



Ballads – Group Work

In this assignment, your group (or *you* if you are working solo) should progress from the *familiar* (a ballad that you have already read), to the *closely related* (a new ballad whose interpretation will draw on what you have learned) to the subtle to *a level of mastery* (writing a ballad yourself). Do not TYPE this assignment. **Part I: 10 min. Part II: 20 min Part III 10 min Part IV 15 minutes.**

I. Open to the handout from *England in Literature* entitled “The Ballad of Sir Patrick Spence” (page 68). Answer the following questions:

1. How does the topic of this ballad fit within the “most popular topics of ballads” list found in your Elements of Literature Books (New Books)?
2. What event foretells Spence’s doom? What is poetic about that description (think personification)? How does that description mesh in with the last two lines of the ballad (and maybe even the first line)?
3. Suppose that this ballad was based on an actual historical event. How then does the creation of this ballad and its heroic descriptions *fit in* with ideas from Grendel (specifically, but not exclusively consider the songs that immediately follow Grendel’s first decimation of the mead hall and his annoyance with them). What does Spence die for? How does the ballad give his death meaning? Use at least two quotes **each** from the ballad and from *Grendel*.

Remember this ballad 4 months from now when we study Coleridge.

II. Read the following ballad and answer the questions that follow it.

The Wife at Usher’s Well

There lived a wife at Usher’s Well
And a wealthy wife was she;
She had three stout and stalwart sons
And sent them o’er the sea.

They hadna been a week from her,
A week but barely ane,
Whan word came to the carline wife
That her three sons were gane.

They hadna been a week from her,
A week but barely three,
Whan word came to the carline wife
That her sons she’d never see.

I wish the wind may never cease,
Nor fishes in the flood,
Till my three sons come hame to me
In earthly flesh and blood.

It fell about the Martinmas
Whan nights are lang and mirk,
The carline wife’s three sons came
hame.
And their hats were o’ the birk.

It neither grew in syke nor ditch
Nor yet in ony sheugh,
But at the gates o’ Paradise
That birk grew fair enugh.

Blow up the fire, my maidens,
Bring water from the well;
For a’ my house shall feast this night
Since my three sons are well.
And she has made to them a bed, She’s
made it large and wide,
And she’s ta’en her mantle her about,
Sat down at the bed-side.
Up then crew the red, red cock
And up and crew the gray;
The eldest to the youngest said,
‘Tis time we were away.

The cock he hadna
craw’d but once
And clapp’d his wings
at a’
Whan the youngest to
the eldest said,
Brother, we must
awa’.

The cock doth crawl,
the day doth daw,
The channerin’ worm doth chide;
Gin we be mist out o’ our place
A sair pain we maun bide.
Fare ye weel, my mother dear;
Fareweel to barn and byre;
And fare ye weel, the bonny lass
That kindles my mother’s fire.

1. Write a literal outline of what takes place in this story.
2. Why must the boys leave?
3. Write down as many elements as you can that make this a ballad. Be specific and give examples. Use your text book and handout(it includes a page on ballads) information on ballads as a reference.
4. Does there seem to be a theme of “fate cannot be denied” running through many ballads. Connect this ballad with “Sir Patrick Spence” using that theme.
5. How does a ballad of such a commonplace thing (the death of



children) fit in with Grendel’s view of the shaper

III. In class you will hear two ballads – for which you now have the lyrics. After listening to them and reading them, answer the following:

1. How do these two ballads both examine the same event?
2. Which of them, and why, comes closer to Grendel’s idea of what Hrothgar’s shaper was doing with history & tragedy? Which of them is closer to explaining tragedy in the manner of “The Wife at Usher’s Well”. Look at your answers to parts I & parts II. Use specifics in your answer.

IV. Write a ballad (at least 12 lines) about one of the following

- A. Your first 7 weeks in this class (be nice...)
- B. The first 7 weeks at Whitney Young
- C. The Mighty Dolphins (the homecoming?)
- D. The Firemen who lost their lives on Sept 11, 2001

Be sure to include as many of the elements of the ballad as you can. See your text book and handouts.

I’m looking for two things.

- **Adherence to the ballad format**
- Creativity and Imagination.