

# ***THE BALLAD***



Ballads were originally written to accompany dances, and so were composed in **couplets** with **refrains**.

Most northern and west European ballads are written in ballad **stanzas** or **quatrains** (*four-line* stanzas) of alternating lines of **iambic tetrameter** (eight syllables) and **iambic trimeter** (six syllables), known as *ballad meter*. Usually, only the second and fourth line of a quatrain are rhymed (ABCB).

**The FOOT is the basical metrical unit that forms part of a line of verse in most Western traditions of poetry.**

**The unit is composed of syllables, the number of which is limited, with a few variations, by the sound pattern the foot represents.**

**The lines of verse are classified according to the number of feet they contain.**

**One of the feet, in English, is the IAMB.**

**It refers to a foot comprising an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable.**

The horse | fair Ann | et rode | upon |  
He amb | led like | the wind |,  
With sil | ver he | was shod | before,  
With burn | ing gold | behind |

*Stanza from "Lord Thomas and Fair Annet"*



Lord Thomas  
and  
Fair Annet



Medieval musicians had a wide variety of instruments available to them.



Ballads usually use the common dialect of the people and are heavily influenced by the region in which they originate.

The ballads do not have any known author or correct version; instead, having been passed down mainly by oral tradition since the Middle Ages, there are many variations of each. The ballads remained an oral tradition until the increased interest in folk songs in the 18th century led collectors to publish volumes of popular ballads.

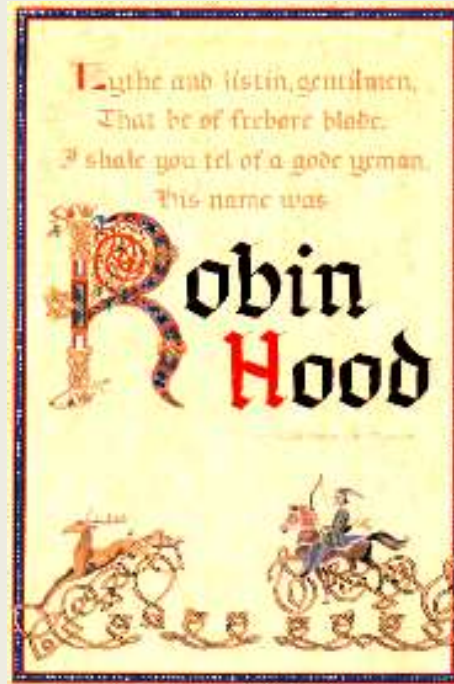
*Illustration by John D. Batten for  
Tamlane in More English Fairy Tales*



The **traditional** (classical or popular) ballad has been seen as beginning with the wandering minstrels of late medieval Europe.

From the end of the 15th century there are printed ballads that suggest a rich tradition of popular music.

For example, ballads about Robin Hood were being sung from at least the late 14th century and the oldest detailed material is *Wynkyn de Worde's* collection of Robin Hood ballads printed about 1495.





**"Oh where ha' you been, Lord Randal, my son?  
And where ha' you been, my handsome young man?"  
"I ha' been at the greenwood; mother, mak my bed  
soon  
For I'm wearied wi' hunting', and fain wad lie doon.**

**"And wha did you meeting there Lord Randal my son  
and what did you meeting there my handsome young  
man  
"O I met wi my true-love; mother, make my bed  
soon, For I'm wearied wi' huntin', and fain wad lie  
doon."**

**"O dove sei stato, Lord Randal, figlio mio?  
O dove sei stato, mio bellissimo giovane uomo?"  
"Sono stato nel bosco sacro; madre, prepara il mio letto presto,  
ho cacciato e sono stanco e vorrei coricarmi."  
"E chi hai incontrato, Lord Randal, figlio mio?  
E chi hai incontrato, mio bellissimo giovane uomo?"  
"Ho incontrato il mio vero amore; madre, prepara il mio letto presto,  
ho cacciato e sono stanco e vorrei coricarmi."**

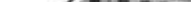
There has been an increasing interest in traditional popular ballads during the eighteenth century, prompted by social issues. As a matter of fact, many of the ballads deal with **themes concerning rural laborers**.

In the late 19th century, in Denmark, **Svend Grundtvig** and, in England and Scotland, the Harvard professor **Francis James Child** attempted to record and classify all the known ballads and variants in their chosen regions.

Since Child died before writing a commentary on his work it is uncertain exactly how and why he differentiated the 305 ballads printed that would be published as *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*.



