Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro
Centro de Educação e Humanidades
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Carolina de Pinho Santoro Lopes

The (re)writing of Scottish history in Lewis Grassic Gibbon's *Sunset Song*

Rio de Janeiro
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Dissertação apresentada, como requisito parcial para a obtenção do título de Mestre, ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras, da Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. Área de concentração: Literaturas de Língua Inglesa.

Orientadora: Prof[a]. Dra. Ana Lucia de Souza Henriques

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DEDICATION

To my dear family of storytellers, who have made me acutely feel the importance of memory – and its immense power.

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A special thanks to my family, especially my parents, Ana and Guilherme, for being tireless proofreaders, for putting up with my (many) monologues about Gibbon and Scotland, and for helping me navigate through the academic world. Thank you for the endless support!

Finally, huge thanks to Igor, my proofreader, therapist, tech guru, and much more, for lending me his shoulders, ears, time, and energy.

It is strange to think that, if events never die (as some of the wise have supposed,) but live existence all time in Eternity, back through the time-spirals, still alive and aware in that world seven thousand years ago, the hunters are *now* lying down their first night in Scotland, with their tall, deep-bosomed sinewy mates and their children, tired from trek. . . . Over in the west a long line of lights twinkles against the dark. Whin-burning – or the camps of Maglemose?

Lewis Grassic Gibbon

RESUMO

LOPES, Carolina de Pinho Santoro. *The (re)writing of history in Lewis Grassic Gibbon's* Sunset Song. 2016. 90 f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Literaturas de Língua Inglesa) – Instituto de Letras, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2016.

Este trabalho tem por objetivo explorar possíveis diálogos entre a história e a ficção em *Sunset Song* (1932), do escritor escocês Lewis Grassic Gibbon, analisando a representação da história escocesa na narrativa. O romance retrata as primeiras décadas do século XX no vilarejo ficcional de Kinraddie, no nordeste da Escócia, tratando das repercussões da Primeira Guerra Mundial nessa comunidade rural. Este estudo investiga como a posição política de Gibbon e o seu foco na perspectiva dos camponeses afeta a representação da história da Escócia e seus eventos e personagens pelo autor. Como o grupo retratado tradicionalmente não tem voz, essa escolha do escritor pode contribuir para preencher as lacunas da historiografia. Além disso, esta dissertação analisa a presença de alguns elementos da tradição no romance, a exemplo das canções tradicionais, da língua escocesa e da religião presbiteriana, explorando como eles são afetados pelas mudanças no vilarejo após a Primeira Guerra.

Palavras-chave: História. Discurso ficcional. Escócia.

ABSTRACT

LOPES, Carolina de Pinho Santoro. *The (re)writing of history in Lewis Grassic Gibbon's* Sunset Song. 2016. 90 f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Literaturas de Língua Inglesa) – Instituto de Letras, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2016.

The present work aims at exploring possible dialogues between history and fiction in *Sunset Song* (1932), by the Scottish writer Lewis Grassic Gibbon, analyzing the representation of the history of Scotland in the narrative. The novel portrays the early decades of the 20th century in the fictional village of Kinraddie, in the northeast of Scotland, dealing with the repercussions of World War One in this rural community. This study investigates how Gibbon's political position and his focus on the perspective of peasants affect his representation of the history of Scotland and its events and figures. As this is a traditionally voiceless group, the author's choice may contribute to filling in the blanks in historical accounts. Besides, this dissertation analyzes the presence of some elements of tradition in the novel, such as traditional songs, the Scots language and the Presbyterian religion, exploring how they are affected by the changes in the village following the war.

Keywords: History. Fictional discourse. Scotland.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

It is telling of the position of Scotland within the United Kingdom that this nation's history was neglected for a long time, with its study only becoming compulsory in Scottish schools in 1990, after interest in the past greatly increased in the 1970s. This rise in attention to the subject was due in part to the possibility of devolution of the Scottish Parliament in the 1979 referendum (LYNCH, 1994, p. xv). England has held a position of dominance in the United Kingdom, which led in the past to the repression of the Scottish religion, languages, and even other cultural elements considered typically Scottish, such as the bagpipes. Even though the situation has been changing, political representation remains an issue, with "Scotland opposed it; Westminster imposed it" as one of the slogans for the campaign in favor of Scottish independence in the 2014 referendum.

As the saying that history is written by the victors implies, the writing of history is deeply intertwined with power. Historical accounts are traditionally written by the political and economic elites; consequently, their views predominate, as well as their version of the facts. Thus, some groups remain voiceless and are unable to express their perspective. Besides, historical narratives are instruments of power as they have great influence on public opinion and on one's understanding of the present. As summarized by the Ingsoc slogan in Orwell's (1983, p. 204) *1984*, "[w]ho controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past".

In the 20th century, historians came to question the positivist idea that history is an objective science. Scholars such as Hayden White, Paul Veyne, and Edward H. Carr argue that historical accounts are not neutral and relate them to other types of narrative, blurring the line between history and fiction. Hence, fictional narratives may be seen as valid accounts of the past, acting as potent ways to give voice to those who have traditionally been silenced. These ideas will be the foundation of the present work, which will analyze a work of fiction as a form of (re)writing history.

This dissertation aims at investigating possible dialogues between the writing of fiction and history in Lewis Grassic Gibbon's *Sunset Song* (1932), exploring the novel's focus on the lives of crofters. This study also intends to relate Gibbon's representation of Scottish history in *Sunset Song* to his political position and the opinions expressed in his essays. The novel recounts the story of Chris Guthrie, a young girl coming of age in a village in the northeast of Scotland. It encompasses the years between 1911 and 1920, dealing with the

impact of World War One in the community. This way, the narrative portrays a moment of transformation both in Chris's life and in her village, as well as Scotland as a whole. *Sunset Song* is the first novel in the trilogy *A Scots Quair* – followed by *Cloud Howe* (1933) and *Grey Granite* (1934), which tell Chris's story up to the early 1930s. The present work will focus only on the first installment in order to develop a deeper and more careful analysis of the novel and the historical period in question.

Lewis Grassic Gibbon was a literary persona of James Leslie Mitchell. Born in 1901, in Aberdeenshire (Scotland), Mitchell grew up in Arbuthnott (in Kincardineshire, also known as the Mearns), where his family worked in a croft. During his childhood, he showed a keen interest in history and archaeology. Mitchell started working as a reporter at a very young age, in 1917, which took him to Aberdeen and Glasgow. After serving the army in the Middle East, he worked for the Royal Air Force in the south of England and then settled near London. His career as a writer was remarkably short and productive, with sixteen books published from 1928 until his death in 1935.

Under the name of James Leslie Mitchell, he published a variety of works, ranging from science fiction, such as *Three Go Back* (1932) and *Gay Hunter* (1934), to a historical novel, *Spartacus* (1933), and a non-fiction book about history, *Nine Against the Unknown* (1934). Both science fiction books deal with the theme of time travel, respectively to the past, to the lost continent of Atlantis, and to a post-apocalyptic future. *Spartacus* retells the story of the slave who dared to revolt against the strength of Ancient Rome, in an example of Mitchell's political concern about oppressed groups in society. Finally, *Nine Against the Unknown* is about the story of nine explorers, such as Marco Polo (1254-1324), Columbus (1451-1506), and Richard Burton (1821-1890). This eclectic literary production points to the author's interest in history, especially his belief in Diffusionism, a theme which will be explored later on.

As Lewis Grassic Gibbon, he wrote books connected more specifically to Scotland, such as the trilogy *A Scots Quair* and *Scottish Scene* (1934), a collection of essays written in collaboration with Hugh MacDiarmid. When signing as Gibbon, he referred to Mitchell as a "distant cousin" (GIBBON, 2007b, p. 133), and even as an "English cousin" (SMITH, 2007, p.xii), reinforcing the bond between his pseudonym and writing about Scotland. Since the present work will be dealing with *Sunset Song*, the author will be referred to by his pen name unless when specific Mitchell's books are mentioned.

Gibbon's concerns outside the realm of literature were a major influence on – and even a motivation for – his works. Considering himself "a revolutionary writer", he declared "I

hate capitalism; all my books are explicit or implicit propaganda" (GIBBON, 2001 apud SMITH, 2007, p. xix, xxi). His concerns for the poor and oppressed are clear in both his fictional and non-fictional texts. In the essay "Glasgow", for example, he considers that the solution of social issues is more important than cultural elements and national sovereignty, affirming that "I would welcome the end of Braid Scots and Gaelic, our culture, our history, our nationhood under the heels of a Chinese army of occupation if it could cleanse the Glasgow slums, give a surety of food and play [...] to those people of the abyss" (GIBBON, 2007b, p. 138).

This preoccupation with oppression and social inequality is combined with his interest in history, leading to an admiration of diffusionist ideas and, according to Keith Dixon (2003, p. 139-140), of historical characters whom Gibbon saw as revolutionary leaders, such as William Wallace (c. 1270-1305), John Knox (c. 1514-1572) and Lenin (1870-1924), among others. Diffusionism was a theory that claimed that civilization was the root of all evils of modern society, having shattered the golden age of freedom experienced by nomadic communities (CAMPBELL, 2007, p. 7-8). Gibbon's views and predilections are reflected on the writing of his two literary personas, for instance, "The Antique Scene", an essay on Scottish history, and *Spartacus*, the historical novel signed by James Leslie Mitchell. In "The Antique Scene", Gibbon (2007b, p. 104) affirms that civilization developed for economic reasons and that "before the planning of that architecture [the great fabric of civilization] enslaved the minds of men, man was a free and happy and undiseased animal", making it clear that he considers civilization an oppressive and corruptive force.

Even though his ideals are clearly leftist, it is not easy to categorize Gibbon's political orientation. Having lived in a period when several different political ideals coexisted, he flirted with diverse ideologies. For example, he tried to establish an anarchist pacifist group in 1930, only one year before trying to join the Communist Party of Great Britain. Dixon (2003, p. 142-143) argues that Gibbon is a "heterodox communist" since he is skeptical of the notions of hierarchy and authority. Gibbon's main concern seems to be the guarantee of freedom and equality for all. Hence, according to Dixon (2003, p. 146), his writing may be interpreted as an attempt to bridge two traditions within the British labor movement: anarchism, called by this scholar "libertarian communism", and orthodox Marxism, called by him "authoritarian communism". Taking into account that Gibbon (2007b, p. 136) himself affirmed "I have amused myself with many political creeds", in a rejection of any political belief that does not diminish oppression and inequality, his position seems too idiosyncratic to be easily defined.

Lewis Grassic Gibbon wrote during a period marked by economic depression and the rise of nationalism. With World War One, the need for industrialized products increased, leading Scottish industry to prosper. The end of the conflict, however, exposed the lack of investment in the modernization of the industry and plunged the country in an economic crisis which would last until the 1930s (TANGE, 2000, p. 18). In addition, the fight for Home Rule in Ireland, along with the population's discontent with the country's situation, rekindled Scottish nationalist ambitions in the 1920s, leading, for example, to the creation of the National Party in 1928 (TANGE, 2000, p. 23).

In this context emerged the Scottish Literary Renaissance, a cultural movement which aimed at asserting the place of Scottish literature in an international context which attributed much more value to English culture. Writers such as Hugh MacDiarmid (pen name of Christopher Murray Grieve), Neil Gunn, Edwin Muir, Willa Muir, and Gibbon addressed political and social issues in their works, expressing their views of Scottish cultural and national identity (RIACH, 2009, p. 14). Hanne Tange (2000, p. 11) identifies “the construction of Scotland in the literature” as the main concern of the writers involved in the Scottish Literary Renaissance.

Despite Gibbon’s evident interest in Scottish history and culture and the fact that he co-authored a book with nationalist MacDiarmid, he regarded this ideology with suspicion, considering the idea of nation one of the constraints imposed on individuals by civilization. According to the author in his essay “Glasgow”, “a time will come when nationalism, with other cultural aberrations, will have passed from the human spirit”, leading to a cosmopolitan social organization which would include the whole human race (GIBBON, 2007b, p. 142-143). Even though Gibbon revives aspects of the Scottish culture, such as the Scots language, in his works, he does so not for the sake of nationalism, but due to his belief that these elements may contribute to the development of a cosmopolitan culture and, consequently, to the coming of freedom (GIBBON, 2007b, p. 143).

Hanne Tange (2000, p. 39) argues that the Scottish Literary Renaissance authors aim at countering the representations of the country's history that were prevalent in the 19th century. While these 20th century writers present a bleak picture of contemporary Scotland, which faced unemployment, housing issues, and several other problems, they also keep an optimistic attitude towards the future, taking upon themselves the responsibility to point to the readers the way to build a better nation (TANGE, 2000, p. 40-41). This approach to history also applies to *Sunset Song*, as our analysis intends to demonstrate.

The first chapter presents the theoretical foundations of this study, discussing the close

relation between historical and fictional narratives, based on the works of historians and literary critics. It is taken into consideration that historians are inserted in a certain historical context and, as a consequence, their writings respond to the ideas circulating in their own time. In the second section, the mechanisms of selection of the events which are included in historical accounts are explored, as well as the consequent exclusion of certain points of view, and historians' role in the choice and organization of the facts. Finally, the third section focuses on the view of history as a kind of narration, addressing similarities and differences between historical and fictional narratives.

The second chapter analyzes Gibbon's writing of the Scottish history in *Sunset Song*, comparing it to the related historiography and establishing parallels between the fictional text and the views expressed in some of Gibbon's non-fictional works. The first section deals with the various references in *Sunset Song* to historical events occurred in Scotland and abroad up to the beginning of the 20th century, that is, before the time represented in the novel. In the second section, the focus is on the early years of the 20th century, especially on the transformations brought by World War One to the rural community's way of living.

The third chapter explores elements of historical continuity present in *Sunset Song*, taking into consideration Fernand Braudel's concept of the long duration, discussed in more detail in the first chapter. The last chapter begins with an investigation of the ideas of permanence and change in the novel, followed by a section dealing with questions of identity and language. The second section addresses the presence of numerous references to traditional songs in the novel, analyzing them both in relation to an emphasis on oral culture and to the moment of transition represented in the narrative. The third section concerns the role of religion in *Sunset Song*, discussing the importance of the Church of Scotland and of the Standing Stones, a vestige of ancient rituals. Finally, the last section analyzes the endurance of social hierarchy and disparity in the community portrayed in the novel.

In short, this dissertation seeks to bring forth the perspective of the forgotten crofters from northeastern Scotland. This will hopefully contribute to the discussion not only of Gibbon's works, but also of the power of literature to sing previously unheard lives. More than eighty years after the publication of *Sunset Song*, even though the future of equality that Gibbon hoped for has not arrived yet, his ideals of justice live on and are still beautifully conveyed by his works.

1 THE WRITING OF HISTORY

The term history carries two meanings: the first is a series of events which have happened, and the second is the account of past facts (MIRANDA, 2000, p. 19). Even though these definitions might sound almost the same at first, the distinction between them is very important and enlightens the study of how history has developed as a field of knowledge across the centuries. History as a discipline consists primarily of a body of records of past facts, and the relationship between accounts and events has been described differently throughout time.

At the early stages of humankind, a community's past was passed on from one generation to another through oral narratives, which combined real and mythic events. With the development of the calendar and written documents, it became possible to record what had happened and, consequently, to distinguish between verified facts and inventions. This led to an incipient differentiation of the categories which came to be known as history and literature even if myths continued to play an important role in the constitution of a group's identity (KORHONEN, 2006, p. 9).

According to Aristotle, the distinction between history and poetry was that the first narrated what had occurred and the latter dealt with what could occur. This way, history was limited to particular facts, while poetry could express universal truths about the human race. However, Ancient Greeks and Romans considered both history and poetry as rhetorical arts, highlighting similarities between them (KORHONEN, 2006, p. 9).

Hayden White (1986, p. 123) affirms that history continued to be seen as a literary art related to rhetoric until the French Revolution. According to the historian, although theorists from this period valued the presence of real facts instead of inventions in historical texts, they "recognized the inevitability of a recourse to fictive techniques in the *representation* of real events in the historical discourse" (WHITE, 1986, p. 123, italics in the original). Truth did not correspond merely to the facts themselves, but to the facts inserted in the conceptual framework in which they could be represented (WHITE, 1986, p. 123). Therefore, history could not be separated from the rhetorical techniques associated with literature.

However, the Enlightenment period was marked by a strong commitment to reason. Enlightenment scholars, according to White (1986, p. 140), treated the distinction between fact and fable as clear-cut, not considering this question as problematic. He also affirms that Bayle – a French philosopher – regarded truth as "the soul of history" (WHITE, 1986, p. 140).

Nevertheless, White (1986, p. 142) points out a contradiction in the historiography of the period, which, according to him, was:

> caused by Enlightenment historians' dependence upon the rules of classical rhetoric and poetics as the methodology of historical representation and a simultaneous suspicion of the figurative language and analogical reasoning required for their proper application.

Thus, whereas the relationship between history and literary techniques was problematic in the period, it is clear that historical accounts and rhetoric could not be easily disentangled in the 18th century theory.

Yet, the value given to reason in the Enlightenment led to a general disregard of myth as part of the history of a culture. White (1986, p. 143) considers that Enlightenment intellectuals failed in their incapacity to see myths as possible means to apprehend the truth, which could, like scientific thinking, constitute a phase in the history of a community.

In the 19th century, history was raised to the status of a science by positivist thinkers. Historians at the time believed in the possibility of writing a definitive and absolute history (CARR, 2002, p. 43). The ideal historical text had to be objective, “above any impulse to interpret the historical record in the light of party prejudices, utopian expectations, or sentimental attachments to traditional institutions” (WHITE, 1986, p. 124).

In order to reach the ideal of showing what really happened, it was necessary for the historian to deal exclusively with facts, which should be verifiable and based on evidence (CARR, 2002, p. 44-45). The great value attributed to evidence found in documents led historians to focus mainly on subjects which appeared in written records, such as wars and political acts (KORHONEN, 2006, p. 10). The desire to eliminate any trace of fiction from historical accounts meant that history should be as distanced from literature as possible. Whereas history and literature had both been associated with the same rhetorical techniques for so long, these fields came to be seen as opposite or rivals in the 19th century (KORHONEN, 2006, p. 10).

While history was associated with the triad objectivity, facts and documents in the 19th century, these foundations have been questioned mainly since the second half of the 20th century. The positivist view that an absolute truth or a correct history could be found has been shaken by the works of historians such as Hayden White, Paul Veyne and Edward Carr, among others. Their contributions to the study of history will be further analyzed in the following pages.

1.1 **History and the present: the role of historians' point of view**

Instead of setting impartiality as the main goal for historians, 20th century theorists regard interpretation as inevitable, which opens up the possibility of different ways of writing about the same event. In the place of aiming at revealing *the* truth, Jörn Rüsen (1997, p. 95) affirms that there is not a single history, but a multiplicity of them. Paul Veyne (1978, p. 48) also agrees that what historians can find is a number of partial truths.

Besides, interpretation is seen as intrinsically present in a historian's text. According to Edward H. Carr (2002, p. 58), we never have access to pure historical texts since they always suffer the influence of the historian who wrote them. As it is impossible to disengage an author from their perspective, the writing is always influenced by factors such as religion, political orientation or moral values. Therefore, Carr (2002, p. 75) affirms that it is only possible to fully understand a historian's work if their point of view is taken into consideration.

The influence of historians on their work is possible because historical facts do not speak for themselves. In order to represent past events discursively, historians mold them according to their own interpretation (WHITE, 1994, p. 141). Carr (2002, p. 65) states that writing involves a reciprocal process in which facts and the writer's interpretation influence each other. This way, there are multiple ways to describe an event, neither of them being neutral or the only correct one (WHITE, 1994, p. 144). In addition to facts and interpretation, historical texts also contain a message about the position the reader should take towards the issues discussed (WHITE, 1994, p. 122).

It is also fundamental to take into consideration that historians do not exist in a vacuum. A historian's perspective is affected and even shaped by the social and historical context around them. In Carr's (2002, p. 75) words, the historian is a product of history. As a consequence, the author claims that it is important to take into account not only these scholars' point of view, but also the background in which they are inserted (CARR, 2002, p. 79).

Thus, although history deals chiefly with past events, it is by no means disconnected from the present. Carr (2002, p. 65) points out the mutual influence between present and past in the work of historians. Rüsen (1997, p. 87) also describes history as a temporal link between past, present and future.

As stated previously, historians cannot disregard the historical context of their own time. This way, they see the past through the perspective of the present, being both the latter's

product and representative (CARR, 2002, p. 60, 71). According to José Luís Jobim (2002, p. 139), we are always affected by the present when approaching the past, which makes it necessary to be very careful in order to prevent our expectations and biases from causing us to misunderstand the past.

Jobim uses Gadamer's concept of horizon to discuss this question. The notion of horizon encompasses all which can be observed from a certain standpoint and is, consequently, mutable, being affected by a person's experiences (JOBIM, 2002, p. 138, 140). One's horizon is partly shaped by the past horizon, which includes inherited traditions (JOBIM, 2002, p. 139). At the same time, one always encounters the past through one's present horizon. However, transporting oneself to another's situation or perspective helps to modify and expand one's horizon and, as a result, contributes to a better understanding of reality (JOBIM, 2002, p. 138-139). This implies that both past and present horizons are in constant mutation as one's position changes throughout time (JOBIM, 2002, p. 138).

This discussion highlights not only the effect of the present on our perspective of the past, but also the influence of the past on our identity and viewpoint. Korhonen (2006, p. 20) considers that the past is at the same time different from and part of us since “our identity is formed by the very narratives that we make of it”. Jobim (2002, p. 140) states that one's horizon is formed in relation to the past and the tradition, and, as a result, the present and the past do not exist in isolation. Besides, understanding is an operation which always involves a fusion of horizons (JOBIM, 2002, p. 140). Thus, history consists of a constant dialogue between past and current societies (CARR, 2002, p. 90). According to Rüsen (1997, p. 84), it is historical knowledge that enables us to understand the temporal dimension of our lives as well as the continuity of our identity in the midst of constant changes.

