kommer ey hiidtt igenn
allt før sollenn stannder op saa renne. DgF 46A 16

But for me, you would never get me so far off the path
and until the end of the world:
I come not here again
never before the sun rises up so clearly.

The balladeer issues a clear warning to young men not to stray, and to find their future wife within the confines of what they know. We have a similar theme elsewhere. ‘Hr. Bøsmer i Elvehjem’ (DgF 45) was published by Grundtvig in the same group as ‘Elvehøj’ and ‘Elveskud’ and, in many respects, they are companion pieces. Within this group of three ballads we have a chance meeting of elf and human which ends in death (‘Elveskud’), one ending in the triumph of the human (‘Elvehøj’), and in ‘Hr. Bøsmer’ a deliberate assignation where the man foolishly, or at least naively, trades in his human existence for that of the elves. We shall see in Chapter 7 a series of Scottish ballads where the humans are, like Bøsmer, very receptive to the idea of following the elves.

‘Hr. Bøsmer’ is a ballad of a young man sought out in his own home by an ‘ellekuone’ (elf-wife) or ‘havfru’ (mermaid, literally water-woman)—this, of course, is the

central paradox of the oral ballad, that it is characterized both by uniformity and by variation (Syndergaard 2009: 40). She arranges to meet Bøsmer by a bridge. Described as 'liestelig', sly, cunning, she appeals not just to Bøsmer's sexual nature, but to his sense of honour. She makes him promise to comply: 'Du gier thett, her Bøsmer, for dynn thro' ('You do it, Sir Bøsmer, on your faith' 45a, 12). Indeed, she achieves the desired effect; the details implicitly imprinted on his subconscious are of her beauty and this promise. Twice he justifies (to a comrade or to his mother; the identity of the listener is not specified) his journey to meet her with reference to an assurance he cannot break: 'Ieg haffuer hinder loffuet alt paa min thro' (I have promised her on my troth; 45a, 16) and: 'saa weslig skaall ieg holde mynn thro' (certainly shall I keep my promise; 45a, 19). It becomes more serious, since, as he is a knight, his promise is made not just before his earthly lord, but also before God:

'Min drøm den gaar, some here Gud well ...
some here Gud maa' DgF 45a 18, 19

'My dream is going to happen, as Lord God wants it ...
as Lord God wills it.'

The sense of compulsion comes through the second auxiliary ('maa'), which to Bøsmer has the force of a speech act. Bøsmer thinks of her as an 'iumfru', *jomfru* or maiden (he sees what he wants to see), until he is plunged by her into the raging water and into what he now realises is an 'eluer-hieem' (elf home). In line with 'Elvehøj', there is an attempt to keep the young man in the elfin home by means of a magic drink; this time it succeeds. In 'Elvehøj', the young man triumphs over temptation, whereas Bøsmer does not even understand that he is faced with it, and certainly cannot confess to it. He thinks he knows better, but is either foolish or naïve, intent on sexual gratification when he knows the danger. The elf-queen, and subsequently mermaid, while ostensibly non-human has, in fact, many human traits; there is a blurring of the boundaries. The 'hero' of the song is not obviously a more moral creature than the elf. His inability to stand fast against temptation, his unreliable judgement, his lack of heed to his family, his deficient understanding of his own responses and motives, and his inability to admit his 'sin'—so necessary for redemption—do not influence us in his favour. In this ballad, clearly the elf is a symbol for

the erotic side of the psyche, present in both male and female. The didactic element is not as overt as in ‘Elvehøj’, but it is unmistakable in Bøsmer’s refusal to listen to warnings. There is ultimately no escape but neither is there any grief, real or threatened, for Bøsmer, such as we get in ‘Elveskud’ and ‘Elvehøj’. Bøsmer, therefore, does not attract the level of sympathy which we give to Hr. Oluf in ‘Elveskud’ and instead is held up as an example of foolish wrong-headedness and as a warning of the consequences of wrong choices, even of overreaching.

If the elf-maidens came to represent women, they are not painted in a positive light: beautiful temptresses and seductresses who will promise the earth in their determination to get their own way, and when they do not, offer harm. Men may need to be protected from them by God. Gender roles preserve hegemonic status: the sister in ‘Elvehøj’ is portrayed as a weaker creature than her male counterpart, succumbing to temptation more easily and then standing as a warning. While our young man in ‘Elvehøj’ is saved from harm in the ballad, social norms are maintained. He is rewarded with his life for his courage and faith, but he is not tangibly different at the end of the song from at the beginning; he is still a poor young man. Version A puts the spotlight on *pietas*: the qualities of selflessness, loyalty and duty to God and to the family. The remaining versions shift this focus away from the family to consider man and temptation, in particular man’s response to woman. The young man in ‘Elvehøj’ behaves with propriety: when he realises the danger, he refuses to respond or draw his sword against a woman or run, preferring to put his trust in his creator.

Not all of the ballad characters do the same. In DgF 48 ‘Hr. Magnus og Bjærgtrolden’ (TSB A59), once again it is the maiden who, in contravention of the rules of courtship, makes all the running:

hun bød ham Solv og det rødeste Guld,
om han vilde hos hende sove.

DgF48 A 1

she offered him silver and the reddest gold,
if he would sleep with her.

The directness of the language appeals to the buyer of street literature; this version was found in a *flyveblad*, a broad-sheet, created for a specific market. Its bold opening, the

language used by Hr. Magnus when speaking to the woman ('... du er jo en [saa] styg Bjærgtrold, som man vil ... finde' ('...Oh yes! You are such an ugly mountain-troll as one will find'), and the drawing of his sword and chopping her into rather gruesome tiny pieces, all point to a different kind of man from the mannerly central figure of 'Elvehøj'. The portrayal of the woman is deliberately negative. She has no redeeming features: she controls the conversation as she wants to control Magnus; she is bold where she should be retiring; she is sexually motivated; and she is ugly. The hero does not fare much better. While in some respects he is constructed in a similar mould to the hero of 'Elvehøj', capable and courageous, Hr. Magnus himself does not behave in a proper way in the presence of a 'lady'; not that he rejects her, but in the way that he does so. Here we have a hero who is reliant only on self to escape the troll's powers. There is no sister to give advice or God to send the dawn here. We have a portrayal of a world entirely without God, a much more ruthless and machismo one than that of 'Elvehøj', where action is uncompromising and aggressive. In 'Hr. Magnus og Bjærgtrolden', hegemonic masculinity is promoted and the female suppressed through both words and actions. The man holds all the power. Audience response, whether congratulatory or critical, is dictated by gender. In the eyes of Hr. Magnus the outcome is successful; self-reliance and decisive action rather than luck, faith or gentility are the cornerstones of his conduct.

4.2 'Älvefärd'

In 'Elveskud', the realism of the mother's concern for her son and her fatalistic acceptance of his fate, followed by the apprehension, distraction and grief of the fiancée balance the male fantasy of the first section of the ballad and enable audience empathy particularly for the women. In 'Elvehøj', we do not have the grounding provided by the women's roles. Instead, we are asked to suspend disbelief even further as the initial situation of the encounter with the elves is intensified with the enchantment of the environment. Yet despite this lack of realism, or because of it, the charm of the piece and its consequent escapist value have ensured lasting popularity. In the Swedish versions, however, there is no concluding moral, so the message communicated in DgF 46 is not so overt. In the

Danish, Swedish and Icelandic versions of the Oluf ballad, Oluf must die whether he dances or not. Is there a lesson to be learned by all young men from the hero of ‘Elvehøj’ and Älvefärd’, who also meets the elves, but stands steadfast and silent against temptation, and ultimately prevails?

There are three Swedish versions of ‘Elvehøj’, SMB 31 ‘Älvefärd’, in Jonsson’s collection: two complete texts of eight four-line stanzas each (A, C), and a fragment of half that length (B). Each one is very different from the others. The oldest version (A) was collected from a farmer’s wife in Västergötland in the 1670s and, as with the Danish, the narrative is in the first person. The opening is gentle: a young man riding out in the evening lying down to rest—and then an enigmatic refrain: ‘Sedan Jagh henne först sågh’ (Since I first saw her); Dal assumes the unspoken continuation is ‘I have not been able to forget her’ (Dal 1967: 262). The traditional location for the elves is used, Rosenlund. Our hero’s lyrical description of events suggests he is not unduly disturbed, as he lies ‘vnder en lind så gröen, Mine ögon fingo en dwahla’ (under a lime-tree so green, my eyes sunk in a daze). This lyrical section is found in the Danish versions, but here is more condensed. When an elf-maiden sings, the world around her responds:

der wedh stadnad’ den stride Ström
som föer war wahn at rinna

Stadnade då den stride Ström
som föer war wahn ar rinna
Och hinden medh sine brune håår
förgath hwart hoon skulle springa.

SMB 31A 5,6

there stood still the flowing stream
that was used to run.

Stood still then the flowing stream
that was used to run
And the hind with hair so brown
forgot where she should go.

Next comes the secret of success which Herr Oluf in ‘Elveskud’ needs to learn: the ‘fager Unger Swen’ (fine young man) resists through immobility and faith (B, C). He refuses to be drawn in or respond in any way:

Jagh stegh Migh af Jorden Vp,
och stödde Migh widh mit swerd

SMB 31A 7

I stood up from the ground
And I leaned on my sword

As with all the Danish versions, both Swedish versions B and C attribute his salvation to God's intervention, Version B referring twice to 'Guds nåd' (God's grace) that had made the cock wake up. God's protection is not mentioned in Version A, however, but luck is substituted: 'had' icke lyckan varit Migh så godh' (had luck not been so good to me), then he would have slept in the hill that night. Is this a secular rendering of the story, or is the religious element already implicitly present? The traditional symbol of the crowing cockerel may be significant.

4.2.1 *The symbol of the cock-crow*

Symbols are frequently used in the ballads (see Thompson's extensive *Motif-Index*, 1955–58), some more obvious (the bridge for a transitional space, the forest as a place of confusion and change, the combing of unbound hair as a symbol of sexual readiness; Boyes 2004: 53) than others. They represent ideas that are implied rather than stated explicitly and which lead the audience into deeper textual and social meaning, provided the symbols can be accessed. This ability to decode depends on the listener's cultural understanding (Atkinson, 1992: 370) and whether it is shared with the singer. The individual or group or community could access this layer of meaning emotionally, intellectually, culturally, spiritually, if they are able to decode it; if not, the superficial meaning of the ballad is taken. In all versions of 'Älvefärd', the crowing of the cock heralds the dawn, which brings with it the disappearance of the elves and, therefore, the salvation of the young man. The cock-crow is attributed to the intervention of God in all versions except for Swedish A; the theme of the saving grace of God would seem not to be applicable in this version. The symbol of the cock, however, was not uncommon in the Middle Ages, often linked with Christ's nativity and miraculous powers. The restoration to life of a dead and roasted cockerel frequently appeared in ballads and tales where an innocent man is threatened with his life but is saved by this miracle. Ballads such as the Danish 'Jesusbarnet, Stefan og Herodes' (DgF 46), and the eighteenth-century Danish broadside 'Jeg veed en jomfru saa

smal som et vand' (*DgF* III: 881) and the Swedish 'Stefansviser' (*DgF* III: 882) were popular. These, and the British equivalents, among them 'St. Stephen and Herod' (Child 22) and 'The Carnal and the Crane' (Child 55) were used by preaching friars to illustrate the story of Christ's birth as found in the Apocryphal Gospels (Guilfoyle 1978: 215). In each ballad, St. Stephen sees the nativity star over Bethlehem and comes to report its meaning to King Herod. In his disbelief, Herod retorts that there is as much chance of that being true as there is of his roast cockerel returning to life, whereupon it does so.

'Þer is a chyld in Bedlem born xal helpyn vs at our nede.'

'Þat is al so soþ, Steuyn, al so soþ, iwys,
As this capoun crowe xal that lyþ here in myn dysh.'

Þat word was not so sone seyð, þat word in that halle,
Þe capoun crew *Cristus natus est!* among þe lordes alle.

Child 22 8–10

The distribution of these ballads and others similar in Spanish, Breton, Wendish and French,² where a rooster is resurrected in response to a miracle (but not all with a connection to Christ), would suggest that those who were culturally aware would perhaps make a link between the miraculous saving of the young man in 'Älvefärd' from the forces of evil by a cockerel—and God or Christ.

4.2.2 *Temptation and choice*

The hero of Version C, collected in Östergötland in the 1840s, is met by 'stora bergetroll', a couple of large mountain trolls. The gifts which they try to tempt the young man with are quite different. They offer seven pairs of snow-white oxen, their likes not to be found in 'Paradislund' (the grove of Paradise), and rather similar to the twelve oxen unlike any to be found anywhere else in the world in Version B; and also twelve horses which have never felt saddle or bridle; seven mills which mint gold; and a shirt so fine that it is sewn with silk. This is the only version where the young man responds (with a rejection):

De gåfvorna vore väl goda att ta emot
Om du vore en kristeliger qvinna

SMB 31Ca 7

The gifts, they would probably be good to receive

² For the different national versions of the ballad, see Child's headnote to the ballad in I: 233–41.

If you were a Christian woman.

Gifts from trolls are to be avoided. Version C also closes with a eulogy to God for his deliverance:

Om inte min Herre Gud har bevarat mig,
Och beskyddat mig under sina vingar
Så hafver jag legat uti helvetis ström
Allt för den okristeliga qvinna SMB 31Ca 8

If my Lord God had not preserved me,
And kept me under his wing,
So I would have lain in hell's flood,
All because of that ungodly woman.

All three versions have a heavy focus on temptation and choice. While B and C record offers of gifts, A is the most erotic. The elf-maidens parade out individually, touching his cheek, whispering in his ear, fawning on his good looks. The phallic symbol, his sword, is not unsheathed, but remains on the ground, signalling his lack of interest. There are echoes here of the tradition within the sagas of the man having physically to overcome a female ogre or giantess, the process identified as some sort of initiation into manhood, as found, for example, in the Eddic poem 'Skírnismál' (Kress 2002: 83).

As in the Danish versions, here we have a role model, a young man who refuses to be stirred in the face of any temptation, and whose choice is clear. The two full-length Swedish versions (A and C) are shorter than their Danish counterparts. The sections not to be found in Version A, the oldest attested version of 'Älvefärd' (see Table 4B) are inducements, threats, and advice. There are no offers of gifts, and neither do the elf-maidens suggest the young man's life is in danger. The tone of Version A is quieter, finishing with thanks for his preservation, rather than advice to other young men in his predicament. There is little sense of urgency or even danger here; the implication is that this young man is able to cope with the sexual inducements on offer. Had he succumbed, 'så hade Jagh soffwit i Bergen den Natt allt hoos dhe Elfwe qwinnor' (so had I slept in the hill that night all with the elf-women; A, 8), but his fate in C is more explicit: 'så hafver jag legat uti helvetis ström' (so would I have lain in hell's flood, C, 8).

While there is no Icelandic version of 'Älvefärd', the relationship to Ólafur's ballad, 'Kvæði af Ólafi liljurós' (Chapter 3.3) is interesting: resilience, integrity, and piety are to be

found in the hero of each ballad. Chapter 5 sees some of these characteristics, but now in a woman as we move to examine how relationships are depicted between the human Agnete and her merman.

Chapter 5 The Agnete ballads of Denmark and Sweden

We have seen in ‘Elvehøj’ that survival is possible when faced with the temptations of the elves: the power of the supernatural is not always supreme over men, and while we do not fear for the fate of characters such as Hr. Tønne (DgF 34) or Hr. Magnus (DgF 48), other male protagonists do, from folly or weakness, ultimately succumb. Do the ladies fare any better? To discover the fate of Agnete in her liaison with a merman, we move next to TSB A47, the Danish ballad DgF 38 ‘Agnete og havmanden’ (‘Agnete and the merman’) and its Swedish counterpart ‘Agneta och havsmannen’ (SMB 19) where Agnete’s fortune depends not so much on the ballad type as the individual version. The change from elf to ‘havmanden’ or ‘havsmannen’ does not diminish the relevance of this material as there would be little distinction between the terms.

The Agnete ballad is arguably the most fascinating of the supernatural ballads in the complexity and the variety of its presentations (Danish and Swedish) of Agnete and her merman. It is possible to see Agnete as a woman desperate for love and independence, or as a malcontent; as naïve, or harsh; as one who learns to survive, or is taken back by the merman, or even killed. What is constant through all the versions is a sense of confusion as she struggles to determine her own future. This chapter analyses a range of versions from each country including the E version of both the Danish and Swedish corpora, each interesting for being outside the tradition. We shall endeavour to tease out meanings with reference to two nineteenth-century writers who, themselves, were influenced by the ballad. The tale of Agnete became popular outside the ballad, especially as Hans Christian Andersen adapted it into a dramatic poem (1833), and interest was revived in 1842 with the composition of the music and score for an opera based on the Agnete story, *Liden Kirsten* (Shore 2008: 159–90). This chapter will also look at Ibsen’s adaptation for the stage and Matthew Arnold’s use of the story to critique the church.

5.1 ‘Agnete og havmanden’

Grundtvig’s collection provides eighteen versions and, in addition, multiple variants of A and D. Three are *flyveblader* (broadsheets) and all dated versions are from mid to late nineteenth century (except Ax, 1902), the earliest date recorded being 1841 (E), which is a very non-traditional form of the ballad. Piø (1985: 149) insists this ballad originates from the end of the eighteenth century, as based on an earlier tale, though the debate on dating continues (Bredsdorff 1991: 67–80). Only four are not complete (B, G, H, O). The ballad is distributed widely throughout Denmark, and we do not have the clustering that we find with ‘Elveskud’. Even the nine A variants collected on Zealand are spread throughout the island, and only four of the thirteen D variants are in a cluster in South Jutland.

Table 5A DgF 38 ‘Agnete og Havsmænden’: narrative types

Group 1	DgF 38	Versions
Scene 1	A young girl (named most commonly Agnete or Angenete) meets a merman or sea-king on the shore, who asks her to accompany him into the depths of the sea.	A, C, D, E, G, K, L, N, O, Q, R, S, T
1B	Uncertainty whether the girl goes of her own free-will	H, M, Q
Scene 2	Agnete sits by her baby’s cradle listening to church bells in the land above.	A, C, D, E, F, H, I, K, L, M, N, O, Q, R, S, T
Scene 3	The merman gives permission for her to visit on the condition that she returns to their children; he stops her ears and mouth and delivers her back on to <i>terra firma</i> .	A, D, E, H, I, L, M, N, O, Q, R, S, T
3B	Further conditions are applied by the merman	B, C, H, I, K, S
Scene 4	She meets her mother at the church who enquires where she has been for the last eight years.	A, B, D, E, H, K, L, M, N, Q, R, S, T
4B	Her mother enquires about the marriage, in particular what the merman gave her in exchange for her honour. Agnete lists presents received.	A, D, E, H, I, L, M, N, R, S, T
Scene 5	The merman appears, exhorting her to think of her children who are missing her.	A, C, D, E, H, K, L, M, N, O, Q, R, S, T
Scene 6	Agneta renounces her former life and her children, preferring to remain with her mother.	A, C, D, E, I, K, L, M, N, Q, R, S, T

We see that the ballad is reasonably stable. Versions B, G, H, O are not complete. Areas of note are Scenes 1B and 4B, discussed below, and the variety of ending, see Table 5B.

‘Agnete og havmanden’ relates the story of a young woman who seeks excitement, and so leaves her home to go to live with a merman; after several years she has borne him several children (see Table 5A). The central conflict arises when she seeks permission to return to the church near her old home. The protagonist begins the ballad once again in liminal geographical space, on a bridge or on the shore, between her earthly world and the watery home of the merman, but is open to suggestion and temptation, is vulnerable, rebellious, and on the point of leaving her own community. Two readings of Agnete are possible at the start of the ballad, either as simply a young woman in search of love, or a malcontent, for whom independence is everything, who wants something more than her community offers and who plays a part in her own seduction. In one version (C) she is crying when we meet her; in another (H) she is forbidden by her mother to go down to the shore because of the predatory merman, but she goes anyway. In most versions, she offers no resistance when presented with a merman’s love; she ‘gjærne’ (willingly) agrees to be the merman’s true-love, provided he will take her to the ocean deeps so that her parents would not find out (D, E, N, P). Except for Versions H and Q, there is little discussion and no need for persuasion. Agnete is used as a type to warn young girls of what might happen if they ignore the advice, control and choice of their parents and pursue instead a passionate encounter with someone outside the community. She remains for eight years, producing the traditional seven children in that time. Table 5A notes, however, a variation in the opening of Versions H, M and Q. In these versions the singers have considered different scenarios: now the meeting with the Other is between a merman and a virtuous Agnete who does not overtly agree to a liaison (M, where there is no conversation between the merman and the girl), or who actually says ‘No’, an experiment not to be found in the Swedish versions discussed in the next section. In H, M and Q, no permission is elicited or given to transport her to the bottom of the sea. In H, Agnete is warned by a parent of the danger of the Havmanden when she asks permission to go to the beach: ‘for saa kommer Havmanden og tager dig’ (as the merman will come and take you). She goes not to the

beach, but to the bridge (still curious, perhaps), where he appears. She specifically refuses to go with him:

'Og hør nu, Agnete, hvad jeg siger dig:
og kom nu og følg hjem med mig!'

'O nej saamænd det vil jeg ej:
imorgen jeg Bryllup skal holde'

Han stopped hendes Øren, han stopped hendes Mund,
saa førte han hende til den engellandske Bund. DgF 38H 4–6

'And listen now, Agnete, to what I'm telling you:
and come now and accompany me home!'

'Oh no, by my troth I will not:
tomorrow I must hold my wedding.'

He stopped her ears, he stopped her mouth,
Then he led her to the English sea-bottom.

The situation in Version Q is similar. Angnete is standing on a bridge when she receives the offer 'vil du ikke lade dig fæste til mig?' (will you not let yourself be betrothed to me?).

Again, she refuses, in words reminiscent of Oluf's refusal in 'Elveskud':

Nej, hverken jeg vil, ikke heller jeg kan,
Thi jeg kan ikke leve paa Havsens Bund. DgF 38Q 3

No, neither will I nor may I,
Because I cannot live on the bottom of the sea.

The merman will not take a refusal, however, and proceeds to give her gifts for 'det hun skuld' gi' ham sin Ære og Tro ... for det hun skuld' være Allerkæresten sin' (for that she should give him her honour and faith ... for that she should be his beloved). We hear no response from Angnete before he transports her down to the ocean floor. There is no suggestion of rape; nevertheless, if these versions record a deliberate abduction, then, of course, the sympathy lies with the girl (though her journey towards water despite her step-mother's warning in H may show some partiality in her feelings towards the merman). In each of these versions, she is strong enough at the end of the ballad to refuse to be taken back to the merman's home, so sympathy is maintained.

In all versions, Agnete becomes unsettled by the ringing of church bells and seeks release from her compact with the merman in the form of permission to return to her former domain to visit church. Her accommodating husband complies with her request;

however, Scandinavian stories relate how when a person is abducted by preternatural beings, ringing the church bells was believed to compel the abductor to free his captive (Kvideland and Sehmsdorf, 1991: 212) and so our merman may have had no choice. Before he assists with her return, he reminds her of her responsibilities within their 'marriage': she may go as long as she returns to her children. In 38B, C, H, I, K, S other conditions are imposed: she must not take any gold (ensuring continued dependence on her 'husband'); she must not let down her golden hair, which would symbolise a display of inappropriate behaviour through a suggestion of unmarried status (Bartlett, 1994: 54); she must not approach her mother in the church (she must maintain her independence from her family, not attempting to be reunited with them); and when the priest names 'den høje', the high God, she must not bow (she must renounce Christianity).

The pull of home and the church is too great, however, and Agnete disobeys without a second thought. By now she realises that escape from parental control has not brought freedom. The control of the father has been replaced by that of the husband. Constraints of the patriarchy are still in place: producing and looking after children within a domestic space; asking permission to leave that space; obedience to rules put in place by the patriarchy. Escape has been futile; nothing is different, except alienation from society and the Church. Agnete's disobedience to her husband is the first step towards renunciation of evil and her final redemption. There is an awareness of virtue in the ballad, a consciousness of what the human has had to give up to live in her underwater home and of the choice the human must make if she is to return. Her mother here engages her in a conversation (standard in the ballads) about the previous eight years and what recompense the merman has given in exchange for her honour (a gold ring in A, and in other versions a combination of gold-buckled shoes, a gold harp with the power to cure sadness, a gold knife and fork, all richer than the queen owns). The fact that this is a commonplace indicates the importance of maintaining honour within one's society.

Images of the merman and Agnete vie with each other to attract or lose our sympathy over the last six stanzas of Version A. There is a sinister start when the sacred

images turn their faces to the wall as this unholy creature enters the church, but there is an attempt to balance this with his attractive personal features. His hair 'var som det pureste Guld' (was like the purest gold), and his eyes 'frydefuld' (full of joy) in A; but other versions give testimony to his grief at the loss of his companion: 'de var saa sorrigfuld' (they were so sorrowful). The merman in Version D wrings his hands in sorrow, tells of the grief of his children, and offers a vast amount of gold to entice Agnete back, but in most versions this is a sorrow that Agnete seems not to share, as she returns to the values of human society and the church. We cannot know for certain what the 'ballad audience' understood or felt, but we can make progress towards likely interpretations. If culture, or civilization, is to exist, all within the group must abide by its rules. Agnete must reject all the trappings of her sinful lapse, including her children. In the Romantic period, however, attitudes towards types of wild men and creatures of nature who live outside society had begun to change. Hayden White, in his essay on readings of the Wild Man, looks at changes in perception in the nineteenth century, when the corrupt social world began to be seen as a falling away from a now idealized natural world, and the wild man image became the Noble Savage (1972: 28). Similarly, the merman as an antitype of corrupt society, and representative of freedom, may have attracted sympathy. Agnete abandons her most basic instinct and role in respect to her children, denying any motherly feelings towards the family she is about to desert: 'Lad længes' (Let them grieve). There is a final shift in sympathy to the merman when she declares abruptly:

Haa ja! —
Langt mindre paa den lille, der i Vuggen laa. DgF 38A 20

Ha yes!
[I think] much less on the little one that lay in the cradle

Yet supernatural beings on the whole are inimical creatures whose demise would bring about some satisfaction to a conventional audience who would congratulate Agnete on her strength of mind and will-power. In her final act of renunciation of evil, she returns to the situation which opens the ballad: one of choice, now informed by experience and understanding. This is a ballad which demonstrates the power of Christianity (without any

real reference to spirituality) and the possibility of a human victory over the supernatural. The victory is not without its human cost, however. In those versions where Agnete remains in her earthly home (A, Dø, H, K, L, Q, R, S, T), pain is inflicted on the children and the merman.

Bredsdorff links the ballad with a prose legend of Agnete, published in 1818. The narrative in essence is the same, but the reason for Agnete's elopement with the merman is very different:

Der boede engang to fattige Folk [...] En Dag, da de havde sendte hende ned til stranden for at hente Sand, og hun stod der [...] steg en havmand op af Vandet. Havmand [...] sagde: 'Følg med mig, Grethe! Saa vil jeg give dig saa meget Guld og Sølv, som du i Hjertet har kjær.' —
 'Det var ikke ilde' gav hun til svar, 'thi hjemme har vi ikke meget af det.'
 (Bredsdorff 1991: 70)

There once lived two poor people [...] One day, when they sent her down to the beach to get sand, and she stood there [...] a merman rose out of the water. The merman [...] said: 'Come with me, Greta! I will give you much gold and silver, which you hold dear in your heart.' —
 'That was not bad,' she gave in reply, 'because at home we have not much of it.'

Bredsdorff debates whether the story or the ballad came first, concluding that the ballad is earlier, that the folk story changed what was thought an inappropriate (female) ending — Agnete laughing at her victory—to a much more fitting focus on the merman's tears; he considered that abandoned children and a loving husband did not constitute a laughing matter. In one respect, the uncertainty over provenance is not important; it still gives an early nineteenth-century perspective on the situation. The story gives an alternative motivation for Grethe's actions, or even two. We can see her either as a Hansel and Gretel-type, lessening the burden on her impoverished parents by removing the need to support her— but, if we are less charitable, the opposite of this altruism is a viable reading, that she is so driven by greed (*Saa vil jeg give dig saa meget Guld og Sølv, som du i Hjertet har kjær* [my italics]), that she is happy to exchange poverty for life with this heathen. Both of these readings can be applied to the ballad.

Within the ballad versions, there is a range of understanding of the merman's power regarding human women (and their power regarding mermen), demonstrated in the varied endings of the different versions (see Table 5B). In Versions C and G, where the

havmand becomes a *bjærremand* (mountain creature),¹ Agnete is enticed into his cave with gold. After nine years and seven children, she too goes to church, but the *bjærremand* deals far more harshly with her than the merman: similar impositions are placed on her, but this time he has the final say:

Saa gav han hende en Syge saa krank:
Agnete hun døde i selvsamme Stund DgF 38C 17

Then he gave her a sickness so bad,
At that very same moment Agnete died.

We have the same scenario as ‘Agnete og havmanden’, but now the Church is incapable of saving Agnete from her fate.

