I'm not a bot



Discover the best ballad examples to learn about this intriguing poetry style that brings the written word to life. Ballads are poems meant to be or have the right rhyme pattern to be songs. Ballad examples are a rich part of modern literary tradition, often becoming part of a culture's oral history. So, what is a ballad? The Poetry Foundation defines the ballad form as "a popular narrative song passed down orally." Similarly, it typically follows a rhyme scheme of ABCB, where the second and fourth lines of each four-line stanza, also known as a quatrain, rhyme, or abab, where every other line rhymes. A power ballad is a ballad that continually escalates to a sensational or euphoric peak by the end of the song, often evoking emotive or sentimental themes. Some examples of popular power ballads include 'Don't Stop Believing by Journey, 'Kiss from a Rose' by Seal, and Bonnie Tyler's 'Total Eclipse of the Heart,' selected for their powerful and evocative delivery and production. We explore the ten best ballad examples from English literature to better understand this poetic form. One of the oldest known English ballad poems, "La Belle Dame sans Merci," means "The Beautiful Lady Without Mercy. This poem is one of the best examples of ballads because it perfectly follows the ABCB rhyme scheme. Like many of Keats's poems, this focuses on love and death. In the poem, a fairy seduces a knight and then condemns him to an untimely demise. "I met a lady in the meads Full beautiful, a faery's child;Her hair was long, her foot was light, And her eyes were wild." John Keats The longest poem by Coleridge, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," starts with an elderly sailor stopping a man on the way to a wedding. He begins a harrowing tale of life at sea, his poor choice of shooting an albatross, and the penance he pays for his mistake. With over 600 lines, this poem is quite long for a traditional ballad, but it still fits the form. It is also an example of an epic poem because of its length. One of the most famous stanzas is this one: "Water, water, every where,And all the boards did shrink;Water, water, every where,Nor any drop to drink." Samuel Taylor Coleridge Edgar Allan Poe is a world-famous poet known for his lyrical style Edgar Allan Poe weaves the tale of the lovely Annabel Lee. This love song is tragic because Annabel Lee dies, leaving behind her lover to mourn her life. This poem is famous because it is the last poem Poe completed before his death, and its publication occurred after the death of the poet. "It was many and many a year ago,   In a kingdom by the sea,That a maiden there lived whom you may know   By the name of Annabel Lee;" Edgar Allan Poe This lyrical ballad compares love to a rose, and Bob Dylan once called it his "single biggest inspiration." Because it has lines of iambic tetrameter and iambic trimeter woven throughout, it fits the literary ballad tradition, even though it is not a narrative poem. While the meter and rhyme scheme make this poem an example of a ballad, it is also one of the most famous examples of simile in English literature. "O my Luve is like a red, red roseThat's newly sprung in June;O my Luve is like the melodyThat's sweetly played in tune" Robert Burns Kipling modeled "The Ballad of the Red Earl" after the traditional ballad poems of the Scottish Border country. He uses many abbreviations that come from the Scottish language. The poem mocks fun at Earl Spencer, and he published the poem just two days after an infamous speech made by the Earl. In the following excerpt, Kipling accuses the Earl of blindly following William Gladstone, leader of the Liberal party, as if he were a deity. "Ye have followed a man for a God, Red Earl,As the Lord o' Wrong and Right;But the day is done with the setting sunWill ye follow into the night?" Rudyard Kipling As one of the best-known poems of Wordsworth, "The Solitary Reaper" earns a spot on this list. It explores the beauty of a Highland lass harvesting crops in a field and singing a sad song that passersby can hear. Since many ballads are also songs, it is fitting that this poem is about a girl singing an unknown song. It praises music as a form of beauty. It follows a different rhyme scheme, ABAB instead of ABCB, but still fits the ballad form. "Will no one tell me what she sings?—Perhaps the plaintive numbers flowFor old, unhappy, far-off things,And battles long ago:" William Wordsworth This famous ballad starts out tragic as the main character lies dead. The poem tells about a man subject to the death penalty after spending many years in prison. Wilde uses the meter of the poem well, helping the reader get a feel for the pounding, boring rhythm of daily life in prison. "He did not wear his scarlet coat, For blood and wine are red,And blood and wine were on his hands When they found him with the dead," Oscar Wilde In this poem, Yeats tells the story of a tired old priest whose flock is fighting illness. He gets called to the bedside of a dying man, only to fall asleep. When he awakens, the man has died. He sneaks out, then comes back as if for the first time to perform last rites, all without the family knowing he fell asleep on the job. "The old priest Peter GilliganWas weary night and day;For half his flock were in their beds,Or under green sods lay." William Butler Yeats Though the author's name has gotten lost in history, "Bonny Barbara Allen" remains one of the more popular folk ballads. This song tells the tragic story of a lord who calls on the winsome Barbara Allen while sick in bed, only to have his love spurned. The first known references to this poem came from the 1600s, making it one of the older poems on this list. These songs became part of the oral history of England and Ireland, often sung by minstrels at fairs and gatherings. "He turned his face unto the wall,And death was with him dealing:'Adieu, adieu, my dear friends all,And be kind to Barbara Allen.'" Joan Baez Another famous folk ballad, "John Henry," comes from the culture of African-American