Besides, a common description of the role of history involves contributing to a better understanding of the present. Carr (2002, p. 61) believes that the study of history should not lead to nostalgia or escapism, but to a better understanding of both the past and the present. Fernand Braudel (1992, p. 354) goes even as far as affirming that a historian's work is only truly useful when it brings up explanations, in a work that should include the present even if it is not traditionally considered as belonging to the field of history.

However, not all scholars see the relationship between history and the present in such an optimistic light. History responds to the needs of the present (MIRANDA, 2000, p. 17). An example is given by White (2006, p. 30), who affirms that historical discourse may promote certain social and political values, and ideas of importance to the context in which historians write. This promotion is possible since historians can attribute different values and meanings

to past events. This way, historical texts are not neutral, but relate to questions of relevance to the world in which they were written, either endorsing or rejecting certain points of view. As a result, it is fundamental to take into consideration not only a historian's position and background, but also how their works respond to that specific historical context.

History is always related to the present, not only due to this connection to ideologies, but also because historiography is written to specific audiences (WHITE, 1994, p. 120-121). Historians target their accounts at certain social groups and communities, keeping in mind the effects which the texts may have in the present and the future. Writing about the past implies turning unfamiliar events into a representation which is comprehensible to the audience. In order to do that, historians resort to conceptual frameworks shared with their public. This usually means that they write mainly to their contemporaries even though not all people living at the same time hold the same values (JOBIM, 2002, p. 157-158).

The context of reception of a historical text greatly affects its interpretation. One reads and interprets a text in relation to one's experiences, previous knowledge and culture. This way, readers can be considered also partly authors (SOUZA JÚNIOR, 2000, p. 30) since each individual mentally recreates the contents of a text according to a unique interpretation. Souza Júnior (2000, p. 39) claims that the context acts as a co-author, such is its influence on the production of meanings. This idea can be applied to the contexts of production and reception as both affect the sense of a text.

Although historical texts are commonly addressed to the society contemporary to the writer, they may continue to be read for a long time afterwards. This fact may occasion misunderstandings if the reader's cultural background is too distant from the writer's. It may happen, for example, that what was considered important and worthy of being recorded by a historian is deemed irrelevant by a posterior reading public since, as stated before, the historical background directs the author's view (JOBIM, 2002, p. 158).

The present – both the historian's and the reader's – exerts, thus, a major influence on the writing and the interpretation of historical texts. As historically located individuals, historians have their way of looking at the past determined by the context surrounding them (CARR, 2002, p. 72). According to Jobim (2002, p. 137), the effect of history is always present when one seeks to understand a historical phenomenon since it determines both what is deemed important and the objects of investigation which come up. This is a consequence of the fact that history only presents answers to the questions posed by scholars, which are, in turn, shaped by the issues at the heart of society (VEYNE, 1978, p. 37). Therefore, the writing of history is permeated by more or less evident choices and selections, which will be studied

in more detail henceforth.

1.2 **Filtering information: selection and history**

The past is an object of study which does not present itself directly due to its transient nature. It can only be encountered through language, especially in the form of narratives (MIRANDA, 2000, p. 22-23). Historians are constantly dealing with fragments – documents, images, monuments, objects of various sorts, among others. These traces provide no more than an incomplete and partial access to past events as they contain only some versions and perspectives about what happened (VEYNE, 1978, p. 18).

This characteristic of the study of history implies that this field of knowledge is characterized by an abundance of blanks. Veyne (1978, p. 26) affirms that the history of a given period is not about this period, but the information which we still have about it. Historians only have access to a small portion of documents; consequently, they have to fill in the blanks left by the lack of evidence (VEYNE, 1978, p. 117). This way, readers should be aware that historians have to go beyond the proven facts and that the space taken up by a theme depends on both the importance given to it by the author and the amount of evidence available (VEYNE, 1978, p. 26-27).

As a result, the kind of analysis developed by historians vary according to how much evidence can be found. The more information the historian accounts for, the more difficult it is to fit the facts in a more general explanation. By the same logic, when seeking to create a theory which explains more about a period, less information will be encompassed by the explanation (WHITE, 1994, p. 119).

Although the natural loss of evidence throughout time is responsible for some of the blanks, another filtering process also explains the incompleteness of historical accounts. Carr (2002, p. 49) points out that more important than the destruction of documents that may happen at random is the partiality of the representation of any historical period which passes on through time. The image of the past is predetermined by a previous process of selection – conscious or not – of what should be registered. This filtering does not happen by chance, but is guided by a particular view of which facts are worth recording (CARR, 2002, p. 49).

It is fundamental to take into account that this selection is done only by the people and institutions who have the power to do so, such as the State, the media, and the political and

economic elites. When discussing the subject of memory, Jacques Le Goff (1990, p. 422) calls the attention to the relationship between power and the construction of collective memories, affirming that this is a great concern of hegemonic groups. As collective memory is an instrument of power, there is a competition to dominate the creation of records (LE GOFF, 1990, p. 470). As one of the institutions with this prerogative, the State registers past and present events by producing documents, creating monuments, preserving objects, managing museums and national archives, among other actions (LE GOFF, 1990, p. 419). Since the development of technology enabled the creation of oral and audiovisual records, the power of preserving information has also been exerted by the media, which have not escaped the governments' surveillance (LE GOFF, 1990, p. 470-471). Thus, the representation of a given historical moment which reaches us reflects to an extent the way hegemonic groups from the past wanted it to be seen in the future.

This control over memory implies that some points of view have been traditionally excluded. Korhonen (2006, p. 18, italics in the original) mentions the importance of the "introduction of *silent witness* into historical discourse", which reveals that documentary evidence cannot present a full picture of a historical moment. The perspective of marginalized groups has been usually disregarded by those who created and preserved the records. For instance, Carr (2002, p. 49) affirms that our knowledge of Ancient Greece is very much limited to the viewpoint of Athenian citizens, in contrast to slaves or people from other places.

After these processes of filtering and the destruction of evidence caused by the passage of time, historical information which gets to the present goes through another selection, performed by historians. Past events, unlike concrete objects, do not have clear, established limits. Instead, they are cuts from reality freely done by individuals (VEYNE, 1978, p. 46). Hence, what distinguishes historical facts from any other past event is not some intrinsic characteristic, but criteria established by each historian, with no absolute value (VEYNE, 1978, p. 29; CARR, 2002, p. 47). Besides, for each historical fact, there are countless possible perspectives and versions, some of which are selected by a historian when writing about it (VEYNE, 1978, p. 46-47).

Facts do not speak for themselves; it is the historian who selects and arranges them, endowing them with meaning (CARR, 2002, p. 47). After selecting and establishing relations between past events, historians organize them according to their perspective (JOBIM, 2002, p. 152). Within the chosen arrangement, events are endowed with more or less importance in relation to the others (VEYNE, 1978, p. 41). White (1994, p. 129) mentions two kinds of distortions which may be imposed on facts to represent them discursively: excluding events

and arranging them in an order different from the chronological one to attribute different functions to them. The author also affirms that the operation of representing history in a text also involves “transforming persons and groups into figures in a scene that has more in common with the theater than with real life” (WHITE, 2006, p. 30).

Thus, historians have a great influence on the representation of facts, filling in the blanks left by verified events. These scholars are responsible for establishing connections between facts and making them into a cohesive whole (MIRANDA, 2000, p. 23). For this reason, Miranda (2000, p. 23) claims that history is the product of selection and construction and that the emphasis on or omission of past events is not done by chance. According to White (1994, p. 141), historians arrange facts in a unified textual representation using techniques similar to those of novelists. Upon organizing facts and creating links between them, historians act as narrators, thus creating and using their imagination to construct a unit from fragments (SOUZA JÚNIOR, 2000, p. 41).

The selection and the organization of historical facts is related to historians' and readers' interpretation. Past events may seem more easily comprehensible after being arranged by a historian. However, it only works that way within the conceptual model chosen by the author (WHITE, 1994, p. 129). Thus, historians' interpretation of the facts influences the manner in which they choose to represent them, and at the same time is affected by the conceptual frame being used. As for readers' interpretation, Carr (2002, p. 47) affirms that the selection and arrangement of facts is the most effective way to manipulate it.

Filling in the blanks in history entails establishing causal relationships between verified facts. These explanations of past events are called “retrodiction” by Paul Veyne (1978, p. 118). Retrodiction consists essentially of hypotheses based on probability about what led to a historical event when its reasons cannot be found in documents (VEYNE, 1978, p. 118, 121). In order to create plausible and probable hypotheses, it is necessary to explore the way of thinking of the historical period under analysis (VEYNE, 1978, p. 122). Historical texts are an amalgam of retrodiction and information found in documents, and distinguishing between the two may be very difficult (VEYNE, 1978, p. 123). These inferences are deeply influenced by a historian's experiences, which means that retrodiction is a subjective process (VEYNE, 1978, p. 126). Moreover, the formulation of a hypothetical cause depends on the plot in which the historian chooses to fit the events (VEYNE, 1978, p. 136). Consequently, retrodiction is not absolute, that is, there may be different theories to explain the same fact.

Past events do not carry intrinsic meaning. On the contrary, they are invested with significance only after being arranged in a plot by historians. Veyne (1978, p. 34) states that a

fact only has meaning within a series of events and that even though there is an indefinite number of possible series, without one being superior to the other, they do not encompass all possible perspectives. According to White (1994, p. 124), facts are organized and presented in such a way as to support a certain interpretation and explanation instead of others. As a result, discourse is a combination of the facts and the sense attributed to them by the structure in which they are inserted (WHITE, 1994, p. 124).

Historians' understanding and interpretation of the past also play an important role when it comes to the selection of facts. These are selected and interpreted according to each historian's mental reconstitution of the past, which is guided by evidence (CARR, 2002, p. 57). This means that there necessarily is a multiplicity of possible interpretations which are essentially equivalent (POPPER, 1956 apud VEYNE, 1978, p. 36); however, Carr (2002, p. 62) argues that the subjectivity of interpretations does not imply that all of them are equally good. In any case, selection of some viewpoints over others is inevitable, whether conscious or not (POPPER, 1956 apud VEYNE, 1978, p. 37).

Facts are not selected based on their inherent characteristics or an absolute value, but solely on the historian's criteria (CARR, 2002, p. 47; VEYNE, 1978, p. 29). Veyne (1978, p. 36) affirms that it is impossible to establish what a historian should find interesting in any objective way. Thus, the selection of facts depends on the plot within which each historian chooses to represent them (VEYNE, 1978, p. 43). Then, according to Carr (2002, p. 63), historians should seek to include in the text all the events which are relevant to their theme and interpretation.

In addition to their interpretations, historians resort to conceptual frameworks when selecting facts. These frames, which delineate historians' experience, guide the definition of what is relevant to the plot (JOBIM, 2002, p. 152). Therefore, scholars mold facts so that they will fit a structure of preconceived ideas or a predetermined point of view (WHITE, 1994, p. 124). As these conceptual systems are culture-related, they may vary throughout time, making the themes considered relevant change (JOBIM, 2002, p. 159). Although these frameworks are constructions, their repetitive use for a long period may cause the impression that they are natural (JOBIM, 2002, p. 152). As described so far, historiographers have been seeking to denaturalize the writing of history since the late 20th century. This led to an approximation between the writing of history and that of fictional narratives, as will be subsequently explored.

1.3 **(Hi)story and narrative**

Narrative, more than simply telling stories, is understood as a way in which humans can make sense of the world. Miranda (2000, p. 21) affirms that both history and literature deal with form, which is necessary to enable reality to be apprehended by individuals. Therefore, narrative is not limited to the realm of literature, but is a way to organize our experience of time, as much of our contact with reality happens indirectly (MIRANDA, 2000, p. 22). White (1994, p. 142) works with the same idea, stating that "poetizing" is the foundation of all cultural activity. Events need to be compared to generic kinds of stories in order to become part of an intelligible conceptual model (WHITE, 1994, p. 128).

This way, narrative techniques are used in the writing of historical works. In his discussion of the subject, Hayden White (2006, p. 30) states that:

> one cannot historicize without narrativizing, because it is only by narrativization that a series of events can be transformed into a sequence, divided into periods, and represented as a process in which the substances of things can be said to change while their identities remain the same.

Thus, it is the narrative structure that gives coherence to the sequence of events (WHITE, 2006, p. 30). Consequently, historical discourse does not simply mirror the facts, but relates both to the events and to the plot structure in which they are inserted by the historian (WHITE, 1994, p. 123). White (1994, p. 143) also affirms that there are different fictional modes, as there are different historiographical ones, which means that there is a diversity of ways to present the same events, attributing different meanings to them.

The writing of historical texts is guided by a limited set of possible emplotments. Events are explained by the use of some literary conventions which make up the figurative level of discourse (WHITE, 1994, p. 124). Thus, history and literature have in common both the form of the discourse and their objectives (WHITE, 1994, p. 137). Literary and historical phenomena are represented in discourse by a limited range of ways to arrange plots, with the use of four different linguistic modes: metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony (WHITE, 1994, p. 144).

This means that "not only historiographical discourse was predetermined by literary styles, but historical consciousness in general was predetermined by certain linguistic structures" (KORHONEN, 2006, p. 11). White (1994, p. 144-145) associates each linguistic mode with a kind of emplotment: metaphor with romance, metonymy with tragedy, irony with

satire, and synecdoche with comedy. Each of these is also respectively related to a particular ideological position: anarchist, radical, liberal, and conservative (WHITE, 1994, p. 145). Some critics have opposed the idea that a historian can represent an event within any emplotment, pointing out that scholars are constantly testing storylines and discussing about the most appropriate ones (KORHONEN, 2006, p. 13).

As discussed previously, the transformation of facts into plots implies a distortion of the first. Not only do historians select events, they also create causal links between them and highlight some while playing down the relevance of others (WHITE, 1994, p. 129). This way, historical events, which are originally value-neutral, are endowed with meaning within a plot (JOBIM, 2002, p. 155). Historical discourse contains two levels of meaning: the more superficial consists of facts and their explanations whereas plot structures reveal the more subliminal, figurative level, which contributes to making the text seem more plausible to its readers (WHITE, 1994, p. 126-127).

This focus on the forms of presentation of historical information leads to important implications related to the notions of truth and objectivity in history. The combination of events into a comprehensible whole is a poetical process, which may be unveiled by a rhetorical analysis (WHITE, 1994, p. 124, 141). White (1994, p. 121-122) states that history, in seeking objectivity, does not acknowledge its own subjectivity, and suggests that it should be rhetorically analyzed as a prose text before its claims to truth are judged. The author questions to what extent historians can tell the truth considering the limits imposed by language and the “fictionalizing effect of narrativization” (WHITE, 2006, p. 30). History also relates to the mythic sphere as it makes human constructions seem natural or cosmological (WHITE, 1994, p. 120). As for the effects of the use of narrative techniques in historiography, Rüsen (1997, p. 92) affirms that narrative, as opposed to abstract analysis, is more vivid, enabling a more sympathetic reaction from the reader.

The approximation between history and fiction may be expressed in a comparison between historians and narrators. Moreover, Paul Ricoeur considers that history and literature are very closely related as both deal with the past (KORHONEN, 2006, p. 17). Historians mediate the different linguistic and emplotment modes to describe a phenomenon (WHITE, 1994, p. 145). Besides, Souza Júnior (2000, p. 28) affirms that a historian's work is located on the fine line between fictional and documental modes, which would explain why history has always privileged a certain point of view. Thus, subjectivity is a characteristic of both literary and historical discourses, which are articulated by the figure of the narrator (SOUZA JÚNIOR, 2000, p. 29-30, 41).

The acknowledgement of literary characteristics in the writing of history led to a change in the view of imagination in historical studies. Whereas the traditional historical method defends that history should be told directly, avoiding imaginative explorations, the role of imagination has been more recently recognized (WHITE, 1994, p. 142-143). White (1994, p. 142-143) argues that this repression of imagination caused the poetic qualities of history to be kept hidden and ignored, in a position in which they could not be perceived and criticized. Furthermore, imaginative reconstructions help understand the minds and choices of those who lived in the past, and fiction's effects of both making past events present and keeping a critical distance are useful in historical studies (CARR, 2002, p. 59; KORHONEN, 2006, p. 17).

This shift in the role of imagination in historical studies is related to a change in the way fiction is seen. Fiction has had different senses throughout time, the original Latin word *fictio* referring to the shaping of material. Knowledge in general, as well as the literary techniques used in the writing of history, may be related to this original meaning since it involves the molding of information (KORHONEN, 2006, p. 16). White (1994, p. 142) states that fiction is not the opposite of fact and that the use of fictional frames is the basis of all cultural activity. Eighteenth-century philosopher Giambattista Vico was a precursor of this mode of thinking, associating fiction with the creation of hypotheses and claiming that imagination and reason, instead of opposites, are part of a continuum of ways to apprehend reality (WHITE, 1994, p. 162).

As the interface between history and fiction is explored, literary works are increasingly seen as representations of the past. Literature and history share the interest in representing the real world, which means that their works may be seen as complementary rather than opposite (WHITE, 2006, p. 25). Hence, White (1986, p. 122) states that “history is no less a form of fiction than the novel is a form of historical representation”. As a result, literature may supplement historical works by giving voice to groups who have traditionally been excluded (KORHONEN, 2006, p. 18-19).

Nevertheless, there are still vital distinctions between literature and history. First, literature has more freedom than history since the latter is constrained by empirical limitations (MIRANDA, 2000, p. 21). While historians deal with events which can be located in space and time and which were once observable outside of the textual sphere, fictional writers can write both about these and invented events (WHITE, 1994, p. 137). Secondly, history is concerned only with the truth whereas literature aims at aesthetic qualities and at captivating the reader (VEYNE, 1978, p. 23). Although history intends to reveal the truth about past

events, both literary and historical works may fail to do so (SOUZA JÚNIOR, 2000, p. 37-38) as language is not a neutral mirror of the world.

Language mediates the relationship between the human mind and the world around us (WHITE, 1994, p. 142). Due to the focus on evidence and the establishment of a research method in the 19th century, historians tended to disregard the language and the narrative techniques used in historiography (KORHONEN, 2006, p. 13). Nevertheless, being part of the world, language is affected by the context, rather than functioning as a transparent means of representing reality (WHITE, 2006, p. 26). According to White (1986, p. 129), “not only all interpretation, but also all language is politically contaminated”, which means that it is impossible to write a value-free description or explanation.

Language requires a choice of words, reflecting ideological positions and preventing texts from being neutral (CARR, 2002, p. 61). Hence, before any attempt of explanation or interpretation on the part of historians, the very language used distorts the object of analysis (WHITE, 1994, p. 118). The narrative techniques employed in the writing of historical accounts include figurative language, which contributes to creating the subliminal level of meaning mentioned before (WHITE, 1994, p. 127). This way, what is described in discourse may be very different from their counterparts in the real world (WHITE, 1994, p. 125).

In addition to questioning the alleged objectivity of language, some historians have pointed out that written documents do not guarantee impartiality. As previously discussed, not only is evidence incomplete and filtered throughout the years, but it is also selected by historians, who choose some accounts of the past over others. Moreover, instead of directly reproducing past events, documents reflect the opinions and prejudices of those who have written them, showing only what these people thought that had or should have happened. This way, written evidence does not reveal much about the past until a historian works on it (CARR, 2002, p. 52). As documents are isolated from their context, they are interpreted in a variety of ways with the passage of time (KORHONEN, 2006, p. 9). When trying to understand history, it is fundamental to take into consideration that people's way of thinking has changed over time, instead of projecting one's own perspective on the past (RÜSEN, 1997, p. 96-97). Although historians may resort to other documents from the same period to try to understand the mindset of that time and fill in the blanks of a particular source, written records do not provide absolute answers since interpretation is influenced by historians' perspective and expectations (VEYNE, 1978, p. 125-126).

As aforementioned, the emphasis on the importance of documentary evidence led traditional historiography to focus on events that were recorded, especially great political

decisions and conflicts, leaving aside topics such as the history of ways of thinking or the lives of common people (VEYNE, 1978, p. 29; KORHONEN, 2006, p. 10). However, Veyne (1978, p. 32) affirms that any daily life occurrence may be a valid object of study and provide historians with information about an event. Thus, scholars can work with sources which are less controlled by hegemonic groups, such as personal recollections or the history of clans or villages (LE GOFF, 1990, p. 471). Yet the history of an individual or a short period is related to a broader context, which cannot be ignored; hence, the study of both objects is complementary (RÜSEN, 1997, p. 96).

Fernand Braudel proposes a kind of historical analysis which seeks to understand characteristics of a given period in relation to a wider context spanning centuries. The author claims that there is always a certain number of changes unfolding; however, some of them are slower than others, and some processes even remain immobile for a period (BRAUDEL, 1992, p. 339). Braudel (1992, p. 351-352) still argues that there are coexisting layers of more recent and more distant history in every civilization, constantly interacting and even getting in conflict with each other. Underlying structures, which change very slowly and imperceptibly, endure and resist for a long time, representing continuity in all societies (BRAUDEL, 1992, p. 356). These long-term phenomena, the essence of the social context, are marked by the repetition over the centuries (BRAUDEL, 1992, p. 340, 356). Some examples are social hierarchy, language, eating habits, and religion, all of them constituting a heritage, a part of the past that lives within us and influences our actions and way of thinking (BRAUDEL, 1992, p. 342, 355).

