

The Ballad of William Bloat

“The Ballad of William Bloat,” a ballad written by Raymond Calvert, is about a man named William Bloat describing how he kills his wife. Calvert wrote the poem influenced by the ongoing conflict between the Catholics and the Protestants in Belfast¹.

The Ballad takes place on Skankill Road, which is a road in Ireland where the Protestants and the Catholics lived in unhappy unison. The Protestants, a group that denied the universal authority of the Pope, had a center of militant Protestantism on Skankill Road; William Bloat had been known to have been a member of this group. As proof, in William Bloat’s last words, he cursed the Pope.

Raymond Calvert was an Irish writer born in 1906. He wrote this poem while attending a university in Belfast near the location of where the poem takes place. The poem was originally written for a cast party in 1926 but it was later transformed into a song and an advertisement for Belfast linen. The final line was changed from “Irish linen” to “Belfast linen.”

The poem is comprised of five stanzas each one being six lines in length. The rhyming scheme goes ABCBDB, however in the final stanza there is one imperfect rhyme. There is internal rhyme in the first, third and fifth lines of each stanza. The sound of the poem as it’s being read sounds happy and upbeat, similar to a limerick, also originating in Ireland. This is a strange pairing because the poem contains dark subject matter which doesn’t suit the typical limerick style. Calvert may have written the poem to be comedic at a cast party with irony and a plot twist at the end.

The reasons why William Bloat killed his wife are briefly explained, however Calvert didn’t go into much detail. He may have killed her because she was a Catholic. William Bloat has been known to have been a Protestant which would have given him a motive since the rivalry was so big between the two groups.

In conclusion, the reason Raymond Calvert wrote the poem was likely to make people laugh at a cast party, hence the comedic irony present in it. The conflict between the Protestants and the Catholics clearly influenced the writing of the poem.

¹ http://chivalry.com/cantaria/lyrics/william_bloat.html