Early English Ballads and the poems they make

Oral roots, cheap print, and the literary uses of ballad material
A New Song... between Robin Hood and the jovial Tinker (late 1600s) adding episodes to a well-known story

EBBA ID: 20729
Magdalene College - Pepys 2.107

https://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/ballad/20729/xml

Ballads were typically printed on single sheets of paper, often with woodcut illustrations.
Now of the Seven Champions here, my Purpose is to write; To shew how they with sword and spear, put many Foes to flight:

Distressed Ladies to release, and Captives bound in Chains; That Christian glory to encrease, which evermore remains.

First, I give you to understand, that Great St. George by Name, Was the true Champion of our Land, and of his Birth and Fame…
The Male and Female Husband (late 1600s): an intersex character

EBBA ID: 33456 National Library of Scotland - Crawford 257

https://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/ballad/33456/xml

To the Tune of, What shall I do, shall I dye for Love, &c.

Both broadsheets and the ballad form were also used for sensational “news”
Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* (1596)

The same stories migrated from elite to popular genres and back again: *FQ* was an attempt to make (prestigious) national epic out of (devalued) folk materials. The Faust legend is another example!
Ballad meter: what is it?

1. 4 line stanzas (aka quatrains);
2. Alternating rhyme pattern (abba);
3. Iambic meter (weak/strong);
4. Alternating tetrameter (8 syllable) and trimeter (6 syllable) lines.

Where dost thou live quod Robin Hood,  
I pray thee now me tell,  
Sad news I hear there is abroad,  
I fear all is not well.

(from “A New Song... between Robin Hood and the jovial Tinker”)
Two versions of a Wordsworth poem in ballad meter

Draft included in a letter to Coleridge
(December 1798 or January 1799)

My hope was one, from cities far
Nursed on a lonesome heath:
Her lips were red as roses are,
Her hair a woodbine wreath.

She lived among the untrodden ways
Beside the springs of Dove,
A maid whom there were none to praise,
And very few to love;

A violet by a mossy stone
Half-hidden from the eye!
Fair as a star when only one
Is shining in the sky!

And she was graceful as the broom
That flowers by Carron's side;
But slow distemper checked her bloom,
And on the Heath she died.

Long time before her head lay low
Dead to the world was she:
But now she's in her grave, and Oh!
The difference to me!

Final version
(Lyrical Ballads, 1800)

She dwelt among the untrodden ways
Beside the springs of Dove
A Maid whom there were none to praise
And very few to love:

A violet by a mossy stone
Half hidden from the eye!
--Fair as a star, when only one
Is shining in the sky.

She lived unknown, and few could know
When Lucy ceased to be;
But she is in her grave, and, oh,
The difference to me!
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F18

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