**BONNY BARBARA ALLEN**

The ballad, written by an anonymous writer, is about a tragic love story. Its title is surely a name and it plays on the alliteration (repetition of some consonant sounds) of sounds “b” and “n” (some of the most frequent characteristics of both epic poems and ballads play on repetition, because they’re generally oral form of poetry and it helps the memorisation). The text is organized into 8 quatrains (stanzas of 4 verses rhyming ABCD) and it is characterized by the use of simple language and the repetition of words or lines.

In the 1st quatrain the narrator tells the reader about settings and storyline. He plays on settings to create an atmosphere: verse 2 communicates sadness through the image of falling leaves and verse 4 through the word “West”, which is the place where the sun dies.

The first element we get from the settings in time and from the storyline is that it was ***Martinmas\**** when Sir John fell in love with Barbara Allen.

In the 2nd quatrain the reader becomes aware of the fact that Sir John sent his men to search Barbara Allen. This stanza differs from the previous one because it mixes the narration with the real words of direct speech. The use of direct speech helps to involve the reader and the dialect allows to know that the man who turns to Barbara belongs to a lower class.

There is a phonological parallelism between the 2nd stanza and the 1st one (v. 2 “falling”, v.6 “*dwelling*”), that connect the two stanzas.

The subject of the 3rd stanza is Barbara Allen, who visited Sir John. Her speech, reported in the 12th verse, allows the reader to indirectly understand that Sir John is dying. In this quatrain the rhyme scheme is different from that of the other quatrains: it’s ABCB.

When the intelligent reader arrives at the 4th stanza understands that Sir John is on the point of dying because of Barbara Allen. In fact Sir John is speaking to Barbara Allen: he is telling her he is sick and she answers him that it is better for her if he dies, even if his heart is spilling.

We don’t know exactly what is Barbara’s attitude towards him, but it sounds as she is not moved in front of his suffering, which is expressed by the words “heart’s blood were a spilling”.

The composer uses such a realistic and concrete expression to communicate the idea of sufferings in order to reach even common people.

In the 5th stanza there’s only dialogue so the reader can listen to the concrete words and has directly access to what actually happens. Language is easy and concrete so the feelings the composer want to communicate are immediate, also, the use of dialect allows the narrator to have a realistic effect. Feeling are not filtered by the narrator and the reader can make his own idea about the event. In the 1st line the narrator is reporting Barbara’s words: she invites Sir John to remember when he, drunk a lot of red wine, angered her. The narrator concludes the stanza focusing on Barbara’s reaction: on her anger.

In the next stanza the narrator and Sir John are speaking: the narrator is telling us Sir John is fighting with death and then Sir John uses the language of aristocracy to greet his friends.

The reader can see his regret when he tells to his friends to be kind to Barbara Allen; this implies she is still important to him.

Here is another phonological parallelism (v. 18 “filling”, v. 22“dealing”) that connect the 5th stanza and the 6th one.

In the 7th stanza Barbara Allen left Sir John, she doesn’t seem to worry about him.

The first two verses are united by an anaphora (v. 25/26 “And slowly, slowly”) and the rhyming scheme is like the one of the 3rd stanza (ABCB).

In the last quatrain there seems to be a change in Barbara’s attitude towards Sir John, since the narrator tells the reader she feel pain at every stroke of the bell that announces his death.

\* **Search the net and find out information about St. Martin: what does St. Martin celebrates? What is “Martinmas Term”? Make a short text.**

**St. Martin's Day**, also known as *Martinmas*, is celebrated on the 11th of November, when autumn wheat sowing is completed and "Martinmas beef" is produced from the annual slaughter of fattened cattle. In the agricultural calendar it celebrates the end of the agrarian year and the beginning of harvesting with the arrival of the natural winter.

Historically, “***Martinmas Term***” is one of the four divisions of the legal year used as the days when contracts and leases would begin and end, servants would be hired or dismissed so on this day were held hiring fairs where farm laborers would seek employment.

St. Martin is patron of the poor because of a legend on his life which tells that during a snowstorm, in order to save a beggar from dying of cold, he cut his cloak in half to share it with him. That night he dreamed that Jesus, while wearing the half-cloak, said to the angels: "Here is Martin, the Roman soldier who is not baptized; he has clothed me."