Table 5B DgF 38 ‘Agnete og Havsmanden’: endings

Ending type	Versions
Agnete refuses to go back, rejecting her children	A; Q
Agnete rejects her children. He gives her a disease and she dies.	C
Agnete laughs; he goes home	H; Dø
He takes her back into mountain / sea	I; O; P
They divide the children	K; L
Agnete doesn’t think of her children; he jumps out of church door (and variation of).	R; S; T
Agnete disappears	M

While the majority of the Agnete ballads show her rejection of a heathen lifestyle, there are some like Version C which do not have a satisfactory ending for her. In the power struggle with the otherworld, sometimes the Church loses: in four versions (I, N, O, P) her husband takes her back into the sea. Versions K and L show them dividing the children between them.

5.1.1 DgF 38E, a non-traditional version

Version E is particularly interesting. Grundtvig is clear on the ballad’s provenance: ‘den første 20 Vers ere ægte ... og stemme næmest overens med vor Opskr. D, der ogsaa er fra Fyn ... Resten (V 21–29) derimod er kjendelig en modern og ufolkelig Tildigting’ (DgF, 2:

¹ There is no geographical correlation between place of origin and use of *havmand* or *bjærremand*.

658) (the first twenty verses are authentic ... and agree most closely with our Version D, which is also from Funen ... The rest (verses 21–29) on the other hand is recognizably a modern and unfolksy addition). His final word ‘Tildigtning’ carries the force of ‘reworking’ or ‘rewriting’. Version E challenges the ‘Agnete’ tradition but is no less viable or interesting as a ballad for this challenge. The role of the mother in this version is thrown into much sharper relief as the voice of conscience. She questions Agnete on reparations made by her husband for the surrender of her honour, but the final section of the ballad remains with her and her relentless questioning, with no return from the merman. Agnete has told her mother in stanza 14 that her eight years away have produced ‘syv Sønnen’ (seven sons). The two sons referred to in stanza 21 by the mother (‘dine to Sønne de længes efter dig’, your two sons are longing after you) would suggest, therefore, that Agnete’s mother is trying to restore her daughter to a marriage made before she ran off with the merman. Where the mother in Variant D asks four times ‘hvad gav han dig mere for Æren din?’ (What did he give you for your honour?), the mother in E is more particular in her phrasing: ‘hvad gav dig den Havmand for din Kjælighed og Tro?’ (What did the merman give you for your love and troth? st. 15), then ‘hvad gav han dig mere for Æren din?’ (What did he give you for your honour? in stanzas 17 and 19). Her questioning is inexorable and judgmental in its implication: what could he possibly give her to recompense not only her loss of honour, but also the damage to her own family which the mother is about to reveal? She refers subsequently to Agnete’s ‘Ægtehusbond’ (real husband) as distinct from the ‘Havmand’, confirming our suspicions that she has two families, one in this world and the other under the sea. Now we have a narrative about adultery and desertion. The mother nails her own loyalties to the mast, painting an emotive picture of the family Agnete has left behind. ‘Skarig’ is used to describe the state of the two sons, not just crying, but ‘howling’ or ‘shrieking’, yet Agnete is unrepentant: ‘Jeg ene for min Havmande smaa Sønne leve vil’ (I’ll live only for my merman’s small sons, E 22). Emotive detail continues to be piled on: her sorrowing husband’s body has been found, since he has hurled himself

off the headland. The funeral bells are now ringing to announce the lowering of his coffin into his grave that very day.

A non-traditional ending, but that is not all. We have been told that Agnete arrived in a more emotional state than, for instance, in Version D. She 'græd og hun klagede' (cried and she wailed) to her husband when asking permission to visit home, and this subsequent information has added to the grief. At this point Agnete turns back to the church, whereupon once again 'alle de små Billeder de vendte sig' (the small pictures turn their back on her): she is rejected by the church. In this heightened state of emotion,

Agnete hun stirred paa Stenen ved sin Fod:
Der saae hun sin kjær Moders Navn, som paa den Ligsten stod. DgF 38E 28

Agnes she stared at the stones near her foot,
There she saw her dear mother's name which was on a tombstone.

The mother is dead and buried. Has Agnete been speaking to a revenant all along, or is this the effect of overwhelming emotion, grief and guilt? Is she now understanding the implications of what she has done, having a vision of how things will and must be? However we are to read it, the burden is too heavy and Agnete succumbs to death. The tension between Agnete and the merman has been removed from the end in order to put the focus purely on the consequences of her actions and enable the audience more easily to judge. We have a new and somewhat clumsy ending, but one with a strong moral dimension which directs the audience to examine carefully consequences of their actions.

5.1.2 *A portrayal of the Church*

We see in 'Agnete og Havmanden' the extent to which the Church without doubt exerts a powerful influence over its adherents, even its lapsed ones, yet there is no sense of the spirituality it embodies. The church *building* is the axis of the ballad, the touchstone marker and defender of the rules of the community. Hustvedt sees the conversation between mother and daughter as a form of confession. Once she has broken her ties with her husband through disobeying his instructions and letting down her hair, Agnete must give an account of herself and her life with the merman before she can be redeemed; in

addition, she must also be tested. She must renounce her former life in its entirety, which includes her children (Hustvedt 1922: 236).

A problem for the modern audience is that in most variants of the ballad, we have more sympathy with the merman than with Agnete. If we shift our mind-set, however, to when the ballads were collected, we see a young lady who is named and with whom, therefore, we should have more fellow-feeling than the unnamed, heathen merman who takes advantage of her frailty. She is one of us and the merman is the Other. She returns to values remembered from her youth and, in particular, to the Church. We have difficulty understanding how she can reject her children, yet perhaps she is following one of Christ's commands in doing so, to put Christ before family (Luke 14: 26). In fact, 'Agnete og Havmanden' could well have been regarded as a parable of the young person who succumbs to temptation and is drawn away from her upright living with her family, but eventually recognises the sinfulness of her life and returns to both family and church, rejecting the sins and trappings of temptation and the heathen to do so (in all versions where she does not return with the merman). In Variants C and G, Agnete must pay the final penalty for her sin, this transgression of boundaries which has produced a multivalent threat to the integrity of herself, her community, to her religion, and to her family. Does the ballad suggest that the Church is tolerant towards those who reject its teachings, here represented by the merman? The answer to that question comes as the images turn their faces to the wall; there is no attempt to reach out to the Other. There is a strong message that marriage to a husband with non-Christian beliefs must bring with it a threat not just to that generation but, through children, to future generations also, and to the hegemony of the Church. During the Reformation, it was easier to legislate against a formal religion, incorporating forms of worship, Catholicism, than it was during Christianization to eradicate beliefs which were not so formalized. A firm belief in an Otherworld of spirits, mermen and elves and a fear of neglecting or harming them, whether deliberate or not, remained strong in agrarian communities where the sustainability of crops and animals was vital to economic wellbeing, and life itself (Milis 1998: 30), and existed alongside Christian

faith as part of the same belief system. God was approached where worries were major; otherwise, even the practising Christian would appeal to the practitioners of magic where today medicine and fertilizers would be used (Hutton 1991: 290). In successive societies, the merman would become a trope for the Other, for something which attracted and tempted the individual away from what was regarded, perhaps by his elders, as the *proper* way to behave. The ballad's message is an age-old one and one that is not very different from that of 'Elveskud' and 'Elvehøj': it suggests the 'right' way to live by holding up an image of one who fails (in some versions), and who survives in others.

The concepts of temptation and of choice are central to all versions of the Agnete ballad. She rejects the guidance of her family (D and H), which we assume has also been offered by the Church, for something far more thrilling, whether that be riches, the forces of modernity, freedom, or a longing for the unknown or the lure and excitement of the sea which frequently symbolizes a desire to find one's identity. Remaining on the land, being grounded in reality, lacks the thrills so often required by the young and which may have induced Agnete's tears which open Version 38C. The tears reflect the constraints felt by a young, poor nineteenth-century woman faced with a life of hard work, uncertain climate, little money or comfort, and living under the patronage of first father and employer, and then husband, with no clear means of expressing her individuality. Whether we see Agnete as a malcontent and rebel, or as one who has the spirit to escape to a better life if the possibility arises, the allegory continues as Agnete learns through experience that escape is futile, and returns to the protection of her family and spiritual beliefs (in that she returns to the church and not to her watery home in nine out of nineteen versions).² In the process, she rejects the promise of the exotic which, over eight years, has become the humdrum existence she was trying to avoid. The Church provides a 'buffer' (Sørensen 1959: 194–201) between man and nature, which is not there in 'Elveskud'.

² The remaining ten versions are fragments, or she is punished: she dies (C) or she is forcibly returned to her children (I, O, P).

5.1.3 *Ibsen and Agnete*

Hustvedt sees a wider context: a nineteenth-century conflict between ‘the fascination of the sea and the more prosaic demands of earth, between idealistic romanticism and ethical realism’ (1922: 236); all the sources Grundtvig dates are nineteenth-century. The concept of ‘idealistic romanticism’ is hardly a concern of the ballad type, but the interface between freedom and constraint is under examination. Agnete does not have a voice (Saari 1997: 249) so chooses freedom with the merman, where it takes her a further seven or eight years to realise that a voice is still denied her. The late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw a rise in the popularity amongst young people of the romantic idea of marrying for love (Jacobsen and Leavy 1988: 75) and the diminution thereby of parental input and control, a situation reflected in the ballad, and the source of a conflict resolved only in hurt.

An idea of what the images of the ballad suggested to these nineteenth century audiences may be gleaned from Ibsen’s play, *Fruen fra havet* (*The Lady of the Sea* 1888), based on the Agnete ballad and written the year after Ibsen spent summer on the north coast of Jutland, though we should consider that his audiences and the ballad audiences may have had different outlooks. Ibsen directs his audience’s sympathies to the Agnete figure, here Ellida Wangel. Ellida has married a kind and understanding doctor, but for material support and not for love. In Ibsen’s play, it is the human who is out of her ‘element’ and who has a restless yearning for the sea and for its representative, a seaman (the Stranger), to whom she had been engaged some years before, and who promised to return for her. The central conflict is played out between the husband and the seaman, and symbolizes the struggle within Ellida for freedom. Dr. Wangel seems to understand its nature, and it is one which is fundamental to the merman in the ballad: an ability at once to repel and attract, which has transferred to his wife: ‘det grufulde igen med dig. Du både skræmmer og drager’ (that terror is in you again. You both repel and attract; Act 4). Ibsen’s remedy is to return to Ellida her full sense of freedom, but this can happen only when she is offered it by her husband: when she can choose it, rather than be forced into a course of

action. There is little criticism of the Agnete figure here, and where there is, it comes from the mouths of the young and those of little understanding.

But Per Schelde Jacobsen (Jacobsen and Leavy 1988: 100–1) concluded that this is more than a play about freedom and choice: that Ibsen used the ballad to interrogate conflicts arising between a conservative, unimaginative bourgeoisie and an urge (represented by the demon and the sea), to create, be dynamic, and to break out of the constraints of social moeurs and respond to a more energizing individualism. We also see that in the ballad, but here the ballad and play part company in that Ibsen paints on a broader canvas, using a sub-plot to convey his satire. In addition, Ellida ultimately chooses freedom with responsibility in that she chooses to return to the marital bed, to her husband's children, and the family home, whereas Agnete wants freedom without responsibility, rejecting first her own birth-family and then the children she has raised with the merman.

Matthew Arnold uses a poem based on the Agneta ballad, 'The Forsaken Merman' ([1849] 1979: 101–05), to highlight the inadequacy of faith in Victorian times (Buckler 1982: 48–52). Sympathy is shifted to the merman through the use of dramatic monologue, the merman speaking of betrayal and loss. Our perceptions are challenged as the supernatural being, traditionally amoral and alien, is here depicted as faithful, loyal and moral, while his wife, Margaret, is as cold as he is generous. She faithlessly returns to the human world, which lacks life and energy and is insensitive to deep moral values, symbolised by her lack of care for their children.

Ballads such as 'Agnete og Havmanden' have continued to appeal through this ability to speak to successive generations, each in turn bringing its own response. We see the struggle for freedom illuminated by Ibsen in the ballad, but freedom to him comes as a result of informed choice, where Agnete simply looks for escape and finds what she believes will be a different way of life, which turns out to be a reflection of her life with her family. The Church is central in both 'Agnete og havmanden' and 'The Forsaken Merman', but there is no attempt in the ballad to interrogate issues of faith or discipleship.

We recognize in Jacobsen's description of *Fruen fra Havet* the world of the ballad, which is characterized by a kind of dullness from which Agnete is eager to escape. Excitement and individualism are sacrificed by Agnete as she realizes that perception and reality are very different. Ibsen's *Ellida* is ultimately more fulfilled than Agnete is.

5.2 'Agneta och Havsmannen'

'Agneta och Havsmannen' (SMB 19), is a popular ballad as attested by the number of extant versions, twenty-five collected by Jonsson in *SMB*. The familial relationship with the Danish versions is strong but the Swedish corpus does have its own individuality. SMB 19E, for instance, will be examined which, while recording all the scenes of the ballad, stands outside the main tradition in its detail. It was collected between 1847 and 1848 from Catharina Gertrud Mattsdotter in Levide in the south of the island of Gotland, a community exposed to other cultures, lying as it did on the Hanseatic League trade route, though six other traditional versions were also collected from Gotland.

Table 5C SMB 19 'Agneta och Havsmannen': narrative types

Group 1	A, B, C, D, G, J, L, M. T, V, Xa, Y
Scene 1	A young girl (named Agneta, or its variant spelling Agnete, Agnata, Annetta, and Helena in six of the versions in this group) meets a merman or sea-king on the shore, who asks her to accompany him into the depths of the sea.
Scene 2	Agneta sits by her baby's cradle listening to church bells in the land above.
Scene 3	The merman gives permission for her to visit on the condition that she returns to their children; he stops her ears and mouth and delivers her back on to <i>terra firma</i> .
Scene 4	She meets her mother at the church who enquires where she has been for the last eight years.
Scene 5	The merman appears, exhorting her to think of her children who are missing her.
Scene 6	Agneta renounces her former life and her children, preferring to remain with her mother.

There are three clear groupings within this Swedish ballad type: Group 1 the most basic, with the six scenes listed above; Group 2 goes beyond the six scenes to extend the mother's role; and Group 3 builds further by using the harp to bring the ballad to a close. Group 1 shows no evidence of geographical clustering, but is dominated by women singers, as is the Agneta corpus as a whole. The four earliest versions, collected in 1840, are present here. Each of these ballads has the six scenes and little else; hence the shorter versions feature, eight out of the twelve in this group having fourteen stanzas or fewer.

Version A, one of the earliest collected in Sweden, in Småland around 1840, belongs to Group 1. In its twelve two-line stanzas (line 2 of each stanza is repeated after a brief refrain 'hå, hå, hå, hå, hå, hå'), the couplets are masculine end-rhymed and self-contained and allow for little detail and no explanation of motive. The narrative is much more streamlined than the Danish versions, but follows the same pattern. At the point where Agneta returns home, the mother, in a show of strength, moves swiftly to reclaim her: 'nej nu är du min' (no, now you're mine), having her baptised immediately. The call of the Church is stronger in the Swedish versions than the Danish. While examples of spirituality are few in both Swedish and Danish ballads, there is a confidence that Agneta's baptism will weaken the heathen's power over her (SMB 47B, L, T). She ensures a return to the church from heathendom, the contrast set up by the juxtaposition of the baptism and the images in the church turning to face the wall on the entry of the merman. The merman begs her to think of her children; she refuses and the ballad comes swiftly to its close.

Where there are embellishments on the basic narrative, they fall into two groups. The first (in seven of the twelve versions) concerns the addition of personal details.³ Where in a ballad such as 'Elveskud' we see little variation in the narrative (Oluf meets an elf-maiden and dies), in the Danish and Swedish Agnete/Agneta corpora we find ballad-singers producing slightly different representations of the tale with varying outcomes. The personality of both the merman and Agneta changes according to the version. The merman

³ SMB 19C, D, J, V, Xa for the merman's clothes, and B, L for Agneta's.

to be the antithesis of truth and loyalty, as she reneges on her promise to return to her children, and later in the same version where she shows a feisty side to her character:

‘Å fannen dä giver ja’ bå’ klockare och präst,
Men uppå vackra gossar står hennes ögon fast. SMB 19V 7

‘I don’t give a damn for both the sexton and priest,’
But upon the beautiful boys her eyes are fastened.

This sexual desire for young men while in church is a marker of the depth of her sin and depravity. Yet there is a picture in Version E of a very contrite Agnete. Upon her entry into the church: ‘alla Guds beläten de vände sig irking’ (all the graven images of God they turn around), and so:

Skön’ Agnete satt i bänken och gråt:
‘En syndiger människa jag visst vara må;

Ty alla Guds Englar de vände sig ifrå’ SMB 19E 18–19

Beautiful Agnete sat in a pew and wept:
‘A sinful human I certainly am;

For all God’s angels, they turned away’

The other addition to the basic narrative of Group 1 is the baptism of Agneta (in A, B, L), also occurring in Version T which ends with a show of power:

Så ledde de Agnätta i altarringen fram,
Där trettio präster gav henne annat namn
De tänkte till att komma den havsman på skam. SMB 19T 16

So they led Agnätta forward to the altar,
Where thirty priests gave her another name.
They thought to shame the merman.

In the Danish versions, the merman’s occasional injunctions regarding Agnete’s behaviour while in church (to ensure her hair remains braided, not to sit with her mother, no genuflections), is repeated in one Swedish version; only in Version J is she instructed not to bend her knee when the priest mentions God.

Table 5C.1

Group 2 I, K, O, Q, S, Z (and includes Group 3: E, F, H, P, R, U)

Scenes 1–6 (as above)

Scene 7 The mother questions her daughter about her absence and life with the merman. There is frequently a focus on the gifts received from him.

Group 2 is characterized by an extension of the mother's role. In 'Elveskud', the mother has been the one who advises and warns and has undertaken an interrogation into where Oluf has been, communicating the news of his death to his fiancée. Here in Group 2, the mother wants to know where Agneta has been for so long, but her concern is twofold: for her daughter's honour and to try to save her from heathendom. Added to the six versions in Group 2 are a further five (F, H, P, R, U) from Group 3, which also include this almost priestly role of confessor. The gifts she has received are traditional: silk shirts; red-gold bands; golden robe, hat and boots, the descriptors intensifying the concept of wealth, but two deserve special mention. All eleven versions of the Agneta ballad in Groups 2 and 3 record the gift of a knife, variously gold, silver or embossed, and with this knife we get a picture of a feistier Agneta than in most Danish ballads where the knife is used to illustrate the merman's wealth, comparing it favourably with that owned by the queen. The knife in the Swedish ballads (and in only three Danish versions, DgF 38M, S, T) has a very different function. In most versions 'knif' is rhymed with 'lif'—the merman's—and in some the woman makes her wishes clear:

han har mig gifvit en stubbeknif af gull,
Den öskar jag att han satt i hans hjärteblod. SMB 19O 20

He has given me a belt-knife of gold,
I wish it were in his heart's blood.

Spirited in expressing a desire for the merman's death, she does not, however, attempt to use the knife in this way. We see a greater level of unhappiness here and elsewhere in some of the Swedish versions, perhaps from singers anxious to find a motivation for Agneta's desire to return to her earthly home. As with the Danish versions, all those which record the gift of a golden harp from the merman (SMB 19F, H, K, P, R, S, U, Zb, Zd), tell us it is played when Agneta is sorrowful:

... en harpa utaf gull
Och den skulle jag spela på när jag var sorgsefull SMB 19K 11

Similarly other gifts are used to demonstrate her sadness. When Agneta in Version P wears her silk knitted shirt, she tells of her discomfort: 'som jag måste slita med mödor och med värk' (which I must wear with toil and with pain; P 16). Agneta in Version O says of each

of her golden robe, her golden hat, and her boots of gold: 'Den hafver jag slitit och varit sorgsefull' (that I have worn and been sorrowful; O 14, 16, 18). We find the same emotions expressed in Versions S and R, clothes worn 'med möda och med vårk' (in toil and suffering).

Versions in Group 2 present us with a strong motive to support Agneta's desire to desert her husband, and a strong role for the mother. Hemmer and Ystad point out the significance of family support, that Agnete succumbs to temptation in the absence of her mother at the beginning of the ballad and is saved only when she is reunited with her mother (1997: 40).

Table 5C.2

Group 3	E, F, H, P, R, U
Scenes 1–7	(as above)
Scene 8	The harp is used to summon the merman.

Group 3 uses the motif of the gold harp to bring the ballad to a dramatic close, reminiscent of 'Harpens Kraft', whereas in the Danish versions its function is to cure unhappiness (see page 6). The mother asks her daughter to play, which has the effect of summoning the merman back for a final encounter with Agneta. In Versions F and H, the first note she plays brings the merman out of the sea; the second note brings him into their presence, but he is threatening only in Version E. There is not such a variety of endings in the Swedish as in the Danish versions. In the majority, fifteen versions, the ballad ends with Agneta determined to stay on the land, refusing to think about her children, and laughing in the face of the merman. As noted, there is an occasional sympathetic visual picture of her husband, focusing on his eyes and clothes, and sometimes he strikes a chord verbally, in Version G, for instance, where he sighs and says he can find no comfort. In one account he is just pathetic, bleating: 'Hvar vill jag finna amman till barnen de små?' (Where will I find a nurse for the small children? M 12, provided by a female singer). In only two versions is

he proactive at the end. In E he strikes her, draws blood and then takes her on his back forcibly: ‘Lejonmannen tog henne uppå sin bak’; Version Y sees the death of Agneta:

Då drager han ut en förgyllene spång,
så dödar han Agneta i sin moders famn. SMB 19Y 10

Then he pulled out a dagger⁴ of gold,
So killed he Agneta in her mother’s arms.

—and the children continue to cry, but now for a different reason.

5.2.1 SMB 19E

Version E is the only Swedish version where the antagonist is not a *hafsman*, *sjöman* or *sjögud*. Here we have *lejon-man*, a lion man (or lion-mane).⁵ We picture a wild-man figure, an other-world creature, or type,⁶ and as such consistent with *havmanden* and *bjærgmanden*, other wild men living in other realms. He exudes power and is a threat to human existence. In other ways Version E sits outside the ‘Agneta’ tradition, in that the singer of the ballad builds upon the character of Agnete, whose name is prefaced by ‘skön’ (beautiful) throughout, an epithet which takes on a hint of irony as we move through the ballad. In a long eight-stanza build-up to the action, Agnete seeks permission to go down to the beach at night ‘se om något skepp har kommit i land’ (to see if any ships have arrived ashore). Her mother suspects ulterior motives; she warns her that ‘Lejonmannen han fångslar dig’ (Lion man, he will captivate you). The mother is right (as ballad mothers usually are): Agnete does meet the lion man and follows him back to the beach where he pushes her into the water, and she remains in the ‘berget’ (rock) for eight years. We find this convergence of water and mountain (or rock) also in Danish version DgF 38I. On her initial visit to the church, she is much affected by her own sinfulness, but only momentarily. She returns to

⁴ *Spång* is not easily translated. Usually used to mean ‘footbridge’, it can also refer to a piece of metal such as a fastener or ornament on jewellery. Contextually, it has to refer to a weapon. A similar word ‘stång’ means ‘metal pole or poker’; perhaps there is an editorial error here. (*Svenska Akademiens ordbok*, <http://g3.spraakdata.gu.se/saob/>).

⁵ SAO: – LEJON-MAN ~ma²n. (lejon- 1804 osv. lejona- 1818 WIKFORSS (1804; under löwenmähne). särsk (i sht i vitter stil) i bildl. anv., om yvigt huvudhår (särsk. hos mansperson). DIXELIUSBRETTNER Hebbe 281 (i handl. fr. 1880).

⁶ See Bartra (1994) and Husband (1980: 117), where the author describes the wild man as living in ‘gloomy isolation, unrestrained aggression, and perverse lasciviousness’.

the church and immediately is conscious of ‘så många Ungersven’ (so many young men), with an implication that her mother was justly concerned about her daughter’s behaviour at the opening of the ballad. When Agnete promised her husband that ‘inte lyder jag min moders lof’ (I will not obey my mother’s law), it seems he believed her, but as she did not obey her parents when living with them, neither is she going to submit to her husband’s edicts. This is the only version in which the mother has a speaking-part at the beginning, which is a reflection on the guidance a mother tries to provide to a daughter she suspects is going off the rails. Here we have a young girl who, even within the confines of the church building, is like the Wife of Bath in the funeral procession, eyeing up her next conquest. The Agnete of Version E is perhaps the most unattractive of all the Agnetes (and will receive her just desserts), but is not in the same league as Agnete of the Danish DgF 38E, whose disloyalty to her earth family destroys both husband and mother.

There are two other departures from tradition in Version E. When Agnete plays her harp for her mother, a lyrical section follows, reminiscent of that in the Danish ballad ‘Elvehøj’ when the elf-queen sings. This interlude, where a falcon sits on the grass smiling (‘log’; a rhyme with ‘slog’ was needed) and the fish in the river start to play, lulls the audience into a sense that all will be well, when the peace is shattered as the third and fourth notes bring the lion man into their presence. Nature may be enchanted by the music, but he is not. He is violent and threatening:

Lejonmannen slog henne uppå på hennes öra,
Så blodet ran ner uppå hennes guldsnöre. SMB 19E 32

Lion man hit her on her ear,
So blood ran down on her gold string.

He cites her obedience to her mother (and, therefore, disobedience to himself) as the reason for his aggression before hoisting her on his back and returning to the mountain. The ballad closes with a premonition of grief to come:

Förr har du sutit med din fagergula hår,
Och din guldkrona på;

Men nu skall du få sitta med ditt svartblekta hår
Och din sorgfulla tår. SMB 19E 35, 36

Before, you have sat down with your fine gold hair
And your gold crown;

But now you get to sit with your black faded hair
And your sorrowful tear.

The accentual metre of the ballad varies between three and four stresses in each line. The disruption of the line-length in the example above reflects the lion-man's anger and the disruption of the peace and comfort of Agnete's future life with the lion man. The disharmony of the rhythm responds to that in her life; this is the price she has paid for disobedience to her husband.

Importantly, Version E begins and ends with a reference to the significance of the mother's advice: in line one Agnete asks her mother 'om lof' (for permission) to go to the beach, and she is reminded at the end by her husband that her fate would have been different 'hade du ej lydt din Moders råd' (had you not obeyed your mother's advice) when she returned to church. Instead, she is locked in the mountain where, with a neat sense of balance, she immediately loses the trait with which the ballad begins, 'skon' Agnete', her fine looks.

5.3 *An analysis of the Danish and Swedish versions of the Agnete ballad*

While the similarity between the Agneta ballad type of Denmark and Sweden is clear and strong, the narrative in all its parts is more consistent across the Danish versions. The emotional core of the ballad lies in the relationship between Agneta and her merman in which we see a reflection of a marital relationship in the human world. In the Swedish versions we have a stronger picture of the devotion of the merman to Agneta, and her coldness subsequent to the ringing of the bells, even to the point of suggesting the knife he gave her should be used to end his life. There is a clearer picture of change in her in the Swedish versions (SMB 19E, F, H, K, O, P, S, R, U, Z) than in the Danish where she is more likely to complain to her mother of how sorrowful her life has been (and will not countenance returning to her home beneath the sea, even where there have been no complaints). The merman in the Swedish ballad thinks he can trust Agneta more than the one in the Danish versions who delivers injunctions on her behaviour far more frequently

before he will allow her to attend church. The merman's demand that she should return immediately to her children is common in nearly all the Swedish versions with few exceptions (in SMB 19S, for example, where Agneta must promise that she will not listen to her mother's advice). In the Danish versions, the merman only once becomes 'vred', angry (DgF 38D), whereas in the Swedish he can be angry and 'grymme' (cruel, SMB 19C, F, H, U). The majority of versions in both languages depict, at the end of the ballads, an otherworldly creature whose will and power must succumb to that of family and church and who returns to his home and children without his wife. Some versions, Danish as well as Swedish, however, explore the possibility of the merman's power exceeding that of the Church. In four versions, immediately upon Agnete or Agneta's rejection of her husband and children, the Havmand (Danish I, O, P) and the Swedish Lejonman (47E) carry her off back to her home and children; she is powerless. In DgF 38C and SMB 47Y he kills her. As a direct struggle between the forces of the Church and a non-Christian way of life, in a minority of cases the Church would seem to lose.

5.4 *Concluding comments*

Chaucer's Franklin reminds his audience of how precious freedom is to women:

Love is a thing as any spirit free.
Wommen, of kynde, desiren libertee,
And nat to be constreyned as a thral;

'The Franklin's Tale', 767–69 (Robinson 1968: 136)

In both the Danish and Swedish versions of the Agnete ballad we have a picture of an unhappy young woman who lacks a voice and so must snatch at freedom. A key word in Ibsen's play is 'frivillig',⁷ of one's free-will; in both Ibsen and the ballad we have a picture of a young woman refusing to succumb to the narrow role ascribed to her by others (Templeton 1997: 203). The rules of the patriarchal society are clear in the ballads of both countries, and she is determined to flout them without thinking through the realities of her attempted escape. As in each ballad discussed in this work (with the exception of

⁷ *Fruen fra Havet* vii, 80–1, for instance.

