Ae Fond Kiss

POEM TEXT

Ae fond kiss, and then we sever;
Ae fareweel, and then forever!
Deep in heart-wrung tears I'll pledge thee,
Warring sighs and groans I'll wage thee.
Who shall say that Fortune grieves him,
While the star of hope she leaves him?
Me, nae cheerfu' twinkle lights me;
Dark despair around benights me.

I'll ne'er blame my partial fancy,
Naething could resist my Nancy;
But to see her was to love her;
Love but her, and love forever.
Had we never lov'd sae kindly,
Had we never lov'd sae blindly,
Never met—or never parted—
We had ne'er been broken-hearted.

Fare thee weel, thou first and fairest!
Fare thee weel, thou best and dearest!
Thine be ilka joy and treasure,
Peace, enjoyment, love, and pleasure!
Ae fond kiss, and then we sever;
Ae fareweel, alas, forever!
Deep in heart-wrung tears I'll pledge thee,
Warring sighs and groans I'll wage thee!

SUMMARY

The speaker begins by asking his beloved for one more loving kiss before they have to separate; this kiss will be their goodbye before they must leave each other forever. The speaker promises that he will honor his beloved's memory when he weeps with intense sorrow. Torn between wistful memories of their happy days past and anguish that these days will never come again, he will offer all these emotions as a tribute to her. The speaker expresses disbelief that anyone could claim to be truly unhappy so long as they still have the slightest possibility of good fortune in the future. But the speaker *is* truly unhappy because he has no hope of any such future happiness to inspire him to keep going; the only thing he can feel, or imagine feeling, is hopeless sorrow.

Even though he is now suffering for it, the speaker doesn't criticize himself for having been too easily attracted to his beloved. No one could have seen her and *not* been deeply attracted to her. Just seeing her would be enough to make anyone fall in love with her; and once you were in love with her, you would love only her, and you would love her always. The speaker does reflect, though, on what would have happened if they had never loved each other with such deep affection, or with such intensity that it made them lose sight of everything else in their lives. If they had never met—or if they had fallen in love but never had to separate from each other–then they would never have had to suffer this devastating loss.

The speaker then fondly bids goodbye to his beloved, reminding her that she is the first woman he has truly loved and the most beautiful woman he has ever seen; she is also the person he admires and cherishes most. He wishes her delight, prosperity, contentment, happiness, love, and bliss in her future life. He then asks, once more, for one more kiss before they have to separate and laments that this kiss really is their goodbye forever. Finally, he reminds her again that he will continue to remember her through the terrible sorrow he feels at losing her, and continue honoring her through his memories of past happiness with her and anguish at future grief without her.

THEMES

THE COST OF LOVE

In "Ae Fond Kiss," the speaker confronts the pain that comes with losing a lover. The emotional distress of this is so great that the speaker asks himself whether love is worth its cost, or whether it is better simply never to love at all.

At first, the speaker seems to think that love *isn't* worth the pain of heartbreak, and wishes he had never fallen in love in the first place. But then he changes course, agreeing to pay the emotional price of parting all over again in return for just one more moment with his beloved. Thus, while people might ask themselves if love is worth the cost, the poem suggests that the answer almost doesn't matter: once you are in love, you are at the mercy of your desire.

In the first stanza, the speaker reveals how hopeless his life is about to become since he is losing his beloved for good. The speaker asks his beloved for one more "fond kiss" before they are "sever[ed]," or separated, "forever." After this kiss, all he will have left are the "heart-wrung tears" and "sighs and groans" that her memory brings. The speaker then says no one can "grieve" too deeply if they have some "star of hope" left. But the

speaker is not just losing his beloved's company for *now*; he's losing any hope of seeing her again. As such, his grief is deep, sinking him in "dark despair."

In the next stanza, the pain of this loss drives the speaker to ask himself if it would have been better never to have loved her, or even met her, at all. If they "[h]ad … never lov'd" so affectionately or intensely, then they would "ne'er [have] been broken-hearted." But in fact, there are *two* ways he could have avoided this pain: if they had never met, *or* if they had "never parted." There would be no painful cost to love if they could just stay together. But, similarly, there would be no painful cost if they had never met in the first place.

By placing these two alternatives together in the same line, the speaker suggests that he would have been equally happy with either option—lifelong joy with the beloved or never having met her at all—just so long as he could escape the pain love can bring. If the speaker's main goal is to escape this pain, he seems to say that love is not worth its high cost.

In the final stanza, however, the speaker returns once more to the beloved. Whether or not he would have been better off never meeting her, he cannot resist even one more moment with her now, even if that moment renews the pain of parting. After seeming to wish they had never met, the speaker still asks her for one more "fond kiss"—even though the kiss in the first stanza was meant to be their last. He cannot help his desire to be with her, although each moment of their farewell draws out the pain of that farewell.

Significantly, he frames his pain as a willing offering to his beloved. With the word "pledge," he turns his "heart-wrung tears" into a cup of wine with which he toasts her. Similarly, with the word "wage," he turns his "sighs and groans" into the price he pays for loving her. Repeating these lines from the first stanza as the final lines give them particular weight, emphasizing that the speaker is willing to pay this price, high though it is.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-4
- Lines 7-8
- Lines 13-16
- Lines 21-24

LOVE AND SELFLESSNESS

In "Ae Fond Kiss," the speaker reveals the nature of truly generous love for another person. At the start of the poem, the speaker is focused on himself and his own pain. This pain comes from parting with someone he truly loves. But as the poem goes on, he shifts his attention to the beloved and *her* experience. Although for him, pain is a sign of his true love for her, he does *not* wish her to suffer the same pain. Rather, he wishes her joy, love, and the pleasure love brings—even though that love can no longer be with him. Genuine love, the poem implies, thus requires selflessness; it means wishing happiness for the beloved, even if they find that happiness with someone else.

In the first stanza, the speaker declares that parting from the beloved leaves his life dark and without hope. The speaker knows he is leaving his beloved "forever." With this separation, life "leaves him … nae cheerfu' twinkle," no "star of hope." He describes the "tears," "groans," and "dark despair" he will suffer in this hopeless state. The stanza is focused on the speaker's own emotional experience, emphasized by its repetition of the pronoun "me." His hopelessness is confirmed by the fact that he will never find love with anyone else. No future happiness will alleviate the heartbreak he now feels.

In the second stanza, the speaker affirms that he can only ever love this one woman—"[l]ove but her"—and that he will "love [her] forever." The pain of parting from her leads him to reflect that he never would have been "broken-hearted" if they had "[n]ever met." But this reflection, in turn, leads him to consider his *beloved's* experience as well as his own. "We had ne'er been broken-hearted," he says. The pronouns in the second half of this stanza are all "we." The speaker realizes that he is not the only one who's suffering; she is suffering, too.

