

THE BALLAD

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NOTES

The first group of ballads here are old folk ballads. They are all part of a collection of traditional Scottish and English ballads that was made in the late nineteenth century by Francis Child. Many of the poem's in Child's collection probably go back to at least the sixteenth century, and some are almost certainly much older. The subject matter of these ballads ranged from the historical and political to the romantic and tragic to the religious and even the supernatural. Most of these ballads were also set to music. All of these ballads exist in different forms, and with different music written at times up even to the present day (see course website for an example). The Child Ballads is evidence of a strong vogue in the the nineteenth century for ballads and folk tales.

The second group of ballads is evidence of this Romantic fashion for ballads, which included William Wordsworth's and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's long project in the 'voice' of the working-class man - the *Lyrical Ballads*, of which Wordsworth's 'Expostulation and Reply', included here, was a part. You might also know the much longer 'The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere' by Coleridge.

The third group includes two contemporary ballads: a poem by the Scottish poet Kathleen Jamie which is indebted to the long poetic, musical and folk tradition of the ballad, and 'Ballad of a Hero' by performance poet Kate Tempest.

QUESTIONS

- What kinds of narratives do you find in these ballads? What is the subject matter?
- What does the ballad *do* with narrative? How do these narratives develop?
- What kinds of poetic voice do you find here? Who *speaks* in these poems?
- Are there features that these ballads all share? Any interesting differences?
- How has the ballad changed over time? Does the subject matter change?
- What can you say about the *form* of the ballad?

It was in and about the Martinmas¹ time,
When the green leaves were a falling,
That Sir John Graeme, in the West Country,
Fell in love with Barbara Allan.

He sent his men down through the town,
To the place where she was dwelling:
'O haste and come to my master dear,
Gin ye be Barbara Allan.'

O hooly, hooly² rose she up,
To the place where he was lying, 10
And when she drew the curtain by,
'Young man, I think you're dying.'
And when she drew the curtain by,
'Young man, I think you're dying.'

'O it's I'm sick, and very, very sick,
And 'tis a' for Barbara Allan:'
'O the better for me ye's never be,
Tho' your heart's blood were a spilling.

'O dinna ye mind,³ young man,' said she,
'When ye was in the tavern a drinking, 20
That ye made the healths gae round and round,⁴
And slighted Barbara Allan?'

He turn'd his face unto the wall,
And death was with him dealing:
'Adieu, adieu⁵, my dear friends all,
And death was with him dealing:

¹ *Martinmas*: St. Martin's Day, 11 November. The time of the annual slaughter of cattle for the winter.

² *hooly, hooly*: slowly, slowly

³ *dinna ye mind*: don't you remember

⁴ *To make the healths go round*: to drink toasts to everyone.

⁵ *Adieu*: goodbye

'Adieu, adieu, my dear friends all,
And be kind to Barbara Allan.'

And slowly, slowly raise she up,
And slowly, slowly left him, 30
And sighing said, she could not stay,
Since death of life had reft him.

She had not gane a mile but twa,
When she heard the dead-bell ringing,
And every jow that the dead-bell geid,
It cry'd, Woe to Barbara Allan!

'O mother, mother, make my bed!
O make it saft and narrow!
Since my love died for me to-day,
I'll die for him to-morrow.' 40

The Ballad of Sir Patrick Spens

THE king sits in Dumferling toune,
 Drinking the blude-reid wine:
 'O whar will I get guid sailor,
 To sail this schip of mine?'

Up and spak an eldern knicht,
 Sat at the king's richt kne:
 'Sir Patrick Spence is the best sailor
 That sails upon the se.'

The king has written a braid letter,
 And sign'd it wi' his hand,
 And sent it to Sir Patrick Spence,
 Was walking on the sand.

The first line that Sir Patrick red,
 A loud lauch lauched he;
 The next line that Sir Patrick red,
 The teir blinded his ee.

'O wha is this has don this deid,
 This ill deid don to me,
 To send me out this time o' the yeir,
 To sail upon the se!

'Mak hast, mak haste, my mirry men all,
 Our guid schip sails the morne:'
 'O say na sae, my master deir,
 For I feir a deadlie storme.