'Elvehøj'), 'Agneta och Havsmannen' features a young person moving from one of life's stages to another, from the protection of family (threatened by the merman, by sexuality, by the Other, however we want to read it) to the state of marriage. The ballad is about choice, particularly uninformed, rash choice. Agnete rejects guidance to make her own decisions, embracing temptation as a means of escape to something a little more exciting, until she finds that this new state is no better than the old; it is nothing but a reflection of the first. She takes the predictable path of marriage, home, children. The ballad again comments on the irrationality of life. Whether Oluf in 'Elveskud' dances or not, he perishes. In a similar comment on life, each version of 'Agnete' begins with a picture of an ordinary young woman yet, as the merman stops her ears and mouth, organs of reception, self-expression and perception, we see Agnete losing the ability to see and rationalize her situation.

Both Swedish and Danish ballads would seem to have a moralizing function. One reading would suggest that the ballad of Agneta carries a common theme in literature: the narrative of the wilful child. Will is key to the presentation of her character. In some versions her meeting with the merman and her request to be taken to the depths and out of sight of her parents would seem to be planned and not impulsive. If we read this early act as one of wilfulness, there is then a chance that we continue to read her character in that way, the wilful child becoming the wilful adult whose return to earth is in line with her contrary nature, rather than an act of restitution.⁸ If we reconsider the prose legend of Agnete as discussed by Bredsdorff (5.1), where the young girl goes with the merman in order to escape the poverty her family is suffering, the audience may see her will as a positive characteristic: a determination to sacrifice herself for a better life; without the backstory, her willpower can only be undesirable. In addition, the ballads examine the theme of changeability and flux, appropriately with the motif of the ever-moving, ever-changing sea, traditionally associated with female changeability (Rudd 2007: 143; Findlay 2010: 276). They warn of threats to the life and faith of young people whose heads are

⁸ An interesting article on the way we attribute wilfulness is Sara Ahmed's 'Willful parts: problem characters or the problem of character' (2011: 231–253).

turned by the promise of wealth and power and who are lured from their families by a suggestion of the exotic or different. The ballads examine the consequences of breaking the rules of one's community, of wrong choices made by emotional, irrational humans who would change their lifestyle on a whim, and the impact on themselves and their families, emotional and economic. Similar narrative and motifs can be found in SMB 24 'Den Bergtana' ('The Mountain King'), TSB A54, a popular ballad, Jonsson's collection numbering twenty-five versions, most from the nineteenth century. The longest and most detailed version is SMB 24I (forty-one stanzas) collected in Uppland in the 1810s and combining narrative devices found in the 'Agneta' ballads and the commonplaces from the end of 'Hr. Bøsmer i Elvehjem' (DgF 45), which restore calm to the household. Again, in this ballad, the woman does not get a good press. She is 'Stolts Margareta', proud, the daughter of a king of seven realms, and too haughty to receive any man in marriage. The reason behind her rejections is implied in her response to the hill-king when he comes to woo her: 'huru mycket ville du gifva åt mig?' (how much will you give me?). His answer, 'det rödaste gull/ Och all dina kistor med penningar full' (the reddest gold/ And all your chests full of money) intrigues her enough to allow him to take her to his mountain home. He gives her 'gullringar' (gold rings), a 'gullkrona' (gold crown), and 'Drottningenamn' (the name of Queen). As with Agneta, she stays eight years in the mountain, bears his children, and then desires to go home to see her mother. The hill-king acquiesces, but the refrain promises a sad conclusion:

—Tiden görs mig lång—
 —Men jag vet, att sorgen är tung.

—Time is made long for me—
 —But I know that grief is heavy. SMB 24I Refrain

The hill-king's character, hitherto generous, caring, thoughtful, darkens as Margareta refuses to return home. Accusing her of ingratitude, he strikes her and carries her forcibly back into the mountain. The juxtaposition of the children, who rejoice at her return, with Margareta uttering 'Christ gifve, jag aldrig vore Moder åt Er!' (Christ grant, that I never would be a mother to you), attracts no audience sympathy for her. As with Hr. Bøsmer (DgF 45), the drink the children give her is laced with a magic ingredient to make her

forget her home, her family and even God, though an eternal punishment for Margareta is that 'aldrig glömde hon sin sorgbundna Mor' (she never forgot her sorrow-bound mother). This final line of the final stanza leaves the thought with the audience that our foolishness impacts on others as well as on ourselves.

What is clear is that these ballads make us consider issues from various perspectives; they acknowledge that people and the sympathies they attract are complex. Is Agneta simply a malcontent who is not happy with life at home and so becomes similarly disgruntled with life with her merman? Or is she a young woman misled by glamour, who then has the strength of character to reject a lifestyle that is wrong to return to the security of her family and church? There is no clear answer; it is the duty of 'literature' to raise questions rather than provide answers. Each successive society will bring its own response but, on this basis of this one ballad, we see women characterized in the Swedish versions as a little colder and feistier than in the Danish, more likely to refuse to return home. In line with this stronger Swedish role, the mother on the whole is given a larger part, as an interrogator or confessor in most Swedish versions, and occasionally in the Danish.

If there were few elves in the Danish versions of 'Agnete og Havsmanden', there is none in the Swedish 'Agneta och Havsmannen'; they are, however, proving to be fiercer creatures than the mer-people. Implacable in their revenge on man, the elves move quickly to inflict death, where the mermen are saddened or angry and are ready to retreat, only occasionally hurting or forcibly returning Agneta to their underwater home. We move on to further depictions of the merman, but now of a two-dimensional creature for whom there can be no sympathy, in the ballads of 'Harpans Kraft' and 'Harpens Kraft'.

Chapter 6 ‘Harpans Kraft’

Grundtvig records five versions of ‘Harpens Kraft’ (‘The Power of the Harp’, DgF 40, TSB A50), four from handwritten folios, the earliest Karen Brahe’s, and a broadsheet version dated 1778. The ballad was popular throughout northern Europe, with versions in Norway and Iceland, and the much larger Swedish corpus found in *SMB*, with its twenty-five versions and several variants, dated between the 1690s and 1923. The focus in Chapter 6 is on the Swedish ‘Harpans Kraft’ and, in the second half of the chapter, the Icelandic ‘Gauta kvæði’, with its radical changes from mainland versions.

Both Danish and Swedish versions present us with a forthcoming marriage. The woman is emotional and fearful, anxious about crossing from the single to the married state, which is represented by a bridge. The groom’s concerns that his lady feels he is not rich or well-born enough, or that she does not want to leave her father, are unfounded, and neither is she being forced into the marriage by her family. She reveals the nature of her fears, expressed most lyrically in the Danish DgF 40E:

Jeg sørger, jeg sørger, jeg sørge vel maa:
jeg veed alt, hvad Skjæbne jeg skal faa.

Jeg sørger fast mere for bredden Bro,
thi der faldt ud mine Søskende to.

Jeg sørger fast mere for striden Strøm,
thi der faldt ud mine Søskende fem.

DgF 40E 8–10

I grieve, I grieve, I can certainly grieve,
I know all, what fate I must undergo.

I grieve much more for the wide bridge,
from which fell my two sisters.

I grieve much more for the raging stream,
from which fell my five sisters.

Unfazed, the groom offers the protection of his squires as the bride crosses the bridge, only to see her snatched into the waters below by the water sprite who also abducted her sisters before her. Orpheus-like, however, the bridegroom then sends for his harp and charms him into returning all five ladies.

6.1 *'Harpans Kraft': an analysis*

We begin our analysis of the ballad with the Swedish SMB 22 'Harpans Kraft'.¹ Its structure is as in the Danish version: four parts, leading from distress, through conflict and resolution, and finally victory for the humans over the supernatural, which is variously a merman, mermaid or a waterman, but usually *necken* or *näcken*, a water-sprite living in lakes and rivers (Keightley 1900: 258), but never the troll of the Danish versions. The first section, as with the Danish, takes the form of the maid's conversation with the *ungersven* (young man) who is shortly to become her husband. He is unnamed in nine of the twenty-five versions, compared with a much larger seventeen for the maiden where she is often identified solely by her relationship to the young man. She is his dearest (*kiäreste*, or *allerkiäreste*, most dearest), his fiancée (*festemö*) or his *unge Brud* (young bride). Even though the focal point of the narrative is the young woman's fate, her anonymity in the majority of versions indicates a secondary role, unlike the man whose function is to save and protect her. Her lack of a name also generalises the situation: this could be any woman, and women in general need protection which can be provided only by men.

The opening scene of the ballad reveals the groom questioning the maiden about her upset and fears. Interest is added by presenting this through a question and answer format; the repetition also facilitates the remembering of the lyrics. This discussion has the function of establishing character, setting and situation. His most frequently asked questions across all versions concern whether she has any objections to their forthcoming marriage, or to the horse and saddle, the length of the journey or leaving her parents. Three versions (B, D, N) are more intrusive: 'Kanskie I särger I her icke Möe' (Perhaps you sorrow that you are not a maiden, B, 5).

The second section of the ballad brings the groom (most often called Peder or Peter) to an understanding of the girl's distress—that her fear is for the journey. She reveals her fears for her life specifically at the point where her sisters have already drowned (A, B, D,

¹ These ballads were collected from Småland (A, D, M, N); Skåne (B); Östergötland (F); Vestergötland (J); Götland (Q). The ballads as a whole were collected from the more populated area to the south-west of Stockholm.

F, J, M, N, Q). Again, we are asked to focus on the maid's journey through life, as she is about to take the step from maidenhood to adulthood and marriage and her fear of doing so. Absent from most of the Danish versions is the reason behind the maid's fatalism, a prophecy:

Min Syster Hon drunknad' i åen så strid
och mig är det spådt jag skall lika så med SMB 22M 8

My sister, she drowned in a [stream] so rapid,
And for me it was prophesied I must also do the same

and: Det enda jag sörjer för, så är det mig spått,
at näcken mig skall taga i Linlaga å — SMB 22O 9

The only thing I sorrow for, so it is prophesied for me,
the sprite must take me in Linlaga stream—

Peder is pragmatic, and has an immediate solution: he will re-model the bridge and (in seventeen of the twenty-seven versions) will provide a guard, even though hugely expensive. The Danish bridegroom is more likely to suggest surrounding the maiden with his men than widening or strengthening the bridge.

Section three deals with the fulfilment of the prophecy. Even though the horse's shoes and their nails are gold, they are not enough to prevent it from stumbling and the maiden falls into the raging stream where the water sprite seizes her, as with her sisters before. The men in the guard have proved useless. In nine of the versions they are not mentioned when the catastrophe occurs;² each of these was collected from a female ballad-singer from Östergötland or an adjacent province. In the remaining eight they are distracted, and so fail in their duty. These eight are far more widely distributed in place of origin and, where the informant is recorded, represent more male than female.³ The guards are distracted by a deer (lion, K) holding some form of gold object in its mouth or with gilded antlers, symbolising the attractions of sport and wealth (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 2003: 299–300). The bridegroom (from a higher social class) retains his integrity in this ballad, while his men fail in their duty. The attraction of the gold is an obvious symbol (the desire of riches and pleasure), but the deer perhaps less so. We move into romance territory with

² Versions E, Ha, Qa, Ra, S, T, X, Y, Z.

³ Versions B, D, I, Ja, K, M, N, V, none found in Östergötland.

the hunting of the deer prefiguring what Peder must accomplish if his lady is to be safe: he must follow the hunt, but his quarry is far more dangerous than the one his men will follow. As the forest became a place of mystery and chivalric questing in late medieval and Renaissance literature, so hunting the deer comes to symbolise the idea of losing one's way (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 2003: 297–98). The stag hunt in this ballad is a conventional plot-device, providing a distraction that ensures Peder's quest is one he must undertake single-handedly.

The maiden has disappeared, and so the final section must provide a resolution to the problem. The drama is running high, the maid now presumably dead and the knight defeated by the supernatural. In his final attempt to resurrect this latter-day Eurydice and show the power of man over nature, Hr. Peder sends for his golden harp. The ballad moves into the realms of hyperbole in a parody (whether conscious or not) of the effect of Orpheus's harp in the Underworld, as we see the magic of the music emanating from this harp, charming the bark from the trees, the horns off animals, and the spire from the church. Rather bizarrely, in individual ballads he is able to charm the foetus out of the mother's womb (C), the eyes out of the water-sprite (D), and resurrect the dead (I). In response to the music, the sprite smiles and remonstrates and weeps, but cannot resist the power of the harp, returning not only the bride but also her sisters. The ballad ends with a wedding and, as evidence of success, a son presented to Hr. Peder within a year. Tragedy is averted without loss of life.

6.1.1 *The central theme: the transition*

In Chapter 2.3 we began to consider Sørensen's theory (1959) that some ballads give expression to a condition undergone at the *forlovelsessituationen* (betrothal-time), a period in a young person's life which is emotionally critical. The ballads examined so far could be considered as encoding rites of passage, as coming-of-age narratives (Syndergaard 2009: 28) focusing on a time when the young person turns his back on his family to form a new emotional centre: 'In the betrothal situation people wish to give themselves up fully, and

yet grow anxious—over losing themselves’ (Sørensen 1959: 168). In ‘Harpans Kraft’ we have a dramatization of Sørensen’s transitional stage, depicted as a confrontation between a human and supernatural being. In other ballads, we have seen the symbols of the journey, the greenwood and the bridge as representative of the emotional and psychological passage from one state to another, and the elf-dance as perhaps the potential for, or actual entry into, the erotic experience. This is a time of new understanding of love, when *storge*, love shown within the family, and *phileo*, the love of friends, are no longer sufficient; this Syndergaard calls the ‘transition from the child’s “understanding of life” in which the family is the emotional center, to an adult understanding of life in which the emotional center of being becomes the beloved’ (2009: 22). This new territory is entered with the arrival of *eros*, romantic love, where one must die to the old self in order to give of oneself to another. The elf, merman or troll symbolize this unleashed erotic love, or at least anxiety about it, fearful to many as it insists on a destruction of the old inner self and giving oneself unconditionally to another. The bride in ‘Harpans Kraft’ makes the transition successfully, where Olaf in ‘Elveskud’ returns to his family to die. In these ballads, elves and mermen are employed as a way of understanding oneself and the world. Rudd’s examination of the function of the wilderness in medieval poetry concludes on similar lines, that as it is the demon’s environment, the challenge for man was not to become physically lost in the wildness, thus losing his identity (2007: 93).

A nineteenth and twentieth-century response to the ballad would pitch the issue slightly differently: that trolls or demons were initially projections of the unconscious mind which, over time and the duration of the popularity of the ballad, become internalized, so symbolizing passions and sexual impulses which must be resisted. By the time the ballad reached the nineteenth century, belief in elves and mermen was becoming less secure, though it had not died out by any means. Many of the non-elite, particularly in rural situations, held firm to their beliefs, but developing fascination with the mind and the growth of the study of psychiatry and interest in mental illness in the nineteenth century led

to demons being understood as internal mental issues (Inkster and Morrell, 1983). Freud explained the process:

Primitive man transposed the structural conditions of his own mind into the external world ... Spirits and demons ... are only projections of man's own emotional impulses. He turns his emotional cathexes into persons, he peoples the world with them and meets his internal mental processes again outside himself ([1913] 1950: 91)

Freud proceeded to reverse the process, to find in the recesses of the mind what had been projected as external beings. Some of our ballad characters actively seek their demons out, like Agneta and Hr. Bøsmer, while others are terrified by the inner changes these demons symbolize.

In 'Harpans Kraft', we have a situation where the inclusion of the sisters who have also fallen into the water suggests that *all* young women must fall prey to this (inner) demon. It has been prophesied; no matter what plans have been put into place, the bride will be seized by this creature. What happens after that is perhaps dependent on the woman's character. Here Kerstin is innocent, so she is saved; in 'Agneta og Havmanden' she is restored or punished depending on the version and, presumably, according to how guilty the ballad singer thinks she truly is.

6.1.2 *Gender lines in the ballad*

I have suggested that 'Harpans Kraft' may be seen as a kind of companion piece to the Agneta ballads in their response to the theme of sexuality and marriage: that the young bride here is at the other end of the moral spectrum from Agneta who is only too happy to be whisked off by her merman to live with him at the bottom of the sea. In 'Harpans Kraft' the spotlight is not, in fact, on the woman and her problem, but on the man. We have said already that she is more likely than her husband to be unnamed. In addition, the title 'The Power of the Harp' makes no reference to her, but to the man's orphic qualities, the power unleashed by him and its persuasive influence.⁴ Taking Swedish Version A as an example,

⁴ Analysis of ballad titles is an interesting area but are outside the parameters of this work. Within the Danish corpus, some of the (mainly 16th-century) manuscripts of the lesser nobility had titles, and broadside versions, even if they adapted "almue" or "adels" texts, also had titles. Many of the Swedish corpus would have been given titles by Arwidsson or Geijer and Afzelius in their pioneer

we see the opening conversation is initiated by him, though in response to her emotion; it is important he understands the nature of the truth, but his questions indicate that he is wide of the mark. Questions are overwhelmingly used by powerful participants and, if we analyse their discourse, we see an inequality in power: the fiancé questions and her responses echo his questions (though, in all fairness this repetition is a convention of the ballad). The man takes the initiative: he questions, he reasons, he is pro-active. Active verbs are allocated to him: he rides, he plays, he walks with his sword; he summons and commands; he widens the bridge; ultimately he enables his bride's return. Without his intervention, she would be dead. The woman is presented as passive and emotional: she cries, accepting her fate; there is nothing she can do about it. There is no analysis of her worries; this is a song about action, not feeling. He is depicted in a public place, the 'Gården' (courtyard), while she is in a more private place, 'i buren', closeted in a bower or in the high loft. The focus of the ballad is not the woman's distress, but rather how the man is to respond to it; she is not consulted in the decision-making process. Of the twenty-two stanzas of Version A (and typically so of the other versions collected by Jonsson), only two stanzas (10–11) record the catastrophe involving the fiancée and even now, she is rendered passive: *she* does not fall; the horse does, and presumably the same for her sisters before her. This major event threatening the life of the woman is minimised, and once the action starts, there is little place for the woman, except for a cursory reference to her return at the end. The ballad is really about the man's response to this danger: how he will try to avert it and how he will respond to it. The principles celebrated in this ballad are male ones. After the initial show of sympathy, we see initiative, action, daring and courage, generosity, integrity, power, and chivalry. The man is in a position to act, to give, to command, and to save life, and it is action in the ballad which defines his character and manhood. The useless men (presumably the fiancés of the sisters) are implied and hidden in the text. The Icelandic version will insist on an ability to respond to tragedy and a capacity for grief in a hero more open to his 'feminine' side.

editions. Jonsson's *Sveriges Medeltida Ballader* notes given titles where he had access to them. Of the thirty-eight versions and their variants in *SMB*, just over one-third have a title.

The uncivilized landscape, usually a forest or wilderness, was central to medieval romances (Saunders 1993), a place lacking order and stability where the individual could act out his passion, or transform, or define his role through adventure or quest. In the ballads, this uncivilized space is still inhabited, not so much by the gods of the ancient texts, but now by the spirits of folk belief. In the romances, *aventure* replaces the supernatural. 'Harpans Kraft' is moving in the tradition of the romances: it is a song about a quest in which the bridge identifies Peder as a chivalrous knight. The quest is his; he must succeed. Rudd's analysis that the inhabitant of the wilderness in medieval poems, 'confronts and confounds our designs, forcing us to confront and reappraise them likewise', reminds us that man is not necessarily the 'naturally dominant and successful species' (2007: 93). He must prove that the forces within him are greater than those without (Clemoes 1979: 160). While this ballad is more about the man's rite of passage than the girl's, in SMB 22 Version Q there is evidence of a significant shift in focus.

6.1.3 *The proto-feminist Version Q*

Jacobsen saw 'Harpans Kraft' as very much the product of a patriarchal society, as a teaching tool reminding girls of their vulnerability and subsequent need to stay strictly on the path that leads from father's house to that of the husband:

women are only safe as long as they do what they are told and marry the one their parents have chosen for them. Women have to walk across that bridge, past the abysses below, and settle among their own kind. (Jacobsen and Leavy 1988: 78)

Deviation from this decree will result in danger, from which only a man can save you. Here there is a close relationship with many fairy stories. Little Red Riding Hood must follow the path trodden by her mother and grandmother before her through the forest and, if she strays from it, she should not be surprised that a wolf will be there to catch her, with a handy woodcutter equally ready to save her. Jacobsen's formula fits the Agnete ballads, but not 'Harpans Kraft' quite so readily. Syndergaard (1993: 136) pointed out the flaw in Jacobsen's case, that ballads show young women entering the liminal space and frequently emerging successfully:

A better view is that the liminal spaces of wood and road in our ballad types stand,

for the wilderness within us. The entry of young women into them certainly, symbolically, represents the risks all encounter in venturing away. But the venture is not away from a male world but rather from *home and family*, those foci and products of culture.

(Syndergaard 1993:136–7)

He applies this idea to ballads of incest but the danger lurking on this journey/rite of passage can equally be applied to any type of love or lust.

In his work on women's narrative control in elite and non-elite Swedish literature, Stephen Mitchell extols the work of ballad-singer Ingierd Gunnarsdotter (1601–86), who has the *auctoritas* to introduce change into the ballads she sings, such as providing motives, or altering an ending. Mitchell sees this as an important element in maintaining a living tradition: 'Individual performances may be informed by ballad tradition, but they are neither stifled nor enslaved by it' (2002: 274–75). Version Q of 'Harpans Kraft' shows a much more radical change than those of Gunnarsdotter, and was collected from Margareta Helena Lallér (1772–1860) from Visby, Gotland, who learned the ballad in her youth (Jonsson 1983–2001: 288). There are no other versions attested in *SMB* from the island of Gotland, so we do not know whether Margareta Lallér sang this version to an audience familiar with the traditional type. Her version was collected in the 1830s and is called 'Liten Ingrid' (Little Ingrid), thus putting the woman firmly at the heart of her song, rather than the power of the man through his harp. In Version Q, the female protagonist is named immediately in stanza one and on five subsequent occasions in the fourteen-stanza ballad; Herr Peter is named just once, and not until stanza eleven. There is no identification of Peter in the first stanza; within the dialogue, he is only known by the first person 'I'. Ingrid responds to his questions and explains succinctly the reason for her grief. By this point, Peter has spoken twice, Ingrid three times. The control then remains with Ingrid: whereas in other versions attention stays on the man as he outlines his plans to keep his fiancée safe, in this version it continues with Ingrid for a further three stanzas as she is prepared for her wedding:

De klädde liten Ingrid i silkes särk
Så silket det låg uti ruta-verk

De klädde liten Ingrid i silfverspända skor
Så silvret det uti sömmarna låg

De häfde liten Ingrid på högan häst,
Fyratjugu hofmän de redo dernäst.

SMB 22Q 7–9

They dressed little Ingrid in a silk shift
So the silk it lay under the square patterns

They dressed little Ingrid in silver-buckled shoes
Such that the silver in the seams it lay

They put little Ingrid on a high horse
Twenty-four knights, they rode next [to her].

The horse stumbles, and then the only way we know that Peter is actually there and playing his harp is from the words of the necken, ‘kara Herr Peter ni spelen intet mer!’ (Dear Herr Peter, don’t you play any more!) The ballad comes to its close, still focusing on Ingrid:

Liten Ingrid hon kom uppå hvitaste sand
Med en hennes syster in hvardera hand

De tre brudar de gingo i kyrkan in
Hvad folk som dem såg fälde tårar på kind

Liten Ingrid hon var så förskräckelig grann
Hvad folk som henne såg de tänkte solen upprann SMB 22Q 12–14

Little Ingrid, she came up on the whitest sand
With one of her sisters in each hand.

The three brides, they go into the church
When people saw them, tears fall on their cheeks

Little Ingrid, she was so startlingly fine
When people saw her, they thought the sun rose.

The woman is central: the power of the man’s harp has been obscured, and the ladies would seem to emerge from the river under their own steam. They then take themselves into a public place and while we may assume that Ingrid and her sisters present themselves at the church to be married, there is no mention even at the end of a bridegroom.

Ingrid is, in terms of the plot, as passive in this version as in all the others, but here she is no longer side-lined. By removing the instrument of the action (Peter) from throughout the ballad, the focus goes onto Ingrid and her fears of marriage. Peter’s quest is no longer central; the woman ballad-singer sings about a woman. Johanna Gustafva Angel (1791–1869) from Ryssby in Småland, who supplied several ballads to *SMB*, goes a step

further. In her version of 'Harpans Kraft' (22O) it is the woman who plays the harp, and she is not taken away by the water sprites. Johanna herself 'fick en gedigen utbildning, hon kämpade för nykterhetsrörelsen och väckelserörelsen' (received a sound education, she championed the temperance movement and the revival movement; Eriksson and Henriksson 2005: 58–60), so it is not surprising that she endows the woman protagonist of 'Harpans Kraft' with independence and an ability to save herself.

6.1.4 *'Harpans Kraft' and the Orphic tradition*

The prominence of the woman in these versions of the 'Harpans Kraft' narrative is not, however, in the tradition of the Orphic poems, of which the traditional versions are so reminiscent. The ballad would seem to follow the story of Eurydice's death as narrated in Virgil's *Georgics* (c. 29 B.C.) where her role is minimised: she is not given a name, only 'illa' (she) and 'moritura puella' (the girl about to die) and there is no description of her. She is allowed no character or emotion but is presented purely as the reason for the dearth of bees and the motive for Orpheus's quest. The story is very much presented as the tragedy of Orpheus in which Eurydice is not a lot more than a plot device. After her abduction, as with the protagonist of 'Harpans Kraft', Orpheus must face up to the supernatural to reclaim his wife, using the power of music to bring her back to the surface. Orpheus and Peder move their audience to submission, but Orpheus ultimately fails in his task as Eurydice slips back into the Underworld; he does not in the Danish and Swedish versions. 'Gauta kvæði', however, the Icelandic version of 'Harpans Kraft', does follow the Virgilian ending.

In *Sir Orfeo*, a Middle English romance composed in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century (author unknown), the central conflict again lies in the removal of the lady, which acts as a trigger for the male hero to initiate a quest to rescue her. The Scottish ballad 'King Orfeo' (Child 19; Lyle 2007: 62–65) and the parallel lay 'King Orphius', recently published (Purdie, ed, 2013), are testimony to the wider circulation of the Orphic theme and may help us to understand the

connection between Middle English, Shetland and Scandinavian culture. In both *Sir Orfeo* and the majority of the ballads of the 'Harpans Kraft' type, the woman's weakness and need give identity to the masculine self of Orfeo, Peter or Orpheus, which he needs to prove in his own rite of passage. Each ballad, lay or poem reveals the patriarchal hegemony which underpins the various societies which produced them.

Orpheus's tale has been interpreted widely: as a role model for responsible behaviour (Anderson 1982: 35); as an allegory for Reason, taming the barbarous and irrational (Vicari 1982: 66–68); as a narrative about the agricultural fertility cycle (Warden 1982: 16); and the Romantics saw Orpheus as an eternal seeker beyond the horizon (Warden 1982: 16), many of which readings could effortlessly be applied to 'Harpans Kraft'. There is a danger of seeing the ballads with their single-plot line and rule of two-to-a-scene as unsophisticated products of a rural society; a danger of accepting a blend of lyricism, didacticism, and streamlined plot in the great classical poets such as Virgil and Ovid, and not expecting much above the simple from the songs, tales and plays staged in our rural communities. We must not be content with just one reading from the ballads. Criticism on the Orphic literature (and on those works referred to in Chapter 5, Ibsen and Arnold) enables us to gain insights into the less well-studied Nordic ballads, so supporting readings on multiple levels. They enable the modern reader to break down barriers of assumption, and challenge our understanding of how people with little formal education were able to express the complexities of their existence.

6.1.5 *The music motif*

Does the harp music represent the power of love over nature, as in Orpheus's story and as exemplified by the kiss in 'Trollden og bondens hustru'? There the farmer's wife releases the prince from imprisonment through the kiss she gives to the ugly troll, thus enabling the spell to be broken (See Chapter 2.8). In 'Harpans Kraft' the power of virtue assisted by the patriarchy or by love, or a combination of the two, rescues the maiden. Uncontrolled and

wild, nature is a place of danger, whereas human society is supposedly regulated by man and God and is subject to rules. The music of the harp in ‘Harpans Kraft’, which is either fetched from home or the monastery (B) or is forged by the blacksmith (E, V) or by the groom himself (L) is man’s own magic, produced by man on an instrument also made by him, and thus distinguishes him as civilised (Rudd 2007:99). When man encroaches upon nature by moving into or through its space, nature takes revenge, but the power of music can be seen to be affecting all parts of nature and ultimately forces nature’s demon to return what is not his own (Jacobsen and Leavy 1988: 84). The concept of music ‘taming the savage breast’ is, of course, an ancient one, to be found not only in the narratives of Apollo and Orpheus, but also in texts such as the *Prose Tristan* (1230–35), Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Vita Merlini* (c. AD 1150), in the attempt to release Gunnarr from the snake-pit in *Völsunga saga*, in the Old Testament in David’s harp music, and much further afield throughout the ancient and medieval world.

The Danish and Swedish versions of ‘Harpans Kraft’ leave us with the clearest message so far that this ballad-type is concerned with managing this so-important transition. The central motifs are all there, with the addition of a significant detail. The couple is about to be married, they are to undertake a journey to the wedding over a bridge and water, where they will be obstructed. The additional detail is that the same fate has struck all her sisters before her, an idea explored also in ‘Lady Isabel and the Elf Knight’ (Chapter 7.3), where the knight has murdered several others already. The ballad tells of a common rather than an individualised event. In our next ballad, ‘Gauta kvæði’, the removal of the supernatural element demands that we re-consider the event and its cause.