Ultimately, the speaker's reflection on the pain of lost love leads him to wish that his beloved will *escape* this pain—and that she will find love again. Thus even as the speaker's pain despair partly from the faithfulness of his love, the fact that he will "[l]ove but her … forever," he does not ask the same faithfulness from his beloved. Instead, he hopes that she will find "joy … [p]eace, enjoyment, love, and pleasure." That is, he would rather she find a new love with someone else than maintain love for him alone and suffer "[d]ark despair" from their separation.

The speaker, for his part, shows no sign of wanting or expecting such a new love for himself. He repeats in the final lines that he will continue offering "sighs and groans" to his beloved. But he maintains that he does not wish her to suffer what he suffers. His wish that she find a new love shows that he values her happiness more than her exclusive attachment to him. This wish—that she enjoy love and happiness even though it must be with someone else—is a sign that his love for her is truly selfless.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 5-8
- Lines 9-12
- Line 16
- Lines 17-20
- Lines 23-24

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-4

Ae fond kiss, and then we sever;
Ae fareweel, and then forever!
Deep in heart-wrung tears I'll pledge thee,
Warring sighs and groans I'll wage thee.

The opening lines establish the poem's dramatic setting: the speaker is a man addressing his beloved just before they have to leave each other for good. In the poem's first two lines, the speaker is torn between cherishing and extending the blissful present moment as much as possible, and imagining the pain that their inevitable parting will bring.

Lines 1 and 2 share a parallel structure. Both begin with "Ae" (meaning "One"), creating anaphora. More broadly, in the first half of each line the speaker fixes his attention on his interaction with his beloved in the present moment: they share a "fond kiss," they bid each other "farewell." There is a pause (caesura) in the middle of each line, and with the word "then," the speaker looks forward into the future when they must "sever," or separate, "forever."

This parallel structure serves several different purposes. Repeating the same general idea (lovers parting) over two lines emphasizes the importance of this idea, which literally takes up more space on the page. It also allows the speaker to explore and develop different *aspects* of the idea. The kiss isn't just another kiss, it's a *farewell* kiss. And this parting isn't just for a week or a month, it's *forever*. If the reader thought the situation in line 1 was tragic, they realize that it's even more tragic after line 2!

Lines 3 and 4 share a similar parallel structure as well. Both start by describing the bitter passions the speaker will experience without his beloved—"tears," "sighs," "groans"—and both end with "I'll (wage/pledge) thee." By repeating this same phrase at the end of the line (epistrophe), the speaker reinforces the idea that there will still be a connection between himself and his beloved—between "I" and "thee"—even after they have parted.

His anguished tears and groans, his sighs for happier past days, aren't just emotional outbursts he needs to release; he frames them as active ways that he will continue memorializing his beloved. The verb "pledge" often refers to toasting someone and drinking to their health. The speaker transforms his tears into wine in a cup that he will use to toast and honor his beloved. Similarly, the speaker transforms his "sighs and groans" into "wage[s]" he gives to his beloved. He frames his grief not as mere emotional discomfort but as the *price* he pays for love.

The rhyme scheme reinforces the parallelism between each pair of lines. The poem is written in rhyming couplets, AABBCC, etc. The similarity in *sound* between the final words of each couplet helps the reader see their similarity in *sense*. The couple must say goodbye or *sever*; they must say goodbye *forever*. The speaker will both *pledge* and *wage* his grief to his beloved.

These first four lines also establish the poem's meter. The poem is written in trochaic tetrameter, meaning there are four trochees (DUM-da) per line:

Ae fond kiss, and then we sever;
Ae fareweel, and then forever!
Deep in heart-wrung tears I'll pledge thee,
Warring sighs and groans I'll wage thee.

The meter is extremely regular throughout the poem, which creates a sense of calmness and composure. The speaker is deeply moved, but he not in the grips of uncontrollable emotion that breaks the pattern of the lines. This quiet tone is also enhanced by the line endings. The trochaic meter means that the last syllable of each line is unstressed (a.k.a., a feminine ending), as opposed to the more common iambic meter, which stresses the last syllable. The feminine endings mean that each line sounds as though it's going quiet or dying off as it reaches its end--appropriate for a poem focused on saying goodbye.

LINES 5-8

Who shall say that Fortune grieves him,
While the star of hope she leaves him?
Me, nae cheerfu' twinkle lights me;
Dark despair around benights me.

Lines 5-6 might sound surprising at first. The speaker has just been indicating how much grief lies ahead, but now he seems to say that his future is not so bleak after all:

Who shall say that Fortune grieves him,
While the star of hope she leaves him?

The speaker asks, in a rhetorical question, if anyone can truly count themselves unhappy, or not blessed with good fortune, if there is still the smallest chance, some "star of hope," for happiness in the future. Perhaps the speaker actually does have some small hope that he and his beloved could reunite one day.

But then in lines 7-8 the reader learns that the speaker is not referring to himself. He imagines a person with hope to draw a stark *contrast* with his own case. The speaker takes the metaphor of the "star of hope" and reverses it. He has no "cheerfu' twinkle light[ing]" his way forward. He cannot see what possible good his future might hold because, he says, extending the metaphor, he only sees "dark[ness]" all around him. He is "benight[ed]," or enveloped by night. He doesn't have even the smallest spark of hope for a future reunion, only "despair" at certainly never seeing his beloved again.

With these contrasting images of light and darkness, lines 5-8

are again structured by parallelism (within the two couplets) and antithesis (between the two couplets). Lines 5-6 and lines 7-8 each form a parallel couplet, with both lines in the pair featuring similar ideas and similar structures. Lines 5-6 end with "[grieves/leaves] him" and each line conjures up hope; lines 7-8 end with "[lights/benights] me" and each line affirms the speaker's hopelessness.

Together, then, the two couplets form an antithetical contrast with each other. The first couplet represents hope through the image of light; the second couplet represents despair through the image of darkness. The speaker asks the reader to imagine a star lighting the dark sky, and then to imagine that light going out. By first conjuring an image of hope and then negating it so completely, the speaker reinforces the reader's sense of just how irreversibly tragic his situation is.

These lines focus on the speaker's situation particularly through their pronouns. Lines 3-4 repeated "thee," placing attention on the beloved. But lines 7-8 end the stanza with three repetitions of the word "me" (an example of diacope). The speaker's attention is now less on how he will remember his beloved than on himself and his own grief.

LINES 9-12

I'll ne'er blame my partial fancy,
Naething could resist my Nancy;
But to see her was to love her;
Love but her, and love forever.