This way, history is characterized by a dialectic between long-term structures and short-term events or situations, between permanence and change. Any transformation happens in parts of the structure which have been slowly eroded for a long period of time (BRAUDEL, 1992, p. 356-357). Braudel (1992, p. 357) affirms that humans suffer history rather than make it, having a passive role, when it comes to long duration history. On the other hand, Carr (2002, p. 65) argues that human beings are never completely subjected to or masters of the world around them, acting as both agents and victims of history. Any social force or historical event is the product of the action of individuals – alone or in groups –, even if the consequences may sometimes be unforeseen or undesired (CARR, 2002, p. 85-86).

2 AND FOLK SAID: SCOTTISH HISTORY THROUGH GIBBON'S EYES

Though most of the histories were dull as ditchwater, with their kings and their battles and their dates and such muck, you wondered how the people had lived in those times.
(Lewis Grassic Gibbon)

Lewis Grassic Gibbon (2007b, p. 103), in his essay “The Antique Scene”, in a rejection of romanticized interpretations of the past, claims that “[f]ew things cry so urgently for rewriting as does Scots history”. Some of his works, such as the trilogy *A Scots Quair* (1932-34) and the novel *The Thirteenth Disciple* (1931), deal with Scottish history, showing the author's effort to contribute to this task.

As previously mentioned, historical studies in the 20th century highlight the similarity between historical and fictional narratives, as well as the influence of the context and of historians' point of view on the account of past events. Besides, literature comes to be valued in this period as a way to represent history which may be complementary to historical texts. This chapter aims at investigating how Gibbon writes Scottish history in *Sunset Song* and how the chosen representation may be related to his political creeds and to the social and historical context in which the novel was written and published.

Sunset Song is marked by a blend of official history and legend, interweaving historical and fictional events and also real and invented places. The setting of the narrative is the fictional village of Kinraddie, located in the region of the Mearns, in the north-east of Scotland. Even though the village is not real, based on the description of the surrounding towns and also on the author's notes on a map, it is possible to determine its location as close to Gibbon's hometown, Arbuthnott (MALCOLM, 2007, p. 270). The novel also mixes references to historical figures with fictional characters, some of whom bore such a resemblance to Gibbon's acquaintances that "[his] parents were to complain that he had made them ‘the speak of the Mearns’ with his all-too-recognisable portraits and sardonic references" (CAMPBELL, 2007, p. 1).

Set between 1911 and 1920, *Sunset Song* represents not only an important period of Scottish history, but also encompasses relevant events of world history, such as World War One. The focus, however, is not on famous historical figures, but on the daily lives of common people. The passage from adolescence into adulthood experienced by Chris, the main character, mirrors the moment of transition to a different way of life undergone by the

community after the war, showing how history and the lives of the characters are deeply intertwined.

Not only does history in the novel focus on common people, but it is also told from their point of view. According to Catriona Low (2003, p. 104), the whole *Quair* trilogy and some of Gibbon's short stories share the technique of using an anonymous community narrative voice. As a result, the language in *Sunset Song* reproduces some characteristics of oral narratives, with simple, loosely connected clauses, exclamations and comments from the narrative voice (CORBETT, 2003, p. 91-92). Besides, the fact that direct speech is not conventionally marked, but only distinguished by the use of italics, suggests that the narration takes the form of a conversation with the reader. These features might be illustrated by the passage which describes Mistress Gordon's reaction after her son was hit by two other men:

> She went tearing round to the bothy and made at the foreman, a dour young devil of a Highlandman, Ewan Tavendale, *Why didn't you help my Johnnie?* and Ewan said *I was fee'd [hired] as the foreman here, not as the nursemaid*, he was an impudent brute, calm as you please, but an awful good worker, folk said he could smell the weather and had fair the land in his bones (GIBBON, 2007a, p. 29)[1].

The oral narrative effect is also evoked by the fluidity with which the word “you” is employed in the novel, meaning either Chris, the reader or the common folk who worked the land, which helps to make the reader feel closer to the characters (SMITH, 2007, p. xiv-xv). This way, according to John Corbett (2003, p. 91), the language in *Sunset Song* conveys “a sense of conversational intimacy”. This form of narrative, bringing the reader closer to the characters, contributes to the readers' feeling as part of the community of Kinraddie.

This communal narrative voice recounts several events in the novel in the form of rumors and gossip, with a pervasive ironic tone. Low (2003, p. 105) affirms that the narrative voice adopts at times a malicious tone, expressing criticism, mockery and judgment about the neighbors. An example of these spiteful rumors is the presentation of Alec Mutch, in which there is also a negative comment about his wife: “folk said he was head over heels in debt, and damn it you couldn't wonder with a slummock of a wife like that to weigh him down” (p. 30). The community's tendency to criticize and ridicule others without their knowledge is also recognized by the narrative voice, who after mentioning that a character was laughed at, questions “[b]ut God knows, who is it [folk] don't laugh at?” (p. 18).

In addition to showing a negative, malicious aspect of the community, the narrative through gossip reveals the subjectivity present in the act of recounting past events. Mirroring

1 All quotations are from the same edition of the novel, which will be, from now on, referred to by page numbers only.

Veyne's (1978, p. 46-47) claim that historians select some of the innumerable perspectives about an event, the narrative voice in *Sunset Song* acknowledges that there are different versions of the same fact. When describing Chae Strachan's experience in Africa, for instance, two perspectives are presented: “[An African man] and Chae had fought against Boers and British both, and beaten them, or so Chae said, but folk that didn't like Chae said all the fighting he'd ever done had been with his mouth” (p. 18). This passage demonstrates how feelings like affinity and the desire to create a good personal image may influence what one says about oneself and others. This way, an element of uncertainty and unreliability is inserted, instead of presenting narrative as objective or the representation of the absolute truth.

Facing the inevitable task to select some versions of the facts, the narrative voice at times assesses their likelihood. In some passages, narratorial commentary – “but folk would say anything” (p. 13) – seemingly dismisses the story just told, while nonetheless further spreading the rumors. Even if the narrative voice states that some of the gossip cannot be trusted, the suspicion that they might be true has already been planted on the reader's mind.

Furthermore, the technique of narrating from the viewpoint of the community creates the impression that the story being told belongs to a tradition passed on by word of mouth from one generation to the other. An example is the retelling of the clearances of the land in the 18th and 19th centuries, whose main objective was generally raising sheep to supply the growing factories with wool. As the clearance of part of the properties in Kinraddie to increase the rents and the owner’s profit is narrated, it is said that “folk told that a hundred years before five of the crofter places had crowded there till Lord Kenneth threw their biggings [buildings] down and drove them from the parish and built the fine farm of Upperhill” (p. 27). This quotation shows that there is an orally transmitted collective memory of the village, which preserves the history of the place.

As mentioned before, in *Sunset Song*, Gibbon privileges the lives of common people, who “had no history” (p. 12), but were affected by historical events. Even though famous historical figures are mentioned in the novel, all the characters who are more fully developed are tenant farmers. Gibbon's (2007b, p. 103-104) interest in the poor is also evident in his non-fictional works, in which he affirms that behind romanticized historical characters and events are “the lives of millions of the lowly”, “human animals bedevilled or uplifted by the play of the forces of civilization in that remote corner of the Western world which we call Scotland”. Hence, Gibbon gives voice in his novel to those who suffer history instead of making it and are traditionally excluded from historical accounts. In this sense, *Sunset Song* may be an example of literary work which fulfills the role mentioned by Korhonen (2006, p.

18-19) of complementing historical studies by bringing to the center those who have often been marginalized.

Although the story is set in the 20th century, other moments of Scottish history are repeatedly mentioned in the novel, which reveals the importance attributed to them to the writing of a certain image of Scotland. Some of these references are connected to the idea of the landscape as a witness of history. There is sometimes material evidence of the past, such as the Pictish tower in the town of Brechin, dating from the 11th century (p. 126). Places like this are also remembered in relation to the people who once lived there. When Chris and her husband Ewan visit Edzell Castle, for instance, she thinks about those who had walked around there before, “who had no name or remembered place, even in the lands of death they were maybe forgotten” (p. 179), echoing Gibbon's concern about history, memory, and what is not recorded or remembered, such as the lives of common folk.

Moreover, this treatment of the land as a witness of the past inserts the setting of the novel in a long historical tradition, reinforcing the idea of continuity and how the present is shaped by history. For instance, when Chris heads toward Mondynes, the narrative voice does not fail to explain “there where the battle was fought in the days long syne [past]” (p. 84), in a reference to the conflict in 1094 which resulted in king Duncan II's death. Another example is the description of the farm of Peesie's Knapp as having “the sweat of two thousand years in it” (p. 17), which values the labor of the peasants who lived there. This way, Gibbon makes it clear that even a small, rural place in Scotland, far from the center of political power, has a history that is part of a bigger panorama and sometimes representative of the whole.

As mentioned in the introduction, Gibbon believed in Diffusionism, claiming that civilization was an oppressive force which spread from the valley of the Nile. Gibbon (2007b, p. 104), in the essay “The Antique Scene”, describes the meeting of the first peoples in Scotland, “cultureless, without religion or social organization, shy hunters, courageous, happy, kindly”, with the first explorers bringing agriculture and civilization from continental Europe, when the indigenous population “set on their necks the yoke under which all mankind has since passed”.

This view of history is also present in *Sunset Song*, for example, in the scene in which a minister preaches about the beginnings of civilization in Scotland and, consequently, the end of the Golden Age:

> […] he pictured the dark, slow tribes that came drifting across the low lands of the northern seas, the great bear watched them come, and they hunted and fished and loved and died, God's children in the morn of time; and he brought the first voyagers sailing the sounding coasts, they brought the heathen idols of the great Stone Rings, the Golden Age was over and past and lust and cruelty trod the world [...] (p. 62-63).

Another passage mirrors Gibbon's description of the moment of that first encounter in “The Antique Scene”: when Chris and her family are moving to Kinraddie through the Grampian hills, she dreams of a foreign-looking man who cries in Greek about the ships of Pytheas. This reference to the first Greek explorer to visit the British Isles, in the 4th century BC, suggests that the place, with its “ancient hills” (p. 48), is still marked and haunted, in a way, by history.

Another character from Ancient History mentioned by Gibbon is Calgacus, the leader of the Caledonian resistance against Roman attacks led by Agricola in AD 83. This episode, known as the battle of Mons Graupius, was the first to be recorded in Scottish history (LYNCH, 1994, p. 3). The only remaining account is that of Tacitus, describing a huge defeat of the Caledonians, who would have suffered 10,000 casualties – as opposed to 360 Romans –, in spite of a great numerical advantage. The Roman historian profusely praises Agricola's strategic abilities in the account included in the latter's biography, showing that his narrative is not neutral, but embellishes the general's deeds (TACITUS, 2005, p. 5, 7).

Modern historical studies question Tacitus's version since the Romans retreated after the battle and there is no evidence that they managed to expand their domains (FRY; FRY, 1995, p. 25). Lynch (1994, p. 3) agrees that the true importance of the battle remains unclear. Gibbon (2007b, p. 106), however, not only praises Calgacus as “a great military leader” in “The Antique Scene”, but also presents a completely different version of the event in *Sunset Song*. The chieftain of the Caledonians is described as “him that chased the Romans all to hell at the battle of Mons Graupius” in the novel (p. 24), making it evident that the narrative voice privileges a more flattering view of the Caledonians and seeks to value the Scottish people and their origin. Thus, it is clear that the limited access to information about the past may foster a multiplicity of versions and interpretations, depending on who is writing and what their interests are.

Although the precise location of the battle is unknown, several options having been suggested over the years, the word Graupius appears to have been the origin of the name Grampians. According to Lynch (1994, p. 450), the current name of the mountains comes from a setting error in the 1470s edition of Tacitus's text. This shows that one of the ways that the past can make itself present is through place-names.

Gibbon (2007b, p. 109), when writing in an essay about the peoples which gave origin to the Scottish population, sees a continuity of the Picts and their culture well after the 9th century, when they were last mentioned in historical accounts. This view also appears in *Sunset Song*, in which peasants in the early 19th century are described as “of the old Pict stock”, who “had no history” (p. 12). The notion that not much is known about the Picts'

history is confirmed by historical texts. Fitzroy Maclean (1996, p. 22) describes the Picts as “a shadowy, ill-documented race of people of uncertain antecedents”, and Michael Lynch (1994, p. 12) compares their history to a mystery narrative.

Standing stones are important pieces of evidence of Pictish art and history, showing its distinctiveness, but also similarities with Celtic art from Northumbria and Ireland, suggesting connections between these places or even the existence of a common culture (LYNCH, 1994, p. 13). In Gibbon's novel, besides the already mentioned tower in Brechin, the Standing Stones of Blawearie, part of the property where Chris's family lives, are signs of Pictish occupation. The community voice describes the people who erected the stone circle (“Druids”) as wild, violent people, “coarse devils of men” (p. 20), revealing a negative view of non-Christians as primitive. This opinion can be explained by the community's belief in the Church of Scotland, a Christian denomination of Presbyterian basis.

The references in *Sunset Song* are not limited to Scottish history, including, for example, the English King Alfred (871 – 899)[2], notable for defending his kingdom from the Vikings and expanding its territory. When Chris is baking some cakes, distracted by thoughts of the man who will eventually become her husband, the situation is compared to an anecdote about Alfred. It is told that, after a Danish attack in 878, the king had to flee and hide away in a cowherd's cottage. Once the cowherd's wife, unaware of his identity, asked Alfred to watch some baking cakes; however, the king let them burn and was severely reprimanded for that (ALEXANDER, 2013). The mention of this story by the narrative voice shows that historical elements and anecdotes pervade popular culture and attributes value to folk's knowledge and traditions. In the novel, however, Alfred is not referred to as “the Great”, but as “the English creature” (p. 108), revealing a negative attitude toward him which may be explained by a dislike of the aristocracy or of the English in general, both present in other passages of the book. This way, the narrative voice's stance reflects that of Kinraddie's community, corroborating the idea that Scottish history is recounted from their perspective in *Sunset Song*.

The history of the Middle Ages and the adoption of the feudal system in Scotland is told partially through myth in *Sunset Song*. According to the narrative voice, a Norman man, Cospatric de Gondeshil, gained the lands of Kinraddie after killing the gryphon that lived in the region. The story, reminiscent of tales of medieval romance, is set in the times of William the Lion (1165-1214), described in the novel as “when gryphons and such-like beasts still roamed the Scots countryside” (p. 9). Thus, historical events are mixed with myth, blurring

2 Whereas the dates of birth and death are given in reference to historical figures in general, kings will always be followed by the period of their reigns.

the line between fact and fiction. The choice to narrate the origin of Kinraddie in a mythical way emphasizes the importance of folklore and popular culture in the novel, as well as acknowledges the richness of Scottish traditional legends. This narrative option reinforces the idea that history is told from the perspective of the common people since it values the stories which circulate among them. Malcolm (2007, p. 271), in his notes to *Sunset Song*, identifies Gibbon's source as the local legend which recounts the killing of a dragon by Hugh le Blond, fourth Laird of Arbuthnott (c. 1260 – c. 1300).

In addition to recounting Kinraddie's mythical origin, Cospatric's story recalls an important aspect of the Scottish Middle Ages – the Anglo-Norman presence and influence, especially in the Lowlands. The influence of Anglo-Norman culture, with the adoption of the feudal system in the Lowlands, started to be felt in Malcolm III's reign (1057-1093). His sons, especially David I (1124-1153), granted lands to Normans, who in turn agreed to be loyal vassals (FRY; FRY, 1995, p. 60). According to Lynch (1994, p. 55, 91), this new nobility eventually intermarried and mingled with the old Celtic, Gaelic-speaking aristocracy, becoming, from the end of the 13th century on, tied more strongly to Scotland, rather than letting international interests keep their loyalty divided.

This process is represented in *Sunset Song* by the story of Cospatric de Gondeshil, which makes Kinraddie a representative of what took place in a good part of Scotland. William the Lion, “the most Anglo-Norman of the macMalcolm kings” (LYNCH, 1994, p. 86), bestowed the lands of Kinraddie on Cospatric, a landless Norman, as a reward for killing the gryphon. After that, Cospatric married a Pict lady and his son adopted Kinraddie as his surname (p. 10), assimilating into the old aristocracy. As for the ordinary people, Lynch (1994, p. 56) affirms that not much is known about their status in the medieval period. Gibbon chooses to focus on their oppression, affirming that Cospatric had license to “keep down all beasts and coarse and wayward folk” (p. 10). The language used by the narrative voice is filled with irony, reproducing and at the same time denouncing a derogatory discourse about the poor.

This irony is reinforced by the fact that the aristocracy is represented in a negative way in the novel, revealing the community's point of view on the elite. King William the Lion, for instance, is presented as an idle man living in luxury, who was “sitting drinking his wine and fondling his bonny lemans [mistresses] in Edinburgh Town” when heard the news about Cospatric and the gryphon (p. 10). Besides, the narrative voice's irony targets the volatile alliances, based on political and economic interests, made by the nobles. This is clear in the following passage about the Kinraddies' participation in the battle of Mondynes (1094):

“[Cospatric's son] took out his men and he fought there, but on which side they do not say, but maybe it was the winning one, they were aye gey [great] and canny [cautious] folk, the Kinraddies” (p. 10). The adjectives used to describe the Kinraddies are telling; “canny” sounds very much like a euphemism for “sly” in this context. Also, according to the Dictionary of the Scots Language[3], “gey” often has an ironical connotation.

Fry (1995, p. 54) considers the Anglo-Norman influence harmful since it gave origin to a group of Scottish lords who could be led with money and gifts to support English causes, a process which, according to the author, ultimately led to the closure of the Scottish Parliament with the Act of Union in 1707. Gibbon (2007b, p. 109) seems unsure about how negative this phenomenon was, claiming both that the English Margaret, Malcolm III's wife, may have been one of “the most calamitously pathological influence[s]”, while affirming that this process of Anglicization was not deep. Whereas this Anglo-Saxon influence is called a “new cultural weapon”, it gave origin to a cultural and artistic tradition which is positively described (GIBBON, 2007b, p. 109). An example in literature would be the works of Blind Harry (1450-1493), Renaissance poet who wrote an anti-English epic, entitled *The Actes and Deidis of the Illustre and Vallyeant Campioun Schir William Wallace* (c. 1477), which perpetuated the image of William Wallace as a Scottish martyr (WATSON, 1995, p. 35). Gibbon (2007b, p. 109) considers the language used by this writer in his epic as “a thing national and with a homely and accustomed feel”.

While William Wallace (c. 1270-1305) – a leader of the resistance against the English invasion in the end of the 13th century – is one of the most frequently mentioned historical figures in *Sunset Song*, he is portrayed in different ways depending on the passage of the novel. In the “Prelude”, in which Gibbon presents a survey of the history of Kinraddie, Wallace is described, in an ironic reproduction of an aristocratic voice, as “the Cateran [outlaw, marauder] who dared rebel against the fine English king” (p. 10). Those who fought beside him are equally represented in a derogatory language, as “coarse and landless men” and “vagabond Scots” (p. 10-11). The ironic tone suggests that the narrative voice's viewpoint is actually the opposite of what is said, thus corresponding to the community's stance towards Wallace, as will be later explored.

Lynch (1994, p. 119) goes against the idea that Wallace led a revolt of poor peasants, affirming that it has been known for a long time that the revolt had a diversity of origins and that English people living at the time recorded their suspicions that some noblemen were the

3 Available at: http://dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/gey. Access on May 23rd, 2015.

true leaders of the rising. However, in the essay “The Antique Scene”, Gibbon (2007b, p. 111) highlights the fact that Wallace managed to convince the peasants to join the cause and attributes his defeat in Falkirk to the aristocrats who had become part of the force after the victory in 1297. According to the writer, the nobles “fled without striking a blow”, ruining Wallace's strategy and causing the “heroic peasant spearmen” to be dispersed (GIBBON, 2007b, p. 111). In this passage, a negative view of the aristocracy is once more clear, as the nobles are represented as cowards and even called “laggard”.

Gibbon (2007b, p. 110-111) considers William Wallace “one of the few authentic national heroes”, who “apprehended and moulded the historic forces of his time”, comparable to great leaders such as Cromwell (1599-1658), Lincoln (1809-1865), and Lenin (1870-1924). This positive image is reflected in passages from *Sunset Song*, which, apart from the “Prelude”, do not describe Wallace with irony and derogatory language. These references to the Scottish rebel reflect the folk's opinion, showing admiration for him and contempt for the English, as illustrated by the following passage: “But everybody knew that the English were awful mean and couldn't speak right and were cowards who captured Wallace and killed him by treachery” (p. 43).

In the novel, Wallace is strongly related to the landscape of the region, which suggests an idea of continuity through history. The yews in the Manse's garden, for example, “had sheltered the lost childe Wallace in the days before the coarse English ran him to earth and took him to London and there hanged and libbed [castrated] him and hewed his body in four to hang on the gates of Scotland” (p. 82-83). Dunnottar Castle is also associated to this historical figure since it is the place chosen by Kinraddie (Cospatric's great-grandson) and the English to resist the rebel (p. 10), an episode that echoes Blind Harry's poem, in which the Scottish hero set fire to the castle's chapel.[4] Considering Gibbon's position, Kinraddie's alliance to the English may be considered an act of treason against Scotland, which is interestingly punished in the novel, seeing that the character dies without leaving an heir after Wallace invades the castle, and the family only continues through a child out of wedlock (p. 11).

The memory of Wallace's presence in the landscape represents a desirable inspiration for the people, as Gibbon (2007b, p. 143) points out in his essay “Glasgow”, in which he mentions the Battle of the Bell o' the Brae and remembers the rebel's successful “venture unsupported by priest or patrician, the intellectual or bourgeois of those days”. As the author

4 Available at: http://www.dunnottarcastle.co.uk/history.cfm. Access on May 23rd, 2015.

affirms that the Glaswegian population may succeed in a new undertaking of this kind one day (GIBBON, 2007b, p. 143), it is clear that he considers Wallace as a symbol of revolutionary fighting beside and for the poor.

