



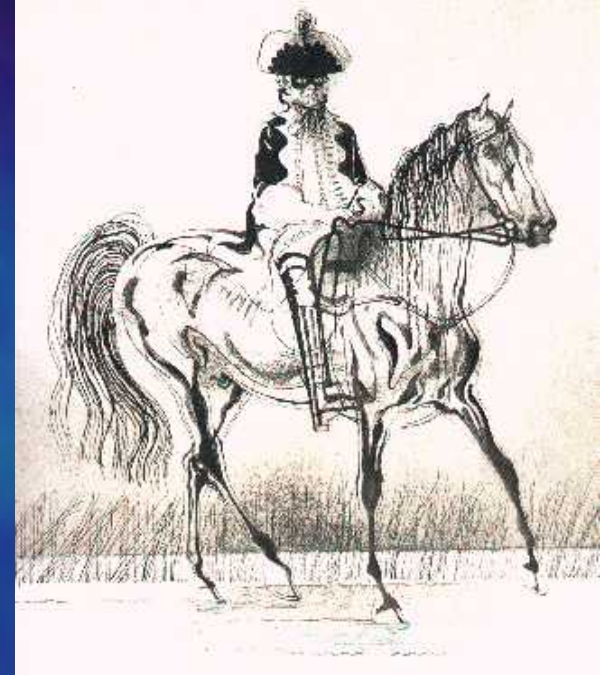
# The Highwayman

By Alfred Noyes (1880-1958)

# The Highwayman

"The Highwayman" is a narrative poem

written by Alfred Noyes, first published in the August 1906 issue of *Blackwood's Magazine*. The following year it was included in Noyes' collection, *Forty Singing Seamen and Other Poems*, becoming an immediate success.



# PLOT

The poem, set in 18th century England, tells the story of a nameless highwayman who is in love with Bess, a landlord's (innkeeper) daughter. Betrayed to the authorities by a jealous ostler (stableman), the highwayman escapes ambush when Bess sacrifices her life to warn him. Learning of her death he dies himself in a futile attempt at revenge, shot down on the highway. In the final stanza, the ghosts of the lovers meet again on winter nights.

The wind was a torrent of darkness among the gusty trees,  
The moon was a ghostly galleon tossed upon cloudy seas,  
The road was a ribbon of moonlight over the purple moor,  
And the highwayman came riding—  
Riding—riding—  
The highwayman came riding, up to the old inn-door.





He'd a French cocked-hat on his forehead, a bunch of  
lace at his chin,  
A coat of the claret velvet, and breeches of brown doe-skin;  
They fitted with never a wrinkle: his boots were up to the  
thigh!  
And he rode with a jewelled twinkle,  
His pistol butts a-twinkle,  
His rapier hilt a-twinkle, under the jewelled sky.



Over the cobbles he clattered and clashed in the dark inn-  
yard,  
And he tapped with his whip on the shutters, but all was  
locked and barred;  
He whistled a tune to the window, and who should be  
waiting there  
But the landlord's black-eyed daughter,  
    Bess, the landlord's daughter,  
Plaiting a dark red love-knot into her long black hair.

And dark in the dark old inn-yard a **stable-wicket** creaked  
Where Tim the **ostler** listened; his face was white and  
**peaked**;

His eyes were hollows of madness, his hair like mouldy hay,  
But he loved the landlord's daughter,

The landlord's red-lipped daughter,

**Dumb** as a dog he listened, and he heard the robber say—





- He rose upright in the **stirrups**; he scarce could reach her hand,  
But she loosened her hair in the **casement**! His face burnt like a **brand**  
As the black cascade of perfume came **tumbling** over his breast;  
And he kissed its waves in the moonlight,  
(Oh, sweet, black waves in the moonlight!)  
Then he tugged at his rein in the moonlight, and galloped away to the West.



He did not come in the dawning; he did not come at noon;  
And out o' the **tawny** sunset, before the rise o' the moon,  
When the road was a gypsy's ribbon, looping the purple moor,  
A **red-coat troop** came marching—

Marching—marching—

King George's men came matching, up to the old inn-door



They said no word to the landlord, they drank his ale  
instead,  
But they gagged his daughter and bound her to the foot of her  
narrow bed;  
Two of them knelt at her casement, with muskets at their side!  
There was death at every window;  
                    And hell at one dark window;  
For Bess could see, through her casement, the road that *he*  
would ride.

They had tied her up to attention, with many a **sniggering**  
**jest;**

They had bound a musket beside her, with the barrel  
beneath her chest!

"Now, keep good watch!" and they kissed her.

She heard the dead man say—

*Look for me by moonlight;*

*Watch for me by moonlight;*

*I'll come to thee by moonlight, though hell should bar the  
way!*



---

She twisted her hands behind her; but all the knots held good!  
She writhed her hands till her fingers were wet with sweat or  
blood!

They stretched and strained in the darkness, and the hours  
crawled by like years,

Till, now, on the stroke of midnight,

Cold, on the stroke of midnight,

The tip of one finger touched it! The trigger at least was hers!

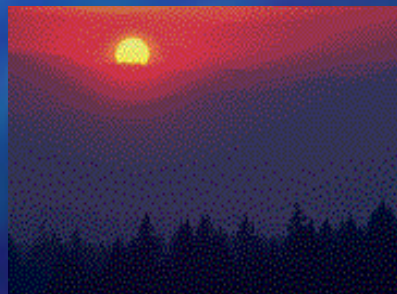
The tip of one finger touched it; she strove no more for the rest!