workers. It tells the story of a heroic black working man, and it likely originated as a work song. Whether or not John Henry was based on a real person remains a debate among historians, but the song has taken its place among the best ballads ever. "When John Henry was a little baby,Just a sittn' on his mammy's knee,Said, 'The Big Bend Tunnel on that C&O RoadGonna be the death of me, Lord GodGoing to be the death of me.'" "The Lady of Shallot" is one of the most famous ballads that shows the life of a woman who is isolated in a tower. The ballad speaks about the woman's experience and her longing to escape and experience life. This emotive poem focuses on how the woman feels unsatisfied with life because she is playing it safe by keeping herself isolated. "On either side the river lie Long fields of barley and of rye, That clothe the wold and meet the sky; And thro' the field the road runs by" – Alfred Lord Tennyson, "The Lady of Shalott" "Horatius at the Bridge "is a narrative ballad about Horatius Cocles, who was a legendary hero from Roman history. "Horatius" is known for its long-form and narrative structure. It's a plain-spoken ballad, so it's easy to read and understand. The ballad narrates the life and history of Horatius Cocles, drawing attention to his story and folklore. "LARS Porsena of Clusium By the Nine Gods he swore That the great house of Tarquin Should suffer wrong no more." – Thomas Babington Macaulay, "Horatius at the Bridge" A ballad is typically a song with a story or thematic journey. Ballads are one of the oldest forms of music and date back to aural forms of storytelling passed down through generations of cultures. Modern ballads tend to be stories that are witty, dramatic, or romantic, and the term comes from the medieval French term 'balade,' which was a dancing song. Much like a traditional ballad, a Cowboy Ballad is a story told through song. However, cowboy Ballads are largely authorless, as they were songs and poems passed around as cowboys traveled from ranch to ranch across America. This means there can be countless variations of a single cowboy ballad, changing depending on where the song was originally discovered. Irish Ballads date back as far as the Elizabethan Era and typically tend to be Nationalist and rebellious. Irish ballads tend to revolve around political events or wars, and it's been noted that huge amounts of Irish ballads are created during major Irish upheavals (such as the 1916 Easter Rising, for example). However, some are also recent creations, such as the Fields of Athenry, written by Pete St John in the 1970s. 10 Sonnet Examples From Ancient Italy To Today Top 10 Haiku Examples To Ponder 10 Ode Examples To Explore Top 10 Concrete Poem Examples Top 10 Limerick Examples To Make You Laugh Free Verse Examples: 12 Top Poems To Consider Top 10 Ekphrastic Poem Examples Villanelle Poem Examples To Study Top 10 Epigram Examples Share — copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format for any purpose, even commercially. Adapt — remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially. The licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as you follow the license terms. Attribution — You must give appropriate credit , provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made . You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use. ShareAlike — If you remix, transform, or build upon the material, you must distribute your contributions under the same license as the original. No additional restrictions — You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits. You do not have to comply with the license for elements of the material in the public domain or where your use is permitted by an applicable exception or limitation . No warranties are given. The license may not give you all of the permissions necessary for your intended use. For example, other rights such as publicity, privacy, or moral rights may limit how you use the material. Verse set to music For the slow form of popular music such as love songs and pop & rock ballads, see Sentimental ballad. For other uses, see Ballad (disambiguation). "Balladeering" redirects here. For the album, see Balladeering (album). Maria Wiik, Ballad (1898) A ballad is a form of verse, often a narrative set to music. Ballads were particularly characteristic of the popular poetry and song of Great Britain and Ireland from the Late Middle Ages until the 19th century. They were widely used across Europe, and later in Australia, North Africa, North America and South America. While ballads have no prescribed structure and may vary in their number of lines and stanzas, many ballads employ quatrains with ABCB or ABAB rhyme schemes, the key being a rhymed second and fourth line. Contrary to a popular conception, it is rare if not unheard-of for a ballad to contain exactly 13 lines. Additionally, couplets rarely appear in ballads. Many ballads were written and sold as single-sheet broadsides. The form was often used by poets and composers from the 18th century onwards to produce lyrical ballads. In the later 19th century, the term took on the meaning of a slow form of popular love song and is often used for any love song, particularly the sentimental ballad of pop or rock music, although the term is also associated with the concept of a stylized storytelling song or poem, particularly when used as a title for other media such as a film. 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 "dancing songs" (L: ballare, to dance), yet becoming "stylized forms of solo song" before being adopted in England.[1] As a narrative song, their theme and function may originate from Scandinavian and Germanic traditions of storytelling that can be seen in poems such as Beowulf.[2] Musically they were influenced by the Minnelieder of the Minnesang tradition.[3] The earliest example of a recognizable ballad in form in England is "Judas" in a 13th-century manuscript.