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# Robert Burns' Poetic Style Through his Poetry, Songs, and Correspondence

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SUMMARY

This thesis explores connections and contradictions within the songs, correspondence, and poems of Scotland's bard, Robert Burns. A selection of works from each of these categories is presented to compare the ways Burns writes verse, lyric, and letter. Through this thesis, I analyzed his work looking at subject matter, use of the Scots dialect, structure, and poetic devices in order to offer holistic commentary on Burns' style in a way that includes his letters more heavily than most other Burns scholarship. Overall, I thought Burns remained a consistent man of conviction and societal criticism throughout my findings, as well as someone who proved his skill in writing in English and Scots in order to elevate Scottish music and language through his work.

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# INTRODUCTION

The University of South Carolina possesses an extensive collection of poems and correspondence by Robert Burns, and this piqued my interest as a student and helped to inspire me to study Burns. As the national poet of Scotland, Burns has been lauded ever since this farmer's son wrote his poems that have remained in our cultural milieu. While he is a fascinating and already widely studied figure, this thesis will provide a close literary study of Burns from a unique perspective, across his letters and poems. After reading Burn's letters, Lord Byron felt prompted to comment on Burns' "antithetical mind", and Burns' letters have been considered inferior to his poetry by some critics (Low). However, I think there is more to be discussed and discovered here, both in the holistic analysis of Burns' writings and his use of Scottish dialect and other stylistic elements. It has been said that "Burns employed stage Scots or linguistic stereotypes to rearrange and to bind together ideas about place, language and identity" across his published writings, and this thesis will allow me to explore whether significant evidence of this appears in his letters, or if his use of Scots as a linguistic stereotype is something that was arranged according to any discernible pattern across Burns' writings (Broadhead). Adopting Scottish dialect as an affected voice separates his work from cultural authority of the time, whether British or Scottish, showing that Burns was undertaking something entirely new and his own (McGuirk). Burns has left a lasting legacy, and there is still remaining room to explore his dialect and style across multiple forms of his writing.

Burns' personal myth of the rustic bard has been in place ever since the initial reception of his poems. Through the analysis of his poems, songs, and letters, I will be able to glean interesting insights into Burns the man and Burns the myth, and his 'native genius', which leads to his being sometimes described as a "poet who proves himself to be as much a protean master

of persona in his private life as in his poems" (Young). The potency of the Burns myth "filters into the initial reception of Burns, helping to shape both the poet's public image and even his own self-image," influencing the interpretation of his writing (Young). Robert Burns' poetry is world renowned; his poems have been analyzed and recited across history. The comparative study of his letters and poetry in this thesis, and by extension, what he presented publicly versus personally, will yield further insights into Burns as a poet, and his style and subject matter as a writer.

This thesis is going to delve into the discrepancies and commonalities of Burns' self-created persona through presenting qualitative research and analysis of the ways he presents himself in published poetry and songs as well as in private correspondence. In my efforts to better understand Burns' use of dialect and poetic style through this research, I found common themes across his poems and songs, in their inclusion of Scots dialect, the Burns stanza, and subversion of power structures, often through irony or satirization. The poetry and song analysis throughout this thesis will focus on works intentionally published by Robert Burns, many of which appear in the Kilmarnock edition of *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect.* In terms of correspondence, this thesis will incorporate letters that were intentionally private, where Burns was communicating on an individual scale to someone he had a personal relationship with and did not necessarily intend that the letter would be seen by a wider audience. I have studied these through the Oxford editions of Burns' correspondence and this will be beneficial in heightening my ability to compare and contrast the ways he writes by focusing on more clearly separated writings. In preliminary research regarding Burns, I found that Burns' son James Glencairn Burns "liked his father's 'letters better than his Poetry'" (Crawford, 11). This is indeed a controversial opinion that "few today would concur" with, but there is value in exploring the

"superior manner" James thought these letters possessed, and what biographers have described as an "energetic sense of what Burns's conversation and anecdotes, which impressed so many who met him but are now largely buried under a tonnage of 'lore', must have been like" (Crawford, 11). Through looking at these letters and Burns' personal prose style, I will be able to put forward a more holistic sense of Burns' style of writing and the way he used dialect outside of poetry.

The poems utilized in order to accomplish this thesis include "To a Mouse, on turning up in her Nest, with the Plough", "To a Louse, on seeing one on a Lady's bonnet at Church", "Address to the Deil", and "To W. Simpson, Ochiltree". The songs I will be analyzing are "Highland Mary", "Song, Now Westlin Winds, and Slaught'ring Guns", "Auld Lang Syne" and "Scots Wha Hae". I will be analyzing these poems and songs across their subject material and looking at Burns' choices like devices used, poetic structure, and use of Scots as compared to English.

## BACKGROUND

There are a few concepts I will mention throughout this thesis and therefore I need to define these initially. One of those is the 'Burns stanza', which characterizes the structure of many of the poems I incorporate. This refers to what was formerly called the standard Habbie stanza but was popularized by Robert Burns and therefore came to be known as a signature element of his poetry. This is well put by Andrew Philip in the *Irish Pages* where he writes that Burns "'demonstrated that Scots was still capable of range and depth of expression' and in terms of Habbie stanza, so close is the association that this verse form, although found in eleventh-century provencal poems and medieval English romances, is now often simply known as 'the

Burns stanza'" (Philip). This stanza is written with six lines and a rhyme scheme of AAABAB. The "A" lines are written in iambic tetrameter, with the "B" lines in iambic diameter.

Another essential element of Burns scholarship is his use of Scots. His poems are self-labeled as being written "chiefly in the Scottish Dialect", and comparison between his use of English and Scots in his letters and poetry is one aspect of the research contained herein. In the words of one of many Burns biographers, Burns wrote in "complicated mixtures of vernacular and formal language, English and Scots, which Burns so loved and which give energy to the busy, sculpted interchange that is his verse" (Crawford, 12). Scots refers to Burn's native dialect, and what was commonly spoken in Scotland during Burns' time, after Scots and Gaelic had been oppressed through English colonization. It was often seen as lesser than 'proper English', and as such, choosing to write in Scots was a defiance of cultural literary norms.

In looking at scholarly literature, David Sampson does not neglect to explore the importance of Burns' use of Scots in his poetry as something which strongly contributed to his critical reception. He outlines "the ways in which Burns's poetry differed from the prevailing mode of polite English literature: his use of the vernacular, his 'low' subject-matter, his colloquial humour. These differences were more cultural than individual" (Sampson, 16). Eventually, Sampson argues that Burns' use of Scots came to be regarded as a demonstration of his authenticity, and Scots came to be seen as a language that could be poetic. This acceptance has affected more modern art in dialects other than Scots, and Burns paved the way for this through his poetry. An important aspect of Burns' legacy is how he popularized local vernacular to a degree that contended with highbrow English literature. Crawford explains Burns' foundations in English and Scots well as they relate to his poetry and correspondence, writing that "Burns, then, from an early age was an eager reader with a flair for language, and was able to express himself

in English as well as Scots. This bicultural upbringing gave him access equally to the vernacular heritage of song and folk-tale strong in his mother's family, and to that world of 'improvement' of which his father was part and whose language was formal English" (Crawford, 39). Burns had access to both languages, and as Crawford argues, this also impacted his penchant for writing tales and songs.

As I will be discussing Burns' correspondence more individually throughout this thesis, I also wanted to include a brief overview of some elements of his letter-writing here. A common theme throughout his writing is "biblical stories, theological arguments and Christian knowledge", and there is abundant evidence of this in my research (Crawford, 37). Additionally, this ties into the discussion of Scots as well, but Burns' letters are mainly written in formal English, which was influenced, as Crawford writes, by "an early interest in English-language politeness that, for good and ill, shaped his often mannered epistolary style, not least in matters amatory", as well his being taught letter-writing through John Newbery's *Letters on the Most Common* (67). Burns also often learned from reading the greats of his time, such as Alexander Pope, whom he quotes throughout his body of correspondence.

