

Ballad

Ballad Definition

The word *ballad* is of French provenance. It is a type of poetry or [verse](#) which was basically used in dance songs in ancient France. Later on, during the late 16th and 17th centuries, it spread over the majority of European nations. Owing to its popularity and emotional appeal, it remained a powerful tool for poets and lyricists to prepare music in the form of lyrical ballads, and earn a handsome income from it.

The art of lyrical ballad, as well as ballad poetry, lost popularity during the latter half of the 19th century. However, it is still read and listened to with interest in most European countries, including the British Isles.

Evolution of Ballad

Two schools of thought, namely the communal school of thought, and the individualist school of thought, have dominated the world of ballad throughout its development. Communalists believe that the evolution of the ballad was a result of the joined and shared literary endeavors of many people. Individualists negate this approach to the extent that they consider the later development as a modification of the [archetype](#).

Most of the ballad examples in ancient times used to be passed from generation to generation through oral traditions. This is because there was no language in which to write them down.

However, in the modern world, the preservation and transmission of such literary treasures has become easier. The availability of advanced technology and common languages has improved not only the documentation, but the accessibility of these resources for people in every part of the world.

Distinguishing Features of Ballads

Ballads, no matter which category they fall into, mostly rely on simple and easy-to-understand language, or [dialect](#) from its origin. Stories about hardships, tragedies, love, and [romance](#) are standard ingredients of the ballad. This is irrespective of geographical origins.

Another conspicuous element of any ballad is the recurrence of certain lines at regular intervals. Ballads can also be in interrogative form, with appropriate answers to every question asked. Ballads seldom offer a direct message about a certain event, [character](#), or situation. It is left to the [audience](#) to deduce the [moral](#) of the story from the whole narration.

Categories of Ballad

Following is a broad list of [categories](#) of ballad:

- Stall ballad
- Lyrical ballad
- Popular ballad
- Blue ballad
- Bush ballad
- Fusion ballad (pop and rock)
- Modern ballad

All these categories are primarily meant to convey popular messages, stories, or historical events to audiences in the form of songs and poetry.

Examples of Ballad

Example #1: *Tam Lin* (Unknown)

Scottish traditional ballad

” ‘O I forbid you, maiden all,
That wears gold in your hair,
To come or go by Carterhaugh
For young Tam Lin is there.”

Example #2: *Rime of an Ancient Mariner* (By Samuel Taylor Coleridge)

“Day after day, day after day
We stuck nor breathe, nor motion;
As idle as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean.”

Example #3: *Stagolee* (By John Hurt)

Blue ballad with roots in American folk music

“Stagolee was a bad man
They go down in a coal mine one night
Robbed a coal mine
They’s gambling down there”

Example #4: *Drover* (By Elton John)

Bush ballad

“From the sunburnt plains of far off North Australia
Came a fella born to ride the wide brown land
Oh he grew up running wil
But soon by all was styled
As the country’s greatest-ever droving man”

Example #5: *The Ballad of Billy the Kid* (By Billy Joel)

Modern ballad

“From a town known Wheeling, Wes Virginia
Rode a boy with six gun in his hands
And his daring life crime
Made him a [legend](#) in his time
East and west of Rio Grande”

Ballads, as stage performances, enjoyed the status of being one of the main sources of entertainment in ancient times. Legends and historical events were narrated in the form of a ballads, which would comprise song and dance.

Ballad was a perfect substitute for our current day technology-based entertainment, albeit with more emotional appeal. In the 18th century, the ballad-based stage entertainment came to be known as “ballad opera.” According to ballad aficionados, the first formal ballad opera was staged in the first half of the 18th century, with the [theme](#) of “The Beggar’s Opera.”