

Traditional Ballads

Written by Ambra Michelli | Samantha Moore

What is a Ballad?

There is only one true requirement to define any song as a ballad: Does it tell a story? If it does, you've got yourself a ballad.

A ballad often answers the questions: Who? What? When? Where? Why? And/or How?

A ballad is repetitive in nature, a feature necessary for a primarily illiterate/non-printing population and audience.

Ballads are non-secular, though many reference religion, if not morality and general common sense/wisdom.

Ballads, because they tell a story, are primarily Narrative. He did this, or she did that. Not so much I did this, lest it be to say 'I' *saw* such and such happen.

Dialogue can often be found in ballads, helping to lead the story.

Ballads often reference historical events, everyday live occurrences that vex or inspire us, even today.

But in summary, and finitely, a ballad simply tells a story.

Subject Matter

Balladic subjects varied widely, from the very noble to the risqué. Two such examples where style and even melody match but theme differ: Lord Willoughby (about a valiant English victory) and The Carman's Whistle (About an afternoon tryst). We'll come back to these.

As ballads are simply songs that tell a story, the subject matter varied, stemming from life events or vexations, drawn from real life or fictional examples of Comedy, Romance, Challenge, Envy, Greed, Strength, History, Angry Lovers, Education, Morality, and more. If you can dream up the story, you can write the ballad.

This is why we have the unique phenomenon that these archaic examples whose composers are long dead and often forgotten are still enjoyable and applicable to us today. They are stories/songs we can all relate to as they relate to the state of people in life.

Judas denies betraying Christ for a bribe of coin, but is found to have spoken false when he falls asleep. Peter defends Christ and Christ tells him he'll deny him thrice by morning.

Traditional Ballads

Written by Ambra Michelli | Samantha Moore

See Adelaide de Beaumont's break down of Volume 1 Child ballads attached, for a summary of many early ballads. While this is an amazing reference, I highly recommend reviewing them yourself for a better understanding.

From Where Do Ballads Originate and Who Sang Them?

Ballads originated all over Europe, especially in England and Scotland, generally accepted as existing in strength from 1200 – 1700. As the printing industry evolved, the ballad in its traditional form faded.

The very oldest ballads are in Middle English, so Elizabethan English ballads, even though they may be based in an earlier rendition, are later or out of period edits of older works. Because of this pattern, we can often note that the fewer versions, the more likely the piece is later or out of period, as it has likely been translated.

Often we get our citations of perioricity from references, which can make documenting their authenticity more difficult:

Samuel Pepys wrote in his diary on January 2, 1666, "In perfect pleasure I was to hear her sing (Mrs. Knipp, an actress), and especially her little Scotch song of Barbary Allen..."

Besides Child, another purveyor of early ballads was Bishop Percy, who published Reliques of Ancient English Poetry in 1765, based primarily on a manuscript dated ca. 1650, which he recovered from the home of his friend, William Pitt (the Elder).

"Pitt's maids were *using the manuscript pages as kindling to light fires.*"

If using Percy for your studies, however, be warned. Percy had a tendency to 'fix' partial or broken stanza's, according to his own notes. Child did not.

The Earliest English ballad, I've been able to find anyways, is "Judas" (Child #23). "Judas" (Child #23) can also be found in a manuscript from the 13th century (Trinity College, Cambridge, dated to 13th c).

These songs, these ballads, were primarily sung not in court, but rather by the towns and country folk.

Survival and Evolution

The very oldest ballads are in Middle English:

Hit wes upon a Scere-þorsday þat ure loverd aros;
Ful mild were þe words he spec to Judas.
"Judas, þou most of Jurselem, oure mete for to bugge;
þritti platen of selver þou bere upo þi rugge.

Traditional Ballads

Written by Ambra Michelli | Samantha Moore

--"Judas" (Child #23) from MS B.14.39, Trinity College, Cambridge (dated to 13th c.)

In examples where we have versions dated before and after the 1600 limit line, we can see that near-1600 language was becoming comprehensible to a modern audience, but definitely wasn't there yet:

The Persē owt off Northombarlonde,
and avowe to God mayd he
That he wold hunte in the mowntayns
off Chyviat within days thre,
In the magger of doughtē Dogles,
and all that euer with him be.

The stout Erle of Northumberland
a vow to God did make
His pleasure in the Scottish woods
three sommers days to take

--"The Hunting of the Cheviot" from Percy MSS, Harvard, (ca. 1650)

--"The Hunting of the Cheviot" (Child #162)
from MS Ashmole 48, Bodleian Library, Oxford (ca. 1550)

It is a well accepted fact that oral tradition was a time-tested poor-man's elementary. I therefore infer they can be reasonably expected to predate their printed examples. However, inferred truth won't get you far in A&S competitions, so best to use the plethora of manuscript versions for a foundation to argue your style choices when writing your own.

As ballads were updated for comprehension or popularity, they began to evolve into alternate versions. One great traditional example is "Mary's Fair". This is an out of period example but relevant.