Letter collections were a very popular genre during Burns' lifetime, where famous figures, like Alexander Pope, would publish their private letters. This adds a complication to the idea of letters as personal and private, because especially as people gained fame, their letters may be approached more with the idea of eventual publication in mind. Even while being written as private correspondence, Burns may have had the idea that his letters would eventually be published as he became more well known. Another complexity in looking at Burns' correspondence is the idea of the verse epistle, another popular genre of the time that Pope also used. One of the poems I chose to include, "To W. S******n, Ochiltree", is a verse epistle, and

this offers an intriguing avenue for direct address in poetry. The Academy of American Poets explains that "the appeal of epistolary poems is in their freedom. The audience can be internal or external. The poet may be speaking to an unnamed recipient or to the world at large, to bodiless entities or abstract concepts", and in this instance, Burns writes to a specific and named recipient, located in time and space.

## POEMS

"To a Louse: On Seeing One on a Lady's Bonnet, At Church" is one of Burns' famed poems written in the Burns stanza, and it was published in the original Kilmarnock edition of *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*. It is important to consider this poem as it is one of Burns' original publications, indicating basic early preferences and style, and to investigate the influence of his handling of the Habbie stanza to better understand Burns' name becoming synonymous with this form.

The poem takes place on a religious backdrop, and it is interesting to see Burns' handling of this topic. It seems rather insincere and ironic, as his speaker ignores the church goings-on in favor of musing about the actions of a louse. As church was a place for everyone to come together, Burns uses this to cross class divides with characters in his poem, like the louse does, but at the same time reinforces them, with lines like:

> Detested, shunn'd by saunt an' sinner,
> How daur ye set your fit upon her-
> Sae fine a lady?
> Gae somewhere else and seek your dinner
> On some poor body. (ll. 8-12)

This indicates that though the louse is universally detested, it is expected for the poor to suffer more than the rich, and the louse would receive a better meal from someone less well-off. There is also a note of jealousy in the speaker's outrage towards the louse, as he would like to inhabit

the nearness to this woman's body that the louse occupies. Through personifying and conversing with the louse, even interrogating it, the speaker is enabled to move on and discuss the uselessness of vanity, as someone could be dressed as nicely as possible and still:

> Ye little ken what cursed speed
> The blastie's makin:
> Thae winks an' finger-ends, I dread,
> Are notice takin. (ll. 39-42)

Burns adopts a teasing tone here as the speaker of the poem expresses his wry concern for Jenny here as the louse unknowingly inhabits her hair and she thinks she is showing off her beauty while she is actually drawing attention to the louse. This change in focus is also interesting, as the speaker makes Jenny the object of his satirization in order to criticize vanity, instead of continuing his conversation with the louse.

> O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us
> *To see oursels as others see us*!
> It wad frae monie a blunder free us
> An' foolish notion:
> What airs in dress an' gait wad lea'e us,
> And ev'n Devotion! (ll. 43-48)

Burns' expostulation about vanity as exhibited by Jenny continues through the end of the poem, making the louse more of a vehicle to reach this point and a way to engage in dialect-play, rather than ending with thoughts about class inequality or desire. Through this concluding stanza, he makes clear the goal of "To a Louse", which ends up not being to a louse at all, but to satirize those who put on vain airs even in a place of religious devotion.

There is no noticeable switching between Scots and English in this poem; Scots dialect is used throughout consistently to a high degree. It seems significant that this use of Scots appears in a poem that deals with class differences, where the louse is a sort of egalitarian creature who alights on both the rich and poor. As mentioned in the background research of this thesis, the use of Scots opposed literary traditions of the day, and highbrow standards dictated that English was

the language of proper writing. Therefore, Burns' choice to write about equality between classes and religious matters fully in the Scots dialect reads as a very marked choice.

In "To a Mouse, On Turning Her Up in Her Nest With the Plough", Burns presents a sensory experience that bridges the lives of the speaker and the mouse he encounters and whose home and future the speaker destabilizes. Burns wrote this poem in 1785, the year preceding "To a Louse", and in both "To a Louse" and "To a Mouse", Burns uses the conversational tempo and scheme of the Burns stanza to make these creatures come alive for readers. In "To a Mouse", unlike "To a Louse", Burns does noticeably alternate between using English and Scots, in that the second stanza does not really feature Scots dialect. These two poems are paired in their titles, lengths, and stanzas, which makes differences like this all the more noticeable. Also like "To a Louse", "To a Mouse" was published in the Kilmarnock edition of *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*, and falls earlier in the list of poems, following the order in which these works were written.

Burns, as someone who practiced farming for a considerable portion of his life whether on his father's farm or attempting it on his own, would likely have been familiar with a scenario like the one included in the poem, and this experience enables him to bring life to it for readers and imbue an ordinary experience with significance. He writes with a sympathetic and kind tone for the seemingly lowly creature of the mouse, and it appears to be much more sincere than any sympathy expressed for Jenny in "To a Louse", or the louse itself. The differences between the louse and the mouse serve to highlight their contrasting signifiers, with the louse as a death-like egalitarian figure, while the mouse is a sort of small and helpless creature representing the break in "Nature's social union" (l.8). A sort of "God-in-nature", deistic belief seems to characterize Burns' faith better than traditional or "fire and brimstone" sorts of religion, as "Robert showed a

strong commitment to the theology of Dr John Taylor of Norwich who argued in his work that in reading the Bible 'we ought not to admit anything contradictory to the common sense and understanding of mankind'" and was an active Freemason (Crawford, 93). The care for the small creature of the mouse does seem to reinforce this seeing of God in the everyday workings of nature, and explains why a break between the community of humans and nature has been especially upsetting.

Most of this poem is written as a gentle, colloquial conversation with the mouse, making the second stanza stand out all the more as it is not written in Scots. Formal English is used to differentiate the stanza where the speaker sincerely apologizes to the mouse, which is striking against the light and conversational tone that is otherwise present and makes it clear to readers that we are supposed to pay special attention here. Readers would already think to be very attentive to the conclusion of a poem as a poet wraps up what they want to say, so perhaps that is why Burns differentiated the second stanza but not the final two, even though these contained the now famous lines

> The best laid schemes o' Mice an' Men
> Gang aft agley,
> An' lea'e us nought but grief an' pain,
> For promis'd joy! (ll. 39-42).

Additionally, the end of the poem contains another notable difference from the structure presented by Burns in "To a Louse", because the speaker retains his focus on the mouse the entire time instead of switching to satirize or comment on another character or topic as he does in "To a Louse". Overall, this poem is characterized by Burns' handling of serious topics through a kind and unassuming conversation with a personified mouse who allows the speaker to voice his concerns about the future through the damage done to the mouse's own home. For the most part, it is easier for the speaker and the mouse to converse in Scots, excepting the stanza which

mentions “Man’s dominion”, which also seems loaded when considering the colonizing role of the English on Scottish people, as this is the stanza that also mentions “union”, and this could lend an explanation to Burns’ choice here (l.7). Towards the poem’s conclusion, the speaker reaches the limits of sympathetic connection, as he recognizes that the mouse cannot process time in the same way that the speaker does, and that therefore he carries an anxiety that people bear alone.

> Still, thou art blest, compar’d wi’ me!
> The present only toucheth thee:
> But Och! I backward cast my e’e,
> On prospects drear!
> An’ forward tho’ I canna see,
> I guess an’ fear! (ll. 43-48)

This is both like and unlike “To a Louse” as there is somewhat of a transition in the object of the speaker’s sympathy, but it is not as sharp as that of “To a Louse”, nor as directionally clear. The slight perspective transition here does again serve to carry the overall message of the poem, this time about future anxiety, as the speaker must end his metaphorical conversation with the mouse because there is no longer mutual understanding possible.

Like “To a Mouse”, “Address to the Deil” was also written in 1785 in the Burns stanza and published in the Kilmarnock edition of *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*. It is significantly longer than either “To a Louse” or “To a Mouse” at twenty-one stanzas, and this poem is written entirely in Scots, with no stanzas standing out by being written in English.

Resembling “To a Louse”, “Address to the Deil” immediately begins with religious themes, through the title and an epigraph from Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, specifically from Beelzebub’s questioning about whether resistance is part of God’s plan. Burns writes with a flippant tone, referring to the Devil he’s addressing as “Auld Hornie, Satan, Nick, or Clootie” (l.2). To undertake addressing the Devil seems like a large step up from addressing mice and

lice, and yet it falls before either of them in the order of *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*. Soon after so nicknaming the Devil, Burns writes

> An' let poor damned bodies be;
> I'm sure sma' pleasure it can gie,
> Ev'n to a deil,
> To skelp an' scaud poor dogs like me, (ll.8-11).

