

LITERARY FORM

BALLAD

Ballads, are one of the earliest forms of literature, are narrative songs. Traditionally they were passed down orally from generation to generation. They are divided into two major types : **Folk Ballads** which are meant to be sung and **Literary Ballads** which are meant to be printed and read. The major themes found in ballads include love, especially unrequited love, revenge, courage, and death.

Example : 1. Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*

2. S. T. Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*

Ballads are usually **tragic in tone** and emphasize **the story** rather than the setting or characters. Dialogue, refrains, and repetitions are common elements in ballads. The ballad stanza **is a quatrain** with the second and fourth lines rhyming. Musical ballads may or may not follow this pattern, but most **tell a story about a person**, and the story is often a touching one.

Ballads, Meter, and Rhyme Scheme : Ballads are a type of formal verse, meaning that they tend to have both strict meter and a defined rhyme scheme.

Meter: A pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables that creates the rhythm of lines of poetry. Each stress pattern is composed of repeating units (da-dum, da-dum, da-dum, for example) where each unit (da-dum) is called a foot.

Meter in Ballads : Though the majority of ballads use iambs as their main foot, there is no specific meter required for a ballad. Generally speaking, ballads have a consistent meter throughout, so that a ballad in common meter will be common meter all the way through. The stanzas of a typical ballad follow the rhyme scheme "ABCB." For instance, here's the first stanza of a famous Irish folk ballad entitled "Tam Lin" that exemplifies the traditional ABCB rhyme scheme.

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

The Evolution of the Ballad: The ballad as a musical and poetic form originated in Europe in the late middle ages—as early as the 14th century—when traveling minstrels popularized the form. Since then, many writers have adapted the ballad to their own vision for new and original compositions. As a result, many different types of ballads exist. These variations can largely be broken up into three main categories that help define the evolution of the ballad:

Folk ballads are traditional ballads (such as "Tam Lin" and "Robin Hood") that existed as an oral (and often musical) tradition before they were recorded in written language. These ballads are, not attributable to any one author. These are some of the oldest ballads, and they tend to **tell stories of love and adventure**.

Lyrical ballads, also called "literary ballads," are poems that began to appear in the 18th century as a new variation on the folk ballad. Although the Romantic poets who pioneered the form of the lyrical ballad were inspired by the musical traditions surrounding traditional folk ballads, lyrical ballads have little to do with oral tradition or music. Writers of lyrical ballads from the 18th to the 20th century are **Coleridge and Poe**. These poets expanded the subject matter of the ballad by using lyrical ballads to tell everyday stories, rather than only stories characterized by excitement or adventure.

Modern ballads: The word ballad is used today to describe many different types of poems and songs that tell stories, but not all modern ballads adhere to the conventions of meter

or rhyme schemes that once defined the form. The musical roots of the ballad have, however, endured. Narrative songs—and especially pop songs about love—are often referred to as ballads.

Lyrical Ballad: *La Belle Dame sans Merci* by John Keats

John Keats' ballad "La Belle Dame sans Merci: A Ballad" is a perfect example of the lyrical ballad's departure from the form of the traditional ballad. While this poem employs the ABCB rhyme scheme and refrain ("O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms") that are typical of a traditional ballad, Keats' use of meter is unconventional for a ballad—particularly the short fourth lines of each stanza.

Lyrical Ballad: *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* by S.T. Coleridge

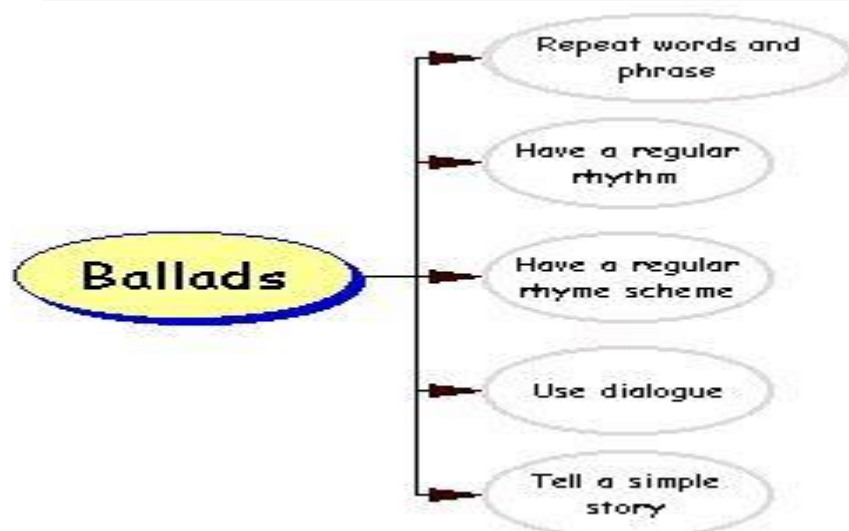
Samuel Taylor Coleridge's long lyrical ballad "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" employs many different types of meter, but the poem frequently uses common meter. (