It starts out with her bemoaning her fate, talking about the guile of her old sweet heart and losing her virtue in a night of drunken debauchery. Then they get married and live happily ever after. It is obvious someone heard this song, and said, "nope, I want a HAPPY ending", and edited it accordingly.

The "versions" of Child ballads are littered with similar story alterations. As these were sung by and for the folk, it is intuitive that one might alter the story to better fit their audience.

The audience and balladeer were prominently illiterate, so it was often that a single hearing had a balladeer singing it again the next night for the first time. This lent for an evident opportunity for mistakes and/or changes to the original text. Such was the nature of the story song.

This is also why many specific details were not included. The story tended to be more generalized with characters anyone could relate to. You don't get a lot of golden suns cresting over emerald fields. You get just "dawn" or "the sun rose or the dale."

Another concept that lent to the survival for a piece was meter and rhythm.

Traditional Ballads

Written by Ambra Michelli | Samantha Moore

Style, Rhythm, and Music: Patterns

A ballad is rhythmically structured... You've probably heard of the poetic form known as "ballad meter"; its proper name is "alternating iambic tetrameter and trimeter" [4]. One example is "Amazing Grace" ~ Mistress Adelaide De Beaumont, OP, SCA

Keep in mind that many ballads were translated at some point from Middle English to English and so the syllable count of a recorded song may not match perfectly. However it is generally accepted that the verses were written in couplets, 2, 4, or 8 (or more), but with definite structure and attention given to meter.

This aided in their survival. If you try to shove a million syllables into a line and then only add 3 in the next, the singer, using a well-known tune or no, the random viewer isn't going to be able to pick it up and fake it. Early ballads were designed for just that. Though they did not have a tendency to, unless translation dictated the need, later ballads could bend this rule a little as music and lyric could be printed side by side, and didn't need to be memorized upon a single hearing of it. The memory cues finite syllable count gave to early balladeers were essential to the survival and success of a ballad.

Ballads were often written in similar style so that they could be sung with a common tune, thus lending to their popularity and ability to be taught, repeated, or spread.

Many reference "Ballad meter"; its proper name is "alternating iambic tetrameter and trimeter. This references the predominant meter in traditional ballads by the 16th century. The earliest ballads were written in rhyming couplets, usually of eight syllables or so. One such example is the 8/6/8 syllable count and abcb rhyme scheme. The examples below loosely follow this meter, as do many others.

Take note, that even though they were recorded to have been sung to the same tune, likely for the sake of longevity and recitation comprehension, so too were other tunes created to match the same text, making regional dialogue and differences affect the song, often contributing to a new version. This represents the variety brought on by popular and even printed text 'remixed' for a different or regional response.

Practical Examples to reference to highlight this are Lord Willoughby and the Carman's Whistle.

Traditional Ballads

Written by Ambra Michelli | Samantha Moore

B293– Lord Willoughby

♩ = 120



Music: Robinson's Schoole of Musicke 1603, German c. 1600 Het Luitboek van Thysius, no. 78.. It appears twice in Byrd: My Ladye Nevells Booke and Byrd's Fitzwilliam Virginal Book II, 190.

Words: English words of "Lord Willoughby" published a billion times but no early copies survive, says Simpson. The battle should have been in the 1585-1590 period.

Lord Willoughby

The fifteenth day of July
With glist'ning spear and shield
A famous fight in Flanders
Was foughten in the field
The most courageous officers
Were English captains three
But the bravest in the battle
Was brave Lord Willoughby

Stand to it noble pikemen
And look you round about
And shoot you right you bowmen
And we will keep them out
You muskets and calivermen
Do you prove true to me
I'll be the foremost man in fight
Said brave Lord Willoughby.

Then quoth the Spanish general,
'Come let us march away,
I fear we shall be spoiled all
If we here longer stay,
For yonder comes Lord Willoughby
With courage fierce and fell,
He will not give one inch of way
For all the devils in hell.'

And then the fearful enemy
Were quickly put to flight
Our men pursued courageously
And caught their forces quite
But at the last they gave a shout
Which echoed through the sky
'God and St George for England!'
The conquerors did cry.

To the soldiers that were maimed
And wounded in the fray
The Queen allowed a pension
Of eighteen pence a day
And from all costs and charges
She quit and set them free
And this she did all for the sake
Of brave Lord Willoughby.

Then courage noble Englishmen
And never be dismayed
For if we be but one to ten
We will not be afraid
To fight the foreign enemy
And set our country free
And thus I end the bloody bout
Of brave Lord Willoughby.

You can read about the history of the tune (and hear a markedly different version) at Greg Lindahl's Music of the Sixteenth Century Broadside Ballad page.

The melody is marked as drastically different from one referenced melody for this same ballad, sung also to the tune of The Carman's Whistle.