6.2 ‘Gauta kvæði’

The ballad ÍF3 ‘Gauta kvæði’ (‘The Ballad of Gauti’), is the Icelandic version of ‘Harpans Kraft’, where a young lady, here Magnhild, falls victim to fate, but here does not survive.⁵ If we thought that the title of the Swedish ballad (‘Harpans Kraft’, ‘The Power of the

⁵ cf. the Norwegian version, ‘Villemann og Magnhilld’.

Harp’) suggested that the ballad would concern itself with the man rather than his bride, the title here unashamedly reveals its true intent: this is about Gauti’s response to the tragedy, which continues beyond Magnhild’s death. The groom’s questioning of the bride is here condensed to two stanzas. There is no doubt in Magnhild’s mind as to why she grieves: ‘mig syrjit það [...] eg mun drukkna i Skotbergsá’ (It grieves me [...] I will drown in Skotbergsá stream). Sørensen’s theory that times of crisis occur when young people are in a liminal state on the verge of marriage needs only a slight tweak if Vésteinn Ólason is correct in his assumption that the opening stanza is a replacement for a lost stanza in which they discussed their imminent wedding (1982: 127). We are told immediately that ‘þau lágn saman í lopti tvö’, implying that they lay together in the loft as a married couple. Even at this moment of happiness, there is no certainty that it will continue. Gauti’s response to her fears is in line with the majority of the Danish and Swedish versions: he will protect her by building an iron bridge over the stream. Magnhild seems to embrace her fate, however. Her words ‘enginn getur sín forlög flýd’ (no-one can flee their own destiny) provides a different voice on the theme of man versus Nature, common to this ballad-type as a whole.

There is no contest here with Nature’s demons: when Magnhild arrives on the middle of the bridge ‘járnbrú stökk í stykkin þrjú’ (the iron bridge split into three sections) but there is no water-sprite or troll waiting to seize the girl. If the fifty men also on the bridge had been provided as a guard (this plan is not outlined in the Icelandic version), then the plan fails as they too fall into the water, and ‘enginn gaf að Magnhild gaum’ (none gave heed to Magnhild, A10). We have reached the halfway point in the ballad; now follows a lyrical section describing the effect of Gauti’s harp music on nature. The Icelandic versions vary in detail considerably from the Scandinavian versions in how this power manifests itself: he plays a star from the sky, a horse and cow from their stall, a bolt from out of its lock, a beautiful deer from the mountain, a ship from the waves, building up to ‘fragra mey frá grunnum’ (the beautiful maiden from the bottom of the sea, A 14–17). This section is marked out by the use of feminine rhymes (found in only one other place in this version), and a shortening of line length by up to three syllables, as the singer alters the

sound of the lines to try to reflect the change occurring in the universe. There follows an immediate sobering of mood in the final four stanzas when Gauti has to come to terms with the tragedy that is Magnhild's death: Gauti suffers 'mikil þín' (much pain) when he discovers the lips he is accustomed to kissing have already been touched by death. Version B finishes on this poignant note. D and E continue with her funeral, and A goes beyond this, to her burial:

Hann tók hennar bjarta hold,
gróf það ofan í vigða mold.

Hann tók hennar bjarta hár,
—riddarinn herlegur og vel—
Span sèr úr því strengi smá.
—hun dansar,
sú ber gull og klæðin brún, hún dansar vel.

ÍF 3A 20–21

He took her bright flesh,
buried it in consecrated soil.

He took her bright hair,
—the knight manly and well—
Wove it into little strings.
—she dances,
that wears gold and bright brown clothes, she dances well.

Gauti's sudden lack of power is highlighted in these two stanzas in the way the ballad-maker reproduces the structure of stanzas 15–17, where he was successful over nature:

Hann sló hest af stalli,
Fagra hind af fjalli

ÍF 3A 16

He played the horse from its stall,
The beautiful deer from the mountains

6.2.1 *The role of fate*

In the Icelandic versions of 'Gauta kvæði' we have the same basic narrative pattern as the other Scandinavian 'Harpans Kraft' ballads, with two major variations. In the Icelandic version we have magic in the power of the harp over nature, but there are no supernatural beings. It is Magnhild's 'forlög' (fate) that she should die young in this way, but it is not a fate ascribed to her sisters too in 'Gauta kvæði' as it is in 'Harpans Kraft'. As Liestøl (1915: 18–22) has demonstrated that the ballad did not originate in Iceland, but probably arrived there from Norway, this has to be a deliberate change from the Continental tradition.

Prophecy and water sprites are omitted and Magnhild succumbs purely to her environment, although she has had a premonition of her death. We are reminded of the tragic ending of the classical Orpheus stories, but here in the Icelandic versions, there is no human blame. Iceland affords a harsh existence, and we see the young surrendering to its cruelty. The community loses a young girl well-loved and productive, in terms of the economic well-being of the family and village, and as a provider of the next generation.

If we consider Magnhild alongside other female ballad protagonists, and the theory (above) that the innocent girls are ultimately saved, the theory fails. There is no cause to believe that Magnhild is coquettish or disobedient or guilty of any wrongdoing, and yet she does not survive. Here we have a ballad which does not function as a socializing tool to warn young people about errant behaviour or about a readiness to give up the self and surrender to another in the state of marriage. ‘Gauta kvæði’ concerns itself with death and the high mortality rates about which man can do little. Magnhild succumbs purely to the environment. Man continues to exert his power over nature, but against such a harsh backdrop without success over life and death. We see the prefiguring of this inability to save Magnhild in a lessening of the magnitude of Gauti’s power over nature; man here is not the dominant species. The feats achieved in this ballad are not as miraculous as in the Danish and Swedish versions; hence Gauti was also unable to extract his fiancée from the jaws of death. Gauti seems to have power over movement—stars and animals move as if to listen— whereas in the Swedish ‘Harpans Kraft’, there is an ability to destroy.

Hallmundsson considered two reasons for the tragic ending, the first linked with the Orpheus story. During its transmission to the north through Brittany and England, the story of Orpheus lost its tragic ending, the English Breton lay of *Sir Orfeo* being an example, as with the Norwegian, Danish and Swedish versions of ‘Harpans Kraft’.⁶ He suggested that Icelanders preferred to retain the tragedy of the original which they found more to their literary taste: heroes of the Icelandic sagas almost always came to ‘a grievous end and, much as they tried to outwit fate, it somehow always caught up with them. This is, in fact,

⁶ Lesser known classical stories of Orpheus, by Manilius and Lucian for instance, relate his successful rescue of his wife from the Underworld.

the recurrent theme in most of the sagas'. Hallmundsson concluded that the Icelandic version gained in artistic merit: the ending is 'direct and utterly simple [...] tragic and tender' as Gauti moves to find peace in his music through the symbol of stringing his harp with his bride's hair (1962: 267–71). The motif is a traditional one, found in 'Hörpu kvæði' (ÍF 13), several Danish and Swedish ballads, and 'The Twa Sisters' (Child 10) where the implication is that the silenced woman will continue to speak, as in each of these versions the harp, strung with the murdered woman's hair, tells who is responsible for her death (Gitter, 1984: 938).

6.3 *Dark landscapes*

With the removal of man's ability to address adversity, 'Gauta kvæði' instils in us a need to question the concept of the ballad as a socializing tool, deemed by critics to be one of its functions (Jacobsen and Leavy 1988: 76–77; Bascomb 1953: 290). This Icelandic ballad does not teach one how to behave. It seems to me that the theme of the ballad has shifted in its move to Iceland, from one concerned with the journey into marriage to one about human adversity. In suggesting a recent marriage, in placing the couple differently from the Danish and Swedish versions, together, inside and in bed, we have a scene which should describe the height of happiness. Instead we have fear of death, and one which is not groundless. The supernatural Other has been removed; there is nothing in this ballad that can be overcome by man or woman. It records a fate which must be submitted to.

Vésteinn Ólason sees the darkness of this ballad as 'fundamental to the ballad world ... happiness is unstable and short-lived and is accompanied by the fear of loss' (1988: 66). Mortan Nolsøe's research in the Faroes indicated that women in particular liked to sing tragic ballads (Vésteinn Ólason 1982: 24–5n.), and ballad singers in Iceland were largely women. Vésteinn Ólason further accounts for this darkness:

I have emphasized the difficult struggle against nature in which the men were engaged, but it does not mean that the women of this society were protected or privileged. The greatest risk in this struggle against nature was that a defeat would lead to hunger and shortage. Emotionally this must have been a great burden on the women, both because of their duties as previously described, but also because they had not the same opportunity as the men to clean themselves of fear by direct confrontation. In fact they were confined within the walls, or the boundaries, of the

home, sentenced to stay there waiting for the villainy leading to lack to happen.
This explains the appeal of poetry concentrated on situations laden with fear and
uncertainty. (1988: 68)

We rarely see true happiness consequent on the action for either party in the supernatural ballads. They are songs about, at best frustration, at worst, fear and death. One can only presume that the dark landscapes of the Nordic lands are responsible for these songs of darkness and terror, but what is clear is that the gloom and tragic outcomes increase as we go further north into Iceland:

Such stories seem to have arisen from the fears of men who were at the mercy of wild forces of nature, storms, blizzards and rough seas, often living in loneliness and poverty and darkness, in poor housing in a remote northern land, perhaps living on bad and insufficient food. It is not to be wondered at that darkness and terror appear. (Einar Ól. Sveinsson, 2003: 288–89)

The ballads attempted to rationalize this fear. We should consider the idea that the ballad was a way of dealing with these difficulties, whether they were social or cosmic. Ballads belonged to the community; they were not personal or subjective views on life. They described the world—but through that description attempted to exercise man's control over it. Singing these songs together ensured that, as a community, they could share and deal with difficulties and control their fears together. The imposition of their own control on the events of the narrative is a way for culture to strive for regularity and order as a way of trying to regain control over nature.

What is clear from these ballads of the supernatural is the belief that the 'hidden folk' throughout the Nordic lands have need of communion with humans. The elves, the mer-people and the necken, the shape-shifting water spirits which appear in human form, all search for an intimacy with humans which they frequently try to buy with their immense wealth; the human response is mixed, but human victory is rare. What we have little sense of as yet in the ballads examined is the world that earlier civilizations imagined these supernatural spirits inhabited, the hidden halls, the underground and underwater dwellings, but we suspect that the non-human world will be held up against a 'human framework and value-system' (Rudd 2007: 43). In the liminal lands we see linden trees, fountains, streams, mountains, but little of the elf- or underwater regions. We hear of the elf-queen's bleaching silk shirts in the moonlight, but nothing of Agnete's environment in

her sojourn underwater. We see her rocking her baby's cot, but there is no detail to suggest this new home is any different from her earthly home. Hr. Tønne is ushered into the mountain abode of the dwarf king, but covered by skins so he is unable to see anything. By nature of the genre, there are few sunny days; liminality appertains to time of day as well as to border country and mental state. So, Olaf delivers his wedding invitations in the evening and the young man in 'Elvehøj' puts his head down to sleep on the elven hill at the end of the day. We have a limited awareness of human spaces: the high loft, the ladies' bower in the garden, the courtyard, and the bridge built by man to cross into territory which lies outside his control. Unlike in the folk-story, there is no time for description in the ballad; much is left to the imagination. Physical action and speech acts are at the centre of the ballad. Where the action pauses briefly, such as the lyrical section in 'Elvehøj', its function is not to add local colour, but to illustrate the consequence of actions. We shall have a more detailed picture as we move into 'Thomas Rymer' in the Scottish tradition in Chapter 7.

Chapter 7 Scottish fairy ballads

Belief in fairies and elves was as prevalent in the British Isles as we have seen in countries to the north, persisting in England and Scotland into the second half of the nineteenth century, particularly amongst unlearned and rural folk. The church and learned elite associated the spirit world with the powers of hell. On King James VI's return from Denmark in 1589, which he had visited prior to his marriage into the Danish royal family (Macdonald 2002: 35), his ships were hit by bad weather. The king believed that this violent storm was created by witchcraft with the intention of destroying him (Henderson and Cowan 2007: 122–23). He acknowledged his belief in a demonic alliance of fairies and witches in his *Daemonologie* (1597) in which he categorized (and thereby legitimized belief in the existence of) four types of spirit:

The first is, where spirites troubles some houses or solitarie places: The second, where spirites followes vpon certaine persones, and at diuers houres troubles them: The thirde, when they enter within them and possesse them: The fourth is these kinde of spirites that are called vulgarlie the Fayrie. (Craigie 1982: 59)

By linking fairies with witches, James demonized these supernatural entities which had been regarded hitherto by many as not presenting a threat:

There was no doubt in the mind of the king that the phenomenon of fairies was little more than an illusion created by Satan: 'the devil illuded the senses of sundry simple creatures, in making them beleeeve that they saw and harde such thinges as were nothing so indeed.' (*Daemonologie*, 74) The redefinition of fairies as demonically inspired hallucinations, as agents of the Devil's work, ensured that all who believed in them were potentially in danger of their lives.

(Henderson and Cowan 2007: 138)

There had been some earlier efforts by the establishment to minimise the influence of the fairies and elves. There was a move by the Scottish Parliament, for instance, in 1551 to legislate against the singing of many ballads and songs in the community, followed by the banning of 'menstrallis, sangstaris, and tail tellaris', specifically itinerant ones: 'The legislation targeted those who were regarded as the custodians of the folk tradition; to eradicate the bearers was to eradicate their lore' (Henderson and Cowan 2007: 115). Local laws attempted to change words and to replace 'pagan' folk ideas with Reformed Christian

ones, with only limited success (Henderson and Cowan 2007: 115–16). Legislation, however, now went beyond the outlawing of ballads and songs. The full extent of the belief in fairies is apparent to us now in stories of their practices in the records of witchcraft trials. From 1450 until the Witchcraft Act was repealed in Scotland in 1736, it is estimated that between 1500 and 2000 people were executed in Scotland (Larner 1981: 27–28);¹ south of the border the authorities were less assiduous in their pursuit of witches. Testimonies given at the witchcraft trials record the activities of fairies, which were associated with the devil. On his accession to the English throne in 1603, James became rather sceptical about witchcraft (Roberts 2009: 211); nevertheless, warnings about the dangers of witches and their accomplices were still being issued by the Methodist Church well into the nineteenth century (Davies 1997: 257–58). John Wesley was open about his suspicions of continued witchcraft in England, and was blamed by the established church for fanning the fires of superstition amongst the unlearned (Davies 1997: 252–65). There is good evidence of continuing belief in fairies in England as well as in Scotland (Hempton 1996: 53; Davies 1997: 257–58).

King James's demonization was not uniform. The extent of the belief in fairies in Scotland is captured in Robert Kirk's *Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns and Fairies* ([1692]; Hunter 2001), and shows an attempt to integrate them into Christian theology. Revd. Kirk, who was well-educated with two degrees in theology and who was a minister in Aberfoyle, Stirlingshire, had spent much time researching folklore and investigating the supernatural in a close and detailed way. He justified his accounts by first-hand eye-witness reports from those gifted with second-sight, and with references to the Bible and to classical literature.

By the nineteenth century, when there was no longer deemed to be a threat from otherworldly beings, curiosity took over amongst the elite. The British Isles followed their Continental neighbours in seeing a need to preserve these ballads and tales for posterity as evidence of their past. The impact of the work of James McPherson (1736–96), particularly his 'Ossian Fragments' (1760), is well known. More important for this chapter is Thomas

¹ See 'The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft 1563—1736', www.shca.ed.ac.uk/Research/witches; accessed 10 February, 2015.

Percy, Bishop of Dromore (1729–1811). Percy's *The Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* was published in three volumes in 1765. He collected manuscripts, artefacts, and transcripts of oral verse to produce an anthology of songs and ballads, romances and sonnets, an authoritative edition with editorial notes and references to local stories, customs and history. He combined heroic narratives of King Arthur, Robin Hood and border warfare with individual songs of love, distraction, madness and death. For the first time, the ballad was given credibility as a literary form. Percy's work was hugely influential through Europe in enthusing research into national folk traditions (Hodgart 1964: 148).

The influence of Walter Scott in ballad collecting and editing is significant (see Chapters 1.2.8 and 7.1.2). Also central to the Scottish scene was Mrs Anna Gordon Brown of Falkland (1747–1810), 'the most important single contributor to the canon of English and Scottish ballads' (Fowler 1968: 294). Her repertoire as singer and reciter was significant not just for size but as representative of the oral tradition in that Mrs Brown sang ballads which had been passed down through her family and continued to be sung by them.² Her own collection of ballads numbered around fifty. Twenty-seven A texts (deemed to be the oldest extant texts) were published by Child (Rieuwerts 2011: 63), and others by Scott and Jamieson in *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Borders* (1802) and *Popular Ballads and Songs* (1806). There has been some debate, however, over whether Mrs Brown altered the songs which she had claimed represented the oral tradition, passed down the female line from her family members (Rieuwerts 2011: 59, 62). While Child and Jamieson described her ballads as 'exemplary', Scott described some of her work as 'inauthentic' (Henigan, 2011). Sigrid Rieuwerts' important scholarly edition of Mrs Brown's ballads (2011) presents Anna Brown's sources for comparative study alongside her own versions (prior to the intervention of collectors), and includes some of Mrs Brown's tunes, many different from those already available for the ballads, some 'amongst the oldest and, in four cases, the only records' of the accompanying music (2011: 69). The book enables a better insight into Mrs Brown's understanding of the ballad genre, her contributions, and her aesthetic sense.

² For a full description of Mrs. Brown's contribution to ballad collection, see Fowler (1968: Chapter 10); Sigrid Rieuwerts (2011); H.N. Nygard (1978: 68–87); Flemming G. Andersen and Thomas Pettitt (1979: 1–24).

However representative Anna Brown's ballads may be, it seems clear that the Scottish material generally is characterised by dynamic female characters—rather more so than the Nordic material analysed above. We begin our study, however, with a man, the semi-historical figure of Thomas Rymer.

7.1 *'Thomas Rymer'*

It is generally agreed that the ballad 'Thomas Rymer' (Child 37) was based on an actual figure, Thomas Rymour of Erceldoune in Berwickshire who lived in the thirteenth century and was famed throughout Scotland as a poet and seer (Child 1: 318). References to his powers can be found as early as the fourteenth century.³ The ballad tells us how he came to receive his mantic powers from the Queen of Elfland. The five versions recorded by Child are all nineteenth-century, but he makes reference to four versions (and includes one) of a much earlier romance, the earliest from the first half of the fifteenth century. This romance is 'Thomas of Erceldoune', believed by scholars to be the pre-text of the ballad; however, Emily Lyle has since disputed this idea (2007: 5–11; 29–36; also Cooper 2005). Thomas had been known as a prophet since the early fourteenth century and rhymed verses of his prophecies had been in existence for some time when Scott published the ballad 'Thomas the Rymer' in *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802), with a note about an incomplete romance manuscript. Scott then published this romance 'Thomas of Erceldoune' in 1803, further manuscripts coming to light shortly afterwards. Emily Lyle asks whether the complete and coherent ballad could have been composed 'from the longer and incoherent piece', or whether the longer piece 'was arrived at by a process of patchwork additions to the shorter work, a process which might go far to account for its incoherence.' (2007: 33). From a close examination of the texts, she argues that 'Thomas of Erceldoune' is a much expanded version of an Urtext, no longer extant and which was also the origin of the ballad.

³ A detailed account of Thomas of Erceldoune can be found in the headnotes to the ballad in Child: (1: 317–23), and in E.B. Lyle (1967: Section 1).

Version A of the ‘Thomas Rymer’ ballad came from Anna Brown of Falkland, written down in her own hand in Brown Manuscript C in 1800. This is the first record of this ballad (Rieuwerts 2011: 218–19). Version B came into Child’s possession from Campbell’s manuscripts of songs collected in the Scottish Borders; no source is named. Child C is a composite version published by Walter Scott in *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border: Consisting of Historical and Romantic Ballads, Collected in the Southern Counties of Scotland; With a Few of Modern Date, Founded Upon Local Tradition* (1802), with [D] and [E] added in the fourth volume. Child [D] was collected by John Leyden and Child [E] was sent to Scott, by Mrs Christina Greenwood of London in 1806, and learned by her mother and aunt in their childhood from a ‘very old woman’ near Jedburgh, Scotland (Child 4: 454). Both Versions [D] and [E] were found in *Scotch Ballads, Materials for Border Minstrelsy*, numbers 96 and 97, published by Scott in 1802–3. At eight stanzas, Version [D] is a very streamlined account of Thomas’s adventures, and Child indicates some omissions, such as the opening. A further version of ‘Thomas Rymer’ is to be found in *The Ballad Repertoire of Anna Gordon, Mrs Brown of Falkland* (ed. Rieuwerts 2011: 218–19). It equates with Child’s A version, but Rieuwerts has restored the stanza moved by Child (l: 321) to Brown’s original position.

Scott’s collection caused some contemporary controversy as he was not averse to editing his material. He believed that the ballad was a ‘fluid form’ and that as long as he maintained the essence and character of the ballad, it was acceptable to ‘improve’ the original by reconstructing lost verses, occasionally altering the rhyme scheme and changing words or fusing earlier versions.⁴ We must, therefore, be cautious in our analysis of Version C; however, this is the version chosen by Emily Lyle to represent the ballad type in her popular anthology *Scottish Ballads* (1994), we assume because of omissions in Versions A and B. Version C will, therefore, be our main point of reference also, and other versions referenced where they throw up points of interest. Scott received his manuscript from ‘a lady residing not far from Erceldoune, corrected and enlarged by one in Mrs Brown’s MS’

⁴ Edinburgh University Library: The Walter Scott Digital Archive, www.walterscott.lib.ed.ac.uk/Works/; accessed 14 May 2014.

(Child 1: 317). ‘Thomas Rymer’ relates the tale of a meeting between Thomas and a lady, dressed in green and clearly wealthy, who offers to take the young man to Elfland where he will serve her for seven years. The ballad describes their journey, taking ‘forty days and forty nights’ to reach their destination. Like the hero of ‘Elvehøj’, ‘True Thomas’ in fact meets the elf-queen as he is lying on ‘Huntlie bank’. She is distinguished, dressed in silk and velvet with fifty-nine silver bells hanging from her horse’s mane. If her green attire is an indicator of a connection with fairies (Wimberly 1927: 65; Henderson and Cowan 2011: 57), Thomas does not realise it, but in true gentlemanly fashion salutes her, mistaking her for the Virgin Mary:

All hail, thou mighty Queen of Heaven!
For your peer on earth I never did see. Child 37C 3

She reveals her true identity immediately: she is ‘the queen of fair Elfland’, come on purpose to visit him. Child points to differences in Version B where Thomas’s words are:

Weel met thee save, my lady fair,
For thou’rt the flower o this countrie Child 37B 3

He suggests the change from ‘Queen of Heaven’ to ‘my lady fair ... the flower of this countrie’ is a Protestant replacement of the earlier Catholic salutation, but which renders the elf’s reply nonsensical: ‘O no, that can never be... For I’m but a lady of an unco⁵ land’ (Child 1: 320). But surely her denial refers to the comment that she is not from that country, but from an unknown land. She is not identified as an elf in three versions (B, D, E).

Thomas has opened the conversation, but she quickly takes control. The elf-queen speaks thirty-six lines of the ballad to Thomas’s ten in C, with a similar ratio in the other versions. As well as retaining control of the turns of the conversation, the elf-queen emphasises her power by speaking in a series of imperatives, both direct and mitigated, insisting on Thomas’s compliance throughout. As to the actual seduction of Thomas (which appears in the romance version also), the versions vary. There is an omission (whether deliberate or a lost stanza we do not know) at the appropriate place in A, Mrs

⁵ ‘unco’: *strange* in the sense of not belonging to one’s own locality; outside one’s experience (*DSL*).

Brown's manuscript collected by Tytler. Fowler makes reference to Anna Brown's 'conventional morality', but also to the 'delicacy' of Tytler (1968: 301); perhaps, therefore, this is a deliberate omission. Rieuwert's edition of the Brown manuscript maintains the omission which suggests it is Mrs. Brown's deliberate decision not to include the seduction, but without signposting it. In both, Thomas is asked simply to 'go wi me' as in C. Only in Versions C and E is there overt reference to a physical relationship. In Version C her directives are used straightaway as a seduction technique:

'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.' Child 37C 5

The lady hooks him with the suggestion of an innocent pastime, and then reels him in with a seductive dare, though she is honest enough to explain the implications of the kiss: 'Sure of your bodie I will be'. No equality is evident, but Thomas seems to understand immediately that there is power here greater than just a sexual relationship. He will not be intimidated by whatever his fate ('weird') may be:

Betide me weal, betide me woe,
 That weird shall never daunton me; Child 37C 6

Straightway he makes a commitment to the elf-queen in his kiss, in exchange for which he must serve her for seven years. Version C is also clear about the lady's invitation:

If ye dare to kiss my lips,
 Sure of your bodie I will be Child 37C 5

There can be no direct comparison of 'Thomas Rymer' with any Nordic ballad as there is no equivalent, but the British elf would seem to be far more direct. No dance metaphors for sexual activity here!

And thus the journey to the Otherworld begins for which this poem and other similar ones ('The Dæmon Lover', Child 243, for example) are well-known. The journey format, while also belonging to the romance genre, is characteristic too of the morality tradition. It reminds us of the metaphorical journey used in the Bible,⁶ of Christian setting off on his quest towards the wicker gate in Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), and

⁶ See Isaiah 35:8, and John 14:6, for examples.

Everyman's pilgrimage to his death in the morality play preserved from the fifteenth century (Cawley: 1967). The journey in 37C has three stages: firstly Thomas and his lady ride to a 'desert' (wilderness) where, as they rest, Thomas is shown three 'ferlies' (wonders). The 'ferlies' are a part of the ballad tradition: two roads, one to heaven, one to hell, plus a third to Elfland.

O see ye not that narrow road,
So thick beset with thorns and briars?
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 to wickedness,
Tho some call it the road to heaven. Child 37C 11, 12

We have description, symbolism, and satire. The road to heaven is not easy, full of barbs and prickles, and few go that way; hence it is narrow and overgrown. The satire continues in the portrayal of the road to hell: the wicked call this the road to their heaven. The path to hell is wide as many follow it, and is attractive, across a 'lily leven' (lovely meadow) in line with the tempting quality of sin. The description of both paths derives from biblical concepts: 'Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it' (Matthew 9: 13–14, KJV). For one engaged in a sexual relationship outside marriage, the road to heaven is inappropriate, and the punishment meted out on that to hell is draconian. The third route enables Thomas to step aside from the judgement of the church to pursue his adventure unfettered. There is no mention of the road to Elfland in D where the lady has not been identified as an elf.

These 'hell visions' are not uncommon. Three paths are shown to a Holstein peasant in the twelfth century *Visio Godeschalci*, though the third path here is to Purgatory and not Elfland.⁷ The characteristics of the narrow, thorny path to heaven and the wider, easier journey to hell are traditional. Shakespeare's Ophelia asks to be shown 'the steep and thorny way to heaven' and not 'the primrose path of dalliance' (*Hamlet* I, iii, 51–3) and

⁷ Ed. Rudolf A. Usinger (1875: 97–98; 112–13). Summary in Knut Liestøl (1946: 91–92).

Macbeth's Porter satirically refers to 'the primrose way to the everlasting bonfire' (II, iii, 18–19).

The second stage of the journey attains Gothic proportions. It begins and ends with wading up to the knee, through rivers and later through blood:

For a' the blude that's shed on earth
Rins thro the springs o that countrie. Child 37C 16

In 37A the wading through blood is on a biblical scale in that it takes forty days and nights to complete, a conflation of Moses parting the Red Sea (Pettit 2012: 474) and the time Christ spent in the wilderness. There is no sun, moon or starlight to light their path, only the sound of a roaring sea to accompany them.

The final stage of the journey sees them arrive in a 'garden green' and is characterised by the gift Thomas receives from the elf-queen. In each of A, B, D and E Thomas tries to pull fruit from a tree in the green garden, for the elf (in A), for himself in the others, 'for the lack o food he was like to tyne'. He receives a sharp admonition:

'O no, O no, True Thomas,' she says,
'That fruit maun not be touched by thee,
For a' the plagues that are in hell
Light on the fruit of this countrie.' Child 37A 9

There is a much more specific reference to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden in Versions D, E, and here in B:

'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' Child 37B 8

There is a homely touch in both A and B versions which addresses the issue of hunger on this journey when the elf-queen produces bread and wine (on its own, a veiled rather than overt biblical reference, but read alongside others, we see quite subversive questions of religion coming to the fore). In Version C it is the elf-queen herself who plucks fruit, here specified as an apple; Christian references are building up. This apple gives Thomas not quite the knowledge of good and evil, but magical powers:

Take this for thy wages, true Thomas,
It will give the tongue that can never lie Child 37C 17

There is a clear parallel between the plucking of the apple in the garden which enhances Thomas's knowledge once he has eaten from it, with eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge in the Garden of Eden, and the reference to the meal of bread and wine reminds us of the Christian Eucharist.

