

In what ways do
ballads express
enduring human
condition



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The ballad form is one of the most ancient ways known of expressing feelings, events, myths, etc.; even before writing was discovered, the possibility of transmitting these things from one generation to the next existed.

Ballads are a form of oral poetry known worldwide and traditional to many countries; although at first glance no apparent rhyme is seen, one will notice every ballad has a certain rhythm, playing on stress and making use of elements such as alliteration, repetition, enumeration, sometimes rhyming couplets and many other devices known as poetical. These structure the poem and give it the actual ballad shape, mood and basically meaning, stressing on the sound given out by the eye rhymes, off lines and internal rhymes. They show life in a new light, presenting it from an exemplified point of view, easier to understand and accessible to most types of "audiences". They are most often sung along at traditional gatherings, but can also be told as bed stories/songs, for example. Also, ballads frequently use humour to make the understanding simpler. Ballads are structured narrations which can almost always be put into songs - songs are much easier to remember and be sung, to and by children, which will later remember it and pass it on to their own.

They remind of American country songs in some ways, yet the language is rather archaic, stylizing the form. Mostly, ballads have an AABB or ABAB rhyme and are structured in rather short stanzas (2, 4 or 8 lines). Often ballads have deeper meaning than they show; they usually treat with one or two main themes and give and further describe it by exemplifying. These themes can vary, from love, vanity of wishes to death, grief, resentment and

<https://assignbuster.com/in-what-ways-do-ballads-express-enduring-human-condition/>

fear; one will notice they all have in common that they are human emotions rather than anything else (i. e. talk of nature or other).

They reflect events or ways of life, using their structure as a form to get across to the reader or person hearing it, giving way to reflection. For example, "The Twa Corbies" is a ballad found in the Scottish folklore; it addresses a very wide audience. It is a story told by two crows, here symbolizing as most times death. They are in search for food, anticipating feeding on the newly dead body of a knight.

They speak of how he was forgotten there, by his lady, his servant and all who had ever cared for him; no one is searching for him, and "O'er his white banes, when they are bare, /The wind shall blow for evermair" - line 19/20.

In this Scottish traditional ballad, punctuation sets the intonation; one will notice the punctuation repeats itself in each stanza, making the reality even harsher hence powerful, expressing how ruthless human condition can be. It has a strong sense of betrayal about it, also felt in "Edward", another ballad where lament about where life can lead is also felt. "Edward" is the story of a man which, we learn, has killed his hawk, his horse and his father and is preparing to exile himself, leaving behind home and family. The ballad has an unexpected and cruel turning point as we learn by the last stanza that his mother, to whom he is narrating his sadness, is the one who has set him up to these actions.

It is a revolting image as to life, to learn a mother could ever destroy her son's life in such way. Striking imagery, mostly negative, is frequently found

in ballads, as it is something to remember it by as well as teach a life lesson with; “; And what wul ye leave to your ain mither dear /

.....

/ The curse of hell frae me shall ye bear, / Sic counsel ye gave to me, O.;;” (lines 49 to 56) in “ Edward”, the final stanza which shines the light on the origins of Edward’s misery as well as “ O’er his white banes, when they are bare, / The wind shall blaw for evermair” (line 19 to 20), in “ The Twa Corbies”, also as a conclusion to the ballad, similarly outstanding and attention-gripping. Dialogue is also of much use when expressing the human condition, for it is the most used form of communication. Not as much rhetorical questions as in other forms of poetry, questions, even though part of interaction, are very attractive for readers/listeners will always think of the answer coming up, followed by the actual answer given.

In “ The Twa Corbies”, the conversation taking place is quite macabre therefore will get the reader’s attention and reflection, firstly because it is between two birds, crows, symbols of death evil and dirt, but also because of their actual discussion topic: what dead body they will feast on. This talk is furthermore emphasizing the lesson of life given by the ballad, in that one shouldn’t trust anyone, not even those as close as “(His) lady” – line 11. After death, no matter one’s wealth, the only interest one shall present to the world is under the form of crow-food. While “ The Twa Corbies”, even though more fictional in terms of setting (the internal view we get on the crows’ discussion), it is quite realistic as an idea for life one should keep in

mind, while “ Edward” is less pragmatic, for there aren’t many mothers in the world that will advise their children to do such things.

However, it is another emphasis on the betrayal and the trust problem ballads tend to point out (especially these two). Both ballads reflect human condition and its misery using different methods, yet both just as effective and life-teaching lessons; this form of poetry has been and will remain a useful way of reflecting human condition throughout generations passed and those to come.