

**THE
BALLAD
OF RABBIE BURNS**

*A
Lyrical Biography*

*HOMECOMING
2009*

But tell me, Rob (I'm no in scorn)
Aneath what planet was ye born?
'Tis pity you should thrash the corn,
Or till the rigs;
Your kintry should your brows adorn
Wi' laurel sprigs.

**DUAN 1
ALLOWAY**

Its Education maks the genius bright

Adams

Of poesy & her best of men
I sing, a name that maist must ken
It's notes still sound through street & glen
From fame's flaight horn
What years have flown, twelve score & ten
Since Burns was born *

His father toiled thro snow & sun
Crafting an elegant garden
Grafting for friendly gentlemen **
 Of small estate
Whose first born, Rab, tho poor man's son
 Was rich in fate

This lad soon proved a wiseling wean
Whose dad had mov'd from Aberdeen
To marry him a harvest queen
 From fair old Ayr
Who soon sired six more siblings lean
 Rab's bed to share

They settl'd by the gentle Doon
With kettle-happy Granma' Broun
Who whistl'd muckle lip-suck'd tune
 While cooking neeps
Or mutter'd tayles neath bright'ning moon
 To frighten sleeps

She spoke of elfcandles, spunkies
Of witches, warlocks, wraiths, kelpies,
Of dragons, giants & brownies
 From realms faerie
Such wyrd & wondrous trumperies
 Fuell'd Rab's fancy

His mind was as the green, young corn
That grows before the golden dawn
But as Burns was a poet born
 Of no mean clout
Like Venus in the puff of morn
 His stalk stood out

As Rab's mind strides from infant's mruk
He understands all men must work
With moral moulded by his kirk
 Through rant & scowl
& if in labour they would shirk,
 Our bellies growl

His father was a Jacobite
Who said, 'Good men will always fight
For what they felt was wrong & right
 Wheth'e'er they died!"
Whetting a poets appetite
 For native pride

Unless a man would be a fool
The boy in him must skip to school ***
Where endless repetitions rule
 His daily grind
& better teachers fire & fuel
 A gay, wee mind

James Murdoch was the latter sort
His patience long, his lectures short
Sensing this Burns the best he'd taught
 Or ever would
E'en tho the lad's classroom report
 Not always good

For Rab swift to react fiercely
Fists fly at ilk playground bully
& aifter he would cheeky be
 With verbal dash
Soon silenced upon Murdoch's knee
 With backside's thrash

But gie him guid books for inspection ****
Like Mason's eclectic collection
His soul felt haul'd in one direction
 Poesy's uplifts
Homework rarely needing correction
 Such were his gifts

As vernal Burns PATRIOT is
The Blacksmith who shod his horses
Lends him a book on brave WALLACE
 His triumphs & pains
Pouring sic SCOTTISH prejudice
 Down his boiling veins

& so the muses have their way
But not Edina, grand & grey
Nor Glasgow or green Galloway
 Can this bard claim
Twas wee & airy Alloway
 First felt Rab's fame

DUAN 2
MOUNT OLLIPHANT

*The Muse, nae poet ever fand her
Til by himself he learn'd to wander
A down some tottin' burn's meander*

Robert Burns

The Burns' moved to Mount Olliphant *
Where young Rab made to grunt & pant
Ploughing the land for seeds to plant
 In wind & rains
But still in studies most days spent
 To feed his brains

Dalrymple school would always tell
As soon as Burns could amaist spell
He to the crambo-jingle fell
 Tho rough & rude
& Scotia's muse, that crooning belle
 In him renewed

For as a plough the boy did hold
His fingers whitening with cold
His father growing grim & old
 He sang sweet song
How many lines of verse unfold
 From Rab's sweet tongue

But written down! No, not a jot
A poet drown'd in his life's lot
Chain'd to the daily porridge pot
 Ne'er knowing meat
& only ma's broth, thick hot,
 He loved to eat

Rab felt he was a galley slave
Bullwhipp'd to plough the foaming wave
From early morn to early grave
 Without respite
& escaping in books did crave
 Come candl'd night

& foregether'd with family
They shared old songs & poetry
Or snippeting thro history
 From Bruce to Rome
For Burns was luckily bless'd wi'
 A braw Scotch home

Rab soon absorbed his ain zeitgeist
Learnt of the goods ilk cotter priced
Read Grecian gods & Jesus Christ
 Kenn'd ailments sair
But not yet how hearts crush'd & sliced
 By maiden's fair

Until the lad had turn'd sixteen
At harvest coupling, when his e'en
Was fill'd with fairest country queen
 One autumn less
She was the fairest he had seen
 In dance & dress

The lass could sing with such sweet feel
How Rab's young heart would wrack & wheel
His mind riming to every reel
 With spangling pang
From whence his soul began to deal
 In sense & sang **

To Kirkanswald Rab's studies post
Where Uncle Broun plays perfect host
For schooling on a smuggler's coast
 Where puffin flies
Where tavern-snug at every toast
 His bar bills rise

Tw'as here Rab first felt Alba's blast
A people proud of all that's pass'd
& how their liberty held fast
 Thro prayer & toil
How poetry bloom'd thick & fast
 In Scotia's soil

Burns was a sponge to bookish lore
Harvesting tales to set in store
For future days, as more & more
 He delved thro words
'Til some distracting lass next door ***
 Sang like sangbirds

It fell upon a Lammas night
When he first saw a breast fair white
& rous'd up lusty appetite
 'Mang barley rigs
Of how to squeeze & tease & bite
 & squeal like pigs

Thus losing his virginity
& musing trigonometry
Rab cruises back to his country
 Some mouse from toon
Sack full of sangs & poetry
 His pen slapp'd doon!

