

Originally poetry was used to idolize the aristocracy or nobility. It was a form in which to tell stories or tell about people. However, as poetry developed it became accessible and even directed to the general population. A topic such as fornication or having sex with someone that is not your husband or wife is revered by Robert Burns. Burns is described as believing “in the goodness of man against the tenets of the Scots church” (188). Burns encouragement of self motivated actions can contradict church or social norms; Burns places these ideals in his poem directed to the general public. In Burn’s “The Fornicator, A New Song,” Burns promotes sexual expression even at the cost of social condemnation through allusions, hyperbole, and imagery.

Burns uses an allusion to say that the men are actually doing the women a service by sleeping with them unwed. Burns says that the men are giving the diseased women a chance to become mothers:

Ye wenching blades whore hireling jades

Have tipt you off blue-boram,

I tell you plain, I do disdain

To rank you in the Quorum;

But a bony lass upon the grass

To teache her esse Mater,

And no reward but for regard,

O that’s a fornicator. (33-40).

Burns says that he is teaching these women to be mothers: “To teache her esse Mater.” These men are allowing these women to become pregnant and have children. Burns desires some

thanks or credit for this work he has done to benefit society. He does not see that he is being an adulterer. When he says “And no reward but for regard” Burns emphasizes the idea that the men are doing some kind of service to the women. This is contributed to the allusion made in line 34 where Burns says “Have tipt you off blue-boram.” The foot note reads “Infected you with syphilis. The term probably derives from the notorious Blue Boar Tavern in London.” These women are all diseased and have syphilis, a sexually transmitted disease. This Blue Boar Tavern is an allusion to where these diseased women come from, probably a tavern that is known for having these unwed promiscuous women. The men feel they have a right to express their sexual desires on these women who are less than desirable. Through this allusion the men are being heroes and taking in the women that would not have the opportunity to be married or have children. This shows how Burns sees the men as contributing to society and simply expressing their sexual freedom to others.

Burns uses hyperbole to say that there is a mass group of fornicators, and there should not be any punishment for these men who are following in the footsteps of some of history’s greatest men. Burns says that these men have a right to express their sexual desires freely and should not be held down or punished by the church or society. Burns compares himself and his fornicating brothers to other historically successful figures:

Your warlike kings and heroes bold  
Great Captains and Commanders;  
Your mighty Césars fam’d of old,  
And Conquering Alexanders;  
In fields they fought and laurels bought  
And bulwarks strong did batter,

But still they grac'd our noble list

And ranked Fornicator!!! (41-48)

Burns says that he is being condemned and his fellow men are being condemned for committing an act that has been a part of society's history for years. How can the people condemn these men when Alexander and other great commanders were not condemned? These men, according to Burns, should even be looked up to and idolized by the people because they may be the future great leaders. This hyperbole that every man is a fornicator shows Burns desire for social acceptance of sexual liberation. According to Burns, it is natural and freeing to have sex, and there is nothing wrong with these criminal acts except that society has deemed it inappropriate. Fornication has been a part of society for years, and it is natural. Therefore, people should not try to constrict this natural behavior.

Burns paints pictures of the fornicators and their punishments. However, in each punishment Burns twists the punishment into a new perspective. The first image Burns arouses is in stanza two where Burns tells how he has to sit in black on a stool where everyone could look at them being punished. Instead of feeling ashamed and embarrassed, however, Burns takes quite a different approach:

But my downcast eye by chance did spy

What made my lips to water,

Those limbs so clean where I, between

Commenc'd a Fornicator. (13-16)

Burns is sitting on this stool to be punished, but instead Burns takes the chance to look down at the woman who he had sex with and is being punished for now. Burns makes a light-hearted joke

out of his punishment by eyeing his sex partner instead of being punished. This shows Burns attitude that fornication is innocent fun and should not be strictly condemned by the church.

Another image Burns arouses is of him and his mistress making love at night in the grass. Again the description is paired with a light hearted joke to stress the foolishness behind punishing these sexual active men. Burns describes the scene:

A parting kiss, what could I less,

My vows began to scatter,

My Betsey fell-lal de dal lal lal,

I am a Fornicator. (21-24)

Burns describes his girl falling into him. They commence the sexual act which will lead to the punishments, financially and emotionally Burns has already described. However, this is matched with Burns describing the sex as “lal de dal lal lal.” This shows a playful kid likeness describing this criminal act; this shows Burns carefree attitude. Men are going to be sexually free and promiscuous regardless of the undeserving punishments the church and laws try to enforce. This sound connection to the reader is emphasized throughout the poem. The poem as whole when read out loud has a lullaby or sing-song style to it. Burns believes the fornication is innocent.

Through allusion, hyperbole, and imagery Burns conveys the naturalness that is fornication. He describes the males need to be sexually free and not bound by marriage, law, or church. Burn’s poetry is written for the common man. It also shows a naturalistic idea that sex is natural and should not be controlled by church and law. Burns poetry takes a stand for sexual freedom and against restrictions. Burns uses poetic language throughout his poem to show his attitude that these men are being sexually expressive and free which should not be contested by anyone.

## Works Cited

Burns, Robert. "A Fornicator, A New Song." The Longman Anthology British Literature Vol.

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