

“I Don't Like Poetry” *by* Ronnie O'Byrne

I have a confession to make - I used to have a great dislike for poetry and even worse - Robert Burns.

It had to do with that shortbread tin image of him. The only time I used to see anything of Burns was in the tartan gift shop in Auchtermuchty or a service station on the A74.

School was a bit of a disaster - the "English" teacher said something like – “We will now deal with the Scot's poet Robert Burns - Burns wrote love poems and poems about nature - one of his most famous was "To a Mouse"- I would like you all to read this for homework and we'll discuss it again next week”.

Some of my mates were having difficulty reading the Beano – so understanding the old Scot's language - was just a tad above their processing capabilities.

I can remember being up the back of the bike shed at school saying – as we were about to take a double period of English that I didn't like poetry. --I have to say - I kept that attitude with me well into my 20s.

Then one night I found myself at Pumpherstons Golf Club's Burns Supper.

I watched in admiration guys like Tam Jenkins, Willie Kirk and Alan Devlin perform poetry and song in a way that I had never seen or heard before.

Tam o'Shanter - came to life for me. The satire of Holy Willies Prayer filled me with pride.

I was intrigued..... that something so powerful - could be written in my native tongue.

I was so impressed that I took it upon myself to try and learn a little.

This poem on the following page commemorates my journey from school - to present times.

I don't like poetry! As I used to say at school

I don't like poetry
It's glib and droll
It always talks about the soul
That love and bittersweet control
 ower imaged minds
For scholars worship tae enroll
 as school bells chime
As we grow up they teach us Keats
Shakespeare, Byron lines from Bates
 We classified, interpret Yates
 and other lads
Whose Inner Thoughts we'd conjugate
 wae critic jabs.
When men suggested - "read some
 Burns"
The thought wid make ma stomach churn
 Tae read about wee mice and turns
 near Afton Brae,
Or birds wae flappin' wings a' hurrin
 in nature's way
Naw, naw, - tae me - that's nancy speak
 It widna mak' a tough boy sweet
Us lads came frae that ither street
 whare smart guys stay
Who knew it all and never met
 a better way.

But then one nicht I did attend
A Burns supper richt tae the end
I listened keen tae comprehend
 oor auld Scots tongue
And wondered how this bardies bend
 was so well sung
So what's this tale of Shanter Tam
Of markets, drink and Carrick farms
They say he spied a witch's charm
 near some auld Kirk
An'came within a bridges span
 o' meeting Nick
An'tell me more about thon Willie
 O' how I thought him very funny
Tae see him screech an' him sae holy
 wae pious pout
And how the bard cleansed out his soul
 with satire's clout
These sparked a flame, I read some more
 Epistles, letters, songs and poems
I practiced lines, some speeches prose
 And even learned wee turns
and now I'm asked tae bid propose
 The Memory o' Burns

BUT I don't like poetry!