**##DUAN 5
MAUCLINE**

*Of a' the airts the win' can blaw
 I dearly love the west
For there the bonnie lassie lives
 The lass I love the best
There wild woods grow & rivers row
 & mony a hill between
But day & night, my fancy's flight
 Is ever wi' my Jean*

Robert Burns

Tis said all poets need a muse
To lead their souls to finer views
Of love & life so they can lose
 Dull minds in beauty
Far prettier than psalmic pews
 On solemn duty

Now Rabbie with a lass does clash
His wee dog cross her wash does dash
& there did CUPID lightning flash
 On young amour
Pretending not to gie ane fash
 This both ignore *

They met again that Halloween
"Hello, I'm Rab," "Hello, I'm Jean"
The loveliest in all Mauchline
 Leggy gazelle
With tempting lips & rougish een
 & breasted well! **

At first Rab thought her wee young thing
But then he heard an angel sing
& watch'd her nimble, sma' feet spring
 To beat & fiddle
& so he join'd her in a fling
 Arms flung a-middle

Rab woos Jean with a course romance
Delighted by his staggish dance
Excited by his countenance
 & dark complexion
When clapping snapp'd the cailedh-trance
 Lips made connection

Meeting in secret from her pa
Jean fell for Rabbie's gabby star
Whose fingers shynesses unbar
 Her heart to win
So she lay down, long legs aspar
 & let love in

As Rab meander'd hame that night
He saw a vision's blazing light
Outlandish Hizzie came in sight
 Ayr's ain goddess
Her name was Coila, wild & bright
 In haelan dress

Down flow'd her robe, a tartan sheen
Til half a leg was scrimly seen
& such a leg, his bonnie Jean
 Could only peer it
Sae straight, sae taper, ticht & clean
 None else came near it

Said Colia, "*Hail thee, mine own bard,
In me they native muse regard
No longer mourn thy fate is hard
 Thus poorly low
I come to give thee such regard
 As gods bestow!*

My boy, wear this!" she solemn said
& bound a holly round his head
The polish'd leaves & berries red
 Did rustling play
As like a passing thought, she fled
 In light away

As rubbers Rabbie rarely used
Jean's bump her da' soon unamused
Whose brulzie face point blank refused
 Jean for a wife
Rab left the Armour's most confused
 In all his life

He had to nurse his broken heart
By heaping up the harvest cart
& saw his sharp plough rip apart
 Some nested house
Where, on the spot, a rhyme did start
 For this wee mouse

*"I'm truly sorry man's dominion
Has broken nature's social union
An justifies that ill opinion
Which makes thee startle
At me, thy poor, earth-bound companion
An' fellow mortal."*

Deem them touching moments as these
To haul sad poets off their knees
Rab knew he must speed overseas ***
By western sail
Else stay & pay his baby fees
Or rot in jail

**DUAN 6
KILMARNOCK**

*Farewell my friends, farewell my foes!
My peace with these, my love with those;
The bursting tears my heart declare
Adieu, my native banks of Ayr*

Professor John Wilson

Rab's fame has spread beyond his Ayr
The time is ripe his verse to share
Gaining subscriptions everywhere
& plaudits too
For folk must soon become aware
Of poets true

But editing his first edition
He blank'd out Jeanie's pa's decision
By drinking himself to derision
 &, when frisky
Frigg'd any pig, blaming his vision
 On strong whiskey

*"Let other poets raise a fracas
'Bout vines, an wines, an' drucken bacchus,
An crabbed names & stories wrack us
 An' grate our lug,
I sing the juice Scotch bear can mak us
 In glass or jug"*

*'Hic-cup' Rab fell on tavern floor
Then stood up with a cavern roar
"I, Rabbie Burns, leave Scotia's shore
 To see Jamaica
But first I'll find a local whore
 Then west I'll take her"*

He swiftly found his fair Mary
A maiden from the high kintyre
& woo'd her to complicity
 With charming plans
*"Let's share the New World's liberty
 With Scotland's clans"*

It was the second May Sunday
When Mary said she'd 'go away'
With Rab, however far away
 Their love boat sails
Her petticoat up as they play
 At heads & tails

Again the houghmagandie pack
Like holy beagles at his back
Produced the stool & sack-cloth black
 Of fornication
For Jeanie wore a six-month stack
 Of procreation

From Kilmarnock comes a letter
"Your work's ready," wrote his printer
 *"As publisher & editor
 You've quite a book!"*
Now delivered by its writer
 To every nook *

Rab rides on madly in a dash
Thro thunderplomp & Levin flash
From house-to-house, collecting cash
 For his ship's berth
While Mr Armour's greed did gnash
 At this books worth