[4] See also: AABA form A sixteenth-century printed ballad, the A Gest of Robyn Hode Ballads were originally written to accompany dances, and so were composed in couplets with refrains in alternate lines. These refrains would have been sung by the dancers in time with the dance.[5] 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.[6] This can be seen in this stanza from "Lord Thomas and Fair Annet": 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 |.[2] There is considerable variation on this pattern in almost every respect, including length, number of lines and rhyming scheme, making the strict definition of a ballad extremely difficult. In southern and eastern Europe, and in countries that derive their tradition from them, ballad structure differs significantly, like Spanish romanceros, which are octosyllabic and use consonance rather than rhyme.[7] Ballads usually are heavily influenced by the regions in which they originate and use the common dialect of the people. Scotland's ballads in particular, both in theme and language, are strongly characterised by their distinctive tradition, even exhibiting some pre-Christian influences in the inclusion of supernatural elements such as travel to the Fairy Kingdom in the Scots ballad "Tam Lin".[8] 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 such as Bishop Thomas Percy (1729–1811) to publish volumes of popular ballads.[5] 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.[6] Themes concerning rural labourers and their sexuality are common, and there are many ballads based on the Robin Hood legend.[9] Another common feature of ballads is repetition, sometimes of fourth lines in succeeding stanzas, as a refrain, sometimes of third and fourth lines of a stanza and sometimes of entire stanzas.[2] Scholars of ballads have been divided into "communalists", such as Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) and the Brothers Grimm, who argue that ballads are originally communal compositions, and "individualists" such as Cecil Sharp, who assert that there was one single original author.[4] Communalists tend to see more recent, particularly printed, broadside ballads of known authorship as a debased form of the genre, while individualists see variants as corruptions of an original text.[10] More recently scholars have pointed to the interchange of oral and written forms of the ballad.[11] Walter Scott's Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border The transmission of ballads comprises a key stage in their re-composition. In romantic terms this process is often dramatized as a narrative of degeneration away from the pure 'folk memory' or 'immemorial tradition'.[12] In the introduction to Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border (1802) the romantic poet and historical novelist Walter Scott argued a need to 'remove obvious corruptions' in order to attempt to restore a supposed original. For Scott, the process of multiple recitations 'incurs the risk of impertinent interpolations from the conceit of one rehearser, unintelligible blunders from the stupidity of another, and omissions equally to be regretted, from the want of memory of a third.' Similarly, John Robert Moore noted 'a natural tendency to oblivescence'.[13] European Ballads have been generally classified into three major groups: traditional, broadside and literary. In America a distinction is drawn between ballads that are versions of European, particularly British and Irish songs, and 'Native American ballads', developed without reference to earlier songs. A further development was the evolution of the blues ballad, which mixed the genre with Afro-American music. For the late 20th century the music publishing industry found a market for what are often termed sentimental ballads, and these are the origin of the modern use of the term 'ballad' to mean a slow love song. See also: Child Ballads Illustration by Arthur Rackham of the Scots ballad "The Twa Corbies" The traditional, classical or popular (meaning of the people) ballad has been seen as beginning with the wandering minstrels of late medieval Europe.[2] From the end of the 15th century there are printed ballads that suggest a rich tradition of popular music. A reference in William Langland's Piers Plowman indicates that 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.[14] 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.[14] Inspired by his reading as a teenager of Reliques of Ancient English Poetry by Thomas Percy, Scott began collecting ballads while he attended Edinburgh University in the 1790s. He published his research from 1802 to 1803 in a three-volume work, Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border. Burns collaborated with James Johnson on the multi-volume Scots Musical Museum, a miscellany of folk songs and poetry with original work by Burns. Around the same time, he worked with George Thompson on A Select Collection of Original Scottish Airs for the Voice.[15] Both Northern English and Southern Scots shared in the identified tradition of Border ballads, particularly evinced by the cross-border narrative in versions of "The Ballad of Chevy Chase" sometimes associated with the Lancashire-born sixteenth-century minstrel Richard Sheale.[16] Illustration by Arthur Rackham to Young Bekie. It has been suggested that the increasing interest in traditional popular ballads during the eighteenth century was prompted by social issues such as the enclosure movement as many of the ballads deal with themes concerning rural laborers.[17] James Davey has suggested that the common themes of sailing and naval battles may also have prompted the use (at least in England) of popular ballads as naval recruitment tools.[18] Key work on the traditional ballad was undertaken in the late 19th century in Denmark by Svend Grundtvig and for England and Scotland by the Harvard professor Francis James Child.[4] They 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.[19] 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.