

**THE MINISTRY OF HIGHER AND SPECIAL SECONDARY
EDUCATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF UZBEKISTAN**

GULISTAN STATE UNIVERSITY

QUALIFICATION WORK

**to obtain Bachelor's Degree on Specialty 5220100 – English
Philology on theme
*“Depiction of Female Characters in English and Scottish Ballads”***

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GULISTAN - 2014

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INTRODUCTION

Studying the literature of the English language is one of the primary focus of preparing English teachers at higher education system of the Republic of Uzbekistan, as the literature of the target language provides information about the culture, traditions and customs of the people who speak in the language. One of the famous genres of literature that contains valuable information about the culture is folklore and especially ballads which is a part of folklore.

Topicality of the research. The theme of folklore and ballads of the English people was not studied deeply in our republic. The theme of women characters is one of the topics that require further researches in the sphere of English language and literature. Taking into account the fact that the research topic requires deeper consideration we set the aim of studying the ballads of the British people and study the depiction of women characters in these ballads. The primary source of our research is “The English and Scottish Popular Ballads”, a widely acclaimed canonical collection of British balladry. It was compiled by Harvard Professor Francis James Child and published in ten volumes between 1882 and 1888. In this massive collection Child brought together all the ballads accessible to him, either from printed sources or from manuscripts, his only criterion being their authenticity. The oldest ones date to the 13th century, though the majority was composed in the 18th century (Kittredge, xiii). The collection comprises 305 ballads in all their extant versions. Since it is not unusual for a ballad to have 10 or more versions, the total number of all the versions exceeds 2000. They are known today as the “Child Ballads”. It is customary to refer to the individual pieces by their number in the collection. This qualification work uses “C” in front of ballad numbers in order not to confuse them with page references. Unless it is noted otherwise, citations are from the

A version which is considered to be basic, the other ones being variations of the same theme. The citations are followed by stanza numbers.

The aim of the research is to study the depiction of women characters in the British popular ballads.

Taking into account the specific features of the aim we set the following **tasks of the research**:

- to define ballads;
- to study and define literary characteristics of the ballads;
- to study the Francis James Child ballads and their features;
- to study English and Scottish popular ballads and their features;
- to analyze female characters in the ballads

Scientific scrutiny of the research question. The theme of ballads is studied together with the history of the English literature. Among the scholars who investigated the Scottish and English popular ballads we may mention Sargent H.C. and George L. K., Baines B.J., Blamires A., Buchan D., Burgess J., Child F.J., Classen A., Collinson F. and Goldstein Kenneth.

The object of the research is Child Francis James collection of English and Scottish ballads.

The subject of the research is the image of women in the English and Scottish ballads.

The methods of the research include the method of literary analysis, the method of literature review, and the method of translation in translating the ballads into Uzbek language.

The novelty of the research. The research topic is new itself in the meaning and content as the theme of ballads of the English and Scottish people has never been studied in our country. The results of the investigation contain the specific features of describing women in the ballads, the role of women's image in the plot and themes of the ballads.

The practical and theoretical value of the research results can be seen in the necessity of studying the history of the English literature and folklore. The work gives the outline of development of balladry tradition in England. The materials of the work can be used in studying the history of the English literature, in writing course works, synopses and other assignments during the course.

The structure of the qualification work. The first chapter of the work present scholarly debates on the definition of the genre of ballads and presents discussions on the definition of the genre. The paragraphs of the chapter also describes the specific features of the genre.

The second chapter is dedicated to the topic of women's image in the Scottish and English popular ballads.

Chapter I. Literary Characteristics and Definitions of the Ballad

1.1 Definitions of the Ballad

David Buchan remarks in the introduction to his influential study of Scottish balladry entitled *The Ballad and the Folk*¹: “The ballads are awkward things. Few literary genres give so much pleasure to so many kinds of people and yet pose such refractory problems for the scholar and critic”. The ballads became widely popular after the Second World War. Even contemporary audience is captivated by what Buchan poetically labels as “tales of marvel, love and butchery”. Therefore, it may come as a surprise that this genre has always puzzled the minds of scholars and critics. The “ballad enigma” includes questions about origins, authorship, terminology, classification and definition.

First of all, the question of ballad origins is very complex. According to Hart and Gummere, the ballads were derived from Anglo-Saxon epic poems. Early ballad scholars believed that “the older it [a ballad] is, the earlier it is caught and fixed in print, the better”. This view was shared by F. J. Child, who admired the “Robin Hood” ballads because they “have come down to us in comparatively ancient form”². Contemporary scholars, in contrast to that, appreciate the view that the ballads are in a constant process of change, where the earlier versions cannot be viewed as better than the latter. This process, however, is not always a linear development from an epic poem to a ballad. Some ballads were derived from romances or lays and some late ballads even imitate the style of earlier ones.

Nevertheless, when the first ballad collections were compiled at the end of the 18th century, the peak of balladry had already been gone and

¹ Porter, James and W. F. H. Nicolaisen. “Ballad Explanations, Ballad Reality, and the Singer’s Epistemics.” *Western Folklore* 45. 2 (1986): 110-127. // <http://www.jstor.com>

² Hart, Walter Morris. “Professor Child and the Ballad.” *PMLA* 21.4 (1906): 755-807. // <http://www.jstor.com>

the number of traditional ballad singers was diminishing. Early collectors such as Thomas Percy, Robert Burns or Walter Scott saved the remaining ballads from extinction by fixing them in print. “How few of them (...) have come down to us, and how broken and baffled is the story which they tell!” laments one of the early 20th century ballad scholars, Francis Barton Gummere (xcviii). As he points out, the ballad is difficult to study because “the conditions of any analysis of it are apt to be the conditions of its own decay and disappearance”¹.

Although some of the Child Ballads describe historical events (for example, the battle of Otterburn or the battle of Harlaw) or recount deeds of famous heroes (such as William Wallace and Robin Hood), the majority are concerned with relationships between ordinary men and women. As Gordon Gerould observes, “nearly half of the ballad stories in the Child corpus are love-stories of one sort or another or concern crimes of violence that derive from attractive relationships” (in Hixon). Approximately two thirds of the Child Ballads include a female character.

From a feminist perspective, the society which created these ballads should be viewed in terms of patriarchy – as a society where women were subjected to men. At first sight, it seems that they depict female characters as victims of this male-dominated system. They reflect historical conditions, depicting women who have to cope with hard work, lack of medical care or legal discrimination. They demonstrate that women were not allowed to act independently. Many positively described female characters are passive and obedient. It is their father’s, brother’s or husband’s responsibility to make decisions for them. In a strikingly high number of instances, female characters fall victims to male aggression. Peggy Seeger, a famous American folksinger and a ballad scholar, remarks that ballad women are often “battered, victimised, marginalised, trivialised, cubby-holed, jeered at, discarded and

¹ Hart, Walter Morris. “Professor Child and the Ballad.” PMLA 21.4 (1906): 755-807. // <http://www.jstor.com>

murdered”. Polly Stewart, a feminist critic, views them as victims of the male dominated society, as well (in Hixon). In other cases, female characters are portrayed in a negative or openly misogynistic way as, for example, murderesses and temptresses. This thesis, however, argues that the depiction of female characters is not homogenous. There are many examples depicting women as positive, active and independent heroines, who surpass their male counterparts.

The very definition of the genre is problematic. Throughout the 19th century, the ballads were judged by the same standards as poetry written by famous authors of the period. Scholars did not realize that folk songs have their own specific features. Subsequently, they viewed them as poor imitations of high art and they did not believe that they deserved scholarly attention.

Even though the specific nature of the ballads is appreciated nowadays, there is still little agreement on the definition. Most scholars only agree on a basic premise: the ballad is an orally transmitted folksong that tells a story. According to Porter, this definition dates back to Gordon Gerould’s “The Ballad Tradition” (1932), where the author continues: “whatever may be added to this statement by way of amplification, to explain and clarify merely, since the whole truth of the matter is in it”¹. Porter aptly observes that such a definition is insufficient since it does not distinguish the ballads from other types of folk songs, such as romances, legendary songs, religious songs, etc. But even though it is possible to identify some general characteristics of the ballad, the genre is very vague and very broad. Different authors focus on different features.

¹ Goldstein, Kenneth S. “Bowdlerization and Expurgation: Academic and Folk.” *The Journal of American Folklore* 80.318 (Oct.-Dec. 1967): 374-386. // <http://www.jstor.com>

1.2 Literary Characteristics of the Ballads

Buchan pinpoints the epic nature of the ballads, specifying that the “[e]mphasis is on people in action, people *doing*, not, as with much written poetry, on people being”¹. Even characters’ emotions are described mainly through actions and outer characteristics. A ballad woman is in all probability “sad” when we are told that she “weeps”. For example, a lady in “Geordie” receives a letter from her husband and learns that he has been imprisoned: “When first she lookd the letter on, / She was baith red and rosy; / But she had na read a word but twa / Till she wallow like a lily”.

In Hart’s definition, the emphasis is on the lack of moral judgements, which are characteristic of written literature. A typical ballad is a simple story devoid of any meditations or reflections, except for the most general comments such as “Her father married the warst woman / That ever lived in Christendom”. Hart further stresses realistic nature of the ballads, by which he means that the majority are either based on historical events or describe believable stories (with a notable exception of magical ballads though these might have been perceived as being just as realistic by the uneducated audience in the past). This view is shared by Gummere, who points out that ballad singers were eager to adopt any moving story they came across to please their audience. On the other hand, however, described actions are seldom localized and characters have conventional names such as Janet, Margaret or Annie. These names are often chosen for the sake of rhyming. Gummere adds that the ballad should tell a natural story, though it is often naturalness that “borders on savagery” (xxix). Robert Pinsky describes the ballads as tabloids of their day since many of them depict various crimes and horrors.

¹ Buchan, David. *The Ballad and the Folk*. – London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1992. – 234 p.

Another key characteristic is brevity or density of expression. A typical ballad combines condensed narrative with dialogues. It was already Wilhelm Grimm, who claimed that the ballad tells nothing more than what is needed (in *Gummere*, xxviii). A 20th century ballad scholar, Francis Collinson, remarks: “It has a characteristic directness that is shorn to the bone of all superfluous descriptive matter and explanation (...). It has a mobility of scene that resembles more the sequences of a film than the telling of a story”¹. In the last stanza of “Edward”, for example, Edward’s mother asks him what he would bequeath her, knowing that he will be sentenced to death for murdering his father. Edward’s reply is: “the curse of hell”. The audience does not learn what exactly happened – there is just the shocking austerity of Edward’s reply and the unrevealed family tragedy.