With warrants out for his arrest
He heard his lass was double blest
A boy & girl upon each breast
 Call'd Rab & Jean
So risks to see that happy chest
 Suckling serene

His soulwoman with their offspring
Began his resolves softening
But still determined west to wing
 In Mary's arms
He, with one last kiss lingering,
 Left Jeanie's charms

But as for Greenock he did ride
A message broke his manly pride
"Young Mary has from fever died"
Cried woes swift flow
But said, When dewy tear ducts dried,
"Still I shall go"

As on the road fear fill'd his heid
For his fair Mary was now deid
Pa Armour barring calm & plead
There came a letter
*"The Embro gentry's all agreed
Nae Bardie's better" ***

As high classes & low masses
Revel'd in Rab's geniuses
Vernal ploughman from Parnassus
Turn'd around his mare
For the land's loveliest lasses
In their lion's lair

**DUAN 7
EDINBURGH**

Know thine own worth, and reverence the lyre

Robert Burns

Rab Burst out from the Pentland Hills
To feel a thousand rousing thrills
As clouds high Heaven's light distills
On Scotia's seats
Where Canonsgate to Canonmills
Rise handsome streets *

Oor Rab soon swirls mid fancy dress
Dines with patron & patroness
Fresh subscribers for this fresh press
 Of his fine lines
Like Gordon's grand Duke & Duchess
 & their fine wines

They loved his love of liberty
His heartfelt sensitivity
His vivida vis animi
 & respect for hosts **
& Scotch sentimentality
In Haggis toasts

*"Fair fa' your honest, sonsie face
Great chieftan of the puddin' race
Aboon them a' ye tak your place
 Painch, tripe or thairm
Weel are ye wordy of a grace
 As lang's my arm!"*

& when some cad tried to make sense
Of his low birth, Rab spat defence,
*"Ah have to learning no pretence,
 Yet, what the matter?
Whene'er my muse does on me glance
 I jingle at her!"*

As his second book swell'd page-by-page ***
With verse to immortalise an age
He felt some tenor on Milan stage -
 But moods may change
 Now like a lion in iron cage
 In kintry strange

As Rabbie's star was rising sun
All of the girls would gie him one
From Muckspreaders in Lothian
 To local belles
& maids, like Peggy Cameron,
 His ego swells

Now higher Rabbie's star rising
Thro' literati glittering
Far from a drumock's curmurring
 His voice sublime
Distills though readers murmuring
 His fresh-wrought rhyme

Now Burns meets sixteen-years-old Scott
The boy, patient as well-wrought plot,
Sits silently within ear shot,
 Then speaks at last
& shakes Rab's hand, their hot palms knot
 & baton pass'd ****

As great men join this celebration
All masons from his ain proud nation
Gave him such a standing ovation
 The lodge roof shook
Granting grand civic elevation
 For one wee book

& what a book, a great success
Brings pounds to both poet & press
Enough for Rabbie to redress
 Fergusson's bones
His brother bardie's grave did bless
 With nobler stones

Now like most poets when them flush
Rab drank his mind to meadie mush
Pick'd up a taste for brothel bush
 From Leith to town
From which a vicar watch'd him rush
 & dress'd him down

*"O Rab! Lay by thy foolish tricks
An' steer nae mair the female sex
Or some day ye'll come through thepricks
 An that ye'll see;
Ye'll find hard living wi Auld Nicks
 I'm wae for thee"*

As Rab restuffs the bottle's cork
He walks doon fate's road's favour'd fork
London, Dublin, even New York
 All feel his fame
The toast of global table-talk
 In Alba's name

DUAN 8 CELEBRITY

*There is scarcely anything to which I am so feelingly aliv
as the honour & welfare of old Scotia; &, as a poet,
I have no higher enjoyment than singing her songs & daughters*

Robert Burns

From Edina's hurly-burly
Rab took leave with his mate Ainslee *
Sat astride his ain nag Jenny **
 On the open road
Drinking late & rising early
 From the ports they moor'd

They drove through Lammermuir's dreich dream
Yon Berrywell, down to Coldstream
Where England lay beyond the breme ***
 & there he spat
Then brash revulsion to redeem
 He donn'd his hat

& said, "*O Scotia's native soil
Long may your sons of rustic toil
With crowns corrupt never embroil
 & virtue cry
& tyrannous endeavours foil
 Til seas gang dry.*" ***

He saw the holly at Roxburgh *****
& won the freedom of Jedburgh
& tour'd the ruins of Dryburgh
 As poets do
Gabbing his tayles of Edinburgh
 Oer rabbit stew

They search'd Selkirk by candlestick
For its fine inn where smoke rose thick
How soon the news spread rampant quick
 "*Our Rabbie's here*" *****
Where in James Hogg, Bard of Ettrick
 He found a peer

They left next morn, hungover, gaunt
& carried on their merry jaunt
From town-to-town, from haunt-tohaunt
 From coast-to-coast
Rab's star he had no need to flaunt
 Nor need to boast

For when he saw towns like Dumfries
His mere presence broke social peace - *****
He liked the air, the Nith did please
 His muse there went
Met Patrick Millar to release
 Ellisland's rent

