

## The Lonely Horde

Full brave are those who face the unexplored  
Through lands that stand as yet untouched by sight.  
And braver, still, the ones, alone, who ford  
The unnamed rivers, depths unknown to light.  
With each new step is reached a greater height,  
Full paid by blood some lonely pilgrim shed.  
And so alone does travel every wight,  
A lonely horde held fast by common thread.

So on and on does march this lonely horde,  
Each forced to travel lonely through this night.  
Each step does strike another lonely chord  
As each does lonely reckon with their plight.  
And though each pilgrim lonely makes their flight,  
They walk together, fates together wed.  
In kinship forge they ever unto light,  
A lonely horde held fast by common thread.

Though now they wander, as a ship unmoored,  
Soon comes a time when all may reunite.  
When all from lowly lout to lofty lord  
Shall once again make feast and share delight,  
And stories of their separate days recite.  
Each pilgrim knows such days do lie ahead.  
Such promise does their lonely hearts ignite,  
A lonely horde held fast by common thread.

And so this hope, pray, let us all invite,  
To fill our hearts where once there did dwell dread.  
And for each moment lost, let us requite.  
A lonely horde held fast by common thread.

## Documentation

This poem is written as a ballade, one of the three “formes fixe” of French poetry. They generally have three stanzas followed by a (usually) shorter envoi, repeating part of the rhyme scheme of the preceding stanzas, with a refrain at the end of each.

Period examples exist by various authors:

Guillaume de Machaut used the form often, writing in the 14th century.

([https://www.lieder.net/lieder/get\\_text.html?TextId=10537](https://www.lieder.net/lieder/get_text.html?TextId=10537))

François Villon, in the 15th century, also used the form.

(<http://www.projetbrassens.eclipse.co.uk/pages/transballade.html>)

Although the form was most commonly written in French, English examples do exist. For example, by Chaucer

(<https://rpo.library.utoronto.ca/content/rosemounde>).

Each of these authors wrote multiple ballades (Machaut and Villon especially used the form often), these are just a few I found representative of the form and its variations.

The number of lines in both the stanzas and envoi varied, but for mine I opted for three stanzas of eight lines and an envoi of four (the same form as in Villon’s “Ballade des dames du temps jadis”), which was roughly average among the examples I found. Given that this form does not repeat rhyme words, I also felt this length was manageable without running out of reasonable rhymes.

This poem reflects on the experiences of the past year and a half (or so) of all of our lives. Forced to isolate in the face of the pandemic, we all made our own journeys in the solitude of our homes, physically separate but united in spirit by the common difficulties we all faced. As we finally begin to open back up, the possibility of being together again seems ever closer, and fills our hearts with hope again.