Readers working through *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* in order would already have come across "The Twa Dogs", making Burns' additional reference to poor dogs like Luath significant in the context of that class conscious poem. This stanza also presents skepticism, as Burns criticizes the Devil for occupying such a joyless role as the threat of punishment for sinners. Burns' satirical subversion of the church's teachings about Satan through "Address to the Deil" does seem in keeping with the more deistic and freemasonic liberal sort of religion that Burns subscribed to, which was not as punitive as many other sects of his day.

For Burns, addressing the devil involves language that is imposing but written teasingly, as though the author does not want these words to carry the weight they would otherwise denote, like "roarin lion" and "tempest flyin". Burns also acknowledges folktale and familial aspects of religious beliefs, with mentions of the speaker's "graunie". However, this is done in such a way to make the devil seem more like a scary story than a real threat, and pokes fun at the societal character of the Devil and the rather gullible behavior of those who operate under this old wives' tale as a real threat. This is especially visible in the eighth stanza, where Burns' speaker says

> The cudgel in my nieve did shake,
> Each brist'ld hair stood like a stake,
> When wi' an eldritch, stoor "quaick, quaick,"
> Amang the springs,
> Awa ye squatter'd like a drake,
> On whistlin' wings (ll. 43-48),

as Burns overtly makes fun of people who believe what they are told easily. Here, the speaker sees 'the devil', which is actually a duck in a field, and the speaker is frightened of a harmless

bird, invoked with the lighthearted onomatopoeia. The tone of this poem stands out as particularly satirical towards Calvinist teachings of the time, and it goes hand in hand with the glib approach to organized religion that is also taken up in “To a Louse” where Burns satirizes “ev’n Devotion”.

In addition to Burns’ humor coming through a gullible speaker, he also demystifies other religious traditions. He directly references “mystic” elements in his poem, even “Masons' mystic word an' grip”, something Burns would have participated in (l.79). In the fifteenth stanza, Burns writes about Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden in a way that frames them more like ordinary people than like legendary figures of Christian religion. This serves to remind readers that religion is a human endeavor, as the speaker says “When youthfu' lovers first were pair'd, / An' all the soul of love they shar'd, / The raptur'd hour”, and makes Adam and Eve sound like young lovers more than the divinely placed first people on Earth (ll.86-88). There is a self-referential element contained in this poem as well, in the lines “An' now, Auld Cloots, I ken ye're thinkin, / A certain Bardie's rantin, drinkin” (ll.115-116). As “the bard”, and someone who enjoyed drinking, it makes sense to link Burns himself with the man described here by the speaker. He again shows that he does not take the character of the devil too seriously, reusing the “Cloots” nickname and insisting in the rest of the stanza that the “certain Bardie” would be able to dodge the devil. In the final lines of the poem, Burns leaves readers with something even more humanizing than his lowering of Adam and Eve—sympathy for the devil. In the conclusion of this address, Burns writes “I'm wae to think upo' yon den, / Ev'n for your sake!” (ll.126-127). This is what he wants readers’ last impression to be, that of saying that hell, or the devil’s ‘den’, would be a miserable place to exist even for the devil himself. This ties back to the beginning of the poem where Burns writes that the devil’s duties and state of existence cannot be enjoyable

even for the devil, and seems to again be insisting on how it must be overall untruth or exaggeration, as the devil himself would not want this to be true and would not continue in his ways if it were. Religion was and is a useful tool for social influence, and "Address to the Deil" resists that and the threat of damnation in hell. Pushback against norms of the time is a common thread in much of Burns' work, as again his use of Scots defied literary standards of his time.

The final poem I will be discussing is "Epistle To W. Simpson, Ochiltree", another selection from the original Kilmarnock edition of *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*. The epistolary nature of this poem creates an interesting contrast with my other selections though it retains the characteristic of being written in the Burns stanza. At thirty-one stanzas, it is by far the longest of these poems, indicating that Burns had a volume of things to communicate in this poetic letter. Burns did write primarily in Scots throughout this poem as well, with only a couple of stanzas where he did not use it heavily.

As I am focusing on Burns' own stylistic choices, it is important to note here that though the poem's title "To W. Simpson, Ochiltree" is now well-known, Burns did not choose to publish the poem under this name. Instead, it was published as "Epistle, To W. S*****n, Ochiltree" which could perhaps be enough context for some of Burns' acquaintances, but the name was not actually provided in publication. Instead, Burns wrote the full name of "Simpson" in his handwritten notes to Robert Ainslie in a copy of the Edinburgh edition of *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*, which I was able to study firsthand at the University of South Carolina's Special Collections Library. This shows at least some degree of interest in preserving privacy and Burns' desire to not have the personal to override his poem.

Burns closely follows the conventions of a letter within this poem, making it as much like an epistle as possible with the inclusion of a date, closing signature, and postscript. Burns

masterfully blends these elements with the rhyme scheme and iambic structure of the Burns stanza. Additionally, as this is a poem written as an epistle about poetry, there is an indication of textual awareness within the poem and playful metatextualization from Burns. Even Burns' speaker is not distanced from himself as is typical in poetry, rather, he 'signs' this letter as himself, writing "Count on a friend, in faith an' practice, / In Robert Burns" (ll.106-107). "To W. Simpson, Ochiltree" is written as if it is a response to a critic, Willie, where Burns is insisting that his muse is undervalued, this muse being places and stories of Scotland. This motive is shown in Burns' lines: "Nae Poet thought her worth his while, / To set her name in measur'd style; (ll.36-37) and "While Irwin, Lugar, Aye, an' Doon / Naebody sings" (ll.46-47). He is writing to challenge the way poetry is done and encourages Willie along with readers to have a spirit of community and desire to uplift Scotland. In keeping with the idea of writing a letter to a friend, Burns begins with an informal tone, jocularly writing to someone he knows, calling him "winsome Willie", then the poem builds to its more serious points (l.1). Similarly, Burns returns to light informality when he begins the postscript, writing "my memory's no worth a preen: / I had amaist forgotten clean," and then again working into weighter discussion (ll.108-109).

The beauty of Scottish nature is a major theme in this epistolary poem, and Burns uses descriptive language and imagery to communicate this value. He brings out the loveliness of specific places in Scotland, with lines like

> O, sweet are Coila's haughs an' woods,
> When lintwhites chant amang the buds,
> And jinkin hares, in amorous whids,
> Their loves enjoy;
> While thro' the braes the cushat croods
> With wailfu' cry! (ll. 66-71)

Burns paints a cheerful picture of the local flora and fauna to display it in a new light for readers and illustrate how it is a fitting poetic subject by using it himself. He uses Scots heavily, which

serves to emphasize the inherent Scottishness of these places as subjects. Burns writes with passion about the kind of art he produces, saying that:

> We'll sing auld Coila's plains an' fells,
> Her moors red-brown wi' heather bells,
> Her banks an' braes, her dens an' dells,
> Whare glorious WALLACE
> Aft bure the gree, as story tells (ll.54-58).

This use of the word "we" reinforces the connection between Willie Simpson and himself both being Scottish bards, and therefore fitting writers for these subjects, and it is also a means of continuing his conversational style. Also, the mention of singing reminds readers of Burns' other works and how he is an accomplished lyric poet as well as an epistolary one, and again reinforces what he sees as good subjects for songs. The inclusion of William Wallace brings in Scottish history in addition to locales and nature and emphasizes common cultural heritage. In furthering the more provocative tone of this poem, Burns uses strong language in his calls for more Scottish subjects in Scottish poems as he writes:

> At WALLACE' name, what Scottish blood,
> But boils up in a spring-tide flood!
> Oft have our fearless fathers strode
> By WALLACE' side,
> Still pressing onward, red-wat-shod,
> Or glorious dy'd! (ll.60-65)

This stanza is particularly interesting as it is one of the stanzas where Burns uses the least amount of Scots, and it is about "Scottish blood" and pride in William Wallace's fierce fight for independence. The difference shows that Burns wants this to stand out, and it seems like this idea is what he wants to be especially, immediately comprehensible to English readers. Towards the conclusion of the first part of this epistle, Burns writes that:

> The warly race may drudge and drive,
> Hog-shouther, jundie, stretch, an' strive;
> Let me fair Nature's face descrive,
> And I, wi' pleasure,

> Shall let the busy, grumbling hive
> Bum owre their treasure. (ll.90-95)

This stanza is especially interesting in the similarity of message it carries to the second stanza in "To a Mouse", where the speaker laments the break between humans and Nature. Here, Burns advocates for the need to step away from worldliness and into nature to write poetry and be happier. He is providing a model for living to William Simpson, and through this epistle's publication, for all of his readers.

