

Popular Ballads

Text 1

Edward

The popular ballads of the Middle Ages were intended to be heard rather than read. They were originally performed by one or more singers who often danced and mimed in the presence of an audience.

Edward was recorded and published by Bishop Percy Thomas in 1765 in the collection entitled Reliques of Ancient English Poetry.

Preliminary task

Since this ballad is preserved in the old spelling you may find it almost incomprehensible. You will notice that most words are different from the ones you have studied in modern English.

The tasks are devised in such a way that they will help you read the ballad step by step and understand its message.

The first two lines say:

'Why dois your brand sae drip wi' bluid,
Edward, Edward?'

A word by word translation into modern English would be:

'Why does your sword so drip with blood,
Edward, Edward?'

These two lines can provide you with an insight on what the poem is going to be about. Write below what you expect the ballad to deal with.

'Why dois your brand¹ sae² drap wi' bluid,
Edward, Edward?

Why dois your brand sae drap wi' bluid?
And why sae sad gang³ yee⁴, O?'

'O, I hae killed my hauke⁵ sae guid⁶,
Mither, mither⁷,

1. **brand** = sword.
2. **sae** = so.
3. **gang** = go.
4. **yee** = you.
5. **hauke** = hawk.
6. **guid** = good.
7. **mither** = mother.

O, I hae killed my hauke sae guid
And I had nae mair⁸ bot hee⁹, O.'

'Your haukis bluid was nevir sae reid¹⁰,
Edward, Edward, 10

Your haukis bluid was nevir sae reid,
My deir son I tell thee¹¹, O.'

'O, I hae killed my reid-roan steid¹²,
Mither, mither, 15

O, I hae killed my reid-roan steid,
That erst¹³ was sae fair and frie, O.'

'Your steid was auld¹⁴, and ye hae gat¹⁵ mair,
Edward, Edward, 20

Your steid was auld, and ye hae gat mair,
Sum other dule¹⁶ ye drie¹⁷, O.'

'O, I hae killed my fadir¹⁸ deir,
Mither, mither,

O, I hae killed my fadir deir,
Alas, and wae¹⁹ is mee, O!'

'And whatten penance wul ye²⁰ drie for that,
Edward, Edward? 25

And whatten pennance wul ye drie for that?
My deir son, now tell me, O.'

'Ile set my feit²¹ in yonder²² boat,
Mither, mither, 30

Ile²³ set my feit in yonder boat,
And Ile fare²⁴ ovir the sea, O.'

'And what wul ye doe wi' your towirs and your ha'²⁵,
Edward, Edward, 35

And what wul ye doe wi' your towirs and your ha',
That were sae fair to see, O?'

'Ile let thame²⁶ stand tul²⁷ they doun fa',
Mither, mither,

Ile let thame stand tul they doun fa',
For here nevir mair maun²⁸ I bee, O.' 40

'And what wul ye leive to your bairns²⁹ and your wife
Edward, Edward?

And what wul ye leive to your bairns and your wife,
When ye gang ovir the sea, O?'

'The warldis room³⁰, late³¹ them beg thrae³² life,
Mither, mither, 45

The warldis room, late them beg thrae life,
For thame nevir mair wul I see, O.'

'And what wul ye leive to your ain³³ mither deir,
Edward, Edward? 50

And what wul ye leive to your ain mither deir?
My deir son, now tell me, O.'

'The curse of hell frae³⁴ me sall³⁵ ye beir³⁶,
Mither, mither,

The curse of hell frae me sall ye beir,
Sic³⁷ counseils ye gave to me, O.' 55

8. **nae mair** = no more.9. **bot hee** = but him.10. **reid** = red.11. **thee** = you.12. **steid** = steed, horse.13. **erst** = once.14. **auld** = old.15. **hae gat** = have got.16. **dule** = sorrow, grief.17. **drie** = endure, suffer.18. **fadir** = father.19. **wae** = woe.20. **ye** = you.21. **feit** = feet.22. **yonder** = over there.23. **ile** = I'll.24. **fare** = travel.25. **ha'** = hall.26. **thame** = them.27. **tul** = till.28. **maun** = must.29. **bairns** = children.30. **the warldis room** = the

world's space.

31. **late** = let.32. **thrae** = through.33. **ain** = own.34. **frae** = from.35. **sall** = shall.36. **beir** = bear.37. **sic** = such.

Tasks

1. Look at the layout of the ballad. What do the inverted commas indicate?

2. Read the first stanza (lines 1-8). Edward's mother asks him two questions. Underline them, then write Edward's reply to his mother's questions. Use your own words. You may use the footnotes if you need additional help.

mother's questions: 'Why does your sword drip with blood?'
'Why are you so sad?'

Edward's answer:

3. Edward's mother reacts with disbelief, saying:
'Your hawk's blood was never so red'

She also says:

'Your steed was old and you've got more'
'Some other sorrow you endure'

Read lines 9-24, underline the mother's remarks in the ballad and then fill in the table with Edward's responses.