[2] The traditional form and content of the ballad were modified to form the basis for twenty-three bawdy pornographic ballads that appeared in the underground Victorian magazine The Pearl, which ran for eighteen issues between 1879 and 1880. Unlike the traditional ballad, these obscene ballads aggressively mocked sentimental nostalgia and local lore.[20] Main article: Broadside (music) An 18th-century broadside ballad: The tragical ballad: or, the lady who fell in love with her serving-man. 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.[21] By the 18th century, they were printed in white letter or roman type and often without much decoration (as well as tune title). These later sheets could include many individual songs, which would be cut apart and sold individually as "slip songs." Alternatively, they might be folded to make small cheap books or "chapbooks" which often drew on ballad stories.[22] They were produced in huge numbers, with over 400,000 being sold in England annually by the 1660s.[23] Tessa Watt estimates the number of copies sold may have been in the millions.[24] Many were sold by travelling chapmen in city streets or at fairs.[25] The subject matter varied from what has been defined as the traditional ballad, although many traditional ballads were printed as broadsides. Among the topics were love, marriage, religion, drinking-songs, legends, and early journalism, which included disasters, political events and signs, wonders and prodigies.[26] 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. Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Keats were attracted to the simple and natural style of these folk ballads and tried to imitate it.[5] At the same time in Germany Goethe cooperated with Schiller on a series of ballads, some of which were later set to music by Schubert.[27] 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).[28] Main article: Ballad opera Painting based on The Beggar's Opera, Act III Scene 2, William Hogarth, c. 1728 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.[29] 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.[30] 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. The first, most important and successful was The Beggar's Opera of 1728, with a libretto by John Gay and music arranged by John Christopher Pepusch, both of whom probably influenced by Parisian vaudeville and the burlesques and musical plays of Thomas d'Urfey (1653–1723), a number of whose collected ballads they used in their work.[31] Gay produced further works in this style, including a sequel under the title Polly. Henry Fielding, Colley Cibber, Arne, Dibdin, Arnold, Shield, Jackson of Exeter, Hook and many others produced ballad operas that enjoyed great popularity.[32] Ballad opera was attempted in America and Prussia. Later it moved into a more pastoral form, like Isaac Bickerstaffe's Love in a Village (1763) and Shield's Rosina (1781), using more original music that imitated, rather than reproduced, existing ballads. Although the form declined in popularity towards the end of the 18th century its influence can be seen in light operas like that of Gilbert and Sullivan's early works like The Sorcerer as well as in the modern musical.[33] In the 20th century, one of the most influential plays, Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht's (1928) The Threepenny Opera was a reworking of The Beggar's Opera, setting a similar story with the same characters, and containing much of the same satirical bite, but only using one tune from the original.[34] The term ballad opera has also been used to describe musicals using folk music, such as The Martins and the Coys in 1944, and Peter Bellamy's The Transports in 1977.[35] The satiric elements of ballad opera can be seen in some modern musicals such as Chicago and Cabaret.[36] Statue of John Henry outside the town of Talcott in Summers County, West Virginia Some 300 ballads sung in North America have been identified as having origins in Scottish traditional or broadside ballads.[37] Examples include 'The Streets of Laredo', which was found in Great Britain and Ireland as 'The Unfortunate Rake'; however, a further 400 have been identified as originating in America, including among the best known, 'The Ballad of Davy Crockett' and 'Jesse James'.[37] They became an increasing area of interest for scholars in the 19th century and most were recorded or catalogued by George Malcolm Laws, although some have since been found to have British origins and additional songs have since been collected.[37] They are usually considered closest in form to British broadside ballads and in terms of style are largely indistinguishable, however, they demonstrate a particular concern with occupations, journalistic style and often lack the ribaldry of British broadside ballads.[11] Main article: Blues ballad The blues ballad has been seen as a fusion of Anglo-American and Afro-American styles of music from the 19th century. Blues ballads tend to deal with active protagonists, often anti-heroes, resisting adversity and authority, but frequently lacking a strong narrative and emphasizing character instead.[37] They were often accompanied by banjo and guitar which followed the blues musical format.[11] The most famous blues ballads include those about John Henry and Casey Jones.[37] Main article: Bush ballad Cover to Banjo Paterson's seminal 1905 collection of bush ballads, entitled The Old Bush Songs The ballad was taken to Australia by early settlers from Great Britain and Ireland and gained particular foothold in the rural outback. The rhyming songs, poems and tales written in the form of ballads often relate to the itinerant and rebellious spirit of Australia in The Bush, and the authors and performers are often referred to as bush bards.[38] The 19th century was the golden age of bush ballads. Several collectors have catalogued the songs including John Meredith whose recording in the 1950s became the basis of the collection in the National Library of Australia.