To transition away from focusing on nature, Burns uses the structural element of the postscript to switch to a new topic, and brings up religion and cultural disunity. He discusses how new-light and old-light religion have become something commonly argued over, as compared to how things used to be when:

> In days when mankind were but callan;
> At grammar, logic, an' sic talents,
> They took nae pains their speech to balance,
> Or rules to gie;
> But spak their thoughts in plain braid Lallans,
> Like you or me (ll.114-119)

Here, Burns directly addresses his own use of Scots, making this a notable stanza, as Lallans refers to the Lowlands Scots dialect. He puts forward his method and intent to speak in "plain braid Lallans", as he is doing in the book where this poem is published, so this is a contribution to the more metatextual aspect of this epistolary poem. And again despite this being a written letter, readers are encouraged to think about singing, and now speaking as well, leaning into the conversational or vocalized nature of much of Burns' work, and the flow of the Burns stanza. As the concluding message to his poem, Burns encourages Willie and readers overall to look past the divisions between them, writing:

> But tho' dull prose-folk Latin splatter
> In logic tulzie,
> I hope we, Bardies, ken some better

Than mind sic brulzie. (ll.182-185).

He wants poets and people overall to be united in being Scottish as they used to be when everyone used “plain braid Lallans” rather than elevated “prose-folk Latin” that has sown division and discord. His diction choices like “dull”, “splatter”, and “brulzie” reinforce Burns’ opinion about how religion should be less divisive and perhaps less prioritized overall.

In moving towards Burns’ songs, these of course are written with differing structures, such as their not being written in the Burns stanza, but there is still a heavy presence of Scots in the songs. Burns gained famed for his poetry, as shown in his regarded as the national poet of Scotland. However, what his reputation neglects is his talent for songwriting, of which Burns wrote hundreds (Johnson). Ballads were especially popular in this period, and “traditional ballads are narrative folksongs – simply put, they are folksongs that tell stories” (Traditional Ballads). Something that I will discuss a bit specifically with the song “Scots Wha Hae” is its nature as broadside ballad, which means it was “composed for the cheap print market” and “seen by scholars as a separate class of ballads from the earlier ballad tradition, and are usually referred to as "broadside ballads." The subject matter of these ballads often concerns the lives of common people” (Traditional Ballads). This subject matter aspect is something that has already come up in the poems, as the conversational or everyday is at the forefront of Burns’ focus.

## SONGS

In this section, I first want to discuss “Highland Mary”, which Burns published in 1792. This song intertwines subjects of love and explores its afterimage and continuance that is present in grief. Burns heavily uses Scots dialect in three out of the four stanzas of “Highland Mary”, giving it a strong presence along with English. It is interesting that like “To a Mouse”, the

second stanza is where Burns chose to write primarily in English. As a fairly short song, especially compared to some of Burns' others poems, it moves along its track quickly, playfully rhyming to match the song structure and using the familiar tune of "Katherine Ogie" that solidifies the connection to Scottish culture in addition to writing in Scots. "Highland Mary" is constructed in four stanzas of eight lines each, so Burns does get to include more in each stanza than the Burns/Habbie stanza allows, though there are fewer stanzas overall. Burns is not shying away from his heritage here as mentioned in the background information, and builds on his connections to biculturalism and song, as Crawford also writes that from a young age, Burns "crooned to himself in Scots", in addition to hearing Scots songs from his mother (40). Though "Highland Mary" was not published in *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*, it makes sense that Burns would write in a Scottish dialect anyway, as these are the songs he grew up hearing from his mother, and because he was writing new words to follow traditional melodies.

A notable attribute of this song is Burns' reliance on shortened words, which is more visible here than in his poems. In "Highland Mary", he is writing to fit a scheme of every other line rhyming, as well as fitting the tune of "Katherine Ogie". His use of words such as "wi'", "fu'", and "nipt" allows him more flexibility and choice in fitting his words to a set tune. If Burns had held himself to solely writing in English rather than embracing bilingualism, readers and listeners would have been deprived of hearing the unique and bicultural flow of his lyrics.

Burns writes in a complimentary and pleased tone for Mary, and it is a love song that does not verge on the sexual from the sensual, which could be out of respect for the fact that that lover has passed away. Additionally, Burns interacts conversationally with the surrounding highland landscape he writes about as he describes where Mary Campbell used to meet with him, with lines like "Green be your woods, and fair your flowers, / your waters never drumlie!" (ll.3-

4). It is beautiful and idyllic, as Mary is to him, and the language of the poem is sensory and rich. She brought out the beauty of nature for Burns and heightened it. Burns personifies summer, writing that "there simmer first unfauld her robes," and this is a fitting bit of innuendo with undressing a woman as "there" is again referring to where the speaker would meet with Mary (l.5). This focus on the beauty of Scotland in complement to the beauty of Mary is reminiscent of "Epistle, to W. Simpson, Ochiltree" in that Burns also praises the beauty of Scottish nature and people in that poem, though the specified person is historic figure William Wallace. His depictions of nature often evoke the pastoral genre, as he writes about nature in such a peaceful and romanticized way. "Highland Mary" also includes many exclamation points, indicating an emotional and exclamatory tone from Burns, with lines like "I aft hae kiss'd sae fondly! / And clos'd for aye, the sparkling glance / That dwalt on me sae kindly!" (l.26-28). Throughout this poem, Burns' speaker is deeply invested in Mary and the loveliness of the world around her when they were together, and beautifully puts love and loss into this song.

The second song I am choosing to incorporate is "Now westlin winds and slaught'ring guns", originally published in the Kilmarnock edition of *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*, as the previous poems all were as well. As Crawford points out in his biography of Burns, "even in boyhood Burns was aware songs might be collected, written down, brought to book", and here we see him exercise this practice for himself (61). At five stanzas of eight lines each, it is just a bit longer than "Highland Mary", though structured similarly in rhyme scheme and lines per stanza. Burns' writing within the constraints of an already created melody is somewhat similar to the rules of iambic pentameter and rhyme scheme in a Habbie stanza, making it easier to draw connections between his poems and songs. In this instance, "Now westlin winds and slaught'ring guns" is intended to be sung to the tune of "I had a horse, I had nae mair".

Like in “To W. Simpson, Ochiltree”, Burns provides temporal grounding for this song, labeling it as “Song, Composed in August”, though it is less specific than the epistolary poem’s date. In another similarity with his other work, as in “Highland Mary”, nature is again an important feature of Burns’ song. He includes seasonal and natural details like

> The partridge loves the fruitful fells,
> The plover loves the mountains;
> The woodcock haunts the lonely dells,
> The soaring hern the fountains: (ll.9-12)

This discussion of what other animals love complements the speakers’ remarks about his “charmer”, and the simple repetition evokes the gentle rhythms of birdwatching or a country stroll.

The song does not retain a relentlessly cheerful tone throughout, however, as Burns writes “Tyrannic man’s dominion / the sportsman’s joy, the murd’ring cry” in the stanza following his listing of all the animals and their loves (ll.22-23). This juxtaposition of sweet simple animal joys compared to man’s taking pleasure in murder is stark and startling, pulling readers or listeners out of the comfortable language thus far, though Burns is only delivering what was promised in the title. These lines also sound very similar to the second stanza in “To a Mouse”, where Burns writes “I’m truly sorry man’s dominion / Has broken nature’s social union”. Interestingly, Burns wrote “Now westlin’ winds” first, in 1783, so this is an idea that matured into “To a Mouse” and is clearly something important to Burns. As this poem overall does not include much Scots, it does not stand out as much, but like in “To a Mouse” as well, this stanza in talking about murdering man’s dominion does not use Scots at all. Perhaps this behavior is not something that Burns wants to uplift in the “plain braid Lallans” he mentioned in “To W. Simpson, Ochiltree”. Again like in “To a Mouse”, this song includes mention of farming

life, as the “Now waving grain, wide o'er the plain, / Delights the weary farmer;” (ll.5-6), making these works closely aligned overall.