Mother	Edward
'Your hawk's blood was never so red'
'Your steed was old and you've got more'	}
'Some other sorrow you endure'	

4. Consider the text you have analyzed so far (lines 1-24) and the answers you have collected in tasks 1-3. Write a short summary. Start like this:

The ballad opens with a conversation between...

5. What is the attitude of Edward's mother?

She is sympathetic
 suspicious
 skeptical
 other: ...

(Tick the answer you consider appropriate; add more if you wish).

6. Now read the next section (lines 25-56) and put Edward's answers to his mother's questions in the same sequence as they appear in the ballad. Write them in the table provided.

Edward answers:

'The world's space, let them beg through life'

'I'll let them stand till they fall down'

'The curse of hell from me you shall bear'

'I'll set my feet in the boat over there'

Mother's questions	Edward's answers
'And what sort of punishment will you endure for that?'	
'And what will you do with your towers and your hall?'	
'And what will you leave to your children and your wife?'	
'And what will you leave to your mother?'	

7. Edward's mother begins her questions with the conjunction 'And'. Underline this conjunction in the text. What is the effect of such repetition?

surprise
 tension
 curiosity
 condescending attitude
 other: ...

(Tick the answer you consider suitable; add more if you wish).

8. Consider Edward's answers. How would you describe his attitude towards:

his father's death?

his country?

his family?

his mother?

9. Consider the last line of each stanza. Complete the table below by writing what or whom the underlined words refer to. One example is provided.

line (in modernized spelling)	referent
And I had none but <u>him</u>	<i>the hawk</i>
<u>That</u> once was fair and free
Alas and woe is <u>me</u>
And I'll travel over the sea
For <u>here</u> never more must I be
For <u>them</u> never more will I see
Such <u>counsel</u> you gave me

In one of the lines above Edward is accusing his mother of being responsible for what he has done.

State what line it is and what she should be responsible for.

.....

10. In the ballad you have read, 'incremental repetition' is used. Look up this expression in the glossary. Then underline the lines which contain 'incremental repetition'.

The effect of this technique is that of:

- increasing suspense till the climax is reached
- providing more detail about the setting
- releasing tension
- drawing the audience's attention away from the action
- impressing the picture more deeply in the consciousness of the audience
- giving musicality

(Tick the answer you consider suitable)

11. You may have noticed other repetitions. A line which is repeated at regular intervals during a ballad is called a 'refrain' (For more information see glossary). Underline the refrains in the text. What is the function of a refrain?

- It provides details about the environment
- It announces the title
- It advances the story
- It voices the mood of the ballad
- It aids in memorization of the ballad
- It holds the listener's attention
- other: ...

(Tick the answer/s you consider appropriate; add more if you wish).

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<u>That</u> once was fair and free
Alas and woe is <u>me</u>
And <u>I</u> 'll travel over the sea
For <u>here</u> never more must I be
For <u>them</u> never more will I see
<u>Such</u> counsel you gave me

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other: ...

(Tick the answer/s you consider appropriate; add more if you wish).

12. If you listen to the ballad on the tape you will notice that the rhythm is very regular.

What are the elements that give such effect of regularity?

13. The singer/narrator of this ballad is absent.

The events are narrated in form of

This demands a narrative of events which is wholly

- a) subjective (choose a or b)
b) objective

14. In the ballad description is kept to a minimum. Underline the descriptive details of the environment and write them down below.

.....

In this way the listener's attention is focused on:

- the characters
the events
the dramatic effect
the lyrical element
other: ...

(Tick as many as you consider suitable; add more if you wish).

15. Consider the subject matter of the ballad.

Edward deals with:

- the supernatural
religion
love and sentiment
domestic tragedy
history

(Tick the answer/s you consider suitable).

16. Does this ballad have a moral? Give reasons for your answer (Class discussion).

Concluding tasks

1. Consider the tasks you have completed so far and summarize the content of the ballad in your own words.

2. Here is the American version of *Edward*. It is slightly different. Read the ballad below and write the differences and similarities between this one and the one on pp. 5-6.

differences	similarities

'How comes that blood all over your shirt?

My son, come tell it to me.'

'It's the blood of my little guinea pig—

O mother, please let me be.

It's the blood of my little guinea pig—

O mother, please let me be.'

'Your guinea pig's blood is not so red.

My son, come tell it to me.'

'It's the blood of my little hunting dog

That played in the field for me...'

'Your dog lies yonder, O my son,

And this it could not be.'

'It is the blood of my old roan horse

That pulled the plow for me...'

'How comes that blood all over your shirt?

My son, you must tell to me.'

'It's the blood of my little brother Bill

Who I killed in the field today...'

'And what will you do when your father comes home?

My son, come tell it to me.'

'I'll put my feet in the bottom of a boat

I'll put my feet in the bottom of a boat

And sail across the sea.

And sail across the sea.'