Traditional Ballads

Written by Ambra Michelli | Samantha Moore

B056– The carman's whistle

♩ = 120



We can reference the periodicity of this poetic text (the title if not the content) by a derogative quote printed:

Quote [Referencing Words]

Contemporary quote, 1592: "I maruell who the diuell is his Printer [who]... would bee so impudent to print such odious and lasciuious ribauldrie, as Watkins Ale, The Carmans Whistle, and sundrie such other."
~Simpson, Claude M.

Quote [Referencing Music]:

.. neither is there anie tune or stroke which may be sung or plaide on instruments, which hath not some poetical ditties framed according to the numbers thereof: some to Rogero, some to Trenchmore, ... to Galliardes, to Pavines, to Iygges, to Brawles, to all manner of tunes which everie Fidler knowes better then myself.'
~William Webbe, *Discourse of English Poetrie*, 1586

Traditional Ballads

Written by Ambra Michelli | Samantha Moore

Carmans Whistle

(1590)

[The tune, "Oh, neighbour Robert", is equivalent to "Lord Willoughby"] [MS Rawl. poet. 185, c 1590, via W. Bolle's article 'Das Liederbuch MS. Rawlinson Poet. 185', Archive fur dan Studium der Neuren Sprachen und Literaturen, 1905. For comparison below is a 17th century version.]

In a pleasant morninge,
in the merrie month of may,
Amounge the frutefull meadowes,
a youngman tooke his way;
and gazinge rounde aboute him
what pleasures he could see,
he spied a proper maiden
vnder an oaken tree.

Comely was her countenance,
and lovely was her lookes;
seeminge that wanton Venus
had write her in her bookes;
many a smirking smile she lente
amidst those meaddoes greene;
the which he well perceaved,
yet was of her vnseene.

At length she changed her smilinge
into a sighing sonnge,
bewailing her bad fortune
that she was a maide so lonnge;
for many one more yonger,
quoth she, hath lonnge bene wed;
yet do I feare that I shall die,
and keepe my maidenhed.

My fathers rich and welthie
and hath no child but I;
yet want I still a husband
to keepe me companie.
my yeares are yonge and tender;
and I am fair withall;
yet is there nere a youngman
will comfort me at all.

This youngman which listned
and marked her grevous mone,
was sorrie for to see her

sit musing all alone
he nimble lepte vnto her
which made the maide to start;
But when he did embrace her,
it ioyed her wolfull harte.

Fair maide, quoth he, whie mourn you?
what means your heavie chere?
Be ruld by me, I pray you,
and to my wordes give care:
a pleasante note ile tell yoy
your sadnes to expell.
good sir, how do you call it?
the truth unto me tell.

Tis called the carmans whistell,
a note so sweete and good,
It will turne a womans sadnes
into a merrie moode.
good sir, then let me hear it,
if so it be no harme.
Doute not, quoth he, faire maiden,
ile kepe you in my arme.

But first let me intreate you
with patience to attende,
till I have brought my musike
unto a perfect end.
If I may heare you whistle,
quoth she, I will be still,
and think, so I molest you
tis sore against my will.

When he to her had whistled
a merrie note or two,
she was so blith and pleasant
she knew not what to doe.
Quoth she: of all the musike
that I ever know,

the carmans plesant whistle
shall for my monie go.

Good sir, quoth she, I pray you
who made this pleasante game?
Quoth he, a gentle carman
did make it for his dame.
And she was well contented
with him to beare a parte,
godes blessinge, quoth the maiden,
light one the carmans harte.

For never was I pleased
more better in my life
then with the carmans whistle
which pleaseth maide and wiffe.
and, sir, I do beseech you,
however I do speed,
to let me hear you whistle,
when I do stand in need.

Quoth he: farewell, faire maiden,
and as you like this sporte,
so of the carmans whistle
I pray you give reporte.
good sir, quoth she, I thank you
for this your taken paine;
but when shall we, I pray you,
meete in this place againe?

Quoth he at any season,
by day or els by night,
commend the carmans whistle
for pleasure and delight;
and counte me slack and slothfull,
if twice you send for me.
I faith then, quoth the maiden,
ile give thee kisses three.

The Combers Whistle, or, The Sports of the Spring

Tune of, The Carmans Whistle (17th Century)

All in a pleasant Morning
in the Merry Month of May;
Walking the fragrant Meadows
where the Comber took his way:
And viewing round about him
whereas he did remain
At length he spied a fair Maid
upon the flowery Plain.

So cheerful was her countenance
and lovely to behold
She seem'd as if that Venus fair
was of the selfsame Mold
And many a smirke and smile she gave
all in the Meadows green;
I could compare her unto none
but unto Love's fair Queen.

At length she turned her smiling
into a love-sick song.
Lamenting of her woful chance
she staid a Maid so long:
There's many that are younger
then I, that have been wed;
Yet still I fear that I shall dye,
and keep my Maiden-head.

My father's rich and wealthy,
and hath no Child but I;
But still I want a Husband
to keep me company.
My yeares are yonge and tender
and I am fair and tall,
Yet there is never a young man
will comfort me at all.

