

Ballad

Centuries-old in practice, the composition of ballads began in the European folk tradition, in many cases accompanied by musical instruments. Ballads were not originally transcribed, but rather preserved orally for generations, passed along through recitation. Their subject matter dealt with religious themes, love, tragedy, domestic crimes, and sometimes even political propaganda.

A typical ballad is a **plot-driven song**, with one or more characters hurriedly unfurling events leading to a dramatic conclusion. At best, a ballad does not tell the reader what's happening, but rather shows the reader what's happening, describing each crucial moment in the trail of events. To convey that sense of emotional urgency, the ballad is often constructed in quatrain stanzas, each line containing as few as three or four stresses and rhyming either the second and fourth lines, or all alternating lines.

Ballads began to make their way into print in fifteenth-century England. During the Renaissance, making and selling ballad broadsides became a popular practice, though these songs rarely earned the respect of artists because their authors, called "pot poets," often dwelled among the lower classes.

However, the form evolved into a writer's sport. Nineteenth-century poets Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth wrote numerous ballads. Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," the tale of a cursed sailor aboard a storm-tossed ship, is one of the English language's most revered ballads.