

Ballad

A ballad is a form of verse, often a narrative set to music.

Ballads were particularly characteristic of the popular poetry and song of the British Isles from the later medieval period until the 19th century and used extensively across Europe and later the Americas, Australia and North Africa. 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 it took on the meaning of a slow form of popular love song and the term is now often used as synonymous with any love song, particularly the pop or rock power ballad.

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. As 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|.*

However, 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 romances, which are octosyllabic and use consonance rather than rhyme.

In all traditions most ballads are narrative in nature, with a self-contained story, often concise and relying on imagery, rather than description, which can be tragic, historical, romantic or comic. 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.

Sonnet

A sonnet is a form of poetry that originated in Europe, mainly Italy: the Sicilian poet Giacomo da Lentini is credited with its invention. They commonly contain 14 lines. The term "sonnet" derives only from the Occitan word sonet and the Italian word sonetto, both meaning "little song" or "little sound". By the thirteenth century, it signified a poem of fourteen lines that follows a strict rhyme scheme and specific structure. Conventions associated with the sonnet have evolved over its history. Writers of sonnets are sometimes called "sonneteers," although the term can be used derisively. One of the best-known sonnet writers is William Shakespeare, who wrote 154 of them (not including those that appear in his plays). A Shakespearean, or English, sonnet consists of 14 lines, each line containing ten syllables and written in iambic pentameter, in which a pattern of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable is repeated five times. The rhyme scheme in a Shakespearean sonnet is a-b-a-b, c-d-c-d, e-f-e-f, g-g; the last two lines are a rhyming couplet.

Traditionally, English poets employ iambic pentameter when writing sonnets, but not all English sonnets have the same metrical structure: the first sonnet in Sir Philip Sidney's sequence *Astrophel and Stella*, for example, has 12 syllables: it is iambic hexameters, albeit with a turned first foot in several lines. In the Romance languages, the hendecasyllable and Alexandrine are the most widely used metres.

Italian (Petrarchan) sonnet

The Italian sonnet was created by Giacomo da Lentini, head of the Sicilian School under Frederick II. Guittone d'Arezzo rediscovered it and brought it to Tuscany where he adapted it to his language when he founded the Neo-Sicilian School (1235–1294). He wrote almost 250 sonnets. Other Italian poets of the time, including Dante Alighieri

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(1265–1321) and Guido Cavalcanti (c.1250–1300) wrote sonnets, but the most famous early sonneteer

was Petrarca (known in English as Petrarch). Other fine examples were written by Michelangelo.

The structure of a typical Italian sonnet of this time included two parts that together formed a compact form of "argument". First, the octave (two quatrains), forms the "proposition," which describes a "problem," followed by a sestet (two tercets), which proposes a resolution. Typically, the ninth line creates what is called the "turn" or "volta," which signals the move from proposition to resolution.

Even in sonnets that don't strictly follow the problem/resolution structure, the ninth line still often marks a "turn" by signaling a change in the tone, mood, or stance of the poem.

Later, the a-b-b-a, a-b-b-a pattern became the standard for Italian sonnets. For the sestet there were two different possibilities: c-d-e-c-d-e and c-d-c-d-c. In time, other variants on this rhyming scheme were introduced, such as c-d-c-d-c-d.

The first known sonnets in English, written by Sir Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, used this Italian scheme, as did sonnets by later English poets including John Milton, Thomas Gray, William Wordsworth and Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

Early twentieth-century American poet Edna St. Vincent Millay also wrote most of her sonnets

This example, *On His Blindness* By Milton, gives a sense of using the Italian form. the Italian rhyming scheme;

When I consider how my light is spent (a)

Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide, (b)

And that one talent which is death to hide, (b)

Lodged with me useless, though my soul more bent (a)

To serve therewith my Maker, and present (a)

My true account, lest he returning chide; (b)

"Doth God exact day-labor, light denied?" (b)

I fondly ask; but Patience to prevent (a)

That murmur, soon replies, "God doth not need (c)

Either man's work or his own gifts; who best (d)

Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state (e)

Is Kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed (c)

And post o'er land and ocean without rest; (d)

They also serve who only stand and wait." (e)

Dante's variation

Most Sonnets in Dante's *La Vita Nuova* are Petrarchan, but some are not. Chapter VII gives sonnet *O voi che per la via*, with two sestets (AABAAB AABAAB) and two quatrains (CDDC CDDC), and Ch. VIII, *Morte villana*, with two sestets (AABBBA AABBBA) and two quatrains (CDDC CDDC).

Occitan sonnet

The sole confirmed surviving sonnet in the Occitan language is confidently dated to 1284, and is conserved only in troubadour manuscript P, an Italian chansonnier of 1310, now XLI.42 in the Biblioteca Laurenziana in Florence. It was written by Paolo Lanfranchi da Pistoia and is addressed to Peter III of Aragon. It employs the rhyme scheme a-b-a-b, a-b-a-b, c-d-c-d-c-d. This poem is historically interesting for its information on north Italian perspectives concerning the War of the Sicilian Vespers, the conflict between the Angevins and Aragonese for Sicily.

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Peter III and the Aragonese cause was popular in northern Italy at the time and Paolo's sonnet is a celebration of his victory over the Angevins and Capetians in the Aragonese Crusade: Valiant Lord, king of the Aragonese to whom honour grows every day closer, remember, Lord, the French king that has come to find you and has left France

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