

Ballads essay sample



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The first type of ballad is broadside, this type consists of topical or controversial issues and came about in the time of the industrial revolution. They could be described as tabloids by people today because they were talked about a lot, this was also a good way to create propaganda too since the broadside ballads were printed on one side of paper so many people could have a copy of them and they could be distributed easily. For example, in the ballad 'Tyburn Fair, the ballad of Ned Ludd' the topical issue is the industrial revolution. The second broadside ballad I have studied is 'Clever Tom Clinch going to be

Hanged', this has the topical issue of public hanging in the time before the industrial revolution. A broadside ballad also has simple lexis and a strong rhythm and rhyme so it could be passed around, especially useful when used as a form of propaganda. Propaganda is where individuals are possibly forced to believe in something they may not have thought of. These ballads were a form of entertainment around this period of time as the issues the poets wrote about were often controversial and also sensational, due to this most of the poets kept their identity anonymous.

The second type of ballad is folk, I studied two poems that fit into this genre "John Barleycorn" and "I once loved a lass, (The false bride)." Folk ballads began as part of the oral tradition, this was due to the time and age, few people were educated and therefore couldn't read or write so they had to tell these tales orally, this may have led to the ballad being changed in some way. In order to stop ballads changing too much folk ballads usually involved rhythm and rhyme to aid memory, also music is sometimes added to aid the reader's/listeners memory.

The subject of folk ballads is usually based on simple everyday events, for example John Barleycorn is based on harvesting and is an extended metaphor. Other folk ballads can be written about love, romance, fantasy, it is endlessly versatile. The structure of the broadside ballad differs from the folk ballads. Both ballad forms use simple rhyme and lexis, although, folk ballads tended to be broken down into stanzas more than broadside ballads, and are also generally longer.

The third and final type of ballad is literary, this type involves the most sophisticated language of the three types, this is because most literary ballads are written down on paper. An effect of this is that they are usually longer than folk and broadside ballads for the same reason, being written down. In literary ballads the language is archaic, an older style of writing. This old style affects the reader because some people won't be able to understand the full meaning of the ballad.

The subjects of literary ballads usually consist of fantasy elements; everyday important events and topical subjects, they also convey feelings and emotions. I am now going to analyse one ballad from each type beginning with the folk ballad, 'John Barleycorn'. This particular ballad is an extended metaphor, which means it has more than one meaning. An example of an extended metaphor is the title 'John Barley Corn' firstly it is obviously a name, but also a personification of the cereal crop, barley. The way the ballad is written makes it easy to see both sides of the story.

An example of this is, 'They let him stand until midsummer.' From this we know that the farmer has let the corn stand until midsummer when it shall

be harvested. The theme is harvesting, which was an everyday event around that time and also today, this folk ballad has an anonymous voice because this poem may have been written many years ago, therefore we do not know who the original writer is. All through the ballad the writer makes most key lines relate to both the corn, and also John Barley Corn. The structure of this ballad has 5 stanzas and 8 lines, this pattern continues throughout the ballad.

In each stanza there are two sets of rhyming couplets. By having these rhyming couplets in a set pattern within the ballad it gives it a constant beat that is interesting and good to read, also the beat helps the reader remember the poem. This ballad has a sad tone to it and talks about a man being tortured in the third stanza. The writer describes things happening to John Barley Corn and how the farmers are doing it. ‘ They hired men with scythes so sharp,’ the narrator is describing to the reader that someone had hired men to possibly kill him.

This makes the reader experience emotions such as fear and pain for John Barley Corn, phrases such as ‘ Cut him off’, ‘ sharp’, ‘ Bound him to the cart’, ‘ pricked him to the heart’. Throughout the whole of the third stanza it repeats these similar words to make the reader feel the suffering of John Barley Corn. There is a lot of rhythm and repetition “ They hired men with” is repeated in the first second and third stanzas. The ballad possibly originated during the days of the early Saxon England Church.

Even then, reaching back to the Pagan Corn King Rite. The poet has written about his feelings around this time using a variety of different emotions. The

atmosphere in the first stanza is dark and gloomy but then a lot fiercer during the third stanza. The language used by this particular poet keeps the reader gripped from the beginning to make it more intense so the reader has a more emotional response to it, and consequently making the reader want to read on. The second ballad I am going to discuss is ‘ The Highway Man’, which is a literary ballad. The Highway Man’ was written in 1906 by a poet called Alfred Noyes.

This is the most modern ballad I have studied. The theme for this certain ballad is ‘ love’; there is romance between the highway man and Bess. The first thing that pops into readers minds about a highway man is mischievous, sly, a villain but at the same time a bit of a charmer because of the sort of job he participates in. The Highway Man gets a thrill and maybe an adrenaline rush out of his job and performing robberies, this is reflected in the expression of his eyes, the “ jewelled twinkle”.