The lack of moral judgements and the brevity of expression are linked to another characteristic feature – the ballads are told by the third person narrator, who uses strictly impersonal and objective tone. According to the German school of ballad criticism, this is what distinguishes the ballads from other songs: “speaker speaks of himself in a song, and of others in a ballad” (in *Gummere*, xxvi). An exception is to be found, for example, in “Rookhope Ryde” where the first person narrator appears: “And now I do entreat you all, / As many as are present here, / To pray for the singer of this song, / For he sings to make blithe your cheer”. Otherwise, the narrator does not interfere, telling his story in “entire freedom from the subjective element”². Child wrongly supposed that the narrator and the ballad singer are the same, which made him claim that “the author counts for nothing”.

It is also necessary to point out that every ballad has its own characteristic tune. However, the early collectors usually recorded only

¹ Buchan, David. *The Ballad and the Folk*. – London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1992. – 234 p.

² *Gummere*, Francis Barton. *The Popular Ballad*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997. – 456 p.

lyrics, even though – as one of Scott’s informants complained – the ballads “were made for singing and not for reading”¹. Even Child himself provides only fifty five tunes in the appendix of *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*. This practice is criticised by Francis Collinson, the author of *The Traditional and National Music of Scotland*: “as if the tune were a sort of banana-skin to be discarded and thrown away”. It is necessary to bear in mind that a particular tune prescribes a particular type of verse and also sets an emotional tone.

As far as the structural level is concerned, the most characteristic feature is called the formula. It is a fixed phrase or “a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea”. Examples of formulas include “the milk-white steed”, “ill death may you die” or even longer stretches such as “When mass was sung, and bells was rung, / And all men bound for bed”. Other typical features, described in detail by Buchan, include parataxis of grammar, parallelisms and contrasts, framing devices and triadic groupings.

The thematic level is almost limitless. As noted above, scholars agree on the basic definition – “a folksong that tells a story” – but what kind of story is it? There are both comic and tragic plots. Sir Walter Scott divides the ballads into two classes, historical and romantic but the thematic scope is much broader than that. Though many ballads depict love stories, there are also magical, humorous, adventurous, chivalric, bawdy, heroic and pastoral episodes. There is also a small minority of ballads dealing with religious themes, such as “St. Stephen and Herod”, “Judas”, “The Cherry-tree Carol” or “Dives and Lazarus”. Child classifies the ballads in *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* as domestic tragic and non-tragic, supernatural, border, outlaw, heroic and

¹ Collinson, Francis. “The Ballads.” *The Traditional and National Music of Scotland*. – London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1996. – pp. 132-147.

miscellaneous. According to Gummere, the word ballad was unfortunately applied to “almost any short narrative poem, to any short didactic poem, to almost any sort of lyric, and to almost every conceivable form of reviling or grumbling in verse”¹.

Finally, many scholars suggest that the distinguishing feature of the genre is to be found in the community that created it. The early scholars were puzzled by the fact that the ballads appear not only in Britain but also in various European countries. Despite this fact, they share the same characteristic features, which were listed above. People in all these countries nevertheless shared the same way of life – they were mostly uneducated farmers or artisans living in feudal societies in agricultural areas. What is more, this way of life changed very little throughout the long history of ballad composing, which spans from the Middle Ages to the 18th century when the ballads were fixed in print.

Gummere stresses that the folk is uniform, claiming that the ballads “came from the people as a whole, from the compact body as yet undivided by lettered or unlettered taste, and represents the sentiment neither of individuals nor of a class” (xvi). Grundvig and Wolf, as well, insist that the ballads must represent the whole homogenous community². Gummere further specifies that members of such a community shared similar interests, beliefs and fears. Unlike modern poetry, which focuses on individuality, the ballad stands for all the people. It is not “a whisper of private sympathy, but (...) a great cry of delight or grief from the crowd” (ibid., xcvi). The importance of the term “folk” is mirrored in the label “folk poetry” or “folk ballads” after all. Early ballad scholars such as Jacob Grimm and William Motherwell actually believed in communal authorship of the ballads. Even Gummere was inclined to believe that they were created at community gatherings where every

¹ Collinson, Francis. “The Ballads.” *The Traditional and National Music of Scotland*. – London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1996. – pp. 132-147.

² Gummere, Francis Barton. *The Popular Ballad*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997. – 456 p.

member could spontaneously create a new stanza on the spot – so homogenous their minds were (ibid.).

This hypoqualification work is, of course, abandoned nowadays. The ballads were produced by individual ballad singers, though their names have been (with rare exceptions) lost. Deborah A. Symonds points out that the majority of identified singers were women. Nevertheless, the term folk did not cease to be used. Buchan pinpoints that the basic presupposition of balladry is non-literacy of the ballad community: “In societies where writing is unknown, or where it is limited to a professional scribe whose duty is that of writing letters and keeping accounts, or where it is a possession of small minority, such as clerics or a wealthy ruling class (...), the art of narration flourishes (...)”. Mechanisms of ballad composition were explained in detail by Walter Ong in his *Orality and Literacy*¹. Since an oral composer cannot rely on written text, a ballad must be stored in his/her memory. However, there is no fixed text, only clusters of words (formulas) which are linked together in the actual act of performance. What matters is the story, not the exact words. Every performance is, therefore, recreation at the same time. No song is performed twice in the same way. The nature of oral community is analysed in Buchan’s *Ballad and the Folk*, as well. In his opinion:

The narrative and linguistic texture of the ballads (...) express the texture of thought and feeling in the oral community (...). Where the literate poet writes as an individual who may uphold or attack or ignore his society’s mores from his personal vantage point, the oral poet tells stories that embody and give expression to the kinds of belief and feelings shared by his community. He is necessarily integrated within his society as the literate poet is not; the literate poet *may* reinforce his society’s ethos, but the oral poet *must*.

¹ Ong, Walter. “Some Psychodynamics of Orality.” *Orality and Literacy: the Technologizing of the Word*. – London: Routledge, 1991. – pp. 31-78.

However, this theory has been rejected by feminist critics, such as Jean Freedman¹. From the feminist perspective, the ballad society can be viewed in terms of patriarchy, where men dominate over women. In contrast to Buchan's view, feminist criticism strives to show that the ballad community is not homogenous but contains many competing sections. The ballads do not reinforce the society's ethos – they can give voice to the oppressed minority. Feminist analyses show that they often express complaints, grievances and injustice or offer sympathy.

The aim of this qualification work is to point out that the ballads do not present homogenous ideas. Though they were produced by the patriarchal society, they do not always stand for its values or principles. There are many different voices. It is true that many ballad women fall victim to male dominance but there is also a number of positive examples showing women as active, powerful and independent.

1.3 Francis James Child Ballads

The Child Ballads are a collection of 305 traditional ballads from England and Scotland and their American variants, collected by Francis James Child during the second half of the 19th century. Their lyrics and Child's studies of them were published as *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, a work of 2,500 pages. The tunes of most of the ballads were collected and published by Bertrand Harris Bronson in and around the 1960s.

Child's collection was not the first of its kind; there had been many less scholarly collections of English and Scottish ballads, particularly from Bishop Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* onwards. There were also "comprehensive" ballad collections from other

¹ Classen, Albrecht. *The Power of a Woman's Voice in Medieval and Early Modern Literatures*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co, 2007. // <http://www.books.google.com>

countries. Child modelled his work on Svend Grundtvig's *Danmarks gamle Folkeviser*, classifying and numbering the ballads and noting different versions, which were placed side by side to aid comparison. As a result, one Child number may cover several ballads, which Child considered variants of the same story, although they may differ in many ways. Conversely, ballads classified separately may contain turns of phrase, and even entire verses, that are identical.

The ballads vary in age; for instance, the manuscript of "Judas" dates to the thirteenth century and a version of "A Gest of Robyn Hode" was printed in the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century. The majority of the ballads, however, date to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Although some probably have very ancient influences,[citation needed] only a handful can be definitively traced to before 1600. Moreover, few of the tunes collected are as old as the words. Nevertheless, Child's collection was far more comprehensive than any previous collection of ballads in English.

Many of Child's ballads were obtained from printed broadsides, but he generally distinguished the "traditional" ballads that interested him from later broadside ballads. Unfortunately, since Child died before writing a commentary on his work, it is uncertain exactly how and why he selected some ballads and discounted others.

Child Ballads are generally heavier and darker than is usual for ballads. Some of the topics and other features characteristic enough of Child Ballads to be considered Child Ballad motifs are these: romance, enchantment, devotion, determination, obsession, jealousy, forbidden love, insanity, hallucination, uncertainty of one's sanity, the ease with which the truth can be suppressed temporarily, supernatural experiences, supernatural deeds, half-human creatures, teenagers, family strife, the boldness of outlaws, abuse of authority, betting, lust, death, karma, punishment, sin, morality, vanity, folly, dignity, nobility, honor, loyalty,

dishonor, riddles, historical events, omens, fate, trust, shock, deception, disguise, treachery, disappointment, revenge, violence, murder, cruelty, combat, courage, escape, exile, rescue, forgiveness, being tested, human weaknesses, and folk heroes.

On one extreme, some Child Ballads recount identifiable historical people, in known events, embellished for dramatic effect. On the other, some differ from fairy tales solely by their being songs and in verse; some have been recast in prose form as fairy tales. A large part of the collection is about Robin Hood; some are about King Arthur. A few of the ballads are rather bawdy.

For a century after Child started publishing the lyrics of old ballads in 1857, most Child ballads remained unknown outside of traditional communities that were insulated from the spread of contemporary urban entertainment (communities in which the ballads were known independent of Child's publications), except in academic, cultural and political circles in which folk music was valued. The "folk music revival" of the mid-20th century brought Child ballads to the attention of the general public again.

Many Child Ballads have subsequently appeared in contemporary music recordings. Burl Ives's 1949 album, *The Return of the Wayfaring Stranger*, for example, includes two: "Lord Randall" and "The Divil and the Farmer".

