

# Robert Burns and The Interpretation of Folk Motifs and Love in His Lyrics

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**Abstract:** This article explores the life and work of the great Scottish poet Robert Burns, providing insight into his entry into the world of literature. Particular attention is given to the themes of folk spirit, patriotism, love for his beloved and homeland, as well as the reflection of national values in his poetry.

**Keywords:** Poetry, dialect, folk motifs, love, inspiration.

**Introduction:** Robert Burns, widely regarded as the national poet of Scotland, was not only a literary figure of the Romantic era but also a cultural preserver of Scottish folk tradition. His lyrics are deeply infused with folk motifs—traditional themes, symbols, and structures drawn from oral literature, music, and rural life. These elements do more than provide local color; they serve as the emotional and aesthetic backbone of his work, connecting his poetry to the collective consciousness of the Scottish people. In his works, he skillfully covered the themes of folk life, the beauty of nature, love and humanity. Burns' poetry is dominated by folk tones, humor and sincerity, and his work has become an integral part of the cultural heritage of Scotland.

Robert Burns was born on January 25, 1759 in the village of Alloway, Ayrshire, Scotland. Born into a farming family, he had to work hard from childhood. His father, William Burns, wanted his children to receive an education and taught them to read and write. Robert was interested in literature from his young age and began to write poetry in English and Scottish.

Burns' first love was a girl named Nellie Kirkpatrick, to whom he dedicated one of his first poems [5, 1971: 81]. However, the poet's life was not always smooth - he faced financial difficulties and complications in his personal life.

After the family moved to another farm in 1777, Burns tried farming, but did not achieve much success in this

endeavor. As a result, he paid more serious attention to literature and published his first collection of poetry. The changes in his life and various difficulties began to be reflected in R. Burns's work.

His lyrical work occupies a special place in the literary heritage not only of Scotland, but also of the whole world. In his works, the poet reflects the spiritual experiences, feelings, lifestyle and cultural values of the Scottish people with high skill and folklorist. His lyrical output, especially his contributions to song collections such as *The Scots Musical Museum* and *A Select Collection of Original Scottish Airs for the Voice*, reveals a profound engagement with folk motifs—traditional themes, symbols, and narrative structures drawn from Scotland's rich oral heritage.[9.1968,22] These motifs are not employed merely for their aesthetic appeal; rather, they serve as cultural signifiers that ground Burns's poetry in the lived experience of the Scottish people, particularly the rural working class. In addition, in his works, the feeling of homeland, natural landscapes and the image of a lover who is overcome by the pain of his beloved are described in sincere language. He reflected the subtleties of folk poetry in his artistic style, introducing aesthetic elevation into the lives of ordinary people.

Folk motifs are very strongly manifested in the lyrics of Robert Burns. In his works, he reflects the national customs, traditions and lifestyle of the Scottish people in simple language. In order to reflect the spirit of the people, Burns created poems inspired by Scottish folk songs, legends and oral traditions. This makes his

poetry more sincere and quickly takes root in the hearts of readers. Burns's role as both collector and adapter of folk materials is critical to understanding his literary legacy. Rather than treating traditional songs as static artifacts, he actively reshaped and refined them, fusing folk idioms with his own poetic sensibility. His stated intention to "preserve the ancient melodies of my country" speaks to a conscious effort to mediate between the oral and the literary, the communal and the individual. [6.2000;23]

Folk motifs permeate his lyrics in various forms, including natural imagery, archetypal figures, seasonal references, and the evocation of rustic life. These elements not only locate his work within a specific cultural and geographical milieu but also function as conduits for expressing universal human emotions such as love, grief, and joy.

Burns's famous poem "Auld Lang Syne" (The Good Old Days) is distinguished by its richness in folk motifs. This poem is based on the Scottish national song and covers topics such as friendship and the value of the past. The folk dialect and feelings in it can be seen in the following examples:

Should auld acquaintance be forgot,  
And never brought to mind?  
Should auld acquaintance be forgot,  
And auld lang syne?[2. 1786; 42]

These lines glorify the remembrance of the past, not forgetting, the appreciation of old friends and the sincerity of human relationships. Folk motifs are visible in the general content of the poem and its performance. It can be seen that the words in the poem are created from verses which are close to the hearts of their people. The fact that the poem does not depict a big social theme, but simple human feelings is one of the main features of the poetry.

