

ROBERT BURNS

Burns celebrates Scottish identity, everyday life, love, equality, and the dignity of ordinary people through song, humour, and rich Scots language.

A Poet's Welcome to His Love-Begotten Daughter

(Humour, satire, pride, defiance of social judgement)

- Celebration of illegitimate daughter
- Themes: pride, anti-hypocrisy, fatherhood
- Techniques: satire, Scots language

Pride & Affection

- "Thou's welcome, wean! Mishanter fa' me"
- "Sweet bairn!"
- "My bonnie lassie"

Anti-Hypocrisy / Social Satire

- "Some faw-fou' sinner courtin' onie whore"
- "I'm nae hypocrite"
- "An honest man's aboon his might"

Illegitimacy & Social Judgement

- "Thy daddie's no thy daddie's docht"
- "I fear nae hell, I dread nae skaith"

Burns' Self-Deprecating Humour

- "I'm little o' a saint, I trow"
- "A rhymin', rantin', rovin' billie"

Mini-Essay — A Poet's Welcome to His Love-Begotten Daughter

Question: Show how Burns uses humour to challenge social expectations.

Burns uses humour throughout *A Poet's Welcome* to undermine the moral hypocrisy of eighteenth-century society. The poem opens with a warm, exuberant greeting: "Thou's welcome, wean!" Immediately Burns defies the stigma surrounding illegitimacy, celebrating his daughter rather than hiding her. His humorous self-description as a "rhymin', rantin', rovin' billie" mocks the idea that poets must behave respectably.

Burns satirises those who judge him, calling them "faw-fou' sinners" who pretend to moral superiority. By using Scots language and comic exaggeration, he exposes the double standards of respectable society. The line "I'm nae hypocrite" becomes both declaration and critique — Burns insists that honesty is superior to the false virtue of others.

Through humour, warmth, and biting satire, Burns overturns social expectations and asserts a loving, unapologetic fatherhood.

Tam O' Shanter

(Supernatural, moral warning, humour, Scottish identity)

- Epic tale of drunken Tam encountering witches
- Themes: temptation, supernatural, humour, moral warning
- Techniques: narrative drive, imagery, dialect, rhythm

Setting the Scene

- "When chapman billies leave the street"
- "The night drave on wi' sangs and clatter"

Drink & Temptation

- "O Tam! hadst thou but been sae wise"
- "Wi' tippeny, we fear nae evil"

Supernatural Imagery

- "Warlocks and witches in a dance"
- "Auld Alloway's auld haunted kirk"
- "Coffins stood round like open presses"

Comic Horror

- "Weel done, Cutty-sark!"
- "Tam tint his reason a' thegither"

Moral Message

- "Whene'er to drink you are inclin'd, / Or cutty-sarks run in your mind"
- "Remember Tam o' Shanter's mare"

Mini-Essay — *Tam O' Shanter*

Question: Show how Burns combines humour and horror.

Burns blends humour and horror in *Tam O' Shanter* to create a lively, memorable moral tale. Early in the poem, Tam's drinking is described comically — "O Tam! hadst thou but been sae wise" — mixing affection with gentle mockery. His drunken bravado adds to the humour as he stumbles toward the supernatural.

However, the atmosphere darkens when he approaches "Auld Alloway's auld haunted kirk." Burns uses vivid gothic imagery — "Warlocks and witches in a dance," "Coffins stood round like open presses" — to invoke fear. Even within this horror, humour resurfaces: Tam's foolish cry "Weel done, Cutty-sark!" turns danger into comedy, triggering a frantic chase.

The poem's mixture of the grotesque and the ridiculous enhances its moral message. Burns suggests that human weakness is both laughable and dangerous — and that humour and horror live side by side.

A RED, RED ROSE

(Love, devotion, romantic poetry)

- Love poem comparing love to nature and music
- Themes: devotion, constancy
- Techniques: simile, hyperbole, musical rhythm

Love as Natural & Eternal

- "My love is like a red, red rose / That's newly sprung in June"
- "My love is like the melody / That's sweetly played in tune"

Endurance & Promise

- "I will love thee still, my dear / Till a' the seas gang dry"
- "Till the rocks melt wi' the sun"

Separation

- "Though it were ten thousand mile"
- "Fare thee weel, my only love!"

Romantic Hyperbole

- "And I will come again, my love"

Mini-Essay — *A Red, Red Rose*

Question: Show how Burns expresses deep and enduring love.

Burns expresses profound love through rich natural imagery and hyperbole. The repeated simile "My love is like a red, red rose" evokes freshness, beauty, and emotional intensity. Comparing love to a melody "sweetly played in tune" adds musical harmony, reinforcing the deep emotional connection.

Burns emphasises the endurance of love through extreme hyperbole. Promises such as "Till a' the seas gang dry" and "Till the rocks melt wi' the sun" suggest devotion that surpasses natural limits. These lines showcase the total commitment Burns expresses toward his beloved.

Even when separation looms, emotional certainty remains: "Though it were ten thousand mile." The poem's simplicity and sincerity allow Burns to communicate a love that is both passionate and eternal.

COMPARISON GRIDS — ROBERT BURNS

Grid 1 — Theme: LOVE & AFFECTION

Poem	Key Insight	Quotation	Link
A Red, Red Rose	Romantic, idealised love	"Till a' the seas gang dry"	Everlasting devotion

A Poet's Welcome	Parental love with humour	"Thou's welcome, wean!"	Joyful, warm affection
Tam O' Shanter	Friendship & marital strain	"O Tam! hadst thou but been sae wise"	Shows concern despite humour

Grid 2 — Theme: SCOTTISH IDENTITY & DIALECT

Poem	Point	Quote	Why It Works
Tam O' Shanter	Strong Scots voice	"Warlocks and witches" / "Cutty-sark"	Cultural richness
A Poet's Welcome	Satiric Scots tone	"Rhymin', rantin', rovin' billie"	Authenticity + humour
A Red, Red Rose	Scots simplicity	"O my luve is like"	Accessible, musical Scots voice

Grid 3 — Theme: MORALITY & HUMAN NATURE

Poem	Point	Quotation	Link
Tam O' Shanter	Warning against excess	"O Tam! hadst thou but been sae wise"	Moral caution
A Poet's Welcome	Rejecting hypocrisy	"I'm nae hypocrite"	Honest human nature
A Red, Red Rose	Sincere romantic promise	"Till the rocks melt wi' the sun"	Moral integrity in love