In 1956 four albums of 72 Child Ballads sung by Ewan MacColl and A.L. Lloyd were released: *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, Vols. 1-4¹

In 1960 John Jacob Niles published *The Ballad Book of John Jacob Niles*, in which he connects folk songs which he collected throughout the southern United States and Appalachia in the early 20th century to the Child Ballads. Many of the songs he published were revived in the Folk

¹ Toelken, Barre and D. K. Wilgus. "Figurative Language and Cultural Contexts in the Traditional Ballads." *Western Folklore* 45.2 (Apr. 1986): 128-142. // <http://www.jstor.com>

music revival, for example "The Riddle Song" ("I gave my love a Cherry"), which he connects with Child No. 1, "Riddles Wisely Expounded".

Popular folk revival singer Joan Baez included the Child ballads "Matty Groves", "Geordie" and "The House Carpenter" on this Vanguard Records LP issued in 1962.

Joan Baez sang ten Child ballads distributed among her first five albums, the liner notes of which identified them as such. Those albums sold in large numbers in English-speaking countries and abroad.

British electric folk groups such as Fairport Convention and Steeleye Span drew heavily on the Child Ballads in their repertoires, and many other recording artists have recorded individual ballads. Harry Smith included a number of them into his Anthology of American Folk Music.

The ballads crop up even in the work of bands not usually associated with folk material, such as Ween's recording of "The Unquiet Grave" under the title "Cold Blows the Wind" and versions of "Barbara Allen"¹ recorded by the Everly Brothers, Art Garfunkel, and (on the soundtrack of the 2004 film *A Love Song for Bobby Long*) John Travolta. In 2009, Fleet Foxes included "The Fause Knight Upon the Road" as the b-side to the 7" release of "Mykonos" (as "False Knight on the Road"). In 2013 US singer-songwriter Anaïs Mitchell and Jefferson Hamer released *Child Ballads* comprising seven songs from the Francis James Child collection.

¹ Sargent, Helen Child and George Lyman Kittredge, eds. *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*. Student's Edition. - Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992. – 768 p.

Chapter II. Female Characters in The English and Scottish Popular Ballads

2.1 English and Scottish Popular Ballads

Though the thematic scope of the Child Ballads is very broad, as noted in the previous chapter, the majority of them focus on private affairs rather than large-scale epic events. The early 20th century ballad scholar, Gordon Gerould, observed that “nearly half of the ballad stories in the Child corpus are 'love-stories of one sort or another' or concern crimes of violence that derive from attractive relationships”¹. Not surprisingly, therefore, the majority of these ballads contain a female protagonist. According to Gretchen Kay Lutz, women feature in 200 of the 305 ballads.

However, what comes as a surprise is that women are treated very badly by their male counterparts in many ballads. According to Lutz’s quantitative analysis, women are murdered by men in 49 ballads; men by women only in 15. What is more, there are many instances when a male character violates, mutilates or severely beats a woman; whereas men “are not likely to appear as victims of indignity at the hands of women (...)”. Women are also ostracized for being single mothers, whereas men are never blamed for abandoning them. Similarly, women in adultery ballads are condemned as sinful temptresses, whereas their lovers are depicted in a positive way and their husbands are only laughed at for being “cuckolds”.

These aspects of the collection have been criticised (and also questioned) by many scholars. For example, Peggy Seeger, a folk singer and ballad scholar, points out to the fact that we sing songs “in which we [i.e. women] are battered, victimised, marginalised, trivialised, cubby-holed, jeered at, discarded and murdered”. This opinion is shared by a

¹ Hixon, Martha. “Tam Lin, Fair Janet and the Attractive Revolution: Traditional Ballads, Fairy Tales, and Twentieth-century Children’s Literature.” *Marvel & Tales* 18.1 (2004).

feminist critic Polly Stewart, who concludes that the ballads teach us “that a man will take from a woman what he can and will punish her for being his victim; [... and] that a woman's resources for protecting her interests are slim indeed”¹. And Jean R. Freedman adds that even if a ballad ends happily for a female character, the happiness is often purchased at too great a price. For example, Ellen in “Child Waters” is willing to do anything to marry the father of her illegitimate child, even though he himself holds her in contempt. She cross-dresses as a page to be able to follow him. Then, she gives birth in appalling conditions in the stable but when she finally wins her lover, she does not blame him for anything.

From the feminist point of view, the source of inequality between male and female characters stems from the principles of patriarchal society, where these ballads originated. According to Pam Morris, this term is applicable not only to present but also to historical societies. It denotes a system of social structures such as religion, law, education or culture, where men dominate over women. These structures influence every-day life to such an extent that male domination and female subordination are perceived as a natural state. Women rarely question their position: “Certainly many women had so internalized the common beliefs that they felt no need to resist their own degradation”². In the case of the Child Ballads, this implies that even if a particular ballad was created by a woman, she could have expressed the patriarchal principles, as well.

As far as the roles of male and female characters in *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* are concerned, it is possible to make the following observations: male characters are usually denominated according to their occupations – for example, as harp-players, pirates,

¹ Hixon, Martha. “Tam Lin, Fair Janet and the Attractive Revolution: Traditional Ballads, Fairy Tales, and Twentieth-century Children’s Literature.” *Marvel & Tales* 18.1 (2004).

² Nadelhaft, Jerome. “The Englishwoman’s Attractive Civil War: Feminist Attitudes Towards Men, Women, and Marriage 1650-1740.” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 43.2 (Oct.-Dec. 1982): 555-579. // <http://www.jstor.com>

tanners, friars, poachers, tinkers or potters. They appear on their own in a broad range of settings – on the sea, on the battlefield, in the farm or in the inn – and in numerous episodes, including pastoral, epic and humorous. In contrast to that, the vast majority of female characters occur only in episodes where men are present, as well. They are usually defined in relation to them – as their lovers, wives, mothers, sisters and daughters. They occur mainly in love stories and familial tragedies. The exceptions to this rule are queens and princesses, who appear in adventurous and chivalric episodes. They can nevertheless be viewed as “royal consorts” and “king’s daughters” – as characters who are dependent on men, as well. Further, there are nuns, midwives, wet nurses, witches and female monsters. Among these “independent characters”, the midwives and wet nurses occupy a distinctly feminine sphere. The others are negative – including some nuns. For example, “Robin Hood’s Death” is a ballad about how Robin asks a prioress to let his blood (a common medical treatment), but she betrays him, letting too much. Weakened Robin cannot defend himself and is murdered by her lover, Sir Roger of Doncaster. Yet it is obviously the treacherous prioress who is the main villain responsible for the death of the famous hero. From the feminist point of view, the negative depiction of female characters helps to secure subordinate status of women within the patriarchal system¹.

The question of misogyny concerns many of the Child Ballads. A prime example is “Judas”, one of the rare religious ballads, where a female character is incorporated into the Biblical story about Judas’ betrayal. As the ballad explains, Christ has given Judas thirty pieces of silver to buy food for the Apostles. However, Judas meets his sister, who lulls him to sleep and steals the money. Judas has no choice but to “sell” Christ to the Romans for the same amount. Therefore, the ballad explains

¹ Mills, Margaret. “Feminist Theory and the Study of Folklore: A Twenty-Year Trajectory toward Theory.” *Western Folklore* 52.2/4 (Apr.-Oct., 1993): 173-192. // <http://www.jstor.com>

that “both of the two greatest evils of mankind (the expulsion from Eden and the crucifixion of Christ) were due to the dishonesty of women” (“Judas (ballad)”). Another example is a riddle ballad, “Riddles Wisely Expounded”, where a knight promises to marry a young woman on condition that she knows answers to all his riddles, the last one being: “what is worse than woman?”. The girl knows that only the devil is worse. Therefore, she wins the knight.

Openly misogynist are also those ballads which include a supernatural female character. For example, the male protagonist in “Alison Gross” is kidnapped by a hideous witch who wants him to become her lover. When he refuses, she tries to bribe him but when she sees that he would not change his mind, she enchants him:

She showd the cup of the good red gold,
 Well set with jewls sae fair to see;
 Says, Gin you will be my lemman [lover] sae true,
 This goodly gift I will you gi.
 “Awa, awa, ye ugly witch,
 Had far awa, and lat me be;
 For I woudna ance kiss your ugly mouth
 For a’ the gifts that ye could gi.”
 She’s turnd her right and roun about,
 And thrice she blaw on a grass-green horn,
 And she sware by the meen [moon] and the stars abeen [above],
 That she’d gar me rue the day I was born.
 Then out she taen a silver wand,
 An she’s turnd her three times roun an roun;
 She’s mutterd sich words till my strength it faild,
 An I fell down senceless upon the groun¹.

¹ Mills, Margaret. “Feminist Theory and the Study of Folklore: A Twenty-Year Trajectory toward Theory.” *Western Folklore* 52.2/4 (Apr.-Oct., 1993): 173-192. // <http://www.jstor.com>

The man is turned into a hideous worm. He cannot do anything but live in his new shape until one day, when the fairy queen comes by and turns him back into the human shape. Though she is helpful in this story, she causes harm in others. The ballads reflect popular belief that the fairy folk is rather whimsical and not to be trusted. In "Tam Lin", it is the fairy queen who kidnaps a young man and his lover has to save him from her power.

Child's collection was not the first of its kind; there had been many less scholarly collections of English and Scottish ballads, particularly from Bishop Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) onwards. There were also "comprehensive" ballad collections from other countries. Child modelled his work on Svend Grundtvig's *Danmarks gamle Folkeviser*, classifying and numbering the ballads and noting different versions, which were placed side by side to aid comparison. As a result, one Child number may cover several ballads, which Child considered variants of the same story, although they may differ in many ways (as in "James Hatley"). Conversely, ballads classified separately may contain turns of phrase, and even entire verses, that are identical.

The ballads vary in age; for instance, the manuscript of "Judas" dates to the thirteenth century and a version of "A Gest of Robyn Hode" was printed in the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century. The majority of the ballads, however, date to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Although some probably have very ancient influences,[citation needed] only a handful can be definitively traced to before 1600. Moreover, few of the tunes collected are as old as the words. Nevertheless, Child's collection was far more comprehensive than any previous collection of ballads in English.

Many of Child's ballads were obtained from printed broadsides, but he generally distinguished the "traditional" ballads that interested him from later broadside ballads. Unfortunately, since Child died before

writing a commentary on his work, it is uncertain exactly how and why he selected some ballads and discounted others.

