

2nd Place Winner: By Steven Keenan (class of 2021)

Throughout history, wars have been waged for numerous reasons, many of these reasons often repeat themselves. One of the most recurring reasons we have seen in history is fighting for independence. This was especially common during the 18th century, because of the age of imperialism. As a result of the failings of imperialism, colonies were waging war with their mother countries to gain independence, the most notable being the United States of America. Although it's not as popular in western culture compared to other fights of independence, Scotland's fight for independence is a very important part of history. Although it occurred four centuries prior to the fall of old imperialism, it still holds the same core idea of the fights that occurred during the 18th century.

Robert Burns' "Scots Wha Hae", was written during the 18th century, but was about the turning point battle of Bannockburn, which ultimately led the Scottish to independence from Great Britain during the 14th century. Even though it encapsulates the fight of four centuries prior, it still encapsulates the many voices of the 18th century against the tyranny of Imperialism, and specifically the Tyrannical British Monarchy. Though the use of calling to arms and condemning tyranny, Burns successfully depicts the same calls that occurred during the late seventeenth hundreds.

Scotland and Great Britain have not had the friendliest relationship throughout history. They gained independence from Britain during the 14th century, but were never free from their atrocities. As a result of this relationship people from Scotland still held anger towards their neighbor. This anger was often displayed by actions, but during the Scottish Enlightenment, it began to be expressed in words. Robert Burns was like many citizens of Scotland, and hated the British Empire, so in many of his works he expressed his anger towards the actions and atrocities of the crown. The poem is Burns metaphorically flipping the bird to the British Monarchy. One way Burns displays his hatred is when he states,

"Now's the day, an now's the hour:

See the front o' battle lour,

See approach proud Edward's power –

Chains and Slaverie."

In stating this, Burns is calling the Power of Britain during Scotland's fight for independence, or rather the power of King Edward, is nothing but chains and slavery. Which refers to how King Edward's power comes from his tyrannical actions against

man and specifically Scotland. To further illustrate the feeling that he and many other feel for Britain, Burns states,

“Wha, for Scotland's king and law,  
Freedom's sword will strongly draw,  
Freeman stand, or Freeman fa,  
Let him on wi me.”

Burns is ruthlessly rubbing in the Britain face how they won, and Scotland is now free of their tyranny. He is referring to how by purely righteous indignation alone, they had the will to defeat Britain, and did defeat Britain. Not only did Britain lose, but they lost and were in the wrong.

Even though Burns likes to recall history in order to express to the listener Scotland's deeply rooted feeling for Britain, he also begins to quote the present actions of the British Monarchy during the late seventeen hundreds. To illustrate this Burns states,

“By Oppression's woes and pains,  
By your sons in servile chains!  
We will drain our dearest veins,  
But they shall be free.”

In stating this Burns, is referring to the recently independent United States of America. In specifically America's escape from the Oppression of King George. While still rubbing in the failures of the monarchy, Burns is also pushing the idea that the Monarch has not changed, and even though it sometimes recognizes its own problems the tyranny fails to change. Additionally to reference the present state of the world Burns states,

“Lay the proud usurpers low,  
Tyrants fall in every foe,  
Liberty's in every blow! –  
Let us do or dee.”

Burns continues to mock the crown, and still refers to the recently independent America. By stating "Tyrants fall in every foe," Burns is directly attacking the Tyranny of King George instead of alluding to it like he had done previously. These quotes perfectly summarize Scotlads feelings towards Britain.

Although it is not the most subtle attack on the acts of the British, Burns' writing style and tone perfectly fits the attitude of the Scottish towards the British, that of unwavering and deliberate hatred. Burns ingeniously professes Scotlands hatred of Great Britain's current actions by reminding the listeners of the history between the two neighbors. The calls that happened four centuries prior are the same calls that were being made in the present, and Burns highlights this alongside profound Scottish anger. He is essentially illustrating how those who do not remember history are doomed to repeat it, and Britain has been repeating it for centuries rolling over and oppressing every civilization that it can.