

English Medieval Ballads

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- Medieval ballads were anonymous narrative poems, intended to be sung with the accompaniment of music: short stories in verse, coming directly from popular tradition.
- They had a simple musical rhymed meter; being composed in short stanzas of two or four lines, and were sung to a simple instrumental accompaniment. Produced by the common people they were not in written form but mostly recited or sung in the market square, in alehouses or at fairs. They were sung by balladeers and often accompanied by dance, as the word ballad (from Latin, through French) hints to.
- Generally, in every ballad, there is a refrain: a phrase or a line, which is repeated again and again after a stanza. Use of colloquial language is an indispensable feature of a ballad: they use day-to-day, common words and stock phrases easy to be memorized. The story is often told through dialogues.
- The traditional ballad had no single author; rather, it was the product of many poets. It had no written form and underwent many changes during the course of time due to new circumstances and conditions.
- Ballads usually have an abrupt and unexpected opening, they don't provide any details about the subject matter, the surroundings, atmosphere or environment. The ending of many ballads may also be abrupt and unexpected. Motifs or precedings are not explained and often there are supernatural elements.
- The content of a ballad often involves love and death, battles, adventure or a quest or journey involving risk and crossing boundaries, or desire and loss. Many had outlaws as their protagonists.