Child Ballads are generally heavier and darker than is usual for ballads. Some of the topics and other features characteristic enough of Child Ballads to be considered Child Ballad motifs are these: romance, enchantment, devotion, determination, obsession, jealousy, forbidden love, insanity, hallucination, uncertainty of one's sanity, the ease with which the truth can be suppressed temporarily, supernatural experiences, supernatural deeds, half-human creatures, teenagers, family strife, the boldness of outlaws, abuse of authority, betting, lust, death, karma, punishment, sin, morality, vanity, folly, dignity, nobility, honor, loyalty, dishonor, riddles, historical events, omens, fate, trust, shock, deception, disguise, treachery, disappointment, revenge, violence, murder, cruelty, combat, courage, escape, exile, rescue, forgiveness, being tested, human weaknesses, and folk heroes.

On one extreme, some Child Ballads recount identifiable historical people, in known events, embellished for dramatic effect. On the other, some differ from fairy tales solely by their being songs and in verse; some have been recast in prose form as fairy tales. A large part of the collection is about Robin Hood; some are about King Arthur. A few of the ballads are rather bawdy.

2.2 Female Characters in the Ballads

In the case of earthly female characters, the ballads depict many negative qualities which are traditionally associated with women in what Alcuin Blamires labels as “antifeminist” literature. According to Blamires, these works justify their negative attitude towards women through references to authoritative texts such as the Old Testament,

writings of the Church Fathers and the classical Greek culture. Since this topic is very broad, only a few major points will be mentioned.

The major foundation of misogyny is the Biblical story about the Fall, which implies that the expulsion from Eden was caused by Eve's moral and intellectual weakness. As a punishment for her sin, womankind has to suffer labour pains and subjection to men. Yet it was already the Greek physiology which introduced the notion that women are of "animal, material, household, pragmatic realm while men (...) are of a realm of higher deliberations, which shuns the 'animal'"¹. Aristotle introduced the dichotomy which equates men with the soul and women with the body. References to the female body feature in a great number of ballads and therefore will be dealt with in a separate chapter.

Medieval misogynistic texts follow Aristotle, claiming that the female nature is attractive, physical and incapable of intellectual development. A woman is described as being unable to control her nature, risking "sinning almost by her very existence (...)". Lutz pinpoints that women were viewed as "either below or above reason". Being unreasonable – vain, wilful or stubborn – was perceived as distinctly feminine. All these negative qualities are depicted in the ballads. Wilfulness is criticised in "Lord Thomas Stuart", where a lady stubbornly insists on seeing the lands which were given to her as a morning gift (a gift to the bride after the wedding night). The ballad somewhat enigmatically associates the journey with some hardships. The lady's husband becomes ill and dies on the way. The ballad blames the lady for this tragedy, lamenting: "But women's wit is aye wilful, / Alas that ever it was sae! / She longed to see the morning-gift / That her gude lord to her gae". Another example of a stubborn woman is in a humorous ballad called "Get Up and Bar the Door". A woman is busy in the kitchen, when

¹ Blamires, Alcuin. Introduction. *Woman Defamed and Women Defended. An Anthology of Medieval Texts.* – Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992. – pp. 1-15.

her husband asks her to close the door. She refuses, claiming that he should do it himself. They start arguing and finally make a bet – the one who speaks first will have to do it. Two thieves break into their house at midnight. The husband and wife watch them but they still refuse to speak so as not to lose the bet. When one of the burglars proposes to kiss the wife, the husband finally shouts in terror: “Ye’ve eaten my meat, ye hae druken my drink, / and ye’d mak my auld wife a whore!”. The punch-line of the ballad is the wife’s reply: “Ye hae spoke the foremost word / Ye maun rise up and bar the door” (ibid.) – though both of them behave stubbornly, the wife far surpasses her husband. Both ballads negatively depict a female character who wants to get out of subordination and dominate over her husband.

Another quality associated with women in misogynistic texts is, according to Blamires, lecherousness. This issue is dealt with, for example, in St. Paul’s *Epistles*, which view the female bodily nature as a source of frivolous behaviour. This idea is repeated in the ballads, as well. In “Willie o Winsbury”, the king promises to hang his daughter’s seducer but when he sees how handsome Willie is, he claims that no woman would be able to resist him: “It is nae wonder,” said the king, / “That my daughter’s love ye did win; / Had I been a woman, as I am man / My bedfellow ye should hae been”. The king’s daughter is excused from responsibility because of her feminine nature. This idea is expressed also in ballads about infidelity. According to Lutz, “the shame for being cuckolded belongs to the man who cannot control his wife rather than to the wife herself (...) indicating that the woman characters are not expected to possess the same sense of morals as men. Woman cannot control themselves; therefore, it is the duty of a husband to control his wife” (67-68). In “Gypsy Laddie”, a lady falls in love and elopes with a charming gypsy when her husband is away from home – in other words, there is no authority to control her. As Katherine M. Rogers claims,

misogyny is sometimes “rationalized” – when men claim that subjugation is necessary protection for women.

A number of ballads present female characters as dangerous temptresses. Lady Erskine in “Child Owlet” tries to seduce her husband’s nephew but he refuses her. She gets angry and purposefully stabs herself:

Then in it came Lord Ronald,
 Hearing his lady’s moan;
 “What blood is this, my dear,” he says,
 “That sparks on the fire-stone?”
 “Young Childe Owlet, your sister’s son,
 Is now gane frae my bower;
 If I hadna been a good woman,
 I’d been Childe Owlet’s whore.”¹

Child Owlet is then imprisoned and sentenced to death. Similarly, the queen in “The Queen of Scotland” tries to seduce a young man and takes a revenge on him when he refuses. Another example is the above-mentioned “Alison Gross”. All these ballads share the idea that excessive female attractiveness is threatening and dangerous. Also, all these ballads negatively depict those women who act independently.

In contrast to that, many positive female characters in *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* are passive – they are obedient and do not revolt. They patiently wait until men return home from travels or from war, and they mourn when they do not return. They follow their lovers, husbands, fathers or brothers without questioning them like the above-mentioned Ellen in “Child Waters”. It is men who usually take decisions and act because they have authority to it; women only respond to their actions.

¹ Sargent, Helen Child and George Lyman Kittredge, eds. *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*. Student’s Edition. - Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992. – 768 p.

St. Paul in the *Epistles* insists that a good woman should remain silent so as not to distract men¹. Marina Warner points out: “The Silent Woman was an accepted ideal” – both in the classical and Christian period. (29). Warner explains that speaking is linked to independent activity, which must be suppressed: “The speaking woman also refuses subjection and turns herself from a passive object of desire into a conspiring and conscious stimulation: even fair speech becomes untrustworthy on a woman’s lips” (30). This view is shared by Louise O. Vasvári, who claims that “[w]oman’s desire for rebellion is manifested through her tongue, which functions as a kind of prosthetic phallus” (30). Therefore, women must be silenced into obedience.

According to Jane Burns, a feminist scholar, female literary characters are depicted as silent and passive objects devoid of any subjectivity. She claims that Western philosophical thought “constructs man as *homo loquens* and women as the objectified 'other' of his discourse” (in Lutz, 118). Interestingly, the same idea is expressed by Laura Mulvey in film criticism: “Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other (...)” – the only purpose of a female character within any story is to inspire the male hero and incite him to action; that is why there is no place for a woman on her own in the patriarchal society.

However, recent literary criticism such as Albrecht Classen and Blamires warn against sweeping generalizations about patriarchy. Classen’s *The Power of a Woman’s Voice in Medieval and Early Modern Literatures* shows that it is necessary to distinguish “antifeminist” texts from those which offer a more tolerant view of women. These texts have often been overlooked by radical feminist critics because they were searching for confirmations of their black-and-white theories. Barbara

¹ Blamires, Alcuin. Introduction. *Woman Defamed and Women Defended. An Anthology of Medieval Texts.* – Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992. – pp. 1-15.

Newman therefore warns against “re-inscribing gender stereotypes into medieval texts because of a hypertrophic modern feminist agenda”¹. And this problem concerns interpretations of later texts, as well. In Classen’s view, there was never a total subjugation but rather a problematic cohabitation and constant negotiation of identities (ibid.). Though women were far from being equal with men in the past, they were able to wield certain amount of power. As Marina Warner’s book *From the Beast to the Blonde* demonstrates, this power was often communicated through storytelling.

As far as *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* are concerned, it has been showed that the depiction of many female characters is negative and misogynistic and that many female characters are passive and objectified. But there is also the other side of the coin. The ballads do not present homogenous ideas but many different voices. Many female characters acquire active roles themselves. They are often equal or superior to their male counterparts. They are smart and able to outwit male antagonists. They are brave when their beloved ones need their help and strong in childbirth (“Fair Janet”, C.64). The ability to give birth grants them certain magical powers; mothers are able to utter powerful curses. They provoke men’s respect and fear. Classen explains that misogyny is not automatically a sign of subjugation – it also reflects underlying male uncertainty, fear and insecurity (8). Similarly, Blamires points out that: “misogyny was (and is?) part of a reflex of men’s anxiety that women are quicker-witted (...)” (5). What is more, not all the ballads which portray a negative female character support the patriarchal society. For example, the cruel mother from the ballad of the same name is condemned to hell for murdering her illegitimate child. Yet the audience cannot view her as a cold-blooded murderess – she regrets her deed and

¹ Classen, Albrecht. *The Power of a Woman’s Voice in Medieval and Early Modern Literatures*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co, 2007. // <http://www.books.google.com>

we feel that she was driven to it by her community, which ostracizes single mothers, stigmatizes their families and offers no future for illegitimate children. Many other ballads offer sympathetic voices or lament the status quo. Thus, the grounds of the male-dominated society are questioned. The positive and sympathetic depictions of female characters will be discussed in the following chapters.

2.3 Female Characters and the Ballad Society

The ballads are stories about human relationships focusing on private affairs rather than large-scale events. This chapter will examine how female characters function within these relationships. As noted in the second chapter, ballad women never appear on their own, they are always tied to their family or lovers. According to Peter Buchan, relationships depicted in the ballads constitute the central element of the ballad story and its “cultural declarations”¹. But in order to decipher what these declarations mean, it is necessary to focus on the society where the ballads originated.

It was already F. B. Gummere, one of the early ballad scholars, who recognized that the ballads are not poetry for “poetry for poetry’s sake, but are born of an occasion, a need”². The ballads are not songs in a vacuum – they were composed as a reaction to a particular situation, event or problem. The importance of studying oral literature in relation to its social, historical and cultural context is pinpointed by Marina Warner. Though her *From the Beast to the Blonde* focuses on folktales rather than ballads, Buchan observes that these two genres are closely related and often depict the same themes. Therefore, Warner’s observations can be applied to the analyses of the ballads, as well. In her opinion,

¹ Buchan, David. *The Ballad and the Folk*. – London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1992. – 234 p.

