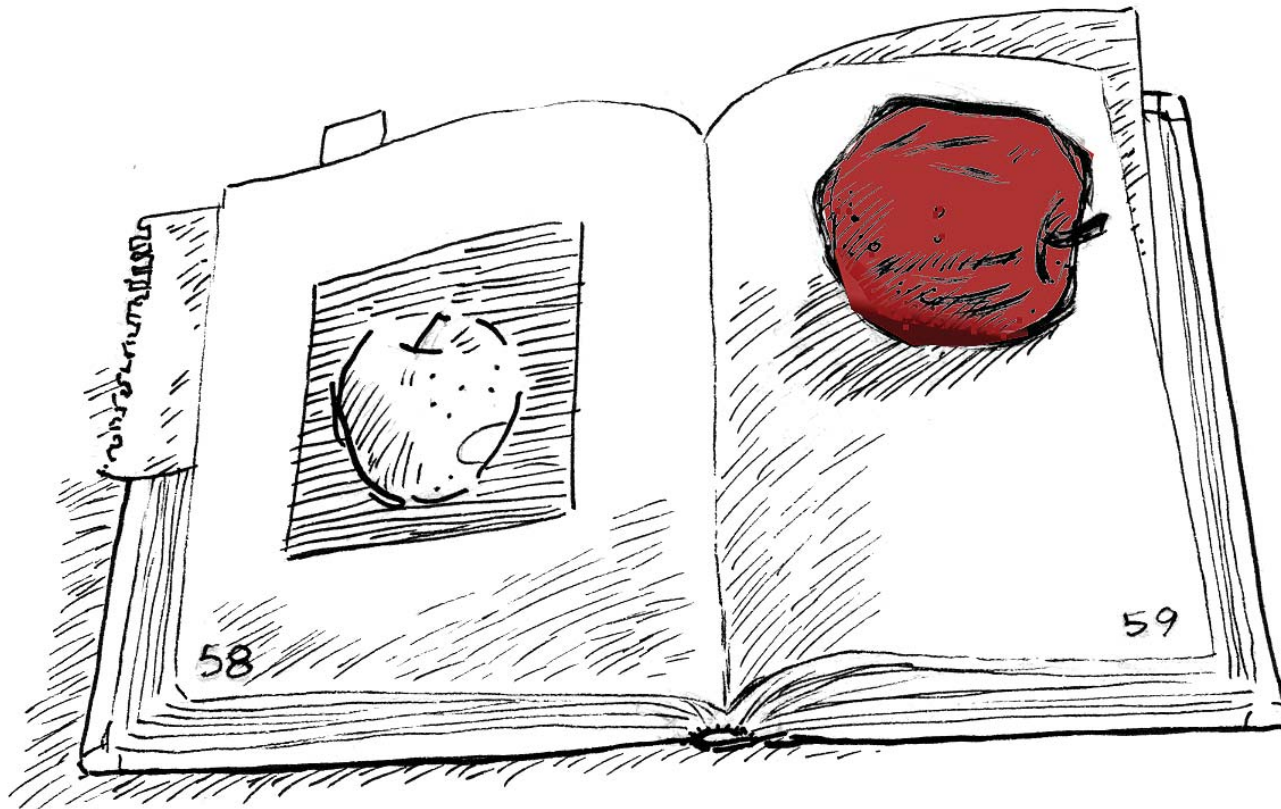


Lyrical Ballads



Lyrical Ballads

Overview:

- Lyrics from ballads are the beginnings of poetry; modern verse began as a natural transition from music lyrics in early centuries of English language.
- Ballads were particularly characteristic of British and Irish popular song *and* poetry from the later medieval period until the 19th century.
- American murder ballads are often versions of older Old World ballads.
- Like folk tales and fables, this form of art describes worlds of reality outside of reality. They seem surreal and illogical because they are based on a story known only to the listeners in past centuries.
- Traditionally these were composed by people who were not literate, nor knowledgeable in formal music methods. They created their instruments by hand: penny whistles, fifes, fiddles, drums, bagpipes.

Lyrical Ballads

Specific themes:

- Folk Stories
- Drinking / Pub songs
- Sports
- Murder
- Love-< Lost Love or Found Love

Westron Wynde

Lost Love Ballad

This is an example of a 16th century lyric with an anonymous author;
contains a very terse, minimalist rhyme.

Follows the rhyme formula ABCB.

Meter: 3.5 / 3 / 4.5 / 3.5

Middle English spellings:

Westron wynde, when wilt thou blow?

(alliteration)

(Then) the small raine— down can raine.

(i.e.: can rain down)

Cryst, if my love were in my armes

And I in my bedde again!’

Murder Ballads

Murder ballad—is a sub genre where a song is based on a violent situation.

Some modern equivalents:

“Frankie and Johnny”

“Mack the Knife”

“Bohemian Rhapsody”

“Cocaine Blues”

- Typically these ballads are narratives, presenting a loose plot line which details the scene of a murder.
- They can be narrated by either the victim or the criminal, or in some cases are recounted by the ghosts of the murdered.
- Parallel structure and repetition of the verses is common.

Cocaine Blues

Early one mornin' while makin' the rounds
I took a shot of cocaine and I shot my woman down
I went right home and I went to bed
I stuck that lovin' .44 beneath my head

Got up next mornin' and I grabbed that gun
Took a shot of cocaine and away I run
Made a good run but I ran too slow
They overtook me down in Juarez, Mexico

Late in the hot joints takin' the pills
In walked the sheriff from Jericho Hill
He said Willy Lee your name is not Jack Brown
You're the dirty heck that shot your woman down

Said yes, oh yes my name is Willy Lee
If you've got the warrant just a-read it to me
Shot her down because she made me sore
I thought I was her daddy but she had five more

When I was arrested I was dressed in black
They put me on a train and they took me back
Had no friend for to go my bail
They slapped my dried up carcass in that county jail

Early next mornin' bout a half past nine
I spied the sheriff coming down the line
Ah, and he coughed as he cleared his throat
He said come on you dirty heck into that district court

Into the courtroom my trial began
Where I was handled by twelve honest men
Just before the jury started out
I saw the little judge commence to look about

In about five minutes in walked the man
Holding the verdict in his right hand
The verdict read murder in the first degree
I hollered Lawdy Lawdy, have a mercy on me

The judge he smiled as he picked up his pen
99 years in the Folsom pen
99 years underneath that ground
I can't forget the day I shot that bad bitch down

Come on you've gotta listen unto me
Lay off that whiskey and let that cocaine be

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- written by T. J. "Red" Arnall
 - based on traditional song "Little Sadie" recorded in 1920's
 - notably sung by Johnny Cash; recorded 1968
 - recorded first in 1947