The blossoms of my beauty,
I think, may well invite
Some Batchelor of fortune good
to take me for his right:
For why I dare presume it,
there's few doth me excell,
As it is manifest and plain
to all that know me well.

How happy are those Virgins all
that in the City throng.
For they have Sweet-hearts plenty,
and ne'r live single long;
Which makes me grieve so sadly
that yet I am not sped;
For in plain terms, to tell you true,
I long for to be wed.

This Comber he stood listening
to hear her make such moan,
His heart was sorely grieved
to see her all alone:
He quickly stept unto her,
and with a joyfull cheer,
Quoth he fair maid, I chanced
your mournful Song to hear.

And now I'm come to ease you
of all your grief and pain;
For why, I well can please you,
by Whistling of a strain.
Quoth shee I long to hear it
so well that you can play;
Then prithee go about it straight,
because I hate delay.

Then he pull'd forth his Whistle
and plaid a note or two;
The Maid she was so over-joy'd,
she knew not what to do,
and well she was contented
with him to bear a part:
A blessing said this Maiden fair,
light on this Combers harte.

Quoth she, I prithee tell me,
where did'st thou learn this game.
It was a young brisk Journey-man
that make it for his Dame,
With which he oft did please her,
and shee to him did say
And charg'd him that he should not see
the Whistle made away.

Then she did him desire
one other Tune to play
Which made her so admire,
she thus to him did say:
Of all the pleasant Musick
that ever I did know
The Comber's merry Whistle
shall for my money go.

When shall we two meet again
for pleasure and delight,
At any time or season,
by day, or eke by night:
Then count me very slothful,
if that you send for me,
When as I fail to meet my Dear:
so take these Kisses three.

Traditional Ballads

Written by Ambra Michelli | Samantha Moore

Writing Your Own

Authenticity vs. Popularity with a Modern audience

1st, familiarize yourself with the topic. Get your hands on as many ballads as you can that were written during the general time you want to reference (if any) in your song.

2nd, accept that you are either going to dress up like a sexy vampire on MTV and sing in middle English for the truest authenticity and still maintain the attention of your audience, or suck it up, base it on the style and concept, and take into consideration your modern audience. The former, you'll be famed for, the latter will have a more likely chance of popularity/allowing your piece to survive the inevitable test of time.

When considering a more modern audience, some of the general rules, specifically citing details about the hero or heroine, can be bent.

There are two takes on this, and I'll use my own original compositions for example.

Her True Love Came a Courting

Her true love came a courting,
a courting well he came
Though poor as any pauper,
she loved him all the same
She loved him as the morning sun
loves the early dew
He loved her as fair cupid
favors well the bending yew

Her father most concerned
decided wealthier she'd wed
Promised that the miller would
soon share her marriage bed
So challenging the whims of fate
she vowed to turn the tide
And so she took her suitors both
unto the water's side

**Ch: Singing Hey Ho into the spray he goes
Hey Ho into the river she flies
Hey Ho as the wind and rain and the leaves do fall
Hey Ho true love never dies**

From off her slightest finger,
she pulled a silver ring
And promised he who found it first
would marry her come spring
But slyly did she slip a stone
into her grasp instead
And tossed it oh so cleverly
into the riverbed

Then both men leapt into the spray
to meet her heart's demand
She planned to slip her silver ring
into her lover's hand
So cunningly she crafted fate
toward all she could wish
And smugly watched the miller rise
like some befuddled fish (**Ch**)

Her triumph all but in her grasp
she thought she'd won the game
Her one true love had yet to rise so
thrice she called his name
So suddenly her worry flared
well fueled by her fears
In horror saw what she had done
and many were her tears

She threw her cloak from off her back
and leapt into the spray
She found herself imperiled as
the river had its way
The icy current dragged her down,
drowning out her cry
Just then her lover caught her hands
and pulled her to the sky (**Ch**)

Her true love pulled her to the shore,
the mud was thick and cold
He cut the corset from her breast and
kissed her full and bold
The water trapped within her rose

Traditional Ballads

Written by Ambra Michelli | Samantha Moore

and spared her cruel death

She slipped the ring into his hand

before she drew first breath

He knew the trick at once and laughed

to share their secret jest

He raised the ring to show the mil-

ler he had won the test

Come spring the two were married and

they lived there till this day

And all along the river side, their

clever children play **(Ch) (Ch)**

Her True Love Came a Courting, follows the general 8/6/8 syllable count and abcb rhyme scheme as many traditional English Ballads, such as with Lord Whilloughby.

In this story, the woman is courted by a poor man, whom she loves, but her father thinks she should marry someone wealthier, in this case the Miller.

Medieval pre 17th century ballads are filled with women seeking to have their will, what e'er it be, and or the out smarting a pre-determined fate, often times right under the nose of their adversary (inferred comedic value).

In HTLCAC, the main character (sung in the 3rd person for the sake of maintaining the traditional narrative form), challenges her own fate and devises a way to have her will.