² Gummere, Francis Barton. *The Popular Ballad*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997. – 456 p.

The historical interpretation of fairy tale holds out more hope to the listener or the reader than the psychoanalytic or mystical approaches, because it reveals how human behaviour is embedded in material circumstance, the laws of dowry, land tenure, feudal obedience, domestic hierarchies and marital dispositions, and that when these pass and change, behaviour may change with them.

(XVIII-XIX)

Warner believes that discovering the historical reality behind oral literature is what makes it valuable for the modern audience. Folk stories are not distant or obscure objects. They have the “the stark actuality of the real” because they are based on genuine experience of real people and though their names are long forgotten, they are still our common European ancestors. Warner warns against searching for universals; the archetype is for her just an empty term of dry scholarly discourse. The real lives behind the stories are what interests her and what she wants to disclose. Similarly, Barre Toelken pinpoints that any analysis of the ballads must be based on thorough knowledge of what he calls the cultural context. According to him, it operates at two levels: the locally referential context is created by allusions to “ways of life, local customs, weather, social and historical detail, ethnographic and biographical matters, occupational customs and the like”, whereas the metaphorical context refers to the fact that the historical audience must have been familiar with ballad metaphors and was able to decipher their meaning. Toelken further explains that the “cultural context category here is simply a reminder that much of the field of reference comes from the realities and the connotations of everyday life in the community” (ibid.).

This chapter will deal with the referential context. The ballads have a long history, spanning from the Middle Ages to the 18th century when they were fixed in print. However, they were created mainly by

uneducated people in rural areas whose values and beliefs were influenced by very few changes throughout this whole period. Thus, it is possible to treat the ballad society regardless of time. When interpreting specific historical data, the majority of authors refer to the 18th century. This chapter will focus on the depiction of marriage and family and especially on transgressions of various social norms and on crimes which haunted the ballad society. The topics analysed in detail will include illegitimacy, infanticide and incest.

The early ballad criticism argued that the ballads are expressions of the whole community, directly reflecting its standards and beliefs. It was believed that they support the status quo, endorsing the positive values and condemning the negative ones. Though the ballads do not include any direct comments or judgements, they make it clear what should be viewed as morally and socially acceptable. For example, the cruel mother from the ballad of the same name kills her child and is condemned to hell by its ghost: “O cursed mother, hell is deep, / And there thou’ll enter step by step”¹.

However, Jean R. Freedman’s feminist paper entitled “With Child: Illegitimate Pregnancy in Scottish Traditional Ballads” strives to show that the ballads “exist not to provide a sum of shared values, but instead to articulate conflicts that arise from unshared values”. In her view, they do not always side with the social norms or the law. Some of them offer sympathy for those who were unjustly victimized while others represent subversive voices questioning the norms themselves. Still other cases show that social and moral laws must be observed, though it might be at too great a price. Although this chapter will include references to anthropological and historical facts, literary analysis of the ballads will not be underestimated, either. The aim of this chapter is to show how

¹ Sargent, Helen Child and George Lyman Kittredge, eds. *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*. Student’s Edition. - Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992. – 768 p.

artistic images support the views that the ballad singer communicates to his/her audience.

It is necessary to re-assess the ballad about the cruel mother with regard to Freedman's ideas. According to her, "the same society that condemns the woman by legal or clerical means may also exonerate her by artistic ones". On the one hand, it is beyond question that the mother has committed infanticide and deserves to be punished. On the other hand, however, the fact that she is condemned to hell does not mean that she is viewed entirely negatively. The audience may be overwhelmed by pity when we are told that she looks at her baby and asks him not to smile at her. Though the ballad does not describe her feelings (the lack of psychological description being one of the characteristic ballad features), the woman's words are passionate and desperate: "Smile na sae sweet, my bonie babe, / And ye smile sae sweet, ye'll smile me dead"¹. She has no choice but to murder her child, though she, according to Freedman, "finds no pleasure in this dreadful act". There was no place for single mothers in the past. She would have been ostracised from her community and there would have been minimal chance for her to find a job and support her child. Therefore, infanticide was apparently quite common, as Deborah A. Symonds explains and as shall be discussed below. The woman, having murdered her baby, returns from the woods in the final scene. She meets a child by the church. Not knowing that it is her own baby's ghost, she claims: "O sweet babe, and thou were mine, / I wad cleed [would clad] thee in the silk so fine" (B version, 6). The punch line is in the baby's reply: "O mother dear, when I was thine, / You did na prove to me sae kind" (B version, 7). This ballad depicts the transgression of a socially accepted norm (infanticide) and the resulting punishment (condemnation). Nevertheless, its tragic atmosphere is created by the fact that the mother

¹ Collinson, Francis. "The Ballads." *The Traditional and National Music of Scotland*. – London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1996. – pp. 132-147.

is not depicted as a cold-blooded murderess but as a desperate woman. As Freedman claims, "'The Cruel Mother' could certainly make a young woman think twice before yielding to passion, but it is not a simple denunciation of unchaste behaviour; rather it is a grimly realistic portrait of what may happen in a society where those in power condemn unchaste behaviour".

Just like the cruel mother, ballad women are rarely portrayed as romantic heroines but rather as realistic women. For example, the ballads reflect the fact that women were seldom able choose their partners according to their free will. Symonds explains that marriage in the 18th century was quite a pragmatic choice. Romantic love was an ideal because people had to support themselves economically and set up a new household in the first place. Therefore, a desirable man is according to many ballads rich and high-born, as in "Fair Annie" or "Child Waters". The men in both ballads are nevertheless not very likeable from today's point of view. They do not intend to marry the female protagonists and treat them disdainfully at first. But the heroines are willing to do whatever they can to get them and they finally succeed.

Much more positive (at least for the modern audience) are certainly those men who are poor but loving. Some of these ballads end happily because the male protagonists prove to be rich after all. For example, the hero of "The Beggar Laddie" tells his lover that he makes his living by selling spindles but she is willing to leave her home with him and they share all hardships together. After some time, he takes her to his father's hall because he is in fact rich. His pretended poverty was a kind of fidelity test for her. In other words, a happy ending is possible only as far as material circumstances are secured. Other ballads about poor suitors usually end tragically. For example, Auchanachie Gordon in "Lord Saltoun and Auchanachie" is a man without any property but the female protagonist, Jeanie, loves him and claims that she would die without him.

Her father rebukes her for “trying the tricks o a whore” and bids her to marry Lord Saltoun. Jeanie protests but there is no choice for her. She collapses in the wedding chamber and dies of a broken heart. When Auchanachie returns from the sea, he only kisses her cold lips and dies, too. In “Lord Thomas and Fair Annet”, it is the woman who is penniless. Lord Thomas is in love with Annet but he knows that she has no dowry and that is why he asks his family for advice. Everyone except for his sister tell him that he should marry a rich woman who is called the “nut-brown maid”. His sister warns him that he would be unhappy but he chooses the nut-brown maid anyway. Annet comes to the wedding on a beautiful horse and dressed in a splendid gown. The bride is so jealous that she stabs her to death. Lord Thomas then stabs her and himself. He is buried behind the graveyard wall, while Annie inside the graveyard. A briar grows from his grave and a rose from hers, and as they grow, their branches intertwine. Though these ballads acknowledge the importance of property, they lament the true love which was condemned by the conventional society.

Even though marriages between people from different classes were possible, the ballads view them problematically. In “The Laird o Drum”, a lord wants to marry a poor shepherd’s daughter. At first, she worries that she is not good enough for him but finally, her family consents. People gossip about them and his brother gets angry:

“Peggy Countts is a very bonnie bride,
 And Drums is a wealthy laddie;
 But Drums might hae chosen a higher match
 Than any shepherd’s daughter.”
 Then bespake his brother John,
 Says, Brother, you’ve done us wrong;
 You’ve married ane below our degree,

A stain to a' our kin.”¹

When the lord arrives home with his bride, they are not welcomed but he does not mind and reassures her of his love. In the last scene, the bride laments what she would do when her husband dies. Though this ballad ends seemingly happily, Lynn Wollstadt points out that it is far from the romantic Cinderella story. Instead, it “emphasizes the social realities of a marriage that crosses class lines” (313). Wollstadt also claims that “[w]hile the marriage may seem romantic to modern audiences, it is not one to be celebrated. The ballad’s final grave imagery underscores the poignancy of the couple’s circumstance” (314).

Many other ballads emphasize the fact that the marriage must be accepted by both families and by the community. These stories recount hardships that must be overcome by lovers; many of them end tragically. One of the cruellest examples is “Andrew Lammie” (C.233) where the female protagonist is brutally beaten by her family because she refuses to give up her love for a poor musician. Nevertheless, it is her broken heart and not her injuries what causes her death. Andrew comes too late and when he finds her dead, he dies too: “Love pines away, love dwindles away, / Love, love decays the body; / For the love o thee now I maun die; / I come, my bonny Annie!”. Just like “Lord Thomas and Fair Annet”, this ballad expresses that the lovers can be re-united only after death because there is no hope for them in reality.

Other ballads more realistically depict lovers who meet each other in secret, in spite of the family’s disapproval. These secret love affairs in many cases lead to illegitimate pregnancy. Symonds’ book *Weep Not for Me* explains that out-of-wedlock pregnancy was a serious problem in the 18th century. Single mothers were not able to support themselves

¹ Sargent, Helen Child and George Lyman Kittredge, eds. *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*. Student’s Edition. - Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992. – 768 p.

economically and had to live at the expense of local charity, which gave them alms but at the same time condemned them as sinful. The ballads, however, do not support these attitudes: “Rather than upholding societal norms that condemn the pregnant spinster as immoral and sinful, the ballads offer alternative points of view”¹. They offer sympathy by depicting rather utopistic happy endings or they portray strong heroines who can be perceived as moral examples. This is the case of the protagonist in “Burd Isabel and Earl Patrick” (C.257), who becomes pregnant by the earl’s son. He does not want to marry her because of her poverty and marries a duke’s daughter, instead. When he hears that his son was born, he resolves to take him home for upbringing but Burd Isabel refuses to give him up. Though she cannot offer him luxury of the earl’s court, she does not want to him to grow up without mother. A non-realistic happy ending is to be found in “The Rantin Laddie” (C.240). At the beginning, the female protagonist sits at home nursing her illegitimate baby. The ballad pinpoints that her family, friends and even servants scorn her, demonstrating the disapproval of the whole community:

Aften hae I playd at the cards and dice,
 For the love of a bonie rantin laddie,
 But now I maun sit in my father’s kitchen-neuk
 And balow a bastard babie.
 For my father he will not me own,
 And my mother she neglects me,
 And a’ my friends hae lightlyed me,
 And their servants they do slight me.
 (1-2)

¹ Kittredge, George Lyman. Introduction. *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*. Eds. Helen Child Sargent and George Lyman Kittredge. – Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992. – pp. 11-31

The only person who takes pity on her is a kitchen boy, who agrees to deliver a letter to her lover. When the lover receives the news, he assembles an army and rescues them both.