7.1.1 *The significance of the Christian allusions*

From the early reference to the Virgin Mary through to the wonders of the cosmology shown to Thomas, we could be excused if we said that the ballad is charged with Christian references when compared with the paucity of allusions to Christianity or religion we have come to expect in this genre. To an unusual degree, there is a Christian frame of reference throughout, against which we are invited to measure Thomas's activities, and which features to a lesser extent in the romance. The allusions are barely coded; it might be possible to overlook them individually, but references are piled up so they cannot be ignored. E.B. Sebo looks at how the Fairy Queen in 'Thomas Rymer' is presented within the context of Elizabeth I's 1559 restrictions on the presentation of religious ideas (2013: 11). She argues that because of restrictions placed on the *literary* interpretation of materials containing religious ideas and imagery, the romance 'Thomas of Erceldoune' had to be reinvented, now as an *oral* piece, now with a central figure who is much stronger (and in many ways more subversive) than the Fairy Queen of the romance.

The Fairy Queen of the ballad has multiple identities. She is mistaken for Mary, 'Queen of Heaven', in the opening lines of the ballad after which, Christ-like, she journeys through the desert for forty days and nights, and offers a third option for the after-life, Fairy land. When the Garden of Eden is evoked, we see a woman not succumbing to temptation like Eve, but one *enabling a man* to avert the Fall, and so completely overturning Christian theology. She again takes on Christ's role in the Eucharist as she gives bread and wine to Thomas.

She moves through personas and roles, through religious narratives, equally dominant in all [...] Under her powerful influence, the Christian myth cycle is recast so that the drama of human damnation and salvation is entirely negotiated by the female figures of Eve and Mary, while the masculine figures of Satan and Adam, and God and Joseph are made largely peripheral.

This is startling for the ballad genre, but a credible interpretation, whether we accept Sebo's theory on the 1559 restrictions or not. It is easier to agree with Sebo than Thomas Hill's assertion that 'much of the content of the ballad is conventionally Christian' (2010: 476). The points of reference are Christian—the roads to Heaven and Hell, the Eucharist, the Garden of Eden—but the agency and authority of these events are given to a woman, and not a Christian woman at that. Hill does not see as heretical the concept of man (not woman) succumbing to temptation in the Garden of Eden or of woman averting the Fall or administering the Holy Sacrament, ideas which are still today the subject of debate within the main-stream Christian Church. Rather strangely, Hill compares what he believes is the 'conventional Christian thought' of 'Thomas Rymer' with that of 'Tam Lin' (2010: 480). 'Tam Lin' (see 7.2), it seems to me, does not demonstrate any theological ideas (except perhaps the strictures against having sexual relations with a fairy and having a child out of wedlock), and we only partially see the 'wary respect for the power and charm of *faerie*' in 'Tam Lin'. If Sebo is correct in her assertion that 'Thomas the Rymer' is a re-write of 'Thomas of Erceldoune', then ironically the subversion that Queen Elizabeth legislated against was achieved. In this ballad, seminal Christian ideas are now governed by a female figure: 'The Queen's presence disturbs the theological order' and she seizes the power (Sebo, 2013: 22).

Christian and non-Christian concepts are presented side by side. Though her frame of reference would seem to be rather outside that of a medieval ballad singer, Saupe sees evidence in 'Thomas Rymer' of the bleeding that occurred between the two belief systems:

As Christianity spread, the art and tradition of old and new cultures blended, and the Blessed Virgin assumed some of the myths and iconographic roles of Isis and Ceres (mother goddesses); Minerva and Diana (virgin goddesses); and Rhea (a virgin who conceived by the god Mars)

(Saupe 1998: 4)

The collision of such fairy beliefs as not eating (food holds you in thrall to the powers of the Otherworld) with central Christian doctrines is striking and seems odd in this genre, but is well attested in the fifteenth-century version of the same story as well as romances such as the *lais* of Marie de France or *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

7.1.2 *The conclusion of the ballad and Walter Scott's own contribution*

Version C now accounts for the legend which accredits Thomas with his special gift. While he accepts a coat and shoes in A and C (the ending of B is lost), the gift of an apple in C enables Thomas to have a 'tongue that can never lie', hence his tag 'true Thomas'.

Thomas's response to this provides a detail not to be found in the other versions:

'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.' Child 37C 18, 19

There is wry humour in the way the ballad has captured Thomas's indignation at the suggestion that without this fairy gift he has not been, nor would he be, capable of carrying out his business (Green 2004: 123). The ending of Version E gave Scott an idea for new material:

Ilka seven years, Thomas,
We pay our teindings unto hell,
And ye're sae leesome and sae strang
That I fear, Thomas, it will be yeresell. Child 37E 18

In a way similar to Grundtvig's expansion of the basic version of 'Elveskud' (DfU), Scott decided to 'finish' the ballad of 'Thomas Rymer'. He ultimately enlarged the ballad by adding two extra parts, the second part describing his prophecies and the third, an epilogue, where Thomas returns to Elfland. It would seem that Scott based his C version on Version A as follows:

- He models on Version A (with the occasional addition of a Scottish dialect word) in stanzas C2 (modelled on A2); C3 (three lines of A2; one line of B3); C4 (modelled on A4); C7 (on A5); C8 (A6); C9 1.1 (A8 1.1); C11 (A 12); C12 (A13); C13 (A14); C14 (A15); C15 ll. 3,4 (A7 ll.3,4); C16 1.2 (A7 1.2); C20 (A16). Child moved stanza 15 in Version A to become stanza 7. This is the section where Thomas and his lady wade through water and blood and, inserted at this point, would emulate the crossing of water in order to access the Other world, found in other world literature,

(crossing the River Styx into the Underworld, for example). Its insertion at stanza 7 would replicate the structure of the other versions of the ballad.

- Where there is an omission in Version A after stanza 4, he fuses two lines from Version B. Perhaps he thought Thomas's actions in B 6 unheroic (having to run behind the horse, and removing shoes and hose to wade through water), so at this point he substitutes his own words to reinforce the impact of the kiss. He then returns to Version A.
- Scott changes the structure of his own version to put the description of the three roads in the middle; this enables him to end the ballad with a focus on the elf-queen's gifts.
- Scott rewrites stanza 1, taking the best of both A and B versions. He takes the strong opening spondee 'True Thom[as]' from A, and the geographical locale from B which fix the exact place where this supernatural event happened, lending credibility to the event. He inserts dialect words, 'spied wi' his ee' (instead of 'beheld'), and 'ferlie', used instead of the watered down 'ladie', to raise interest levels with the promise of something strange.

Scott does demonstrate a fidelity in Child C to the spirit of Mrs Brown's version (A), but with a different ending.

Despite editorial practices such as these, Scott's *Minstrelsy* attracted a varied response:

[it] ... created quite a splash and we find ripples from it for years to come. For some people it was simply an inspiring collection of poetry and commentary; for people with a living tradition of their own, however, it was a work of authority and value, but one which did not have the versions they know.

(Lyle 2007: 9)

With the praise came the criticism. Here are comments made to Scott by James Hogg's mother:

'... But mair nor that, exceptin' George Warton an' James Stewart, there war never ane o' my sangs prentit till ye prentit them yoursel', an' ye hae spoilt them awthegither. They were made for singin' an' no for readin'; but ye hae broken the charm noo, an' they'll never [be] sung mair. An' the worst thing of a', they're nouter richt spell'd nor richt setten down.'

'Take ye that, Mr. Scott', said Laidlaw.

(Mongomerie 1956: 163)

Although Scott supported the union of England and Scotland, what he ultimately did was to appeal to nineteenth-century Romantic nationalism in furnishing the people of Scotland with a collection of ballads and songs which reflected the essence of their folk-history, in the process inspiring further collections and anthologies in his country which, in one respect, sought legitimacy in its cultural heritage. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Scotland was characterised by social hegemony and division; the nobility, the bourgeoisie and clergy dissociated themselves from popular culture (Lincoln 2006). In *The Lady of the Lake* (1810: Canto V), Scott contrasts a highland clan united in enjoyment of a minstrel's songs with nobles in the town who sneer at similar forms of entertainment, and in *The Abbott* (1820: 105–6), Roman Catholic and Protestant authorities endeavour to suppress the popular revels. Peter Burke explains that by 1800, educated men 'had ceased to participate spontaneously in popular culture, but they were in the process of rediscovering it as something exotic and therefore interesting' (1978: 286). Walter Scott was an integral part of that movement.

7.1.3 *An analysis of genres in 'Thomas Rymer'*

The 'packed narrative and courtly language' (Lyle 2007: 30) of the 'Thomas Rymer' ballad have rendered it untypical of its genre and contributed to uncertainty of provenance. This next section considers briefly how the ballad embraces the different generic streams feeding into it to provide a variety of ways of presenting its material. We can understand how characteristics of the romance genre evident in 'Thomas Rymer' gave rise to the suggestion that it was an offshoot of 'Thomas of Erceldoune'. The opening compares well with that of a *chanson d'aventure* (Lyle 1971: 28), where the protagonist has a chance amorous encounter in a wild setting. In the spectacle of the three paths to heaven, hell and Elfland we have the equivalent of a dream vision, also found in medieval romances, with the elf-queen as the guide to interpret the landscape. While Thomas is technically not asleep, in each version he first sees the elf-queen when he is lying down, resting his head on the elf woman's knee

during the visions. Still within the romance genre, we are reminded of the *lais* of Marie de France. 'Lanval' opens with a similar situation: the knight's arrival in a 'wild' space, the forest, in order to discover something about himself, where he meets a unnamed fairy lady to whom he gives himself (Marie de France [12th century] 1958: 1. 53ff.).

The late eighteenth /early nineteenth-century interest in balladry, the supernatural, *femmes fatales*, and all things medieval, epitomised by Percy and MacPherson, lies behind much of the enthusiasm roused by 'Thomas Rymer'. Joep Leerssen, however, is more specific, crediting MacPherson's *Ossian* with the revival of the literary topos of the mantic poet. Leerssen sees Thomas Rymer, poet and seer, as a creation in the tradition of the Gaelic *aisling* or vision-poem:

Ossian [...] This icon is, beyond any contentious debate about authenticity or forgery, an emblem that appeals far and wide throughout literary Europe. It forms a stepping stone between the Biblical notion of a *prophet* and the romantic notion of an *inspired* poet, one who sees beyond the sensual world which fellow mortals can register, who communes with a spiritual realm beyond normal cognition, who from this spiritual trance-like communication takes poetic inspiration.

(Leerssen 2003: 2)

Leerssen links the supernatural agent in the poem, here the elf-queen, with the murderous but alluring elfin women in ballads such as 'Elveskud' and in Keats's 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' (1819). In the traditional Gaelic *aisling*, the otherworldly woman meets the knight (sometimes in a dream) in a liminal and lonely spot where she attempts to lure him out of this world. He is immediately entranced by her beauty and falls in love. The encounter in the Irish tradition usually speaks of the problems of the country, or symbolizes poetic inspiration (Leerssen 2003: 7). Thomas's interaction with the spirit world ensures enhanced knowledge and prophetic powers and is used to explain Thomas of Erceldoune's expertise as a visionary.

The characteristics of the romance genre are clear in the ballad, but so too are shades of the morality tradition. We have an Otherworld which belongs to the faerie, but also paths to other worlds which are in line with Christian cosmology. Both the morality tradition and the romance genre show the response of individual souls to trials and temptations, though the aim of the morality tradition is a focus on just desserts. Like Thomas, Marie de France's Lanval gives in to temptation immediately he meets the

beautiful fey lady: 'Ore est Lanval en dreite veie!' ('Now is Lanval on the right path!' 1958: 1.133). Thomas is given a choice and is informed honestly of the consequences; once he makes that choice, he loses all freedom and must remain in thrall to his lady for seven years.

7.1.4 *The portrayal of Thomas*

Are we expected to admire Thomas? The scenario of this ballad is similar to the Scandinavian elf ballads: an unmarried young man on a journey, tempted by a rich, beautiful and alluring elf, but there the similarity stops. The instant acquiescence without threat, the pleasant and honest nature of the fairy, the consideration shown to the tired and hungry man, and the bestowal of gifts herald a different type of tradition from the Scandinavian where death or subservience is meted out to the humans whether they comply or not. Thomas's surrender to the elf-queen smacks of recklessness, passivity, weakness, wantonness and vanity, yet in other ways he demonstrates *gentillesse*, and courage to face the unknown. He must capitulate to the demands of the woman in order to achieve ultimately his mantic powers. There is no judgement of Thomas; we are perhaps to understand that ultimately he acquires wisdom through his courage and obedience. Version B's portrayal of Thomas is less romantic. We have altogether a much more down-to-earth and comic picture of him, running behind the elfin horse, taking off his shoes and socks to wade through the water, feeling faint through lack of food, and obeying the elf-queen to the letter. We have no information regarding the singer of this version, but perhaps she (or he), in this portrayal, is not as invisible or impersonal as Kittredge claimed of ballads (1904: xi). In all versions we have a society which is matriarchal by consent of the male; the man needs the woman in order to achieve. There is no obvious didacticism in this ballad; if it is meant as a study in temptation, Thomas gives in too quickly.

7.1.5 *The impact of 'Thomas Rymer'*

Fowler does not list 'Thomas Rymer' as an early ballad; Child maintains that Version A can be traced to the first half of the eighteenth century (1: 320) when there was a sudden growth in the numbers of supernatural ballads because of the new interest in folklore, local tradition and balladry (Fowler 1968: 278–9). Yet, if we consider that both Anna Gordon Brown and Mrs Greenwood were both taught the ballad by older family members, there is testimony to its existence over at least two generations before their birth. For some time the stories of Thomas of Erceldoune had been widespread, and his prophecies published and bought extensively⁸ and the place where the thorn tree grew under which Thomas fell asleep and then met the Fairy Queen is even commemorated with an inscribed stone on Huntlie Bank above Melrose (an earlier stone is mentioned in Child I: 320). The powers of prophecy enabled by an otherworldly being were not an invention of the romance poet or the ballad writer, however, but go far deeper: Alaric Hall demonstrates that the ability of the elf to foretell the future was attested in the Anglo-Saxon period. With reference to *Thomas of Erceldoune*, 'Thomas's interrogation of his lady at their parting [...] is strikingly reminiscent of Óðinn's interrogation of the vǫlva in the Eddaic poem *Baldurs draumar*' (2007: 153). He argues that as supernatural powers were attributed to Christian saints, 'it is not inherently unlikely, then, that certain Anglo-Saxons should have claimed supernatural sources for their powers' (2007: 152). Taking the word *y/fig* ('one speaking prophetically through divine/demonic possession'), he concludes that the derived adjective suggests 'predicting the future (through possession by *ælfē*)' (2007: 151). These concepts, deep-rooted into the medieval and early modern psyche, would give the narrative credibility and authority.

In the ballad, we have an explanation not only of how Thomas came by his powers of prophecy, but also lessons on dealing with elves and precautions to abide by should there be a chance encounter. We are furnished with information on the myth of why one should not speak in the elfin court:

⁸ *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune*, ed. Murray (1875). Murray said that by the beginning of the nineteenth century, few houses in Scotland did *not* have a copy of the 'Whole Prophecie' of Merlin, Thomas Rymour, and others (Child 1: 317).

But Thomas, ye maun hold your tongue,
 Whatever ye may hear or see,
 For gin ae word you should chance to speak,
 You will neer get back to your ain countrie Child 37A 16

The superstition was widespread: Robert Kirk explained how fairies would prevent humans from telling their secrets by striking them dumb ([1691] 2008: 72) and similar injunctions while in the presence of spirits can be found in Saxo Grammaticus's thirteenth-century account of the visit of King Gormo to Guthmund⁹, in the Scottish ballad 'Childe Rowland', in *Dr Faustus* and *The Tempest*.

Little can be gleaned from Scandinavian ballads about the appearance and abode of elves; the English and Scottish ballads provide some detail. Straightaway, we have two familiar concepts, green clothing and wealth:

Her shirt was o the grass-green silk,
 Her mantle o the velvet fine,
 At ilka tett of her horse's mane
 Hang fifty silver bells and nine. Child 37C 2

Her milk-white steed is traditional (though dapple-grey in B). In the Scandinavian ballads, the abode of the elves lies within the hills and mountains ('Elvehøj', 'Hr. Tønne'), close to the liminal spot where the encounter takes place. In the British ballads, there is a focus on the journey needed to reach Fairy land. The great distance covered is conveyed in several ways: through repetition: 'they rode on, and farther on' (A8, C9, C15), and through suggestion of time taken: 'for forty days and forty nights' (A7), even though the horse moves 'swifter than the wind' (A6, C8, C9). Distance is suggested also through changes in the landscape: a desert (C), deep rivers (B, C), blood (A, C), a garden (A, B, C); and through the suggestion of exhaustion, lack of food and the need to rest and eat midway (A10, B7, B9, C10). The road to Elfland winds about a fern-covered hillside (A, C), and is 'bonny' despite the occasional Gothic atmosphere. Little is said of Elfland itself. There is a hall (B) where Thomas is questioned by elves, and which appears also in 'The Wee Wee Man' (Child 38) in more detail: a 'bonny ha',

Whare the roof was o the beaten gould,
 And the floor was o cristal a' Child 38A 7

⁹ Saxo Grammaticus: *Gesta Danorum*.

‘Thomas Rymer’ is celebrated for the insight it affords into the world of the Scottish fairy, but far more significant is the way it challenges traditional thought. The binary oppositions we find in the Nordic ballads, age and youth, male and female, and Christian and fairy, do not operate in the same way and are even almost resolved in ‘Thomas Rymer’. The opposition between age (equating to authority) and youth and naïveté, which is central to other ballads about desire and sexuality such as those about Hr. Oluf, Hr. Bøsmer, Agnete and Tam Lin, does not operate here. We have a matriarchy instead of a patriarchy. In her role as fairy-queen, the fairy has not just agency (the ability to determine her own outcome), but power (the ability to determine others’ fate); she would appear to be in control in her own kingdom and on earth and Thomas is happy to accept her authority. The third traditional set of binaries within the ballad, between Christianity and Fairy, are not in tension in ‘Thomas Rymer’ as the fairy other-world is used to reflect on the Christian other-world. One would expect that in a narrative about a man taken to Fairy-land by the Fairy Queen, the focus would be on their relationship in the land of the fairies, but not so. If there is a surprise that such controversial theology—at its strongest in Mrs Brown’s A version—should come from one who was the wife of a Presbyterian minister, Hill attributes the ‘specifically “feminist” theology’ to the female context in which Mrs Brown learned her ballads (2010: 481). The journey and its Christian symbolism are central to the ballad’s statement about the position of women. There is some difference in ‘Tam Lin’ where tension is set up between the strong human woman and the powerful fairy queen but, again, there is a rather submissive man central to the narrative.

7.2 *‘Tam Lin’*

We turn next to two Scottish ballads, the narratives of which attest to the ability of humans to overcome the supernatural, a notion already seen in several Scandinavian ballads. In ‘Lady Isabel and the Elf Knight’ and ‘Tam Lin’, however, we see this power invested in women. Gordon Gerould recognizes the concept of the supernatural being, the fairies, elves and mermen of our ballads, as symbolizing ‘without question an embodiment of

desire' (1932: 143), which is sometimes expressed, other times repressed, and even feared (Jacobsen and Leavy 1988: 64). This 'embodiment of desire' finds its clearest expression in 'Thomas Rymer' and 'Tam Lin', each contributing an approach different from each other and unique in the ballad corpus.

The Fairy Queen in 'Thomas Rymer' co-operates with the human, but we are conscious that her power and dominant characteristics are in line with those of her cousins in the Nordic ballads. Yet she belongs outside the Nordic tradition in that we learn much more about her. In the Continental elf ballads, the elf-maiden's power has dominated all phases of the ballad; even when she is not present, the effect of her power continues. 'Thomas Rhymer' gives us a conversation between Thomas and the Fairy Queen which lasts the full length of the ballad yet which does not end in disaster. Tam Lin's Fairy Queen is very different in character and provides an insight into the limitation of supernatural powers.¹⁰ The ballad's perspective is different from its Nordic counterparts: this ballad shifts its focus from a narrative with the male victim at its centre to one where his girlfriend assumes importance. In 'Elveskud', the fiancée (depending on the version) has the final say. We finish on a poignant note where we are brought to understand the tragic effect, not simply on Oluf, but on others, of the death of a young man who could contribute much to family and community. The Scottish fairy ballads embrace more of a comedic view of life. In the human comedy of 'Thomas Rymer', Thomas enjoys his new-found love and attendant powers. In 'Tam Lin', the potential for tragedy is present, but Tam is redeemed by the efforts of the earthly Janet, thus thwarting a plan to send him down to hell as a teind (tithe) for the devil.

'Tam Lin' is structured around a series of conversations with, until right at the end, only two actors on the ballad stage at any one time. Where this is so different from the Nordic ballads is that throughout the ballad (which runs to fifty-six and fifty-nine stanzas in two of Child's texts), the girlfriend is present; furthermore, she is responsible for the redemption of her lover and for the defeat of the Fairy Queen. This restorative role is not

¹⁰ While Child cites examples of distant relatives of the ballad 'Tam Lin' (Child 39), he acknowledges that early songs with similar titles have been found in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Scotland (1: 336). It made its first recorded appearance in 1549 in *The Complaynt of Scotland*.

found in the ballads analysed so far and looks toward a concept of a less powerful, more manageable supernatural, and a willingness to valorise women as being as, or more, capable than men. Katherine Briggs rated ‘Tam Lin’ as the most important of the supernatural ballads for the richness of the fairy traditions it records: the summoning of a fairy by picking a flower, the abduction of humans, Halloween, shape-shifting, the Fairy Rade (procession), the Fairy Queen, and the teind paid to hell (1977: 449).

Child recorded three eighteenth-century versions of ‘Tam Lin’. Version C, taken from David Herd’s *The Ancient and Modern Scots Songs* (1769), was originally called ‘Kertonha,¹¹ or, The Fairy Court’ and is a fragment of ten stanzas. Version B (1791) from the Glenriddell Manuscripts is longer, at forty-two stanzas, with lines missing from the meeting between Janet and Tom Line. Robert Burns was responsible for contributing Version A. Dated 1792, it too is made up of forty-two stanzas with lines missing in the same place as Version B. Close similarities between A and B are attributed by Child to a working relationship between Burns and Riddell (Child 1: 335). Of the remaining versions recorded by Child in his main entry for Ballad number 39, three were sourced from Motherwell’s manuscripts (D, F, G), and E came from Motherwell’s Note-book. Version H was taken from Campbell’s Manuscripts. Again, Scott had a hand in Version I (from *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* 1802 and 1833). He acknowledged it is a compound of Version A and of Robert Riddell’s, Herd’s and ‘several recitals from tradition’ (Child 1: 335). Child records a further five versions (J1, J2, K, L, M) in his addendum, one of which (M) conflates the ballads of ‘Tam Lin’ and ‘Thomas Rymer’. Two additional texts from the Crawford collection, which was not known to Child, are referred to as Cr86 and Cr99 (Lyle, ed., 1975–96, 2: 9–11, 32–35).

The names of the protagonists vary only slightly: Tam Lin (A), Tam Lien (L), Tam Line (E), Tam-a-Line (G), Tam Lane (H), Tamlane (I), Thomas (C, F, J2, K), Tammas or Tamas (J1, M), Tom Lin (D), and Tom Line (B). His girlfriend is Janet (A, H, I, J1, L, M), its variant Jennet (B, C), Margaret (D), Lady Margaret (E, F, G) or Leady Marget (K). Her

¹¹ Carterhaugh (dialect), the place name used in A, B, H, I.

pedigree is established: her father is landed (A, B, C, D, E, G, I), the family home is a ‘ha’ (hall, A, B, E, I), castle (A, B, I) or court (G). Her father has lairds or knights (A, B, I); in Version G she is the king’s daughter and in I, Earl March’s daughter. The action of the ballad can be divided into five scenes:

- 1 Janet’s preparation to meet Tam Lin
- 2 Their first encounter
- 3 Transition
- 4 Their second encounter and revelation of Tam Lin’s identity
- 5 The consequences: action taken by Janet to secure her lover

In brief, the ballad records the deliberate attempts of Janet to secure her man after an initial sexual encounter. She becomes pregnant and so seeks out Tam Lin, to find that the only way she can be sure of a permanent relationship with him and of a father for her unborn child is to rescue him from the fairies on their ride at midnight on Halloween. Tam Lin predicts the fairies’ resistance, but Janet is brave enough to follow instructions and effect the rescue successfully. The Queen of the Fairies protests, but her powers are limited.

Seven versions (A, B, D, G, H, I, L) begin with an injunction:

I forbid you, maidens a’
That wear gowd in your hair,
To come or gae by Carterhaugh,
For young Tam Lin is there. Child 39A 1

We do not know if this is the voice of the king, or the intrusion of the personal voice of the ballad-maker which happens only occasionally (seen before in ‘Elvehøj’, Chapter 4) and sets forth theme and audience. Wearing gold in the hair is recognized as a traditional ballad metaphor for virginity (Prior 1860: 147). Version D replaces the hair metaphor with ‘young and gay ... so sweet and fair’. Those who go by Carterhaugh are relieved of,

Either their rings, or green mantles,
Or else their maidenhood Child 39A 2; B 2

Version I reminds girls they can re-acquire jewellery and clothes but their virginity, once gone, is gone forever. From the outset Tam is not presented in a good light, but as a lothario who relieves young girls of their wealth or virginity should they stray into his territory, but there is no explicit judgement. Attitudes towards him will change with each audience, and the ballad-singer aims to arouse curiosity to see this young man both in the

audience and in Janet. Now, as in 'Hr. Bøsmers', the human deliberately and despite a warning enters the liminal zone in search of adventure.¹² The woman moves from her father's home, symbol of patriarchal authority and safety, where she has her own space and suitable occupations, her world of petticoats (F) and playing at ball (A, B) and other female pursuits:

Fair Margaret sat in her bonny bower,
Sewing her silken seam Child 39D 2 and similar in G 3

She makes the journey in the moonlight (C), walks to a wood (D, F, G, K) or waits for Tam at a well (A, B, I). Atkinson writes of the attraction (and danger) of such a place as a wood to women 'on account of its aura of being outside the law, and possibly even carries some connotation of a kind of male republic derived from sources like the Robin Hood ballads and legends' (2002:154). 'Prickt' (dressed in a painstaking way) and 'prind' (preened, C), she makes herself attractive, wearing her 'green kirtle a little aboon the knee' (A, B, I, L) and braids her yellow hair, combing of hair symbolizing 'readiness for marriage or willingness to be courted or approached' (Toelken and Wilgus 1986: 131). The speed at which she leaves is evidence of her eagerness and impatience. Once there, in all versions she begins to pick flowers, understood widely in ballads as a means of summoning the fairies or as a prelude to sexual activity (Toelken and Wilgus 1986: 136; Shuldiner 1978: 272), the first of several fairy traditions recorded in this ballad. Furthermore, in most versions (A, B, C, E, G, H, I, J2, K, L) we see Janet snap a 'wand' or branch; again she is asserting herself, this time to a claim of ownership of the land with a challenge to the human or spirit currently residing there (Lang 1907: 90). The flower-picking has its desired effect: the second scene of the ballad opens as Tam Lin arrives. Having made the running so far, Janet is not to be dictated to now. Tam Lin's question is repeated in all versions (except the fragments F and H) and so is significant:

Why comes thou to Carterhaugh
Withouten my command? Child 39A 6

¹² Carterhaugh is deemed to be a liminal zone by its position at the confluence of two rivers, the Ettrick and the Yarrow. Child: 'on this plain they show two or three rings on the ground, where, they say, the stands of milk and water stood, and upon which water never grows' (1: 340).

The ballad has to prepare us for Janet's mental strength displayed later in the transformation scene; the interchange is, therefore, a narrative device used to communicate two ideas: the wilfulness of Janet, who will take orders from no man (she'll 'ask nae leave at thee' A, 7), and the parity of pedigree of both Janet and Tam Lin, to provide some element of suitability in a partner. Janet is from the landed classes; so too is Tam Lin. We find out later that he is the grandson of the [Lord of] Roxbrugh (A, B), the son of the Laird of Foulis (D) or of the Earls of Forbes (G), of Douglas (J2) and Murray (I). He considers himself 'as good' socially as Janet (E).

The transition section which follows in Versions A, B, G, I and K is used to communicate the passage of time, but also the social and familial pressure placed on Janet during this period. The repetition of stanza 3 (A, B), where Janet spruces herself up in readiness for Tam, now suggests her dress needs to be put in order before she sees her father, with all that that implies. Once back home, Janet meets three groups of people, each suggesting the progression of a little more time. Firstly, the ladies playing at ball (A, B, I, K) and chess (I): once Janet was the fairest of them all; she is now the greenest, or faintest (I) as she enters the first phase of pregnancy, morning sickness. Time has now moved on when she hears the criticism of the elderly knight, as now Janet's pregnancy is showing. Finally her father 'meek and mild' (A, I), 'thick (stout) and mild' (B), confronts her with her expectant state. The ballad uses these encounters to reinforce Janet's ability to hold her own in a patriarchal world. She gives short shrift to the knight, who represents society's response to her moral lapse and its consequences:

Out then spak 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 nane on thee.'