To Dumfries a short letter sent
"Your Peggy Cameron pregnant"
& tho he swore him innocent –
 The dates did clash –
But as he was an honest gent
 He sent her cash

As on dear Jean Rab nervous calls
Armour's red starstruck carpet falls
Finds fresh herring & butter'd rolls
 Where all once vicious
& freedom to be with his soul's
 Armful delicious

They play'd & pass'd each giggling twin
& then that look of lust did win
Another night of carnal sin
 In soft haypile
A bellyful of seed sent in
 & her... fertile

Leaving his Jean to tend their stock
Rab headed north by crag & loch
Saw antler'd stag & shaggy flock
 Of haelan cows
Where vicious cleg & soggy sock
 His roamin's douse

Now with a grand tour in their wake
As glass of ale does Ainslee take
Rab danced with maidens on the make
 In rampant caleigh
Then watch'd dawn over Lomond break
 In god-sent glory

Back to Embro these bothers came
But fickle are th flames of fame
& Rab was shunted from the game
 Of bourgeoisie
Being still stigma's with the shame
 Of peasantry

Then Rab was toss'd into the clik
For Peggy's babe was at the brink
Of poverty, in legal ink
 Rab paid his whore
& so he left the wastrie stink
 On one more tour

10
ELLISLAND

*I think it is one of the greatest pleasures
attending a poetic genius, that we can give our woes,
cares, joys, loves, &c, an embodied form in verse,
which, to me, is ever immediate ease*

Robert Burns

Our Rab returns to be the farmer
With cooper, cotter, brewer, weaver,
With fiddler, wauller, tinker, tailer
Such mob headstrong
Tho foolish & creddon together
Them happy throng

The soil of Ellisland quite hard
Auld remnant of Bruce's back-yard
Where Agricola camp'd & sparr'd
With Celtic spears
Now nature's own beloved bard
Here, too, appears

He set young lads to drive the lime
To plough the soil in dust & slime
Preparing for the harvest time
With seeds sewn well
Leaves hours enough for Rab to rhyme
Upon Criffel *

Jean Armour has sweet twins once mair
Just fleeting happiness they share
For angels took this little pair
For Heaven's skies
To join, at seraphim fanfare,
Our Geminis

As grief-on-grief upon them piled
They vow'd to make another child
Their secret meetings guil'd
 Their father's jury
Two lovers fill the woodland wild
 With lurid fury

As rural rumour-mills they tread
The truth soon fills pa Armour's head
Who throws his daughter from her bed
 With every wean
So Rabbies happiness soon wed
 His soul-mate Jean

She join'd him by Nith's airy stream
Some Grecian muse in lucid beam
Resplendant as fame's restless dream
 His soul's flame fires
& grand ambition's fleeting gleam
 His pen inspires

He studied all his mind could cope
Tristram Shandy, Locke, Pindar, Pope
Provisions for Parnassus slope
 Took at a canter
Now summit-stood his telescope
 Spies Tam O Shanter

He rush'd it off in flash excited
Then all his Dumfries friends invited
To hear his poem first recited
 In eldritch moan
When Scotia's best poem alighted
 Its Trojan throne

The Globe Inn rose, applauds Rab's manner
The land-lords neice, the gow-lock'd Anna
Thought him fair Prince & she Sultana
 Out in the street
Like tigress in the wild savannah
 Hunted his meat

Eliza, nine months on, was born
But babes from mothers' breasts are torn
An uncle saved from local scorn
 "Tis mine" Jean said
A twin for her ain that week shorn
 From womby bed

As more mouths at mealtimes arrive
Rab joins the struggle to survive
Of juggling debts to keep alive
 No end in sight
Three guineas do the work of five
 & taxes bite

So with his future looking bleak
An honest job did Rabbie seek
Joining the fiscal excise clique
 That most fowk hate
Riding two hundred miles a week
 For King & State

As all things live & all things end
Rab follows Scotland's national trend
No more long field days shall he spend
 Into old age
But by town streets his spirit penn'd
 To earn his wage

DUAN 11
DUMFRIES

*My passions, when once lighted up, raged like so many devils,
til they got vent in rhyme, & then the conning over my verses,
like a spell, soothed all into quiet*

Robert Burns

Into Bank Street Rab moved his crew
A little cramped, but they made do,
Now every week the rent was due
 For this town house
With tall streets blocking every view
 Rab felt a mouse

But excise work Rab thought was grand
Arm'd with a fine-fill'd reprimand
He rode out seeking contraband
 Like rare coffee
& sometimes found, flung in the sand,
 Strong barley-bree

But there was threat of bullets too
Like when Rab met a smugglers crew
& to his side arm'd dragoons drew
 Sword in firm grip
He led them all aboard to view
 An empty ship *

The smugglers had left naught to chance
& fled the scene, Rabbie did glance
On two fine cannons, whose romance
 Invokes old wars
& buys them both to send to France
 To aid the cause

That cause, my friends, is LIBERTY
Rans heart was hewn from honesty
& deeming human slavery
 Abominous
He pour'd scorn on all monarchy
 Anonymous

Then when the British government
Made war on France, agents were sent
Twards republican sentiment
 Embroiding Rab
Who only just dodged punishment
 With his swift gab **

 As Jean bares Rab another lass
 They move up to the middle class
With French carpets & window glass
 Down Mill Hole Brae ***
With space to give the kids a class
 & act a play

Some say marriage is death sentence
But Jean showed Rab depthless patience
Forgiving every delinquenece
 Til wild oats sewn
At last her husband grows goods sense
 & all her own

For when young beauties trysts propose
Rab channels passions to compose
 A lilt of love, keeps on his clothes,
 Sings fluorescent tune
Like Miss Lorrimer's '*Red, red rose,*
 Newly sprung in June.'