Another way the jewelled twinkle in his eyes could be interpreted is because he’s looking forward to seeing Bess again. We, the readers get a detailed description of The Highway Man in stanza two. ‘ A French cocked-hat on his forehead, a bunch of lace at his chin, a coat of claret velvet, and breeches of brown doe-skin; they fitted with never a wrinkle; his boots were up to his thigh’. We see that The Highway Man is a smartly dressed man, although at first maybe the reader pictured him to be scruffy, ragged and an unattractive person, a stereotypical thief.

The writer then describes Bess using the repetition of the word ‘ red’, throughout the whole of the ballad we associate the colour red with a variety

of feelings, love, hate, passion, death and anger. By using the word red this many times the writer is trying to tell the reader that Bess is very passionate towards The Highway Man and then later on in the thirteenth stanza, she shows her passion for the Highway Man one last time by killing herself to warn him off. The Highway Man', is quite a long ballad and because of its structure it is not meant to be remembered by readers, unlike folk ballads and also broadside ballads.

All through the ballad it is told by the narrator except for stanza five where the Highway Man talks about what he is going to do that night ' One kiss, my bonny sweetheart, I'm after a prize tonight' readers may interpret these word in two different ways, one being the Highway Man is getting ready for a robbery and the prize being the money or loot he is planning on stealing, or two, the Highway Man saying Bess as his prize.

This ballad ends in a sad way as Bess kills herself ' Shattered her breast in the moonlight and warned him off with her death', this makes the reader sad but also appreciates the depth of love that Bess had for the Highway Man. Bess took her own life to prevent the loss of his, this is the ultimate sacrifice she could have given. Despite all the sadness in this ballad there is a lot of excitement involved. The excitement is created by the use of different techniques such as metaphors, similes', alliteration, rhythm and rhyme.

In the first three lines there are metaphors used ' The wind was a torrent of darkness among the gusty trees, the moon was a ghostly galleon tossed upon cloudy seas, the road was a ribbon of moonlight, over the purple moor. ' These three grouped metaphors create the sense of danger and darkness

and because these are used at the start of the ballad it gets the reader gripped. The similes used in this ballad show different things; Noye's uses them to show the comparisons between Tim the Ostler (a stable boy) and The Highway Man 'His hair like mouldy hay' this puts the image of a scruffy ugly man into the reader's head.

In comparison to Tim's appearance, the description of the Highway Man early on in the ballad creates the image of a handsome and smart man in contrast to Tim. The use of Alliteration; in the ballad gives it rhythm and rhyme, 'Tlot-tlot; tlot-tlot' this quote is repetition of the 'T' sound and also Tlot-Tlot is an onomatopoeia. This is the sound that the Highway Man's horse makes when riding on the roads. After the 15th stanza there is a row of five *****, this indicates a change in time.

This happens after the main events in the ballad. The resolution of the story is that the 'Highway Man' dies and goes back to Bess. This creates a circular feel to the ballad and is an effectual ending as both Bess and 'The Highway Man' can now finally be together despite the fact that they are dead. The third and final type of ballad I have studied is a broadside ballad and is called 'Tyburn Fair, the ballad of Ned Ludd' the theme is about the hanging of a man, which was considered as public entertainment years ago.

The place where the hanging would have taken place is Tyburn Fair. The word 'Fair' tells us that hangings were considered to be fun and entertainment. The second theme for this ballad is the Luddites and their protests against the industrial revolution at this time. Ned Ludd was head of a group called 'The Luddites' - the Ludd followers. This group were a social

movement who often went round destroying machines in their protests. The Luddite movement began around 1811, not long after in 1812; ‘Tyburn Fair’ was written.

The writer probably chose to write about Tyburn Fair because it was a popular topic and wrote the ballad as a broadside layout so more people would be able to read it. This ballad may have been written by a member of the Luddites as it could make people feel sympathy towards Ned Ludd and want to join the luddites. The writer repeats ‘To Tyburn Fair I used to go’ this may mean that there are no public hangings at Tyburn Fair anymore and were all stopped before 1912.

The ballad then goes on to say ‘But now i’m bound for Newgate, the hangings take place at a new place now, behind prison gates, but in private. The decision of this may have made readers angry because it was maybe the only entertainment they had although it may have been to do with the rights of the condemned. The tone of the whole ballad is quite dark and in parts some of the language used may make the reader feel scared, the poet talks about burying a body and walking away from the grave. This is because a criminal such as this does not deserve the blessing of sacred ground.

This stanza is talking about death which nobody enjoys to hear about. The ballad consists of four stanzas, two the same number of lines then one short and one long line, and this may be to aid memory. The writer of this ballad managed to get to the reader in the last stanza by using the dark language and I think that broadside ballads are a good way to get across different messages at that certain time many years ago The diverse ballads I have

covered all convey various emotions and ideas to the reader through the use of language and poetical techniques.

The ballad that stood out the most to me was “ The Highway Man”. I thought that the way Alfred Noyes wrote about Bess’s love for the highway man worked well to create an emotional response in the reader due to the fact that she gave up her own life to save his. In the resolution to the poem, Noyes allows his characters to be together forever in spirit form, adding to that emotional response. The popularity of the ballad form remains today because of their versatility, it is possibly more commonly used by song writers in their creations.