'Late late yestreen I saw the new moone,
 Wi' the auld moone in hir arme,
 And I feir, I feir, my master deir,
 That we will cum to harme.'

O our Scots nables wer richt laith
 To weet their cork-heild schoone;
 Bot lang owre a' the play wer playd,
 Their hats they swam aboone.

The Ballad of Sir Patrick Spens⁶

THE king sits in Dunfermline town,
 Drinking the blood-red wine:
 'O where will I get good sailor,
 To sail this ship of mine?'

Up and spake an elder knight,
 Sat at the king's right knee:
 'Sir Patrick Spence is the best sailor
 That sails upon the sea.'

The king has written a broad letter,
 And signed it wi' his hand,
 And sent it to Sir Patrick Spence,
 Was walking on the sand.

The first line that Sir Patrick read,
 A loud laugh laughed he;
 The next line that Sir Patrick read,
 The tear blinded his ee. [eye]

'O who is this has done this deed,
 This ill deed done to me,
 To send me out this time o' the year,
 To sail upon the sea!

'Make haste, make haste, my merry men all,
 Our good ship sails the morn:'
 'O say not so, my master dear,
 For I fear a deadly storm.

'Late late yesterday evening I saw the new moon,
 With the old moone in her arm,
 And I fear, I fear, my dear master,
 That we will come to harm.'

O our Scots nobles were right loath
 To wet their cork-heeled shoes;
 Bot long before all the play was played,
 Their hats they swam above.

⁶ This is a version of the poem with the Scots of the original anglicised.

O lang, lang may their ladies sit,
Wi' thair fans into their hand,
Or eir they se Sir Patrick Spence
Cum sailing to the land.

O lang, lang may the ladies stand,
Wi' thair gold kems in their hair,
Waiting for thair ain deir lords,
For they'll se thame na mair.

Haf owre, haf owre to Aberdour,
It's fiftie fadom deip,
And thair lies guid Sir Patrick Spence,
Wi' the Scots lords at his feit.

O long, long may their ladies sit,
With their fans into their hand,
Before they see Sir Patrick Spence
Come sailing to the land.

O long, long may the ladies stand,
With their gold combs in their hair,
Waiting for their own dear lords,
For they'll see them no more.

Have over, have over, to Aberdour,
It's fifty fathoms deep,
And there lies good Sir Patrick Spence,
With the Scots lords at his feet.

Lord Randal

Child Ballad 12

'O WHERE ha' you been, Lord Randal, my son?
And where ha' you been, my handsome young man?
'I h'a been at the greenwood; mother, make my bed soon,
For I 'en wearied wi' hunting, and fain wad lie down.'

| *would like to lie down*

'An wha met ye there, Lord Randal, my son?
An wha met you there, my handsome young man?
'O I met wi my true-love; mother, make my bed soon,
For I 'm wearied wi' huntin, an fain wad lie own.'

'And what did she give you, Lord Randal, my son?
And what slid she give you, my handsome young man?' 10
'Eels fried in a pan; mother, make my bed soon,
For I'm wearied wi' huntin, and fain wad lie down.'

'And wha gat your leavins, Lord Randal, my son?
And wha gat your leavins, my handsom young man ?'
'My hawks and my hounds; mother, make my bed soon,
For I'm wearied wi' hunting, and fain wad lie down.'

'And what becam of them, Lord Randal, my son?
And what becam of them, my handsome young man ?'
'They stretched their legs out an died; mother, make my bed soon,
For I 'm wearied wi' huntin, and fain wad lie down'

20

'O I fear you are poisoned, Lord Randal, my son!
I fear you are poisoned, my handsome young man
'O yes, I am poisoned; mother, make my bed soon,
For I'm sick at the heart, and I fain wad lie down.'

'What d'ye leave to your mother, Lord Randal, my son ?
What d'ye leave to your mother, my handsome young man?'
'Four and twenty milk kye; mother, make my bed soon,
For I'm sick at the heart, and I fain wad lie down.'