But daily domesticity
Beds rarely down with poetry
For all muses dislike, plainly,
 Life's irritations
So Rab descends to apathy
 Denied sensations

So to escape the suckling den
He sought the company of men
The whiskey glass replaced the pen
 In his right hand
& when, returning to his hen,
 Could hardly stand

For every yin there is a yang
& Rab shall write a famous sang
Out of the hoose, roving amang
 Galloway's scenes
Heard music far from chatt'rin thrang
 Of wife & weans

*"Scots, wha hae wi Wallace bled,
Scots, wham Bruce has aften led
Welcome to your gor bed
 Or to victorie
FREE-MAN lives or FREE-MAN dead
 But they shall be free"*

& as a storm howl'd wind & sleet
He drove across the heathy peat
Into the old Gatehouse of Fleet
 To write it down
Ale warming belly, fire his feet,
 Smile ousting frown ****

DUAN 12
MARTYR

*There is not among all the martyrologies that ever were penn'd,
so rueful a narrative as the lives of the poets*

Robert Burns

*"Has Allan risen from the deid
Or Fergusson repluck'd his reed
As by the muses them decreed
To grace the thistle
Nah, Rabbie Burns has come instead
To Blaw the Whistle!"*

How Burns was loved by his contree
Yet as their bard approach'd forty *
To feed his growing family
Forced out all weathers
Faced yowdendrift & enmity
& jealous blethers **

As Keats cough'd up a clot of blood
& this death warrant understood
Knee deep in mud & soggy flood
Rab caught a chill
Like finding mushrooms far from good –
The kind that kill

While he lay bedridden & pale ***
His goods went one-by-one on sale
Hoping to thwart the debtor's jail
In desperate race
For poverty's low barren vale
A desperate place

As nature's ancient impetus
Clothed winter's bones with spring flowers
Harebells, foxgloves, wild brier rose
 Rab fails to bloom
Plagued by remorseless illnesses
 & roaring rheum ****

Grown day-by-day Rab's prospects bleak *****
Teeth chitterin' as limbs grow weak
& now that damn'd worm-I-the-cheek
 Agues all the day long
From which our bard dost refuge seek
 In bilious song

*"My curse on your envenom'd stang
That shoots my torture sums alang
An thro' my lugs gies mong a bang
 Wi gnawin vengeance
Tearing my nerves wi' bitter twang
 Like racking engines*

*My fevers burn, my agues freeze us
Rheumatics gnaw, my colics squeeze us
My neighbours sympathize, to ease us,
 Wi pitying moan
But thou – the hell o' a' diseases
 They mock our groan."*

Yet, as long summer uplifts men
At last Rab rests his rampant pen
To listen to his requiem
 Lone curlew sings
Now chorus'd in the wide bird's glen
 That Dumfries rings

Where dutiful community
Speak of their poet endlessly
Of a passing so untimely
 Just thirty seven
& how he'd feed his family
 On reaching Heaven

Now as the shades of even close
The waning moon with tearlight glows
Burns Beckoning to long repose
 Now was his time *****
No more fresh thoughts forever froze
 In startling rhyme

As grief immense spread through the land
Ten thousand sad Doonhamers stand
Marching behind the martial band
 From street-to-street
All soul-stung kinsfolk hand-in-hand
 & maist did greet

& as Saint Michael's churchbells sang
Three ragged, straggly volleys rang
As Rabbies coffin set among
 The graves of God
Where books & bones shall linger long
 Beneath the sod *****

As Rabbie from the world was torn
His girl was in her natal morn
That same moment a boy was born
 With daddy's ears
Then Jeanies blackest garments worn
 To grieve great tears

DUAN 14
IMMORTALITY

*Burns' life was a failure until he died.
Ever since it has been a marvelous success*

Reverend Henry Ward Beecher

Almost as Soon as Rab was dead
His legacies were protected
His scatter'd letters collected
 Through years of work
 & anecdotals edited
 To please the kirk

Tho Rabbie's was an Ayrshire muse
All Scotia bonds to share his views
As 'cross the land uprise statues
 Like some mad dance
So generations can peruse
 A poet's stance

When lives we lead are good & lang
To memories our youth does gang
But Jeanies was preserv'd in sang
 & poetry
So all could share Rab's loving pang
 Immortally

& to alleive Jean's morbid mood *
A fresh edition swiftly glued
Enough to feed Rab's cleckin brood
 From yon the grave
For day-by-day his fame renewed
 In songs men crave