[38] The songs tell personal stories of life in the wide open country of Australia. Typical subjects include mining, raising and droving cattle, sheep shearing, wanderings, war stories, the 1891 Australian shearers' strike, class conflicts between the landless working class and the squatters (landowners), and outlaws such as Ned Kelly, as well as love interests and more modern fare such as trucking.[39] The most famous bush ballad is "Waltzing Matilda", which has been called "the unofficial national anthem of Australia".[40] Main article: Sentimental ballad Sentimental ballads, sometimes called "tear-jerkers" or "drawing-room ballads" owing to their popularity with the middle classes, 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 (descendants perhaps of broadside ballads, but with printed music, and usually newly composed). Such songs include "Little Rosewood Casket" (1870), "After the Ball" (1892) and "Danny Boy".[37] The association with sentimentality led to the term "ballad" being used for slow love songs from the 1950s onwards. Modern variations include "jazz ballads", "pop ballads", "rock ballads", "R&B ballads" and "power ballads". Many ballads are included in 20th and 21st century modern music, such as "Swear It Again" (1998) by "Westlife".[41] Alfred Perceval Graves Corrido and Narcocorrido List of the Child Ballads List of folk song collections List of Irish ballads List of rock ballads Murder ballad Roud Folk Song Index Song structure Torch song Vaar ^ Apel, Willi (December 20, 1944). "Harvard Dictionary Of Music" – via Internet Archive. ^ a b c d e J. E. 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The Oxford Book of Ballads, complete 1910 book by Arthur Quiller-Couch English Broadside Ballad Archive—an archive of images and recordings of over 4,000 pre-1700 broadside ballads A Book of Old English Ballads public domain audiobook at LibriVox Retrieved from " A ballad is a type of narrative poem that originally was meant to be sung or recited and tells a simple, dramatic story. Ballads are typically written in quatrains, which are four-line stanzas that often alternate between iambic tetrameter and iambic trimeter. They frequently use rhyme schemes such as ABCB or ABAB. The overall tone and mood of ballads tend to be tragic, dramatic, romantic and suspenseful. Ballads often open abruptly and focus on action rather than exposition or introspection. Instead of describing a story, ballads place readers right in the middle of it through vivid imagery, metaphors and dialogue. The key features that characterize the ballad form are repetitiveness, strong rhythms, memorable rhymes and a refrain that repeats either verbatim or with slight variations. These repetitive elements make ballads easy to remember and recite. Over time, ballads passed orally from generation to generation take on new variations but retain their narrative style and emotive impact. They make ample use of literary devices like vivid imagery, metaphors, repetition, and common rhyme schemes to emphasize key moments and aid memorization. Ballads frequently employ dialogue and repetition while focusing on a climactic plot event. Though often conveying legends passed on orally through generations, ballads have an atmospheric poetic style that powerfully conjures characters, mysteries and the ethos of cultures or time periods remote from contemporary life. Here are some common types of ballads: Traditional ballads – These are anonymous folk ballads passed down orally over generations. These often tell a story. Examples: "Barbara Allen," "Lord Randall." Literary ballads – Ballads that are written by specific authors in imitation of the traditional form. Examples: "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" by Coleridge, "La Belle Dame sans Merci" by Keats. Lyric ballads – These ballads focus on expressing emotion and ideas rather than telling stories. Examples: "Dream Variations" by Langston Hughes. Narrative ballads – Ballads that relate to events and tell the stories. This type of ballad often featured dialogue and drama. Examples: "The Ballad of Bonnie and Clyde" by Georgie Fame, "Frankie and Johnny." Cowboy ballads – The ballads originating in the American Old West, often romanticizing the cowboy way of life. Examples: "The Streets of Laredo," "El Paso" by Marty Robbins. Murder ballads – Dark ballads are dramatized on violent murders. These are sometimes based on true events. Examples: "Mack the Knife," "Knoxville Girl." types of ballads Here are some key ways to recognize a ballad: Narrative structure – Ballads tell a story, often focusing on a dramatic or emotional event. They have a plot and characters. Repetition – Ballads frequently use repetition of lines and refrains. This helps reinforce the narrative and supports oral tradition. Rhyme scheme – Traditional ballads tend to use simple 4-line stanzas with an ABCB rhyme scheme. The rhymes are usually not perfect. Meter – Most ballads use a basic sequence of alternating lines of iambic tetrameter and iambic trimeter. This creates a singing and rhythmic quality. Imagery – Ballads often use vivid imagery to heighten dramatic moments and bring key scenes to life. Imagery helps to convey emotion. Dialogue – Dialogue is commonly used in ballads to advance the plot and reveal character. Conversations heighten the drama. Subject matter – Common ballad subjects are love, tragedy, conflict, legend or history. Themes reflect the human experience. Music – Many ballads were originally meant to be, or can be, sung. The lyrics fit to a simple, repetitious melody. Following are the examples of ballad in literature: – Example#1 "I met a lady in the meads,Full beautiful—a faery's child,Her hair was long,her foot was light,And her eyes were wild." The opening stanza of the poem is characterized as literary ballad. It is written in an ABCB rhyme scheme with iambic tetrameter and trimeter lines. It introduces the fairy-woman central to the ballad's medieval romantic tragedy. The vivid description establishes the supernatural beauty and mystery of the woman. Example#2 "Then up and rose him Rankin o' the Hill,And he's gane to the door wi a fixed will,Syne bowed his head and crept in