In a way, “Now westlin winds” is an address as well, like so many of Burns’ poems, as he writes “But, Peggy dear, the ev’ning’s clear” to show that the speaker is now in direct communication with his charmer, Peggy (l.25). Though this is not written in the Burns stanza, it is still conversational as shown through the last two stanzas which include lots of informal communication between the speaker and Peggy. It is also worth noting that “But” at the beginning of this line and the speaker’s switch to talking to Peggy are the transition away from the lines about the sportsman’s joy and murdering cry. The speaker’s lovely muse is his solace from tyrannical man. Lines like “Come let us stray our gladsome way”, and words like “thy” and “thou” continue this dialogue element of the poem until its close (l.29). Also, when the speaker is in this conversation with Peggy, there is a more physical description of their closeness, where he says that “I’ll grasp thy waist, and, fondly prest / Swear how I love thee dearly:” (ll.35-36). This echoes the desire expressed in poems like “To a Louse” and songs like “Highland Mary”.

Like “To W. Simpson, Ochiltree”, “Scots Wha Hae” expresses strong national sentiments. This is the shortest of the songs yet, at six stanzas of four lines each, making each stanza half as long as the others. Burns wrote this song in 1793, ten years after “Now westlin winds”, and it is sung to the tune of “Hey Tuttie Taitie”. Using this Scottish tune is in keeping with Burns’ cultural roots and goes well with the national theme of the song, as does the heavy use of Scots within the lyrics. Burns originally published this song in James Johnson’s *Scots Musical Museum*, which was a six-volume collection of Scottish folk music published from 1787-1803. The popularity of “Scots Wha Hae” reached far enough to be printed by “Pitts at the

Toy and Marble Warehouse in the Seven Dials area of London", which makes its patriotic Scottish themes more noticeable at their being published in England's capital (Broadside).

In looking at this song, as it is Burns' portrayal of a moment in history, it's interesting to look at his choice and treatment of Robert Bruce. He writes with a challenging tone, with lines like "Wha will be a traitor knave? / Wha can fill a coward's grave! / Wha sae base as be a slave?" designed to whip up morale in soldiers (ll.9-11). Burns is heavy-handed with his use of exclamatory remarks in this song, with seven of the eight final lines ending in exclamation points, showing passionate feeling for the subject and speaker. Though Burns employs figurative language throughout this song, he does not shy away from portraying war and independence strongly. He uses a metaphor for death, calling it a "gory bed" (l.3), and imbues fighters' strikes with "Liberty's in every blow" (l.23). The first person speaker, Robert Bruce, implores listeners to this song to fight "for Scotland's king and law" (l.13), saying "Let him follow me!" (l.16). This song stands out as a battle song, making it unlike any of the others, yet it is written as an engagement with history, not for use by actual soldiers. Burns' choice to wax lyrical about this specific moment in history, one close to many Scottish hearts, seems to show his own sympathies and what preoccupied him.

As it is Burns' most widely renowned song, I would be remiss not to include "Auld Lang Syne" in this section. This song was first published in volume five of the *Scots Musical Museum* in 1796 (Winick). Additionally, "In 1793, Burns had sent a slightly revised copy of the words to publisher George Thomson for inclusion in another anthology, *A Select Collection of Original Scottish Airs*" (Winick). This was a song he was excited to share, demonstrated by multiple efforts to see it published. Because of the different versions of this song in existence, it is challenging to decide which should be authoritative, so I am primarily focusing on the version

printed by Thomson, as it is the “best known” (Winick). This song is the same length as “Scots Wha Hae”, and Burns wrote in Scots throughout the entire song.

Most notably, this song is more repetitive than Burns’ other works I have selected. The use of the phrase “auld lang syne” through the song reinforces Burns’ focus on the nostalgic center of the poem. Also, this song prioritizes community and shared bonds through Burns’ use of mainly first-person plural pronouns, rather than mostly singular as often appears in his other works. Burns includes charmingly pastoral lines in this song like “We twa hae ran about the braes, / And pu'd the gowans fine,” (ll.9-10). These succinct yet evocative lines are also reminiscent of parts of “Highland Mary” and “Now westlin winds”, in their uplift of experiences out in nature. The difference in “Auld Lang Syne” is that the speaker has grown up and is beyond these experiences now. The following stanza is structured the same way, beginning with shared, past childhood experiences enjoying the outdoors. Then in the last two lines of each stanza the speaker moves into acknowledgement that they are looking back fondly, rather than celebrating the present moment.

Before moving into Burns’ correspondence, I will overview some elements of his published works as a whole. It is important to note that at the end of *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*, there is a glossary explaining the Scots words used, both what they mean and how they sound. This clearly indicates that Burns’ audience was not purely Scottish, but that he instead wanted to directly infringe on English literary standards by introducing the Scots dialect to more people and making it accessible to all English-language readers (Burns, 345). He knew that his published work would not be understood by his entire audience without this additional measure, as even many in Scotland did not understand Scots at the level Burns wrote. Also, Burns’ use of Scots throughout his poems and songs makes any omissions seem significant

across several works. Stanzas written solely in English purposefully draw readers' attention, as Burns demonstrates throughout that he is a masterful poet and lyricist in Scots, so a choice to do something different stands out.

A quality that has an interesting overlap between Burns' poems and songs is that of their being designed as an address compared to a shared experience. His poems that are addresses read conversationally, speaking with everything from people, to lice, mice, haggis, and devils. Though it is not titled as an address, "To W. Simpson, Ochiltree" still clearly bears a specified recipient of his message, and "Now westlin winds" is spoken to "Peggy". The use of Scots and the Burns stanza contribute to the conversational nature of these works. Burns writes exclusively in first person, whether singular or plural, which again aligns with the idea of spoken conversation that persists across these texts. Burns' songs add a layer to this as verse poems set to a tune, indicating at least to some degree that Burns intended these to be sung in addition to being read in their printed form. Both conversations and music are shared experiences, just carried out in different manners, and the popularity of ballads during this period blurred the lines between songs and poems. Burns knew the value of preserving songs and poems in writing, but the qualities of his works make them seem designed to be experienced aloud and in community.

Another shared quality of these works is their being grounded in things real or natural, whether people, animals, places, times of year, or history. Though Burns takes artistic liberties like personifying animals and seasons for example, his songs and poems are still rooted in the concrete and recognizable aspects of life in Scotland. In these works, Burns so skillfully adds dimension to everyday life of things like farming and desiring women.

CORRESPONDENCE

There is an abundance of Burns' correspondence in existence to be studied, so I have had to be selective for these purposes, though most of Burns' writing choices are shared across his letters. One of Burns' correspondents is Agnes McLehose, a married woman he met years after she was estranged from her husband and struck up a flirtatious correspondence with while she lived in Edinburgh. An important element to note within the Clarinda letters is how they got their name in the first place—Robert Burns and Agnes McLehose maintained a flirtatious sense of mystery in their use of the Arcadian pen names Sylvander and Clarinda, making a point of disguising their identities despite knowing who the other was. In the Oxford edition of Burns letters, editors Ferguson and Roy refer to their correspondence as a "sentimental, and curiously unreal, flirtation", based on the intensity and frequency of their writing and their use of pseudonyms (465). Another interesting aspect of their disguised names presents itself when Burns writes that "I do highly, very highly esteem you indeed, Clarinda; you merit it all! Perhaps, too, I scorn dissimulation!" (Ferguson, L.176). He scorns dissimulation, meaning concealment, yet they playfully engage in this with their pen names, and he pursues her despite her technically being married. This I think serves to indicate the kind of things Burns prioritizes, like honesty in his opinions and feelings, but considers the details of their situation to be more superfluous.

