

The great Scottish poet, Robert Burns (1759-1796), who with Sir Walter Scott was the father of Scottish literature, wrote a poem that is an anthem for the beauty of Scotland, called “My Heart’s in the Highlands.” Burns made powerful use of alliteration to elevate the patriotic emotion of the poem. The final two stanzas of the four-stanza poem are:

Farewell to the mountains high-covered with snow, a
Farewell to the straths and green valleys below, a
Farewell to the forests and wild-hanging woods, b
Farewell to the torrents and loud-pouring floods! b

My heart’s in the Highlands, my heart is not here; c
My heart’s in the Highlands a-chasing the deer, c
A-chasing the wild deer and following the roe— a
My heart’s in the Highlands, wherever I go! a

here heart highlands

In the first stanza, *woods* and *floods* look like eye-rhyme to us, but they were true rhymes in Burns’s dialect. How much of the beauty of the line would be lost if there were no alliteration: “My heart’s in the mountains, it is not in these lowlands”? Part of the beauty must be in the balance: two *h*’s left of comma, two *h*’s right of comma. But in order to have a balance, there must be something to balance!

My heart’s in the Highlands, my heart is not here.