still,And he barred the door aboon him." The aforementioned excerpt is example from a traditional narrative ballad. In this ballad, vivid Scottish dialect in its dialogue has been used. The repetitive structure, action sequence and emphasis on a decisive dramatic moment is characteristic of the storytelling style of classic folk ballads relaying history and legend orally through song. Example#3 "Yet each man kills the thing he loves,By each let this be heard,Some do it with a bitter look,Some with a flattering word,The coward does it with a kiss,The brave man with a sword!" The passage is the refrain that repeats throughout Wilde's ballad about a hanging he witnessed while in prison. As a lyric ballad, it is focused on expressing emotion through poetry. It uses repetition, parallelism and emotive language to convey the anguish of the prisoner condemned to die. Example#4 "To Noroway, to Noroway,To Noroway o'er the faem;The king's daughter of Noroway,'Tis thou maun bring her hame." This is concise excerpt from a longer narrative ballad. It uses vivid place references and emphatic repetition to establish the dramatic quest at the center of its story. As a folk ballad, it tells a compelling story through song by employing classic ballad techniques like repetition and urgent imperative statements to immerse listeners in its legendary tale. Example#5 "She struck where the white and fleecy waves Looked soft as carded wool,But the cruel rocks,they gored her side Like the horns of an angry bull." This excerpt exemplifies Longfellow's use of vivid imagery and metaphors to dramatize the tragedy described in this lyrical narrative ballad. The ominous personification of the rocks highlights the emotional impact of the dangerous wreck. Example#6 "Ye'll sit on his white hause-bane,And I'll pike out his bonny blue een;Wi ae lock o his gowden hair We'll theek our nest when it grows bare." These macabre lyrics are from a grim poetic ballad in which two ravens plot to use pieces of a slain knight for their nest after his death. The chilling, vivid imagery exemplifies the subjects of death and loss commonly explored in traditional Scottish ballads through poetic storytelling techniques. Example#7 "The keys of Canberra,he took them in his hand,The keys of Canberra,he took them to the land,Where once a king,a king of kings, had stood,And there he made his home, beneath the ground" This modern Australian ballad tells the story of a man who discovers a hidden world beneath the city of Canberra. The poem uses repetition and rhyme to create a sense of rhythm and musicality. It explores the themes of power, secrecy and the hidden nature of politics. The structure of the ballad is clear with each stanza following a similar pattern and rhyme scheme. The use of alliteration and assonance adds to the musical quality of the poem. Example#8 "The sneer is gone from Casey's lip,his teeth are clenched in hate;He pounds with cruel violence his bat upon the plate." The passage dramatizes the baseball setting and building tension in the iconic, tragicomically American tale told through Thayer's clever humorous ballad. The hyperbolic personification of Casey's hate captures the climax of the underdog sports story. Examples of Ballad in literature Example#1 The Brandler, he was a smith,And he had a lodging-house to dwell in.He set the leaves of his book in order,And then he went to his bed. This modern ballad tells the story of a man who sets his book in order before going to bed. The repetition of words and phrases, such as 'The Brandler' and 'his book', develop a sense of musical effect. The poem explores themes of routine, order and the passing of time. Example#2 "J.M. was a king, a king of kings,With a magic wand that made the stars sing.He ruled the land with a gentle hand,And a heart that was kind and true." Here, the repetition of words and phrases, such as 'J.M.' and 'the stars' creates a rhythmic effect. The poem explores themes of leadership, compassion and the importance of kindness in ruling. Example#3 The moon ran like a dog through the night,With its tail streaming behind it.And the people said,"What a sight!" The repetition of words, 'the moon' and 'the night' creates a sense of rhythm and musicality. The poem explores themes of wonder, curiosity and the beauty of the natural world. Examples of Ballad in poetry The language used in ballads is marked by simplicity, brevity and emotional resonance. Ballads favor plain and direct speech featuring archaic terms, regional dialects, concise lines and repetitive phrases that aid memorization and oral transmission through generations of singers. Literary ballads adopt similar linguistic techniques to tell stories in an elevated yet compact lyrical style that powerfully conjures people, places and parts of the human experience that grip listeners across eras. The language of traditional folk ballads tends to be simple, brief, dialect-rich, and formulaic yet evocative for emphasizing drama and emotion. Read also: Literary Devices That Start with B Ballad poems have a unique charm that captures the heart and soul of storytelling. They weave tales of love, loss, and adventure in a way that resonates deeply with readers. Are you curious about how these lyrical narratives come to life? In this article, you'll explore various ballad poem examples that showcase their rhythmic beauty and emotional depth.Ballad poems are narrative forms that tell compelling stories. They often revolve around themes such as love, loss, adventure, and heroism. These poems typically consist of quatrains with alternating lines of iambic tetrameter and iambic trimeter, creating a musical quality.You might find several notable examples that highlight the characteristics of ballads:"The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" by Samuel Taylor Coleridge: This famous poem explores themes of nature and redemption."Barbara Allen": A traditional Scottish ballad about unrequited love and tragedy."Lord Randall": Another classic ballad where a young man recounts his last meal