Back in Mauchline an old friend yearns
To toast the memory of Burns
& with his mates they all take turns
 To reel Rab's rime
& only mornings rose adjourns
 This joyous time **

Th'Ettrick shepheard march'd fifty miles
To Embro, over slaps & stiles,
To see th' Assembly Rooms rich piles
 & chandalier
& recognis'd famous profiles
 Across red deer ***

Where sat Scotia's literati
Celebrating Rab's memory
Like some glorious victory
 Of bonnets blue
Songs mixed with smiling ribaldry
 As voices flew

Where Ganges rolls his yellow tide
Where Amazon's wide waters glide
Old Scotia's soons, spread far & wide
 Shall oft rehearse
Their native soul's immortal guide
 In witching verse

Fast forward to the modern day
Jock Rome drives down from Irongray ****
To fair Terregels, kilted, gay,
 To chair the bout
Where pipes & song & clapping bray
 The haggis out

Jock took his knife with rustic might
"I'll cut you up wi' ready slight
Treaching your gushing entrails bright
 Like onie ditch
& then, O what a glorious sight
 Warm-reekin' rich"

The meal wash'd down with whiskey glasses
Toasts from the lads & from the lasses
Now Selkirk Graces rise like masses
 In sangs & clatter
As many a lively hour passes
 In happy patter

To drunkenness the supper swung
& Rabbies sweetest songs are sung
Words tripping frisky from the tongue
 Like birds in flight
Harmonious, as old & young
 All share the rite

Yes! All of us, some New Year's Eve
Have cross'd our arms a ring to weave
& sang a song that all believe
 Swings true & fine
How Rabbie's heart with pride would heave
 For *Auld Langs Eyne*

Come merry friends lets raise a toast
& praise the gleam of Rabbie's ghost
Whose spirit here our hearts shall toast
 Stood hand-in-hand
For he's the laddie loved the most
 In all Scotland

NOTES

Duan 1

* Burns was born on the 25th January 1759 the son of Agnes Broun & William Burns.

** The land was leased from Dr William Ferguson

*** The Alloway School

**** Murdoch was the first to feed Burns' loves of books. These included the Bible, Arthur Mason's collection of prose & verse, Shakespeare, Milton, Thomson, Gray, Addison, Pope, Akenside. It is thought that it was Addison who first fired him to be a poet.

Duan 2

* 1765

** This first song, inspired by the young lassie at the Harvest Coupling dance, was written to the tune 'I am a man unmarried.'

*** Peggy Thomson

Duan 3

* Burns helped to found the Tarbalton Batchelors Club

** Scotland's first printing press was in Kilmarnock, 1780

*** In respect to the muse of Scottish poetry, the following was written : Scotland has better reason to be proud of her peasant poets than any other country in the world. She possesses a rich treasure of poetry, expressing the moral character of her population at very remote times; and in her national lyrics alone, so full of tenderness and truth, the heart of a simple, and wise, and thoughtful people is embalmed to us in imperishable beauty. If we knew nothing of the forefathers of our Scottish hamlets, but the pure and affectionate songs and ballads, the wild and pathetic airs of music which they loved, we should know enough to convince us that they were a race of men strong, healthful, happy, and dignified in the genial spirit of nature. The lower orders of the Scotch seem always to have had deeper, calmer, purer, and more reflecting affections than those of any other people, — and at the same time they have possessed, and do still possess, an imagination that broods over these affections with a constant delight, and kindles them into a strength and power, which, when brought into action by domestic or national trouble, have often been in good truth sublime.

**** In his letter to Dr. Moore, he remarks that he had nearly abandoned poetry, when in his twenty-third year having become acquainted with the works of Fergusson, he "strung a-new his wildly-sounding lyre with emulating vigour."

Duan 4

* 1784

** Elizabeth Burns – she would eventually be brought to Mossgeil & be brought up with Burns' family

Duan 5

* The actual event transpired as this – Jean scalded the dog & threw something at him. An angry Burns said to her, "Lassie, if ye thought of me, ye wouldna hurt ma dog!" Jean then thought to herself, 'I wouldna think of ye anyway.'

** Burns was fully acquainted with Jean a little later on, at Morton's ballroom in Mauchline

*** At this time Burns had set his mind on settling in Jamaica

Duan 6

* The Kilmarnock Edition was released on the 31st July 1785 – entitled Poems chiefly in the scotch dialect. There were 150 subscribers from an initial run of 600 copies

** This is one of the first reviews of his work: Have you seen the poems of the Scotch peasant Burns? They abound with the irregular fires of genius whenever they describe rural scenery, or the customs and characters of village-life. We find that he has looked at Nature, in her wild and rustic operations, with his own eyes, and he is particularly happy in his winter landscapes.

Duan 7

* While Burns was in Edinburgh the New Town was still under construction. He took up lodgings himself on Baxter's Close, off the Lawnmarket, with a Mrs Carfare

** Here follows a description of Burns at this time: If others had climbed more successfully to the heights of Parnassus, none certainly ever outshone Burns in the charms – the sorcery I would almost call it, of fascinating conversation, the spontaneous eloquence of social argument, or the unstudied poignancy of brilliant repartee.