The speaker has just said that his future is hopeless now that he has to part from his beloved. But even in the face of this dark future, he says that he does not reproach himself for having been attracted to her. The reason he fell in love with her was not that he simply took a "fancy" to her. That is, he didn't simply follow an impulsive whim that made him "partial" to her, or made him prefer her for no reason at all. He couldn't "resist" loving her. *Anyone* would have fallen in love with this woman just the same way he did.

The poem's rhyming couplets help the speaker make this claim. "Fancy" is rhymed with "Nancy" (what he calls his beloved), making them a closely knit pair. The speaker argues that Nancy and "fancy"—that is, love—inevitably go together, and the poem's rhyme scheme makes their pairing seem even more inevitable.

In line 10, the speaker says that no one could help loving Nancy. In line 11, he develops this claim by saying "But to see her was to love her"—no one could help loving her even after seeing her for only a moment. In line 12, he develops this idea still further by saying that this love, even if it sprang into being in a moment, would be faithful and lasting. Seeing her meant loving "but" (only) her and loving her "forever."

Line 11 says one would fall in love with Nancy immediately, upon sight, and the syntax of line 12 reinforces this sense of immediacy. The line reads "Love but her, and love forever." The sense of the line is really "But to see her was to love but her and to love her forever." The speaker avoids repeating "But to see her," letting it be implied from the previous line (a technique similar to zeugma); he also omits the "her" from "love her forever." Omitting these words makes the line shorter so that it reads more quickly, replicating the speed with which a person would fall in love with this woman.

As in stanza 1, the pronouns here are significant. While lines 7-8 repeated "me" three times, lines 11-12 repeat "her" three times (another instance of diacope). The speaker's attention is focused again on his beloved rather than himself. He is, however, speaking of her in the third person ("her") rather than speaking *to* her in the second person ("thee"). He's still focusing on his own reflections rather than communicating directly with his beloved.

LINES 13-16

Had we never lov'd sae kindly,
Had we never lov'd sae blindly,
Never met—or never parted—
We had ne'er been broken-hearted.

Although the speaker does not blame himself for having fallen in love with Nancy, he does now reflect on what things would have been like if this had never happened. He begins:

> Had we never lov'd sae kindly,
> Had we never lov'd sae blindly,

Like other couplets above, lines 13-14 feature parallel structure. Line 14 actually repeats the entire beginning of line 13 (anaphora), only altering the final word from "kindly" to "blindly." As with "Nancy" and "fancy," the rhyme here has the effect of suggesting inevitability, that one word will always follow the other. Here, the rhyme suggests that loving another person "kindly," or with great affection, will inevitably lead to loving them "blindly," or loving them so much that you lose sight of everything else around you—including the future possibility that the relationship will end tragically.

The speaker is now fully aware of what this tragic ending will cost him. If they had not loved each other so intensely, they would "ne'er [have] been broken-hearted." The pain of this heartbreak is so great that the speaker seems to wonder if the relationship has been worth the cost. In line 15, he reflects that they could have avoided this pain if they had "[n]ever met—or never parted"—that is, if they could have been together forever, or if they had never even seen each other at all. By placing these two options together, the speaker suggests that he would have been just as happy with *either* one, just as long as he was spared the pain of loss.

If avoiding pain is the speaker's main concern, then he seems to say, for now, that love is not worth what it costs. Of course, the

speaker does go from imagining they had never encountered each other to imagining their future together. But the long caesura in the middle of the line, the dash just after "never met," suggests that the speaker lingers on the idea and perhaps, just for a moment, wishes they *had* never met.

But even as the speaker is lamenting his own heartbreak, he is also shifting his attention back to his beloved. In stanza 1, the speaker described his own "sighs and groans," dwelling on how "despair ... benights me." In lines 13-16, the pronoun shifts from "me" to "we."

"We" is repeated three times in the four lines (diacope), finally in "We had ne'er been broken-hearted." The speaker seems to have remembered that he is not the only one suffering. His beloved is suffering the same distress that he is. This shift from "me" at the end of stanza 1 to "we" at the end of stanza 2 sets up the beginning of stanza 3, where the speaker turns his attention fully to the beloved again and to her experience.

LINES 17-20

Fare thee weel, thou first and fairest!
Fare thee weel, thou best and dearest!
Thine be ilka joy and treasure,
Peace, enjoyment, love, and pleasure!

In these four lines, the speaker turns his attention fully to his beloved as he directly addresses her with wishes for her future.

Lines 17-18 feature clear parallel structures. Both begin "Fare thee weel" (another instance of anaphora). The repetition emphasizes that the couple's parting is imminent and permanent. It also stresses that the speaker truly does wish his lover *well* in the future—an idea developed further in lines 19-20.

Both lines then describe what the beloved means to the speaker. In line 17, the speaker calls her "first and fairest." In other words, the speaker has never loved anyone this way before, nor has he found anyone else so attractive. The alliteration between these words further connects the in the reader's mind.

The next lines further develop these ideas. The speaker did not just develop a passing crush on the first pretty woman he saw. On the contrary, his beloved is also the "best—the most worthy, most admirable woman he knows—and "dearest," the person he values and cherishes most. The pairing of "fairest" and "dearest" (a slant rhyme) suggests that the speaker may have first been drawn to her beauty but that this physical attraction developed into deep love.

Lines 19-20 show just how deep and selfless this love is. The speaker wishes his beloved:

> ... joy and treasure,
> Peace, enjoyment, love, and pleasure!

The speaker has already affirmed that his *own* future will be nothing but "[d]ark despair," with no "star of hope" to cheer him. This is partly because he is losing his beloved for good; it also because he has no expectation that he will ever find another love. As he said in line 12, merely seeing his beloved meant loving "but her" and loving her "forever." Even after she is gone, he won't be able to love anyone else. This faithful love means great loneliness and suffering for him. But he does *not* wish the same suffering for her.

Right now, he knows they are both "broken-hearted." But he *wants* her to heal from this pain. He hopes that she finds "[p]eace" as opposed to "[w]arring sighs and groans." He hopes she finds "joy," "enjoyment," "pleasure"—and, indeed, "love." The speaker would rather that his beloved find a new love with someone else and be happy than to remain faithful to him and suffer misery. Valuing his beloved's happiness even over her faithfulness to him shows that his love for her is truly selfless.

LINES 21-24

Ae fond kiss, and then we sever;
Ae fareweel, alas, forever!
Deep in heart-wrung tears I'll pledge thee,
Warring sighs and groans I'll wage thee!

