

## 2021- NYC Burns Society Award Winning Essays

First Place Winner: by Thomas Graham (class of 2021)

Among the history of English literature, language, and poetry, names such as Shakespeare, Edgar Allan Poe, and Robert Frost are names that headline the history of the English Language as well as how english speakers interpret it today. Though, these names have headlined English for hundreds of years, one name stands out in the development of the modern euphemisms and beliefs of english speakers around the world. This man is named Robert Burns, a scottish poet born in Alloway, Scotland who was able to write everything for the common man, who may or may not have been on the moral straight and narrow. He wrote for the love of country, love of nature, love of life, love of women, and love for fellow men which made him an important and beloved poet who appealed to every audience imaginable. Burns used his past as well as the history of Scotland to create magnificent poems and songs that not only represented him but represented all those around him. Burns' use of biographical and historical elements in his writing allows for his audience to not only understand him but to understand his stance on topics such as nature and his home, the Scottish Highlands.

Throughout Robert Burns' writing career, the nation of Scotland and the beauty of nature in Scotland was a major focus in many of his writings. In Burns' poem or song "My Heart's in the Highlands", Burns uses his own life and the events that occurred during it to develop a deeper connection between the reader and Burns' ideas. Robert Burns grew up in the Highlands and lived there for all of his formative years. He was born on a farm in Alloway, Ayrshire and then raised on another farm known as the Mount Oliphant Farm. This attachment to nature leads Burns to develop a love of country and a love of nature very early on in his life. This is seen in his song, "My Heart's in the Highlands" where he sings,

"Farewell to the Highlands, farewell to the North,  
The birth-place of Valour, the country of Worth;  
Wherever I wander, wherever I rove,  
The hills of the Highlands forever I love."

Burns makes it apparent that Scotland is his home and that his love for Scotland is undying and unending. He mentions how Scotland is a birthplace of Valour and Worth, invoking that spirit of love of nation that he developed from a young age, working for others by tilling the fields of the Socttish Highlands. He also

takes note of the honored past of Scotland, mentioning the valour and worth Scottish people of past eras gained from war and battle. This powerful feeling of nationalism and honor are strong in the hearts of all Scots but most notably in Burns' heart as seen in the song. Burns continues to use his biographical connections into the chorus of the song, making mention of things he did in his childhood but also making reference to moving away from the Highlands, something he did a few times in his life. Early in his life he moved to Irvine in order to learn flax-sewing and later moved to Dumfries where he would spend his final years. In the chorus of "My Heart's in the Highlands", Burns reminisces about all the good times he had growing up saying,

"My heart's in the Highlands, my heart is not here,  
My heart's in the Highlands, a-chasing the deer;  
Chasing the wild-deer, and following the roe,  
My heart's in the Highlands, wherever I go."

He continues to focus on childhood memories of chasing deer through the woods and how the Highlands have made him into the man he is today. Burns states, "My heart's in the Highlands, wherever I go." which allows the reader to understand Burns' attachment to the Highlands as well as Scotland itself, no matter where he lives or roams. This deep attachment to the Highlands and Scotland itself extends beyond Burns to all Scottish people as many share the same beliefs, ideals, and loves for their nation. This song isn't just about Burns' love for Scotland but rather the Scottish love for Scotland no matter where they may be.

Robert Burns was a man who not only sought to explain his own life in his poetry but the history, beauty, and love that his fellow countrymen shared for the Highlands and Scotland as a whole. The period in which Burns wrote was the height of the Scottish enlightenment, where many philosophers, poets, and writers in Scotland sought to portray the beauty of their land as well as understand its grace. In "My Heart's in the Highlands", Burns states,

"Farewell to the mountains, high-cover'd with snow,  
Farewell to the straths and green vallies below;  
Farewell to the forests and wild-hanging woods,  
Farewell to the torrents and loud-pouring floods."

Burns' description of the Scottish Highlands reflects the popular enlightenment ideas of the beauties of nature and the wonders of Scotland. High mountains, green forests, and rains are all common in the Highlands and mean the most to those who call the Highlands home. Lakes and rivers also dot the land of northern Scotland with Loch Ness and Loch Linnhe headlining the many lakes of the region. These natural beauties are what make the Scottish proud of their heritage and their homeland. Burns

uses this love of nature and love of homeland to make a historical connection to those Scotsmen of the past who fought for their home in order to preserve the beauty of their land.

Robert Burns's use of biographical and historical is able to craft a short yet beautiful song about the beauty of Scotland and what the experiences and nation mean to the people who live in it or are from it. In both the chorus and verses of "My Heart's in the Highlands", Burns is able to convey to the listener the importance of his Scottish heritage and his homeland of the Scottish Highlands to not only himself, but all those who know the beauty of his homeland. Singing Burns' "My Heart's in the Highlands" not only brings out the Scotsman in all people but truly brings out the love everyone has for their home nation.