

Britney DeFay Winner 2022

Love carries many different meanings. Some define love as selfish, or as security, or as respect. Love can hold many meanings, but if one thing is certain is that love lasts forever. People carry that love with them, whether it be for an object or for a person, because love leaves an impression on them. It's an emotion that cannot be easily forgotten. Even if that love fades, the memories associated with the love allow it to live within us for our entire lives. Robert Burns explores this idea of love in his poem, "A Red Red Rose." In his poem he defines love as the fairytale version we all find comfort in, as everlasting no matter what battle is faced. Any common person can find comfort in Burns' writing and relate to him because Burns wrote poems for that reason. The clever use of metaphor and rhyme plays in the childlike fantasy of love people tend to have growing up.

A rose is the universal symbol of beauty. However, Burns takes a different approach in his use of symbolism. A rose, in a more literal sense, is vibrant, delicate, and holds many layers to it, much like someone's love. Burns sees the comparison between love and roses and uses it to begin his poem. Burns' love comes off as young love, when calling it a rose he defines his love as "newly sprung in June." His love is fresh, it's exciting, it's a state of new scenery. It's the type of young love most people feel at one point. The love that is cherished in our souls because it's too precious to ever let go of. Burns begins the poem with a rose because it's the most defining metaphor for the love he is trying to describe. Burns continues to find many of his metaphors from the nature around him to define love.

After the rose, he goes on to define his love as everlasting. For example, Burns states "Till all the seas go dry, my Dear, And the rocks melt with the sun". No matter how long it takes, His love will persist. The irony with his metaphors is that, while he may not realize the love, by how he defines it, can run out at some point. The seas will eventually dry, the melody in a song will hit its final note. , and beautiful roses die eventually. With metaphors like these, commoners can truly see the naivety that Burns is projecting from this idea of love. Someone so young isn't able to realize that the nature around us, the love they hold, can very possibly come to a sudden end.

While any common reader can pick up on the lie Burns is trying to sell to his audience, they are able to forgive him anyway. Burns appeals to the audience with the use of simple rhyme. Yet again bringing them back to a mindset of innocence, someone who hasn't seen the pain that comes with love. The rhymes reflect what Burns believes love to be, simple. The lines "And fare you well a while! And I will come again, my Love,

Although it were ten thousand mile!” lift the weight off of how heavy the journey of love truly is. It makes it appear as though love is able to survive no matter how distant or how long the journey will be. However, anyone with experience knows the burden love puts upon them, and while it’s easy to make pretty rhymes and say these words, it’s sadly just another delusion from the reality people live in.

Love is a complicated topic. Anyone would be naive to believe that someone can never waiver from that feeling. Throughout history, writers have made careers from the tragedies that stem from this one feeling. From Romeo and Juliet to Wuthering Heights, love can bring on much pain and suffering to those around it. Yet humans crave that feeling more than anything else. That’s why they may turn to Burns’ poem. To provide them with hope that something good comes out of such a heavy emotion.

Madison Ohringer first runner up

It is easy to point out when someone else is in the wrong. It's even easier to point out other people's faults and failures. But why do we struggle when it comes to our own? Oftentimes things we hate that other people do, we just so coincidentally do them ourselves. It is easy to point the finger at someone and judge them for how they act and use it as an excuse for our own transgressions. Comparing it and weighing it on our own imaginary scales because their wrongs might not equal our own. “Holy Willie’s Prayer” is a satire piece written by Robert Burns about religious hypocrisy and self righteousness.

“Holy Willie’s Prayer” is about a man who asks God for forgiveness for his own sins but immediately asks God to condemn others who have committed these same acts to eternal damnation. Holy Willie is quick to point out how others swear, drink and dance, speaking down upon them. But in the following lines he admits to doing the same things but when he does it he tries to explain his reasoning by humanizing it and making it seem like an accident; “But yet, O Lord! confess I must At times I'm fash'd wi' fleshly lust An' sometimes, too, in worldly trust, Vile self gets in; But Thou remembers we are dust, Defil'd wi' sin”. This poem follows a format of Willie pointing out others transgressions but then immediately admitting that he too has done the same. In doing so it's almost like he is trying to soften the blow of his own wrong doings by saying “others do it too”. The irony lies in the fact that he feels for his wrong doings he deserves only forgiveness; “But, Lord, remember me an' mine. Wi' mercies temporal and divine, That I for grace an' gear may shine, Excell'd by nane, And a' the glory shall be Thine, Amen, Amen!”. He's asking God to remember him, to gift him the gift of grace and ensure only the best for him. While asking God to smite all the men that he has listed in

his prayer. Catholics believe in original sin, a sin that everyone is born with and is cleansed of through the sacrament of Baptism. But here in yet, Willie asks why he should carry that sin if it was committed six thousand years before he was born. Willie sees himself as an exception to the rules and feels when he does something wrong it's a mistake not representing who he is. However, when someone else does it they deserve the utmost punishment, they deserve to be smited and need to be punished for eternity.