Like in "Highland Mary", the "Clarinda" letters are characterized by their excitable and emotional tone, as Burns writes positively about the object of his affection. In letter 177, Burns refers to Agnes as "My dearest Angel!", and he praises her to the point of exaggeration with lines like "That you have faults, my Clarinda, I never doubted; but I knew not where they existed, and Saturday night made me more in the dark than ever" (Ferguson, L.179). Clarinda is someone

who has significant metaphorical power over Burns' heart, enough to make it "dance with rapture" at the thought of receiving a letter from her (Ferguson, L. 178). There is something frantic and urgent in the way Burns writes to Agnes as well, as he pens letters like 176 where he writes "I am interrupted—Perhaps you are not sorry for it—You will tell me—But I won't anticipate blame.—O Clarinda! Did you know how dear to me is your look of kindness, your smile of approbation! You would not, either in prose or verse, risque a censorious remark", despite the fact that he writes to her again later that same day.

Concerns of business and personal life are almost never mentioned in the Clarinda letters, yet there are letters written the same days to other individuals where Burns elaborates about physical or economic issues that are never penned to McLehose, which seems in keeping with the pleased and complimentary tone of "Highland Mary". An injury was what allowed Burns so much time to write to her and become deeply connected, and perhaps he never mentions it because these letters afford him a distraction as well (Ferguson, 465). Reminiscent of Crawford's characterizing of Burns' love as uncontrollable, the Oxford edition of his correspondence describes his relationship with McLehose by saying "The inflammable poet was promptly smitten with her charms, and she with his" (Ferguson, 465). Ferguson goes on to claim that "the poet's love for Clarinda gave the world some of his most beautiful lines," as seen in his vibrant language and expressions of affection (Ferguson, 465).

Readers of Burns' letters to McLehose are also given additional context for the deistic/freemasonic ideas about religion expressed in "To a Louse" and "To a Mouse". Burns writes to McLehose that "you may perhaps distrust me when I say 'tis also *my* favorite topic [religion]; but mine is the Religion of the bosom.—I hate the very idea of controversial divinity; as I firmly believe, that every honest, upright man, of whatever sect, will be accepted of the

Deity" (Ferguson, L. 204). Letters allow Burns to expand in more detail about his thoughts, including those regarding religion. It seems very telling that even his religion is that "of the bosom", not the head—the idea that Burns prized emotionality and felt deeply is something evidenced across much of his writing. Also, he presents here an open-minded perspective, rather than ascribing too much of someone's character to their religious beliefs, indicating a forward thinking and progressive way of being. This progressive aspect aligns with his choices to publish in Scots, as this was bold and something not many others were doing in his time.

Burns uses solely formal English in the majority of his letters, and the Clarinda letters are no exception, despite being an intimate and friendly exchange between two Scottish correspondents. This more formal language between people with a close relationship is likely a product of the time, yet it does stand out from instances of Burns penning bawdy letters or poems like he does to his friends such as Robert Ainslie. Ascribing this difference to the fact that his correspondent in this instance is a woman, not a close male friend, is a likely answer, but it does still stand out. Burns also embodies his bilingualism exceedingly well, clearly comfortable in both English and Scots, and as he was taught to imitate letter writing from other great authors and poets of the time, that influence seems to be coming through clearly in his epistles to McLehose.

Sometimes Burns includes quotes like he does in poems such as "Address to the Deil" as epigraphs. In his letters to Agnes, they are scattered throughout, such as in Letter 176 where Burns quotes Bolingbroke and Southerne to enhance his own sentiments, or in Letter 178 where he quotes Pope. Burns offers an explanation for his own inclusion of quotes, writing that "I like to have quotations ready for every occasion.—They give one's ideas so pat, and save one the trouble of finding expression adequate to one's feelings.—I think it is one of the greatest

pleasures attending a Poetic genius, that we can give our woes, cares, joys, loves etc an embodied form in verse" (Ferguson, L. 178). Here, Burns indicates his thought process behind incorporating the work of others despite being such a talented writer on his own.

To serve as comparison to Burns' letters to Agnes McLehose, his early letters to Alison Begbie are also worth noting. These sets of letters share interesting similarities, even down to the component of disguised identities. In letters to Alison, Burns referred to her as E, and some have speculated that E stood for Ellison instead of Alison, but Ferguson notes that "it may well have been a disguise and not the real initial", like in Burns' letters to 'Clarinda' (438). The element of flirtatious anonymity is shared in Burns' connections with these women. The idea of hidden identities and preservation of privacy is also present in much of Burns' other work, where names or places were noted only by a letter and a dash, or something similar. This is seen in the epistolary poem I chose to analyze, as again Burns titled it "To W. S*****n, Ochiltree". However, this letter to Begbie differs from a goal of preserving privacy most likely, as Burns writes what he felt towards her: "Whenever the thought of my E. warms my heart, every feeling of humanity, every principle of generosity, kindles in my breast" (Ferguson, L.5). At this point, hiding identities and love seems more for the flirtatious or fun aspects rather than seeking genuine secrecy.

Ferguson and Ross Roy assert in the appendix about Burns' correspondents that Begbie "has almost equal claim to rank with Clarinda, Highland Mary, and Chloris in importance in Burns's love life", and the way he writes to her indicates the truth of that statement (438). Burns thoughtfully intertwines love and religious topics in writing to Begbie, saying that "I verily believe, my dear E., that the pure genuine feelings of love, are as rare in the world as the pure genuine principles of virtue and piety. This I hope will account for the uncommon style of all my

letters to you. By uncommon, I mean, their being written in such a serious manner, which to tell you the truth, has made me often afraid lest you should take me for some zealous bigot, who conversed with his mistress as he would converse with his minister" (Ferguson, L.5). This bears similarities to the way Burns writes about his religious beliefs to Clarinda, as he wrote about his controversial divinities, and here, several years earlier, he writes of how rare true virtue and piety are. Burns also wants her to take note that he is not usually serious, and as a reader of this letter looking to gain insight into Burns' writing and perspective, this is a valuable admittance for confirmation of his often satirical writing style.

The next of Burns' letters that I want to investigate is a lengthy epistle to Dr. Moore, written in 1787. It is much longer than any one letter written to Agnes McLehose, and written in a more measured tone. This largely autobiographical letter has served as a strong reference point for many Burns biographers over the years. Like Burns' letters to Clarinda, it is written in perfect English. Burns writes in more French than he does Scots in this letter, with only the word "bonnie" being used, and Burns calls attention to this by writing "my scarcity of English denies me the power of doing her justice in that language, but you know the Scottish idiom: she was a "bonnie, sweet, sonsie lass" (Ferguson, L.125). Saying that he has a scarcity of English is excessively modest, as all of his correspondence and command of language belies this. But perhaps this interest in understatement is due to Moore's suggestions to Burns to write differently, which Ferguson and Ross Roy explains as: "he was lavish with advice, which was well-intentioned by wrong-headed. The gist of it from first to last was that Burns should abandon Scots and write in standard English—something like Thomson's *Seasons*, only livelier" (466). The explanatory and autobiographical nature of this letter also seems like a justification for Burns writing the way that he does. Influential people like Dr. Moore discouraging Burns from

writing in Scots could have contributed to his choice to include a Scots glossary to make his poems and songs more accessible. Dr. John Moore was a Scottish Doctor of Medicine who also wrote books about views of society and manners in Italy, Switzerland, and Germany, among other publications, including a novel which Burns called “a glorious story!” (Ferguson, 469).