*** A second edition of Burns' poems – the Edinburgh Edition – including many new & improved poems, ran to 3000 copies at its first print

**** The actual meeting transpired as this. Burns encountered the fledgeling Scott at Adam Fergusson's home with several gentlemen of literary reputation. Burns found himself moved to tears before a print of Bunburys,' showing a dead soldier with a dog beside him in the snow. The picture was inscribed with an article of verse

Cold on Canadian hills or mindens plain
Perhaps that mother wept her soldier slain
Bent oer her babe her eye dissolve din dew
The big drops, minglin g with the milk he drew
Gave the sad presage of his future years

The child of misery baptised in tears

& on enquiring as to its origin, Scott informed his senior poet it was a half-forgotten poem of Langhorns entitled 'The Justice of the Peace,' which Burns thanked with a look & a word of mere civility, before turning back to the image.

Duan 8

* Robert Ainslie was a young trainee lawyer

** Burns named his faithful nag of many years Jenny Geddes

*** The Tweed

**** This stanza is a poe-slation of what actually occurred – In fact, Burns recited the last two stanzas of his 'Cotters Saturday Night.'

O Scotia! my dear, my native soil!
For whom my warmest wish to Heaven is sent!
Long may your hardy sons of rustic toil
Be blessed with health, and peace, and sweet content!
And O! may Heaven their simple lives prevent
From Luxury's contagion, weak and vile!
Then, however crowns and coronets be rent,
A virtuous populace may rise the while,
And stand a wall of fire around their much loved Isle.

O Thou! who poured the patriotic tide,
That streamed through Wallace's undaunted heart,
Who dared to, nobly, stem tyrannic pride,
Or nobly die, the second glorious part:
(The patriot's God, peculiarly Thou art,
His friend, inspirer, guardian, and reward!)
O never, never Scotia's realm desert;
But still the patriot, and the patriot-bard
In bright succession raise, her ornament and guard!

***** A holly bush was planted on the spot where King James II was killed by the bursting of a cannon

***** It was said that if Burns : ...entered an inn at midnight, after all the inmates were in bed, the news of his arrival circulated from the cellar to the garret; and ere ten minutes had elapsed, the landlord and all his guests were assembled!

***** On his travels Burns received many civic awards & celebrations – on this occasion he was made an honorary burgess & given the freedom of the town of Dumfries

Duan 9

* Burns was a periodic Jacobite & wrote in response to the day being set aside as a public thanksgiving for King George II's recovery from his first attack of insanity. Burns regarded the 'whole business as a solemn farce or pageant mummery' and accordingly wrote his 'Stanzas of Psalmody', which he sent to Stuart of The Star, signed Duncan M'Leerie.

** Neil Gow was a short, stout highland figure with greyish hair, & said to be the greatest fiddle composer in all Scotland.

*** The following was written concerning Burns' songsmithery : Of the many fine songs which he wrote, a large proportion are either avowedly or evidently conceived in the spirit, and executed in the feeling, of others: he retouched many, restored many, and remodelled many; but he retouched few without improving them, restored none without increasing their beauty, and remodelled none without introducing some of those electric touches of delicacy, or humour, or tenderness, for which he is so remarkable.

**** Clarinda was the name taken by the married Agnes Craig Mcleose (Nancy), to avoid the scandal of her 'affair' with Burns. Her husband had abandoned her & fled to Jamaica, but social mores of the time still held she should not take on another lover. Her affair with Sylvander (Burns) took on the form of increasingly sensuous & titillating letters. Burns had been housebound for a number of weeks after hurting his knee in a fall from a horse, & dislocating his

kneecap, preventing any physical consummation of their passions. His famous song, *Ae Fond Kiss*, was written in this period.

***** The maidservant was Jenny Clow, who finding Burns bursting with unrequited passion, soon found herself pregnant & unemployed, sacked by a rather irate 'Clarinda'

Duan 10

* Burns described his love of nature in the following letter: I have some favourite flowers in spring, among which are the mountain-daisy, the harebell, the fox-glove, the wild brier-rose, the budding birch, and the hoary hawthorn, that I view and hang over with particular delight I never hear the loud solitary whistle of the curlew in a summer noon, or the wild mixing cadence of a troop of grey plovers, in an autumnal morning, without feeling an elevation of soul like the enthusiasm of devotion or poetry.

Duan 11

* The 100 tonne schooner the *Rosamond*. After guiding the ship to the Sark Estuaruy, the smugglers had abandoned ship & holed her in the hull. The next day Burns turned up with 24 armed soldiers, & found her empty but for the contraband & cannons

** During the war of 1792-93 Burns was senior warden of Saint Andrews Lodge, Dumfries, & heavily involved in local politics. He was the writer of a series of 'anonymous' letters of increasingly radical sentiment, & it was only through the severe protestations of innocence & his friends in higher places that he escaped jail.