With a very small variation, lines 21-22 repeat lines 1-4 exactly. These lines then become the closest thing in the poem to a refrain. As a refrain, these lines communicate the central theme and tone of the poem. The speaker has just expressed his hopes that his beloved will find joy and peace in the future. But the poem's dominant note is still their heartbreak at this moment. The final lines here emphasize the "tears ... sighs and groans" that the speaker will suffer.

Even though the words are identical to the words in the opening lines, however, they take on a new significance simply because they are repeated. When the speaker says "Ae fond kiss, and then we sever" in line 1, it sounds as though he and his beloved are about to share one last final kiss before they must part. By repeating the line, the speaker asks for still *another* kiss after what was supposed to be their last kiss, indicating how he just cannot let go of his beloved, even though he knows she must go. He wants to prolong this final moment together as long as possible, even if it also prolongs the pain of parting—pain registered in the variation of "alas," instead of "and then," in line 22.

In repeating lines 3-4 as lines 23-24, the speaker also renews his commitment to remembering his beloved. In stanza two, he seemed to question whether their relationship was worth its terrible emotional cost. Now, he says again that he will "pledge" her his tears and "wage" her his "sighs and groans." These moments of future anguish are the price he will pay for having fallen in love with her. By repeating these lines, the speaker suggests that he *is*, in fact, willing to pay this price. Just as he cannot resist prolonging his goodbye, he cannot help loving her

even if this love takes a great emotional toll.

POETIC DEVICES

PARALLELISM

Almost every line of the poem features some form of parallelism. Many of the line pairs share parallel syntax. Take lines 1-4, for example:

> Ae fond kiss, *and then we sever;*
> Ae fareweel, *and then forever!*
> Deep in heart-wrung tears *I'll pledge thee,*
> Warring sighs and groans *I'll wage thee.*

There is strong parallelism between lines 1-2 and then between lines 3-4. Each line is divided into two parts, and the parts parallel each other. Lines 3-4, for instance, both begin with a phrase that describes the speaker's emotions ("Deep in heart-wrung tears," "Warring sighs and groans)," pause with a caesura, and conclude with a clause, "I'll [pledge/wage] thee," that describes how he will offer up these emotions to the beloved.

The parallelism serves several functions in the poem. The two parallel lines provide essentially two statements of the same general idea, and the restatement gives further emphasis to that idea. The parallelism also develops that idea further, giving the speaker the chance to reveal new aspects of the original thought. In lines 17-18, for example, the speaker declares:

> Fare thee weel, *thou first and fairest!*
> Fare thee weel, *thou best and dearest!*

The first phrase of line 18 parallels the first phrase of line 17 because it repeats it exactly (making this anaphora), emphasizing the fact that the speaker is not merely uttering a conventional but goodbye but that he really, truly does hope that his beloved will be happy in the future.

The second phrase of each line describes the beloved, with line 18 further developing the thoughts of line 17. The speaker may have such strong feelings for his beloved because she is the "first" woman he has ever cared for so much and the first woman he has ever found so fair, or attractive. But those are not the *only* reasons why his love is so strong. She is the first woman he's cared for so much because she has the "best" or most admirable qualities. She is not only very beautiful but very "dear" to him.

Finally, the parallelism provides a high degree of regularity in the poem. The parallel structures and syntax help ensure the same number of syllables and pattern of stresses in each line. This regularity makes it easy to set the lines to a repeated musical tune, as Burns intended when he wrote the poem.

Where Parallelism appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-8
- Lines 13-14
- Lines 17-18
- Lines 21-24

ANTITHESIS

The speaker uses antithesis to heighten a sense of dramatic contrast in the poem and, with it, the reader's understanding of the powerful emotions the speaker feels.

In stanza 1, lines 5-6 form an antithesis with lines 7-8 through a series of opposing images and themes. The first pair of lines uses the metaphor of light to invoke hope; the second pair uses the metaphor of darkness to represent hopelessness. The image of the "star" contrasts with the invocation of the "dark," "hope" contrasts with "despair," and the imagined "cheerfu' twinkle" that could "light[]" the speaker's path contrasts with the darkness that in reality "benights" him. By first describing a more optimistic future—being blessed by "Fortune" with even a small "twinkle" of hope—the speaker makes it clearer what his *own* future lacks, and thus how bleak his situation really is.

There is a similar structure of antithesis in stanza 3. Here, the first four lines of the stanza contrast with the second four lines, again beginning with themes of hope and ending with themes of despair. Both sections begin with a farewell to the beloved; lines 17-18 reflect joy at her fine qualities ("thou best and dearest!") while lines 21-22 reflect grief at leaving her ("alas, forever!"). Lines 19-20 express the speaker's hope that the beloved's future will be filled with "joy" and "pleasure"; lines 23-24, by contrast, describe the hopelessness of his own future, which will be filled with "tears" and "groans."

This extended antithesis reveals just how much the speaker loves "[his] Nancy." He must care about her deeply if their separation grieves him so much—and he must care about her all the more deeply if, in the midst of his own grief, he can still focus so much on wishing her joy.

Where Antithesis appears in the poem:

- **Lines 5-6:** "Who shall say that Fortune grieves him, / While the star of hope she leaves him?"
- **Lines 7-8:** "Me, nae cheerfu' twinkle lights me; / Dark despair around benights me."
- **Lines 17-24:** "Fare thee weel, thou first and fairest! / Fare thee weel, thou best and dearest! / Thine be ilka joy and treasure, / Peace, enjoyment, love, and pleasure! / Ae fond kiss, and then we sever; / Ae fareweel, alas, forever! / Deep in heart-wrung tears I'll pledge thee, / Warring sighs and groans I'll wage thee!"

EPISTROPHE

The speaker uses epistrophe in his repetition of pronouns at the ends of lines. This form of repetition, especially at the ends of end-stopped lines where the reader naturally pauses, gives emphasis to these pronouns and indicates where the speaker's attention is particularly focused.

Lines 3-4 both end in "thee," as part of the larger repeated phrase "I'll [pledge/wage] thee." The repetition of "thee" (a.k.a., "you") emphasizes that the speaker is focused on his beloved. He addresses her directly to tell her how she will remain present to his mind and memory even after she is gone.

The repetition of "him" (lines 5-6) and "me" (7-8), however, reflect how the speaker's attention shifts inward to his *own* situation. First he imagines the situation he would rather be in, still having some "star of hope" to inspire him; then he laments the situation he is in, plagued by dark despair.

In lines 11-12, however, the speaker repeats the pronoun "her" at the end of three successive phrases: "But to see her," "was to love her," and "Love but her." (The first of these, "But to see her," is *technically* diacope, not epistrophe; the effect on the poem is the same.) With the repetition of "her," the speaker focuses again on his beloved and how he first fell in love with her.