Although this is based on real people and Burns even uses their real first names, it's not about their wrong doings but their own self justification and hypocrisy. Willie represents the ordinary person. If asked to reflect upon oneself it would be found that they may have excuses for the wrongs that have been committed. Whether it be temptation, lust, etc.. It's hard to see yourself as a bad person, or even if you know it you probably wouldn't admit it. However, if asked to reflect on someone else's wrongdoings, it is easy to fault them for it and say they need the maximum punishment for it. You probably wouldn't see the human side to them, you wouldn't understand their reasoning or quite understand how they can do such a thing. Willie wants to be humanized and show that he made a mistake, however, he feels other people who are doing the same thing are committing heinous crimes. This is the essence of Robert Burns writing with a message intertwined within them, the message of this one warning against self-righteousness.

“Holy Willie” is a term that has now been adapted and used in Scots language to describe a person who is humorless and really religious. This phrase was derived from Robert Burns piece “Holy Willie’s Prayer”. Robert Burns has had a huge impact on Scotland, portraying the beauty of the culture by choosing to write in Scots although being told otherwise. After receiving tons of recognition for his Kilmarnock edition in 1786, including famous works such as “Halloween” and “To a Mouse”, Burns was told not to write in Scots by figures in Edinburgh. However, for Burns it wasn't about the money, it was about spreading Scottish culture and understanding the power and artistic articulation it held. Burns saw Scots “pulsing heart of the ordinary people”, within each word spoken held their own unique stories of deprivation, joy, laughter, pain, and sufferidge. Burns was a man ahead of his times. Many poets such as Coleridge and Wordsworth are credited for writing about the ordinary person, tying them to nature and using authentic language but Burns was already writing in this way a decade prior. Burns helped pave the path of preservation of Scots, along with many poets who came after him all portraying Scottish identity. Burns gave Scotland a voice in literature. This is why Burns remains so relevant: he stayed true to his roots, never shying away from the beauty of his culture.

Works Cited

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Juliet Romero - second runner up

Happiness is relative, a feeling that when felt, humans sought for more of. In times of despair, they search for the bare minimum dose of serotonin. Yet, when they are in satisfaction with life, that dose is not enough. As the poetic genius that is able to capture and explain this phenomenon, Robert Burns writes of how happiness can be as simple as a bottle and a truthful friend, alongside the subliminal consequences of having them in one's grasp. By demonstrating the simplicity of those two unembellished objects, Burns conveys the idea of the relativity and flexibility of the pursuit of happiness.

The blatant stimulants of happiness is an idea thoroughly explored within "A Bottle and an Honest Friend". Within an environment, humans thrive to be happy within every phase of their lives, a feeling that seems of more as a necessity than a want. He writes,

"There's nane that's blest of human kind,
But the cheerful and the gay, man."

Humans instinctively put in the same amount of effort to generate feelings of contentment as they do for necessities of survival. In his writing, readers, especially those of the older generation, have experienced the tribulations of living, facing the darkness of life on a daily basis with a taste of the light from time to time. When struck with hardship, the idea of happiness seems so far of reach, so much so that the less we have it the more it seems like a blessing when gained. Just as addicts crave drugs for a euphoric feeling, alcohol elevates levels of serotonin to make happiness feel more obtainable, a temporary fix that causes lifelong problems.

Despite craving happiness within our lives, simple solutions typically have long term consequences. Burns, as a man who lived with many complications within his life, often turned to alcohol to relieve his issues. He writes,

"Here's a bottle and an honest friend!
What wad ye wish for mair, man?"

A bottle, a representation of drowning his sorrows until all that is left are feelings of numbness and "happiness", is utilized as the center of his writing. Just as many people fall into the trap of intoxication, Burns brings light to how deceiving it may be. He asks in theory, "What more can

you ask for?”, a question as a result of despair. He describes how easy it is to sacrifice cognitivity and awareness for pure ignorance with such chemical stimulation. He infers at the end of his poem of the sparsity of happiness, writing,

“Believe me, happiness is shy,
And comes not aye when sought, man.”

Burns has felt the feelings of lost hope, asking himself when he’s going to be truthfully content. He comes into terms with this by insisting on that feeling’s inability to be present when needed. Readers receive a sense of relief with his alcohol-induced solution because it is a reliable and easily accessible method for happiness, yet are haunted by the realization that that positivity can only be achieved willingly by such action. Otherwise, they’d have to wait, which, biologically, may be difficult for many humans in dire need of a smile.

Burns successfully conveys his message of how temporary happiness is well achievable, yet lacks the solutions of the trials and tribulations faced by all of humankind on a daily basis. As humans are working to build a life in order to achieve contentment in the near future, they wonder how it feels to be happy in the present moment, which may only be obtained through lifelong detriments that resolve temporary adversities. He advertently hints at these consequences by conveying a positive connotation on “a bottle and an honest friend”, successfully allowing the readers to interpret and gain their own awareness of the negative aspects of his simple solution to happiness.