Whereas Gibbon's positions in his essays are usually similar to those presented by *Sunset Song*'s narrative voice, both have different perspectives on Robert Bruce (1306-1329) and his leadership in the Battle of Bannockburn (1314). This combat represented an important victory against the English in the struggle for Scottish independence in the 14th century. Chris sees this battle as a great Scottish victory, in which the English had “been beaten right well” and “Edward the Second hadn't drawn rein till he was in Dunbar” (p. 43). In opposition to this, Gibbon (2007b, p. 112) affirms that Robert Bruce, one of “various shoddy noble adventurers”, only became king through “intrigue, assassination, and some strategical skill” and mentions Bannockburn only in passing, concluding that “[w]ith that victory the Scots royalties came to their own again, however little the Scots commons”. To the writer, then, common folk's involvement is fundamental to bring real change; consequently, people's hopelessness and lack of enthusiasm after Wallace's death diminished the importance of a military victory.

The next historical event referred to in the novel is another conflict with the English: the Battle of Flodden (1513). According to Gibbon (2007b, p. 113), in his non-fiction, this battle brought the end of “the Golden Age of the great Scots civilization”, represented by the Scottish Renaissance. The battle was a terrible defeat for the Scottish, having led to a big number of casualties, even if Lynch (1994, p. 161) believes that it was probably not as bad as the 10,000 reported by English chroniclers. Among the dead were King James IV (1488-1513) and several nobles, which left the kingdom in a state of instability since the heir to the throne was no more than a baby (MACLEAN, 1996, p. 74-75).

Whereas historical texts tend to give emphasis to the deaths of noblemen and to the resulting political situation, Gibbon focuses on the suffering of ordinary people in *Sunset Song*. Maclean (1996, p. 74-75), for example, presents a small list of aristocrats killed, but, apart from them, only informs that “thousands” of young men died. When Chris thinks of the battle, however, she, as a young unmarried woman, is sad for “the lads that came back never again to their lasses among the stooks, and the lasses that never married but sat and stared down south to the English border where their lads lay happed [well covered] in blood and earth” (p. 43). Other casualties, including the king, are not mentioned by Gibbon. This way, the novel exposes the tragic consequences of war on the lives of anonymous, common people, depicting the scenes of grief described in the song *The Flowers of the Forest*, which comes to

Chris's mind in the passage. An example of these images may be observed in a stanza depicting a scene, remembered by Chris in the quoted passage, of young women grieving over the dead among stacks of hay: “At e'en at the gloamin [sunset], nae swankies [young men] are roamin / 'Bout stacks wi the lassies at bogle [hide and seek] tae play / But ilk ane [each one] sits dreary, lamentin her deary - / The Flooers of the Forest are a' wede awa [carried off, dead]”[5].

Most historical accounts and the novel also differ in the explanation of the Scottish defeat. While historians, such as Maclean (1996, p. 74) and Lynch (1994, p. 161), attribute the English victory to the fact that they were better armed and had artillery more appropriate to the circumstances of the battle, in *Sunset Song*, “[the English] won at Flodden by treachery again” (p. 43). This version of the facts not only blames the English and presents them in a negative way, but also puts the Scottish in the position of victims of a dishonest rival. This view also appears in *The Flowers of the Forest* (“The English, for aince [once], by guile wan the day”), which, in a reinforcement of the importance of popular oral culture, seems to be Chris's source of information about the battle. This perspective is only corroborated in part by Fry (1995, p. 119), who claims that the earl of Surrey “decided on a ruse” when positioning his troops.

Besides, the characterization of the Battle of Flodden in the novel also shows how some reasonably recent cultural elements may gain the status of a tradition from time immemorial. The description of the young men who died includes “their blooded kilts and broken helmets” (p. 43). As this garment has been considered an emblematic Scottish tradition, the focus of the description on the kilts, and not on the soldiers' bodies, for example, suggests that the country itself was stained by this defeat. Historian Hugh Trevor-Roper (1995, p. 21-22) locates the origin of the kilt in the 18th century and limited to the Highland region. Even though this author makes use of particularly harsh language to account for the construction of the kilt as an ancient tradition and symbol of Scottishness, considering it a forgery, he rightly points out that Highland culture and people, generally despised until the 18th century, ended up being considered representatives of the whole of Scotland after this period (TREVOR-ROPER, 1995, p. 25-27). Since the kilt is described as part of the soldiers' dress in the 16th century, this view that this piece of clothing is an ancient Scottish cultural element appears in *Sunset Song*, suggesting that it belongs to the country's collective

5 *The Flowers of the Forest*. Available at: http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/scotlandssongs/secondary/genericcontent_tcm4572881.asp Retrieved on: June 24th, 2014.

imagination.

Lewis Grassic Gibbon holds different views on the Reformation in Scotland and on John Knox (c. 1514-1572), one of its leaders. Reflecting his negative opinion about religion, he affirms that Reformation brought the beginning of the eclipse of Scots civilization, ironically describing this historical process as “[m]en fought and died with enthusiasm in the cause of ceremonial cannibalism” (GIBBON, 2007b, p. 113-114). Although one of the allusions to John Knox in *Sunset Song* makes reference to his sternness, saying that “[the minister]'d glower down at [the organ player] more like John Knox than ever” when she sneezed during a hymn (p. 15), Knox's description in Gibbon's essays is predominantly positive.

Gibbon (2007b, p. 114-115) considers Knox a man “of truly heroic mould”, “capable of apprehending the direction of the historic forces, and determined to enchannel those for the benefit of a Commons' Scotland”. His image is that of a revolutionary fighting for the ordinary people, a role Gibbon attributed as well to William Wallace. The representation of Knox as a leader in the fight for equality also appears in *Sunset Song*, in which Chae, a self-proclaimed socialist, relates the Protestant minister to social justice during an electoral campaign, claiming that equality would come one day because “[t]he God of old Scotland there was, aye [always] fighting on the side of the people since the days of old John Knox” (p. 104). This viewpoint is explained by some of the policies adopted by the Church of Scotland, such as laying some decisions in the hands of the community's elders and determining the establishment of a school in each parish, an ideal which was not fulfilled for a long time (MACLEAN, 1996, p. 94).

According to Gibbon (2007b, p. 114), Knox failed in this attempt to better the lives of the poor, the historical forces having been on “the side of his robbing [political] allies, not on his”. This way, Reformation “left the Commons poorer than ever and Knox an embittered and sterile leader” (GIBBON, 2007b, p. 114). Once again, as it happened with Wallace, Gibbon represents a movement led by a popular, revolutionary figure and defeated by the presence of the corrupt aristocracy inside it, reinforcing the opposition between the rotten nobility and the common people.

Gibbon's negative view of the aristocracy also reveals itself in his narrative of the turbulent 17th century, marked by religious and political conflicts. The organization of the Scottish church was threatened in the reigns of Charles I (1625-1649), Charles II (1660-1685), and James VII (1685-1689), due to attempts of bringing it closer in structure to the Church of England and to the latter king's Catholic faith. In 1638, the National Covenant, a document

defending a Presbyterian church in Scotland, was created and signed by thousands of people, who came to be known as the Covenanters. However, religious conflicts persisted for a good part of the century on account of the continuing royal interference in the Scottish church and the imposition of an episcopal structure.

In the novel, during this period of turmoil, “the Kinraddies sat them quiet and decent and peaceable in their castle, and heeded never a fig the arguings of folk, for wars were unchancy things” (p. 11). Once again, as happened in the battle of Mondynes, the Kinraddies do not reveal a clear position, but are ready to support whichever side eventually wins. Nevertheless, they fought in the medieval battle and only later made their stance unclear, whereas they remained completely detached from the fight in the 17th century, making it even more evident that the family was not moved by political or religious ideals, but only sought to keep their position of power.

In a reflection of Le Goff's (1990, p. 422) idea that those in power are greatly interested in the creation of collective memories, the Kinraddies seek to filter historical information to perpetuate a positive image of themselves. Once the religious question seemed settled with the deposition of James VII (1685-1689) and the reign of William (1689-1702) and Mary (1689-1694), the Kinraddies not only supported the Covenant, but claimed that they had always done so. This process of trying to rewrite or erase history is illustrated by the following passage: “But then Dutch William came, fair plain a fixture that none would move, and the Kinraddies were all for the Covenant then, they had aye [always] had God's Covenant at heart, they said” (p. 11). This shows yet another instance in which Gibbon portrays Scottish nobility as dishonest and untrustworthy.

Nevertheless, the 17th century historical figures who appear more prominently in *Sunset Song* are the Covenanters. Considered by Gibbon (2007b, p. 115) the defenders of “the Church of the Commons, of the People, bitterly assailed by noble and King”, the Covenanters are still present in Kinraddie's landscape. Some of the tombstones in Kinraddie's churchyard date back from “the old, unkindly times of the Covenanters” (p. 67). While crossing the churchyard, Chris is scared as if she could feel the presence of the dead around her. This passage shows that historical records exist all around us, as part of our everyday life, and also reinforces the continuing presence of the past.

Another scene in which the landscape is a witness of the Covenanters' fight and suffering is Chris and Ewan's visit to Dunnottar Castle. The castle was the setting of an episode of Charles II's violent repression of the Covenanters, which became known as the Killing Time. The numbers about this period vary: Maclean (1996, p. 137) claims that 1400

Covenanters were made prisoners at the Bothwell Brig rising, whereas Lynch (1994, p. 295) tones down these events, stating that less than 300 people were punished on this occasion and that the number of executions during the Killing Time was lower than the number of people killed in other religious persecutions. Gibbon (2007b, p. 116), in his essay “The Antique Scene”, describes it as a “political Terror [that] has few parallels in history”.

The episode in Dunnottar Castle, in 1685, involved 167 prisoners, seven of whom died during captivity or attempting to escape, and resulted in the transportation of most of them to the West Indies[6]. The novel reproduces an inscription in the castle which commemorates the Covenanters who died there (p. 132). These ordinary men and women have long been forgotten, turned into a number, and the names of some of them (two of the men and all of the women) were not known even at the time when the inscription was made. This sign in the castle might be the only evidence that some of them ever lived.

Chris's thoughts and feelings about the Covenanters reflect those expressed by Gibbon in his non-fictional work. Chris sympathizes and identifies with them in opposition to the elite, a feeling she inherited from her father, as the following passage shows:

> There the Covenanting folk had screamed and died while the gentry dined and danced in their lithe [sheltered, cozy], warm halls, Chris stared at the places, sick and angry and sad for those folk she could never help now, that hatred of rulers and gentry a flame in her heart, John Guthrie's hate. Her folk and his they had been, those whose names stand graved in tragedy (p. 132).

Chris sees the dead Covenanters as peasants like her, leading a harsh life, very different from that of the nobles, and the perception of this inequality breeds hatred in her.

Gibbon (2007b, p. 116) voices a similar perspective on the event, stating that the “People's Church” was defended by peasants, particularly those from the western region, and that “[i]n the forefront of this business of oppression were the Scots nobles, led by Graham of Claverhouse”. In addition to relating the conflict to social class issues, Gibbon (2007b, p. 116) once again reveals a negative opinion about the aristocracy, affirming that Graham of Claverhouse, “a sadist and a criminal degenerate”, was not an isolated case, but “one in a long train of the Scots nobility”. Thus, Gibbon, both in his fiction and non-fiction, associates the conflicts in the Killing Time to social inequality and a rotten aristocracy who oppresses the poor.

The Jacobite Rising of 1745, even though only briefly mentioned, is treated in a significant humorous way in the novel, which differs from some of Gibbon's other works. In his non-fiction, Gibbon (2007b, p. 118) sees Prince Charlie Edward's attempt to restore the

6 Available at: http://www.dunnottarcastle.co.uk/history2.cfm. Access on May 23rd, 2015.

Stuart dynasty in Scotland as a “relief from that crushing sense of inferiority that had pressed on the nation since the first day of the Union [with England]”. Therefore, its defeat would be tinged with somewhat tragic colors, representing the loss of “the last chance to restore the ancient nationhood of Scotland” (GIBBON, 2007b, p. 119). Nevertheless, in *Sunset Song*, the characters mention the event in an irreverent manner in the scene in which Long Rob jokes that Chris's father looks like a “veteran of the '45” because of his second-hand gun (p. 51). This way, the historical trauma and sense of loss are deconstructed in the novel, suggesting that Kinraddie's community has enough resilience to overcome this defeat. Moreover, resorting to irony and humor may be a way to lessen the pain and the suffering of the characters' harsh way of life.

Besides, *Sunset Song* brings the Jacobite Rising close to Cospatric's myth as the narrative voice makes reference to the tower next to Kinraddie's church. In this passage, different stories about the object kept there are presented: “the spear [Cospatric] killed the gryphon with was locked in a kist [chest] there, or so some said, but others said it was no more than an old bit heuch [sickle] from the times of Bonny Prince Charlie” (p. 15). In addition to going against the idea of absolute truth in historical accounts, this quotation equates myth and history in the eyes of the community, suggesting that both carry the same importance and meaning for those people.

The scorn for the aristocracy is also present in the characterization of John Kinraddie, who became successful in London and befriended Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) and James Boswell (1740-1795). The narrative voice does not refer to any intellectual achievement of either historical figure, but calls them “creatures” and affirms that Boswell and Kinraddie only cared about drinking and looking for women in their visit to the Mearns (p. 11). This passage makes it clear that the community sees the nobles as idle, selfish individuals, who do not take advantage of their prestige in the English court to better the lives of the Scottish people.

The effects of the French Revolution in Scotland are depicted in an ironic way in *Sunset Song*. Maclean (1996, p. 199) affirms that the support given to the revolutionary ideas in Scotland was strong enough to attract a heavy repression from the authorities. In the “Prelude” of the novel, the representation of the French Revolution's influence, as that of William Wallace, is filled with irony. The narrative voice mentions risings of peasants and other common people inspired by “the poison of the French Revolution” (p. 11). Once more the language used by the narrative voice ironically reproduces an elitist discourse, with derogatory terms to describe popular movements.

The irony is also present in the depiction of the young laird Kinraddie's support to the French Revolution. The young man joins the Jacobin Club of Aberdeen, participates in riots and sells pieces of land to send money to the French revolutionaries. However, this demonstration of “a real good heart” is actually hypocritical since the support of the ideal of freedom and equality for everyone does not include the people in Scotland (p. 12). This point, which reflects Gibbon's general negative opinion about the nobles, is presented in the scene that shows a revolt in the village: “And the crofters marched on Kinraddie Castle in a body and bashed in the windows of it, they thought equality should begin at home” (p. 12). Interestingly, the narrative voice seems less ironic in its description of the rising, not characterizing the tenant farmers in a negative way, which suggests that it actually agrees with their struggle for the ideal of equality.

The laird's decision to sell part of the land to support the revolution left his family in a difficult financial situation. His son tried to find a solution and, in order to have bigger farms which would be worth higher rents, expelled from the land “half the little tenants, they flitted off to Canada and Dundee and parts like those” (p. 12). This passage fictionally represents two historical processes under way in the 18th and 19th centuries: the clearances of the land and industrialization, thus positing Kinraddie as a representation in a micro level of what was happening in several places in Scotland. The clearances consisted of the expulsion of many tenants from the farms, usually to give way to sheep farming in order to provide wool for the sprouting factories. Many of the evicted peasants emigrated to other territories belonging to the British Empire or to industrial cities, such as Dundee, which is mirrored in the description of what happened in Kinraddie. Once more, the novel focuses on the consequences of historical facts for the common people, who were uprooted and ironically affected in a negative way by the previous laird's support of ideals of equality and freedom. This reinforces the idea that his political views were limited to the revolution in France and did not extend to his home country.

The history of the Kinraddie family symbolizes continuity throughout time since they keep the village under their possession from the 12th century until the beginning of the 20th century. This may be related to Braudel's (1992, p. 342) analysis of the long duration as he mentions social hierarchy as one of the underlying structures which change more slowly. Even though Scotland went through many political, economic and cultural transformations during this period, the Kinraddies’ power over the land and the peasants endured. However, in the beginning of the 20th century, as the Age of Empire begins to collapse, so does the Kinraddie family, with their only heir living in an asylum, and the estate mortgaged and left in

the hands of trustees (p. 13).

2.1 **“The pride o' oor land lie cauld in the clay”: World War One in *Sunset Song***

Gibbon's exploration of the history of Kinraddie puts in evidence the importance of the past and the continuity of some of its elements into the present. The land of the region is a witness of the events which took place there. Besides, the past is present not only as material evidence, like monuments, buildings and tombstones, but also on people's memory, preserved through stories and songs, for example. Layers from the past coexist with and influence the reality experienced by the characters, which is a fictional representation of the beginning of the 20th century. The background in which the characters are inserted will now be the focus of the analysis.

Gibbon depicts a community whose way of life has remained fundamentally unchanged for a long time; however, some signs of transformation begin to arise, both in technology and in the realm of ideas. The clash between change and the old customs is evident in some passages from the novel which take place before the outset of World War One. New technology starts to arrive in Kinraddie in the form of cars and farming machines and meets with the resistance of some crofters.

Two incidents involving cars happen to John Guthrie, Chris's father, and one of Chae Strachan's sons right in the beginning of the novel: Chae's son is almost run over, and John Guthrie is accused of obstructing the road while riding his cart (p. 36, 45-46). Chae and Chris's father, both representatives of the old, traditional way of life, react strongly against the intrusion of automobiles in their lives, the first hitting the driver and the latter insulting the car owner. Thus, the two crofters may be considered symbols of the resistance of the old Scotland, albeit almost run over, against changes.

More than simply the arrival of new technology, these incidents highlight the issue of social inequality. The opposition of the poor tenant farmers and the elite who can afford a car may be illustrated by passages such as the description of the driver who almost hit Chae's son as an unpleasant, rich man: “the motorist, he was a fair toff [an upper-class person] with leggings and a hat cocked over his eyes, he'd said *Keep your damn children off the road in future.*” (p. 36). The narrative voice, making reference to the community's point of view, expresses a negative opinion about the elite, stating that “they'd little care for anybody, the

dirt that rode in motors, folk said" (p. 36). When the incident involving John Guthrie is narrated, the owner of the car is also described in a negative, grotesque manner, as "a creature of a woman with her face all clamjamfried [caked] with paint and powder and dirt" (p. 45). The narrative voice also approves of Guthrie's attitude of insulting the woman, affirming that "[t]hat was the way to deal with dirt like the gentry" (p. 46).

Nevertheless, both Chae and John Guthrie have to face negative consequences for having opposed individuals from the elite. Chae is charged with assault and has to pay a fine while Guthrie has his application for renewing the lease of the farm where the family lived denied (p. 36, 46). This way, the vulnerability of the poor in relation to those with economic and political power is evident in the novel. In a parallel way, these peasants are also powerless to resist inexorable historical processes, such as the spread of new technologies and the transformations affecting their community and the surrounding areas.

In addition to automobiles, other technological novelties influence the peasants' lives, bringing changes to the way of farming the land. The creation of farming machines contributed to the advance of large-scale farming, which would crush traditional small farms. This change of paradigm may be illustrated by the passage in which John Guthrie has to seek a new farm to rent after his lease was not renewed and finds out that "nearly all the district was land of the large-like farm, he'd be squeezed to death and he'd stand no chance" (p. 46). Hence, it is clear that this process meant the exclusion of the crofters from the land which had supported them for generations.

Once again, Chris's father represents a force of resistance against changes in the community's way of life. He refuses to make use of new farming tools, such as a binder, preferring to keep on using "an old reaper" even after his son's protest (p. 76). Besides dismissing his son's affirmative that driving the old reaper would make one be considered "the fool of Kinraddie", John Guthrie uses a scythe and swears that "the scythe would yet come back to its own when the binders and reapers rotted in rust" (p. 76). Although the older man defends the use of old, traditional farming tools, the narrative voice makes it clear that change is inevitable and that even John Guthrie has to give in, stating "[b]ut its time was past or yet to come, the scythe's, out the reaper was driven and yoked" (p. 76-77).

Chris's father believes that his way of working and living is at an end and sees this transformation in a negative light, as a force ruining traditional morals and values. The idea of the end of an era is present in passages such as:

> it grew plain to him [John Guthrie] here […] that the day of the crofter was fell [very much] near finished, put by, the day of folk like himself and Chae and

> Cuddiestoun, Pooty and Long Rob of the Mill, the last of the farming folk that wrung their living from the land with their own bare hands. (p. 84)

Thus, John Guthrie predicts, in a foreshadowing of what the following years would bring, that this generation of tenant farmers would be the last to keep the way of life passed on by their ancestors. Guthrie also relates these changes to a deepening of social inequality and the corruption of moral values even among the clergy, as “the world was rolling fast to a hell of riches and the old slave days come back again, ministers went with it and whored with the rest” (p. 84). Chris's father, an extremely religious man, sees as a negative “[s]ign of the times” the suicide of his wife, as well as the social abyss, “with the country-folk climbing in silver, the few, back in the pit, the many” (p. 84). This way, the concern about social inequality and the oppression of poor farmers is once again expressed in the novel.

Nevertheless, not every character in *Sunset Song* sees transformations, such as the use of new farming machines, in an unfavorable way. For instance, Chae Strachan, Kinraddie's self-proclaimed socialist, believes that machines will improve the lives of the peasants by making their harsh work easier. Therefore, he affirms that “*the machine's the best friend of man, or it would be so in a socialist state*” (p. 162). Chae's point of view seems to be more similar to that of Gibbon (2007b, p. 173), who suggests in his essay “The Land” that enthusiasm and “a great and tremendous agricultural hope” are more important than the perpetuation of the old ways in the countryside. As a result, Gibbon (2007b, p. 173) would see changes in the fields and the use of machines “with no more regret than the sensitive felt in the passing of the windjammers and the coming of the steamboats”. Gibbon, like Chae, values the peasants' quality of life over the continuance of traditions out of nostalgia.