She takes the two suitors down to the river and tells them that whoever brings back her ring will be her husband, then tosses it into the water, or so they believe. In truth she tosses a stone, palming the ring with the thought to slip it to her true love when the Miller is distracted.

They both dive in. The Miller is the first to rise without his prize. And the woman is triumphant, believing she has won.

Unfortunately, as she never filled in contestant number one, her true love doesn't come up, seemingly searching so very long for the ring, that he drowned. In grief and panic, she actually jumps in after him and nearly drowns herself.

Luckily, her true love is a strong swimmer, didn't drown, and actually pulls her to safety, out of the deadly current. When she wakes up, she slips the ring into his hand and the game, however perilous, is won.

They live happily ever after, their children singing their story down by the water. Thus, one medieval ballad this song parallels are as follows is The Drowned Lovers: Childe 216.

Some of the Archaic terminology/references, phrasing, and vocabulary are:

- Hey, Ho: a common choral element
 - Rose Round
 - "*Cruel Sister*"[7]

Traditional Ballads

Written by Ambra Michelli | Samantha Moore

- Shakespear: *As You Like It*: Act 5 Scene 3
 - “With a hey, and a ho, and a hey-nonny-no,”
- References in chorus to the “Wind and Rain” and some natural/season element
 - “*Cruel Sister*”[7]
 - Certain versions of Black Jack Davey
 - *The Wind and Rain* (Childe Ballad #10)
 - *Pretty Polly*
- Thrice
 - To the modern ear, we understand this, but it lends a medieval-y vibe
 - Adverb: three times, as in succession; on three occasions or in three ways.
- Corset
 - Reference to garb, pulls us into a more renaissance feel
- Jest: modernly referenced as a joke. Another slightly archaic term to lend to the flavor of the song.

Good Hunter

My basis for my rendition/composition of “*Good Hunter*” was the Child ballad #18, “*Sir Lionel*” [2], from sited text: *English and Scottish Popular Ballads* [3]. As is common, this traditional ballad “*Good Hunter*” has many renditions, some for which we have examples.

Burden lines were a late period updating to the favored ballads of the time. It was a style that evolved and is often a warning that you aren’t singing the original version (as if there were such a thing in such an oral tradition format).

Come sit you down on this dark night

Wind well thy horn good hunter.

And hearken to a tale of fright

Though you be a mighty hunter.

A maid dwells in the woods nearby

Wind well thy horn good hunter.

She draws the careless with her cry

For she is a mighty hunter.

No mortal man can break her will:

Wind well thy horn good hunter

No sword avails, no strength, no skill.

For she is a mighty hunter.

One day a man of chivalry

Wind well thy horn good hunter

Heeded not this history.

Though he was a mighty hunter.

So I will tell you of his fate,

Wind well thy horn good hunter

The Knight who learned the truth too late.

Though he was a mighty hunter.

He ranged the woods both far and near,

Wind well thy horn good hunter

A maiden’s weeping drew his ear

For he was a mighty hunter.

"Why grieve you in the forest here?"

Wind well thy horn good hunter

"A boar has killed my husband dear!"

For he was a mighty hunter.

"Oh where shall I this wild boar see?"

Wind well thy horn good hunter

"Oh blow a blast, he’ll come to thee."

Traditional Ballads

Written by Ambra Michelli | Samantha Moore

For he is a mighty hunter.

The knight put horn unto his mouth,
Wind well thy horn good hunter
He blew it north, east, west, and south.
For he was a mighty hunter.

As strong as seven armored men
Wind well thy horn good hunter
The boar came forth from out his den.
And it was a mighty hunter.

The boar cut wounds of scarlet red
Wind well thy horn good hunter
But the knight at last struck off his head.
For he was a mighty hunter.

Then the maid turned to the knight:
Wind well thy horn good hunter
"Thou art the man of greater might".
Oh, you are a mighty hunter.

"Fair lady sad this day must be,
Wind well thy horn good hunter
But let me take you off with me.
For I am a mighty hunter.

Your beauty rare has captured me.
Wind well thy horn good hunter
Come off with me, I'll marry thee."
For I am a mighty hunter.

"Oh foolish man no wife I'll be;
Wind well thy horn good hunter
Tis ye who'll come and follow me.
For I am a mighty hunter.

You have slain my magic boar
Wind well thy horn good hunter
Who was, as you, a man before.
Though he was a mighty hunter

And now you'll take his place good knight,
Wind well thy horn good hunter
Till you are slain by greater might."
Yes, by some mighty hunter

The knight cried out in grief full sore
Wind well thy horn good hunter
Where he had stood, now lay a boar.
And he was a mighty hunter

Beware all ye the crying bride
Wind well thy horn good hunter
Who lives within the green wood-side.
For she is a mighty hunter

Hunt not within the Maid's domain,
Wind well thy horn good hunter
Or as a beast you may remain,
As one more mighty hunter!