*** Number 11

**** Burns composed his great patriotic ode, 'Scots wha hae' in the Murray Arms Hotel : He was returning home one evening over a heath with an acquaintance during a violent thunder-storm; his companion happening to urge some conversation, found the Bard totally dumb, nor could all his endeavours rouse him from the deep contemplation in which he was solemnly buried; he was in fact addressing the soldiers of Bruce amidst the

storm, and composing that animated Ode which begins — "Scots, wha hae wi' Wallace bled,"
&c

Duan 12

* This little anecdote exemplifies Burns' position in society in his latter years: A gentleman of that county, has often told me that he was seldom more grieved, than when riding into Dumfries one fine summer evening about this time to attend a county ball, he saw Burns walking alone, on the shady side of the principal street of the town, while the opposite side was gay with successive groups of gentlemen and ladies, all drawn together for the festivities of the night, not one of whom appeared willing to recognise him. The horseman dismounted, and joined Burns, who on his proposing to cross the street said: 'Nay, nay, my young friend, that's all over now.

** Burns described the pains his poverty in the following letter : Take these two guineas, and place them over against that **** account of yours! which has gagged my mouth these five or six months! I can as little write good things as apologies to the man I owe money to. O the supreme curse of making three guineas do the business of five! Not all the labours of Hercules, not all the Hebrews three centuries of Egyptian bondage, were such an insuperable business, such an task! Poverty! thou half-sister of death, thou cousin-german of hell! where shall I find force of execration equal to the amplitude of thy demerits? oppressed by thee, the venerable ancient, grown hoary in the practice of every virtue, laden with years and wretchedness, implores a little, little aid to support his existence from a stony hearted son of mammon, whose sun of prosperity never knew a cloud; and is by him denied and insulted. Oppressed by thee, the man of sentiment, whose heart glows with independence, and melts with sensibility, inly pines under the neglect, or writhes in bitterness of soul, under the contumely of arrogant unfeeling wealth.

*** His cycle of ill-health was exasperated in Autumn 1775 by the death of his daughter.

**** During this period Burns tried sea-bathing as a cure for his illnesses, staying at The Brow, a little hamlet by the chilly waters of the Solway, which could only have helped to feed his fevers.

***** The following is one of the last descriptions of Burns: The last time I saw Burns in life was on his return from the Brow-well of Solway; he had been ailing all spring, and summer had come without bringing health with it; he had gone away very ill and he

returned worse. He was brought back, I think, in a covered spring cart, and when he alighted at the foot of the street in which he lived, he could scarce stand upright. He reached his own door with difficulty. He stooped much, and there was a visible change in his looks.

***** He died at dawn on the 21 st July 1776

***** The following is a contemporary account of Burns' funeral: The corpse, having been previously conveyed to the town-hall, remained there till the following ceremony took place: The military at Dumfries, consisting of the Cinque Port Cavalry and the Angusshire fencibles, having handsomely tendered their services, lined the streets on both sides to the burial-ground. The royal Dumfries volunteers, of which he was a member, in uniform, with crape on their left arms, supported the bier. A party of that corps, appointed to perform the military obsequies, moving in slow solemn time to the Dead March in Saul, which was played by the military band, preceded in mournful array with arms reversed. The principal part of the inhabitants of the town and neighbourhood, with a number of the particular friends of the bard from remote parts, followed in procession; the great bells of the churches tolling at intervals. Arrived at the church-yard gate, the funeral party, according to the rules of that exercise, formed two lines, and leaned their heads on their fire-locks pointed to the ground. Thro' this space the corpse was carried, and borne forward to the grave. The party then drew up alongside of it, and fired three vollies over the coffin when deposited in the earth. The whole ceremony presented a solemn, grand, and affecting spectacle; and accorded with the general sorrow and regret for the loss of a man whose like we scarce can see again

Duan 13

* Wordsworth undertook -----

Duan 14

* Rab died at 37, leaving Jean a widow with six young children. A new release of his books went a long way to settle her financial needs, which were further strengthened by a pension of £50 per annum by a Scottish gentleman of large fortune, Mr. Maule of Panmure..

** This occurred in

*** The following description of the first official Burns Supper was made by James Hogg, *The Ettrick Shepherd* : Those who are accustomed to talk and think of the Scotch as a cold phlegmatic people, would have been convinced of their mistake by a single glance at the scene which met my eyes when I entered. I have never witnessed a more triumphant display of national enthusiasm, and had never expected to witness any display within many thousand degrees of it, under any thing less than the instantaneous impulse of some glorious victory. The room is a very large one, and I had already seen it lighted up in all the splendour of a ball; but neither its size nor its splendour had then made anything more than a very common-place impression on my mind. But now — what a sight was here! A hall of most majestic proportions — its walls, and hangings, and canopies of crimson, giving a magical richness of effect to the innumerable chandeliers with which its high roof appeared to be starred and glowing — the air overhead alive with the breath of lutes and trumpets — below, the whole mighty area paved with human faces, (for the crowd was such that nothing of the tables could at first be seen,) — the highest, and the wisest, and the best of a nation assembled together — and all for what? — to do honour to the memory of one low-born peasant. What a lofty tribute to the true nobility of Nature! — What a glorious vindication of the born majesty of Genius!

**** Irongray is a parish just north of Dumfries, not far from Ellsiland Farm. Burns mentioned the area in his letters & would have known the area like the back of his hand. Jock Rome is the farmer at Ingleston there, & is often the chairman of the local Burns Supper held in the village of Terregels.