The presence of emigration in *Sunset Song* is a mark of continuity through history. The migratory flux of Scottish people to other places increased during the 18th and 19th centuries due to the enclosures of land, also mentioned in the novel, and continued into the 20th century. In the years between 1905 and 1914, the emigration rate was higher than any recorded in the 19th century (ROSS, 2008, p. 289). The perpetuation of this migratory process is represented by the characters Chae and Will, Chris’s older brother. Chae, “a fell wandering billy” (p. 17), settled in Alaska, California and South Africa before coming back to Scotland. Several years after Chae’s return, Will plans to pursue the dream of a better life in Canada, a place where “a man was soon his own master” in his opinion (p. 75). He ends up moving to Argentina to raise cattle in a ranch in 1913 (p. 110).

Although Chae’s journey took place in the end of the 19th century, when Britain possessed a vast empire, he does not take part in the colonialist project. After looking for gold

in Alaska and working in fruit farms in California, Chae settled in South Africa. However, instead of seeking to dominate the natives, he became close to the chieftain of a tribe, and they "had fought against Boers [white settlers who were not of British origin] and British both, and beaten them, or so Chae said" (p. 18). Even though the community narrative voice, as aforementioned, casts doubt on his battle achievements in this passage, his siding with the native Africans remains unquestioned. Therefore, the character seems to have stayed true to his egalitarian ideals.

Chae's sympathy for the Africans against the colonial oppression is also visible in his narrative of the episode of the man who found a diamond and swallowed it to avoid having it taken away from him. Chae says that "as soon as the British heard of it they sent to arrest him for't" (p. 146), once again setting himself apart from the British colonizers. This way, Chae is characterized as not taking part in the exploitation of the colonized people. The focus of his experiences is, however, more anecdotal, describing adventures and curiosities, such as the story about the diamond and another about the hunt of a lion. Even though the community suspects that Chae embellishes his tales to sound braver and stronger, the fact that he shows some scars that seem to have been caused by a lion's claws (p. 146-147) gives support to his version of the stories.

Another sign of permanence from the 19th century is the political polarization between Tories (Conservatives) and Liberals, which is visible in different scenes in the narrative, especially in the ones dealing with a by-election in the region. The references to politics in the novel are consistent with its focus on the lives of tenant farmers, concentrating on local issues and on how the community is affected by political decisions. The political preferences of some of the characters are explicit, like Erbert Ellison's, who "said he was a Conservative but everybody in Kinraddie knew that meant he was a Tory" (p. 14).

In a reference to a well-known event in the northeast of Scotland, Ellison, who ran the estate for the trustees, gave support to Robert Paterson, a farmer from Turriff (Aberdeenshire) who refused to pay his employees' insurances and had a cow taken by the government to settle his debts. The incident, known as the "Turra Coo" [Turriff cow], caused a riot in the town, and the cow ended up being bought in an auction in Aberdeen by local farmers and returned to the original owner. The establishment of the National Insurance in 1911, intended to benefit workers who needed support due to sickness or unemployment, was controversial even among the working class since it required contributions from employees as well as employers. The controversy, however, did not mean that farm workers were satisfied with their work conditions (CAMERON, 2010, p. 95-97). Ellison's opposition to the insurance was

cause for joke in Kinraddie, where “folk said it was no more than a show off, the Cow creature and Ellison both; and they laughed at him behind his back” (p. 15). Ellison’s position about this issue befits his characterization as someone who feels “fair gentry” (p. 14) and superior in relation to the tenant farmers in the rest of the novel.

Chae Strachan is fiercely against the Tories, which marks a distinction between him and most of Kinraddie’s inhabitants. Chae, who identifies himself as a socialist, says after some drinks that he would have “all Tories nailed up in barrels full of spikes and rolled down the side of the Grampians”, to which Long Rob replies that “there would be a gey [great] boom in the barrel trade then, the most of Kinraddie would be inside the barrels” (p. 102). The characteristic humor of the narrative is used here to show the conservative inclination of most of the characters portrayed.

Whereas John Guthrie declares himself a Liberal, Chae refuses to choose one side in the polarization between Tories and Liberals. To the latter, it makes no difference which party is elected since “one tink [a disreputable person] robber was bad as another, Tory as Liberal” (p. 105). Chae believes that everyone should have the same amount of money, an idea considered “clean daft” by Kinraddie’s folk as “if you’d all the same money one day what would it be the next? – Rich and Poor again!” (p. 18). However, even though the community laughs at Chae and does not share his ideals, people defend him when a political candidate tries to expel him from the room after being attacked by Chae. After all, “they weren’t to see him mishandled by an English tink and the coarse fisher brutes he’d hired from Gourdon to keep folk from asking him questions” (p. 105). This passage makes it clear that, above political differences, there is a sense of community which makes people from Kinraddie defend one another when confronted with “outsiders” from other villages or England.

This enmity toward people from other places, especially England, is present in passages throughout the book. The narrative of the regional by-election campaign reinforces this idea and shows clearly the distance between political candidates and the people they are supposed to represent. The Tory candidate, who tried to expel Chae from the meeting, is described in an unflattering manner, as “an Englishman with a funny bit squeak of a voice, like a bairn [child] that’s wet its breeks [trousers]” (p. 104). Besides nationality, language itself sets the candidate apart from Kinraddie’s community. In a place where most people speak Doric, a Scots dialect, speaking English makes the politician more distant and may even sound pedantic. This issue related to language is expressed in the following quotation: “the Tory said the House of Lords had aye [always] been defenders of the Common People, only he didn’t say aye, his English was a real drawback” (p. 104).

The Liberal candidate tries to take advantage of the fact that his rival is English, using a slogan – "*Vote for the Scottish Thistle and not for the English Rose*" (p. 104) – which refers to both nations' floral emblems to sound closer to the electorate. Another attempt to bridge the gap between him and voters is his support to measures which are expected to appeal to the working class, like the institution of insurances for workers and the end of the House of Lords' power of veto. Although he tries to show himself as part of the community, he is also a stranger to the village, being from Glasgow.

However, more than geographical, the distance between candidates and voters also has to do with social class. Both Tory and Liberal candidates belong to the upper-class, the first being described as a "gent" whose uncle is a lord and the latter, as a "fell [very] rich" man working on the shipbuilding business (p. 104). The community narrative voice seems to see through their speeches, affirming of the Liberal candidate that "real Radical he was, with everybody's money but his own" (p. 104). The Tory man, who has the minister's support, tries to affirm that he is on the side of the common people, but ends up being attacked by Chae, who says that "there was a greater Lord who heard when the Tories took the name of poor folk in vain" (p. 104). After his stewards try to take Chae away from the room by force, the Tory candidate eventually loses the election. However, reinforcing Chae's statement that both parties were similar, the Liberal politician never appears in Kinraddie again after his victory, as his predecessor had done (p. 105). Hence, it seems that politicians' complete disregard for Kinraddie and, by extension, for poor, rural regions is yet another element of continuity.

Within a predominantly conservative community, Chae's and Long Rob's points of view call the attention for different reasons. Chae, as mentioned before, defends social equality and identifies with socialist ideals, which makes the community laugh at him. Long Rob has an anti-clerical attitude and reads agnostic texts "of a coarse creature Ingersoll" (p. 26), a behavior which is negatively regarded by Kinraddie's folk, as the use of the word "coarse" by the narrative voice demonstrates.

While Chae's and Rob's ideas are shocking to Kinraddie's community, they are actually closer to Gibbon's own positions. The author's deep concern about social inequality may be perceived in his essays, such as "Glasgow", in which Gibbon (2007b, p. 137) affirms that "[t]here is nothing in culture or art that is worth the life and elementary happiness of one of those thousands who rot in the Glasgow slums". Besides, Long Rob's ideas are not very distant from some of Gibbon's statements, like "[r]eligion is no more fundamental to the human character than cancer is fundamental to the human brain" (GIBBON, 2007b, p. 183).

This identification between Chae's and Rob's views and Gibbon's may explain these

characters' generally positive characterization in the novel. Even though their ideas, in a reflection of the community's opinion, are described by the narrative voice as "coarse" or "daft", Chae and Rob are considered good workers and well-liked, which is a much more positive description than "there were worse folk than Munro, though maybe they were all in the jail" (p. 21), for example. Moreover, both of them are generous and help Chris in many situations. They are also the characters who appear the most in *Sunset Song*, apart from Chris and her family, and are responsible for a good part of the humor present in the narrative, which might be illustrated by passages such as "some said there was no bottom to it, the loch, and Long Rob of the Mill said that made it like the depths of a parson's depravity. That was an ill thing to say about any minister, though Rob said it was an ill thing to say about any loch" (p. 20).

Thus, when World War One begins, Kinraddie is a place where politics and social hierarchy have not significantly changed for a long time, though some technological novelties and non-conservative currents of thought are beginning to appear. At first, the war seems comfortably distant from the crofters' reality. When Chae brings the news that war was declared, Chris and her husband Ewan do not pay much attention to it. With Chris in her late pregnancy and their crops to take care of, there seems to be more pressing concerns, as the following passage may illustrate: "Chris paid no heed to the war, there were aye [always] daft [silly] devils fighting about something or other, as Ewan had said; and God! they could fight till they were black and blue for all that he cared if only the ley [fallow] field would come on a bit faster" (p. 191).

Nevertheless, the influence of the war starts to be felt in Kinraddie soon after that. The first effect is the spread of war propaganda, especially an anti-German discourse, which was propagated not only by the media, but also by the church. The aggressiveness of the media may be perceived in passages like "*Man, some of those [newspaper] editors were right rough creatures, God pity the Germans if they'd their hands on them!*" (p. 197). This anti-German discourse is reproduced by some characters, such as Chae, who says that if Germany won the war, "there'd be an end of both peace and progress forever, there wouldn't be safety in the world again till the Prussians – and they were a kind of German, with meikle [big] spiked helmets, awful brutes, and the very worst – were beaten back to the hell they came from" (p. 196). The creation of this extremely negative image of the Germans was intended to encourage people to fight, making them believe that "every man might yet have to fight for bairn [child] and wife ere this war was over" (p. 196).

As an anti-German feeling grows among the population, the minister's sermons

become increasingly hostile to fit the community's mood and avoid being mistaken for pro-German. Reverend Gibbon, Kinraddie's minister, compares the Germans to Attila in one of his sermons, saying that they are God's punishment for the world's sins (p. 197). As for the future, the minister states that "from chastisement by blood and fire the nations might rise anew, Scotland not the least in its ancient health and humility, to tread again the path to grace" (p. 197). In spite of his comparison of the Germans to "a curse and a plague", many members of the congregation leave the church, shocked to see the minister "defending the German tinks [disreputable people] and some friend that he called Attila", and some even threaten to hit him (p. 197-198). This passage evidences not only some of the crofters' ignorance about history, but also the growing anti-German hysteria affecting the community. Once more Kinraddie seems to represent fictionally what happened in the country as a whole, where propaganda promoted "a hearty jingoism and savage hatred of 'the Hun' (the Germans)" (GRANT et al., 2011, p. 326).

If Reverend Gibbon is attacked due to the extreme anti-German feeling, his subsequent sermons, which embrace the patriotic discourse, end up increasing this hatred with the help of the press. While newspapers warn the population about the presence of pro-Germans and retell cases of aggressions against them, the minister preaches that "the Kaiser was the Antichrist, and that until this foul evil had been swept from the earth there could be neither peace nor progress again" (p. 199). After a sermon praising Jael, a Biblical character who killed an enemy of the Jews, and urging the congregation to act like her since there were "traitors that sided with the Antichrist" in Kinraddie, a group of people decide to beat Rob, considered a pro-German (p. 200).

Rob is one of the characters who act as a counterpoint to the war propaganda, deconstructing the official discourse about the conflict and the Germans. In his opinion, it is not worth fighting to defend the Belgians against the German invasion for one country is as bad as the other. The character recalls the Belgian colonization of the Congo to justify his opinion, without, however, acknowledging Britain's colonial exploitation of other countries (p. 199). Besides, Rob points out the distance between those who decided to declare war or encourage it and those who are affected by the conflict, as illustrated by the following quotation:

> He [Rob] said that it [the war] was a lot of damned nonsense, those who wanted to fight, the M.P.s and bankers and editors and muckers [derogatory term for homosexuals], should all be locked up in a pleiter [bog] of a park [field] and made to gut each other with graips [pitchforks]: there'd be no great loss to the world and a fine bit sight it would make for decent folk to look on at. (p. 199)

Once again, there is the suggestion of the distinction between a negatively regarded elite of politicians, bankers and editors, and ordinary people, considered "decent", in the novel.

Chris's opinion also contrasts with the official war propaganda, an illustration of the fact that her views and values are often different from the community's. The atmosphere in Kinraddie is so full of suspicion and hatred during the war that simply affirming of the Germans that "*they're maybe not such bad folk as the papers make out*" makes Mrs. Strachan accuse Chris of being pro-German (p. 198). However, when two of the families decide to boycott Rob's mill, most of Kinraddie believes this attitude is exaggerated, and the community narrative voice even admits that maybe there is some reason in his saying that not every German is bad (p. 203). The extremely negative image of the Germans is hardly confirmed by soldiers' experience. When Chae comes back home on leave after enlisting, he is asked whether the Germans are so bad as people are saying and answers that he does not know as he has practically no contact with living Germans (p. 205). Staying true to the community's suspicion toward foreigners, though, he says that he does not like the French, who are bad farmers and a "damned poor folk you'd to fight for, them, meaner than dirt and not half so sweet" (p. 205-206).

Folk's suspicion is also extended to soldiers, revealing a paradoxical attitude towards them. Whereas most of Kinraddie accepts the discourse of defending king and country and some of the characters even affirm they would enlist if they were younger (p. 196), those who choose to fight are considered lazy. One of the first men to enlist, James Leslie (a play with Gibbon's real name), is considered "fair daft, showing off and looking for a holiday" as it was predicted that the war would not be long (p. 196). Even after Chae joins the fight and it becomes clear that the conflict would not be so short, this belief that soldiers lead an easy life persists among the community. For example, one of Chae's neighbors slights him during his visit, stating that "*[a]h well, we'll have to get on with our work. Fine being you and a soldier, Chae, with your holidays and all. But poor folk aye [always] have to work*" (p. 208).

Like the anti-German exaggerations, the idea of heroism created by war propaganda is deconstructed in *Sunset Song*. This deconstruction is clear in the narrative of the scene of Mrs. Gordon's visit to her son, blinded in the war, at the hospital, when he affirms: "*What think you of your son now, old wife? – the son you wanted to make a name for you with his bravery in Kinraddie? Be proud, be proud, I'll be home right soon to crawl round the parks and I'll show these holes to every bitch in the Mearns that's looking for a hero*" (p. 209). This way, the relation between war and heroism and glory is denied, with the emphasis laying on the brutality of the life on the front.

In addition to the influence of propaganda, the effects of the war are also felt in the economy. Due to the war, Kinraddie experiences a rise in the price of food, which increases some of the crofters' expenses, but mostly presents them with an opportunity to make more money. Tenant farmers, like Chris and Ewan, who used to work mostly on crops, can afford to start investing more in raising cattle (p. 204). The Munros buy incubators and focus on raising chickens, which are sold "at great bit prices to the Aberdeen hospitals" (p. 208). The opportunity for easy profit brought by the war is seized by most people in Kinraddie, like Ellison, the manager of the estate, who "[had] grown fair big in the mind and the pouch [pocket], folk said he was making silver like a dung-heap sourocks [sorrel]; and he'd bought him a car and another piano" (p. 207). This excerpt shows that the change in the financial situation brings along a transformation in the way of thinking and behaving, for example reinforcing Ellison's feeling that he belongs to the upper class, which would make him superior to the other crofters in his own opinion.

Ambition soon becomes excessive and gives way to selfish, thoughtless greed. Most of the tenant crofters, who endured harsh work and life conditions in exchange for little money for so long, become too greedy once they finally have the opportunity to increase their earnings. When Chae comes back home on leave, he notices this transformation, which is clear in the following passage:

> it seemed the same wherever he went in Kinraddie, except at the Mill and his father-in-law's: every soul made money and didn't care a damn though the War outlasted their lives, they didn't care though the land was shaved of its timber till the whole bit place would soon be a waste with the wind a-blow over heath and heather where once the corn came green (p. 208).

The community, who, despite prone to gossip, used to be close-knit and offer support to each other in moments of need, becomes so selfish that most are not concerned about the impact of the war as long as they could continue to profit without being negatively affected by it. Therefore, it is suggested that money exerts a negative influence on people, which echoes Gibbon's diffusionist idea that civilization – which includes money and social classes – is a corruptive and oppressive force.

This thoughtless ambition is demonstrated by the decision to let the woods surrounding Kinraddie be cut down. Attracted by the opportunity to make money, Kinraddie's trustees sell the timber and "they got awful high prices, the trustees did, it was wanted for aeroplanes and such-like things" (p. 207). Nevertheless, this was a mindless decision since the cutting down of the trees would cause the climate in the region to change, making it impossible to cultivate the land. Besides showing the prevalence of immediate gain over long-

term planning, this attitude reveals the trustees' lack of consideration for the tenant farmers and their means of subsistence. This is yet another instance in which the novel portrays the elite as a selfish group becoming wealthier at the expense of the poorer.

The felling of the trees also symbolizes the end of the peasants' traditional way of life. Once more, mirroring the incidents with cars in the beginning of the narrative, Chae is outraged and scolds the manager of the estate, but this time he is also nostalgic, telling his wife that "he'd often minded of [remembered] them out there in France, the woods, so bonny [beautiful] they were, and thick and brave [fine]" (p. 206-207). Again, Chae considers change negative and resists it; though his nostalgia suggests that this time he sees transformation as inevitable.

Even though Kinraddie's folk have some financial benefits due to the war, they cannot escape its negative consequences. One of the most remarkable and traumatic effects of the war was the trail of violence and loss it left. In *Sunset Song*, more than the aggressions perpetrated by the Germans, it is the violence inflicted by the State and by the very community which is highlighted. This emphasis is related to the fact that the narrative focuses on Kinraddie and how the conflict affects its people, not showing battle scenes or the life in the trenches.

Long Rob suffers aggressions from the State and is also ostracized from Kinraddie's community. News of the Conscription Act arrives in Kinraddie, as much of the information, "in a wave of gossip", and "that meant you'd to go out and fight whatever you said, they'd shoot you down if you didn't" (p. 212). This quotation makes it clear that the war effort implied not only sacrifices from the population, but also an amount of violence inflicted by the government. War propaganda discourse is also used as a persuasive tool to convince people to fight. When Rob resists the mandatory enrollment, the chairman of the Exemption Board asks him if he likes the idea of being considered a coward, to which Rob replies that "*I'd rather any day be a coward than a corpse*" (p. 213). The deconstruction of the ideal of heroism is also present in the description of the chairman, who is "a wee grocer that worked night and day to send other folk out to fight the Germans" (p. 213), in which it is clear that he does not meet the standards of bravery that he hypocritically advocates.

As Rob refuses to enroll in the army, the police take him from his house, and Kinraddie is left wondering what happened to him as rumors spread. As in several other passages of the novel, in a demonstration of the variety of versions possible in the narrative act, different accounts and possibilities are presented: "there rose this rumour and that, some said he was in jail, some said he'd given in, some said he'd escaped and was hiding in the

hills; but nobody knew for sure" (p. 213). Once a much weaker Rob comes back home, stories spread quickly that he was sent to prison, where he was awfully "ill-used", and resorted to a hunger strike (p. 222). Even after enduring all these aggressions, he was not released until a doctor attested that "he'd never be of use to his King and country" (p. 223). This episode illustrates the dehumanization involved in the war as individuals are valued more as soldiers than human beings and deemed useless when they are not able to fight.

Although Kinraddie's people show curiosity and gossip about Rob's fate, many continue to reject him as a pro-German. No one but Chris takes the corn to be ground by Rob anymore, and even the grocer does not stop at his door to sell goods (p. 223, 233). The community's rejection is so strong that Rob ends up abandoning his pacifist ideas and enlisting after realizing that "there was neither trade nor trust for him here, or rest ever again till this War was over, if it ever ended at all" (p. 233).

After all, propaganda keeps building up patriotism and the feeling of enmity toward the Germans and anyone defending them. Reverend Gibbon, after seizing the opportunity of ascending in his career brought by the war and leaving for a position as colonel-chaplain in Edinburgh, is replaced by his own father, "*an old bit stock that drinks German blood by the gill with his porridge, by the way he preaches*" (p. 210). Even if his sermons about "how the German beasts now boiled the corpses of their own dead men and fed the leavings to pigs" (p. 221) do not attract a big audience anymore, the anti-German sentiment persists very strong among the community.

The community's pressure and the brutality of military life may also be perceived in Ewan's story. Chris's husband decides to enlist because he cannot stand anymore "folk laughing and sneering at him for a coward, Mutch and Munro aye [always] girding at him" (p. 217). This episode shows the power of both propaganda and popular pressure to persuade people to fight in the war. Gibbon portrays the influence of the atmosphere of military training as extremely negative since Ewan undergoes a radical transformation. The kind, loving young man comes back home on leave turned into a jeering and abusive husband. The transformation is such that Chris thinks that "it wasn't Ewan, her Ewan, someone coarse and strange and strong had come back in his body to torment her" (p. 217-218). Ewan's change, described by the author in a letter as "factually the truth" (GIBBON, [1932] apud MALCOLM, 2007, p. 287), may be considered another demonstration of the dehumanizing power of the war.

