

Writers and texts

▼ The tower of London was a royal treasury and stronghold as well as a prison, just outside the City of London.



Focus on the text. As a ballad, *Geordie* presents a fairly **complex narrative**: the storyteller, or narrator, meets a young girl who is lamenting the fate of her lover; the young girl rides on her pony to London's Court of Justice; there she finds many lords and ladies, to whom she pleads for the life of her lover; the judge says it is too late: Geordie has already been sentenced; Geordie is hanged; the girl proclaims her eternal devotion to her lover, for whom she would be ready to die. It is a compact dramatic story of love and death – and this is, again, typical of ballads. The element of mystery is less marked than in other ballads, but the general atmosphere is one of **impending death and violence**: the girl is ready to part with her children to save Geordie's life (stanza 5); Geordie is hanged (stanza 7); the girl is ready to kill with her sword and pistol (last stanza).

The **storyteller** is not outside the ballad, simply as a narrating voice, but inside it, as a character: he opens the first stanza with indications of **time and place** which are both general ("One misty morning early") and specific ("over London Bridge"). He also introduces the two main characters of the story: the young girl and Geordie. What we have here is a short poem made up of **narration** (stanzas 1, 3 and 7), **dialogue** (stanzas 2, 4-5 and 8), **narration and dialogue** (stanza 6). These characteristics give *Geordie*, together with certain traditional traits, its peculiar liveliness and narrative complexity. As such, the ballad has been interpreted both in an almost **realistic** way – as a true story – and as a **moving and mysterious** tale of love and death.

LANGUAGE THROUGH LITERATURE

1 Basic word order.

As you know, the basic word order in English is: **subject** + **verb** + **object**, as in 'I like chocolate'. The object may also be indirect, as in 'I go to the cinema'. In ballads, which are characterized by a simple language, this basic word order is fairly common.

Consider the first stanza of *Geordie*, in which subjects, verbs and objects are highlighted in, respectively, pink, green and blue, then highlight three more sentences in the corresponding colours showing the basic word order.

2 Changed word order.

In poetry, however, and sometimes in speech, to give emphasis to certain words or for the sake of rhythm, the basic word order may be changed, as in "Nor sheep he never stole any" [l. 14].

Highlight in the ballad three more sentences showing a changed word order.

3 Consider the adjectives.

Highlight in yellow all the **adjectives** in the ballad and write them down. The first one has been done for you in line 2.

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