The major novels of Lewis Grassic Gibbon

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THE MAJOR NOVELS OF LEWIS GRASSIC GIBBON

ABSTRACT

James Leslie Mitchell is better remembered as Lewis Grassic Gibbon, the author of the trilogy A Scots Quair. Mitchell regarded himself as a communicator rather than an artist. His trilogy and the novels published under his own name all reflect his concern for moral and political issues and his passionate interest in the implications of Diffusionism.

A Scots Quair is undoubtedly his finest achievement. Apart from his success in creating a new, sophisticated written Scots, it is superior to his other novels in that the ideas do not dominate the structure. Set in Mitchell's native area, North-eastern Scotland, the towns and villages of the Mearns become the focus for the author's analysis of both Scottish problems and the complexities of industrial life in the Depression.

In this thesis I concentrate on A Scots Quair and refer to his other work only as a necessary context. The first chapter is about his life, his intellectual development and his work apart from the trilogy. In the second chapter I discuss Sunset Song, and the third and fourth chapters deal with the middle and last books of the trilogy respectively. The final chapter contains an appraisal of criticism of the trilogy. I approach the trilogy primarily through close analysis of the text because too many critics have assessed the second and third books solely within the terms of reference established in Sunset Song. A close textual analysis discloses the special 'integrities' of each novel.

The separate life and literature of Scotland raise problems for the critic. Should 'English' critical norms be automatically applied to Scottish literature? Approaching the trilogy primarily through its language, I initiate a dualistic appreciation, suggesting that a work can simultaneously be a flawed 'English' novel and a successful 'Scottish' one.

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I, the undersigned, do hereby declare that none of the material contained in this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree in this or any other university.

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There are several people I would like to thank for their assistance. The late Mrs Ray Mitchell was very kind and very generous with her time. As well as recalling conversations and incidents from the past, she made available to me all Leslie Mitchell's books and papers. Thanks are due too, to the staff of Hereford City Library. I am also grateful to Mrs Zena Matthews. Above all, I would like to thank my supervisor, Peter Lewis, for his patience, help and friendship.

INTRODUCTION

James Leslie Mitchell was already a successful author when in 1932 he published Sunset Song under the pseudonym of Lewis Grassic Gibbon. Although the ostensible reason for the pseudonym was to avoid confusing readers of novels published under his own name, this new novel differed radically from his earlier work, and was to be the first part of a specifically Scots trilogy. This was completed with the publication of Cloud Howe in 1933 and Grey Granite in 1934, although it was not to be published in the single volume form entitled A Scots Quair until 1946. It is common critical practice to refer to these as the 'Scottish' novels and to all the others as the 'English' ones. It is on the Scottish novels that Mitchell's fame rests. With the exception of Spartacus (first published in 1933; re-published by Hutchinson in 1970), his English novels have been out of print for years and, although Spartacus is the exception here too, they have been largely dismissed by critics. Douglas Young makes a valiant attempt to rescue them from obscurity in his study of Mitchell's work, suggesting that the English novels reflect the mind of the writer as clearly as the Scottish ones:

> I believe that his work can and should be seen as a whole. All of his writings, with a very few minor exceptions, are reflections of certain central ideas which he held about the nature and the history of man. If one gets these

> ideas clear in one's mind, then one sees that the non-fiction works are all related, for they are all attempts to propagate, more or less directly, the same view of man and his destiny. Further, the fiction becomes more meaningful if it is seen as the expression of this vision of man.[1]

In this study, Young is attempting to demonstrate that the philosophy of Diffusionism formed the backbone of Mitchell's writing. Although his criticism of the trilogy is limited by this approach, he does make a valid case for a reappraisal of the English novels and for a criticism of A Scots Quair based on its relation to the larger unity of Mitchell's thought.