(Burden lines – Wind well thy horn good hunter... for she is a mighty hunter)

Documenting Your Work

This song I actually based on a pre-existing ballad: Good Hunter

Documenting your original composition as authentic renditions of historical ballads is all about the argument. The research of what they did, what you did, and what you did differently and why.

One such attempt is as follows:

See version 'A' of "Good Hunter" in the provided book *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*. (One half of A (the second and fourth quarters) is missing in the Percy Manuscript [5])

Next, See version B. This version can be traced in Banff Shire for more than a hundred years prior to its print date (1605) [3], "through the old woman that sang it, and her forbears".

What we can gather of the story is this: A knight finds a lady sitting in (or under) a tree, who tells him that a wild boar has slain (or wounded) her lord and killed (or wounded) thirty of his men. The knight kills the boar, and seems to have received bad wounds in the process. The boar

Traditional Ballads

Written by Ambra Michelli | Samantha Moore

belonged to a giant or to a wild woman. The knight is required to forfeit his hawks and leash and the little finger of his right hand (or his horse, his hound, and his lady). He refuses to submit to such disgrace, though in no condition to resist; the giant allows him time to heal his wounds, and he is to leave his lady as security for his return. At the end of the time the knight comes back sound and well, and kills the giant as he had killed the boar.

Now, see version C. This version says nothing of the knight having been wounded. The wild woman, to revenge the death of her “pretty spotted pig”, flies fiercely at him, and he cleaves her in two. The last quarter of the Percy Manuscript copy would, no doubt, reveal what became of the lady who was sitting in the tree, as to which these traditional copies give no light.

As to my variance choice for a supernatural element in this song, there are many examples to draw from with similar concepts. I chose to let my version of “*Good Hunter*” adapt a similar ending. Such traditional ballad examples of transformation by the wicked or sorcerers include but are not limited to:

- a. “*Young Edward and the Dove*”[6]
Unknowing of a witch’s blessing/curse who transformed his Eleanor into a dove through a magic wish, shot his true love through the heart while in flight.
- b. “*Cruel Sister*”[7]
A maiden’s bones and hair are turned into a harp to seek justice from her murdering sister.
- c. “*The Marriage of Sir Gawain*”[8]
The wife-to-be is an ugly hag, cursed by a witch, who transforms into a beautiful maiden when kissed or granted her will. Also, her brother has his head chopped off, picks it up, and walks away still issuing challenge.

As to my introduction and conclusion in the song, I tried to recreate the strong “Moral-of-the-story” element found within most ballads.

A ballad has a simple metrical and sentence structure structure. By far the most common balladic stanza form consists of four lines, with either four stresses per line, as in “*The Twa Corbies*” (Child #26 in sited text: *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*) [9]:

As I was wal’king all’ alane’
I heard’ twa cor’bies mak’ing mane’,
The tane’ unto’ the ti’ther say’
“Whare’ sall we gang’ and dine’ the day’?”

Or four stresses alternating with three stresses as in “*Sir Patrick Aspens*” (Child #58) [10]:

The king’ sat’ in Dunferm’line town’
Drink’ing the bluid’ –reid wine’;
“Oh where’ sall I’ get a sai’lor bold’
To sail’ this ship o mine’?”

Indeed, the latter is sometimes referred to as the “ballad stanza” or Ballad measure”.

Traditional Ballads

Written by Ambra Michelli | Samantha Moore

In “*Good Hunter*”, the meter is similar to those above and in accordance with the original versions of the Child Ballad “*Sir Lionel*” [2]. It is written in a ballad stanza or ballad measure form.

So I’ will tell’ you of’ his fate’
Wind well’ thy horn’ good hun’ter’,
The Knight who learned the truth too late,
For he’ was a mi’ghty hun’ter’

The Chorus’ every other line are in keeping with traditional ballads such as “*Sir Lionell*” [1], “*Lady Isabel and the Elf Knight*” (Child ballad 4, pg 4 in sited text: English and Scottish Popular Ballads)[11], “*Hind Horn*” (Child ballad 17, pg 31 in sited text: English and Scottish Popular Ballads) [12], and is found regularly in traditional ballads.

“*Sir Lionell*”[5]

