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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Alan Garner's *Red Shift* and the Shifting Ballad of "Tam Lin"

Charles Butler (bio)

In his 1975 lecture, "Inner Time," the British writer Alan Garner suggested that each of his books could be seen as an "expression" of a different myth.¹ *Elidor* (1965), for example, was an expression of the myth contained in the ballad of "Childe Roland and Burd Ellen." For *The Owl Service* (1967) the myth was that of Lieu, Blodeuedd, and Gronw, from the Fourth Branch of the *Mabinogion*. As for *Red Shift* (1973), then his most recent novel, the myth was "another ballad, the story of Tamlain and Burd Janet and the Queen of Elfland" (111). The first two of these identifications will come as no surprise to anyone familiar with the books in question, but the third is more unexpected. Few people seem to have discerned the presence of "Tam Lin" in *Red Shift* independently.² Indeed, Neil Philip, certainly Garner's most important critic, has written that he finds Garner's statement "hard to accept" (*Fine Anger* 104). However, Garner is, famously, a man who does not use words lightly, and it is surprising that, in the twenty-six years since he made it, his assertion has not received greater attention. Not only has *Red Shift* itself been widely studied, but a number of critics have written on the use of "Tam Lin" in other recent children's books. However, the connection between *Red Shift* and "Tam Lin" has been largely overlooked.³ In this article I will consider the ways in which *Red Shift* can be seen as an "expression" of "Tam Lin," and what this tells us about Garner's conception of his novel's nature and origin. In doing so I will contrast the novel with a number of other books based on or inspired by this same ballad, particularly the British writer Catherine Storr's 1971 novel *Thursday*.

The ballad of "Tam Lin" exists in numerous versions. There are nine in Francis Child's *English and Scottish Popular Ballads* alone, and that is certainly not an exhaustive collection.⁴ Many of the differences between versions are quite significant, but the narrative can be broadly summarized thus: a young woman called Janet (in some versions Margaret) goes to Carterhaugh (or Kertonha, Chaster's Wood, Chester Wood, etc.) against the injunction of her parents, who fear she will lose her virginity to Tam Lin, a fairy youth who haunts the place. There she

plucks a flower and summons Tam Lin himself. He challenges her presence, but she replies defiantly that Carterhaugh is her own property and that she has as much right as he to be there. On her return home, it becomes apparent that she is pregnant. Her family (variously her mother, sister, brother, or a family retainer) is shocked. She asserts that Tam Lin is the child's father and returns to Carterhaugh, either to find Tam Lin or else (in some versions) to find an herb to cause an abortion. Tam Lin appears and explains that he is not a fairy at all but a young man of human blood who was stolen away by the Fairy Queen when he was a boy. Although his life with the fairies is pleasant, every seven years on Halloween the fairies must pay a "tithe to hell," and this year he is likely to be the victim. If Janet wishes to save him (and therefore give her baby a father), she must execute a complex procedure that involves pulling Tam Lin from his horse as he rides past with the fairy troop, holding fast to him while he undergoes a series of frightening transformations, and finally covering his naked body with her green mantle. She achieves all this and thus wins Tam Lin from the Fairy Queen, who is bitter at her loss.

As the folklorist Katherine Briggs observes, "Tam Lin" brings together a remarkable number of motifs associated with fairy lore, making it "perhaps the most important supernatural ballad" (449). Although (as is common in ballads) characterization is minimal and several of the narrative episodes obscure, there are enough hints to expand upon and...

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by Charles Butler

(For Catherine Storr 1913–2001)

In his 1975 lecture, "Tamer Time," the British writer Alan Garner suggested that each of his books could be seen as an "expression" of a different myth.¹ *Lifor* (1965), for example, was an expression of the myth contained in the ballad of "Childe Roland and Boreas Flee." For *The Owl Service* (1967) the myth was that of Lleu, Blodeuwedd, and Gronw, from the Fourth Branch of the *Mabinogion*. As for *Red Shift* (1973), then his most recent novel, the myth was "another ballad, the story of Tam-Lin and Brud Keret and the Queen of Elfhand" (111). The first two of these identifications will come as no surprise to anyone familiar with the books in question, but the third is more unexpected. Few people seem to have discerned the presence of "Tam Lin" in *Red Shift* independently.² Indeed, Neil Philip, certainly Garner's most important critic, has written that he finds Garner's statement "hard to accept" (*The Anger* 101). However, Garner is, famously, a man who does not use words lightly, and it is surprising that, in the twenty-six years since he made it, his assertion has not received greater attention. Not only has *Red Shift* itself been widely studied, but a number of critics have written on the use of "Tam Lin" in other recent children's books. However, the connection between *Red Shift* and "Tam Lin" has been largely overlooked.³ In this article I will consider the ways in which *Red Shift* can be seen as an "expression" of "Tam Lin," and what this tells us about Garner's conception of his novel's nature and origin. In doing so I will contrast the novel with a number of other books based on or inspired by this same ballad, particularly the British writer Catherine Storr's 1971 novel *Thursday*.

The ballad of "Tam Lin" exists in numerous versions. There are nine in Francis Child's *English and Scottish Popular Ballads* alone, and that is certainly not an exhaustive collection.⁴ Many of the differences between versions are quite significant, but the narrative can be broadly summarized thus: a young woman called Janet (in some versions Margaret) goes to Carterhaugh (or Kertonha, Chester Wood, Chester Wood, etc.) against the injunction of her parents, who fear she will use her virginity to Tam Lin, a fairy youth who haunts the place. There she plucks a flower and summons Tam Lin himself. He challenges her presence, but she replies defiantly that Carterhaugh is her own property and that she has as much right as he to be there. On her return home, it becomes apparent that she is pregnant. Her family (variously her

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As the folklorist Katherine Briggs observes, "Tam Lin" brings together a remarkable number of motifs associated with fairy lore, making it "perhaps the most important supernatural ballad" (449). Although (as is common in ballads) characterization is minimal and several of the narrative episodes obscure, there are enough hints to expand upon and, indeed, difficult to resolve to give it the potential for a much fuller treatment. Even so, "Tam Lin" is unusual in having been adapted so many times, and particularly for a teenage readership. As well as versions for younger children by Jane Yolen and Susan Cooper, the ballad has been expanded to novel-length by at least five writers other than Garner: Storr's *Thursday* is set in contemporary London. Other Tam Lin novels include Dabney Ipour's *Queen of Syffis* (1973), set in nineteenth-century America; Elizabeth Marie Pope's *The Perfumed Card* (1974), which places the story in Derbyshire on the eve of Elizabeth I's accession; Diana Wynne Jones's complex *Fire and Hemlock* (1985), again set in contemporary England; and Pamela Dean's *Tam Lin* (1991), which gives the ballad an American campus setting (based on Carleton College, Minnesota).

Why should this ballad exert so strong an appeal for modern children's writers, particularly those writing for young adults? Part of the answer doubtless lies in the subject matter, which involves such "contemporary" issues as pregnancy outside marriage, abortion, and inter-generational conflict. In the ban on visits to Carterhaugh

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