In the third stanza, the speaker once more addresses his beloved directly. "Thee" is repeated, again, at the end of the poem's final two lines and becomes the poem's last word. Even as the speaker knows that he is leaving his beloved forever, he insists that he will maintain a connection to her through his grief for her. The use of epistrophe reinforces this sense of connection, as it reflects the speaker's attention.

Where Epistrophe appears in the poem:

- **Line 3:** "thee"
- **Line 4:** "thee"
- **Line 5:** "him"
- **Line 6:** "him"
- **Line 7:** "me"
- **Line 8:** "me"
- **Line 11:** "her," "her"
- **Line 12:** "her"
- **Line 23:** "thee"
- **Line 24:** "thee"

ANAPHORA

The speaker uses anaphora in some form of each stanza of the poem. Repeating the same words or phrase at the beginning of two lines creates a relationship between the two lines, usually a relationship of similarity (the two lines express similar or connected ideas) or of causality (one line leads to, or causes, the next). (The parallelism in the poem serves similar functions; the reader will notice that the anaphora in fact helps create much of the parallelism.)

The speaker repeats "Ae" at the beginning of lines 1 and 2 (and 21 and 22) before "fond kiss" and "farewell." The repeated "Ae" emphasizes that the kiss and the farewell are connected; this kiss *is* their farewell to each other. Likewise, the repetition of "and then" at the beginning of the second phrase in each line connects the idea of "sever" and "forever." They are separating never to meet again.

Lines 13-14 both begin "Had we never lov'd sae [kindly/blindly]." Here, the repeated phrase suggests that the event of line 13 helped cause or bring about the event in line 14. It was *because* they loved each other so kindly, or with such deep, natural affection, that they started to love each blindly, or in a way that made them ignore everything else in their lives—including the fact that they would someday have to separate.

The anaphora also creates emphasis. The speaker repeats "Fare thee weel" at the start of lines 17 and 18. The repetition helps stress that the speaker is not merely saying the words of a conventional goodbye but that he truly wishes in his heart that his beloved will be well and happy in the future. This wish is stressed further by lines 19 and 20, when he lists all the good things he hopes she will enjoy.

Where Anaphora appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Ae," "and then"
- **Line 2:** "Ae," "and then"
- **Line 13:** "Had we never lov'd sae"
- **Line 14:** "Had we never lov'd sae"
- **Line 15:** "Never," "never"
- **Line 17:** "Fare thee weel"
- **Line 18:** "Fare thee weel"
- **Line 21:** "Ae"
- **Line 22:** "Ae"

DIACOPE

The poem often uses a type of repetition called diacope. This device is especially pronounced in the second stanza, when the speaker repeats several words multiple times in close succession:

> But to see her was to love her;
> Love but her, and love forever.
> Had we never lov'd sae kindly,
> Had we never lov'd sae blindly,
> Never met—or never parted—
> We had ne'er been broken-hearted.

In the space of six lines, "her" is repeated 3 times, "love" 5 times (twice as "lov'd"), "we" 3 times, and "never" 5 times (once as "ne'er"). Composing almost an entire stanza out of a few repeated words gives extraordinary focus to and emphasis on

those words. The speaker could have conveyed the same basic meaning without repetition, by saying something like "But to see her was to be in love forever. Had we never met, we would not be broken-hearted." But the repetition conveys a sense of the emotional power and force behind this basic meaning.

Lines 11-12 claim it is impossible not to love this woman, Nancy, if you meet her. The repetition of both "love" and "her" emphasize that this love was unavoidable. Lines 13-16 then lament the tragic ending, the "broken heart[s]," that have resulted from this love. The repetition of "never" make it feel as if the speaker is asking himself, over and over, what his life would have been like had he never met this woman. The repetition stresses how tempting it is, at this moment, to wish they had never met at all. This wish indicates how much he must be suffering now, and how strong his attachment to his beloved must be.

Where Diacope appears in the poem:

- **Line 7:** "Me," "me"
- **Line 8:** "me"
- **Line 11:** "her," "love," "her"
- **Line 12:** "Love," "her," "love"
- **Line 13:** "we," "never," "lov'd"
- **Line 14:** "we," "never," "lov'd"
- **Line 15:** "Never," "never"
- **Line 16:** "We," "ne'er"

EXTENDED METAPHOR

The speaker uses an extended metaphor that compares hope to light (and despair to darkness) to capture the strong contrast between hope and despair, and to intensify the reader's sense of the speaker's despair and loss.

Lines 5-6 suggest that no one could be entirely "grieve[d]," or unhappy, so long as they had some hope left—that is, so long as there was even the smallest possibility that they would find some happiness in the future. The speaker represents this small degree of hope with the metaphor of a star. A star is the tiniest pinprick of light in an otherwise dark sky. But, the speaker argues, just as one star can allow someone to find their way at night (as sailors navigate by the North Star), one "star of hope" can be enough to guide them forward into the future.

The speaker conjures up this image of a single light in a dark sky so he can show the reader what he does *not* have. Immediately after the "star of hope" metaphor, he insists that "nae cheerfu' twinkle lights me." He asks the reader to take their image of the sky and "put out" the star's light, so to speak, so that the sky is now entirely dark. Similarly, without his beloved, the speaker's life is entirely dark: "Dark despair around benights me." The metaphor of a starless night, of total darkness, represents the hopelessness he feels without her.

The two metaphors together help the reader better imagine this process of loss. If they first imagine a bright light, and then imagine that light going out, they have an image of what the speaker has gone through: first having someone who gives direction and hope to his life, and then losing that person and losing all hope with her.

Where Extended Metaphor appears in the poem:

- **Lines 5-8:** "Who shall say that Fortune grieves him, / While the star of hope she leaves him? / Me, nae cheerfu' twinkle lights me; / Dark despair around benights me."

REFRAIN

The speaker repeats the poem's first four lines, nearly word-for-word, at the end of the poem, creating what is almost a refrain. A refrain usually expresses a key message of a poem or song, something that the speaker keeps returning to and reflecting on. Given the implied dramatic context of the poem, it is significant that the speaker makes the first four lines his refrain. Lines 1-2 speak about one final moment together for the speaker and his beloved:

> Ae fond kiss, and then we sever;
> Ae fareweel, [and then/alas,) forever!

At the start of the poem, the speaker is asking to enjoy one last, final kiss ("Ae" means "one") before he and his beloved must part. This is the context in which the poem is spoken. The reason why this kiss is so significant is that it will *not* be repeated. So it is surprising when the speaker asks *again* for "Ae fond kiss" in line 21. The repetition conveys very effectively what the speaker wants: to prolong this last moment together for as long as possible. He can gain a little more time with his beloved if he continues to ask for one more—and then one more—final kiss.