Percy MS., P 32, Hales and Furnival, I

Sir Egrabell had sonnes three, Blow thy horne, good hunter	There dwells my friends of great renowne	How well thy buffet it were paid’
Sir Lyonell was one of these As I am a gentile hunter	Says, “Lady, Ile ryde into yonder towne And see wether your friends beene bowne	Take 40 daies into spite To heale thy wounds that been soe wide
Sir Lyonell wold on hunting ryde Untill the forrest him beside	I my self will be the formost man That shall come lady to feitch you home	When 40 dayes beene at an end, Heere meete thou me both safe and sound
And as he rode thorrow the wood, Where trees and harts and all were good	But as he rode then by the way He thought it shame to goe away	And till thou come to me againe With me thoust leaue thy lady alone
And as he rode over the plaine There he saw a knight lay slaine	And Vmbethought him of a wile how he might that wilde bore beguile	When 40 dayes was at an end Sir Lyonell of his wounds was healed sound
And as he rode still on the plaine He saw a lady sitt in a graine	Sir Egrabell he said my father was He neuer left lady in such a case	He tooke with him a litle page He gaue to him good yeomans wage
Say thou lady, and tell thou me What blood shedd here has bee	Noe more will I’...	And as he rode by one hawthorne Even there did hang his hunting horne
Of this blood shedd we may all rew Both wife and childe and man alsoe	*****	He sett his bugle to his mouth And blew his bugle still full south
For it is not past 3 days right Since sir broninge was mad a knight	And a[fter] that thou shalt doe mee Thy hawkes and thy lese alsoe	He blew his bugle lowed and shrill; The lady heard and came him till
Nor it is not more than 3 dayes agoe Since the wild bore did him sloe	Soe shalt thou doe at my command The litle fingar on thy right hand	Sayes the gyant lyes vnder yond low And well he heares your bugle blow
Say thou, lady, and tell thou mee, How long thou wilt sitt in that tree	Ere I wold leaue all this with thee Bpoon this ground I rather dyee	And bidds me of good cheere be This night heele supp with you and me
She said I will sitt in this tree Till my friends doe feitch me	The gyant gaue Sir Lyonell such a blow, The fyer out of his eyen did throw	Hee sett that lady vpon a steede And a litle boy before her yeede
Tell me lady and doe not misse Where that your friends dwellins is	He said then, “If I were safe and sound, As with-in this hower I was in this ground,	And said “Lady in you see that I must dye As euer you loued me from me flye
Downe shee said in younder towne	It shold be in the next towne told How deare thy buffet it was sold	“But lady if you see that I must lieu,’
	And it shold haue beene in the text towne said	

Traditional Ballads

Written by Ambra Michelli | Samantha Moore

'Isaac-a-Bell and Hugh the Graeme' [13]

Christie, Traditional Ballad Airs, I, 110.

From the singing of an old woman in Buckie, Enzie, Banff-shire.

A knight had two sons o sma fame
Hey nien nanny
Isaac a Bell and Hugh the Graeme
And the norlan flowers spring bonny

And the youngest he did say
What occupation will you hae?
When the, etc.

Will you gae fee to pick a mill
Or will you keep hogs on yon hill
When the, etc.

I winna fee to pick a mill
Nor will I keep hogs on yon hill
When the, etc.

Bit it is said as I do hear
That war will last for seven year
When the, etc.

With a giant and a boar
That range into the wood o Tore
When the, etc.

You'll horse and armour to me provide
That through Tore wood I may safely ride
When the, etc.

The knight did horse and armour provide
That through Tore wood Graeme micht safely ride
When the, etc.

Then he rode through the wood o Tore
And up it started the grisly boar
When the, etc.

The firsten bout that he did ride

The boar he wounded in the left side
When the, etc.

The nexten bout at the boar he gaed
He from the boar took aff his head
When the, etc.

As he rode back through the wood o Tore
Up started the giant him before
When the, etc.

O cam you through the wood o Tore
Or did you see my good wild boar
When the, etc.

I cam now through the wood o Tore
But woe be to your grisly boar
When the, etc.

The firsten bout that I did ride
I wounded your boar in the side
When the, etc.

The nexten bout at him I gaed
From your wild boar I took aff his head
When the, etc.

Gin you have cut aff the head o my boar
It's your heard shall be taen therefore
When the, etc.

I'll gie you thirty days and three,
To heal your wounds, then come ta me
It's after thirty days and three

When my wounds heal I'll com ta thee
So Graeme is back to the wood o Tore
And he's killed the giant, as he kild the boar

"The Jovial Hunter of Bronsgro." [14]

Allies, *The British, Roman, and Saxon Antiquities and Folk-Lore of Worcestershire*, 2d ed., p. 116. From the recitation of Benjamin Brown of Upper Wick. *Ancient Poems, Ballads and Songs of the Peasantry of England*, edited by Robert Bell, p. 124.

Sir Robert Bolton had three sons
Wind well thy horn good hunter
And one of them was called Sir Ryalas
For he was a jovial hunter

He rang'd all round down by the wood side
Till up in the top of a tree a gay lady he spyd

O what dost thou mean fair lady? Said he
O the wild boar has killed my lord and his me thirty
As thou beest, etc

O what shall I do this wild boar to see
O thee blow a blast, and he'll come unto thee

Then he put his horn unto his moult
Then he blowd a blast full north east west and south

And the wild boar heard him full into his den
Then he made the best of his speed unto him

Then the wild boar being so stout and strong
Thrashed down the trees as he came along

O what dost thou want of me the wild boar said he
O I think in my heart I can doe enough for thee

Then they fought four hors in a long summers day

Till the wild boar fain would have gotten away

Then Sir ty las drawd his broad sword with might
And he fairly cut his head off quite

Then out of the wood the wild woman flew
Oh thou hast killed my pretty spotted pig
There are three things I do demand of thee
It's thy horn, and thy hound, and thy gay lady.