Child 39A 11, 12

She defends herself by adopting words deemed more fitting for a man: an injunction (Haud your tongue), an insult (ye auld fac'd knight), a curse (Some ill death may ye die), and a declaration she will do things her own way (Father my bairn on whom I will). In the

conversation with her father she holds her head high: 'Myself may bear the blame', when it might have been easier to suggest she was victim of an unscrupulous man taking advantage of her innocence. She is proud of who the father of her unborn child is:

If my love were an earthly knight,
As he's an elfin grey,
I wad not gie my ain true-love
For nae lord that ye hae. Child 39A 15

Versions C, D, E, F and I omit these dialogues, instead moving straight into the second encounter between the two protagonists. Versions D, G and I add detail to Scene two to ensure the listener has fully understood the consequences of Janet and Tam's meeting. The colours already introduced in the ballad appear again, milk-white, red and green, the white no longer suggesting innocence. We cannot escape the green of the leaves, the green wood, the grass-green sleeves, a colour traditionally associated with faerie (Wimberly 1927: 65; Henderson and Cowan 2007: 57)). The colour has the effect of keeping the notion of fairy to the front of our minds and, when it is used again to describe Janet's skin-colour, we see the effects of the fairy.

7.2.1 *Diversity in delivery*

At this point, it is useful to examine how choice of word and detail in these three versions, D, G and I, demonstrate how the ballad could be delivered as comic, or potentially calamitous for the young protagonist. I reproduce this section here side-by-side to best illustrate a difference in tone:

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.'

Child 39D 7, 8

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 will as he had taen,
He's taen her by the middle sma,
Set her to feet again.

Child 39G 7, 8

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 returned a maid.

Child 39I 11, 12

Version D has begun with a traditional warning over one stanza, though not specific, that Tamlin is in Chasters wood. Margaret wishes that she were there and goes 'as fast as she could go'. The excerpt above suggests Margaret's doubt at the conclusion of her sexual liaison: 'She blushed and felt shamed'. Tam 'asked no leave'; was she seduced? She is portrayed as an inexperienced young woman, in search of sexual experience but unaware of consequences. This version then shows some sympathy as it omits the transitional scene, the pregnancy, where Margaret must deal with reactions at home, and goes straight into what in the other versions is the second meeting with Tam. There is a passing reference to abortion in a warning from Tam not to pick a flower which would 'destroy the bonny babe/ That we've got in our play', but nothing more. Margaret has suffered in the seduction and further suffering is removed as the conversation continues about Tam's background and his rescue. As the transitional scene is omitted, so we do not have a picture of the rough-tongued response to the eldern knight which we find in Versions G and I. We see Version D as a rather polite version of the ballad, one delivered for family listening.

Version G has begun with a warning given in two stanzas about Tam-a-line removing gold and maidenhoods; despite this, Lady Margaret 'langd to gang'. The stanzas above begin in a matter-of-fact style: Tam takes Margaret's hand, lays her low, asks no leave, takes her by the waist when he has had his will, and puts her on her feet, but there is no response, favourable or not, from the woman as there is in D. There follows an uncanny, magical episode which seems to counterpoint this impersonal tone:

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 gre dim.

Seven days she tarried there,
 Saw neither sun nor meen;
 At length, by a sma glimmering light,
 Came thro the woods her lane.

Child 39G 9, 10

The eerie glow reminds us of the lack of light in Thomas Rymer's fairy world (Henderson and Cowan 2007: 40). The scene serves to fix the idea that Tam, who has seemingly disappeared, is not human. The seven days she waits for Tam lead into the eight months of waiting, in the following stanza. Tam then tells her that 'lang I've haunted' the woods, 'A' for your fair bodie'. Overall, there is little emotional response in this version.

The intention of version I is very different, to raise a knowing wink and a smile. The initial warning about damage to honour and reputation is explicit: it now takes three stanzas and is expressed in stronger terms: 'I forbid' maidens from visiting Carterhaugh. Janet cuts an eager figure as she hitches up her skirt and preens herself. When we arrive at her meeting with Tamlane, there is no concern expressed for the fate of Janet; the mood is comic, particularly when we factor in the description of Tamlane, a 'wee wee man', no higher than Janet's knee. The repetition and the authorial intrusions of the excerpt above lend a sense of voyeurism. Stanza 13 tells of the gossip as Janet arrives at her father's hall, the bathos of the final line again provoking a smile:

They thought she'd dreed some sair sickness,
Or been with some leman Child 39I 12

As we leave Scene 3, we are beginning to hear very different voices establishing themselves in the telling of the same narrative, each representing different stakeholders: concern for the woman who may have been seduced (D), a more neutral response in G, and I, which exploits the perceived comedy value of the tale. Speculation on the identity of this last voice raises the possibility of the eldern knight representing the patriarchy (*I told you so ...*), or perhaps the other women, who show no fellow-feeling. These differing presentations also invite us to consider the attitude of the woman to the liaison with Tam. If Janet is to be the heroine of this narrative, the presentation of aggression in her attitude to the men, whether father, brother, eldern knight, or Tam would attract no sympathy. There is a fine line between hostility and feistiness which would remove or add sympathy in the audience. In D, we have someone who would seem to have bitten off more than she can chew, who is rather naïve, while in Version I, we have a woman who certainly puts herself on display. All suggestion of frisky and aggressive behaviour (with all the men) is

offset, however, by use of comedy devices. No version continues the initial wantonness of the woman through to the sex scene—there is no suggestion of Janet’s agency; we have already received the warnings about Tam Lin’s behaviour, indicating he is not the genteel knight that we would find in the romances.

To return to our analysis of the ballad, scene four, the second meeting with Tam Lin and the revelation of his identity, occurs in all versions in various degrees. Janet dresses carefully again, and begins once more to pick flowers, but not this time to summon her lover. Janet would seem now to be bowing to society’s pressures. Fearful that she will give birth to a child who will be not only illegitimate but perhaps not human either (Lyle 1970b: 39), she is here to find herbs which will induce miscarriage. She seeks reassurance about Tam’s identity and breeding. Was he ever in holy church? Had he ever been baptised? If we had thought badly of Tam hitherto, his compassion at this point for his unborn child redeems him. Janet is reassured by his answer, though the audience is a little surprised: his pedigree is not dissimilar from hers. In two versions he states categorically that he is now a fairy: ‘I’m a fairy, lyth and limb’ (C, 4; I, 31); in D and G he says he is human. The revelation of his identity is the first step of his plan to persuade Janet to rescue him from the fairy queen. The date of this second meeting is key: it is Halloween (A, B, F, H, I, J1, J2, K) or the day before (C, D, E, G, M) when the fairy teind is paid to hell every seven years.¹³ Tam fears it is his turn because he is so ‘fair’ (A, G, I), or human and the latest arrival (D). At midnight on Halloween the threshold of the world of the supernatural opens, allowing souls to pass through (Henderson and Cowan 2007: 82). Tam holds out the promise that he will be Janet’s life mate (B, D, E, G, H, I, J1) and the father of her child (A, B, D, E, G, H, I, J1, J2, K) and even a perfect man (C) if she rescues him—in this version he has described himself as ‘a fairy, lyth and limb’ (C, 4). ‘Man’ takes the important position at the end of the line; perhaps it is his transformation back into human that is the issue, rather than a promise of perfection!

¹³ For a full description of the teind, see E.B. Lyle (1970a: 177—81).

Tam warns Janet that the fairies will try to stop her snatching him by making her afraid, which they will do through a series of transformations. When she has Tam in her arms he will be changed into (most frequently across the versions) an adder or 'esk' (newt), various other wild creatures, and a naked knight. The final transformation, a hot iron or coal, to be plunged into milk or water to return Tam to a man (in A and B) seems to be a purification process (Gerould 1932: 149).

The final scene begins as Janet goes home to prepare for the rescue. She returns to the place prescribed at the appointed hour, bearing compass and holy water. The rescue is described quickly in some versions (A, B, G, H, I), but Versions D, E, F, J2 and K come to a more dramatic conclusion by describing each of the transformations in turn. B is matter-of-fact:

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 recoverd him. Child 39B 37

Version A, which also does not describe the transformation, tries a little harder to capture the atmosphere:

Gloomy, gloomy was the night,
And eerie was the way ...

About the middle of the night
She heard the bridles ring;
This lady was as glad at that
As any earthly thing. Child 39A 36, 37

But soon the sense of fear and anticipation is lost with a commonplace simile:

Syne covered him wi her green mantle,
As blythe's a bird in spring. Child 39A 39

The incremental effect achieved by the use of repetition in successive stanzas of D, E and F with varying final lines captures the frenzied activity and Janet's achievements:

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. Child 39D 29, 30, 31

Janet shares each of these stanzas on equal terms with Tam as finally she achieves not necessarily supremacy, but equality in her attempt to save him. Her defiance of what her society deems socially acceptable behaviour is finally successful and rewarded. It is a public defiance, unlike Lady Isabel (Section 7.3), who also ignores family advice, who also comes face to face with danger and is successful, but Isabel's exploits must remain a secret. Lady Isabel has to return to the protection of her family while Janet has made the journey away from her family to another cultural space (which will be little different).

The ballad closes with the response of an angry fairy queen, who threatens Janet with an untimely death in A and F, and more commonly rues the fact that she had no foreknowledge of what was to happen. Had she realised, she would have replaced Tam's heart with stone (B, D, E, G, H, I), we assume so he could not fall in love with another, and/or his eyes with wood (A, B, I). This would ensure not just that he would never be able to find his way back to fairy-land, but that he should be blinded. It was believed that physical and second sight both emanated from the eyes (Lyle 1969: 182).¹⁴ This blindness motif, designated F235.4 by Thompson (1955-8: 3, 43-4), is more usually found in stories where a human midwife is summoned to assist in the birth of an elf or fairy baby. She accidentally smears fairy ointment in her own eyes rendering her able to see the fairies as they really are. Once the fairies realise, they have no option but to blind her (in one or both eyes) to prevent her finding her back to the fairies. Robert Kirk records this eventuality:

Women are yet alive who tell they were taken away when in child-bed to nurse fairie children, a lingering voracious image of theirs being left in their place [. . .] When the child is weaned, the nurse dies, or is conveyed back, or gets it to her choice to stay there. But if any superterraneans be so subtle as to practice sleights for procuring a privacy to any of their mysteries (such as making use of their ointments [. . .]) they smite them without pain, as with a puff of wind, and bereave them of both the natural and acquired sights in the twinkling of an eye (both these sights where once they come being in the same organ and inseparable) [1691] 2008: 50-51

¹⁸ In folk-tales, ointment is commonly applied to the eyes of humans before they are returned from Elfin to their own community.

The legend is prolific in northern and north-western Europe (Mac Cárthaigh: 1991: 133–43). Emily Lyle looks at the further motif of the replacement of eyes with wood. She quotes a Shetland legend, ‘When the Trows take anything they always leave some resemblance of the stolen property in its place’ and draws a possible analogy with a Dumfriesshire story where a man prepared to substitute for his wife a ‘piece of moss oak shaped and fashioned to the size of his wife’ (Lyle 2007: 137). It is the inclusion of beliefs and legends such as these which give the ballads a ring of truth, and ground them in local knowledge. Version H concludes with the fear of the fairy queen that she must now replace Tam Lane in the tribute to hell, and Version G with the feel-good ending of Lady Margaret rescuing Tam-a-Line at midnight and giving birth to his baby an hour later.

Significant ideas emerging from our analysis of the ballad so far are role reversal, and textual changes made by singers to reflect their own attitudes towards this strong-minded woman. While Janet, typically for the woman, has a significantly smaller percentage of the dialogue, yet she dominates the action and brings about an outcome favourable to her own circumstances, the rescue of a man who would become a husband and father to her child. This marriage would redeem her in the eyes of her family and social group. We shall now look further at the female protagonist and in what ways different sections of the audience may have responded to her.

7.2.2 *Janet as heroine?*

The figure of Janet dominates the ballad; she is present in every scene and in every stanza as either actor or listener. Her tale would seem to serve as an exemplum for the opening injunction, and would perhaps have been sold as such to the men in the audience, who might object to the voice and agency given to this woman. Cautionary advice such as that which opens ‘Tam Lin’ can be found elsewhere, the opening of ‘Child Waters’ (Child 63B), for example, with a response similar to Janet’s:

I warn ye all, ye gay ladies,
That wear scarlet an brown,
That ye dinna leave your father’s house,
To follow young men frae town.

‘O here am I, a lady gay,
That wears scarlet an brown,
Yet I will leave my father’s house,
An follow Lord John frae the town.’ Child 63B 1, 2

This warning to maidens not to hang around with the wrong sort of boy is in line with the edicts of both church and society on sex outside marriage in all periods of the ballad’s popularity, but especially the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when Calvinism and Presbyterianism controlled not just spiritual matters but also welfare and education (Mitchison and Leneman 1989: 1, 8, 9). Janet’s response, and that of many during their youth, is one of rebellion: she will not be told what to do. The opening of Version D sees Margaret doing what a woman would be expected to do, sitting ‘in her bonny bower, sewing her silken seam’. Passivity, attractiveness, and the ability to sew are all attributes suitable for the fairer sex, but she quickly begins to make her own choices. She ignores her father and tosses aside the protestations of society, represented by the old knight, and follows her heart. She assumes conventional male characteristics: she takes the initiative, she moves into public areas, and she becomes self-assertive. She makes the first move in looking for Tam Lin, summoning him by picking flowers, and she demonstrates huge bravery in facing up to the fairy queen by holding Tam tightly as he moves through the painful and frightening transformations. She ultimately achieves her desire: a lover and a father for her child. David Buchan describes it as ‘a protofeminist text’ (2001:2). ‘The gloriously self-willed Janet, beautiful, bold, brazen and tenacious as she is, represents the ideal of womanhood for both women and men’, argue Henderson and Cowan (2007: 92), and Niles agrees (1977: 346); yet we should at least consider an alternative perception of her. Is her behaviour prompted by love, or contrariness, or social necessity? There is evidence in the texts for all. Tam Lin is Janet’s ‘ain true love’, on whom he relies for his redemption: he will be saved ‘if you do love me’ (C, 9). There is no great outpouring of love from either of them. We assume that they have not met up in the intervening eight months between first meeting and the denouement. There are references to Margaret’s ‘heart’s delight’ (E, 18) and ‘you’ll have your desire’ (D, 24) but it is unclear whether this refers to

love or the need for a father for her child. She is conscious that the baby should have a name (A, 19). Tam is referred to as ‘the man she loved best’ (F, 15), with further addresses to her ‘love’ and his longing for her in Versions G and I ‘as you do love me weel’, with a comment outside the main tradition that ‘We loved when we were children small’ (I, 28). She is, however, clearly feeling pressured to abort the baby when she searches for herbs that will induce miscarriage.¹⁵ Versions F, G and K are significant here in their introduction of other family members, an episode which has two effects: it clarifies the heroine’s actions and, at the same time, raises sympathy for her. Her sister and mother are angry (F); along with her brother (G) and the unknown speaker in K, possibly the elderly man, they tell her to find the herb which will abort her baby, which is what she would appear to be doing when Tam takes her to task, a feature of every other full version except M, and J2 which is very much a sanitized picture of events. In J2, there is no deliberate attempt to see Thomas and no overt activity between him and the unnamed heroine. There is no time lapse to suggest pregnancy, though Thomas does promise he will be ‘the father of her child’. In Version J2 his instructions are Christianized:

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.

—but within a fairy context (Gerould 1932: 136).

Without doubt, Janet feels much pressure to conform. Mitchison and Leneman’s research into illegitimate births in Scotland during the period 1660–1780 reveals Scotland was ‘a nation learning to contain sexual impulse mainly within the narrow range of opportunity that society made permissible, out of genuine acceptance of religious doctrine’ (1989: 243). Janet is guilty of sexual activity outside marriage, and of carrying an illegitimate child, particularly frowned upon among the gentry and aristocracy as a suitable

¹⁵ Versions A, B, I refer to Janet picking roses, assumed an error in transmission (Hixon 2004: 76). If not an error, then Janet is once again summoning her lover. Toelken sees the picking of roses as a ‘powerful way of foregrounding the physical, sexual, reunion of the couple’, which would not make a lot of sense in this scene of the ballad (1986: 130).

marriage contract would thus be out of the question.¹⁶ The father of the unborn baby is absent and may not be human anyway. Furthermore, Janet refuses to save face through marriage to one of her father's lords. The community is critical and her father disappointed, though more out of fear that Janet's baby would be the progeny of an 'elfin knight', according to Lyle (1970b: 38), than concern regarding the shame brought on the family. It is no wonder that we see her searching for a way out of her dilemma when she meets Tam Lin the second time. This is the unacceptable behaviour against which the opening stanzas warn us. Janet is defiant, putting her own impulses before social convention which will ultimately not only secure her future and that of her child, but also Tam Lin's life. Martha P. Hixon writes robustly about the anomaly created within the ballad, of the opening stanzas supporting the status quo, yet with a heroine who defies convention and achieves everything she wants despite that. Janet is not condemned in the ballad; on the contrary we are invited to admire her. Hixon questions whether we are given a positive or negative picture of Janet, concluding that it is the ballad singer and the audience who, as context varies, will make that decision (2004: 74). The number of ballads which treat illegitimacy as a state giving rise to shame and condemnation is a pointer to an early negative response to the actions of Janet, while a modern audience would find her far more admirable.

One aspect of the action has generally been overlooked, however. By the third scene of the ballad, we find Janet looking for a way out of her predicament, caving into convention and her family's demands by picking abortifacient herbs, the effect of which would return her to a marriageable state. She stops, but not of her own volition. The only way she can continue to defy society's protocols (in keeping her child and in her choice of marriage-partner) is with a man's permission. Tam Lin at this point forbids the abortion and assumes responsibility for Janet's child: 'Do not pluck that flower, lady ... They would destroy the bonny babe' (D 10). Ironically, responding to Tam Lin's command will give her some social acceptance, in that the baby would no longer be illegitimate. The ballad quickly shifts the spotlight from Janet and onto Tam's story. John D. Niles sees this

¹⁶ Punishment meted out to women found guilty of fornication and illegitimate pregnancy would include heavy fines, and inhumane treatment and public humiliation in the public courts, and in church services before 1820s (Brown 1987: 94-96).

moment as the first step to Tam's return to humanity, quoting Version F where Thomas refers to 'my baby' as evidence of his desire 'to preserve his own flesh and blood' (1977: 340). His evidence is somewhat tenuous, however, as this is the only version where Thomas uses 'my'; in most other texts the baby is one 'we got us between'. Tam is conscious of his humanity: he speaks of his human origins and is seeking to be restored to human state; he has fathered (we assume) a human child. If we keep the spotlight on Janet, however, we can read her as a foolhardy, headstrong girl, who resists pressure for so long but is on the point of surrendering when she is rescued by a man. From this moment on she becomes brave Janet, but she has no choice. It is understandable now why each of the versions save one (39 C: 'Kertona or The Fairy Court') is named after the male protagonist.

The man in turn needs the woman to save his life. We do have an inversion of the traditional male hero motif (Hixon 2004: 70), but the woman has been enabled by the man. Just as Janet has rejected the rules of her society, so does Tam; both have been controlled by the desires of others. When we consider his sudden assumption of responsibility, we should remember it is at *Halloween* when Tam rejects fairy society, when he is in danger of being handed over to the devil as a tithe. He is ready to undertake human duties in the form of husband and father, not through a sudden onset of morality or love, but to save his own life. The timing is key. One of the central anomalies of the ballad concerns the identity of Tam Lin. It would seem he is a bespelled knight. He is variously described as 'elfin grey' (A, B) and 'elfin rae'¹⁷ (G,) and he describes himself as a lithe fairy (C, I). In Version I he is a 'wee wee man', and in G he disappears, leaving Janet in a kind of fairy land for a week. His points of reference, however, are human: his parentage and place of birth. Janet has her suspicions, seeking reassurance in her questions about Tam's Christian background (A, B, D, E). At any one time, he appears as a seducer, a lover, a dutiful father-to-be, a manipulator, a hero, and a villain (Butler 2001: 6), yet he avoids condemnation, just as Janet does.

¹⁷ *OED* s.v. *grey* (n.) 'a horse having a coat with a mixture of white and dark hairs'; *DSL* s.v. *rae* (n.) 'roe deer'. Ritson (1875: 26–27) offers a definition of *elfin grey* as 'fairies of the moors, often clad in heath-brown or lichen-dyed garments'. *DSL* s.v. *gray folk*: gnomes, trolls.

7.2.3 Readings of 'Tam Lin'

'Tam Lin' confronts what patriarchal societies considered for a long time were essentially female problems, sexual dalliance and consequential illegitimacy, paternal authority, and love versus duty. The church line was that cases of pregnancy outside marriage were the fault of the woman totally, and not her partner (Mitchison and Leneman 1989: 10).

Responses, however, change from society to society and through time. In her support of a feminist reading of 'Tam Lin', Hixon espouses the right to self-determinism and autonomy supported by this ballad (2004: 88), but we must question whether Hixon's idea was likely to be generally accepted in the ballad's first manifestations, whether Janet would have been recognized as simply a headstrong young woman not untypically in conflict with authority. The anomaly still remains between the apparent support of conventional behaviour and the lack of overt condemnation of Janet's behaviour. A code of morality would seem to have been established at the beginning of the ballad with the intrusion of the singer's warning, after which it becomes a grey area as Janet's behaviour is proved to be successful. If we examine other ballads which deal with illegitimate babies, we see varied responses. The mother in 'The Cruel Mother' (Child 20) is condemned to 'the pains o hell' for being in almost the same position as Janet, unmarried and pregnant. She, however, is driven a step further, actually succeeding in killing her new-born twins:

She took out her wee pen-knife,
She twind them both of their sweet life. Child 20E 5

Poor Lizie Wan (Child 51) confesses her pregnancy to her family, whereupon her brother acts:

And he has drawn his gude braid sword,
That hung down by his knee.

And he has cutted aff Lizie Wan's head,
And her fair body in three, Child 51A 5, 6

Whether his action attests to the community's need for justice alone, or reflects the guilt, shame and need to cover up the misdemeanour of the brother also—the baby is the consequence of incest—is not clear. The brother then feels he must 'set my foot in a bottomless boat, and swim to the sea-ground' in sorrow for his incest and murder, before

his father sees him. The older generation's response to the daughter was milder, less rigid: they took no action against her when she earlier confessed. Mary Hamilton (Child 173) is to be hanged for killing her new-born child, and Lady Maisry (Child 65) is to be burnt alive by her (Scottish) family for carrying the illegitimate child of an English lord. Yet here, the errand-boy represents a gentler response to the predicament, perhaps embodying the audience's reaction when Lady Maisry is to be burnt along with her unborn child. Freedman points to the need to quash and even destroy the woman who is active, courageous, has her own voice (1991: 14); yet 'Tam Lin' celebrates one who resists and survives. There may be no threat of death to Janet in 'Tam Lin'; nevertheless, Janet feels the force of convention. Different audiences, different tellers, different times: there is more than one response to be found to this predicament in the ballads.

Ballads show us people not necessarily adhering to the church and elite society's rules, but trying to cope with them. Freedman saw the ballad as the voice not of the 'people', but of the 'peoples'. The community had many voices and represented different shades of opinion and values (1991: 4). Mitchison and Leneman's research showed, for instance, much higher rates of illegitimacy in pockets of rural Scotland than in the towns, as high as over 30% in some parishes, suggesting it was not problematic, socially. 'In the nineteenth century it was the complaint of those who commented on rural illegitimacy in the north-east [of Scotland] that there was no stigma attaching to the child or to the mother' (1989: 235, quoting George Seton, *The Causes of Illegitimacy*, Edinburgh 1860), yet elsewhere there was. It is, of course, the nature of the oral tradition that we have to surmise what the varied responses were to Janet's behaviour.

If Gerould considered the fairies of the supernatural ballads as representing sexual desire, and Sørensen as portraying some sort of fear of those desires, Niles went a step further to link the two. In his examination of the erotic in this ballad, he looked in particular at the shape-shifting scene, seeing erotic metaphors throughout. The wrestling with wild beasts, serpents and hot elements to a successful conclusion—not just the overcoming of the fairy queen and the rescue of Tam, but the ultimate relationship,

presumably marriage— Niles saw as a celebration of the resolution of sexual fears. Tam is ‘a distinctly “other” and dangerous figure associated with aggressive sexual energy’ (Niles and Long 1986: 346). If, however, Janet is attributed with coming to terms with, or even taming, sexual fears, she certainly did not seem to have any reservations in the first scene of the ballad.

There is a further theme present in all versions, the response to which is unlikely to change:

Hold me fast, let me not gang,
If you do love me leel. [loyally] Child 39C 9

The physical holding on to Tam while the fairies perform shape-shifting spells on him is a metaphor for the faith, trust and support vital in any relationship. It is this holding on which is at the core of the ballad and which redeems both protagonists. It is what Janet does in the family setting when she is determined to marry for love, and it is what she ultimately does to be secure of her lover. When she is at her weakest in the final weeks of her pregnancy, the reappearance of Tam gives her the strength needed to persevere. As a couple, they have the understanding and courage to defeat supernatural forces with all that that says about love. We cannot deny the resolution, courage and perseverance of Janet, but neither should we close our eyes to evidence of times when she does succumb to the patriarchy. The tragedy of ‘The Cruel Mother’ becomes a human comedy as there is a man there to help. The anomaly of the opening warning is further explained if we consider Janet’s story as a coded message for the sisterhood on their need to pursue their own interests in a world governed by men. Ballad openings are, of course, a less stable part of the structure of the text than the core narrative (Nygard 1958: 40). If it was transferred from another ballad, it inevitably has come with some significance.

Much of ‘Tam Lin’s continued popularity lies in the picture it offers of a young woman willing to take on authority figures in an attempt to determine her own future. The ballad is more complex than that, however. If we look again at the presentation of binary opposites, again we see three sets of binaries, but in ‘Tam Lin’ (unlike ‘Thomas Rymer’) each is in tension, without any clear opinion or judgement expressed on the conflict

between them. We see age against youth, male versus female, and the powers of Christianity set against those of fairy. Age, in the father-figure, has no vigour but is sensible, while youth is energetic, daring, and single-minded—easily interpreted as hot-headed. The women in the ballad are the ones who hold the power while the men are in many ways passive. Janet's determination is self-evident, but the role of the fairy-queen needs further examination. In her power over, and interest in, the man, she can be compared with the fairy queen in 'Thomas Rymer'. The difference is that in 'Tam Lin', she remains in the background, though the final lines are given to her. Thomas is given his *raison d'être* through the figure of the fairy. She is his lover, his mentor, his guide and his protector. She is a force for the good in his life, so he believes, differing hugely from the elf-queen we find in the Nordic ballads, menacing and vengeful when rejected, and even when not. The sexual element is absent in 'Tam Lin'. There are two references in G to the existence of a fairy-king (none in 'Thomas Rymer'). In 'Tam Lin', the fairy-queen describes Tam as a 'stately groom' (A, B, I), the 'best' (B) the 'bravest' (D), and 'bonniest' knight (A, I), but there is not the prescience that we might attribute to a fairy-queen: she cannot foresee what will happen to him. Her power is expressed in her abduction of Tam as he fell from his horse (A, B, I) or fell asleep (D, E, G). His youth at the time of abduction is stressed in two versions: ages nine (I) and three (G), which puts us in mind of Goethe's interpretation (Chapter 2).

The third binary opposition offered in the ballad, between the fairy and the human, is expressed in terms of the ability of the human to overcome the supernatural through the power of love. Thomas D. Hill sees in 'Tam Lin' a 'blending of conventional Christian thought, delight in sexual love, and a wary respect for the power and charm of *faerie*' (2010: 480), comparing it with Marie de France's 'Yonec'. We would agree that both narratives employ magic and shape-shifting where the heroine tries, successfully in 'Tam Lin' but not in 'Yonec', to secure her lover's life, and in both there is an enjoyment of physical love outside marriage, but this is celebrated side by side with a need for a Christian faith far more overtly in 'Yonec'. Morality is foregrounded in 'Tam Lin', but not so Christianity.

There is an acknowledgement of the existence of powers such as those of the fairy, but a conclusion that in Scotland it is the power of love which will win through. This we shall see again in our next ballad, 'Lady Isabel and the Elf Knight'.

7.3 *'Lady Isabel and the Elf Knight'*

Despite Nygard's assertions that elves 'are not predatory beings in traditional song of the North' (1958: 312) and not murderous (23), it would seem from the ballads that encountering elves and fairies in Scotland is a far safer experience than in Scandinavia.¹⁸ Thomas Rymer positively enjoys his sojourn with the fairy queen, and Tam Lin seems not to complain until it is his turn to be the payment demanded by hell and so escapes. The notion of the ability of humans (even women) to effect escape and render the fairy powerless continues in our next ballad, 'Lady Isabel and the Elf-knight' (Child 4), which is interesting on several levels. The title was added by Child to text A and has been applied, ironically, to all versions of the British type even though the elf knight does not survive beyond this version (Nygard 1958: 256).

Stephen Knight called 'Lady Isabel and the Elf-knight' the 'most popular ballad in Europe' (1993: 274) in a reference to its wide distribution, the number of versions, and its ability to resist the demise of the genre. Knight attributes this to its central theme (1993: 275), where concern for the behaviour of strong-willed young ladies is explored through a dramatization of tensions occurring within the family and between lovers. As such, he considers the text should be read as a 'social document' (Knight 1993: 273). As with 'Tam Lin', the ballad concerns itself with the family's fears for the protection of (and need to control) a nubile daughter who wants to assert her independence. Child recorded six versions, but the core narrative of each remains the same. Versions of the ballad type can be found extensively throughout central Europe and Scandinavia, including an early 1550

¹⁸ Elves are murderous creatures in the 'Elveskud' tradition in Denmark, Sweden and Iceland, and certainly predatory in many of the other Scandinavian ballads examined. Stephen Knight restates Nygard, that elves are not murderous in European *folklore* (1993: 279). In many Scandinavian folk stories, elves are cooperative beings, but show as a threat in ballads where humans refuse to cooperate or be seduced, and even when they do. Knight conceded that in a ballad they are 'capable of conveying a threat' (279).

