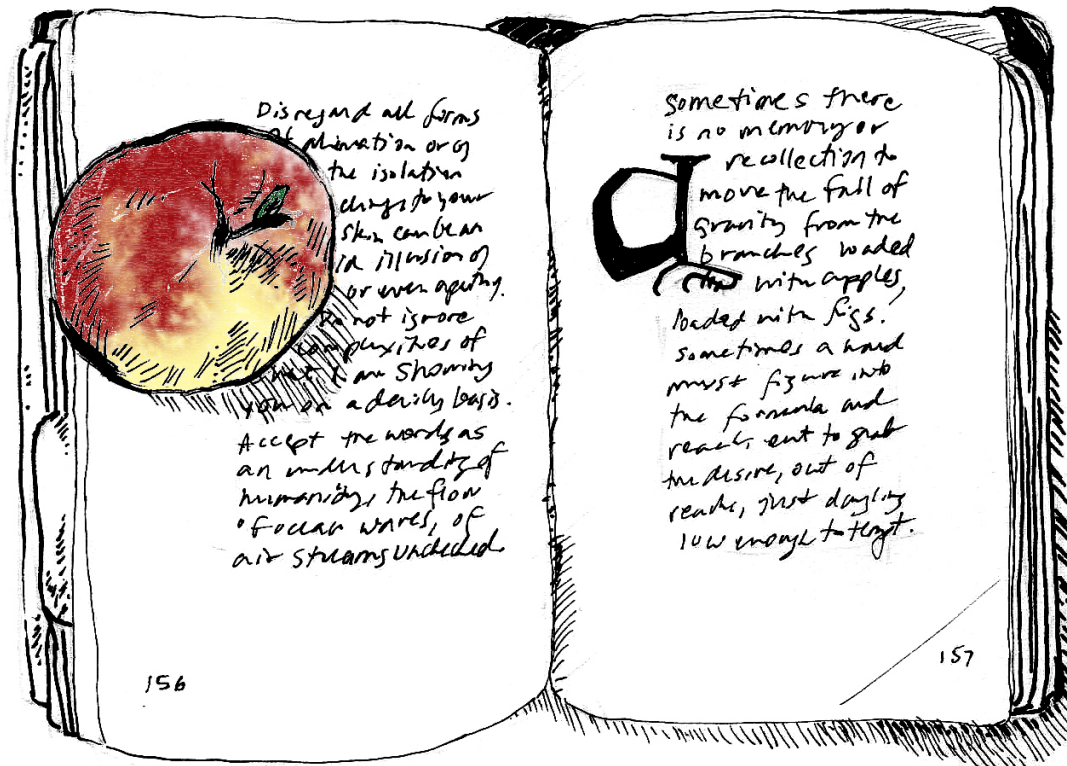


Ballads-overview



Middle English Ballads

Lyrics from ballads are the beginnings of modern poetry.

What we call modern verse once 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. As a result the language tends to be more common, typical figures of speech: “stone-deaf,” “blind as a bat.”
- They created their instruments by hand: penny whistles, drums, bagpipes, fifes, and sometimes fiddles in later years.
- Mostly themes fall into two categories: secular and religious.

Middle English Ballads

Specific themes:

- Folk Stories
- Drinking / Pub songs
- Sports
- Murder / Crime
- Love
 - > Lost Love
 - > Found Love
 - > First Love
 - > *etcetera*

Westron Wynde

Lost Love Ballad

This is an example of a 16th century lyric with an anonymous author; all that now exists is a fragment of a larger Medieval piece. The verse follows the rhyme formula **A B C B**, which is referred to as the **ballad stanza**.

- Notice the poem can be read either secular *or* religious, all based on how a reader stresses the name of Christ in the third line.
- *Longman* does point out that on occasion erotic language was used for sacred verses (551).

Westron wynde, when wilt thou blow?	(<i>alliteration</i>)	3.5	A
The small raine down can raine.		3	B
Cryst, if my love were in my armes		4	C
And I in my bedde again!		3.5	B

Sumer Is Icumen In

First Love / Confirmation of / Warnings of Love Ballad

Most love poetry of the time period will accentuate the season of Spring in the verse; overall the timing displays nature's renewal and creates an obvious rejuvenation of spirit. Events in nature often provoke lustful energies.

- “Sumer is Icumen In” primarily is a medieval song intended for a choral round.
- Although the poet is unknown, its estimated time of creation is the late Thirteenth Century.
- On the surface the poem presents a litany of natural activities:
 - > a cuckoo singing
 - > seeds producing blooms in meadows / renewal of forest growths
 - > ewes call out to their lambs
 - > calf for the cows
 - > bulls leap about and bucks fart

Sumer Is Icumen In

G. H. Roscow proposes that this piece is a parody of love and spring, rather than a traditional view of the work as a celebration of spring.

As evidence he points out that the animal activities do not show the pairing up of various animals, but rather show the after-effects of the mating rituals.

- mothers looking after their young
- males celebrating their virility in a loud, noisy manner
- the male figures are then wanting to establish a secondary, adulterous union with any female of the same species
- he further notes that since this is considered a round, the song in theory does not have a perceived time limit, the musical performance could continue indefinitely, just like adultery itself continues across generations
- he also indicates the events mentioned in the work occur in early summer, not spring
- he proposes therefore that the work serves as a playful warning about the pitfalls of overt sexual activity, rather than celebrating notions of spring

The Unquiet Grave

This piece is an anonymous English ballad.

- Believed to be written in the 1400s.
- A basic reading shows a male figure mourning his love for “twelve month and a day.” At the end of this period of time, the dead woman speaks from the grave, complaining that his weeping is keeping her from a peaceful rest.
- Despite the passage of time, he begs for a kiss— this is intended to show a devotion towards the departed, rather than to be taken as an act of morbidity or perversion. With the logic of folk tales, the dead sometimes are shown locked in a perpetual state of sleep, waiting for the Second Coming.
- Despite his passionate devotion, the woman tells him her kiss would kill him, and most importantly, stop mourning over the loss. She wants him to move on in his life until the proper time for them to be together.

The Unquiet Grave

This verse is set in A B A B showing two sets of alternating sounds.

- In an inventive manner, the writer experiments with repetition of key words stressing the theme's subject of grief for a dead loved one.
 - > The word "love" exists as a repeating element in stanza one *and* seven.
 - > Likewise in stanza five the word "lip" repeats.
 - > And also, notice keywords repeat between all of the stanzas throughout the ballad: love (5), day (2), grave (3), sleep (2)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
love	love	day (<i>not up</i>)	grave	lips	green	love
rain	may	speak	sleep	strong	walk	decay
love	grave	grave	lay (<i>not lips</i>)	lips	seen	love
lain	day	sleep	seek	long	stalk	away