

BALLAD

A **ballad** is a form of verse, often a narrative set to music. Ballads derive from the medieval French *chanson balladée* or *Ballade*, which were originally "dance songs". Ballads were particularly characteristic of the popular poetry and song of Britain and Ireland from the later medieval period until the 19th century. They were widely used across Europe, and later in Australia, North Africa, North America and South America. Ballads are often 13 lines with an ABABBCBC form, consisting of couplets (two lines) of rhymed verse, each of 14 syllables. Another common form is ABAB or ABCB repeated. The ballad derives its name from medieval Scottish dance songs or "ballares" (L: *ballare*, to dance), from which 'ballet' is also derived, as did the alternative rival form that became the French ballade, in alternating eight and six syllable lines. Ballads were originally written to accompany dances, and so were composed in couplets with refrains in alternate lines. Most northern and west European ballads are written in ballad stanzas or quatrains (four-line stanzas) of alternating lines of iambic (an unstressed followed by a stressed syllable) tetrameter (eight syllables) and iambic trimeter (six syllables), known as ballad meter. Usually, only the second and fourth line of a quatrain are rhymed (in the scheme a, b, c, b), which has been taken to suggest that, originally, ballads consisted of couplets (two lines) of rhymed verse, each of 14 syllables. Ballads usually are heavily influenced by the regions in which they originate and use the common dialect of the people. In all traditions most ballads are narrative in nature, with a self-contained story, often concise, and rely on imagery, rather than description, which can be tragic, historical, romantic or comic.

European Ballads have been generally classified into three major groups: traditional, broadside and literary.

Traditional ballads

The traditional, classical or popular (meaning of the people) ballad has been seen as beginning with the wandering minstrels of late medieval Europe. Early collections of English ballads were made by Samuel Pepys (1633–1703) and in the Roxburghe Ballads collected by Robert Harley, (1661–1724), which paralleled the work in Scotland by Walter Scott and Robert Burns.

Broadsides

Broadside ballads (also known as 'broadsheet', 'stall', 'vulgar' or 'come all ye' ballads) were a product of the development of cheap print in the 16th century. They were generally printed on one side of a medium to large sheet of poor-quality paper. In the first half of the 17th century, they were printed in black-letter or gothic type and included multiple, eye-catching illustrations, a popular tune title, as well as an alluring poem. By the 18th century, they were printed in white letter or roman type and often without much decoration (as well as tune title).

Literary ballads

Literary or lyrical ballads grew out of an increasing interest in the ballad form among social elites and intellectuals, particularly in the Romantic movement from the later 18th century. Respected literary figures Robert Burns and Walter Scott in Scotland collected and wrote their own ballads. Similarly in England William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge produced a collection of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798 that included Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*.