'What d'ye leave to your sister, Lord Randal, my son?
What d'ye leave to your sister, my handsome young man?' 30

'My gold and my silver; mother, make my bed soon,
For I'm sick at the heart, an I fain wad lie down.'

'What d'ye leave to your brother, Lord Randal, my son?
What d'ye leave to your brother, my handsome young man?'
'My houses and my lands; mother, make my bed soon,
For I'm sick at the heart, and I fain wad lie down.'

'What d'ye leave to your true-love, Lord Randal my son?
What d'ye leave to your true-love, my handsome young man?'
'I leave her hell and fire; mother, make my bed soon,
For I'm sick at the heart, and I fain wad lie down.'

40

The Three Ravens

Child Ballad 26

There were three ravens sat on a tree,
Down, a down, heigh down, heigh down
They were as black as they might be.
With a down, derry derry derry down down

Then one of them said to his mate,
'Where shall we our breakfast take?'

'Down in yonder green field,
There lies a knight slain under his shield.

'His hounds they lie down at his feet,
So well they can their master keep.

'His hawks they fly so eagerly,
There's no fowl dare come him nigh.'

| *nigh: near*

Down there comes a fallow doe,
As great with young as she might go.

| *great with young: pregnant*

She lift up his bloody head,
And kissed his wounds that were so red.

She got him up upon her back,
And carried him to earthen lake.

She buried him before the prime,
She was dead herself 'ere even-song time.

| *'ere: before*

God send every gentleman,
Such hawks, such hounds, and such a leman.

| *leman: lover*

Henry Martin

Child Ballad 167 / 250

There were three brothers in merry Scotland,
In merry Scotland there were three,
And they did cast lots which of them should go,
And turn robber all on the salt sea.

The lot it fell first upon Henry Martin,
The youngest of all three;
That he should turn robber all on the salt sea,
For to maintain his two brothers and he.

He had not been sailing but a long winter's night
And a part of a short winter's day, 10
Before he espied a stout lofty ship,
Come abiding down on him straight way.

Hullo! Hullo! cried Henry Martin,
What makes you sail so nigh?
I'm a rich merchant bound for fair London town,
Will you please for to let me pass by?

Oh no! Oh no! cried Henry Martin,
That thing it never could be,
For I am turned robber all on the salt sea
For to maintain my brothers and me. 20

Come lower your topsail and brail up your mizz'n
And bring your ship under my lee,
Or I will give you a full flowing ball,
And your dear bodies drown in the salt sea.

Oh no! we won't lower our lofty topsail,
Nor bow ourselves under your lee,
And you shan't take from us our rich merchant goods,
Nor point our bold guns to the sea.

With broadside and broadside and at it they went
For fully two hours or three,
Till Henry Martin gave to her the deathshot,
And straight to the bottom went she.

30

Bad news, bad news, to old England came,
Bad news to fair London Town,
There's been a rich vessel and she's cast away,
And all of the merry men drown'd.

La Belle Dame Sans Merci

O what can ail thee, wretched wight,
Alone and palely loitering?
The sedge is wither'd from the lake,
And no birds sing.

Ah, what can ail thee, wretched wight,
So haggard and so woe-begone?
The squirrel's granary is full,
And the harvest's done.

I see a lily on thy brow,
With anguish moist and fever-dew, 10
And on thy cheek a fading rose
Fast withereth too.

I met a lady in the meads,
Full beautiful, a faery's child;
Her hair was long, her foot was light,
And her eyes were wild.

I set her on my pacing steed,
And nothing else saw all day long,
For sideways would she lean, and sing 20
A faery's song.

I made a garland for her head,
And bracelets too, and fragrant zone;
She look'd at me as she did love,
And made sweet moan.

She found me roots of relish sweet,
And honey wild, and manna dew,
And sure in language strange she said.—
I love thee true.

She took me to her elfin grot,
And there she gaz'd and sighed deep, 30
And there I shut her wild sad eyes
So kiss'd to sleep.

And there we slumber'd on the moss,
And there I dream'd, ah woe betide!—
The latest dream I ever dream'd
On the cold hill side.