The majority of ballads about illegitimate pregnancy end tragically, often depicting an extreme solution – child murder. Deborah Symonds' analysis of infanticide in Scotland demonstrates that it was quite a frequent phenomenon. There were at least 347 women investigated for this crime between 1661 and 1821 (2). Symonds links all these cases to illegitimacy, claiming that the murders were done for purely economic reasons. She explains that the 17th and 18th centuries were a period of rapid population growth. It coincided with intensification of plant and animal production, which was run by a few wealthy families. As a result of these processes, access to land became extremely limited for non-wealthy people. Couples which could not set up their own household or stay with one of the families were not able to marry either (*ibid.*, 6-7). When a woman found herself pregnant without being married, she risked losing her reputation, her job and finally her community's support (*ibid.*, 2). It was more the prospect of extreme poverty than shame which drove these women to desperate actions. Therefore, many of them kept their pregnancy in secret and killed their baby immediately after birth, even though they risked hanging. Despite this, the crimes were investigated only by local courts. Symonds stresses that higher authorities did not deal with them systematically, turning a blind eye to them or denying their very existence.

In the 19th century, the punishment was moderated to imprisonment, after it had been redefined by William Hunter. This Scottish surgeon was asked to defend a woman accused of hiding her pregnancy and murdering her child after a secret childbirth (*ibid.*, 139). He argued that women were from their nature incapable of murdering a child, being prevented by their “powerful instinctive passion, which, for a wise and important purpose,

the Author of our nature has planted in the breast of every female creature, a wonderful eagerness about the preservation of its young". The baby in this particular case – according to Hunter – died because its mother was not able to take care of him due to her total physical exhaustion caused by the childbirth. Therefore, the only problem was her underestimation of potential dangers at childbirth since it took place without a doctor or a midwife being present. In spite of all the evidence for intentional infanticide, Hunter won the case and it came to be seen as precedent for subsequent trials. What is more, Symonds shows that opinions set by Hunter were mirrored in literary depictions of infanticide, as well (179). In particular, she analyses Walter Scott's novel *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* where the heroine, Effie, faces accusation of infanticide, though in fact, it was a malicious mid-wife who stole the baby and sold it to gypsies. Being a romantic and sentimental writer, Scott denies the grim reality that women are capable of murder.

According to Symonds, the ballads are the only source where the reality of infanticide is fully acknowledged. "The Cruel Mother" has already been discussed above. Another prominent example is "Mary Hamilton", a ballad recorded in the highest number of versions from the whole collection (twenty-nine), which proves its popularity. It has already been mentioned in connection with the protagonist's appearance. Mary's beauty enchants even the king, who wants her to become his mistress. A happy ending resulting from marriage is therefore not an option in this case. Even though physical beauty usually implies inner goodness, Mary drowns her illegitimate baby in the sea. When the queen bids her to depart to "see fair Edinbro town", Mary refuses mourning colours and puts on a splendid white dress to "shine" through the town. She behaves in a noble and composed manner. Women in Edinburgh feel pity for her but she does not deny her guilt and accepts the punishment:

When she cam down the Cannongate

The Cannongate sae free,
 Many a ladie look oer her window,
 Weeping for this ladie.
 “Ye need nae weep for me,” she says,
 “Ye need nae weep for me;
 For had I not slain mine own sweet babe,

This death I wadna dee.”¹ Although she herself claims that she deserved to be hanged, the ballad is more sympathetic than condemning. Wollstadt points out that “[s]ome portion of the ballad, either several verses or the entire song, is always told from Mary’s first-person point of view, thus demanding some measure of the singer’s identification and empathy” (308). Mary regrets her parents, who do not deserve to lose their daughter, and also laments her beauty, which brought about her misery. The king would not have wanted her, if she had not been beautiful. According to Wollstadt, Mary’s words “do not absolve [her] of her guilt, they make her actions the result of a situation that the young woman did not or could not control” (309). Mary could not escape the merciless law, though women in Edinburgh protested against it when they wept for her. Furthermore, Mary is portrayed sympathetically because she accepts her fate stoically and does not revolt against the society or threaten its order in a way that, for example, “Bonnie Barbara Allen” (C.84) does (*ibid.*). A young man dies of unrequited love for Barbara but she does not express any pity for him even when summoned to his death bed. She is cruel and selfish, unlike Mary, who is just trapped by the circumstances.

Symonds focuses on Mary’s speeches and pinpoints that she is one of the “speaking women” that deviate from the tradition of misogynistic texts, which strive for silencing women into obedience. She can be

¹ Kittredge, George Lyman. Introduction. *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*. Eds. Helen Child Sargent and George Lyman Kittredge. – Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992. – pp. 11-31

perceived as a moral example; her “frank speech and reconciliation must have been rare for most women accused of infanticide. Only a very small number of women confessed; the rest had to live, or die, with whatever truth they admitted to themselves”. Mary has to die but she seems to be reconciled with her fate. Her last words are: “Last night there was four Maries, / The night there’l be but three; / There was Marie Seton, and Marie Beton, / And Marie Carmichael and me”. Considering Mary’s death, Symonds claims: “To face those unknown hardships with equanimity, was no doubt a valued skill in the early decades of the nineteenth century, and the ballad heroine offered a tough, honourable, attractive, and utterly secular model of what a woman could be”.

The importance of accepting one’s punishment without revolt is stressed also in ballads about incest. There are five of them: “Sheath and Knife” (C.16), “The Bonny Hind” (C.50), “Lizie Wan” (C.51), “The King’s Dochter Lady Jean” (C.52) and “Brown Robyn’s Confession” (C.57). The crime is committed between brother and sister in all of them. In C.50 and C.52 they were not aware of being relatives – they did not recognize each other because the brother had been absent from home for a long time. With the exception of C.57, the sister dies, either being killed or of grief. The siblings recognize that they have transgressed a fundamental moral law and accept punishment in all these ballads.

The opening stanza of “Sheath and Knife” describes that rumours have spread that the king’s daughter is pregnant by her brother. Since the rumours are true and their secret has been disclosed, the brother takes his sister to the woods to kill her. The baby would prove their guilt but she must also disappear because of her visible pregnancy. Though we do not know her feelings, Ruth Perry points out that she seems to be “cooperating in her own death when she tells her brother to shoot an arrow from his bow when he hears her give a loud cry, which is apparently the cry of childbirth”:

He's taen his sister down to her
 father's deer park,
 Wi his yew-tree bow and arrows fast
 slung to his back.
 "Now when that ye hear me gie a loud cry,
 Shoot frae thy bow an arrow and there let me lye.
 And when that ye see I am lying dead,
 Then ye'll put me in a grave, wi a
 Turf at my head."¹
 (3-4)

Perry further notes that the yew tree was associated with death and sorrow since it usually grew in graveyards. The brother murders his sister in spite of loving her, but there is apparently no other way. Throughout the ballad, the refrain "The brume blooms bonnie and says it is fair" refers to the place where they used to meet as lover. Perry points out that the reference to the broom evocates a place in the margins of civilization, "a liminal place outside the established limits of society--outside the law". The last line of every stanza goes: "And we'll never go down to the broom any more". According to Perry, it signifies "the end of innocence for us as well as for the principals in the story--and also the end of attractive pleasure and of companionable strolling for the brother and sister". Once the society discloses their secret, it is denoted as incest.

When the sister dies, the brother buries her and returns to his father's hall where a feast takes place. Perry remarks: "The music and dancing are evocative of attractiveness and bodily pleasure--music always signifies passion and the lapsing of reason--which sets off his sadness in contrastive relief. He seems all the more alone because everyone around him is gay". When his father worries why he looks so sad, he replies: "I

¹ Sargent, Helen Child and George Lyman Kittredge, eds. English and Scottish Popular Ballads. Student's Edition. - Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992. - 768 p.

have lost a sheath and knife that I'll never see again" (8), referring to his sister "both as his lost attractive partner (...) but also as the carrier, the sheath, of his child" (ibid.). He expresses no guilt, only pain of loss. There was no other way but death in the sweeping fatality of the ballad world. "Sheath and Knife" does not revolt or protest against the moral law prohibiting incest. Nevertheless, the audience is able to feel pity for the protagonists. They did not cause any harm or evil; they just loved each other. Being the king's children, they were the elite elevated above ordinary people and from this point of view, they did not have any equal match but one another. The sister had to die and the brother, who has become her executioner, expresses deep grief at the end. But the law must be protected at any cost, even though the price is too high.

All in all, this chapter strove to analyse female characters in a broad context of the ballad society. Since the ballads are stories based on a dramatic conflict, relationships between characters are often problematic. On the one hand, the ballads mirror historical reality, depicting social values, norms, customs and laws. On the other hand, though, they do not always stand for them; they frequently support victims or lament the price that needs to be paid for securing of the social order.

2.4 Image of Female Victims and Female Aggressors in the Ballads

This chapter will continue with the same topic – that is, the transgressions of social and moral laws. It will focus more closely on various kinds of violence depicted in the ballads. It strives to show that female characters fall victim to violence more often than men. According to Gretchen Kay Lutz's quantitative analysis, women are murdered by men in 49 ballads; men by women only in 15 (55). Further, women are subjected to worse injustice than men. Topics that will be analysed in

detail include violence, mutilation, domestic violence and murder. The ballads frequently offer support to victims. As far as female aggressors are concerned, they are not as frequent as male. The archetype known as the “wicked stepmother” will be analysed, in particular.