Scottish subjects are a prominent feature in Burns’ correspondence as well, like in his songs and poems. In this letter, Burns tells Dr. Moore that “the story of Wallace poured a Scottish prejudice in my veins which will boil along there till the flood-gates of life shut in eternal rest” (Ferguson, L.125). This bears obvious similarity to “Scots Wha Hae”, as Burns is focusing heavily on Scottish independence and William Wallace’s struggle in that song. This also directly corresponds to Burns’ advocacy for Scottish subjects in Scottish poems that is represented in “To W. Simpson”. The exaggerated and enthusiastic language of this line expresses similar sentiments to both of these pieces and reinforces the love for Scotland that appears in much of Burns’ work. There is an interesting juxtaposition in this letter, as in addition to Burns’ usual lack of Scots in letters, he also writes that “meeting with Fergusson’s Scotch Poems, I strung anew my wildly-sounding, rustic lyre with emulating vigour” (Ferguson, L.125). This is again a mention of Scots though he barely uses it in this letter, showing that it was on his mind whether actually included or not, and it is interesting that Burns aligns it with the ideas of wildness, rusticism, and music. Burns seeing crossover between music and Scots aligns very well with his use of traditionally Scottish tunes and Scots phrasing in his songs, as these are intertwined concepts for him since his childhood.

In writing to someone he looks up to or with a higher position, Burns is sure to be appropriately deferential, writing phrases like “you have done me the honour to interest yourself” (Ferguson, L.125). Yet, this language of class implication is mixed with class consciousness and

explanation for the man behind Burns' "Tale of Twa Dogs". Burns writes that "it takes a few dashes into the world, to give the young great man that proper, decent, unnoticing disregard for the poor, insignificant, stupid devils, the mechanics and peasantry around him, who were, perhaps, born in the same village" (Ferguson, L.125). Burns writes about the world he sees around him, where the rich and poor were largely in different spheres, and he makes his awareness plain to Dr. Moore with a sardonic tone. He challenges the idea of class signifying any more than wealth in writing lines like "my girl sung a song which was said to be composed by a small country laird's son, on one of his father's maids, with whom he was in love; and I saw no reason why I might not rhyme as well as he;" (Ferguson, L.125). Burns expresses class consciousness again as he points out this lack of difference in merit, and that it is only one's situation which separates nobility and servants. This also reminds Dr. Moore of Burns' lower status upbringing, and how he has himself exemplified that talent or ability is not born from wealth. Burns' letters read more overtly than poems and songs, as a more matter of fact medium, but his ideas seem consistent throughout, as the class sentiments here are reminiscent of those in "To a Louse".

In this letter, Burns writes at length about romance, and connects it to class differences. He explains the difference in approaches to love as being "to the sons and daughters of labour and poverty they are matters of the most serious nature: to them the ardent hope, the stolen interview, the tender farewell, are the greatest and most delicious parts of their enjoyments" (Ferguson, L.125). This offers and interesting and at least partial or potential justification for why it is so important to him, and conveys again that urgency that is often in his tone when Burns is writing to or about women he or his speakers desire. When writing about love affairs to Dr. Moore, Burns uses an abundance of figurative language. Metaphor and hyperbole serve him

well in sentences like “my heart was completely tinder, and was eternally lighted up by some goddess or other; and, as in every other warfare in this world, my fortune was various; sometimes I was received with favour, and sometimes I was mortified with a repulse” (Ferguson, L.125). This bears a lot of similarity to the ways that Burns wrote to ‘Clarinda’ especially, including the desire to avoid mortifying rejection, and his intensity of romantic feeling that is represented in some of the songs I have selected as well.

The overlap between love and music is another important area that Burns explores in this personal missive. He writes about the object of his affection with eloquent prose, saying that “the tones of her voice made my heart-strings thrill like an Aeolian harp; and particularly why my pulse beat such a furious ratan, when I looked and fingered over her little hand to pick out the cruel nettle-stings and thistles” (Ferguson, L.125). Though this remains firmly in prose form, it sounds poetic through Burns’ use of simile and rhythm, and he writes about musical elements like harps and beats which should remind Dr. Moore of Burns’ musical capabilities and love songs. Burns goes on to write that country romances he facilitated or participated in are “the favourite theme of my song”, which we see evidence of in “Highland Mary” and “Now westlin’ winds” (Ferguson, L.125).

Another shared topic across Burns’ poems, songs, and this piece of correspondence is farming life. This is what Burns has been intimately familiar with since childhood, so it is natural that he include it in an autobiographical letter. In particular, he focuses on farming as a more adult venture rather than helping as a child, writing that “I entered on this farm with a full resolution, ‘Come, go to, I will be wise!’ I read farming books; I calculated crops; I attended markets; and in short, in spite of ‘The devil, the world and the flesh,’ I believe I would have been a wise man; but the first year from unfortunately buying in bad seed, the second from a late

harvest, we lost half of both our crops: this overset all my wisdom, and I returned 'like the dog to the vomit, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire'" (Ferguson, L.125). Burns paints a pretty unpleasant picture of farming with this biblical verse here, and it does not quite match with the gentle communication between farmer and creature that happens in "To a Mouse" or the simple picture of waving grain in "Now westlin winds". He does not avoid the uglier parts of farming, rather choosing honesty in showing its difficulty.

Building on the verse from 2 Peter in the quote above, Burns' letter to Dr. Moore includes many other biblical quotations, showing Burns' in-depth religious knowledge. He discusses religion somewhat similarly to how he did with Agnes, though it is more flippant than theological, as Burns writes that he "puzzle[s] Calvinism with so much heat and indiscretion, that I raised a hue and cry of heresy against me, which has not ceased to this hour" (Ferguson, L.125). This offhanded approach to religion is reminiscent of "To a Louse", "Address to the Deil", and "To W. Simpson", as in one church is a background setting for simple human vanity, in the next, the devil is a caricature to poke fun at, and in the last, religion is too divisive and should be considered with cooler tempers. Literary quotations feature prominently in Burns' letter to Dr. Moore in addition to biblical ones. These serve to show the recipient how much he has read and remembered. Also, as Burns seems to understate his own capabilities in this letter, quotes can fill what he appears to be saying is a gap, and that is how he claims to employ them in his letters to Agnes.

As comparing public and private communication is central to this thesis, I would be remiss if I did not include Burns' discussion of publishing in this letter. He emphasizes the power of publishing when he writes to Dr. Moore that "before leaving my native country for ever, I resolved to publish my Poems.—I weighed my productions as impartially as in my power;

I thought they had merit; and 'twas a delicious idea that I would be called a clever fellow, even though it should never reach my ears" (Ferguson, L.125). Burns is discussing here his plans to go to Jamaica immediately after publishing the Kilmarnock edition of *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*. Burns claims that he "threw off six hundred copies, of which I had got subscriptions for about three hundred and fifty.—My vanity was highly gratified by the reception I met with from the Publick" and between this an encouragement from Dr. Blacklock to publish a second edition, Burns decided to stay and keep writing in Scotland (Ferguson, L.125). This framing of the issue as publication success and encouragement "rousing [his] poetic ambition" illustrates why publication versus private writing is an important distinction and that they are designed to achieve different results (Ferguson, L.125). It also serves to contradict Burns' own projected image about his command of language and knowledge where he has previously been overly humble in this letter. He builds to this moment of success and claims that he "was pretty sure my Poems would meet with some applause" (Ferguson, L.125).

Looking seven years before this letter to Dr. Moore, the earliest letters in Oxford's *The Letters of Robert Burns* are those written to Burns' friend William Niven. In comparison to his other letters, Burns does not include many quotations in these beginning three letters, indicating perhaps that Burns became more well-read over time, or he just simply did not feel the need to quote to express himself to an old friend the same way he does to people he is more interested in impressing, like newer acquaintances or women he is pursuing. The dynamic between these friends is expressed as being a relationship where they "sharpened their wits by arguing and debating with each other", so this is someone who Burns trusted to help him figure out his values and beliefs through friendly debate as a young man (Ferguson, L.1). Burns also mentions the concerns of daily life that he carries, in addition to discussing character building. Farming efforts

are on his mind, as he writes “I have three acres of pretty good flax this season perhaps in the course of marketing it I may come your way” (Ferguson, L.1). He is using this aspect of work to also try to visit Niven, but again this light inclusion of concerns of daily life bears resemblance to some of Burns’ other work included in this thesis. In “To a Mouse” especially, as well as “Now westlin winds”, farming concerns frame the poems. These are grounded in real experience, as we see here it is the kind of issue Burns wrote to friends about.