Danish version, 'Kvindemorderen' (DgF 183), found in Karen Brahe's manuscript, which is not examined in this thesis as the knight is human, and so is not included in the *trylleviser* section. A close analysis of the whole tradition (including a chapter on the British versions) can be found in Holger Nygard's impressive *The Ballad of Heer Halewijn: Its Forms and Variations in Western Europe* (1958) where the main focus is on provenance and transmission rather than interpretation. Other major works on 'Lady Isabel' (Iivar Kemppinen, 1954, and Lajos Vargyas, 1967) also give their main attention to transmission; no argument is conclusive—each calls each other's conclusions into doubt. Our concern here, however, is to focus on the cultural meanings of particular variants and not with transmission.

The core narrative of the Scottish versions centres on the attraction of a young woman to a knight, occasioned by the blowing of his horn (A) or playing of his harp (B). In each version, the knight comes to woo the lady; in all versions, she succumbs and elopes with her knight to the greenwood (A), Weavie's well (B), Bunion Bay (D), the sea (C, E), and the riverside (F). In the broadsides, the knight encourages his lady to steal gold and horses from her father to take with them. Once at their destination, the knight reveals he is a serial killer and that she will join the six, seven or eight (depending on the version) maidens he has already killed there. She delays by applying a ruse, to give her time and opportunity to gain supremacy. She suggests rest before he kills her (A), or asks for a kiss (B). In Versions C, D, and E, upon being told to disrobe as her clothes are too costly to spoil in the water, she asks the knight to turn his back while she does so. In F, she demands he scythes the weeds from the bank to enable her to access the water more readily. She then takes advantage of the situation and plunges him to his death in the water (B, C, D, E, F), or stabs him (A). The lack of credibility continues in a further scene (C, D, E, F) where Isabel's parrot is bribed into silence not to reveal the maiden's adventure to her father, the king.

The earliest of these (C) dates from 1776; the majority were collected in the 1820s and in the north-east of Scotland.¹⁹ Versions C, D, E and F form a group, where the drowning is the *modus operandi* for the removal of the knight, and each includes all the scenes through to the cat's conversation with the king. D, E and F were originally broadside ballads (Child I: 23), re-written for the popular market. For the broadside audience, drama is enhanced through direct address to the audience:

O heard ye of a bloody knight,
Lived in the south country?
For he has betrayed eight ladies fair
And drowned them in the sea. Child 4 D 1

Here the singer begins with a summary of the serial killing to draw the audience in. The streamlined F broadsheet (twelve stanzas) goes straight *in medias res* to establish the bullying character of the knight in his demands for gold before the abduction. Version D does the most to present May Collin as, in some respects, a dutiful daughter who refuses to leave without parental permission and who also confesses to the murder to her mother. The mother makes sure the body is buried before it is discovered, thus ensuring the transgression can be blamed on a woman and not the father.

Our main focus here will be Child 4A, collected in Aberdeenshire by Buchan (published 1828) and which is the only Scottish version to include an *elf* knight. Child referred to references to elf-land in the Danish equivalent, 'Kvindemorderen' (Versions A, E), though the elf-land is not named as such, and could equally be a vision of an after-life; in the Swedish 'Röfvaren Rymer' (Afzelius 82); Norwegian 'Kvinnemordaren' types A ('Svein Norðmann') and B ('Rullemann og Hildeborg'). The continued speech of the knight once beheaded suggests an otherworldly being in the Dutch versions ('Heer Halewijn') and German A, B, C, E (Child 1: 49). The opening of Version A reminds us of that of 'Tam Lin': here Lady Isabel is behaving as was expected of a woman, sitting 'in her bower

¹⁹ The dates of the variants are: **Ba**: Buchan's MSS, London: 1816–27; British Library Add. MSS 29; **Bb**: Buchan's *Ancient Ballads and Songs of the North of Scotland*, 1828; **Bc**: Motherwell's MS (Glasgow University Library: 1825; Murray 501; **Bd**: Harris MS: 1830; **Ca**: Herd's MSS, British Library Add MS 22311: 1776; **Cb**: Herd's *Ancient and Modern Scottish Songs*, Edinburgh: 1776; **Cc**: William Motherwell: *Minstrelsy, Ancient and Modern*: 1846; **Da**: Sharpe's *Ballad Book*, UCLA, PR1181.S53: 1880; **Db**: Buchan: *Ballads of the North of Scotland*: 1875; **Dc**: Motherwell: *Minstrelsy*: 1827 **E**: JH Dixon: *Ancient Poems, Ballads, and Songs of the Peasantry of England*: 1846/1857; **F**: *Roxburgh Ballads* (London and Hertford: 1871).

sewing'. She is 'fair', passive, and restricted to her own, woman's, space. The date is significant, the 'first morning in May', May Day, the beginning of summer, the time when, like Halloween in 'Tam Lin', the fairies were particularly active (Henderson and Cowan 2007: 81). Lady Isabel hears 'an elf-knight blowing his horn', to which she responds, and here begins a metaphor of sexual attraction and adventure. The lady steps out of the role dictated by family and society by voicing aloud a desire for this knight:

If I had yon horn that I hear blawing,
And yon elf-knight to sleep in my bosom. Child 4A 2

The horn traditionally has been a symbol of male power and strength (Cirlot 1971: 144; Becker 2000: 144), here attracting the maiden, awakening a need for a sexual relationship. Jung saw a dual symbolism: the horn is penetrating in shape, and therefore active and masculine in significance, yet also it is a receptacle, which is feminine in meaning ([1953] 1968: 471). The knight, blowing the horn, is predatory, but Isabel also expresses a readiness: her desires are realised as the knight magically jumps in at her window. He suggests the initiative was hers:

'It's a very strange matter, fair maiden,' said he,
'I canna blaw my horn but ye call on me.' Child 4A 4

Her response is immediate: 'He leapt on a horse, and she on another' and they ride to the greenwood (which is where Janet summoned Tam Lin by plucking the flower, 39D, F, G, Section 7.2), traditionally a place of danger or risk, where we search for our true identity and where transformations occur as a result of this search (Syndergaard 1993: 135; Chapters 5.1.2 and 6.1.1). On arrival at 'the place where ye are to die', Isabel is now stimulated by wit instead of desire. Her first attempt at delaying the elf-knight in his determination to kill her fails:

Have mercy, have mercy, kind sir, on me,
Till ance my dear father and mother I see. Child 4A 8

He does not respond to compliments or pleas for compassion, so Isabel must think harder:

O sit down awhile, lay your head on my knee,
That we may hae some rest before that I die. Child 4A 10

Here is the turning point: we move from his commands ('Light down, light down, lady Isabel' A7)) and her meek compliances, to Isabel taking charge of the situation: 'O sit down a while, lay your head on my knee'. This time her ruse works:

She stroaked him sae fast, the nearer he did creep,
Wi a sma charm she lulld him fast asleep. Child 4A 11

She binds him with his sword-belt, stabs him with his own 'dag-durk' (dagger), and proclaims his epitaph with a flourish:

If seven king's-daughters here ye hae slain,
Lye ye here, a husband to them a'. Child 4A 13

As with 'Tam Lin', here is a ballad which reveals fears for the safety of daughters who demand independence. Of the two relationships which lie at the heart of this ballad-type, that between the woman and her lover, and between father and daughter, the former is dramatized in Version A, while the latter is implied, but features more strongly in later versions. In the potentially sexual relationship Isabel, like Janet and Tam Lin, takes the initiative: she is not coy or submissive, but eager to escape the patriarchal world in which she has been brought up. There is no fear, or reluctance to enter into a relationship, but neither is there suggestion of careful consideration. And as with Janet, the moment Isabel steps out of her own space, without knowledge of the man she has selected (who has not been vetted by her family) or the place where she is going, problems arise (Knight 1993: 277). Here is a woman like Agnete (Chapter 5) whose youth renders her hot-headed but who, like Janet, ultimately wins through. But at what cost? In order to avoid death, she must administer death. Even so, she attracts more sympathy than Agnete, in two ways. Isabel, unlike Janet and Agnete, retains her honour in saving her own life and that of many more potential victims in her heroic deed (Top 1992: 115); in addition we sympathize as a result of our antipathy to the elf-knight who, unlike Agnete's merman, has no redeeming qualities whatsoever.

7.3.1 *A ballad of an independent woman*

A good memory is essential for a ballad singer and so women's lack of formal education may have resulted in better memories as they could not rely on the written word. In their role as mother, grandmother or nurse-maid, opportunity was ample for singing ballads to

the children, and groups of women would also sing socially or during work (Knight 1993: 277).²⁰ Where there were no men present, we can imagine the popularity of songs about strong women:

It is not hard to conceive of some at least of the female part of the audience finding *LIEK* compulsively interesting as a statement of the experienced pressure of a patriarchal world, and also as a coded statement of the existence of certain powers actually held by women within that world
(Knight 1993: 280).

We can speculate that the sisterhood, taking the opportunity to discuss their menfolk, would fantasize over a woman like Lady Isabel, strong enough to take on her father and lover and win. She has the courage to forge her own destiny and understands that when faced with danger, she must do something rather than allow death to be administered to her as to her predecessors. Isabel is quick-thinking. In order to gain advantage, however, this newly independent woman must slip back into the feminine norms which she has been taught and which she has implicitly rejected in her escape from her father's space, in order to overcome the elf-knight. While rejecting passivity to realise her heart's desire, she must now, ironically, adopt passivity to save her own skin. She appears to obey the knight; she offers wifely comfort ('put your head on my knee'); she strokes him and lulls him. Knight notes this anomaly as central to the ballad (1993: 278); feminist critics holding up Isabel as a paradigm for the independent young woman, should not, however, omit to consider the full picture, that the restrictions placed by the patriarchy on their young women are often there for good reason: there are wolves out there who know nothing other than to behave like wolves. The father knows this; the child does not. A foolish and unwise dalliance could wreck any chance of a subsequent good marriage, as is suggested in 'Tam Lin'. Like Agnete, Lady Isabel has had to learn her lesson: that firstly her judgement of the lover was wrong; and then that modesty and womanly behaviour will (used wisely) ultimately ensure her security. There is an even greater anomaly: she has had to learn that the passivity instilled in her as a woman perhaps has a purpose. This knowledge has been instilled by her family and so, even at a distance, they still control her. The ballad is about the parents'

²⁰ It should be repeated here that while we know that women were integral in transmitting the ballad genre, Child's headnotes reveal the collection from which each version was taken, and sometimes identify the gender of the singer.

need to protect reputation and the marriage expectations of the whole family. It is a text which deceives us into thinking one thing while leading us to think another: it is not so much about women achieving an independent voice as about parental fear of loss of control over their children and concern that nothing jeopardizes their financial future.

A grasp of this idea helps an understanding of the final parrot scene which occurs in the later versions and which is examined in detail by David Atkinson (2002, Chapter 5). The parrot has knowledge of the murder, and so the lady bribes him with the promise of a gold cage to hold his tongue. The metaphor of the parrot in its cage, with its clear awareness of what is going on, supplies an insight into the position of the woman, leaving in the audience's mind a picture of the woman who has no choice but to return to her own gilded cage. While Isabel may have undergone a kind of rite of passage (Atkinson 2002: 176), little ultimately has changed. The parrot knows, but the secrets are kept and, as Atkinson points out, there are many secrets: not just murder, but the money stolen from her father; the elopement; how close she came to wanton behaviour and death; and her furtive night-time return home. The rite of passage and acquiring of experience have to be suppressed. There is no suggestion that the ending might be different, that Isabel would reveal that she has put an end to this mass murderer. While women may indeed have celebrated one who was able to pull the wool over her father's eyes and put an end to the male aggressor, they were not yet in a position where they could introduce a heroine capable of taking complete independence without making a bit of a mess of the whole situation. These ballads are beginning to interrogate gender norms but the women still have lessons to learn if they are to leave the male space successfully. 'The boundaries are dangerously permeable and insecure' (Atkinson 2002: 178). The heroine saves herself in that she comes to a point of recognition, a critical moment where she understands the truth (Sebo 2013: 15 fn. 17), but must return to her cage.

Both 'Lady Isabel and the Elf-knight' and 'Tam Lin' consider the impact of the independent woman in her attempt to secure a lover. Janet's tenacity ensures a lover in Tam Lin and father for her child, suggesting an assured future and a workable paradigm

with which to convince the older generation that there is a different model for women than the one they advocate. Isabel is equally bold in her initiation of a relationship and leaving her father's cultural space in search of a future on her own terms. Unlike Janet, however, she does not find it. She does not get beyond the liminal space where she must examine her situation and act accordingly. If the elf-knight is a projection of her desire, she must kill him in order to return to her initial situation. We continue with 'The Elfin Knight', and another relatively harmless elf.

7.4 'The Elfin Knight'

The concept of the demon as a projection of sexual desire sits comfortably also in 'The Elfin Knight' (Child 2) which, along with 'Tam Lin' and 'Lady Isabel and the Elf-knight' considers a different model of the independent woman. Child's earliest example of 'The Elfin Knight' (A) is dated to 'about 1670' (1: 15), a broadside discovered bound with other pieces at the back of Blind Harry's *Wallace* ([1361] 1673). Of the eleven versions recorded by Child, only five are of any length (A, B, C, D, I); the remainder vary between four and twelve stanzas, and are all nineteenth century.²¹ The core of each version is remarkably stable. The ballad is in the riddle song or wit-combat tradition, and takes the form of a conversation between an elfin knight (A, B, C, D, E) or unidentified man (F, G, H, J, K) or an 'auld man' (I), and a maiden. The earlier versions include a narrator who provides a context for the dialogue; the later ones (F, G, H, J, K, L) are delivered in the first person, in direct speech, without a frame. The framed versions (with the exception of I) form a group, all beginning in a similar way and are reminiscent of the opening of 'Lady Isabel'. The elfin knight blows his horn, a welcome sound to the maiden:

I wish that horn were in my kist, [chest]
Yea, and the knight in my armes two. Child 2A 3

A similar sentiment is expressed in B, C, D, E. Her words act as a kind of summons—we remember Janet taking a similar initiative in 'Tam Lin'—and the knight appears

²¹ Jürgen Kloss has written an extensive history of 'The Elfin Knight': www.justanothertune.com/html/cambriesshirt.html, first published June 15, 2012; accessed 1 June 2014.

immediately, in the lady's bed (A, B), by her side (C), in her arms (E). Version I puts a new slant on the narrative, suggesting that this ballad is about an attempted abduction and rape (White 1997: 4); but in the rest we have an elfin knight unwilling to enter a relationship unless the lady proves her maturity by completing an impossible task. The knight expresses concern at her youth, but the girl has an immediate answer:

'Thou art over young a maid,' quoth he,
'Married with me thou il wouldst be.' [ill]

'I have a sister younger than I,
And she was married yesterday.' Child 2A 5, 6

Prompted by her reference to her sister's wedding, he does then go on to suggest marriage.

Version D, found in Buchan's *Ballads* so we may expect some editing ('mauling, mingling, and lengthening' Nygard 1958: 305), startles us by quantifying the youth of the maiden:

I hae a sister eleven years auld,
And she to the young men's bed has made bauld.

And I mysell am only nine,
And oh! Sae fain, luvie, as I woud be thine. Child 2D 3, 4

We are further surprised to see the elder sister has been so bold as to enter the bed of more than one young man. The singer is flagging up what will become a discussion on women entering relationships on their own terms. The remaining stanzas record the conditions laid down by the elf if he is to marry her, a dialogue which comprises the whole of the later versions F, G, H. The elfin knight poses an impossible challenge: the maiden is to make him a 'sark' (shirt) without using a needle to sew it (F, H) or cutting the material or hemming it (A, B, C, D, E, G, I). Further conditions are imposed in the versions from 1810 onwards (C, D, F, G, H, I): the maiden is to wash the shirt in a cistern or well devoid of water, and dry it on a thorn bush where the sun has never shone (C), or which has never blossomed or grown since Adam's time (D, F, G, H, I). The maiden is not fazed: she seizes the initiative and also the control of the conversation. Where the knight uses three stanzas to set his challenge, she uses nine (B) with a similar ratio in the other versions. If she is to sew a shirt for the knight, he must work on her acre of land: plough it with his horn, sow it with corn, and harrow with a thorn, completing all this by daybreak. He must then cut the

crop down with his knife, losing none; stack it in a mouse-hole; thresh it with the sole of his shoe; winnow it with his 'loof' (palm); and use his gloves as sacks. Finally he must transport it over the sea, ensuring it arrives in a dry condition. The tasks set have varied little over the years; each version differs slightly in detail, and the enormity of the task lies in the detail. Upon completion, the knight may then report to the maiden to receive his shirt. He realises that he has met his equal, if not his master.

We have already seen the significance of the shirt as a betrothal gift in 'Clerk Colvill' (Chapter 3). It is a recurring motif in the supernatural ballads. Liestøl and Moe summarize: 'A shirt was a love-gift from a betrothed maiden to her fiancé. That a woman should sew a shirt for a man was a token that she was willing to give him her love' (1924: 3, 178; also Parker 1947: 266–70). In asking the maiden for a shirt, the elfin knight is asking for her love. If folk song brings to its audience 'a fund of imagery which belongs not to the mind of a single poet but to the hidden emotional life of all who speak and know English' (Reeves 2008: 31), then we should assume that the meaning of imagery found in the other ballads is applicable here too. The horn, prominent at the beginning of 'Lady Isabel and the Elf-knight', makes an appearance here also. The knight's horn which stirred powerful feelings in Lady Isabel at the beginning of that ballad and which came to carry a sexual metaphor, has the same function in 'The Elfin Knight'. He is instructed to use it to work on her 'acre of land', to plough, and the knight must use it to sow the land before he cuts it down in due course. The metaphor loses control in places, but that does not matter; the point has been made and, if there are objections to apparent crudity, that the girl is giving the elf permission to take her sexually, the lack of a perfect fit would assist in denying accusations.²²

'The Elfin Knight' has retained its popularity largely as a wit-combat ballad, but the solution to the riddles is not the focal point; the contest between the sexes is (Fowler, 1968: 22). The task the elf sets, making a shirt for him, is one typically assigned to a woman. The

²² Critics such as Atkinson (2002: 57) and Toelken (1966: 12) have expounded further on the meanings of the metaphors, suggesting imagery of love and death or desire and danger, not unlikely with a lover who is not of this world.

'man' is ensuring she is fit for marriage. He complicates the task, however, by adding a series of disabling clauses:

For thou maun shape a sark to me
Withouten any cut or heme,' quoth he. Child 2A 8

He is testing both her domestic skills and her intellectual capacity, which she then proceeds to match in the tasks she sets in return. What can be read as a metaphor for sexual banter is seen in other terms by Buchan:

the mortal must match wits and win a riddling combat in order to avoid submission to the immortal [...] In general terms the wit-combat serves to dramatize the clash that can occur at the interface between the Otherworld and this world. It shows [...] how a mortal can repulse the unwelcome attentions of an immortal, and avoid falling into his power;
(Buchan 1984: 390–91)

We also have in the ballad-type a reversal situation. The girl is younger and has no obvious power, yet is portrayed as a land-owner ('I have an aiker of good ley-land' A11) and the knight must work for her on her land. She does not sit passively sewing in her bower, but is knowledgeable about the processes of agriculture and can set tasks more challenging than the knight's to get what she desires. Women can offer intelligence and 'wit' over brute strength, but the ballad reveals this power is 'constantly being tested and contested' (Atkinson 2002: 61).

'The Elfin Knight' would seem to celebrate the independence and equality of women but, as with 'Tam Lin' and 'Lady Isabel and the Elf-knight', there is a sting in the tail, though of a different nature. In the final section, the maiden is rejected in favour of the elf's wife and children. Most of the versions of the ballad (which have become more streamlined through time) close with the riddle-challenge, but in A and B there is this final stage:

'I'll not quite my plaid for my life; [integrity]
It haps my seven bairns and my wife,'
The wind shall not blow my plaid awa

'My maidenhead I'll then keep still,
Let the elphin knight do what he will.'
The wind's not blown my plaid awa Child 2A 18, 19

We close with a picture of a young lady, rejected, but who has to have the final say.

Perhaps there is disappointment in her voice at the end, rather than triumph, as she vows to

keep her 'maidenhead', the only response she can voice in the face of his rejection. While we can seize on this ballad as an example of the woman holding her own in this battle of the sexes, we see that ultimately she loses. If 'plaid' (tartan cloth) is a metaphor for honour, integrity or virginity,²³ the man rejects the woman first: 'I'll not quite my plaid for my life; [...] The wind shall not blow my plaid awa'. The elf has entered into the sexual banter, but then suddenly becomes a guardian of morality, where the woman appears as wanton. We are reminded of the otherworldly upholders of proper behaviour in the Agnete ballads and in 'Hr. Tønne af Alsø'. Here is a ballad which would seem to valorise the adventurous, independent woman, but in fact portrays a triumphant man, who may be a chancer but who then refuses to pursue what is on offer and maintains the moral high ground.

Versions A—E specifically name an elfin knight as protagonist; beyond those there is no overt reference to elves. While tasks requiring some sort of supernatural power are essential to the plot of all the remaining versions, the use of the direct speech without introduction precludes our knowing whether the speakers are human or preternatural. Child is sceptical about the inclusion in the ballad of the task-setting by an elf, which is not found elsewhere in the northern tradition, arguing that the elf is an 'intruder' who has found his way into 'The Elfin Knight' from elsewhere (Child1: 13). The absence of the elf in later versions would perhaps suggest some rationalization of beliefs.

7.5 *Scottish ballad women*

In the Scandinavian ballads studied, the women are rarely foregrounded. In 'Clerk Colvill', the Scottish ballad in the Continental tradition (Chapter 3), the ladies are given

²³ The 'plaidie awa' symbol has appeared in other well-known Scottish ballads, 'The Wind blew the Bonny Lassie's Plaidie Awa' for instance, where a visit to the butcher resulted in a loss of virginity:

For there wis a bonnie lassie an' she lived in Crieff
She went into a butcher's shop when he wis sellin' beef
An' he's gi'en tae her the middle cut an' doon she did fa'
An' the win's blewn the bonnie lassie's plaidie awa'.

(Bodleian Library: *allegro* Catalogue of Ballads (2011) [http://bodley24.bodley.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/acwweng/regsrch.pl?wert=wind+blew+the+bonny+lassies+plaidie+awa+\[title\]&recnums=:15671:17122:31079:37095&index=1&db=ballads](http://bodley24.bodley.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/acwweng/regsrch.pl?wert=wind+blew+the+bonny+lassies+plaidie+awa+[title]&recnums=:15671:17122:31079:37095&index=1&db=ballads) accessed 10 February 2015)

space, but they have no power, except for the otherworldly woman. In the home-grown Scottish tradition, however, we have women who are not only given a voice, but have agency too. Like Agnete, they strive for choice and independence, but the Scottish women have more *nous*. Janet, too, has a better understanding of the idea that with independence must come responsibility, a concept which eludes Agnete. Of the three young women who seek a sexual adventure, Isabel, Janet and the maiden from 'The Elfin Knight', the last is the only one who avoids danger: she does not leave her own domain to follow the elf into the wood or other liminal space. Lady Isabel and Janet are searching for self; they go into the wilderness to try to understand their place in life (Syndergaard 1993: 137). Like Isabel, the maiden from 'The Elfin Knight' employs wit and intelligence to get the elf on her side, but he rejects her efforts to master him. If the elf represents both her sexual desires and the male principle, she has no need to kill; after her foray into the realm of desire she loses on a technicality: the male cannot cope with this suggestion of superiority.

A real departure in the Scottish ballads rests in the persona of the Fairy Queen in 'Thomas the Rymer'. In other traditions and in 'Tam Lin' she is characterised by her lascivious nature and arbitrary power, but she cuts a different figure here. She is beautiful, has supernatural powers and knowledge but, once she has Thomas in thrall, she is a useful and positive force. She blurs boundaries and problematizes our assumptions of pagan and Christian (as in 'Hr. Tønne'), and of male and female. She redefines Thomas's masculinity which, in the Nordic ballads, was expressed through concepts of action, safeguarding and deliverance ('Harpans Kraft' and 'Hr. Magnus', for instance), but now in 'Thomas the Rymer' is demonstrated as success through daring and an ability to listen to, and be guided by, a woman.

The strong woman of the Scottish ballad perhaps represents different things to different audiences. The conservative, culture-centred singer and audience would expect culture, the stronghold of familial values, to win through. The proto-feminists (and today's audience, more conscious of equality between the sexes) would see the germs of a strong, independent woman ready to break out, who has the wit to stand up against the male

predator but who should not expect recognition or help or praise. The upholders of the status quo would see in these Scottish women not independence, but wrong-headedness, women who ultimately come to recognise their weaknesses and have little choice but to return to the patriarchy.

The potential for subversion lies more strongly with the Scottish tradition, though the seeds are out there in Scandinavia, but not apparent in the Icelandic ballads. Where there is a Nordic or European tradition, the Scottish ballad is happy to accept it, as with 'Lady Isabel and the Elf-knight' and 'Clerk Colvill', but home-grown Scottish ballads forge their own identity, giving rise to characters and situations not to be found in countries to the north. In the ballads analysed, we have women who eschew passivity, who overcome the opposition and refuse to be compromised in so doing ('Tam Lin') and fairies who are not by definition antagonistic or aggressive ('Thomas Rymer' and 'The Elfin Knight'). It is in a Scottish ballad that religion is used to challenge conventional ideas in an expression of women's equality and even superiority ('Thomas Rymer').

Chapter 8 Conclusion

In the opening comments of my concluding chapter, I turn full circle to a folklore scholar quoted in the Introduction, Alan Dundes, who urged fellow scholars to re-centre their study of the ballad in the texts, to probe their material more deeply. Comparing one tale or (here) ballad with another is a relatively safe undertaking, but to move beyond that into ‘the ever treacherous area of interpretation’ we must put aside the objective and factual, instead employing a subjective, explorative, interpretive approach, even providing multiple interpretations (Dundes 1980: ix–x). What I offer in this final chapter is indeed speculative, but the encouragement is there to take a risk. There are those who urge caution, that the ballads are just stories (Swahn (1983: 176), for instance)—and they have a valid viewpoint. But our difficulties are more deeply entrenched. As with literary texts, ballads over the centuries have spoken to varying audiences and continue to speak in differing ways, and so our interpretations must be multivalent. The ballad does not mean one thing only:

Meaning is a process, a dynamic relationship between a situation (a tale, heard or read in a certain context) and the person who experiences it. In a way, one could say that there never is a meaning, but only one (or several) mind(s) engaged in the process of creating meaning out of a story.

(Simonsen 1985: 30)

The difference between a literary and oral text, however, makes the ballad scholar work harder, in two ways.

Firstly, ballads are even more poly-vocal than literary texts. It is harder to maintain control of the contexts in which they are read. As a ballad text has evolved, it has become the product not of a single author but of many singers who each present the song according to context and memory, and so it is not representative of one age or even one society. There is expression in the ballads not of a world view, but of world views. Even when transcribed, ballads are not ‘fixed’. This leads onto the ballad scholar’s second difficulty. Performance is the core activity, where context is as important as delivery. The effect of audience on performance is as crucial as performance on audience. This response to context and the dynamics of performance, however, are both lost: because of the nature

of the ballads' orality, we are not privy to audience response. When we consider Ibsen's *Fruen fra havet*, for instance, we have access to audience and critic appraisal, both in 1888 and subsequently, and we know what were the social concerns when the play was first performed and how the play has been received since. Later (twentieth-century) reception of the ballad may be available, but it is not available for the period under study in this thesis. A difficult question, therefore, for the scholar is how the listener or reader does actually create meanings out of a tale: 'The reflection of social reality provided by the ballads is often blurred because so many ghosts of so many pasts are looking back out of the mirror' (A.L. Lloyd 1967: 161). The same ballad story told to different audiences who, because of geography or time or local context and personal circumstances, do not share the same frame of reference or inference, may have different meanings.

This thesis has focused on the elves and their function in the supernatural ballads over four hundred years. Their presence in the ballads is not a casual one, an elf adversary where a human one would do just as well. They stand as a metaphor for some anxiety or concern that the community together will try to address or rationalize. They represent an external threat, or an internal one, whether that be puberty, sexuality, or another type of change which requires a response. There is a balance to be struck, of course: in our search for meaning, we should not view the ballad as simply a sociological document, but consider in what ways the supernatural ballads encode the psychology of the individual and the group: like legend, ballad, 'psychologically, [...] is a symbolic representation of folk belief and reflects the collective experiences and values of the group to whose tradition it belongs' (Tangherlini 1994: 22). The communal singing of ballads is a way of voicing, rationalizing and sharing concerns and hardships with the community. Ballads describe but also enable people to exercise control over events, reflected in the song's own ways of imposing control, through structure, rhythm, and rhyme.

