

How have modern poets such as Charles Causley been inspired by the ballad essay

[Profession](#), [Poet](#)



A ballad is a popular way of telling a story.

It is part of an oral tradition where the ballad is sung or told aloud. The old surviving ballads were mostly from the middle-ages and mainly Scottish. A lot of the English ones were lost as the written word was used for the spreading of the news and stories instead of making ballads with them. People were normally paid to create and sing the ballads. These people were called ballad mongers.

Ballads were first made because not many people could read or write and they were an easy way of remembering the stories. The ballads were based on true stories, which were stripped down to the basics. Such as in *The Two Corbies*, this ballad tells a simple story of two crows planning to eat a dead man who was killed by his wife. One of the crows asks the other “ Where shall we gang and dine to-day? ” The second one replies “ I wot there lies a new slain knight. ” Later on it is suggested that his lady killed him because “ His lady’s ta’en another mate”. Some ballads are in a question and answer form to help the listener to understand and it is also another way of revealing the storyline, like in *Edward Edward*, where the mother questions her son till she finds out that he killed his father and is planning on leaving her, his wife and children; “ “ O I have killed my father dear, Mother, mother’.

... ‘ And what will ye leave to your bairns and your wife, Edward, Edward? ‘ ” Other ballads have chorus, these are the ones which were sung. Each verse in a ballad has a vivid scene or special dialogue. For example in *Sir Patrick Spens* there was a really vivid scene of a storm.

“ When the light grew dark, and the wind blew loud, and gurgly grew the sea. ”

All ballads deal with a heroic way of life whether it is with loyalty to family or loyalty in love, they normally have an act of heroism or tragedy in them. New ballads tend to have personal tragedies which involves normal people whereas old ballads have tragedies which involves knights and princesses. Both old and new ballads have a definite rhythm of ABCB and a beat pattern of 4343 in each verse.

Each verse is a 4 line stanza. All of this helps to keep the story simple and easy to learn. New ballads differ from the old because they are written down so the reader can look back and re-read it, they can be more complex and have symbolic meanings whereas the old need to be simple to understand the first time that they're heard. Throughout the ages poets have been inspired by the ballad including the modern poet Charles Causley. ' The Ballad of the Bread Man', like an original ballad, tells a story. It tells the story of Jesus Christ, from the Annunciation to the Resurrection, but it gives a modern twist to it.

Causley uses colloquial speech throughout the poem such as, “ The old man's past it, the neighbours said. That girl's been up to no good. ” And, “ They stored him safe as water. ” to modernise the story.

In the original story Mary and Joseph went to Joseph's home town for the Roman census. In this version they go to town because “ It was election winter”. Originally Jesus was born in a Stable at the back of an inn and at first some Sheppard's turn up to see him. This is changed to the baby being

born in an annex, “ Next to the local pub. With “ a delegation” from the “ Farmers’ Club” turning up.

Then instead of three wise men, “ a bishop, and a five-star general were seen, with the head of an African country”, arriving a few days later. The last people to arrive were soldiers who came “ With rifle and bomb and gun, Looking for enemies of the state. ” They were instead of King Herod’s army, which originally were sent to kill the baby Jesus because King Herod wanted all babies dead. In this ballad “ bread” is a metaphor for Jesus’ teachings, the bread man offers his fathers bread, “ Here is some bread from my father. Take, eat,” he said, where as Jesus was offering the Word of God, our father, to those who would listen. Later on Jesus wears “ A paper crown on his head” instead of a thorn one and was shot dead instead of being put on a cross to die which was a traditional way of execution back then.

The Ballad of the Bread Man deals with the story of a hero, Jesus, and his heroic way of life. It shows that even though he never fitted in with anyone, “ That boy will never be one of us” said the neighbours, he still persisted with his cause even when no one wanted to hear about it, “ Nobody seemed very hungry. Nobody seemed to care. The bread man ended up dead which was a tragedy made worse because still no one wanted his “ bread”, “ Now do you want any loafs? ” He cried.