Ewan's fate, being executed as a deserter, is another instance of violence inflicted by the State. The use of executions as punishment for cowardice, desertion or mutiny remains

controversial, being considered excessively harsh given that many soldiers suffered from shell shock. British military forces executed more than 300 of their own men whereas Germany, with the double of troops, condemned 48 men to death (TAYLOR-WHIFFEN, 2011). As the wind brings a smell which reminds him of home, Ewan realizes that it was a mistake to enlist, "*it was just daft to be there*", and decides to go back home and try to reunite with the wife he mistreated so badly before leaving (p. 240-241).

Once more, Gibbon deconstructs the ideal of bravery and heroism promoted by war propaganda. Chae, when describing what happened to Ewan, tells Chris that he was executed "*as a coward and deserter*" (p. 240). Ewan, however, employs the word "coward" in a very different way. As he recounts to Chae his abuses against Chris before leaving to the war, Ewan says that he knows that he drew her apart through his own behavior, but that "he'd be a coward if he didn't try [to go back to her] though all hope was past" (p. 241). From Ewan's perspective, cowardice is not related to the refusal to fight, but to the ill-treatment and abandonment of his family. To the court martial, Ewan was a coward for leaving the battle; to his mind, though, he would be a coward for staying there in the war front, setting a different standard of bravery. The novel's treatment of the issue of desertion also differs from the official discourse in that Ewan's name is included in Kinraddie's memorial to those who died at the war, as opposed to what happens up to this day in Britain.

Moreover, grief and the feeling of loss also lead to the questioning of the patriotic discourse of defending one's country in the book. After the news of Ewan's death, two neighbors visit Chris and say that "he'd died fine, for his country and his King he'd died", to which Chris's response is "*Country and King? You're havering, havering [talking nonsense]! What have they to do with my Ewan, what was the King to him, what their damned country? Blawearie's his land, it's not his wight [fault] that others fight wars!*" (p. 238-239). In this fragment, Chris points out, as Rob did before, the distance between politicians' and common people's interests, emphasizing the idea that soldiers are fighting and risking their lives for the sake of a war which is not theirs. She also criticizes the authorities in another passage of the book, in which she calls them "cowards and liars and bloody men, the English generals and their like down there in London" (p. 238). This reinforces the distance between those who fight and those in power, as well as suggests a hierarchical relation between England and Scotland. Chris's angry reaction is soon the subject of gossip in Kinraddie, meeting with people's disapproval, as frequently happened to her due to her holding different values from most of the community.

The futility of war is expressed in several passages of the novel. First, Chris believes

that Ewan "died for nothing, for nothing, hurt and murdered and crying for her, maybe, killed for nothing" (p. 239). Secondly, as Rob's death is retold, having been the result of an act of bravery which won him a medal, the community narrative voice comments "[n]ot that he got it, faith! he was dead, they came on his corpse long after, the British, but just as a mark of respect" (p. 250-251). This remark highlights the emptiness of such medals of honor in comparison to one's life, the price paid for many of them. Thirdly, the fact that Chae is killed just an hour before the cease-fire foregrounds the futility of a conflict which claimed so many lives. Nevertheless, Hew Strachan ([2012], p. 130) affirms that the vast majority of the soldiers and their families believed in the legitimacy of the war and the causes they were fighting for. Thus, it is possible that the perspective on the war presented in the narrative is related to Gibbon's temporal distance from the conflict, as he was a child when it happened and only wrote *Sunset Song* in the 1930s.

As Gibbon places Kinraddie within a long historical tradition, he also suggests links between the First World War and previous conflicts. An element which shows these connections is the song *The Flowers of the Forest*. First recorded in writing in the 18th century, the song is a lament for the dead in the battle of Flodden (1513), in which the English inflicted many casualties, including the king, on the Scottish army. This way, the song brings closer two military conflicts separated by centuries.

This song appears in different moments of the narrative: first, when Chris is a young girl; secondly, during Chris and Ewan's wedding; and thirdly, on the inauguration of Kinraddie's war memorial. As mentioned before, the song describes a scene of young women grieving over the young men killed, which moves teenage Chris as she imagines the lonely, unmarried girls (p. 43). During her wedding party, it is Chris herself, in a foreshadowing of the war and the loss to come, that sings *The Flowers of the Forest*, lamenting that "The Flooers [Flowers] o' the Forest, that fought aye [always] the foremost, / The pride o' oor [our] land lie cauld [cold] in the clay" (p. 170). Toward the end of the novel, in the scene of the inauguration of the war memorial, the song is played one more time, and even its musical score is included. Therefore, a parallel is established between the grief following both the 16th century battle and World War One, as the community narrative voice goes on to describe the reactions of Chris and Kirsty Strachan, Chae's wife, both women who are left "lamentin [their] deary"[7].

7 *The Flowers of the Forest*. Available at: http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/scotlandssongs/secondary/genericcontent_tcm4572881.asp Retrieved on June 24th, 2014.

Another reference to a past conflict is Chae's vision of a soldier from ancient times. Coming back from a visit to Rob on his leave, Chae sees a man "in strange gear, hardly clad at all, and something had flashed on his head, like a helmet maybe", near something similar to a cart but different from anything he has seen (p. 211). Terribly frightened, he thinks that "maybe it was one of the men of old time that he saw there, a Calgacus' man from the Graupius battle when they fought the Romans up from the south" (p. 211), in a reference to the first recorded battle in Scottish history. Symbolically, the scene takes place near Kinraddie's circle of Standing Stones, which are a sign of the endurance of the past. Even though the vision may be attributed to the power of the whisky drank by Chae, the passage is another instance in the book which suggests that the past lives on in the present and that it is still possible to feel the presence of people from ancient times in Kinraddie.

The establishment of connections between these different battles and conflicts points out to a cyclical view of the passage of time. Instead of a constant forward movement, history would move as a spiral, bringing wars and destruction from time to time. This idea of the circularity of time is reflected in the structure of the novel, which mirrors the cycle of agricultural activity in its sections. The book is divided into six parts: the Prelude, entitled "The Unfurrowed Field"; "Ploughing"; "Drilling"; "Seed-time"; "Harvest"; and the Epilude, also entitled "The Unfurrowed Field". This way, the ending of the narrative does not represent an absolute conclusion, but a new beginning.

One of the novel's main themes is the end of a way of living, the sunset of the crofters' days. On the one hand, the war brings prosperity to the tenant farmers due to the rise in the prices of meat and grain. For instance, Mutch, one of the crofters, manages to buy a car, something only the elite could afford in the beginning of the narrative (p. 247). Moreover, some of the farmers are able to buy their land and other pieces of the estate when the trustees decide to sell the property (p. 248, 253, 255). On the other hand, there is a price to pay for this economic improvement. The emergence of this "new gentry" does not imply that there was less inequality, the narrative voice affirming that "Rich and Poor were as far off being Equal as ever they'd been" (p. 254). In addition, some crofters, like the Munros, get carried away by the opportunity of making money, as it is clear in the following quotation: "[t]hey'd hardly ever a well-cooked meal in the house themselves, but if their stomachs had little in them their bank books knew no lack" (p. 255). This way, the possibility to earn more does not necessarily mean that their quality of life is much better or that they are less enslaved by their work.

Besides, this uncontrolled greediness leads to the decay of the land as Chae's

predictions about climate change due to the cutting down of the woods are fulfilled. The community narrative voice remarks nostalgically that “faith! the land looked unco [strange] and woe with its woods all gone, even in the thin sun-glimmer there came a cold shiver up over the parks of the Knapp and Blawearie, folk said that the land had gone cold and wet right up to the very Mains” (p. 259). A symbol of the death of a way of living, the cutting down of the trees represents the deterioration of the land “where once the parks flowed thick with corn” and which becomes fit only to the raising of sheep, something lamented by the community narrative voice (p. 255).

Other signs of decadence are the abandonment of the Mill and Pooty’s, as well as the decay of Pooty’s health. Pooty, the oldest inhabitant of Kinraddie, starts having a paranoid behavior during the war, being extremely frightened by the possibility of an invasion of the Germans or their ghosts (p. 210). This fear is probably stimulated and heightened by the intense war propaganda. At last, Pooty’s mental health deteriorates to the point that he has to be taken to a mental asylum (p. 249). As a result of his confinement and Rob’s death, their houses are deserted and start to crumble, which is yet another symbol of the end of an age and way of life.

Nevertheless, in spite of a somewhat nostalgic tone, the novel ends in a more positive note, with the hope for a better country in the future. Like the thistles, mentioned before as a Scottish national symbol, continue to grow in the midst of the desolation of Pooty’s, so can Scotland flourish after the radical changes brought by the war. This hope is embodied in Colquohoun, the new minister who arrives in Kinraddie after the war and shares the author’s left-wing political position.

Kinraddie witnesses political changes in the post-war years, with the strengthening of left-wing currents. Whereas at first the revolution which Chae hoped for was considered very distant by the community, especially by Rob (p. 36), there is more support for socialism after the war, even if most people in the village still resist it. An example of this is the creation of the Farm Servants’ Union – described by the narrative voice as “nonsense” (p. 251) – and its secretary’s decision to run as the Labour candidate for the Mearns in the General Election, showing cracks in the Tory and Liberal hegemony depicted in the by-election before the war. As “socialist creatures” come to help the Labour candidate, they gain the support of the daughter of one of the most conservative farmers in Kinraddie (p. 251-3), showing that Chae’s ideals and his hope that the war would contribute to a socialist revolution (p. 210) did not die with him.

The influence of the Russian Revolution is also felt in Kinraddie. Minister

Colquohoun's "fair objectionable" behavior is attributed to his being a Bolshevik (p. 256-257). The community condemns the minister's proximity to the peasants, his support for the ploughmen's union, and his sermons, which would "speak as though Christ had meant Kinraddie" and be interpreted as an incitement of rebellion (p. 256). Acting this way, he is compared to "those awful creatures, coarse tinks [disreputable people], that had made such a spleiter [mess] in Russia" (p. 257). This way, folk in Kinraddie see the influence of socialist ideas as undesirable and even a threat, taking them more seriously than before the war and the Russian Revolution, when they would simply laugh at Chae. However, Gibbon suggests that Colquohoun may represent a good path for Scotland to follow as his marriage to Chris is announced toward the end of the novel.

On the inauguration of Kinraddie's war memorial, Colquohoun begins his speech by reaffirming the end of an age, saying that "*[w]ith them we may say there died a thing older than themselves, these were the Last of the Peasants, the last of the Old Scots folk*" (p. 260). This passage reinforces the idea of the loss of a long tradition, which had been passed on for generations, and shows his high regard for the crofters. The minister also praises a simple life – in which one asks no more than "*the kindness of friends and the warmth of toil and the peace of rest*" (p. 261) – and harshly criticizes the excessive ambition felt by Kinraddie's folk, which is illustrated by the following fragment:

> *Nothing, it has been said, is true but change, nothing abides, and here in Kinraddie where we watch the building of those little prides and those little fortunes on the ruins of the little farms we must give heed that these also do not abide, that a new spirit shall come to the land with the greater herd and the great machines. [...] So, lest we shame them [the dead], let us believe that the new oppressions and foolish greeds are no more than mists that pass. They died for a world that is past, these men, but they did not die for this that we seem to inherit. Beyond it and us there shines a greater hope and a newer world, undreamt by these four died. But need we doubt which side the battle [sic] they would range themselves did they live to-day, need we doubt the answer they cry to us even now, the four of them, from the places of the sunset?* (p. 261).

Colquohoun expresses hope for a better future, free from oppression and the blind search for wealth. To reach this future and honor the dead, it is necessary that Kinraddie's folk change their attitude; however, it would still be an attainable goal from his viewpoint.

In sum, Gibbon introduces the reader to a community which preserves basically the same social and economic structure for a long time, with a few signs of change in the beginning of the 20th century. World War One acts as a catalyst and a trigger for transformation, leading not only to a new social and economic organization, but also to a change of mentality. Although these changes are recounted in a nostalgic tone, they also

represent the opportunity for a new beginning. It is in the hands of Kinraddie’s folk the chance to sow and reap a better future.

3 DOES ANYTHING ENDURE? – TRADITION IN *SUNSET SONG*

> *I find myself part of a history and that is generally to say, whether I like it or not, whether I recognize it or not, one of the bearers of a tradition.*
> (Alasdair MacIntyre)

As affirmed before, *Sunset Song* represents a moment of transition and the end of an old way of life. However, historical processes are marked by the interaction between permanence and change, which means that there are elements of continuity in the midst of transformation. As historian Fernand Braudel (1995, p. 31) puts it, civilizations acquire over time "a shape which is never wholly new but never quite the same as before". In Gibbon's *Sunset Song*, we may observe elements that endure in the long term, some of which constitute aspects of cultural identity and tradition. The aim of this chapter is to analyze these elements, exploring their continuity or transformation in the development of the narrative.

Change is an important theme in the novel, with the recurrent idea that everything but the land vanishes. This notion is frequently expressed in moments of transition in Chris's life, such as the one following her father's death or the day before her wedding, establishing an analogy between transformations at the individual and at the historical level. To Chris, however, the changes in one's life always pass and are insignificant in the long historical time. Her marriage and even her life would end as the landscape changed over and over through the centuries and "the sea came flooding up the Howe, all her love and tears for Ewan not even a ripple on that flood of water far in the times to be" (p. 152). This way, human existence is seen as an ephemeral element, irrelevant in cosmological time.

The belief that only the land endures may also be related to the attachment some characters, especially Chris and her parents, feel towards the land. Remembering her Greek lessons, in a reference to Heraclitus's idea that everything flows, Chris thinks that:

> nothing endured at all, nothing but the land she passed across, tossed and turned and perpetually changed below the hands of the crofter folk since the oldest of them had set the Standing Stones by the loch of Blawearie and climbed there on their holy days and saw their terraced crops ride brave [fine] in the wind and sun. Sea and sky and the folk who wrote and fought and were learned, teaching and saying and praying, they lasted but as a breath, a mist of fog in the hills, but the land was forever, it moved and changed below you, but was forever, you were close to it and it to you, not at a bleak remove it held you and hurted [sic] you. (p. 126)

In this fragment, the interplay between permanence and change is evident since the land is the

only thing which endures, though it is constantly transformed by the peasants' work. The strength of the land is emphasized as this element contrasts with the sea and the sky, described as transient. The passage also makes reference to the Standing Stones, showing that an abiding sign of the past other than the land is present in Kinraddie. In addition, this quotation reinforces Chris's – and the peasants' – attachment and closeness to the land, with the use of "you" suggesting that the reader may share this intimacy with the earth.

More than tourist attractions and statistics about the yearly produce, the Land – with capital "L" – is to Gibbon (2007b, p. 170) the combination of the landscape itself and the people who live there. The author also describes the country folk as possessing a special connection to the land, which is embodied by the figures of Chris's parents, among others. As Jean, her mother, remembers her youth, filled with nostalgia, she says "*Oh, Chris, my lass, there are better things than your books or studies or loving or bedding, there's the countryside your own, you its, in the days when you're neither bairn [child] nor woman*" (p. 37). This passage shows her sense of belonging to the land and the special place it has in her life. As for John Guthrie, an extremely religious man, the narrative voice mentions "the land he loved better than his soul or God" (p. 84), which shows the depth of his attachment to the land.

Nevertheless, Gibbon does not assume an uncritical, overly romanticized position in relation to the countryside. Even if Chris's mother describes her own childhood as the happiest time of her life, the poverty and lack of opportunities which characterized it are evident: her father earned thirteen shillings to support thirteen children, she stopped studying at the age of nine to start working and only wore shoes when she was twelve years old (p. 37). In his essay "The Land", Gibbon (2007b, p. 172) also expresses the hardship of the peasant life, which promises, in his words, "years of a murderous monotony, poverty and struggle and loss of happy human relationships". Thus, although the writer describes a sentimental connection between the crofters and the land, he highlights negative aspects of the life in the fields.

The harshness of farm work is only made worse by the fact that a good part of Scottish land is not particularly productive. Agriculture in Scotland is to Gibbon (2007b, p. 172) "heart-breaking toil in one of the most unkindly agricultural lands in the world". This characteristic of the soil is also present in *Sunset Song*, as John Guthrie realizes that the land in Blawearie is "so coarse" that "in a normal year the corn would come hardly at all on the long, stiff slopes of the dour red clay" (p. 84). Even Guthrie's bitter and authoritarian temper is related to the harshness of the soil and of the work in the fields, that is, "the fight unwearying he'd fought with the land and its masters to have them [his family] all clad and

fed and respectable" (p. 123). During her father's funeral, Chris remembers that he was once a more tender man, before "the world's fight and the fight of his own flesh grew over-bitter, and poisoned his love to hate" (p. 123). In these fragments, it is clear that tenant farmers have to endure a fierce struggle against both the roughness of the agricultural work and the landowners' exploitation.

As explored before, the poverty of the land is aggravated by the cutting down of the woods surrounding Kinraddie. Once again the events in the narrative mirror those in the real world, which is evident in Gibbon's (2007b, p. 173) account of his visit to the region, as it can be observed in the essay "The Land": "all the land about here is left bare in the North wind's blow". The author also establishes a parallel between the cutting down of the trees and other historical events both in his non-fiction and in *Sunset Song*. In the aforementioned essay, Gibbon (2007b, p. 173) affirms that the destruction of the woods was a repetition of the Highland clearances, "eating away the land and the crofter". These negative consequences are also emphasized in the novel, with Reverend Colquohoun stating in a sermon that "*[t]hey have made a desert and they call it peace*" (p. 255). This sentence is attributed by Tacitus to Calgacus, the Caledonian chieftain who fought the Romans, who would have said this in a reference to the destruction caused by the Roman army when invading territories. Besides highlighting the negative impact of the cutting down of the woods, the comparisons to other historical moments place this event in a broader context of the transformation and the desolation of the land, pointing out the repetition of destruction throughout history.

In spite of the attachment peasants feel toward the land, the hardships of the life in the countryside prevail with increasing frequency. The difficulty of the work and the exiguous earnings make some people encourage their children to leave the land in search for better opportunities. This may be illustrated by the following fragment:

> they [Kinraddie's people] agreed that the land was a coarse, coarse life, you'd do better at almost anything else, folks that could send their lads to learn a trade were right wise, no doubt of that, there was nothing on the land but work, work, work, and chave, chave, chave [work hard], from the blink of day till the fall of night, [...] and hardly a living to be made (p. 161).

This way, the end of the old crofter's day, although accelerated by the war, was a process already underway even before the beginning of the military conflict.

Gibbon's feelings about the land are, thus, not undivided. On the one hand, he praises the peasants and is proud to be the son of crofters and to feel the land as "so closely and intimately [his]" (GIBBON, 2007b, p. 171). On the other hand, he acknowledges the drawbacks of the work in the fields and the poverty afflicting many of those who earn their

living from the land. Gibbon (2007b, p. 171) also admits his former hatred for the countryside, stating that “once I had a very bitter detestation for all this life of the land and the folk upon it”. In this passage, he ironically compares his old views to those of his “distant cousin, Mr. Leslie Mitchell” and quotes from his novel *The Thirteenth Disciple*, published under his real name. The distance from his birthplace may have contributed to Gibbon’s change of mind as he affirms: “I would never apprehend its [the landscape’s] full darkly colourful beauty until I had gone back to England [...] I would see it in its simplicity then, even as I would see the people of the land” (GIBBON, 2007b, p. 177). With Chris, Gibbon seems to have created a character that mirrors his own ambivalence toward the land.

3.1 **Divided Selves: Being Scottish and/or English**

Chris, like Gibbon, has a complex relationship with the land, holding mixed feelings about it. This may be illustrated by the following fragment: “she hated also and she didn’t hate, father, the land, the life of the land – oh, if only she knew!” (p. 40). Competing with her bond with the land is her love of books and learning, and her dream to become a teacher and leave the farm work behind.

Chris’s keen interest in school sets her apart from most of Kinraddie’s inhabitants, who see education in a negative light. For many people in the community, education is useless and only makes one’s children more arrogant, which is evident in the excerpt: “[m]ost said it was a coarse thing, learning, just teaching your children a lot of nonsense that put them above themselves, they’d turn around and give you their lip as soon as look at you” (p. 94). As in many other instances in the book, Chae and Rob are the only dissonant voices in this discussion about education. Both of them believe a broader access to education is in tune with their respective socialist and anticlerical ideals since “*[e]ducation’s the thing the working man wants to put him up level with the Rich*” and “*the more education the more of sense and the less of kirks [church] and ministers*” (p. 94).

Chris’s conflicting interests and bonds are symbolized in the novel in the description of two personalities, two Chrisses. An instance of this characterization is this quotation:

> So that was Chris and her reading and schooling, two Chrisses there were that fought for her heart and tormented her. You hated the land and the coarse speak of the folk and the learning was brave and fine one day; and the next you’d waken with the peewits crying across the hills, deep and deep, crying in the heart of you and the

> smell of the earth in your face, almost you'd cry for that, the beauty of it and the sweetness of the Scottish land and skies. (p. 41-42)

The girl's dilemma between her fondness of the land and of education is clearly expressed in this passage. Chris's wavering is also suggested by the author's word choice in this fragment from the text as learning is characterized as "brave and fine", with an adaptation of a Scottish word – "brave" is an approximation of the Scots "braw", meaning "fine" – and an English one. Another formal feature, Gibbon's use of "you", brings the reader closer to Chris's divided feelings.

The two sides of Chris's personality are also characterized and separated in terms of nationality. The interest in education, at the expense of her attachment to the land, is embodied in an English personality, as illustrated by the following excerpt: "you've your lessons and studies, the English Chris, and living and eating and sleeping that other Chris that stretches your toes for you in the dark of the night and whispers a drowsy *I'm you*" (p. 56). The English Chris also despises the people who look down on education in Kinraddie, considering them "yokels and clowns everlasting, dull-brained and crude" (p. 94). The use of the derogatory term "yokel" to refer to people from the countryside points out to the English personality's derision for the land and its folk.