before death.These examples showcase how ballads not only entertain but also evoke strong emotions through their storytelling techniques. The rhythmic structure enhances their oral tradition, making them memorable and impactful.Ballads captivate with their storytelling and emotional depth. Here are notable examples that showcase both traditional and modern forms."Barbara Allen" features a heart-wrenching tale of unrequited love. In this classic Scottish ballad, a young man dies from heartbreak after his affections go unreturned, illustrating themes of loss and remorse."Lord Randall" tells the story of a young man who recounts his last meal with his mother before succumbing to poison. This ballad highlights betrayal and tragic endings, making it memorable in folk tradition."The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," written by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, combines adventure with moral lessons. The mariner's journey through nature's wonders ultimately leads him to redemption, emphasizing the importance of respecting all living things."Love Story" by Taylor Swift reinvents classic ballad elements for contemporary audiences. It narrates a romantic tale inspired by Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet," presenting themes of hope amidst adversity."The Night the Lights Went Out in Georgia" by Vicki Lawrence, mixes crime and betrayal into its narrative. This modern ballad reveals a wrongful conviction that stirs deep emotions about justice and vengeance.These examples illustrate how ballads evolve while retaining their core storytelling essence, ensuring their relevance across generations.Ballad poems possess distinct characteristics that make them unique and captivating. These features contribute to their storytelling quality and emotional impact.Ballads typically consist of quatrains, or four-line stanzas. Each stanza often follows an alternating rhyme scheme, such as ABAB or ABCB. In terms of meter, ballads commonly use iambic tetrameter for the first and third lines and iambic trimeter for the second and fourth lines. This rhythmic pattern creates a musical quality that's easy to remember. For instance:Quatrains provide a framework for storytelling.Alternating rhymes enhance memorability.Iambic patterns give a lyrical feel.Ballads explore a range of themes, often focusing on human experiences. Common subjects include love, loss, adventure, betrayal, and heroism. They frequently tell stories about historical events or folktales that resonate with audiences emotionally. Some prevalent themes are:Love: Unrequited love in "Barbara Allen."Death: The tragic fate in "Lord Randall."Adventure: Moral lessons found in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner."These elements connect deeply with readers by evoking strong emotions through relatable narratives.Ballad poems showcase a rich tapestry of storytelling through their unique structure and emotional depth. They effectively convey complex feelings and narratives, drawing readers into their world.Ballads utilize several literary devices that enhance their storytelling. These include:Repetition: Repeated phrases create rhythm and emphasize key themes.Imagery: Vivid descriptions evoke sensory experiences, making the narrative more relatable.Dialogue: Conversations between characters drive the story forward and add depth.Alliteration: The repetition of consonant sounds adds musicality to the verses.These devices work together to create an engaging reading experience. For instance, in "Barbara Allen," repetition highlights the protagonist's sorrowful longing, while vivid imagery paints a picture of unrequited love.The emotional impact of ballads resonates deeply with audiences. They often explore universal themes such as love, loss, and betrayal.For example:In "Lord Randall," the tragic fate evokes sympathy for the character's suffering."The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" delves into redemption after guilt.Such stories engage you on an emotional level, prompting reflection on your own experiences. Do you find yourself relating to these timeless themes? It's this connection that makes ballads enduringly powerful across generations. By Dr Oliver Tearle (Loughborough University) 'Ballad metre' is the term given to poems written in quatrains, usually of alternating tetrameter (four-foot) and trimeter (three-foot) lines, rhymed abcb. Ballads originally became popular in the late medieval period, and were designed to be sung and danced to: the word 'ballad' is derived from the Latin balar, 'to dance'. The ballad form is often used to tell a story: a tragic love story, for instance, or else a tale of adventure and high romance. Often they contain dialogue spoken by one or more of the characters who feature in these narrative poems, and the final stanza often echoes the first, so there's a cyclical feel to the poem. But over the centuries, more modern poets have used the ballad form to write other kinds of poems, from meditative lyrics to poems responding to contemporary events. These often retain features of the ballad to a greater or lesser extent, however. Below, we introduce and discuss eight of the finest examples of the ballad in poetry. 1. Anonymous, 'The Unquiet Grave'. 'I'll do as much for my true-love As any young man may; I'll sit and mourn all at her grave For a twelvemonth and a day.' This is part-ballad, part ghost story, as we find a dead woman speaking from beyond the grave, telling her bereft lover to stop pining for her. Like many 'ghost stories' from the Middle Ages, the voice from the grave is a kindly and well-meaning one here, who entreats her grief-stricken lover to enjoy life (albeit without her) while he still has it. Although this ballad is thought to be around 600 years old, fans of A. E. Housman's poems will note the striking similarities this poem had on Housman's own poems (the Border Ballads were a big influence on his work). 2. A. E. Housman, 'Is My Team Ploughing'. 