“ Not today, they said. ” One of the vivid scenes is at the start, where God is described as being in his “ big gold heaven. Sitting in his big blue chair,” this scene is so vivid because of the child-like alliteration in the description.

Another vivid scene starts with “ Nobody seemed very hungry. ” This is vivid because of the repetition of “ Nobody” at the start of each stanza and the fact that the poem takes on a more serious note from this scene onwards.

The poem also has the ballad form. All of this proves that Causley was inspired by the ballad in this poem. Causley was also inspired by the ballad in another poem called ‘ What has happened to Lulu? ’ The poem, just like a ballad, tells a story. This story is about a young child wondering where their older sister is.

“ What has happened to Lu? ” The child asks. The younger child discovers Lulu’s empty bedroom and goes to their mother, who doesn’t tell them what has happened.” Why do you crumple that note on the fire and say it is nothing at all? The child questions and then goes on to say what she heard the night before, “ I woke to voices late last night, I heard an engine roar. ” Yet the mother dismisses it as a “ dream and nothing more”. The child then questions why the mother is wondering about as though she “ don’t know what to do”.

It ends with the child asking the same questions it began with, “ What has happened to Lulu, mother? What has happened to Lu? ” I think it is a younger child asking all the questions because she shortens Lulu’s name to Lu (Lulu could even be short for Louise) just like a young girl would. Also it becomes clear that Lulu has run away from home yet the child is too young to understand that and she is still asking the same question at the end, like she’s gone round in a circle. It is obvious that Lulu has run away because she

left a shoe hinting that she left in a hurry, “ by its side a shoe. ” And her window is wide open with “ the curtain flapping free,” she has also taken her money-box because there’s a “ circle on the dusty shelf where her money-box use to be”. As with most runaways she left a note which the mother then crumples up and throws in the fire.

It is also suggested that someone picked her up, like an older boyfriend or something, and left in a hurry. I think this because the child hears an “ engine roar” and if they left slowly it wouldn’t have been so loud. The form, again like a ballad, has the traditional ballad form with a regular beat of 4343 and rhythm of ABCB. This poem deals with the personal tragedy of a girl running away from home.

One of the most vivid scenes would have to be second one where the child inspects Lulu’s bedroom. It has alliteration in the first stanza, “ wide window”, and it shows how observant the child is because she notices that the window is open, the curtain is flapping and there’s a space where the money-box used to be. Again this shows how a modern poet has been inspired by the ballad. Yet again Causley has been inspired by the ballad in another one of his poems, “ Green man in the Garden”. This poem tells the story of a person who sees a green man in his garden. “ Green man in the garden staring from the tree.

The green man wants the person to leave their house but they didn’t want to, “ Leave your house and leave your land and throw away the key”, “ I bolted up the window, I bolted up the door”. But at the end the green man

turns up inside the house, “ As I went up to bed, I saw the green man standing there. ” The green man is described as being quite devil-like with dark eyes and horns “ of sycamore”, his bones “ are made of elder-branch” which shows that he has no skin. His teeth are sharp and pointed as they are made of thorns. He also sounds elf-like as he has “ dancing shoes”, and wears a green “ jacket and shirt and trowsers.

This poem is about how you can't hide from your fears. Your fears are represented by the green man, you can try and hide from them by locking the door, but they always come back, you can't run from them. Like the others, this poem has the traditional ballad form. Yet unlike a ballad or the other poems this one does not have a hero or a tragedy in it. Yet it does have vivid scenes in it like the ballad.

One of them is where the green man is being described in the second stanza. It's so vivid because the description makes you think if the green man is real or not. This is because it sounds like a tree, “ sycamore”, “ elder-branch” and “ thorns”. It could have been a tree moving in the wind. Another vivid scene is where the person locks up the house in the fifth stanza. This is vivid because there is the repetition of the word “ bolted” and it clearly shows the person's feelings towards the green man.

He doesn't want the green man in his house, “ I drew the blind that I should find the green man never more. ” This poem, as well as the others, prove just how much the ballad has influenced modern poets.