

AFTON WATER, by Robert Burns

Afton Water, or Flow Gently, Sweet Afton, is one of my favorite Burns songs. It warns the river Afton not to wake the singer's sweetheart Mary, who is sleeping by its banks. Although it is a love song of sorts, the song is more focused on the natural beauty of Scotland than on the sleeping Mary. I particularly love the beautiful melody Burns wrote this song to, but the words are a very fine example of his deep regard for nature and all that it offers to humanity. Each verse focuses on a different aspect of the landscape, most of which bring back fond memories to the singer. Burns' love of nature shines through the whole time as the words are crafted such that the melody will mirror them; at times acting like a screaming birdcall, at times a babbling brook. Burns wrote many songs that express his political idealism and humanism, but he also wrote many like Afton Water that can serve to remind us of the importance of humanity's relationship to nature. It is clear that Burns' ideas of inclusivity, empathy and respect expanded beyond the interpersonal to the human-nature relationship. In the spirit of "Robert Burns Speaks to America" this song is an important reminder to continue to value the environment and natural beauty all around us and I am pleased to be able to contribute it to this great collection of performances.

– Neil Pearlman
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