

ABOUT THE TEXT

***Young Tambling* by Kate Greenstreet
Ahsahta Press, 2013**

Genre(s): Image-text hybrid, experimental memoir, poetry, prose.

Classes and levels: Upper-level undergraduate and graduate creative writing, literature, and mixed media classes.

Content warning: Allusions to sexual violence, addiction, suicide.

About *Young Tambling* (c/o Ahsahta):

“*Young Tambling* resonates with Greenstreet’s relentless exploration of what it means to be human, to need to feel, to make art. Memory, in this book of ‘experimental memoir,’ works something like the narrative tactics of a traditional ballad—‘alternate leaping and lingering,’ in one formulation. Greenstreet does not dabble in teleological platitudes: the lives crosscutting these poems are not singular but plural and sublime, full of sacrifice and empathy for the lost. In *Young Tambling*, a life’s meaning is born of its poet’s song, and a memory cannot reveal its truth until it finds its ballad.”

From Greenstreet’s website: “How does a person move toward finding their calling? The title *Young Tambling* references a song recorded by Anne Briggs in 1971, a 10-minute version of the Scottish border ballad more widely known as ‘Tam Lin,’ a song about decision and transformation.

I had the germ of an idea: ‘not autobiography but about biography.’ I don’t think *Young Tambling* turned out to be a book about biography though, exactly. I’d say it’s an experimental memoir, about a sense of otherness that gradually reveals itself to be suited to doing something.”

Author’s bio:

A multidisciplinary artist and writer, Kate Greenstreet is the author of *case sensitive* (2006), *The Last 4 Things* (2009), *Young Tambling* (2013), *The End of Something* (2017), and several chapbooks.

TEACHING GUIDE

Discussion Questions:

- What does it mean that this book presents itself as an experimental memoir which is “based on a true story,” or in the words of Greenstreet, “not autobiography but ABOUT

biography”? Consider the relationships between speaker(s), characters, and author and what details are given or left out. What constitutes a life story in this work?

- Point of View. *Young Tambling* begins in second person, which puts the reader into the place of the ballad’s heroine. In other sections, it shifts between first and third person. What effect does this have? Who are the people who populate this book? Whose story is being told?
- Hybrid strategies. Greenstreet mixes lineated poetry, (seemingly) autobiographical prose, marked and unmarked quotations, fragments of text, and images. How does each mode function in itself and as part of the book as a whole?
- Images. What do the black-and-white photos of Greenstreet’s visual art do in the text besides decorate it? Look at sections of *Young Tambling* that reflect on visual art or describe specific paint colors, such as “Plate 1: Stands at Her Half-Door” (pp. 44-45).
- Consider *Young Tambling* as a story of trauma and memory. How do Greenstreet’s fragments, elisions, indecipherable images, and use of narrative ambiguity present personal or collective trauma?
- What claims does *Young Tambling* seem to make about female experience? Consider the book’s stories of pregnancy, motherhood, spirituality, relationship, and violence.

Exercises:

- Listen to and/or read different versions of the Child Ballad “Tam Lin” that Young Tambling draws from. Greenstreet mentions folk singer Anne Briggs’ “Young Tambling” as a particular inspiration.
- Consider the formal qualities of the ballad, both on the page and sung. How does the ballad genre inform the style and content of *Young Tambling*?
- Read the unmarked endnotes section (pp. 161-165) while reading the book and use them to decode certain parts.
- Assign one of the critical essays that Greenstreet mentions in the endnotes and have students discuss it in relation to *Young Tambling*. These are: Martha P. Hixton, “Tam Lin, Fair Janet, and the Sexual Revolution;” Polly Stewart, “Wishful Willful Wily Women: Lessons for Female Success in the Child Ballads;” Lynn Wollstadt “Reading Gender in the Ballads Scottish Women Sang.”
- Watch and discuss Greenstreet’s corresponding video poem, “ACT:”
<https://vimeo.com/132114599>
- Read Adam Clay’s interview with Greenstreet in Denver *Quarterly* and discuss:
<http://www.kickingwind.com/assets/denver-quarterly-winter-2013.pdf>

Credit: Prepared by Claire Cronin, 2019.