Up, she stood up to attention, with the barrel beneath her chest,

She would not risk their hearing; she would not strive again;  
For the road lay bare in the moonlight;

Blank and bare in the moonlight;

And the blood of her veins in the moonlight throbbed to her love's refrain .



*Tlot-tlot; tlot-tlot!* Had they heard it? The horse-hoofs  
ringing clear;

*Tlot-tlot, tlot-tlot,* in the distance? Were they deaf that  
they did not hear?

Down the ribbon of moonlight, over the brow of the hill,  
The highwayman came riding.....

Riding, riding!

The red-coats **looked to their priming!** She stood up,  
straight and still!



*Tlot-tlot, in the frosty silence! Tlot-tlot, in the echoing night!*

Nearer he came and nearer! Her face was like a light!  
Her eyes grew wide for a moment; she drew one last deep breath,

Then her finger moved in the moonlight,

Her musket shattered the moonlight,  
Shattered her chest in the moonlight and warned him—  
with her death.





He turned; he spurred to the West; he did not know who stood.  
Bowed, with her head o'er the musket, drenched with her own  
red blood!

Not till the dawn he heard it, his face grew grey to hear  
How Bess, the landlord's daughter,

The landlord's black-eyed daughter,

Had watched for her love in the moonlight, and died in the  
darkness there.

Back, he spurred like a madman, shrieking a curse to the sky,  
With the white road smoking behind him and his rapier  
brandished high!

Blood-red were his spurs in the golden noon; wine-red was his  
velvet coat,

When they shot him down on the highway,  
Down like a dog on the highway,

And he lay in his blood on the highway, with the bunch of lace  
at his throat.



*And still of a winter's night, they say, when the wind is in the trees,*

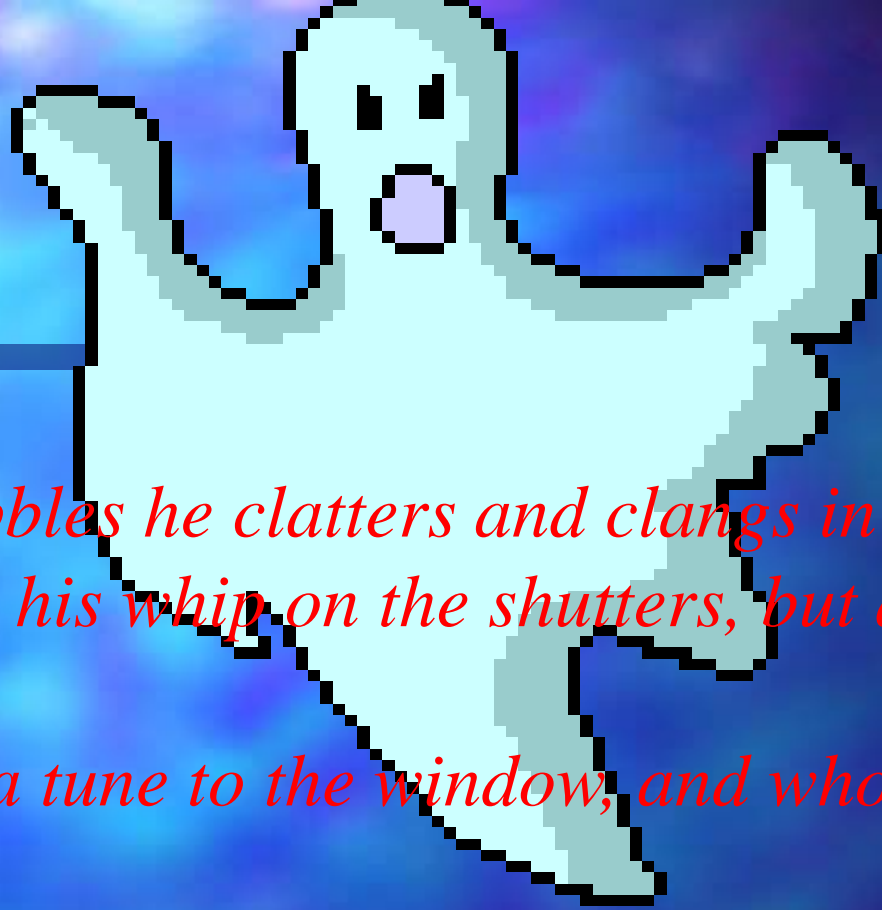
*When the moon is a ghostly galleon tossed upon cloudy seas,*

*When the road is a ribbon of moonlight over the purple moor,*

*A highwayman comes riding—*

*Riding—riding—*

*A highwayman comes riding, up to the old inn-door.*



*Over the cobbles he clatters and clangs in the dark inn-yard;  
He taps with his whip on the shutters, but all is locked and  
barred;  
He whistles a tune to the window, and who should be waiting  
there*

*But the landlord's black-eyed daughter,  
Bess, the landlord's daughter,  
Plaiting a dark red love-knot into her long black hair.*

# ONOMATOPOEIA

ON – O – MAT – O – PEA –A

We are using onomatopoeia when we use a word that SOUNDS like its meaning.

Can you think of any words from the text of the Highwayman poem that uses onomatopoeia?

Remember.....

*Tlot-tlot*, in the frosty silence! *Tlot-tlot*,  
in the echoing night!"

*Tlot-tlot*, is the sound made by the highwayman's..... horse.

Here are some more!

BANG – CRASH – CUCKOO – WHISTLE - SLITHER