Burns’ second letter to William Niven adds interesting depth to “Auld Lang Syne”, as he writes “you have not time to remember an old acquaintance, who has nothing else to recommend him, but only he has an honest heart, and wishes you well” (Ferguson, L.2). There is some confused hurt in Burns’ tone here, and this kind of friendship abandonment could have very easily lent itself to inspiring the lyrics of “Auld Lang Syne”, where Burns through his speaker implores listeners to treat each other better and more kindly by remembering old acquaintances. Cherishing childhood friendships for their own sake is at the core of “Auld Lang Syne”, and it is what is missing from his correspondence with Niven. Burns drives this message home by writing “I am still so happy as to have a friend or two (tho’ I am afraid I must no more have the honor of having you among that number)” (Ferguson, L.2). He does not release Niven from commitments of friendship easily or soften his words to hide how hurt he is by Niven’s neglect of their bond. Overall, Burns appears to be an emotionally oriented man, and in this instance he is a very young man as well. This youthful and kindhearted perspective leads to lines like “I shall be happy to hear from you how you go on in the ways of life; I do not mean so much how trade prospers, or if you have the prospect of riches, or the dread of poverty; as how you go in the cultivation of the finer feelings of the heart” (Ferguson, L.2). Even in the same letter where he points out Niven’s failures of friendship, he still extends seemingly sincere well-wishes.

As this thesis focuses heavily on materials for publication versus private correspondence, it is important to include one of Burns' many letters to George Thomson, a man who published several of Burns' works in the *A Select Collection of Original Scottish Airs*, and the two collaborated on a few of Burns' songs. This letter is from 1794, much later than my other selections, and it begins with Burns asking for feedback about a duet. The letter promotes collaboration strongly, as Burns uses phrases like "singing our songs", and "the rhythm is so peculiar and irregular, and on that irregularity depends so much of their beauty, that we must e'en take them with all their wildness, & humour the verse accordingly" (Ferguson, L.647). Again, Burns associates wildness with Scottish music, and he focuses heavily on the sounds of things throughout this letter. As this is a musical collaboration, Burns stresses the value of writing for the ear, even when he is writing words, not music itself, with lines like "Nelly, & Sally, the only name that suits, has, to my ear, a vulgarity about them, which unfits them for anything except burlesque" (Ferguson, L.647). Burns shows his consideration and measured thought that went into even seemingly small decisions like choosing the names Nelly or Sally to include in a song.

Burns' passion for Scots and Scottish subjects is present in his correspondence to Thomson, as it is in much of his work. His passion for Scottish art is visible in sentences like "are you not quite vexed to think that these men of genius, for such they certainly were, who composed our fine Scotish lyrics, should be unknown?—It has given me many a heart-ach" (Ferguson, L.647). This reinforces the importance of publication, especially to Burns, as someone who did not want his own authorship to remain unknown or ambiguous. In further discussions of how to be a Scottish lyricist, similarly to Dr. Moore's advice to Burns not to write in Scots, in letters to Burns "Thomson stressed two details: that there must be no 'indelicacy' in

the songs in his collection, and that English words were preferable to Scots" (Ferguson, 484). Perhaps worrying that Burns may write something "indelicate" was warranted, as Burns did pen a few raunchier pieces, but he seemed to face as much negative advice from friends as he did encouragement towards his writing style. Ferguson and Roy further pick apart Burns' and Thomson's relationship, saying that "the worst instance of Thomson's meddling with Burns's work was *Bannockburn*. The poet sent it to him with the suggestion that it should be to the tune *Hey Tuttie Taitie*, but Thomson insisted that it must be to *Lewie Gordon*, and forced Burns to rewrite the words" (Ferguson, 484). Multiple times, Burns was subject to collaborators or friends discouraging the way that he wanted to be a poet. However, the strength of his conviction was such that *Bannockburn* was the most egregious alteration, and the world still benefited from *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* as Burns envisioned.

## CONCLUSION

Through this study across some of Burns' poetry, songs, and correspondence, I feel prepared to tie together what I have learned about Burns' poetic style and use of dialect. In analyzing his style across a survey of his works, it is valuable and necessary to include Burns' letters, because style often has continuity between the public and private. Comparing work he outright intended for publication with letters he did not lends insight into Burns' overall style as well as purposeful decisions he chose in order to make points in publication that were not as much part of his private or personal style of writing to friends.

Burns' excitability and high emotionality that is especially notable in "Highland Mary" also appears frequently in his letters. Looking at the way he describes love to Dr. Moore, or the way he writes to Agnes especially, show the urgency and import that romance had for Burns.

This tendency is noted by Burns' biographers, as Crawford wrote that one of Burns' main themes was "the uncontrollable energy of love" (65). Not just love alone, but the unmanageable and irresistible qualities of it, were central in romance for Burns. Across his works, Burns writes with passion, particularly regarding his romantic pursuits of women, and he is consistently thoughtful and provocative towards religion. There is evidence of a culture of sharing and borrowing in Burns' incorporation of quotes and epigraphs in his letters and poems. This extends to the songs as well in that the tunes themselves are not original, but rather folk songs that Burns set his words to.

Another element that I continually noticed throughout my reading of Burns over the past year was conversationality. Most of his poems, letters, and songs engage with their subjects or readers in a lively and conversational way, making this something that seems like a distinctive through-line for Burns. Epistolary poems and poems written as "Address[es] to" also indicate that bringing a sense of individual conversation and communication were important for Burns in his published work. However, in my research, I saw that something of this quality is altered in the letters despite their also being explicitly engaged with another being. The letters bring with them a sense that they are not meant to be read or heard aloud, which makes sense. Still, this stands out in stark contrast as though they are engaged in everyday conversations with people, the letters do not have the same verse flow or musical qualities that Burns writes with in his works that are for publication and communal enjoyment. Despite their not being explicitly for publication, Burns' letters sometimes carry a sense of performativity, which is likely due to the letter collection as a popular genre that Burns would have had in mind especially as he gained fame. Additionally, Burns' epistolary poems, such as "To W. Simpson, Ochiltree", offer another interesting contrast to Burns' correspondence. This poem reads very differently than Burns'

letters do, as he uses Scots more in this letter, and the Burns stanza, while his letters are primarily written in prose and English. This difference indicates that were "To W. Simpson" a letter of Burns' not intended for publication in *Poems* as it was, it likely would have been written much more similarly to those in his private correspondence. Burns often wrote for the ear, which usually meant writing in Scots for him, and the fact that the letters are all in English also add to the idea that he would not want them to be read aloud, as they lack the cadence of Scots that he found so enchanting he had to publish in it despite several people in his life suggesting otherwise.

An additional common thread throughout many of the pieces included in this thesis is discretion in identities. This appears in a few different ways. In the case of "To W. S*****n, Ochiltree" it was in that titular choice to censor the recipient's name, yet this was privately revealed to Robert Ainslie, indicating that Burns wanted an overall public perception that differed from a friendly and intimate one. Other times, the element of hidden identity is playful and flirtatious, as in the cases of Alison and Agnes, who Burns disguised as "E" and "Clarinda", respectively. In looking at what he could have intended with these choices, preservation of privacy seems like a justified assumption, as William Simpson becoming widely known as the addressee of "To W. S*****n" was something that did not happen until Ainslie's annotated copy of *Poems* was available to the public. Here, the addressee was not as much of the point as the message, and the idea that Burns could be crafting a letter to a genuine critic he wanted to converse with. The element of pretend in the romantic pseudonyms contributes to fantasy and secrecy heightening the feelings of each relationship. As there would need to be some element of truth marking these letters in order to ensure that they were delivered to the correct person, preservation of privacy is not as plausible of a theory here.

Burns often wrote with a cleverly pointed tone that was usually lighthearted or sardonic, but paired with an important meaning, particularly in his published works. Throughout this research, I discovered a bard, a friend, and a man who carried strong beliefs and convictions that were consistent across poems and songs. Burns' correspondence enables readers to gain additional insight into the goals and meaning of his poetry, in turn both complicating and clarifying Burns' writing. Unlike Byron, I did not find overwhelming evidence of Burns having an "antithetical mind", as there were typically shared convictions and points of view across his poems, songs, and letters, despite their being written differently. Burns' use of Scots in published and private work was often something he was advised against by trusted friends, mentors, teachers, and standards of the day, yet his certainty in this venture was enough to overcome all the criticism or well-meaning advice he received.

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