In addition, love is one of the main themes in the work of R. Burns. He raises the theme of love not only in romantic, but also in all manifestations of human relationships. Among the most persistent motifs in Burns's lyrics is romantic love, often articulated through the conventions of traditional balladry. Songs such as "A Red, Red Rose", "Ae Fond Kiss", and "Green Grow the Rashes, O" exhibit a marked influence of oral tradition, particularly in their use of refrains, simple diction, and symbolic imagery. [9. 2001;47] Burns situates romantic narratives within communal settings—dances, harvest gatherings, and rural festivals—thus reinforcing the social function of courtship and affection in folk culture. [13 2010;78] His frequent use of the Scots vernacular further authenticates these experiences, aligning them with

the linguistic identity of his audience. [4.1985;142]

In the poem "My Love is Like a Red, Red Rose", love is described as boundless and loyal. The feeling of love in his poems is unique in its sincerity and imagery.

O my Luve is like a red, red rose

That's newly sprung in June;

O my Luve is like the melody,

That's sweetly played in tune.

The red rose, a recurring motif, serves as a culturally resonant symbol of beauty and passion, while the hyperbolic expressions of enduring love echo the stylized emotional excess typical of folk verse. The central theme of the poem is the permanence and idealization of romantic love. The speaker compares his love to a "red, red rose" and a "melody. That's sweetly played in tune," invoking both natural and artistic imagery. These similes emphasize beauty, harmony, and the emotional freshness of the beloved. [3. 2009;43] As the poem progresses, love is portrayed as transcending physical and temporal boundaries, evident in the hyperbolic lines:

Till a' the seas gang dry, my Dear,

And the rocks melt wi' the sun:

I will luve thee still, my dear,

While the sands o' life shall run.

"Till a' the seas gang dry" and "the rocks melt wi' the sun."

Such exaggerated expressions serve not to deceive but to intensify the depth of the speaker's emotional commitment. These metaphors reflect a core Romantic belief — that genuine emotion can surpass the constraints of the material world.

Burns's use of Scots dialect (e.g., "luve," "gang," "wi'") adds both a regional identity and emotional authenticity to the poem. [1.1973;67] The dialect grounds the lofty subject of eternal love in the familiar, everyday speech of the Scottish people. This juxtaposition between the universality of love and the intimacy of personal expression enables the poem to function on both folk and literary levels.

R. Burns is one of those poets who does not seek inspiration from far away. Inspiration for him is embodied in the beloved next to him, in the smile of his beloved, in the rye field, in the valleys, rivers and mountains of his country, in the history of his homeland, in the suffering of national heroes. Due to his strong love for his homeland, he prefers to write most of his poems in the Scottish dialect.

Natural imagery plays a central role in the poem's emotional appeal. The rose, newly sprung in June,

symbolizes freshness, youth, and beauty. Likewise, the metaphor of the melody suggests emotional harmony and depth. The speaker's use of hyperbole — including claims of love enduring until “the seas gang dry” and beyond “ten thousand mile” — reflects the Romantic era's fascination with infinite emotion and transcendental experience.[7.1988;73] These rhetorical flourishes are not merely ornamental; they signal the speaker's desire to communicate love in its most intense and enduring form, asserting its capacity to overcome even the laws of nature and geography.

Nature occupies a central place in folk literature, often serving as both setting and symbol. Burns's lyrics reflect this tradition through their vivid descriptions of flora, fauna, and landscape. In “Now Westlin Winds”, for example, the poet integrates natural and emotional rhythms, drawing a parallel between the changing seasons and the vicissitudes of love. [4.1985;142] Such alignments are characteristic of folk sensibility, which often views the natural world not as a passive backdrop but as a dynamic participant in human affairs.

This ecological consciousness is also evident in Burns's pastoral songs, where the land is portrayed not only as a source of livelihood but as a repository of cultural memory and identity. His attention to the specificities of place—names of rivers, hills, and valleys—functions as a form of ethnographic documentation, preserving local knowledge within poetic form.

Robert Burns, despite his short life, is one of the creators who lived his life meaningfully. His lyrical work occupies a special place in the literary heritage of not only Scotland, but also the whole world. In his works, the poet reflects the spiritual experiences, emotions, lifestyle and cultural values of the Scottish people with high skill and folklorist. In addition, in his work, the feeling of the homeland, natural landscapes and the image of a lover who is lost in the pain of his beloved are described in sincere language. He reflected the subtleties of folk poetry in his artistic style, introducing aesthetic elevation into the lives of ordinary people. By incorporating traditional themes, symbols, and linguistic forms, Burns not only preserved a vanishing cultural tradition but also reconstituted it within the framework of literary artistry. His work exemplifies the permeability of boundaries between oral and written cultures and underscores the capacity of folk motifs to convey complex human experiences. In Burns, the lyric becomes a site of cultural continuity, where the voices of the past are not merely echoed but reimagined for posterity Robert Burns is one of the poets who were able to reflect the life experiences of the people through poetry and make them an integral part of the national culture of Scotland.

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