**A BARD’S EPITAPH 1786**

Robert Burns was a Scottish poet and lyricist. He is generally thought to be the national poet of Scotland because he is the most widely read among all poets who have written in the Scots language. Burns has also written in English and a light Scots dialect, so that his poetry would be understood by an audience beyond Scotland as well. He has even written in standard English. The volume of works by Burns which came to be known as Poems, mainly in the Scottish dialect came out in 1786. Also called the **Kilmarnock volume**, it contained much of his best writing. In 1791, Burns was requested to write lyrics for **The Melodies of Scotland**, and he responded by contributing over 100 songs.

**A Bard’s Epitaph**, the concluding poem of the Kilmarnock edition. Here Burns makes himself into a national symbol by writing about himself as one – albeit deceased. Where Burns names himself a bard which connotations according to McGuirk, *a bard is a poet whose insights convey a national perspective and for whom self-expression simultaneously involves cultural definition*.  In the opening stanza, Burns asks any man, any **whim-inspir’d fool, / Owre fast for thought, owre hot for rule that passes his grave to pause and shed a tear on his behalf**.  Burns imagines himself buried in the grave and invites passers-by to weep for him. Is there an idiot who acts on the inspiration of caprice Who acts before he thinks and is too hot-headed or stubborn to be ruled; who is to bashful/shy to seek/inquire or ask others probably and too proud to creep? Let him draw near and over this grassy heap/mound and sing dolefully and drop a tear. He, **the bard of rustic song** who (in a hidden pun) both ste**a**ls a position among the crowds and ste**e**ls the crowd towards radical sentiment, appeals to the onlookers and hopes to elicit a **frater-feeling strong** or sense of Scottish fraternity.  Is there a poet who creates rustic songs and who unknown is passing among the crowds that usually gather weekly in this area? Do not go by (my grave without stopping). But with strong brotherly feeling come and heave a sigh. Is there a man whose clear judgement can teach other people how to take the right course but for himself is unable to do this and instead runs as wild as the waves in his own path in life? Burns then makes an example of himself for others, asking them to avoid his mistakes and wildness he means his fondness for whisky and women. The poor inhabitant below. Burns himself was very quick to know how to teach wise people knowledge He cautions the onlooker, and so too the reader, to attend and learn to steer the course of their lives with similar passionate Scottishness but with more prudence.

Burns deeply appreciated the warmth of friendship and the softer flame of love. **Readers listen to me**! Whether your soul soars your flights of imagination beyond the North Pole or whether your soul digs about half-concealed in this hole in the ground looking for light. Know that the root of wisdom is prudent, cautious self-control.

Burns switches from a thin Scots at the opening to pure Standard English in the linking **self-control** with an increasingly anglicized voice.  Burns’s bardic self allowed Scotsmen to see themselves as flawed yet genuine, as farmers also capable of philosophical thought, as both able to use English and able to choose Scots as best suits the moment.

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