

Third Place Winner: Luca Nitti (class of 2021)

Much of Robert Burns's fame and popularity is due to his distinctive blend of formal English and Scottish dialect, clearly seen in "A Red, Red Rose." At the time Burns was writing, this dialect was known as "Scots." Robert Burns himself spent the last years of his life working to preserve and formalize the traditions of oral Scots poetry, found especially in the Scottish countryside. "A Red, Red Rose" is a poem composed by Scotland's national poet, Robert Burns and was first published in 1794 in a collection of traditional Scottish songs set to music. When analyzing the poem "A Red, Red Rose" by Robert Burns, the reader can make connections between the lines as well as making connections about the poem's literary and historical contexts in order to fully understand the theme of love and change.

To be able to identify the theme of a poem is much different than being able to connect the poem to the author's culture, life and history. Robert Burns poems, specifically "A Red, Red Rose" must be set into the bigger picture of Robert Burns' life in order to grasp where these ideas are coming from. After carefully analyzing the poem, it is noticeable that Burns composed 'My Love Is Like a Red, Red Rose' in 1794, just two years before he died, and is said to have written it for his wife and muse, Jean Armour, to sing.

Writers are often influenced by what is going on in not only their lives, but also with what is going on in the world. Similarly, writers of certain time periods and of similar cultures will write in very similar styles. In order to fully understand a poem's theme and where it comes from, the author's writing style must be appreciated and interpreted correctly. This writing style starts with the author and poem's historical context.

Burns lived during the Scottish Enlightenment which took place during the 18th and early 19th centuries. A time full of tremendous scientific and philosophical accomplishments in Scotland. The enlightenment was an eighteenth century intellectual movement whose three central concepts were the use of reason, the scientific method, and progress. Enlightenment thinkers believed they could help create better societies and better people. Enlightenment thinkers in the capital city of Edinburgh made a point of being fluent in both Scots and standard English. Robert Burns was the most accomplished poet to combine both languages. Burns also arguably draws on Enlightenment science to symbolize his romantic vision of everlasting and never changing love. For example, the third stanza of "A Red, Red Rose" features several images that represent the passage of time: "Till a' the seas gang dry, my dear/ And the rocks melt wi' the sun." In these lines, it is possible that Burns is purposely evoking concepts of geology and time that had recently been discovered by Enlightenment scientists.

"A Red, Red Rose" was first published, as a song, in Pietro Urbana's 1794 *A Selection of Scots Songs Harmonized Improved with Simple and Adapted Graces*. Urbani wrote in the volume that "the words of the RED, RED ROSE were obligingly given to him by a celebrated Scots Poet, who was so struck with them when sung by a country girl that he wrote them down." Robert Burns announces giving Urbani "a simple old Scots song which I had pickt up in this country" in one of his letters. Robert Burns' poem's first three stanzas were reprinted in

Johnson's *Museum* in 1797 and in Thomson's *Scottish Airs* in 1799. His poem became most well known when it was set to the tune and rhythm of "Low Down in the Broom" in Robert Archibald Smith's *Scottish Minstrel* in 1821. This literary context plays a larger role in the understanding of his work because it shows the appreciation his poem had when listened and read to as a song. The poem shares the message of eternal love never changing. This type of theme is often best listened to as a song as it is very optimistic and cheerful written as a ballad.

Robert Burns', "A Red Red Rose", must be placed into historical and biographical context in order to be fully appreciated and interpreted. The Scottish language and writing style are clearly present and impact the poem by altering the way the audience reads and sings the poem.