'Is my team ploughing, That I was used to drive And hear the harness jingle When I was man alive?' Ay, the horses trample, The harness jingles now; No change though you lie under The land you used to plough. Since we mentioned Housman (1859-1936) above, let's take a look at one of the best examples of his use of this form. This is a poem in which a dead man speaks to the titular 'lad' of Housman's 1896 collection, A Shropshire Lad. The two are clearly old friends, and the dead man is keen to hear how things are going in the land of the living. But there's a revelation at the end of the poem which he may not wish to hear … 3. Emily Dickinson, 'It Was Not Death, for I Stood Up'. It was not Death, for I stood up, And all the Dead, lie down – It was not Night, for all the Bells Put out their Tongues, for Noon … Many of the 1,700+ poems written by the American poet Emily Dickinson (1830-86) utilise the ballad metre, although Dickinson often innovates with rhyme, using slant rhyme or pararhyme in place of full rhyme (as above, with 'down' and 'Noon'). This poem is about the feeling of despair and depression that grips the poet. She begins by describing what it is not: not death, she said, for she was still standing while the dead lie down. But it feels like a kind of death. It was not night, because all of the bells put out their tongues to announce noon, the middle of the day ('tongues' is a pun: bells do have tongues, but the image of the bells sticking out their tongues in mockery takes this wordplay and presents us with a fresh and absurd image). 4. Anonymous, 'The Bonny Earl of Moray'. Ye Highlands and ye Lawlands, Oh where have you been? They have slain the Earl o' Moray And layd him on the green. This ballad played a curious role in the 1950s, in helping to inspire a neologism: the term mondegreen, the name Sylvia Wright proposed for a misheard song lyric, named after Wright's own childhood mishearing of 'And layd him on the green' as 'And Lady Mondegreen'. The ballad stems from real events in 1590s Scotland, when the Earl of Huntly slew his rival, the Earl of Moray (pronounced 'Murray', and so rendered thus in some versions of the ballad). 5. Dudley Randall, 'Ballad of Birmingham'. Ballads are a truly popular art form, because they were designed to be enjoyed by the people, rather than an elite (the upper classes or university-educated). And although ballads enjoyed their heyday some five hundred years ago, there have been some notable twentieth-century examples. The African-American poet and editor Dudley Randall turns to the traditional ballad form in his moving 'Ballad of Birmingham', about a tragic event during the Civil Rights movement when a Black church was bombed by white supremacists in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963. The poem has many features of the traditional ballad: direct dialogue, a story (and it is usually a tragic story), and powerful use of the quatrain form to structure the narrative. But Randall was writing about a real-life event that had recently occurred. He circulated the poem as a broadside among the African-American community, once again attesting to the popularity of the ballad form. 6. Anonymous, 'The Ballad of Chevy Chase'. 'Tell me whose men ye are,' he says, 'Or whose men that ye be; Who gave you leave in this Cheviot chase In the spite of mine and of me?' Although the name 'Chevy Chase' is perhaps inextricably linked with that of the American comedian, it is actually also the name of one of the most celebrated Border Ballads, set among the 'chase' (or hunting-ground) of the Cheviot hills, hence the name of the ballad. This is a 'Border' Ballad in the truest sense: it's even set on the Anglo-Scottish borders! The poem tells of Percy, the Earl of Northumberland, leading a hunting party on the Cheviots, an action which incurs the wrath of the Scottish Earl Douglas and leads to a bloody battle. 7. John Keats, 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci'. O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms, Alone and palely loitering? The sedge has withered from the lake, And no birds sing. O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms, So haggard and so woe-begone? The squirrel's granary is full, And the harvest's done. 'La Belle Dame sans Merci' ('the beautiful lady without mercy') is one of John Keats's best-loved and most widely anthologised poems; after his odes, it may well be his most famous. The poem is about a man who meets a knight who has been seduced and then abandoned by a fairy woman: the beautiful but merciless lady of the poem's title. Keats wrote this poem in the early nineteenth century, but he draws on the popular ballad form to suggest a link to far older medieval romances. The poem has the hallmarks of the ballad: the abcb rhyme scheme; a story or narrative; and the final stanza echoing the first, so the poem goes, in effect, full circle. However, Keats changes the metre of the even lines, making the second line of each stanza a tetrameter and the fourth line a shorter dimeter line. This lends the knight's tale an air of anti-climax and disappointment – he has, after all, been left on a hillside by his lover. We have analysed this poem in more detail in a separate post. 8. Anonymous, 'Sir Patrick Spens'. The king sits in Dunfermline toune drinking the blude reid wine, 'O whar can I get skeely skipper, To sail this ship o' mine?' Let's conclude this selection of examples of ballad poems by, appropriately enough, returning where we began: with a classic Border ballad. This is one of the most famous ballads: it's the tale of a reluctant sailor, Sir Patrick Spens, whom the King of Scotland sends for and tasks with the job of undertaking a perilous sea mission in the depths of winter. Curiously, there are different versions of this ballad in existence, some of which have a happy and some a tragic ending, suggesting that the tale was adapted for different audiences and perhaps different kinds of occasion. Subscribe to get the latest posts sent to your email.

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