First of all, depictions of violence in the ballads will be discussed. However, the historical reality behind the ballads is quite complex in this case, as explained in Barbara J. Baines’ paper “Effacing Violence in Early Modern Representation”. During the medieval and early modern period, the crime was defined legally as a “forcible ravishment of a woman” and was to be punished by death penalty. However, rapists were rarely convicted and sentenced because they usually claimed that their victim had consented with the attractive act and in that case it was no violence. The problem was, as Baines points out, that even if a woman “clearly did not give her consent, a rapist claimed that her mind protested but her flesh consented”. This assertion boils down to the definition of feminine nature, which was analysed in the second chapter. It was believed that women were incapable of rational thinking, being driven by their weak and whimsical nature. According to the 12th century manuscripts *On Human Generation*:

If in the beginning the act displeases the women violenced, yet in the end it pleases [them] because of the weakness of the flesh. For there are two wills in humans, namely, the rational and the natural, which we often see fighting within us. [What] is displeasing to reason is pleasing to the flesh. And if, therefore, there is not the rational will in the violenced women, there is nevertheless [the will] of carnal pleasure.¹

What is more, when a violenced woman conceived a child, the accusation of violence was invalid. This law was based on ancient and

¹ Baines, Barbara J. “Effacing _in Early Modern Representation.” *ELH* 65.1 (Spring 1998): 69-98. // <http://www.jstor.com>

medieval medical texts about the woman's part in reproduction: "medieval texts of theoretical medicine and of natural philosophy establish, under the influence of Galen, a strong connection between attractive pleasure and conception". In other words, the conception was enabled only by consent, which negated the reality of violence. Baines points out that the question of consent puzzled some authorities to the point of denying the very existence of the crime. They claimed that women were from their nature prone to seek out illicit attractive affairs. They depicted them as seductresses, switching the roles of victim and offender. As Baines' paper shows, this confusion is mirrored also in literary depictions of violence from that period.

All in all, a violenced woman had small chance to prove the crime. When she conceived, her accusation was futile and she faced the problem of having an illegitimate child. Nevertheless, the law gave her one option – it stated that "the woman and the accused can be reconciled to each other by marriage". No wonder that many women strove for marrying the offender. This scenario is depicted, for example, in "The Knight and Shepherd's Daughter", where a woman rushes to the court to tell the king that she has been "robbed" by one of his knights:

"What hath he robbed thee of, fair maid,
Of purple or of pall?
Or hath he took thy gay gold ring,
From off thy finger small?
"He hath not robbed me, my liege,
Of purple nor of pall,
But he hath got my maidenhead,
Which grieves me worst of all."
"Now if he be a batchelor,
His body I'le give to thee,
But if he be a married man,

High hanged shall he be.”¹

When the king summons his knights, she identifies the offender but he tries to bribe her with forty pounds “to seek another love”. She still insists on marrying him. At the end, it turns out that she is herself rich and the ballad ends with a happy marriage. Though this is a peculiar happy ending from today’s point of view, it is necessary to bear in mind that marriages crossing class borders were viewed problematically, as noted above.

Other ballads portray heroines behaving quite pragmatically, as well. One of the earliest ballads depicting violence is “Crow and Pie”, which dates back to the beginning of the 16th century. A man meets a woman in the woods and asks her to become his lover. She replies sharply: “the crow shall byte yow”, threatening him with an image of violent death because the crows are scavenger birds that usually feast on unburied bodies (“Crow and Pie,” Wikipedia). He violence her. She tells him to marry her but he only scorns her. She orders him to give her money but he refuses, again. Then she asks him: “In case that I with chylde be / what ys your name? Wher doo ye dwell?” but he mockingly tells her all sorts of names and places and departs. The woman curses him and claims that her heart would eventually recover. This ballad warns women to be careful unless they want to get into troubles but it also offers support. It portrays a strong heroine, who does not succumb to her misery – unlike Lucrece from the well known classical story, who committed suicide after she had been violence.

Ballad women fall victims to various kinds of violence. An extreme example can be found in “Little Musgrave and Lady Barnard”. When Lord Barnard discovers that his wife has been unfaithful to him, he kills her

¹ Baines, Barbara J. “Effacing in Early Modern Representation.” *ELH* 65.1 (Spring 1998): 69-98. // <http://www.jstor.com>

lover and mutilates her by cutting off her breasts: “He cut her paps from off her brest; / Great pittie it was to see / That some drops of this ladie’s heart’s blood / Ran trickling downe her knee”. In this act of violence, he rids her of the distinguishing feature that marks her as the woman. However, when the lady dies, he starts to pity her, claiming that he has slain the bravest knight and the fairest lady. He orders to bury her next to her lover.

An example of what we nowadays call domestic violence is to be found in “The Laird of Wariston” where a man beats his wife for no apparent reason: “He spak a word in jest; / Her answer wasna good; / He threw a plate at her face, / Made it a’gush out o blood”. In the next two stanzas, the woman is accosted by the devil, who offers to teach her how to avenge herself. She then arranges the murder of her husband and laments that she had to marry him for money and live without love. On the one hand, this ballad does not justify her. Her deed was clearly evil, having been devised by the devil. On the other hand, however, it identifies the husband’s action as the reason why the devil came in the first place. It condemns his violence as unacceptable.

In contrast to that, “The Wife Wrapt in the Wether’s Skin” depicts beating as something normal and justifiable. Thus, it is included in the list of misogynistic ballads that view women as subordinate to men. It describes a woman who refuses to work because she is of higher social class than her husband. Therefore, the man wraps her in a wether skin and beats her thoroughly. Though he is not permitted to harm his noble wife, he can certainly beat a wether. At the end, the woman redeems herself and starts to work. According to Louise O. Vasvári, this ballad follows the basic plot of an archetypal story commonly known as the “taming of the shrew”. It is important to note that this ballad has humorous tone. Vasvári points out that the beating is considered to be “the height of humor because it is embedded in a comic text”.

A similar theme is included in “Our Goodman” where a husband arrives home and finds various sorts of evidence that his wife is with a lover – there is a sword, a wig, a coat, etc. The humour lies in wife’s assertions that the sword was in fact a spurtle, the wig was meant to be a hen and the coat a blanket. Finally, the husband finds the lover and the wife tries to convince him that it was a maid. Some versions state that the wife is beaten in the end. According to Vasvári, this ballad belongs to “*jokelore*, a liminal popular oral discourse, the vast majority of whose manifestations are male-to-male, commenting on gender relation and aimed at relieving unfulfilled or failed attractive desire, with blame always placed on woman as, alternately, promiscuous or frigid”.

Many ballads depict murder of female characters. In “The Cruel Brother”, a young man stabs his sister to death only because she did not obey him and married who she wanted. She makes her will before dying, bequeathing him “the gallows-tree to hang him on”. In “Young Benjie”, Benjie drowns his lover because she did not want to let him into her house for fear of her brothers. When they find her body, her ghost reveals the murderer and asks them to blind him.

To sum up, the ballads depicting violence on women usually portray heroines that try to behave independently, disobeying their male counterparts. Male heroes try to resume their position within the patriarchal system by punishing women or manipulating them back into their subordinate position. Some of these ballads end tragically, being more critical of the society which allows such inequality. Others do not include any overt criticism but bear witness to the historical reality behind these stories. They show that women could easily fall victim to men and had little chances to protect themselves.

Some ballads stress that women did not possess means to take a revenge on male aggressors, even though they would like to. “The Fire of Frendraught”, based on real events, describes a feud between William

Gordon of Rothiemay and James Crichton of Fren draught. Gordon's castle was set on fire and both Gordon and his son burned to death. The ballad depicts Lady Rothiemay lamenting this tragedy and her own helplessness: "O were I like yon turtle-dove, / Had I wings for flie, / I'd fly about fause Fren draught / Crying vengeance till I die". Similarly, Fair Annie in (already discussed above) has been kidnapped and forced to live with the aggressor. She has seven children by him. She wants to marry him and live in a proper marriage but he only scorns her and plans to marry another woman. Annie considers murdering her children to avoid shame but her frustration is released only in words:

"Gin my seven sons were seven young rats,

Running on the castle wa,

And I were a grey cat mysell,

I soon would worry them a"

"Gin my seven sons were seven young hares,

Running oer yon lilly lee,

And I were a grey hound mysell,

Soon worried they a' should be."

Generally, ballad women engage in violence less frequently than men. When a female character commits murder, it is often out of jealousy, for example in "Lord Thomas and Fair Annet" or in "Twa Sisters". The former one portrays a bride who stabs her bridegroom's former lover and the latter one is about a young woman who pushed her sister over the cliff because both loved the same man. In "The Fire of Fren draught" mentioned above, it is said that the evil plan to set the castle on fire was devised by a woman, by Lady Fren draught. She is standing in front of the castle and watching the flames but when she hears cries for help, she cold-bloodedly replies: "the keys are casten in the deep draw-well, / Ye cannot get away". However, she has a motive for killing Lord Rothiemay

and his son – her husband is in feud with them and she is protecting her own family.

In case there are female antagonists who are spiteful without any obvious reason, they often have supernatural qualities – there are witches, evil fairy queens or female monsters. These characters are scary and threatening for male heroes. For example, a she-demon appears in “King Henry” to trouble him in his hall, being brought there inside a killed deer. She demands meat, something to drink, a bed and finally the king to lie down beside her. She metaphorically represents men’s fear of excessive feminine attractiveness and power. She is transformed into a beautiful woman at the end because the king has fulfilled all her desires. Though the king was meant to be the most powerful person in the realm, his power is nothing in comparison with the feminine demon.

Among the most frequently depicted female aggressors are the so called “wicked stepmothers”. Some of them are endowed with supernatural powers, as well. The stepmother in “The Laily Worm and the Machrel of the Sea” transforms her stepson into a hideous worm and his sister into a mackerel. Their father discovers her evil trick and persuades her to transform them back. However, the sister wishes to stay in her new shape rather than being transformed by magic again. Similarly, the stepmother in “Kemp Owyne” gets rid of her step-daughter by enchanting her:

Her mother died when she was young,
 Which gave her cause to make great moan;
 Her father married the warst woman
 That ever lived in Christendom.
 She served her with foot and hand,
 In every thing that she could dee,
 Till once, in an unlucky time,
 She threw her on ower Craigy’s sea

Says, "Lie you there, dove Isabel,
And all my sorrows lie with thee;
Till Kemp Owyne come ower the sea,
And borrow you with kisses three,
Let all the warld do what they will,
Oh, borrowed shall you never be!