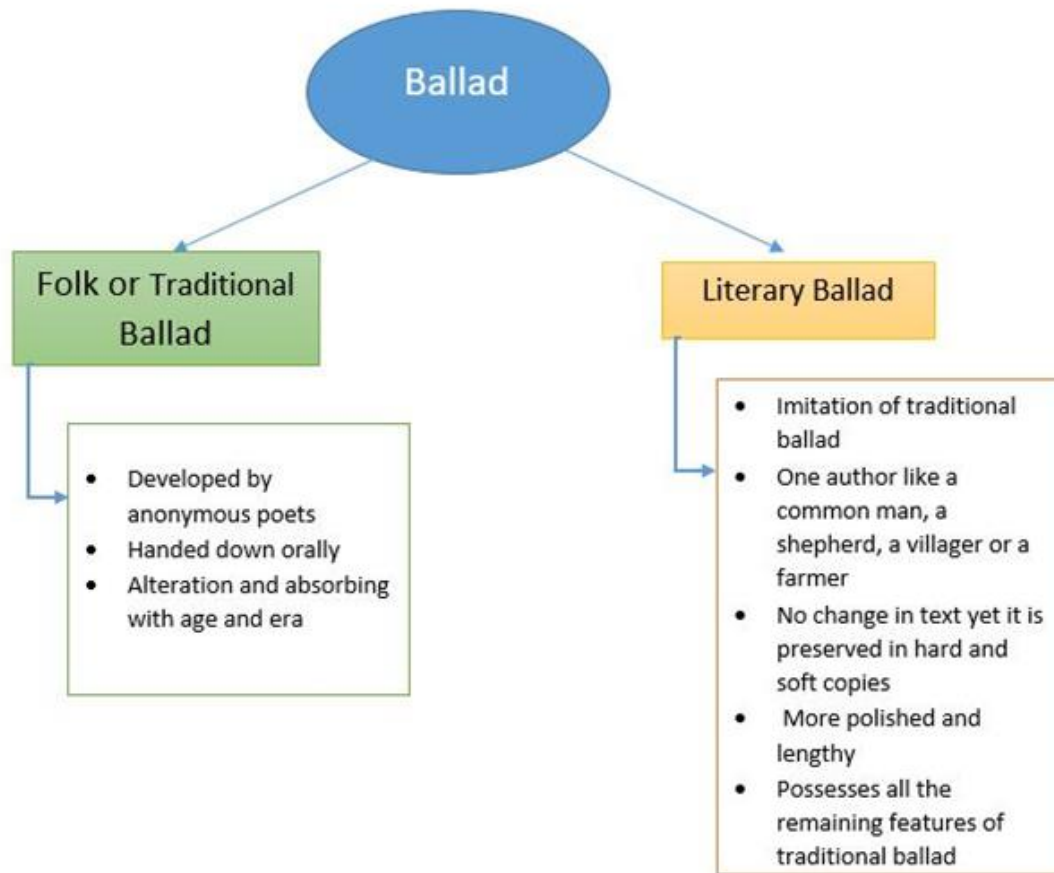
✓ A song **transmitted orally** and **has a story.**

✓ A ballad is dramatic, condensed and impersonal.

✓ Stanza form: **Ballad Stanza** having alternative 3 & 4 stress lines.

✓ e.g. Ancient Mariner by Coleridge.





- * Folk ballad
 - * A song/narrative poem transmitted orally that **tells a story**
 - * Focuses on **one incident**
 - * Begins in the midst of a crisis (in medias res)
 - * Proceeds to the resolution with little background information, character development, or descriptive detail

- * Literary ballad
 - * are composed and written down by known poets, usually in the style of folk ballads
 - * Example: *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* by Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Definition:

- A poem that tells a story, usually with a musical quality or rhythm and put to music.

Examples:

- *“Light do I see within my Lady’s eyes
And loving spirits in its plenisphere
Which bear in strange delight on my heart’s care
Till Joy’s awakened from that sepulchre.”*
from Ballata 5, by Guido Cavalcanti

Most ballads tend to follow these elements:

the beginning is often abrupt;
the language is usually simple;
the story is told through dialogue and action; and
there is often a refrain, or chorus.

Although there are exceptions, most ballads have
four-line stanzas (not counting musical refrains)
and follow an ABAB or ABCB rhyme scheme.
A ballad with six lines per stanza is not uncommon.