8.1 *A tragical world view?*

Niels Ingwersen, in ‘The Tragic Rhythm of the Scandinavian Ballads’ (2005), considers the unremitting gloom pervading the atmosphere of supernatural ballads: the scenario of man, regardless of his merit, facing a desolate destiny in an unjust world governed by arbitrary justice:

They are people who meet their solemn and bleak destinies with no surprise and no lament. One reason for that attitude towards life is that humans were surrounded by multitudes of malevolent supernatural beings who were powerful and intent on causing harm. In the Scandinavian magical (‘naturmytiske’) ballads, such demons are abundant, and they cannot, as in the case in the tales, be overcome or, as in the legends, be pacified, so they strike out and destroy the human being’s hope for happiness.

(2005: 62–63)

The ballads focus on the waste, or potential waste, of a young life, but Ingwersen’s final sentence of the quotation above invites a note of caution. There is an assumption that all Scandinavian ballads of the supernatural end in disaster. Table 8A suggests differently:

Table 8A: Ballad outcomes

Protagonist is overcome by the power of the otherworldly being	Protagonist refuses to be vanquished by the otherworldly being	The outcome for the protagonist varies according to the version
D: ‘Elveskud’ Sw: ‘Hr. Olof och Älvorna’ Ic: ‘Kvæði af Ólafi Liljurós’	D: ‘Elvehøj’ Sw: ‘Älvefärd’	D: ‘Agnete og Havmannen’
	D: ‘Harpens Kraft’ Sw: ‘Harpens Kraft’	
Ic: ‘Gauta kvæði’	D: ‘Hr. Magnus og Bjærgtrolden’	
D: ‘Hr. Bøsmere’	D: ‘Hr. Tønne af Alsø’	
	D: Trolden og Bondens Hustru’	
	Sw: ‘Agneta och Havsmannen’ (most versions)	

Of the fourteen ballads listed (including Icelandic versions), those with a tragic ending are outnumbered by the positive outcomes in ballads where the supernatural being is defeated. Icelandic ballads are even more tragic than their Scandinavian counterparts. The outcome of ‘Gauta kvæði’ is the drowning of the young woman, and Ólafur suffers in the same way as the Danish and Swedish Oluf, but now there is not even the potential of marriage. The most difficult ballad-type to pigeon-hole is the Danish ‘Agnete og Havmannen’, versions of

which vary in their endings as ballad singers experiment with different scenarios and outcomes regarding what would happen if the formula changed slightly.

We should consider the supernatural ballads gathered from outside the Nordic countries. Leaving the German ballads analysed aside as they are too small a selection to be a true reflection of the tradition of that country, we should consider Scotland. If we include the Scottish ballads examined, the result is a little different:

Table 8B: Outcomes in the Scottish corpus

Protagonist overcome by the power of the otherworldly being	Protagonist refuses to be vanquished by the otherworldly being	The outcome for the protagonist varies according to the version
Sc: 'Clerk Colvill'	Sc: 'Tam Lin'	
Sc: 'Thomas Rymer'	Sc: 'Lady Isabel and the Elf Knight'	
	Sc: 'The Elfin-knight'	

'Clerk Colvill', the Scottish version of 'Elveskud', is the only Scottish ballad examined where the protagonist is *overcome* by the power of the supernatural being and, as such, remains within the Nordic tradition. 'Thomas Rymer' finds itself in this category, but it is hardly a tragedy. Thomas falls under the spell of the fairy queen, enjoys being in Fairyland, electing to remain—and returns in Walter Scott's 'Third Part'. It is Thomas's choice to accompany her. The remaining three ballads, 'Tam Lin', 'Lady Isabel', and less so in 'The Elfin-knight', have the potential for tragedy but it is averted. It would seem that, contrary to Ingwersen's assertion, made on the basis of the Scandinavian ballads, the characters of some ballads are dealing with the threat and averting disaster.

8.2 *The central motifs of the supernatural ballads*

The four elements common to the ballads of the supernatural analysed in this thesis are liminality, a journey, a common age in the protagonists, and the supernatural itself, whether elves, mermen or fairies. The fact that there are elements in common surely suggests the ballads convey a 'meaning', though here we begin to speculate. Youth and a journey through a liminal place together indicate a transition, a move away from the family

in search of the next stage. The elf, the trope central to this thesis, deserves careful consideration. David Buchan (1991: 148–49) considered the meaning of the supernatural ballads to early audiences, as part of an enculturation process: ‘as well as telling a good story, they convey cultural knowledge through an exposition within narrative of the Otherworld and the Otherworld beings: their nature, characteristics, and practices.’ These ballads provided guidance to members of the local community in how to deal with the insidious behaviour of such creatures. Most scholars see the elves as metaphors. Diane Purkiss considers the centrality of death, linking the ballads of supernatural abduction with the Ancient Greek myth of Persephone, snatched by Hades to be his consort in the Underworld: ‘this is the court of death at play, and a reminder of the irreducible otherness of death at the heart of what seems most familiar and homelike’ (2000: 76). Many of the ballads have direct links with these stories of young men and women carried off by classical deities or nymphs, Persephone, Eurydice, Hylas and Zagreus, for instance. Kvaerndrup is in broad agreement, that the ballads ‘at skildre menneske der rammes af begivenheder so berøver dem deres handlefrihed’ (portray people affected by events which deprive them of their freedom; 2006: 87).

Chapter 6, in particular, considers a psychoanalytical approach: the elf tales tell of ‘psychic conditions’ in the human (Einar Ól.Sveinsson 2003: 29) or ‘inner conflicts’ (Ingwersen 2005: 65). Writing specifically about the portrayal of wildness and the Wild Man in literature, Hayden White sees wildness as representative of repressed desires: the wild man may no longer be out there but is within, ‘lurking within every man [...] clamouring for release within us all, and will be desired only at the cost of life itself’ (1972: 7). This ‘conflation of a physical with a moral condition’ (White 1972: 13) not only threatens the individual but, through him, the family unit and the community. Diane Purkiss sees specific times of danger. With a reference to T.S. Eliot’s ‘birth, and copulation, and death’, she considers the role of the supernatural in the ballads to be one of expression of repressed desires, ‘the ones who articulate the unspoken, silent desires that lie within all three events, the desires that go beyond what society can accept’ (2000: 52). Fairies are

‘symbols for what cannot be said, or cannot be acknowledged, or cannot be believed’ (Purkiss 2000: 86).

Few would disagree with Gerould’s view that ‘fairies are without question an embodiment of desire’ (1932: 143). Niles sees ‘Tam Lin’ as a ballad about the ‘resolution of sexual fears’ (1986: 346), with Tam Lin as the ‘other’ and associated with ‘aggressive sexual energy’. Sørensen factors in the age of the protagonists; the supernatural represents an inner demon, but within a *forlovelsessituationen*, a betrothal situation. The young person on the threshold of a new life with a loved one is struggling as he or she is not ready to give up something of him or herself, a demon which is ultimately destructive if, as in ‘Harpens Kraft’, a way is not found to deal with it. Sørensen’s theory makes sense, but it cannot be applied to all ballads, ‘Trolden og Bondens Hustru’, for instance, or ‘Hr. Magnus og Bjærgtrolden’, and outside the Nordic corpus, ‘Thomas Rymer’. But neither should we expect it to. The ballads are not formulaic, each speaking in a different way about experience (Ingwersen 2005: 69). Mossin interprets the elf-maid in ‘Elveskud’ as representative of one aspect of Oluf’s fiancée, her sexuality. If Oluf cannot face up to it, neither can he face up to his own and so their relationship must ‘die’, (Jacobsen and Leavy 1988: 65). In reference to a tale of a fairy Bowman visiting a young girl’s house, Diane Purkiss suggests ‘it is almost as if he is her awakening sexuality’ (2000: 110). Per Schelde Jacobsen expresses a similar idea about the Elf-Knight:

If he symbolizes uncontrolled sexuality, it is quite obvious that he represents the ‘natural’ in her, which longs to escape from social constraints to act out secret desires. His horn is her nature ‘calling’, this is also why he can hear it, he is part of her.

(Jacobsen and Leavy 1988: 88)

In a carefully argued theory, Jacobsen looks at the internalization of the demon, from the demon characterized as an entity in its own right which over time becomes represented as the demon within, which he deems to be sexuality (1988: 45–46).

Timothy Tangherlini’s view that the elf represents the Other—anyone outside the community who is, therefore, a threat to that community (1995: 50)—is discussed in Chapter 2.8. He further writes:

Supernatural beings offer one of the easiest ways to code threat to members of a homogeneous society. Supernatural beings are situated clearly outside the

bounds of the tradition group—they live in places where members of the society do not live, they eat things which members of the society cannot or do not eat, they have powers which normal members of the society do not possess. Perceived threat can therefore be assigned a symbolic representation in the form of supernatural beings—either non-human beings, such as *bjærgfolk* and trolls; supernaturally endowed human beings, such as witches; or supernatural human form beings, such as revenants.

(Tangherlini 1994: 231)

The critics concur, and it is a conclusion of this thesis, that the elves represent some kind of threat with which people need to come to terms, whether an external one, as we see with Tangherlini, or internal. James Porter cautions us, however, about finding the meaning already in the ballad when perhaps the singer and audience bring a meaning dependent on occasion or context significant to them or their community (1986: 118). Tangherlini agrees that the teller and the listener create the meanings for themselves (1994: 30). There is no reason to discount any of these theories; each is viable in its own way. The external threat from outside the community in time became a metaphor, representing an internalized danger to the individual, a bad choice or a fear of change.

8.3 *Cultural tool or rites of passage narrative?*

We cannot know definitively, of course, whether these ballads simply *record* concerns, or were used as a cultural tool to remind young people of the values to which they should ascribe. What is clear is that there are two types of fear expressed, both closely linked. In some ballads, the elf can be interpreted as an embodiment of a fear within the young person facing a rite of passage, anxiety about change and perhaps commitment, of moving from one area of control to another. This concept explains ballads such as ‘Elveskud’ and ‘Harpens Kraft’ where there seems to be no issue regarding the choice of partner, and which Sørensen and Mossin see as a fear of losing one’s identity in commitment to another. If we consider that the ballads go beyond an expression of experience into a more didactic role, then the elf may be identified as the fear of the family or community, who worry that the young person will make a wrong choice not in line with family interests and social factors (Simonsen 2004: 242). In ballads such as ‘Lady Isabel and the Elf-Knight’, ‘Tam Lin’ and ‘Hr. Bøsmer’, the elf or fairy tries to lure the young person from his or her

family into a place or situation of disorder where the old rules are abandoned. The conflict is now between the power of the family and the individual. These ballads would be used as a cultural tool, a reminder of the dangers out there, of society's rules and, the bottom line, that a woman's sexuality should be governed by a man, as head of the household.

If, indeed, the elf ballads were ever used as a platform from which to remind the young¹ of cultural expectations, as suggested by Buchan (1991: 148–49) we can find models of those men and women who have succeeded against the supernatural through avoidance of taboos, through silence, not eating and, especially, not dancing with the elves, and there are examples of those who have failed, or redeemed themselves through single-minded determination. We are in danger, however, of focusing all our attention on the young, human protagonist. What if we turn 'Elveskud' on its head; we could say the ballad is really about the elf and not Oluf at all. It sounds a warning that profligate behaviour in a woman, such as that displayed by the elf-mistress, has a dangerous effect, leading to death, and disaster for the family. Could the demon be the girl? The elf's riotous behaviour, expressed in her dancing, and her disregard for the rules of a well-ordered society in the way she makes all the running where relationships are concerned, her need for power, her general lack of control, are all fatal to a well-controlled (male-controlled) society, though this may have been an attractive concept for some women.

8.4 *Centralizing the ballad women*

What if these ballads are not about *men* at all? What if their narratives have been appropriated by the women in order to put women at the centre of the story? We have been encouraged over the centuries, often through titles provided by editors, to focus on the male lead in these ballads, on the groom, for instance, in 'Harpens Kraft' and Icelandic 'Gauta kvæði', who hijacks a narrative about a woman's grief and makes himself central (Chapter 5). My contention is firstly that we should give more attention to other characters in these

¹ I use 'young' as the ballad protagonists are without exception young, but the message might also have been relevant to people later in their lives, both in the sense that they too might experience socially problematic desires, and that society needs to remind parents how to bring their children up.

ballads, and secondly that the women singers have gone further than we thought in using the medium to communicate ideas about their own gender. If we consider first the male protagonists, we see that several of them are portrayed as somewhat boring: they lack charisma, and many lack agency. Hr. Oluf falls foul of the local otherworldly seductress and then goes home to his mother to die. The adventure may make interesting listening, but that does not in itself make Oluf's character interesting. In some versions, Oluf is not even dependable and boring: he dances, and then he still goes home to his mother to die. Perhaps his fiancée has a lucky escape. There are further examples. 'Elvehøj': the young man is, again, boring, not even distinguished by name. Unmoving and silent, he stands in stark contrast to the joy and zest expressed by nature's creatures in response to the elves (Chapter 4.1). The farmer in 'Trolden og Bondens Hustru' is completely ineffectual and has to be rescued by his wife—who has also to rescue a knight who has been turned into a troll. Thomas Rymer trots along behind the Fairy Queen, in thrall to her, his head completely turned (Chapter 7.1). Where are the men of action? Hr. Magnus is certainly not ineffectual—he can reduce troll-women to mincemeat, but he is hardly an attractive advertisement for chivalric behaviour. The male heroes Tam Lin, Clerk Colvil and Lady Isabel's elf-knight are unattractively lascivious (Chapter 7).

In Chapter 2.3 we compared the ballad with another vernacular art form, the fairy story which, when in the domain of mothers, grandmothers and nurse-maids, was populated by feisty women, unafraid to take the initiative. But when Perrault and successive male editors and publishers appropriated the genre, the women in the tales were rendered passive, no longer capable of rescuing themselves, but now looking to the menfolk to take the lead. Similar development did not seem to happen in the ballads, however: the earliest (extant) supernatural ballads of the Nordic countries depicted women as passive, even though this is supposed (outside of Scotland; Wollstadt 2002: 295) to be a 'women's genre'. But, Rieuwerts argues, that phrase is a misnomer: the men created the tradition, the women preserved it (2002:152). And so we see the wives and sweethearts

waiting at home for the men to return from their adventures (Chapter 2.3) and, often, as in 'Harpans Kraft, the woman's problems are solved by the man (Chapter 6).

This thesis has argued, however, that it is perhaps possible to see the women in a new light through some sort of encoding (Stewart 1993: 54–73), verbal or presentational. In 'Elveskud' the women are often more individualized than Oluf. We have discussed the elf-maiden's possession of power, her desire, and wealth (Chapter 2.3), but the fiancée also has as big and more diverse a part as Oluf in many of the versions. Not all versions include the arrival of the fiancée and her ultimate discovery of Oluf's body; where the scene is fully described, however, three times as many come from women singers as men. While it is hard to be certain that these figures are representative of the tradition as a whole as little attention has been given to singers' gender in the past, the numbers given here would suggest a determination to include detail which at the end of the ballad would elicit emotion for the woman and not the (dead) man. In most versions, Oluf moves quickly to his death; his resignation to his fate reflects no emotion and attracts little sympathy from his family, other than the fiancée. In Sections 2.3 and 2.4 we examined the possibility that the use of specific detail in versions of 'Elveskud' was enabling some singers to encode comments about the man. Individuals like Johanna Gustafva Angel (Chapter 6.1.3), in her rendition of 'Harpans Kraft', went much further, eliminating the role as the woman's saviour from the man's part altogether. The occasional woman, like Agnete or Janet, is able to seize the initiative. The 'Agnete' ballads and 'Trolden og Bondens Hustru' put the women in a central position as they trigger action, even though at the end of the day they return to the fold. The elf in 'Hr. Bøsmer', in her long wait for Bøsmer's emotional and physical maturity, in the picking of the lock of his room and finally her jumping into his bed in her socks and shoes (Versions E, F, 1870 and 1872) is far more vivid and commands more interest than Bøsmer as she takes on the character of a lusty young woman easily recognizable in any village.

When the tradition moves into Scotland, Clerk Colvil is given more personality than Oluf, but it is not an attractive one (Chapter 7.4). On the back of his disloyalty,

sympathy goes to the beleaguered wife or mother, and we fully understand the enmity of the mermaid towards him. No tears are shed in the audience at his departure. The woman is portrayed in the role of deliverer in 'Elvehøj' A, in 'Trolden og Bondens Hustru', in the Agnete ballads where she saves herself, and far more clearly in the remaining Scottish ballads of 'Tam Lin', 'Lady Isabel and the Elf-Knight' and 'Elfin Knight'. The Scottish ballads have made their own tradition. In these largely eighteenth-century ballads, women are central and have seized the initiative ('Tam Lin', 'Lady Isabel and the Elf Knight', 'The Elfin Knight') even though they must still share, or even hand over, the ballad title to the men. Now we have a new breed of adventurous women who take their destiny into their own hands. These women who move from a safe space into the unknown are feisty, determined, sometimes cunning, all character traits needed to make this escape into a world where there is no link between control and gender. They do not want to be guided, may be wilful, disobedient and make bad choices, but they resist the oppression of the 'other'. They all, however, return home: the human woman always reverts to male protection and so reaffirms the values she has tried to escape; but the fantasy woman does not, and continues to wreak havoc. The women recognise male hegemony, but do not celebrate it (Wollstadt 2002: 296). It will be Angela Carter in 1979 who will lead the escapees out of male control, never to return (see below).

The woman in 'Thomas Rymer' (Chapter 7.1) has to be the ultimate fantasy: attractive and powerful, who is not restricted to one space and whose life is not inhibited by rules laid down by others, yet who has her own sense of order and culture. Here is the real feminist hero (along with Johanna Gustafva Angel's version of Kerstin in 'Harpens Kraft', Chapter 6.1.2) rather than those like Janet and Lady Isabel (Chapter 7) who became fashionable with the 1970s' feminists (Simonsen 2004: 246), and who all return to the status quo after their adventure. They made a start towards independence, though we are unclear to what extent they could sustain it; yet the elf mistresses embrace a different type of women's culture. Kvaerndrup suggests that these determined and energetic women in the ballads have their roots in the Old Norse ideal of an independent and dynamic woman, in

particular in the Icelandic family sagas, where the women who are depicted as passive victims follow the French romance tradition (2006: 158–59). We can imagine this is true of the beginnings of the ballads, but the eighteenth and nineteenth century cotter's wife makes the women fit her own circumstances.

8.5 *Problems of perception*

If the interpretation above suggests we have sometimes been focusing on the wrong character, perhaps the ballads point out that quite often there is a general tendency to look through a glass darkly, and invite us to see with different eyes. On occasion, our expectations will be questioned. Ballads such as the Agnete type muddy the waters, and suggest there must be another position. They present us with an interesting ambivalence which forces us into interrogating what we assumed were accepted value systems—based on patriarchal norms, of course. Humans were considered rational beings whose plans and judgements were to be respected, while supernatural beings were devilish, tempting, beguiling, grooming humans to fulfil their own desires. The sympathy which the ballad audience is on occasion directed to feel for the merman cuts across these traditional lines of thought. The audience is left unsettled and wary of this human woman who, depending on the version, acts in a harsh, unfeeling, disloyal way and who rejects her children, we are not sure for what.

We have a similar blurring of boundaries in 'Hr. Tønne af Alsø' where the dwarf-princess, Ulfhild, is not a threat and neither is her charming and helpful father, the dwarf-king. The ballad takes us into a discourse of identity by demanding that we think again about our preconceptions. The ones who commit inhuman acts in this ballad are Christians: in a surprising role-reversal, the Swedish king and his knights are the ones lacking compassion with their shows of power, and their abduction and imprisonment of children, while the dwarfs are the 'human' ones. While the ballad-singers would largely see themselves as members of a Christian culture (or rather a range of Christian and hybrid cultures), many of the ballads problematize concepts previously accepted as truisms, such

as 'pagans' are by definition bad, whereas Christian women are good. Ballads like 'Hr. Tønne' question these categories, probe and test them, rather than declare and teach the 'truth'. Complex sympathies are expressed, as with Agnete's merman; indeed, use of the supernatural is a perfect vehicle for ambivalence of thought and consideration regarding the lack of rigid taxonomies of right or wrong. In the supernatural ballads, warnings abound, examples and scenarios are laid out, concerns expressed but there is not necessarily a 'right' answer. They ask us to consider who we are and imply that, if we purport to be human, then we must take on the moral responsibility of being human.

The flourishing of these ballads over several centuries suggests they speak of experience; the fact they focus on youth and sexuality indicates specific concerns. These are ballads about choice, and especially the devastating effect of wrong choices. Ultimately, it is not the elves that are important, but one's relationship with them, how we deal with threat, from within and outside the community, and how we see and interpret that threat. They are about young people understanding themselves and their unvoiced desires, and about understanding the world around them: the demon within and the demon without. They warn the men of dominant women and powerful sexuality, which distract and remove commitment from a right course of action and proper behaviour. They warn the women of the centrality of the father's choice and the wisdom of his guidance, and of men who disregard the wellbeing of the woman and her social group. They are about the child's arrival at an age where formal education and control may have finished but where an integral part of independence is the ability to build upon those foundations and make the right choices.

8.6 *The continuation of the elves into the twentieth century*

This study begins in the sixteenth century with the earliest extant ballads of the supernatural, and goes on into the nineteenth century, as ballad revivals continued from country to country, and fascination with the otherworldly remained. The elves had side-stepped the Christianization of northern Europe and the Reformation, and survived the

Enlightenment. While their popularity had persisted among the peasant class, the ballads found their feet again in elite culture in the nineteenth century in response to a need for a national mythology and, as the Industrial Revolution started to bring about huge change across Europe, many early Romantics responded by conjuring up an idealized, less complicated past which they found in medievalism and mythology. Both Carole G. Silver and Diane Purkiss continue their analysis of the depiction of fairies in British culture into the time when the fairies were thought to have departed for ever. *Strange and Secret People: Fairies and Victorian Consciousness* (Silver 1999) looks at the depiction of fairies from 1798 to 1923, while *At the Bottom of the Garden* (Purkiss 2000) examines their roots in the ancient worlds through to the popular culture of the twentieth century, including *Star Wars* and the *X-Files*. Both authors trace the continued representation by elves and fairies of human social behaviour and our deepest desires and fears.

With the Romantics, the popular ballad sung in the community developed into the literary ballad. Romantic poets such as Keats, Shelley, Coleridge, James Hogg and Walter Scott, and numerous artists like William Blake and Henry Fuseli left a tremendous legacy to the Victorians who too sought to immerse themselves in mythical and medieval contexts, as a refuge from their own fast-changing world with its focus on scientific rationality rather than on emotional and social matters. The antiquarian work of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries provided a foundation for the collection and analysis of fairy lore materials amongst Victorians: ‘historical, empirical, religious, and linguistic’ approaches begun by the Brothers Grimm in Germany and transmitted throughout northern Europe (Silver 1999: 31), augmented by work of scientists and social scientists, reflecting concerns of the time ‘about change and growth in children, about the status of women in marriage and divorce, about the discovery of new and alien racial groups, and about the sources of evil, occult and natural’ (1999: 51). Work, for instance, on changelings was extensive. As urban sprawl, industrialization, the centrality of the sciences and the spread of education took hold, belief in fairies diminished—except in Iceland where a study in 2006–07 revealed surprising findings distinct from the scepticism of the rest of Europe.

While a handful of people denied the existence of *huldufólk*, 30% admitted to a possibility of their existence and 70% could not say one way or another whether supernatural beings existed (Pilkington and Gunnell 2011: 22).

Fiction which attempts to capture the life and times of a past era or significant event will always be popular, but while we recognise this human yearning to recreate an historical past, what perhaps requires further research is the continued resurgence in literature *targeted at adults* of fairies and elves in the twentieth century and perhaps beyond, the most celebrated contributor being J.R.R. Tolkien. The popularity of the Oluf-ballad has continued among the ballad-singers of Denmark, but it also appears in international twentieth-century prose literature. Michel Tournier, Lord Dunsany, John Connolly and Angela Carter have all used the traditional Oluf story to explore and advance various questions and ideologies: to critique Nazism, to explore creativity, and to advance feminism. Their readings resonate with different parts of the thesis and an exciting development would be to use the findings of this thesis as a platform for studying these imaginative responses to ballad literature.

Appendix

TABLE 2A 'Elveskud' – Danish versions

Dg F 47 versi on	Place collected	Date collected and gender	Length omissions indicated **	Episodes									
				1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
A	Unknown (Karen Brahe MS)		54	1		3					8	9	10
B	Unknown (Peter Syv collection)		25	1		3		5			8	9	10
C	Stevns district, Zealand	1844 F	29		2		4	5			8	9	10
D	Rosenvold near Horsens b. Bisgaard	1851 M b. 1854 F	31 18	1			4 4		6		8 8	9 9	10 10
E	Sydsjælland	1844 F	20			3		5			8		10
F	Frederiksborg	1813 M	16	1		3					8	9	10
G	Fanø near Ribe	M	8			3	4						10
H	Bovlund, Agerskov Parish, Haderslev	1855 M	32			3	4		6		8	9	10
I	Lerskov near Aabenraa	1854 M	25	1		3	4				8	9	10
K	Ikast parish, Grødde, Hammerum	1870 F	29			3	4		6		8	9	10
L	Sunds parish	1871 F	15**			3	4						
M	Kolkjær, Rind parish, Hammerum	1871 M	27			3	4		6	7	8	9	10
N	Snejbjerg, Hammerum	1872 F	16			3	4			7			10
O	Hammerum a. Lindebjerg, Ikast parish b. Tværmose, Sunds parish c. Tværmose, Sunds parish	1874 M 1872 F 1874 M	33			3 3 3			6 6 6	7 7 7	8 8 8	9 9 9	10 10 10
P	West Jutland	1871 F	22			3				7	8		10
Q	Tem, near Ringkjøbing	1876 M	7										10
R	Lundgaard, Gjellerup parish, Hammerum	1868 F	22			3			6	7	8		10
S	Skovby, Gjellerup parish, Hammerum	1869 F	32			3	4		6		8	9	10
T	North Jutland	1861 M	27	1		3	4		6		8	9	10
U	Rind near Viborg	1874 F	25**			3	4		6	7	8	9	10

V	Bording parish, Hammerum	1873 F	18			3		5		7	8	9	10
X	Herning, Hammerum	1873 F	11**	1		3	4		6				
Y	Timring, Hammerum	1870 M	11**	1		3	4		6		8	9	
Z	Tøstrup in Randers county	1865 F	8**	1		3							10
Æ	Lundgaard, Gjellerup parish, Hammerum	1868 F	23**			3				7	8	9	10
Ø	Broadsheet published Copenhagen	1817	25			3				7	8	9	10
A*	Værsløv. North-west Jutland	1882 F	No text										
B*	Sundby, Mors; learned in Sperring in Ty	1889 F	32			3			6		8	9	10
C*	Ty	1884 F	10	1		3							10
D*	Snebjerg parish, Hammerum	1872 F	20**			3	4		6	7	8	9	10
E*	Gellerup parish, Hammerum,	1870 M	35**			3	4		6		8	9	10
F*	Gellerup parish, Hammerum	1871 F	8			3	4						10
G*	Horsensegnet, Hvirring parish, Nim	1889 F	13		2		4		6	7			10
H*	Vejle-Eggen	1889 M	24	1		3	4		6	7	8	9	10
I*	Nørup parish, Tørrild, Vejle-Eggen,	1889 M	21	1		3	4		6	7			10
K*	Ringive parish, Vejle-Eggen	1889/1907 M	2										
L*	Hørup parish, Lysgaard , Viborg-Eggen	1889/1907 F	29**			3				7	8	9	10
M*	Rostrup, Gadbjerg parish, Tørrild, Vejle-Eggen	1887 M	4	1	2								
N*	Havhus, near Jælling, Vejle-Eggen	1897 F	4**	1			4					9	
O*	Skarrild, Hammerum	1872 F	17**			3		5			8	9	
P*	Ørre parish, Hammerum	1874 M	6**										(10)
Df	Redacted by Grundtvig	1882	79	1		3			6		8		10
U													

Episodes

1	Oluf is tempted by the elf-woman	6	He lies about his whereabouts
2	He dances without hesitation	7	He gives instructions to his family members
3	He refuses to dance	8	The Bride episode
4	He refuses to dance, but finally dances	9	He instructs she is not to be told the truth
5	He is truthful to his parent about his whereabouts	10	The deaths are recorded

CLUSTER B

H*	Vejle-Eggen	1889 M	24	1		3	4		6	7	8	9	10
I*	Nørup parish, Tørrild, Vejle-Eggen,	1889 M	21	1		3	4		6	7			10
K*	Ringive parish, Vejle-Eggen	1889/1907 M	2										
L*	Hørup parish, Lysgaard , Viborg-Eggen	1889/1907 F	29**			3				7	8	9	10
M*	Rostrup, Gadbjerg parish, Tørrild, Vejle-Eggen	1887 M	4	1	2								
N*	Havhus, near Jælling, Vejle-Eggen	1897 F	4**	1			4					9	

Area 25–30k from Cluster B

D	Rosenvold near Horsens	1851 M	31	1			4		6		8	9	10
	b.Bisgaard	b. 1854 F	18				4				8	9	10
G*	Horsenseggen, Hvirring parish, Nim	1889 F	13		2		4		6	7			10

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