Marina Warner analyses this archetypal figure in connection with the Cinderella fairy tale. She points out that a stepmother who harbours negative feelings towards her stepchild appears in all versions of this story, not only in European folklore but all over the world, including China. Warner refers Bruno Bettelheim's psychological theory in order to explain the origins of this character. Bettelheim derives his theory from the Freudian principle of splitting, claiming that a child divides the image of his/her mother between two entities, evil and good. The evil image comes to be perceived as the stepmother and the child can direct all negative feelings towards her. This means that she/he does not have to feel guilty about hating the real parent.

Warner herself opts for a historical explanation, claiming that Bettelheim's theory has "effaced from memory the historical reasons of women's cruelty within the home and have made such behaviour seem natural, even intrinsic to the mother-child relationship". Warner stresses that death in childbirth used to be the most common cause of female mortality in the past. It was usual for a widower to re-marry but when "a second wife entered the house, she often found herself and her children in competition – often for scarce resources – with the surviving offspring of the earlier marriage, who may well have appeared to threaten her own children's place in their father's affection too". Therefore, "[t]he chronicles of the Anglo-Saxon and Merovingian dynasties, before the establishment of primogeniture, are bespattered with the blood of possible heirs, done away with by consorts ambitious for their own progeny – the

true wicked stepmothers of history, who became embedded in stories as eternal truth” (ibid.). The ballads mentioned above metaphorically enhance the threat that stepmothers posed by giving them supernatural powers. Otherwise, their hatred towards stepchildren was historically-founded.

To sum up, female characters are in many cases portrayed as antagonists who cause harm and do evil. However, they are not as frequent aggressors as men and they do not indulge in such cruelties as mutilation. They usually commit violence out of jealousy or necessity – for example, to protect themselves or their family. Those who are depicted as truly malicious usually take shape of various supernatural beings.

CONCLUSION

A ballad is “a folksong that tells a story”. But when inquiring what kind of story it is, there is no easy answer. As we have seen throughout this thesis, there are numerous episodes – both comic and tragic, historical, romantic, magical, adventurous, bawdy, heroic, etc. Jean Freedman nevertheless pinpoints that every ballad story is based on a conflict. The most important distinguishing ballad feature is in her opinion the nature of the ballad world, which “is anything but a place of harmony and shared ideas. It is a world rife with conflict, a world of murder and violence and revenge, of war and abduction and broken promises, of thwarted love and malicious cruelty”. We have also seen that this world is especially hard for ballad women, who often get into conflict with male dominance.

Different ballads present different outcomes of these conflicts. Some of them support the status quo, others reject it. There is a multiplicity of attitudes, opinions and beliefs and nothing like a “neat coherent system manifesting a unified world view”. Freedman insists that “folklore is not fundamentally harmonious, but fundamentally contestative”. A surprisingly high number of ballads side with social outcasts and victims of the social system. The ballad singer is not always a representative of the whole community but often a questioning outsider. Freedman argues that oral literature exists precisely for this purpose: to question and to oppose the dominant culture. She quotes Luigi Lombardi-Satriani, who insists that folklore should “be interpreted as a specific culture that derives from the lower classes with the function to oppose the hegemonic culture, the latter being a product of the dominant class”. In Mikhail Bakhtin’s view, folklore is not an intentional opposition to the dominant culture but its counterpart. Unlike artificial poetry, oral

literature is not bound by any conventions or ideology. This enables the emergence of “heteroglossia” of different voices:

At the time when poetry was accomplishing the task of cultural, national, and political centralization of the verbal-ideological world in the higher official socio-ideological levels, on the lower levels, on the stages of local fairs and at buffoon spectacles, the heteroglossia of the clown sounded forth, ridiculing all “languages” and dialects; there developed the literature of the fabliaux and Schwänke of street songs, folksayings, anecdotes, where there was no language-center at all, where all “languages” were masks and where no language could claim to be an authentic, incontestable face.

It is “the entire folk milieu that may be viewed as contestative” (ibid.). This idea is shared by feminist folklorists, who nowadays place on emphasis on the diversity within folk groups – unlike earlier theorists who viewed these groups as a uniform system of patriarchy where all women were equally oppressed by men. Albrecht Classen stresses that the historical reality was never black-and-white; there was constant negotiation of identities and shifting of power structures. Women were able to wield certain amount of power – depending on the actual situation and conditions.

This qualification work has confirmed the diversity of voices within *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*. As Freedman claims, “[b]y viewing them in all their moral, artistic, and social complexity, we come closer to understanding their intricacy than if we search for a unity they do not possess”. As far as female characters are concerned, some ballads depict them in accordance with misogynistic texts, attributing negative qualities such as passivity, irrationality, lecherousness, wilfulness and inconstancy to them. They equate women with the body, while men with the soul.

However, the majority depict women in positive terms. There are many instances of heroines who are active and courageous. The female body is often viewed as a source of fascination and power rather than a shameful object. Pregnant women and mothers, in particular, are portrayed as strong heroines that reign over life and death. They exclude men from their feminine sphere of knowledge; they can cast spells and utter curses. Some female characters are so powerful that they become oppressive and threatening for men – they are usually depicted as supernatural characters such as witches, fairy queens and feminine monsters. All these ballads mix Christian and superstitious beliefs, fairy-tale elements and artistic images.

Other instances come closer to the historical reality, reflecting local customs and ways of life. The dramatic conflict often focuses on transgressions of various social and moral laws. These ballads often side with the weak and the victimized, offering sympathetic voices and questioning the dominant order. Stories about unhappy marriages, illegitimacy, infanticide, violence, murder, mutilation or domestic violence portray women as proud and unyielding moral examples or they lament their misfortune. Positive descriptions of female characters are identifiable throughout the whole collection – they are not haphazard instances but a vital and strong tendency.

Chapter one summarizes scholarly debates about the definition of the genre. There is no consensus; different scholars focus on different characteristics. Most agree only on the basic premise: a ballad is “a folksong that tells a story” (Buchan, 1). In spite of the lack of comprehensive definition, it is nevertheless possible to pinpoint certain characteristic features, such as the epic nature, the lack of moral judgements, the lack of subjectivity, density of expression, specific tunes and the use of formulas and triadic patterns.

Instead of defining the genre as such, many authors focus their attention on ballad singers and the ballad community. Early ballad scholars such as Jacob Grimm and William Motherwell came up with a rather far-fetched theory about the communal authorship¹. They believed that the ballads were created at community gatherings where every member could sing a new stanza due to their gift of improvisation and ingenious memory. This theory was, of course, abandoned but the importance of the ballad community did not cease to be to be stressed. Scholars such as Buchan emphasize its homogenous nature – they pinpoint that the ballads were created in rural areas by uneducated people from lower social classes (171). On the other hand, however, critics such as Jean R. Freedman demonstrate that values mirrored in the ballads are far from uniform (3). They represent many different voices. Some of them support but others reject the status quo. They often offer sympathy for social outcasts and question underlying principles of the society.

The second chapter examines ballad women in terms of their roles. It focuses on negative depictions of female characters and strives to compare them with what Alcuin Blamires labels as “antifeminist” texts (1). According to him, these texts justify misogyny by references to authoritative sources such as the Old Testament, writings of the Church Fathers and the classical Greek culture. They depict feminine nature as whimsical, irrational and attractive. Positive female characters are portrayed as passive and obedient, whereas the negative ones are wilful, lecherous and stubborn. However, Albrecht Classen warns against making black-and-white generalizations about misogyny in the past. There are many texts which offer positive views of women but these were often overlooked or even purposefully neglected by feminist critics who needed justification for their theories about patriarchy (ibid.). In reality, there was never a total subjugation but rather a problematic cohabitation and

¹ Gummere, Francis Barton. *The Popular Ballad*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997. – 456 p.

constant negotiation of identities. Though women were far from being equal with men in the past, they were able to wield certain amount of power. As Marina Warner's book *From the Beast to the Blonde* demonstrates, this power was often communicated through story-telling. Positive descriptions of women in the ballads will be analysed in the following chapters.

Chapter three focuses on depictions of the female body, which feature in a striking number of ballads. The chapter starts with a reference to medieval misogynistic texts, which usually depict the female body as a source of degradation and shame or view it as a mere object. In contrast to that, many ballads refer to it with fascination and respect. Topics analysed in detail include the gaze, virginity, attractiveness, pregnancy and motherhood. Pregnant women and mothers, in particular, are depicted as strong and powerful heroines, who are often granted magical powers. Due to their ability to give birth – to create new life – they are symbolically linked to death. Mothers can utter powerful curses or enchant their disobedient children. Many ballads also depict midwifery as a distinctly feminine sphere of knowledge. These ballads present a mixture of reality, superstitious beliefs and artistic images. All in all, ballad women are depicted through their bodily nature but their femininity is viewed in positive terms.

The following two chapters examine female characters in connection with the ballad society. Marina Warner and Barre Toelken pinpoint the necessity of studying oral literature in its historical and social context and with a thorough knowledge of the historical background. The ballads have a long history, spanning from the Middle Ages to the 18th century when they were fixed in print. Nevertheless, they were created in similar conditions throughout the whole period – by uneducated people in rural areas whose values and beliefs were relatively stable. It is therefore possible to treat the ballad society as a whole. However, different ballads

voice different attitudes towards this society. Not all of them support the status quo – they sympathize with victims of social injustice or represent subversive voices questioning the rightfulness of social norms. Still other cases lament that social and moral laws must be observed at any price, even when it means sacrificing an individual in order to secure the social order.

Since the ballads are stories based on a dramatic conflict, they often depict transgressions of social norms and various crimes. Chapter four focuses on depictions of happy and unhappy marriages, illegitimacy, infanticide and incest, showing that women had to live in extremely harsh conditions. Examples of infanticide, in particular, are compared with the historical reality. Chapter five examines violence in the ballad world, claiming that ballad women are victimized more often than men and are subjected to worse injustice. Analysed topics include, for example, violence, murder, mutilation or domestic violence. In spite of all these hardships that women had to cope with, there are many examples of heroines who are strong and unyielding¹.

This qualification work views *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* in their complexity, focusing on their historical, social and artistic aspects. It demonstrates the importance of female characters in this collection and at the same time pinpoints that their depictions are not homogenous. Unlike written literature, which was mostly tied by conventions, ballads offered space for a multitude of different voices. Many of them were very sympathetic to women. In spite of being produced by the “patriarchal society”, they did not always stand for its values or principles. There are many ballads which depict women as active, powerful and independent.

¹ Child, Francis James, ed. *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*. Vol. 5. Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 2003. // <http://www.books.google.com>

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