Chris's English and Scottish personalities are related to different interests in the novel. Ian Campbell (1974, p. 48) argues that Chris faces a choice between intellectual and emotional satisfaction. Her English self is associated to school and her desire to follow a teacher's career and escape "the weary pleiter [working or walking in wetness or mud] of the land and its life while you waited for rain and thaw" (p. 70). Books take Chris to a distant, "magic land [...] out and away and south" (p. 40), reinforcing the relationship between learning and the English self. The Scottish Chris, also called the Murdoch in her – a reference to her mother's former last name –, is characterized by her bond to the land and all that is associated with it, such as the crofters, their way of speaking, and the farming life. This Chris is the one who, while at school, "laughed a canny laugh at the antics of the teachers and minded [remembered] Blawearie brae and the champ of horses and the smell of dung and her father's brown, grained hands till she was sick to be home again" (p. 54).

This inner conflict experienced by Chris is affected by changes in her life, namely her mother's and her father's death. After Jean's suicide, Chris leaves school to take on the household chores. Along with her mother, "the child in your heart died then [...] That died, and the Chris of the books and the dreams died with it, or you folded them up in their paper of tissue and laid them away by the dark, quiet corpse that was your childhood" (p. 72-73). Thus,

English Chris's dream to have a teaching career and leave the land is deferred. Afterwards, though, her father's death leaves her in a position to choose what to do: "now she could do as she'd planned, she'd go up to the College again and pass her exams and go on to Aberdeen and get her degrees, come out as a teacher and finish with the filthy soss [mess] of a farm" (p. 125).

However, along with the freedom to do as she pleased comes the realization of the strength of her connection to the land. After the reading of her father's will, Chris feels that her desire to follow her plans is no longer as intense as it used to be. Then, during a walk over the fields, she becomes aware that her attachment to the land cannot be relinquished, as shown by the following passage:

> She walked weeping then, stricken and frightened because of that knowledge that had come on her, she could never leave it, this life of toiling days and the needs of beasts and the smoke of wood fires and the air that stung your throat so acrid, Autumn and Spring, she was bound and held as though they had prisoned her here. [...] She could no more teach a school than fly, night and day she'd want to be back, for all the fine clothes and gear she might get and hold, the books and the light and learning. (p. 126)

Thus, Chris's ultimate choice is to stay in Kinraddie, her connection to the land prevailing over the English Chris's plans. According to Campbell (1974, p. 49), the emotional bonds to the farming life are "too strong to be broken by an essentially intellectual desire to be free of them".

Although the love for the land eventually preponderates over her intellectual pursuits, the English Chris has an enduring influence on the girl's way of thinking, which contributes to making her different from most of the community. As previously mentioned, Chris holds different moral values from most of Kinraddie, which can be exemplified by this quotation: "it was maybe because she was over-young, had read over-many books, had been the English Chris as well as this one [...] the old ways of sinning and winning, having your own pleasure and standing affronted at other folk having theirs, seemed often daft to her" (p. 135).

Besides the feelings for the land and education, Chris's different selves are also distinguished by their preference for the Scots or the English language. This linguistic question is part of a bigger discussion both in Gibbon's fictional and non-fictional works, being an issue of fundamental importance in Scottish history and literature. The status of the Scots language is closely related to political matters and to the constitution of a national identity.

Stephen Barbour (2000, p. 28) states that there are two tiers of national identity in Britain: a British, civic identity and more ethnic ones, that is, English, Welsh, and Scottish

identities. Nevertheless, given the English political, economic and cultural dominance within the United Kingdom, the differences between British and English national identities are not easily discernible. In this context, Scottish identity is "clearly linked to language [...] in very complex ways" (BARBOUR, 2000, p. 28-29). Linguistic questions are so intertwined with politics that the very definitions of language and dialect rely both on linguistic and on political and social aspects (CRYSTAL, 1990, p. 217). Whereas David Crystal (1990, p. 217) affirms that the definition of Scots as a language – and not a dialect of English – is controversial, Barbour (2000, p. 30) claims that Scots can be considered a distinct language due to its separate process of codification and to the fact that it is not easily understandable to most English-speakers from England.

Different languages have coexisted in Scotland for a long time, with the simultaneous presence of Scots, Scottish Gaelic and English for centuries. Scots developed during the Middle Ages, when it grew increasingly distinct from English, with which it shares its origin. Scots – also called Lallans ("Lowland language") – replaced Gaelic, of Celtic origin, in the Lowlands and became the state language. However, Scotland's loss of independence and political power contributed to the decline of the Scots language status. After the Union of the Crowns (1603) and the Union of Parliaments (1707), the influence of English language and culture was more strongly felt, leading to the progressive assimilation of Scottish culture. As a result, Scots came to be regarded as merely a group of dialects of English, and not a language in its own right. This way, Scots was considered a corrupted form of English, which should be corrected in order to be free from all Scotticisms. In the 18th century, members of the educated elite in general, such as David Hume, aspired to using "proper" English and excluding from their texts all marks from Scots (JOBIM; HENRIQUES, 1996, p. 123).

Nevertheless, this process of erasure of Scottish language and culture was resisted by many who wished to preserve a distinct Scottish identity. This will to perpetuate the Scots language was particularly felt in the literary production of the time, especially through the anthologies and poems of Allan Ramsay (1686-1758), Robert Fergusson (1750-1774) and Robert Burns (1759-1796). In an example of the close relationship between language and nationalism, these writers were stimulated not only by an affective bond to Scottish cultural tradition, but also by the desire of Scottish self-government (SCOTT, 2002, p. 16). Their works contributed to attract, even outside of Scotland, interest in the national literature and culture. In the early 19th century, Walter Scott (1771-1832) included Scots in the speech of some characters in his *Waverley Novels*, showing a certain desire to preserve this language. In order to reach a broader audience, the author combined English and Scots and made some

adaptations to make Scottish terms more easily understandable. The use of Scots also served as a mark of social rank, as only characters belonging to the lower classes employed Scottish words and expressions (JOBIM; HENRIQUES, 1996, p. 125).

In the beginning of the 20th century, the prejudice against Scots remained, with its use being strongly repressed at schools. However, within the context of the Scottish Literary Renaissance, which included the search for a distinctive national identity and literature, Hugh MacDiarmid promoted a revival of the Scots language in his poetic works. In his essay "Literary Lights", Lewis Grassic Gibbon asserts the importance of the use of Scots in order to write Scottish, rather than English, literature. Gibbon (2007b, p. 147) claims that Scottish authors writing in English are behind in terms of formal innovation because they write in a language which is not their first. Besides, their texts sound alien to English readers, "as though the writer did not *write* himself, but *translated* himself" (GIBBON, 2007b, p. 146, italics in the original).

Gibbon (2007b, p. 146) sees the Scots language in a positive light, as conveying to Scottish authors "a richness, a clarity and a conciseness impossible in orthodox English". The author attributes a great importance to Scots, as well as acknowledges the prejudice against it among the upper classes, which may be illustrated by the following passage:

> it [Scots] is still in most Scottish communities, (in one or other Anglicized modification,) the speech of bed and board and street and plough, the speech of emotional ecstasy and emotional stress. But it is not genteel. It is to the bourgeois of Scotland coarse and low and common and loutish, a matter for laughter, well enough for hinds and the like, but for the genteel to be quoted in vocal inverted commas. (GIBBON, 2007b, p. 146)

Thus, the writer associates Scots both to emotions and to the everyday life of those who are not part of the elite.

In Gibbon's (2007b, p. 148) opinion, most Scottish authors of the early 20th century should not be considered Scots writers. From his point of view, nationality expresses itself in literature not only in the characters and landscape, but also in the language used. This idea is evident, for example, in his assessment of the works of Neil Gunn (1891-1973), another 20th century Scottish writer: "Mr. Gunn is a brilliant novelist from Scotshire who chooses his home country as the scene of his tales […] Writing in orthodox English, he is merely a brilliantly unorthodox Englishman" (GIBBON, 2007b, p. 149-150). Gibbon's characterization of Gunn as a writer not from Scotland, but from Scotshire, expresses the idea that the latter's works lack a specific Scottish quality and identity, which is clearly related to the language employed in them. Hence, to Gibbon's mind, it is not enough to be a Scottish-born writer or

set one's narratives in Scotland, choosing a language from the native country – either Scots or Gaelic – is fundamental to the writing of a national literature.

Furthermore, the use of the national language should not be restricted to a few characters, according to Gibbon. When discussing the works of John Buchan (1875-1940), which he considers completely unrelated to Scotland, Gibbon (2007b, p. 151) affirms that little Scots is present in his narratives, "when his characters talk Scots they do it in suitable inverted commas: and such characters as do talk Scots are always the simple, the proletarian, the slightly ludicrous characters". This use of Scots reproduces the social stigma which relegated Scots to an inferior position in relation to English, as a language which should be avoided by educated people. Gibbon (2007b, p. 151, italics in the original) addresses this question and shows his negative opinion about this limited use of Scots, stating that Buchan "could envisage Braid Scots as being only a 'vernacular,' the tongue of *a home-reared slave*".

An advocate of a wider use of Scots in literature, Gibbon adopts in *A Scots Quair* a style radically different from the restricted use of this language in dialogues. The author, however, does not abandon the use of the English language as it allows his work to reach a broader audience. His intention is, as he describes in the essay "Literary Lights", "to mould the English language into the rhythms and cadences of Scots spoken speech, and to inject into the English vocabulary such minimum number of words from Braid Scots as that remodelling requires" (GIBBON, 2007b, p. 155). Gibbon even adapts the spelling of some Scots words to make them closer to English. Thus, his desire to be understood by the English-speaking public is evident, without, however, obliterating the Scots spoken in the area portrayed in the novels.

Gibbon announces his approach to language with a note to the reader right in the beginning of *Sunset Song*, claiming that the writer of a disappearing language "might import into his pages some score or so untranslatable words and idioms – untranslatable except in their context and setting" and might shape the language in which he is writing "to the rhythms and cadences of the kindred speech that his peasants speak" (p. 4). According to Billy Kay (2006, p. 76), Gibbon writes *Sunset Song* in such a way that "for those from a Scots-speaking background, it can be rendered broad Scots by simply changing the pronunciation and intonation of the English text". The mixture of English and Scots is used not only in dialogues, but also by the narrative voice throughout the book. The narrative voice's diction and style do not differ significantly from the characters' since, as aforementioned, the text incorporates some characteristics of oral language.

The complex linguistic politics in Scotland is acknowledged not only in the author's style, but also in the opinions and feelings expressed by the characters. In the novel, Scots is

associated with tradition and emotional bonds while English is the language of education and the opportunity of social advancement. Rob, a representative of the peasant tradition, deplores the decline of the use of Scots and the language's lack of social prestige. Regretting in strong language the high status held by English at the expense of Scots, the character says "what a shame it was that folk should be shamed nowadays to speak Scotch" and that "[e]very damned little narrow-dowped [dowp = buttocks] rat that you met put on the English if he thought he'd impress you – as though Scotch wasn't good enough now" (p. 161).

Besides, Rob praises the expressivity of the Scots language, which possesses words that, according to him, "the thin bit scraichs [screeches] of the English could never come at" (p. 161). He gives several examples of terms which he considers untranslatable to English: "*You can tell me, man, what's the English for sotter, or greip, or smore, or pleiter, gloaming or glunching or well-kenspeckled?*[8] *And if you said gloaming was sunset you'd fair be a liar*" (p. 161). This passage deals with the question of the untranslatable quality of some words, which is addressed by Gibbon in his note to the reader. As well as highlighting the richness of Scots, this quotation reveals the affective nuances underlying one's native language since, even though Gibbon's glossary includes correspondents in English for some of the terms mentioned by Rob, the author reinforces their untranslatability and states that his translations are actually "a mere approximation" (p. 291).

In response to Rob's passionate defense of Scots, other characters remember the practical value of speaking English, such as more opportunities of social mobility. The following passage makes this idea clear:

> *You can't help it, Rob. If folk are to get on in the world nowadays, away from the ploughshafts and out of the pleiter [working or walking in wetness or mud], they must use the English, orra [strange, worthless] though it be.* And Chae cried out that was right enough, and God! Who could you blame? (p. 161).

Even though the crofters show a preference for Scots, they recognize that speaking English is necessary in order to escape the exhausting farm work. Consequently, they do not condemn those who adopt the English language as Rob harshly does.

Nevertheless, speaking English is generally considered pedantic in the community, as an attitude of those who want to sound superior. An example of this is the folk's judgment of the Gordons, characters described as proud and being "near to gentry" (p. 27). As Mrs. Gordon tries to speak English and to make her daughters do the same, the community

8 sotter = to bubble stagnantly; greip = a kind of cow-shed drain; smore = to smother; pleiter = working or walking in wetness or mud; glunching = to mutter half-threateningly, half-fearfully; well-kenspeckled = trim

narrative voice, showing a negative opinion about this behavior, remarks that the girls mix Scots and English and “look so proud it was all you could do to stop yourself catching the futret across your knee and giving her a bit skelp” (p. 28). After getting richer during the war, the Gordons become “fell gentry” and “you couldn’t get within a mile of the Upperhill [Gordons’ estate] without you’d hear a blast of the English, so fine and genteel” (p. 251), which causes the community’s mockery.

As for Chris, the conflict between her two personalities also involves the choice between English and Scots. This inner struggle is evident in the following passage:

> You saw their faces in firelight, father’s and mother’s and the neighbours’, before the lamps lit up, tired and kind, faces dear and close to you, you wanted the words they’d known and used, forgotten in the far-off youngness of their lives, Scots words to tell to your heart how they wrung it and held it, the toil of their days and unendingly their fight. And the next minute that passed from you, you were English, back to English words so sharp and clean and true – for a while, for a while, till they slid so smooth from your throat you knew they could never say anything that was worth the saying at all. (p. 42)

This quotation shows that the English Chris, with her love for study, prefers English, the language of instruction at Scottish schools, reflecting the role of schools as “the instruments, or the perpetrators, of an organized drive to separate Scottish children from their native linguistic background” (McCLURE, 1980, p. 14). Nonetheless, Chris has a strong emotional attachment to Scots, the language associated to family and to a sense of community, a group which shares the everyday toil and fight. This affective relationship with Scots echoes Gibbon’s own statement, previously quoted, that Scots is the language of “emotional ecstasy and emotional stress” (GIBBON, 2007b, p. 146). This passage from the novel also suggests that the Scottish self will eventually prevail since it describes that, however “sharp” and “clean” English may be, only Scots can express anything of worth to Chris.

3.2 **Singing the nation in *Sunset Song***

As its title suggests, the presence of music in the novel is significant and pervasive. Music appears in important scenes of the narrative, especially in Chris’s wedding and the inauguration of Kinraddie’s war memorial. The poems and songs referred to in the novel reveal the perpetuation of cultural traditions in the community, as well as denote the changes through which the village goes during and after World War One.

There is a strong presence of folk songs, English or Scottish, in the narrative, which shows once more the value attributed to popular oral culture. Among these songs, the works of Robert Burns are particularly recurrent. It is suggested in the novel that songs and poems by Scotland's national bard are deeply ingrained in the community as they are sung not only in special celebrations, like Chris's wedding and the New Year's eve, but also during everyday activities, such as while Rob works or Will goes out to take the train. Chris even remembers that she and Will used *Up in the Morning Early* as a signal when they went to school together (p. 109). This prevalence of Burns's songs may be partially explained by the fact that the poet frequently worked upon songs and lyrics which were already in circulation in Scotland. This is the case of some of the songs mentioned in the novel, such as *Auld Lang Syne* and *Up in the Morning Early* (BURNS, 2009, p. 310, 341).

Songs are also associated to a national mood, as well as the Scottish nature and climate. After a sequence of sad Scottish songs, like *The Bonnie House o' Airlie* and *Auld Robin Gray*, is sung during Chris's wedding, she thinks

> how strange was the sadness of Scotland's singing, made for the sadness of the land and sky in the dark autumn evenings, the crying of men and women of the land who had seen their lives and loves sink away in the years, things wept for beside the sheep-buchts [sheep pen], remembered at night and in twilight. The gladness and kindness had passed, lived and forgotten, it was Scotland of the mist and rain and the crying sea that made the songs (p. 171).

In this quotation, the sadness of the songs is associated with the bleak Scottish weather and the disappointments experienced by the people of the land. Folk songs are also closely related to a rural setting in the passage, with reference to the land and to sheep pens. Moreover, the melancholy of many songs played during the wedding may act as a foreshadowing of the loss and the end of a way of living to be brought by the war.

Furthermore, the songs mark the moment of transition lived by the community in the early 20th century. From the beginning of the narrative, it is described that Rob likes to sing while he works, making songs such as *Ladies of Spain* – an English naval song from the 18th century – echo through Kinraddie. During the war years, Rob keeps singing the same songs; however, "[h]ardly anybody left in Kinraddie sang these songs" anymore (p. 234). While Rob represents tradition, like "an echo from far in the years at the mouth of a long lost glen" (p. 234), the new trends are the songs popular among British troops, such as *It's a Long, Long Way to Tipperary* and *There's a Long, Long Trail*, which are negatively regarded by the narrative voice as "squawling English things, like the squeak of a rat that is bedded in syrup" (p. 234). After the war, however, the narrative voice is not even able to remember the name of

one of the songs that Robert used to sing and remarks that "[y]ou heard feint the meikle [very little] of those old songs now, they were daft and old-fashioned, there were fine new ones in their places, right from America, folk said" (p. 251). This way, the references to the songs which are popular in Kinraddie reveal both the cultural impact of the war and the growing influence of American culture after the conflict, with the increasing popularity of the blues.

Some of the songs in the novel make direct reference to events from the history of Scotland. In some instances, the historical context is not explored in the narrative, for example, the references to *The Bonnie House o' Airlie* and *A' the Blue Bonnets Are Over the Border* do not deal with the facts which inspired the songs, respectively, the political and religious conflicts in the 17th century and the Jacobite Rising of 1745. The most important of the songs with historical reference is, undoubtedly, *The Flowers of the Forest*. As previously stated, the references to the lament on the Battle of Flodden (1513) are recurrent in the narrative, with the song being invested with a new meaning and recontextualized to honor the dead in World War One. The final scene of the novel portrays the contrast between generations: while the Highlander McIvor, embodying what is often considered typically Scottish, plays *The Flowers of the Forest* on the bagpipes, those who experienced the war cry, but young farm workers "stood with glum, white faces, they'd no understanding or caring, it [the song] was something that vexed and tore at them, it belonged to times they had no knowing of" (p. 262). Hence, the presence of the song represents the relation between past and present and, at the same time, reveals that there may be changes so profound that lead to a certain distance between new generations and the past.

3.3 **Religions – old and new**

Religion has helped to shape Scottish culture and identity, leaving an important and lasting legacy to the nation. Cairns Craig (2002, p. 37) affirms that Calvinism was an important factor in preserving a distinct Scottish identity within the United Kingdom since it was the basis of fundamental institutions. The scholar also relates this religion to the nation's emotional landscape, associating Calvinism both with fear and a sense of community (CRAIG, 2002, p. 37). According to Craig (2002, p. 36-37), religion represents the foundation of the strict moral code ruling the communities, which gives origin, at the same time, to the fear of God and to fearless individuals who challenge the rules.

This close association between the Presbyterian sternness and fear is also present in Gibbon's works. In his essay "Religion", Gibbon (2007b, p. 185) describes how ministers and the community itself controlled and surveilled other people, and compares the dominion of religion to "a reign of terror". The writer also attributes great power to the Church of Scotland, affirming that the Scottish clergy "were the real rulers of the Scots scene" and kept "people under a rigorous rule" (GIBBON, 2007b, p. 187). Even though Kinraddie's folk do not face the Sunday strict inspections or Catechism questions described in the essay, the practice of prying into others' lives is still strong, with many rumors circulating through the community.

The strong relationship between religion and other institutions in Scotland is exemplified in *Sunset Song* by the interaction between the Church of Scotland and politics. In the novel, the proximity between the church and political power is clear in the description of the religious services, with sermons which ranged from anti-German propaganda, as previously explained, to prayers for the members of the royal family (p. 36, 221). As mentioned earlier, Reverend Gibbon also shows his support for the Tory candidate in the by-election (p. 105).

In addition, it is possible to see in the novel the emergence of a wave of younger, left-wing-oriented ministers, embodied in the figure of Colquohoun, Kinraddie's minister after the war. The Kinraddie community, who is mostly conservative, deems his behavior "fair objectionable", feeling uncomfortable about his support for the ploughmen's union and his criticism on the wages paid by farmers to their employees (p. 256). In contrast, the author, despite his general negative view of religion, sees these younger ministers in a positive light, affirming in his essay that "[t]here are few such pleasant people as the younger ministers of Scotland. [...] They are (the most of them) free-hearted and liberal, mild socialists" (GIBBON, 2007b, p. 188).

Some features of the Church of Scotland – or the "Auld Kirk", as referred to in the narrative – are evident in *Sunset Song*. The Church of Scotland, established during the 16th century Reformation, is a Protestant religion, very different in structure from the Anglican Church, which led, as aforementioned, to a series of religious conflicts in the 17th century. One aspect of the Kirk's presbyterian organization is the custom to have the congregation vote to choose the parish minister after each candidate preaches a sermon. This practice appears twice in the narrative, once before and once after the war (p. 62-64, 256).

Another characteristic of the Church of Scotland which figures in the novel is the sober decoration of the churches, a common feature in Protestant denominations. Describing

the main hall of Kinraddie's church, the narrative voice states: "there were no pictures in there at all, who wanted them? Only coarse creatures like Catholics wanted a kirk to look like a grocer's calendar" (p. 16). Besides showing the lack of decoration in the church, this passage hints at the sectarianism in Scotland, revealing a negative opinion and hostility toward Catholics.

