Medieval ballads were anonymous narrative poems, whose distinctive style developed in Europe in the late Middle Ages and persists to the present day in communities where literacy, urban contacts have little affected the habit of folk singing. Intended to be sung with the accompaniment of music ballads are short stories in verse, coming directly from popular tradition.

Since ballads thrive among unlettered people and are freshly created from memory at each separate performance, they are subject to constant variation in both text and tune. The new versions of ballads that arise as the result of cumulative variations are no less authentic than their antecedents.
Generally, in every ballad, there is a refrain: a phrase or a line, which is repeated again and again after a stanza. Use of colloquial language is an indispensable feature of a ballad: they use commons words and stock phrases easy to be memorized. The story is often told through dialogues.

The traditional ballad had no single author, rather, it was the product of many poets.

Ballads usually have an abrupt and unexpected opening, they don't provide any details about the subject matter, the surroundings, atmosphere or environment. The ending of many ballads may also be abrupt and unexpected. Motifs or precedings are not explained and often there are supernatural elements.

The content of a ballad often involves love and death, battles, adventure or a quest or journey involving risk and crossing boundaries, or desire and loss.

The characters reveal themselves in their actions or speeches; Alliteration is often used as well as the rhyme scheme ABCB ABAB.
As I walked out over London Bridge
One misty morning early,
I overheard a fair pretty maid
Was lamenting for her Geordie.

“My Geordie will be hanged in a golden chain ‘Tis is not the chain of many
He was born of king's royal breed
And lost to a virtuous lady.

Go bridle me my milk white steed
Go bridle me my pony,
I will ride to London’s court
To plead for the life of Geordie.

My Geordie never stole nor cow nor calf,
He never hurted any,
Stole sixteen of the king’s royal deer And he sold them in Bohemy.

Two pretty babies have I born,
The third lies in my body;
I’d freely part with them every one If you’d spare the life of Georde”.

The judge looked over his left shoulder,
he said," Fair maid I am sorry."
He said," fair maid you must be gone For I cannot pardon Geordie."

“My Geordie will be hanged in a golden chain, ‘Tis not the chain of many
Stole sixteen of the king’s royal deer And he sold them in Bohemy.”
The ballad is divided into quatrains: there are seven stanzas of four lines.

There are imperfect rhymes.

The ballad is set in London and there is a mix of narration and direct speech between the maid and the judge.

There are some repetitions of words and phrases.

There is the presence of some formulaic expressions: a beautiful woman; a fair pretty maid; a white horse; a milk-white steed; an omen of bad luck: tis not the chain of many.
The protagonist of the song, named Geordie, is a young man who has committed a crime, in fact he has stolen some of the king's deer, and therefore he will be hanged. His wife tries to convince the judge not to condemn Geordie.
According to the Scottish hypothesis, the ballad seems to have a historical basis: it is the story of George Gordon, marquis and count of Huntly, who was sentenced to death as a traitor in 1589 for rebelling against James VI, king of Scotland. Through the intercession of the family he was freed upon delivery of a ransom; it is probable that James VI through this concession wanted to avoid the clash with George’s family, who had always been a powerful ally of the Crown.