The speaker then repeats lines 3-4 as lines 23-24:

> Deep in heart-wrung tears I'll pledge thee,
> Warring sighs and groans I'll wage thee.

Although the words are the same, these lines gain new significance by appearing at the end of the poem. In stanza 2, the speaker seemed to question whether love was worth its high emotional cost. Now, the speaker reaffirms that he *is* willing to pay that cost. What he suffers emotionally, he will continue offering up as a tribute to his beloved's memory. Altogether, the "refrain" at lines 21-24 emphasizes the speaker's unwillingness to leave his beloved and his promise to keep honoring her when they are separated.

Where Refrain appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-4:** "Ae fond kiss, and then we sever; / Ae fareweel, and then forever! / Deep in heart-wrung tears I'll pledge thee, / Warring sighs and groans I'll wage thee."
- **Lines 21-24:** "Ae fond kiss, and then we sever; / Ae fareweel, alas, forever! / Deep in heart-wrung tears I'll pledge thee, / Warring sighs and groans I'll wage thee!"

CONSONANCE

"Ae Fond Kiss" is a poem that was also originally intended to be sung to a traditional Scottish tune. The poem's highly regular rhyme scheme, which rhymes the last two syllables of pair of lines, creates a unified, harmonious sound in the poem that enhances its musical, lyric quality. The consonance in other places throughout the poem performs a similar function in terms of the poem's sound.

In stanza 2, for instance, most of the lines repeat the /r/, /v/, and /n/ sounds, in words like "her," "love," "never/ever," and "broken-hearted." These particular consonants also have a soft, euphonious tone, which gives a gentle quality to the whole stanza. The speaker's emotions are strong, but not out of control. The regularity of the lines (contained as they are by the accompanying tune) suggests a calmness in the speaker that is reinforced by these soft consonants.

The repeating consonants also link key words through their sounds. In the "refrain" of the poem—"Ae fond kiss ... Ae farewell, and then forever!"—the repeated /f/ sound links the three most significant words. These three words could almost be a title or a summary of the poem: Fond Farewell Forever. The speaker calls attention to these words and highlights the connection between them by giving them the same initial consonant.

Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "fond," "sever"
- **Line 2:** "fareweel," "forever"
- **Line 3:** "pledge," "thee"
- **Line 4:** "wage," "thee"
- **Line 5:** "grieves," "him"
- **Line 6:** "hope," "leaves," "him"
- **Line 7:** "twinkle," "lights," "me"
- **Line 8:** "Dark," "despair," "benights," "me"
- **Line 9:** "ne'er," "partial," "fancy"
- **Line 10:** "Naething," "Nancy"
- **Line 11:** "her," "love," "her"
- **Line 12:** "Love," "her," "love," "forever"
- **Line 13:** "never," "lov'd," "kindly"
- **Line 14:** "never," "lov'd," "blindly"
- **Line 15:** "Never," "never," "parted"
- **Line 16:** "ne'er," "been," "broken-hearted"
- **Line 17:** "Fare," "first ," "fairest"
- **Line 18:** "Fare," "best," "dearest"
- **Line 19:** "joy," "treasure"
- **Line 20:** "Peace," "enjoyment," "pleasure"
- **Line 21:** "fond," "sever"
- **Line 22:** "fareweel," "forever"
- **Line 23:** "pledge," "thee"
- **Line 24:** "wage," "thee"

CAESURA

In terms of sound, this is a very controlled poem. The meter (which is trochaic tetrameter; more on that in the Meter section of this guide) is very regular throughout, adding a sense of steadiness and predictability even amidst the speaker's pain and despair. The poem's many caesurae add to this effect, drawing out lines and slowing the poem's pace by adding frequent pauses.

On the one hand, this slow pace contributes to the poem's overall somber, fatalistic tone. It implies that the speaker is not frantic, but rather has accepted the seeming tragedy of having to part with his beloved.

On another level, the many caesurae in the poem reflect the speaker's desire to remain with his beloved for as long as possible, to delay their parting again and again. Take the first two lines of the poem. Here, the speaker adds a pause right after saying "Ae fond kiss" and "Ae fareweel," effectively dragging out that final kiss and goodbye. The speaker forces these moments to linger a second more before moving on to the eternal "sever[ing]" that concludes these lines.

Another evocative caesura comes in line 15:

> Never met—or never parted—

The sudden dash in the middle of the line here—the only punctuation mark of its type in the poem—might suggest the speaker hovering for a moment on this idea. That is, he allows himself a moment to consider the potential benefit of never having met his beloved at all, and, as such, avoiding his present pain.

Where Caesura appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** ",", ","
- **Line 2:** ",", ","
- **Line 7:** ",", ","
- **Line 12:** ",", ","
- **Line 15:** "—"
- **Line 17:** ",", ","
- **Line 18:** ",", ","
- **Line 20:** ",", ",", ",", ",", ","
- **Line 21:** ",", ","
- **Line 22:** ",", ",", ","

RHETORICAL QUESTION

The poem has one rhetorical question, which is actually part of the extended metaphor that comprises the second half of the first stanza. Here, the speaker rhetorically asks, how could a person with even a smidgen of hope of left ever say they were unhappy?

The speaker is not looking for an answer here. Instead, the rhetorical nature of the question provides its own answer: *no one* with any hope left would say they were unhappy, because that "star of hope" itself provides some happiness or "Fortune."

This, in turn, sets up a moment of sharp contrast with the speaker's *actual* state. Unlike the person alluded to in this rhetorical question, the speaker himself is completely devoid of hope. The metaphorical light of the "star of hope" referenced in line 6 has left the speaker, who is instead surrounded by the "Dark despair" of night. In other words, the speaker has no hope of ever getting back together with his beloved, and as such is overcome with sadness. Posing the rhetorical question in lines 5-6 serves to make the speaker's reality seem all the more bleak.

Where Rhetorical Question appears in the poem:

- **Lines 5-6:** "Who shall say that Fortune grieves him, / While the star of hope she leaves him?"

