

Topic Page: [Burns, Robert, 1759–1796](#)

Definition: **Burns, Robert** from *Philip's Encyclopedia*

Scottish poet. The success of *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (1786), which includes "The Holy Fair" and "To a Mouse", enabled Burns to move to Edinburgh, where he was admired as "the heaven-taught ploughman". Although popular, he could not support himself from his poetry and so became an excise officer. Scotland's unofficial national poet, his works include "Tam o'Shanter" (1790) and the song "Auld Lang Syne". An annual Burns Night is held on his birthday, January 25.

Summary Article: **Burns, Robert**

From *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

Scottish poet. He used a form of Scots dialect at a time when it was not considered suitably 'elevated' for literature. Burns's first volume, *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*, appeared in 1786. In addition to his poetry (such as 'To a Mouse'), Burns wrote or adapted many songs, including 'Auld Lang Syne'.

Burns Night is celebrated on 25 January, his birthday. His strength lies in his essential sincerity to his own experience and the extraordinary vitality of its expression.

Born in Alloway, near Ayr, and went to the village school, and he became joint tenant with his brother Gilbert of his late father's farm at Mossgiel in 1784, but it was unsuccessful. Burns intended to emigrate to Jamaica with Mary Campbell as his wife, but she died. He later commemorated this romance in several poems, including 'Highland Mary'. In 1786, to earn money for his passage, he published *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*. It was an immediate success and contained much of his best work especially in social criticism, including 'The Twa Dogs', 'Hallowe'en', 'The Holy Fair', 'To a Mouse', 'To a Mountain Daisy', and 'The Cotter's Saturday Night'. Burns was thereafter welcomed among intellectuals and aristocrats and was dissuaded from going abroad. In 1788 he used his capital to try a new farm, Ellisland, on the banks of the Nith near Dumfries. This farm also proved unsatisfactory and in 1791 he moved to Dumfries and became a full-time excise officer. In 1792 he nearly lost his job because of his radical opinions. Meanwhile he began the provision of songs for the *Scots Musical Museum* and also for Thomson's *Select Collection of Original Scottish Airs* – many of his own composition, many based on older verses or fitted to old tunes. This was entirely a labour of love, for he received no payment.

Burns, who wrote as well in English as he did in Scots, is recognized as the culminating figure in two centuries' tradition of folk song and genre poetry and one of the greatest of all writers of love songs. Although not a Romantic himself, the example of his work was one of the vital influences in the coming artistic movement known as Romanticism. He contributed some 300 songs to James Johnson's *Scots Musical Museum* (1787–1803) and Thomson's *Select Collection of Original Scottish Airs* (1793–1841). Whether composing original pieces or, as in the case of 'Auld Lang Syne', revitalizing a song which had already passed through more than one version, he had the touch of lyric genius. To this he added a power of bitter, criticizing satire, shown in such poems as 'Holy Willie's Prayer', and a command of vivid description that appears at its best in 'Tam o' Shanter' and 'The Jolly Beggars'. His poetry owed much to Scottish poets Allan Ramsay and to Robert Fergusson, who stands in much the same relation to Burns as Marlowe to Shakespeare; but he far surpassed both his forerunners.

quotations

Burns, Robert

documents

Emerson, Ralph Waldo: Tribute to Robert Burns

weblinks

Selected Poetry of Robert Burns (1759–1796)

images

Burns, Robert

audios

Burns, Robert A Red, Red Rose

APA

Chicago

Harvard

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Burns, Robert. (2018). In Helicon (Ed.), *The Hutchinson unabridged encyclopedia with atlas and weather guide*. Abington, UK: Helicon. Retrieved from https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/burns_robert_1759_1796



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