Some influence of the Church of England can also be noticed in the novel. As Reverend Gibbon preaches his trial sermon, he says the Lord's Prayer in a less common way: "[f]or though he begged to be forgiven his sins as he forgave those who sinned against him – instead, as was more genteel, crying to be forgiven his trespasses as he forgave those that trespassed against him" (p. 63). According to Malcolm (2007, p. 280), the use of the term "trespasses" is present in the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*, but not in the Authorised Version of the Bible, used by the Church of Scotland. The minister's choice to replace the terms of the Scottish version with those of the English one is considered more refined and something that "pleased gentry" (p. 63), suggesting the higher prestige associated with elements from English culture.

As mentioned before, although the community generally regards ministers as deserving of respect and deference, the narrative voice at times expresses negative judgment on them. The community narrative voice makes critical remarks about the content of the sermons, which may be exemplified by the commentary on the ministers that came from other parishes before Kinraddie chose one parson: "God knows for all they had to say they might well have bidden at home" (p. 17). Besides, the ambition of part of the clergy is also criticized, for example, when some members of the congregation argue that an older minister is preferable since he is "not aye [always] on the look for a bigger kirk and a bigger stipend. For if there's a body on earth that would skin a tink [travelling or disreputable person] for his sark [shirt] and preach for a pension in purgatory it's an Auld Kirk minister" (p. 62).

The criticism of ministers is part of a tendency in the novel to expose the hypocrisy of the characters more closely associated with religion. An example of this is the characterization of Reverend Gibbon as an adulterous man prone to drinking. Whereas he reprimands Will based merely on rumors about his relationship with his girlfriend, the minister's behavior toward women is far from complying with Christian morals, with several instances of adultery, for example the one during Chris's wedding (p. 90, 165). Moreover, the minister's attitude corroborates the narrative voice's statement about the ambition of clerics. During the war, he leaves Kinraddie to work as a colonel-chaplain in Edinburgh, seeking a more prestigious position (p. 210). After the war, instead of going back to Kinraddie, he emigrates

to New York, to which the narrative voice reacts with a biting remark: “[w]ell, well, he’d done well for himself, it was plain to see; no doubt the Americans would like him fine, they could stand near anything out in America, their stomachs were awful tough with all the coarse things that they ate out of tins” (p. 256). This way, it is clear that his most pressing concerns are his own position and stipend, and not the well-being of his congregation.

John Guthrie is another character who is target of criticism on account of his hypocritical behavior in the novel. Religious to the point of extremism, Chris’s father is exceedingly authoritarian, submitting the whole family to his strict rules. His abuses range from forcing his wife to have more children against her will to brutally beating his son for using the word “Jehovah” to name a horse when the boy was unaware of its meaning (p. 38, 40). Nevertheless, the affirmative that “[h]e wouldn’t do anything against God’s will” (p. 38) does not hold true as John Guthrie fails to live up to the standards which he imposes on his family. An instance of this fact is the character’s lust, which he regrets when witnessing his wife’s difficult labor of twins: “[he] sat with his head between his hands and groaned and said he was a miserable sinner, God forgive him the lusts of the flesh” (p. 43). However, his repentance does not last for long, ultimately leading to Jean’s suicide as she discovers herself pregnant one more time. In addition, Guthrie expresses his incestuous desire for Chris after her mother’s death, with a reference to the story of Lot and his daughters, as the following passage may illustrate:

> father lay with the red in his face and his eye on her, whispering and whispering at her, the harvest in his blood, whispering her to come to him, they’d done it in Old Testament times, whispering *You’re my flesh and blood, I can do with you what I will, come to me, Chris, do you hear?* (p. 115).

Thus, religion is not represented as contributing to a more moral behavior since characters more closely related to it have hypocritical attitudes, not following the principles that they preach.

In contrast, the characters who are not religious are presented in a more positive way. Rob shocks the community since “he didn’t believe in ministers or kirks, he’d learned that from the books of Ingersoll though God knows if the creature’s logic was as poor as his watches he was but a sorry prop to lean on” (p. 27). The narrative voice’s comment reveals folk’s ignorance as they confuse two homonyms: the writer of agnostic texts and the owner of a company which sells watches (MALCOLM, 2007, p. 276). Despite his aversion to religion, Rob is considered “a fine stock” (p. 251) by the community and is portrayed in a good way, showing himself to be a constant and loyal friend to Chris. Thus, the narrative implies that

having a religion is not a condition for being an ethical person, reflecting Gibbon's (2007b, p. 183) affirmative that religion "is not ethics; it is not morality".

Chris herself is not a religious person, although not so vocal about it as Rob. Craig (2002, p. 68) considers her a fearless – in opposition to God-fearing – character, one who is not bound by the community's moral values. For the scholar, her fearlessness "is not achieved without separation from the community, without defiance of its timidity and its fear-inducing gossip"; however, Chris escapes from a fearful state without having to utterly repudiate her community and move to a new place (CRAIG, 2002, p. 66, 68). As for religion, Chris rejects the idea that the Scottish people have a strong faith, as she affirms in a conversation with her brother: "*I don't believe they were ever religious, the Scots folk, Will – not really religious like Irish or French or all the rest in the history books. They've never BELIEVED. It's just been a place to collect and argue, the kirk, and criticise God*" (p. 221). This belief that religion fulfills a role more related to social life than faith in Scotland mirrors what Gibbon (2007b, p. 189) states in his non-fiction: "[h]ere you behold not the fervid Presbyterian but the bored (if complacent) farmer and his wife attending a mild social function. They are going to church because there is nothing much else to be done on a Sunday". Hence, Gibbon downplays the relevance of doctrine, focusing more on how religion shapes social life in Scotland.

The disconnect between the community and faith grows more intense with the coming of the war and the consequent atrocities and losses. This change may be illustrated by the following dialogue between Chae and Mistress Mutch when he comes home on leave: "she asked Chae when the War was to end, and Chae said *God only knows* and she asked *And you still believe in Him?* And Chae was real shocked [...] But now that he thought of God for himself he just couldn't say, there was more of his Enemy over in France" (p. 209). This passage shows the rise of skepticism, demonstrating yet another change in society brought by the war. For Gibbon (2007b, p. 195), who harshly criticizes religion and considers it a form of oppression, its disappearance would be positive since the good things in the world "remain and are made the more gracious and serene and unthreatened as Religion passes. Passing, it takes with it nothing of the good – pity and hope and benevolence".

In addition to the Church of Scotland, Gibbon makes reference in *Sunset Song* to religious rituals from much earlier than the Reformation or even the arrival of Christianity in Scotland. The presence of a circle of Standing Stones in Kinraddie serves as a witness of rituals from ancient times, when "they'd [the Druids] climb up there and sing their foul heathen songs around the stones; and if they met a bit Christian missionary they'd gut him as soon as look at him" (p. 20). This passage shows some confusion regarding the prehistoric

peoples in Scotland as most standing stones date back from before the arrival of the Celts or Christian missionaries in the country. This quotation also reveals the community's negative view of the ancient, non-Christian peoples as primitive savages and "awful ignorant people" (p. 20). The only dissonant voice is Rob's since his anticlerical views lead him to see the slaying of Christian missionaries as positive, stating that "what Scotland wanted was a return of the Druids" (p. 20).

The Standing Stones are associated with the supernatural and provoke fear in members of the community. The narrative voice affirms that few people climb Blawearie brae in the evening because of the circle of stones, suggesting that many are afraid of them. John Guthrie, who shares the community's negative opinion of those who erected the Standing Stones, calling them "skin-clad savages" who "were burning in hell", seems to be afraid of the circle. When he looks at the Stones, Chris has the impression "that he kind of shivered, as though he were feared, him that was feared at nothing dead or alive, gentry or common" (p. 51). The mysterious, unearthly atmosphere surrounding Kinraddie's Standing Stones is reinforced by Chae's vision of one of Calgacus's soldiers near them, which was previously discussed. Chae is terribly frightened by the incident, which leaves him with the "blood running cold" and his "hackles fair stood up" (p. 211).

The great importance of the Standing Stones in the narrative is highlighted by the structure of the novel. Each section is bookended by a scene set near the Stones in which Chris recalls past events, with the story up to these scenes narrated in flashback. If at first Chris is scared of the Stones, her feelings towards them soon change. As she walks near the circle, "a queer, uncanny feeling came on Chris then, she looked back half-feared at the Stones" (p. 66), a feeling which accompanies her as she walks through the churchyard. In both places, figures from the past haunt young Chris, who imagines that "the wild men climbed the brae [hill] and sang their songs in the lithe of those shadows while the gloaming [sunset] waited there above the same quiet hills" (p. 66), reinforcing the notion that that same landscape witnessed the events of thousands of years back. Fear, however, gives way to comfort and rest as the Standing Stones become the place where Chris can go to think about her life and remember what happened to her. In the beginning of the third section, when Chris is pregnant and has just had an argument with Ewan, she runs uphill and

> leant against it [the biggest stone], the bruised cheek she leaned and it was strange and comforting – stranger still when you thought that this old stone circle, more and more as the years went on in Kinraddie, was the only place where ever she could come and stand back a little from the clamour of the days (p. 115).

This way, the Standing Stones are a place of comfort, where Chris can rest and distance herself from the hurried everyday life, “the wheel and grind of days” (p. 115). As she stays there and thinks of her past, it also represents a place of memory – both hers and the nation’s.

The association of the stone circle with the supernatural may also bring solace to Chris. Close to the end of the novel, after finding out that Ewan was executed as a traitor, Chris follows an acute urge to climb the hill and stand near the Standing Stones, where she has a vision of her dead husband coming toward her. Their reunion, foiled in life by the war, is possible in the supernatural atmosphere surrounding the Standing Stones: “*Oh lassie, I’ve come home!* he said, and went into the heart that was his forever” (p. 244). Thus, their story of love and heartbreak ends in a harmonious resolution, offering solace to Chris. Once again, she finds comfort and relief from her grief near the mystical environment of the Stones.

As a vestige of a remote time, the Standing Stones represent an element of permanence, a mark of the past in the present. Chris’s special connection with the circle of stones suggests that she is a symbol of continuity. As a child of the land and the farm folk, Chris endures in the midst of a world in transformation. As much as she and the world around her may change, her experiences and her strong attachment to the land leave an indelible mark and influence upon her. Like Scotland, Chris survives the war and has to look forward without forgetting the past since it has a profound impact on her growth and development.

Furthermore, the Standing Stones are symbolic of the aforementioned notion of historical cycles and repetition. A trace of a prehistoric past, the stone circle is endowed with new meaning as it becomes a memorial to those who passed away in the First World War, being invested with a new layer of memory. As Cairns Craig (2002, p. 126) remarks, the creation of the war memorial echoes the scene of Chris and Ewan’s visit to Dunnottar Castle, in which they read the inscription paying tribute to the Covenanters who died there. The presence of both memorials indicates not only the cycle of life and death, but also the idea of historic repetition, with the recurrence of conflicts and destruction.

3.4 **Vicious circle: social hierarchy and immobility**

Another aspect which endures in the long term is the social divide between rich and poor, gentry and workers. Hereditary rights over the land help to perpetuate social inequality throughout the centuries. After the land of Kinraddie is granted in the Middle Ages to

Cospatric de Gondeshil “and the issue of his body for ever after” (p. 10), it remains in the hands of the family until the beginning of the 20th century, when the last heir is committed to an asylum and the property is mortgaged. This way, the Kinraddie family exercises political and economic domination in that region for centuries, regardless of all the transformations undergone by Scotland in the period.

As for the peasants, even though the importance of their work makes Gibbon (2007b, p. 174) consider them “the real rulers of Scotland” and “the rulers of the earth”, they are chained to a life of exhausting, endless toil from time immemorial. The description of a crofter's life in the 18th century, which does not differ much from John Guthrie's, Rob's or Chae's life, is the following: “you worked from the blink of the day you were breeked [put into trousers, grown up] to the flicker of the night they shrouded you, and the dirt of gentry sat and ate up your rents but you were as good as they were” (p. 12). This passage indicates the social abyss between those who work and those who profit from others' work, as well as points out the injustice underlying this system. The narrative voice criticizes the elite and affirms that all people are equal in worth, implying that there should not be such huge differences in their circumstances in life. The use of “you” to refer to the peasants brings the reader closer to these characters, making the audience put themselves in their position. Inequality, however, does not exist only between farmers and gentry, but is also present among the crofters themselves. An example of this is the fact that Ellison, the manager of the estate, rents the “*best land in the parish*” (p. 66) in John Guthrie's words whereas Chris's family has to farm a terribly harsh land.

While education may be regarded as a path to social mobility, inequities may also be observed at school. Many teachers show an indisputable preference for students from wealthier families and act in a condescending way toward poorer students, like Chris. The narrative voice attributes this behavior to the humble background of many of the teachers: “[f]or most of them were sons and daughters of poor bit crofters and fishers themselves, up with the gentry they felt safe and unfrightened, far from that woesome pit of brose [an oatmeal dish] and bree [soup] and sheetless beds in which they had been reared” (p. 53). This fact shows that, even though education may help to ascend the social ladder, it does not necessarily create a sense of social responsibility since many teachers despise, rather than support, those who come from the same social background as themselves.

This lack of social consciousness may also be observed among the tenant farmers in the novel, who express some aversion to the idea of change. An example of this is that the narrative voice considers the idea of the creation of a ploughmen's union “nonsense” and

approves of those who hindered its establishment (p. 251). The crofters seem to be unable to believe that any alternative form of organization of the world is possible, mocking, for example, Chae's hope for a revolution that would bring equality. As previously mentioned, although the war brings an opportunity for the tenant farmers to make more money, it does not diminish social inequality, the narrative voice affirming that “Rich and Poor were as far off being Equal as ever they'd been” (p. 254). Hence, the social disparity which existed for centuries endures even in a changing world and seems far from decreasing in the beginning of the 20th century portrayed in *Sunset Song*.

CONCLUSION

There was a cast of Trajan, good head; Caesar, the Caesar they said wasn't Caesar. Why not a head of Spartacus? […] Or a statuary group of a Roman slave being fed to fishes, alive, in a pool . . .
(Lewis Grassic Gibbon)

This study has explored the view, developed by historians in the 20th century, that historical discourse is not a neutral account of past events, but that it shares some characteristics with fictional narratives. Seeing that historians are responsible for selecting historical events and establishing relations between them to create a coherent, organized whole, their role does not differ much from that of a narrator. Moreover, as fiction is inextricably related to the context exterior to it, it may be considered a valid way of looking at the past, even offering the possibility of filling in the blanks left by the selection processes that guide the writing of historiography.

Sunset Song is an example of fictional work which gives voice to a usually forgotten perspective, that of the crofters from the Scottish region of the Mearns. Thus, the author's choice highlights the worth of the peasants, a frequently underrated group, but described by Gibbon (2007b, p. 174) as “the real rulers”, “the selfless aristos of Scotland”. Due to the focus on these characters, the story develops in many instances through the gossip circulating in the village of Kinraddie, being told by a judgmental anonymous community voice. The style of the book evokes oral language, with several instances of narratorial commentary, resembling a conversation with the readers. In addition, legends and songs, elements of popular oral tradition, have a strong presence in the text, emphasizing the value of folklore. The inclusion of legends in the narrative also blurs the line between fact and fiction in the writing of the history of the region.

Gibbon inserts Kinraddie within Scotland's historical past by presenting an overview of the history of the place and by making several references to historical events occurred there. Besides, the author shows how events such as the Reformation and the French Revolution affected the people of Kinraddie. The landscape is frequently represented as a witness of history and home to marks of the past and of the individuals who lived there, for instance tombstones and historical buildings. These elements, both records created by those who came before and the scenery where events occurred or are believed to have occurred, function as reminders of the nation's history, keeping the past alive in folk's memory for

generations and helping, in a way, to tell their (hi)story. Moreover, Kinraddie may be interpreted as a microcosm of Scotland as a whole since its history mirrors what happened in other parts of the country. This representation of the nation also reaffirms the importance of the peasants' values, that is, of the simplicity, honesty, and hard work embodied by the crofters who want nothing more than "*the kindness of friends and the warmth of toil and the peace of rest*" (p. 261), as the deceased praised by Reverend Colquohoun.

The characterization of historical figures in the novel mostly reflects Gibbon's own opinion of them, which is evident in his non-fictional texts. The author attaches great value to historical personages associated, from his point of view, to popular movements, such as William Wallace, John Knox and the Covenanters. Gibbon praises these figures on account of his belief that they fought beside and for the poor, oppressed people, seeking to construct a better Scotland for the common folk. In contrast, the aristocracy is recurrently represented in a negative way, as cowards and disloyal, hypocritical oppressors. This way, Gibbon's left-wing political position and his ideal of social equality are evident in *Sunset Song*.

Furthermore, the characters whose views are more similar to Gibbon's are portrayed in a more positive light, as illustrated by Chae and Rob, with their respective socialist and anticlerical beliefs. As the novelist rejects the romanticized representations of rural Scotland which became common and highly popular in the 19th century, his description of many characters is filled with a caustic irony. Nevertheless, his portrayal of the countryside is more balanced than cynical, also showing the good in his characters, such as their solidarity and willingness to help one another when facing incidents like a fire in Chae's farm.

The depiction of World War One in the novel maintains the focus on the rural community of Kinraddie. Instead of dealing with military strategy or battle scenes, Gibbon puts emphasis on the impact of the war on the crofters' lives. As the conflict takes place far from Kinraddie, it seems at first to be distant from the village's inhabitants. However, as the war goes on, its consequences prove to be pervasive in the village, leading to profound changes in the characters' way of life. Hence, the novel demonstrates the frequently untold effects of historical forces on small places, remote from the center of political and economic power.

Gibbon's representation of the war deconstructs a series of discourses defending the military conflict. Firstly, some characters question the strong anti-German propaganda since not all of them believe the Germans to be cannibals or the Antichrist, as the community is told. In addition, others even cast doubt on the merits of their allies, namely the Belgians and the French, criticizing the violence of Belgian imperial policies in Africa and considering the

French poor farmers and terribly mean. This opposition to the official discourse, however, is restricted to those characters who are represented as different from most, such as Chris, Chae, and Rob, which demonstrates the strong influence of propaganda on the community. Secondly, there is the rejection of the idealization of heroism, with emphasis on the futility of war and its destructive power. The death of some of the most positively represented characters exposes the loss and grief caused by the conflict. Besides, Ewan's execution and the subsequent homage to him in the memorial challenge the traditional views of cowardice and bravery.

Besides, the novel also shows a problem related to the relative economic prosperity brought by the war as the blind search for profit leads to the destruction of the woods surrounding Kinraddie. In the long term, this decision reveals itself to be misguided, making the land barren in the region. This is another instance of the elite's search for wealth preponderating over the peasants' means of subsistence, echoing the expulsion of farm workers from the land after enclosures were created to raise sheep in other regions of Scotland. Once again crofters are forced to face destruction and loss, and to seek other ways to support themselves. In Kinraddie, their main economic activity changes from agriculture to raising livestock.

Sunset Song portrays a society with much of its way of living and traditional values preserved until the beginning of the 20th century. While there are some signs of change, like the use of farming machines, before World War One, the conflict catalyzes and triggers transformation, leading to the end of the traditional rural way of life. However, the account of this “sunset of an age and epoch” (p. 260) is not dominated by nostalgia. Instead, the novel ends in a more optimistic note, calling for positive changes and demanding that people acknowledge their own responsibility in the construction of a better future. The hope for a better nation is embodied in Reverend Colquohoun, a minister who shares Gibbon's leftist ideals.

Thus, the notions of permanence and change are central to the narrative, with the idea that nothing endures except for the land. This seems particularly appropriate in a novel which deals with a historical moment of transition, in which elements that lasted for centuries start to collapse. Fernand Braudel addresses the interplay between transformation and permanence, and the possibility of transformation in permanence, arguing that there are various coexisting layers of history interacting in a diversity of ways. Each of these layers has a different pace of change, with those which are more slowly modified constituting a society's structure. Braudel points out some of these elements which endure in the long term, such as language and

religion, among others. Besides, the historian also states the possibility of rare moments of rupture, claiming, however, that they never affect the whole fabric of a given society (BRAUDEL, 1992, p. 354-357). In *Sunset Song*, Gibbon seems to represent World War One as a watershed in the history of Kinraddie/Scotland as different elements of its structure start to crumble.

In the novel, some of the most remarkable elements enduring in the long term are: language, traditional songs, religion, and social hierarchy. While the Scots language is strongly present in *Sunset Song*, being used both by the characters and the narrative voice, its decline is evident and even more intense in the rest of the trilogy, as Chris moves to a town and eventually to an industrial city. The traditional songs, recurrent at first, are mostly forgotten and replaced by American ones in the post-war years. Religion plays an important role in the community's life, and the Church is an influential medium of war propaganda in Kinraddie. Nevertheless, this institution, heavily criticized by Gibbon, becomes less powerful as the conflict leads to a decrease in people's faith. This theme is also further developed in the sequel *Cloud Howe*. Lastly, social inequality is the one element which seems to persist even in this period of profound transformation as the oppression and the arduous work in the land are far from over.

This apparently bleak portrayal of Scottish history ends, nonetheless, in a more optimistic way, as affirmed before. As Chris thinks during a conversation with her brother, “Scotland lived, she could never die, the land would outlast them all” (p. 220). Chris's attachment to the land – prevailing over the anglicizing influence of school – and to the past – represented by her connection to the Standing Stones – may be symbolic of continuity amongst transformation. Like Chris, the nation survives the war and carries on, even if somewhat changed, and both will have the chance of a new beginning with Reverend Colquohoun.

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