VOCABULARY

Ae (Line 1, Line 2, Line 21, Line 22) - One

Sever (Line 1, Line 21) - Separate, part from each other

Fareweel (Line 2, Line 22) - Farewell, goodbye

Heart-wrung (Line 3, Line 23) - Tears that come from his having a broken heart

Pledge (Line 3, Line 23) - To drink a toast (to someone) as a gesture of fidelity and goodwill

Thee (Line 3, Line 4, Line 17, Line 18, Line 23, Line 24) - You

Wage (Line 4, Line 24) - To offer as payment (to someone)

Nae (Line 7) - No

Cheerfu' (Line 7) - Cheerful, inspiring hope

Lights me (Line 7) - Shines a light for me

Benights (Line 8) - Surrounds with darkness

Ne'er (Line 9, Line 16) - Never

Partial (Line 9) - Favoring someone/something excessively and unreasonably

Fancy (Line 9) - Love (or the capacity for love), especially an impulsive, somewhat thoughtless love

Naething (Line 10) - Nothing

But (Line 11, Line 12) - Just, only

Lov'd (Line 13, Line 14) - Loved

Sae (Line 13, Line 14) - So

Kindly (Line 13) - In a kind, affectionate manner; in a way that comes easily and naturally

Weel (Line 17, Line 18) - Well

Thou (Line 17, Line 18) - You

Thine (Line 19) - Yours

Ilka (Line 19) - Every

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

The poem is divided first of all into three stanzas of eight lines each (making them octaves):

Stanza 1: lines 1-8
Stanza 2: lines 9-16
Stanza 3: lines 17-24

There are several other important structures *within* the stanzas as well. Each stanza can be divided in half, into two groups of four lines (quatrains). Lines 1-4, 5-8, 9-12, 13-16, 17-20, and 21-24 also form complete units both in terms of syntax and thematic ideas. For example, lines 5-8 focus on the theme of hope and hopelessness and use epistrophe to connect the four lines together.

Similarly, each quatrain also divides in half, into two groups of two rhyming lines (couplets). The rhyme and the speaker's frequent use of parallel structure connect the two lines within each couplet. For example, lines 17-18 are both used to say goodbye to the beloved and to address her fine qualities, and both begin "Fare thee well" (anaphora) and use parallel syntax to list the qualities ("first and fairest," "best and dearest").

This highly organized form (couplets; quatrains; octaves) serves several purposes. The clearly marked quatrains give the speaker an opportunity to explore a number of different aspects of love, from possible regret at the past to fond wishes for the future. The couplets allow the speaker to express an idea in two different ways, developing new aspects of the idea from one line to the next. For example, lines 11 and 12 both indicate the powerful effect that Nancy has on those around her. But while line 11 simply states that anyone would love her, line 12 further develops this idea to say that one would love *only* her and love her *always*. Overall, then, the form allows the speaker both breadth and depth in his exploration of love and the emotions it brings.

The regular form also makes the poem a lyric, a poem that can be set to music (like Burns' "A Red, Red Rose"). The poem was, indeed, published as a song, with a musical score, in a collection

of Scottish songs called the *Scots Musical Museum*.

METER

The poem is written in trochaic tetrameter, meaning there are four trochees—poetic feet with a stressed-unstressed beat pattern—per line. Take lines 3-4:

> Deep in heart-wrung tears I'll pledge thee,
> Warring sighs and groans I'll wage thee.

As is common in poetry, the speaker uses the stressed syllables to focus attention on particularly important words in each line. Here, for instance, the stresses pick out "Deep ... heart ... tears" and "War ... sighs ... groans," emphasizing the speaker's sorrowful emotions.

The meter is highly regular. Every line begins with a stressed syllable, and every line ends with an unstressed syllable; every line contains eight syllables and is end-stopped. The regular meter makes it easy to set the poem to music, as the poet himself specified when he first wrote and published it. But it also shapes the reader's perception of the speaker's emotional state. If the meter were highly irregular, constantly breaking the pattern of stresses, altering enjambed and end-stopped lines, adding or taking away syllables, etc., this irregularity might suggest that the speaker was in some state of emotional turbulence. The speaker of this poem is certainly grieving, but the tone is calmer and quieter more than it is overwrought and frantic.

The trochaic meter also contributes to this tone. The lines all end with unstressed syllables, resulting in feminine endings throughout (from the example quoted above: "pledge thee"). This creates a sense that each line is growing quiet and dying off as it nears its end—an appropriate sound for describing the "death" of a relationship and the quiet grief the speaker feels.

Many of the lines also feature a caesura in the middle. These drawn-out pauses slow the line down, as does the full stop at the end of each line. The speaker, too, is trying to slow down time as the moment of parting draws near. He asks for one more kiss in the poem's first line, as though this will be their last kiss, only to ask for still another kiss in line 21, delaying their goodbye still further. The poem's slow speed of reading reflects both the somber emotional tone and the speaker's own desire to experience this moment as slowly as possible.

RHYME SCHEME

The poem is written in rhyming couplets, making the rhyme scheme of each eight-line stanza:

AABBCCDD

This pattern repeats in every stanza.

The rhyme here should be considered to include the whole last foot of the line (that is, the final trochee, with both its final stressed and unstressed syllable—"pledge thee"/"wage thee" rather than just "thee"/"thee"). As such, several of the rhymes are slant rhymes (lines 3-4, 11-12, 17-18, 23-24). In "fairest"/"dearest," for example, the stressed syllables ("fair" and "dear") do not rhyme perfectly, though they share a consonant sound (consonance). Most of the rhymes, however, are perfect rhymes (like "sever" and "-ever"), with some of the rhymes even including repetitions of the same word ("thee," "me"). The highly regular rhyme scheme and the perfect rhymes enhance the poem's lyric quality, making it easy to set to music.

Arranging the rhymes in rhyming couplets serves several functions. On the most basic level, the couplet, as the name suggests, reflects the *couple* at the center of the poem; each end word is part of a pair, just as the speaker and his beloved once were.

There is also parallel structure in many pairs of lines throughout the poem, and the shared rhyme further enhances the connection created between the two lines by that shared structure. The couplet rhyme scheme also creates a strong sense of inevitability for the second word in the pair, since the rhyme follows so quickly. Readers know to expect certain sounds in the second line of each couplet, and it is as if the first and the second word cannot help going together.

This sense of inevitability, then, translates to the ideas expressed in the poem more broadly. For example, the couplet of "fancy" and "Nancy" makes it sound as though a man's love is always captured by Nancy; "parted" and "broken-hearted" reinforce the reader's sense that separation cannot help bringing heartbreaking grief.

SPEAKER

"Ae Fond Kiss" takes the form of a traditional Scottish ballad, which is generally adaptable for any singer, of any age or gender. But if the speaker of "Ae Fond Kiss" were imagined to be a specific person, he would be a young man of Scottish origin. Robert Burns was around 31 when he sent "Ae Fond Kiss" to Agnes McLehose, one of whom's nicknames was "Nancy." Burns sent the poem to her just before she departed for Jamaica—a parting that, as the poem says, would seem to be "forever."

