A **ballad** is a song that tells a story about common people and events. The song is often a love story or a story where the hero meets a tragic end. Ballads also rely heavily on dialogue, simple stanza form (usually ABAB or ABCB), meter that alternates between lines of tertrameter and trimeter lines, as well as an unusual amount of repetition. The ballad may be classified as either FOLK (traditional) or LITERARY, depending on the characteristics it exemplifies.

**SPECIFIC CHARACTERISTICS OF A BALLAD:**

1. Ballads begin just before the CATASTROPHE. Events before this are given in summary fashion. Setting, description and characterization are given only the slightest attention.

2. The narration is detached, with little personal bias evident. Tragic situations are presented in a simple, almost impersonal manner.

3. Ballads create a single crucial situation dramatically (i.e. the narrator *shows* us the events rather than telling them.)

4. Characters are allowed to speak for themselves and almost all of the action is developed through dialogue.

5. Physical courage and love are the most frequent topics of ballads.

6. Events often have to do with domestic episodes, or at least with incidents that happen to people at the lower levels of a class society.

7. British ballads incorporate the supernatural quite frequently, either as coincidence or ghostly divine actions. North American ballads incorporate coincidence and uncanny events but rationalize them quite frequently.

8. A good ballad has an intense and immediate story, told in a manner to heighten the emotional impact of the climax.

9. The language of the ballad is plain and there are many standard phrases. The verse tends to be short but the line length is often long to develop a chanting effect.

10. Pronounced rhythms, repetition and alliteration are heavily relied on to emphasize key ideas. Progressively increased repetition is often used to make the progress of the action clear.

11. The final stanza may echo the opening. This circular narrative structure is more indicative of a traditional ballad.