There have been many different and contradictory attempts to classify traditional ballads by theme, but commonly identified types are the religious, supernatural, tragic, love ballads, historic, legendary and humorous.

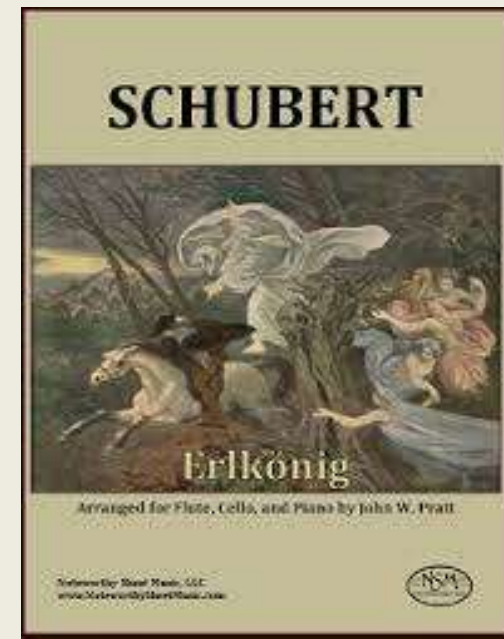


**Literary or lyrical ballads** grew out of an increasing interest in the ballad form among social elites and intellectuals, particularly in the Romantic movement from the later 18th century.

Example of a respected author is **Sir Walter Scott** in Scotland and in England **Samuel Taylor Coleridge** (*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*). In Germany **Goethe** cooperated with **Schiller** on a series of ballads, some of which were later set to music by Schubert. Later important examples of the poetic form included Rudyard Kipling's 'Barrack-Room Ballads' (1892-6) and Oscar Wilde's 'The Ballad of Reading Gaol' (1897).



*F. Schubert - Der Erlkönig*



In the 18th century **ballad operas** developed as a form of English stage entertainment, partly in opposition to the Italian domination of the London operatic scene.

It consisted of racy and often satirical spoken (English) dialogue, interspersed with songs that are deliberately kept very short to minimize disruptions to the flow of the story. Rather than the more aristocratic themes and music of the Italian opera, the ballad operas were set to the music of popular folk songs and dealt with lower-class characters.

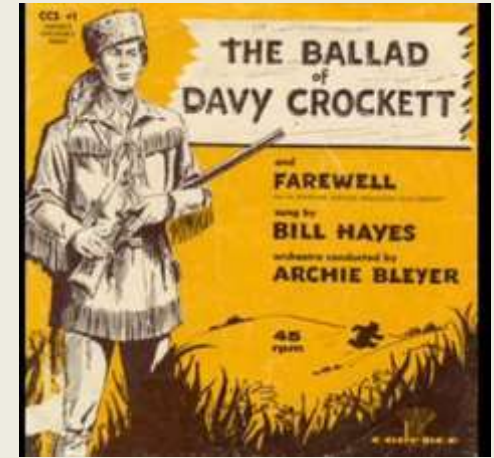
Subject matter involved the lower, often criminal, orders, and typically showed a suspension (or inversion) of the high moral values of the Italian opera of the period.



*Tho' Late I Was Plump" from the 18th century British ballad opera,  
A Poor Soldier*

**Native American ballads** are ballads that are native to North America.

*The Ballad of Davy Crockett*  
Song with music by George Bruns and  
lyrics by Thomas W. Blackburn 1954



The **blues ballad** has been seen as a fusion of Anglo-American and Afro-American styles of music from the 19th century.

They were often accompanied by banjo and guitar which followed the blues musical format.

*The Ballad of Casey Jones.*



*Sentimental ballads had their origins in the early "Tin Pan Alley" music industry of the later 19th century. They were generally sentimental, narrative, strophic songs published separately or as part of an opera.*

*The association with sentimentality led to the term "ballad" being used for slow love songs from the 1950s onwards. Modern variations include "jazz ballads", "popballads" and "power ballads".*



*Danny Boy | BYU Vocal Point*



*After the Ball is a popular song written in 1891 by Charles K. Harris.*

*The most common use of the term ballad in modern pop and R&B music is for an emotional song about romance, breakup and/or longing. Some notable examples of pop ballads include: Celine Dion's "My Heart Will Go On", Elton John's "Sorry Seems To Be The Hardest Word".*



*"Ballad of a Thin Man" is a song written and recorded by Bob Dylan.*