In the first stanza, discussing his "tears," "sighs," and "groans," the speaker focuses entirely on his own hopeless future and his "despair" at losing his beloved. The dominant pronoun is "me." In the next stanza, however, this emphasis on his "broken-heart[]" broadens to include his *beloved's* experience as well as his own. The dominant pronoun is now "we." As he turns his attention to his beloved, the speaker moves from self-absorption to selflessness. He wishes his beloved "joy and treasure, / Peace, enjoyment, love, and pleasure." While he promises that he can love none "but her," he hopes that she will

find joy with a new love. His overriding desire for his beloved's happiness—even though she must find that happiness with someone other than him—reveals that he has a truly selfless love for her. He himself still anticipates no happiness for himself. He then ends the poem as he began it, promising to remember his beloved with tears, sighs, and groans.

SETTING

There is no specific detail about the setting of the poem. Lyric poems like "Ae Fond Kiss" are often meant to be able to be sung by a variety of singers in a variety of contexts, and this lack of specificity can give the lyric a more universal appeal. But the traces of Scottish dialect—"ae" for "one," "nae" for "no," "sae" for "so," etc.—identify the poem as Scottish, so the reader infers that it is most likely set in Scotland.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

Robert Burns wrote "Ae Fond Kiss" in December 1791. It was around this time that he was asked to write lyrics for a collection of traditional Scottish songs called *The Melodies of Scotland*—a collection to which he ultimately contributed 100 songs. He similarly provided lyrics, sometimes entirely his own, sometimes adapted from other poets' work or from traditional ballads (as with "A Red, Red Rose") for George Thomson's *A Select Collection of Original Scottish Airs for the Voice* (1799-1818) and James Johnson's *Scots Musical Museum* (1787-1803). He also collected Scottish folk tunes and set words to them, sometimes even arranging the music as well.

The lyric form clearly influenced Burns's composition of "Ae Fond Kiss," as did traditional Scottish dialect. The highly regular structure of the poem—rhyming couplets in three octaves, with all end-stopped lines—means the poem is easily set to music. In fact, when Burns first composed the poem, he imagined it accompanied by music. Burns later published "Ae Fond Kiss" in *Scots Musical Museum* in 1792 accompanied by the music. Burns's extensive contributions to such volumes and to the preservation of traditional Scottish songs helped create his fame and establish him as Scotland's national poet.

"Ae Fond Kiss," however, was actually inspired partly by an English poem called "The Parting Kiss," published by Robert Dodlsey in *The Charmer* (1749). The first quatrain of Dodsley's poem runs:

> One kind kiss before we part,
> Drop a tear, and bid adieu:
> Tho' we sever, my fond heart,
> Till we meet, shall pant for you

Burns takes Dodsley's formal English diction and replaces it with subtle Scottish dialect—"Ae fond kiss" for "One fond kiss," "Ae fareweel" for "bid adieu." The term "sever" remains, as does "heart." Dodlsey's poem also ends by repeating the first two lines, as Burns's poem ends by repeating the first four lines. But while Dodsley looks calmly forward to a reunion with his beloved, Burns more tragically laments that they must part "forever." This permanent separation gives greater emotional intensity to Burns's poem.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In 1787, Burns's volume *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish dialect* was published in Edinburgh, the capital city of Scotland. The volume won Burns a reputation in the city as an accomplished writer, and during his stay in Edinburgh he began many new relationships—including a relationship with Agnes "Nancy" McLehose. Agnes was a married woman but was estranged from her husband. Though their relationship was not known to be a physical one, Agnes and Burns exchanged passionate love letters.

In 1791, however, Agnes decided to sail to Jamaica, where her husband was living, to try to reconcile with him. After he and Agnes met for one final time, Burns sent her a letter, dated December 27, 1791, in which he enclosed the words to "Ae Fond Kiss." The letter begins, "I have yours, my ever-dearest Nancy, this moment. I have just ten minutes before the Post goes & these I shall employ in sending you some Songs I have just been composing to different tunes for the Collection of Songs, of which you have three volumes—& of which you shall have the fourth." "Ae Fond Kiss" was eventually published in the fourth volume of James Johnson's *Scots Musical Museum* in 1792.

Burns's letter indicates that he was thinking both of his intimate personal relationship with Agnes McLehose and of the more anonymous, more traditional Scottish ballad form. As a biographical account of his relationship with Agnes, the poem is more idealized than strictly factual. Burns married a woman named Jean Armour in 1788 and also had an affair with Agnes's maid, Jennie Clow. If one reads the poem as the words of Burns himself, the pledges of undying, faithful love might raise some skepticism. But as a more impersonal song, ready to be sung by anyone, it captures a universal emotion in its account of love and loss. Sir Walter Scott, the celebrated Scottish author, wrote of lines 13-16 that this "exquisitely affecting stanza contains the essence of a thousand love tales." This may be why "Ae Fond Kiss" is the song of Burns that has been recorded most often by contemporary musical artists.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- "Ae Fond Kiss" in Publication — See a digital copy of "Ae Fond Kiss" as published in "Scots Musical Museum," 1792, set to the musical tune "Rory Dall's Port." (https://digital.nls.uk/special-collections-of-printed-music/archive/87798712)
- Musical Rendition of "Ae Fond Kiss" — Enjoy a beautifully sung version of "Ae Fond Kiss" by Scottish singer-songwriter Eddi Reader. (https://youtu.be/RMmtBgMaF5I)
- The Background and Music of "Ae Fond Kiss" — Learn more about the relationship that inspired "Ae Fond Kiss" and listen to three musical recordings: a sung version of "Ae Fond Kiss," plus an instrumental version of the poem's original tune, "Rory Dall's Port," and the poem's more common contemporary musical setting, "My Love Today As Heretofore." (https://www.scotslanguage.com/articles/node/id/414)
- Burns's Letter — See a digital copy of 1791 letter Burns sent to Agnes McLehose containing the words to "Ae Fond Kiss." (https://digital.nls.uk/robert-burns/edinburgh/ae-fond-kiss.html)
- The Robert Burns Birthplace Museum — More information about Burns's relationship with Agnes McLehose, plus pictures of the exhibit at the Robert Burns Birthplace Museum dedicated to "Ae Fond Kiss." (https://burnsmuseum.wordpress.com/2018/08/15/an-insight-into-ae-fond-kiss/)

LITCHARTS ON OTHER ROBERT BURNS POEMS

- A Red, Red Rose
- To a Mouse

HOW TO CITE

MLA

Devlin McNair, Maria. "*Ae Fond Kiss.*" *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 7 Jan 2020. Web. 22 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Devlin McNair, Maria. "*Ae Fond Kiss.*" LitCharts LLC, January 7, 2020. Retrieved April 22, 2020. https://www.litcharts.com/poetry/robert-burns/ae-fond-kiss.