I saw pale kings, and princes too,
Pale warriors, death-pale were they all;
Who cry'd—'La Belle Dame sans Merci
Hath thee in thrall!' 40

I saw their starv'd lips in the gloam,
With horrid warning gaped wide,
And I awoke, and found me here,
On the cold hill's side.

And this is why I sojourn here,
Alone and palely loitering,
Though the sedge is withered from the lake,
And no birds sing.

John Keats (1819/1820)

This Weird Estate

The kintra drawn on this auld cairt
s'nae sae fremmit as it seems
but a kingdom ye nicht gang tae
in Elfyn-ballads an dreams

whaur the wildwid growes aa briars an thorns
an springs aa blue-red rin
an years o hard-wrocht traivelin
maun be tholed afore ye win

intae a clearing, whaur fower
bare trees gaird ilkane a gate –
– at lang an last ye'll ken yersel
laird o this weird estate

Kathleen Jamie (1962 –)

Glossary of Scots:

kintra – country
auld – old
s'nae – is not
sae - so
fremmit – strange / foreign
nicht – might
gang – go
tae – to
an – and
whaur – where
wildwid – wildwood
aa – all
rin – run
wrocht – wrought
traivelin – travelling
maun – must
tholed – endured
afore - before
intae – into
fower – 4
gaird – guard
ilkane – each one
lang an last – long last
ken – know
laird - lord

Ballad of a Hero

Your Daddy is a soldier son,
Your Daddy's gone to War,
His steady hands they hold his gun,
His aim is keen and sure.

Your Daddy's in the desert now,
The darkness and the dust,
He's fighting for his country, yes,
He's doing it for us.

Your Daddy's coming home soon though,
Not long now til he's back, 10
We'll dress you in your smartest shirt
And meet him down the track.

He'll put you on his shoulders and
You'll sing and clap and laugh,
I'll wrap my arms around his waist,
And hold him close at last.

You Dad ain't left the house again,
Your Dad ain't brushed his teeth,
Your Dad keeps getting angry son,
At nights he doesn't sleep. 20

He's having his bad dreams again,
He seems worn out and weak,
I've tried to be there for him, but
We barely even speak.

He can't think what to say to me,
He don't know how to tell it,
Won medals for his bravery,
But just wants to forget it.

He's drinking more than ever son,
Before, he never cried. But now, 30
I wake at night and feel
Him shaking by my side.

He spoke to me at last my son!
He turned to me in tears,
I held him close and kissed his face
And asked him what he feared.

He said it's getting darker,
It hasn't disappeared,
And I can see it sharper
Now the sand and smoke have cleared. 40

There was this kid he'd got to know,
Young boy. Just turned eighteen,
Bright and kind, his name was Joe,
He kept his rifle clean.

Joe's girlfriend was expecting,
Joe loved to joke and laugh,
Joe marched in front of your old man,
As they patrolled a path.

Everything was quiet until
They heard the dreaded blast. 50
The man that marched in front of Joe
Was completely blown apart.

Some shrapnel hit Joe in the face,
Gouged both eyes at once,
The last thing those eyes ever saw
Was the man in front:

Limbs and flesh and bone and blood,
Torn up and thrown around,
And after that — just blackness.
The taste, the stink, the sound. 60

I tell you this my son because
I know what you'll be like,
As soon as you've grown old enough
You'll want to go and fight.

In whatever battle needs you,
You'll pledge your blood and bone,
Not in the name of good or evil -
But in the name of home.

Your dad believes in fighting.
He fights for you and I,
But the men that send the armies in
Will never hear him cry.

70

I don't support the war my son,
I don't believe it's right,
But I do support the soldiers who
Go off to war to fight.

Troops just like your daddy son,
Soldiers through and through,
Who wear their uniform with pride,
And do what they're told to do.

80

When you're grown, my sweet, my love,
Please don't go fighting wars,
But fight the men that start them
Or fight a cause that's yours.

It seems so full of honour, yes,
So valiant, so bold,
But the men that send the armies in
Send them in for gold,

Or they send them in for oil,
And they tell us it's for Britain,
But the men come home like Daddy,
And spend their days just drinking.

90