If these three things thou dost demand of me
It's just as my sword and thy neck can agree

Then into his locks the wild woman flew
Thill she thought in her heart she had torn him through

Then Sir Ryalas drawd his broad sword again
And he fairly split her head in twain

In Bronsgrove church they both do lie;
There the wild boar's head is pictured by
Sir Ryalas, etc.

Traditional Ballads

Written by Ambra Michelli | Samantha Moore

My version is most closely resembling this last version of “*Sir Lionell*,” though it holds elements of all of them. This last version gives the example of the hero dying and though it is rare that evil should live, for purpose of a moral, the story twists it’s ending to match it’s meaning: “*Listen when we tell you the big-bad is really big and bad. If not, follow other fools to their death.*”

Other Related Works

Henry VIII, Blow Thy Horn, Hunter! [15]

Attributed to King Henry VIII’s

King Henry VIII’s Manuscript

Chappell’s Popular Music of the Olden Time

William Cornysh (circa 1470 - 1523)

Blow thy horn, hunter,
And blow thy horn on high!
There is a doe in yonder wood,
In faith she will not die:

(Burden line)

**Now blow thy horn, hunter,
Now blow thy horn, jolly hunter!**

Sore this deer stricken is,
And yet she bleeds no whit;
She lay so fair, I could not miss,
Lord, I was glad of it:

(Burden line)

As I stood under a band,
The deer shoff on the mead;
I struck her so that down she sank
But yet she was not dead.

(Burden line)

There she go’th! See ye not,
How she go’th over the plain?
And if ye lust to gave a shot,
I warrant her barrain.

(Burden line)

He to go and I to go,
But he ran fast afore;
I bade him shoot and strike the doe,
For I might shoot no more.

(Burden line)

To the covert both they went,
For I found where she lay;
An arrow in her haunch she hent,
For faint she might not bray.

(Burden line)

I was weary of the game,
I went to tavern to drink;
Now, the construction of the same--
What do you mean or think?

(Burden line)

Here I leave and make an end
Now of this hunter’s lore:
I think his bow is well unbent,
His bolt may flee no more.

(Burden line)

Wit and Mirth: [16]

Pills to Purge the Melancholy, Volume III (1719-1720).

There is a wild boar in these woods,
Dellum down, dellum down,
There is a wild boar in these woods,
He’ll eat your meat and suck your blood.
Dellum down, dellum down.

Bangrum drew his wooden knife
Dellum down, dellum down,

And swore he’d take the wild boar’s life.
Dellum down, dellum down.

The wild boar came in such a flash,
Dellum down, dellum down,
He broke his way through oak and ash.
Dellum down, dellum down.

Traditional Ballads

Written by Ambra Michelli | Samantha Moore

Conclusion

In the end, if you write a song that tells a story, you've written a ballad. If you use a predetermined rhythm based on a documented ballad and reference historical pieces that parallel the moral of your tale, you've written an arguably more valid ballad in an academic perspective. Finding one style you prefer, documenting it appropriately, and letting that guide your creative compositions, are fine steps toward maintaining historical validity and making your work smarter, rather than harder. Good luck!

Traditional Ballads

Written by Ambra Michelli | Samantha Moore

Sources Sited

Lord Willoughby:

- ❑ Music: Robinson's *Schoole of Musicke* 1603, German c. 1600 *Het Luitboek van Thysius, no. 78.*. It appears twice in Byrd: *My Ladye Nevells Booke* and [Byrd's Fitzwilliam Virginal Book II](#), 190
- ❑ Words: English words of "Lord Willoughby" published a billion times but no early copies survive, says Simpson. The battle should have been in the 1585-1590 period.
- ❑ Sheet Music from the Cantaria Folk song archive:
Citation: (from [Bruce Olsen's 17th Century Broadside Ballad Index](#))
- ❑ Secondary: Simpson B293, Livingston # 247, Ward
- ❑ MS Rawl. poet. 185, c 1590, via W. Bolle's article 'Das Liederbuch MS. Rawlinson Poet. 185', *Archive fur dan Studium der Neuren Srachen und Literaturen*, 1905
- ❑ Music files (midis and sheet music):
<http://www.pbm.com/~lindahl/ballads/music.html>

The Carmans Whistle:

- ❑ William Webbe, *Discourse of English Poetrie*, 1586
- ❑ F. Coles, T. Vere, J. Wright, and J. Clarke [1674-1679]
- ❑ William Webbe, *Discourse of English Poetrie*, 1586
- ❑ Simpson, Claude M. *The British Broadside Ballad and its Music*. Rutgers University Press, 1966.
- ❑ Secondary: Simpson B056, Ward
- ❑ Music: Byrd's *FitzWilliam Virginal Book* and Byrd's *My Lady Nevells Booke* 1590
- ❑ With Allowance, Ro. L'Estrange. F. Coles, T. Vere, J. Wright, and J. Clarke [1674-1679] [Source, Bolle. poet. 185]