



Robert Burns adapted "John Anderson, My Jo" from a traditional Scottish song. The poet's version of this song first appeared in James Johnson's Scots Musical Museum published in 1790. Burns' adaptation speaks of the relationship of a man and a woman who meet in their youth and travel through life until they "sleep thegither at the foot."

Robert Burns did have a close friend named John Anderson. A Scottish Heritage plaque, found in the Kilchuimen Burial Ground, indicates that he was the character referenced in "the most touching of Burns Songs." There is no evidence directly related to Burns that confirms this statement. Folklore states that John Anderson built Burns' coffin.

Translation

John Anderson, my jo, John Anderson, my jo, (jo – sweetheart)
When we were first acquent; (acquent-acquainted)
Your locks were like the raven,
Your bonie brow was brent; (bonie-beautiful, brent-smooth, unwrinkled)
But now your brow is beld, John, (beld-bald)
And your locks are like the snaw; (snaw-snow)
But blessings on your frosty pow, (pow-head)
John Anderson, my jo.

John Anderson, my jo,
We climb the hill thegither; (thegither-together)
And manys a cantie day, John, (cantie-cheerful)
We've had wi' ane anither: (ane anither- one another)
Now we maun totter down, John, (maun totter down-must climb down)
And hand in hand we'll go,
To sleep thegither at the foot,
John Anderson, my jo.

Pronunciation Guide

John Anderson, my jo

Jawn Ahnderson (*flipped r*) mah Jo (*no diphthong*)

When we were first acquent

Whin we wur (*flipped r*) furst (*flipped r*) ah-quent

Your locks were like the raven

Yur (*flipped r*) lawks wur (*flipped r*) lik' the' raven (*flipped r*)

Your bonie brow was brent

Yur (*flipped r*) bawnie brow (*flipped r*) wis brent (*flipped r*)

But now your brow is beld, John

Bit nowoo (*diphthong*) yur (*flipped r*) brow (*flipped r*) is beld, Jawn

Your locks are like the snaw

Yur (*flipped r*) lawks ur (*flipped r*) lik' th' snaw

But blessings on your frosty pow

Bit blessings awn yur (*flipped r*) frosty (*flipped r*) powoo (*diphthong*)

John Anderson, my jo

Jawn Ahnderson (*flipped r*) mah Jo (*no diphthong*)

John Anderson, my jo

Jawn Ahnderson (*flipped r*) mah Jo (*no diphthong*)

We clamb the hill thegither

Weh clahmb th' hull th'gither

And mony a cantie day, John

'N' muhnie a cahtie day, Jawn

We've had wi' ane anither

Wuv, hud wi' yin anither

Now we maun totter down, John

Nowoo (*diphthong*) weh maun totter downon (*diphthong*), Jawn

And hand in hand we'll go

'N' haun in haun wull go (*no diphthong*)

And sleep thegither at the foot

'N' sleep th'gither at the foot (*long O as in boo*)

John Anderson, my jo

Jawn Ahnderson (*flipped r*) mah Jo (*no diphthong*)