The concern of this thesis, however, is not with the writer, but with his work. Although both English and Scottish novels reflect the mind of their creator, the latter are distinguished by their artistic superiority. While this is a difference of achievement, other differences are to be found in the author's areas of concern. The trilogy is distinguished by an obviously Scottish emphasis, which is not to imply that it is parochial. This thesis will examine the specifically Scottish questions and will partially endorse F. R. Hart's suggestion that Scottish life and letters reflect areas of concern which are apart from England[2] and which identify Scotland as 'a single indivisible cultural unit independent of England.'[3] Hart identifies the problem of language as being of particular

concern to the Scots and this view was expanded upon by Hugh MacDiarmid when he wrote of English as the product of 'a bogus Quisling culture.'[4] Mitchell reached an important watershed in his writing when he began to use Scots. The writer of this thesis will be concerned to demonstrate that Mitchell's Scots is a highly wrought and sophisticated language and not a naive reproduction of a debased dialect. In the essay 'Literary Lights' Mitchell reveals his awareness of the problems facing a Scots writer:

> For, however the average Scots writer believes himself Anglicised, his reaction upon the minds of the intelligent English reader (especially of the professional reader) is curiously similar to that produced by the English poems of Dr. Rabindranath Tagore. The prose - or verse - is impeccably correct, the vocabulary is rich and adequate, the English is severe, serene... But unfortunately it is not English. The English reader is haunted by a sense of something foreign stumbling and hesitating behind this smooth facade of adequate technique: it is as though the writer did not <u>write</u> himself but <u>translated</u> himself.[5]

His essays show that Mitchell is like Hugh MacDiarmid in identifying English as the polite language and Scots as the 'language of bed and board and street and plough'[6] and he deplores the lack of experimental Scots writing which is the consequence of the Scots writer having 'to learn to write in English'.[7] Mitchell explored this complex problem in much greater depth in his trilogy.

It is important to remember, however, that a great work of art is not a mere reflection of the ideas of the author. The Scottish novels are so much better than the English novels because there is a much broader country of created fiction between the author and the reader. One of the main faults of all the English novels except Spartacus, is that this veil of mediating fiction is too thin. Not only is the artistic structure weak, but the complexity and comparative obscurity of many of the ideas associated with Diffusionism make it difficult for the reader to fully appreciate the English novels without some additional background knowledge. The Scottish novels are made fully accessible through their texts and they need no such gloss. Too often critics have placed too much emphasis on the trilogy's relationship to the biographical details of Mitchell's life. For example, William Montgomerie finds fault with the portrayal of Duncairn in Grey Granite because it is not based on a 'real' Scottish city.[8] Even if critics avoid this trap, they too often judge Cloud Howe and Grey Granite within the terms of reference established in Sunset Song, and this has led to a very inadequate

appreciation of these novels.

The writer of this thesis maintains that although the Scottish novels form a trilogy, each novel establishes its own 'integrities', its own terms of reference, and these are to be found within the text alone. As this is the critical approach taken in this thesis, references to Mitchell's other work and to criticism of his work, have been deliberately omitted from those chapters dealing with Sunset Song, Cloud Howe and Grey Granite respectively. To balance this approach, the first chapter of this thesis will contain a brief account of Mitchell's life, intellectual background and early writing and the last chapter will be concerned with an assessment of criticism of his work. While it is the writer's concern in this thesis to demonstrate that the trilogy both can and should be approached through its text primarily, undoubtedly some knowledge of Mitchell's background helps to place the trilogy in a historical, geographical and cultural context. Although much of the earlier criticism of Mitchell's work provides valuable insights, its main failing is a tendency to dismiss Cloud Howe and Grey Granite as inferior sequels to Sunset Song. By assessing these novels primarily within the terms of reference established by the text of each, the author of this thesis hopes to achieve a more constructive evaluation of the whole Scottish trilogy.

1. Douglas Young, Beyond the Sunset (Aberdeen, 1973), p. VIII. This book will in future be referred to as: Young.

2. Francis Russell Hart, The Scottish Novel (London, 1978). This book will in future be referred to as: Hart.

3. H. Brown, 'Mr. Grieve's Creed?', letter to The Scottish Educational Journal, 1925. Republished in the centenary edition entitled Hugh MacDiarmid: Contemporary Scottish Studies (Edinburgh, 1976), p. 138.

4. Hugh MacDiarmid, 'Lewis Grassic Gibbon: 1901-1935', Our Time, vol. 11, no. 2 (September 1948), p. 308.

5. Lewis Grassic Gibbon, A Scots Hairst, ed. Ian S. Munro (London, 1967), p. 144. This book will in future be referred to as: S.H.

6. Ibid., p. 145.

7. Ibid.

8. William Montgomerie, 'The Brown God: Lewis Grassic Gibbon's Trilogy', Scots Magazine, December 1945, pp. 222-223.

CHAPTER 1

THE LIFE AND INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND OF JAMES LESLIE MITCHELL

James Leslie Mitchell was the youngest of James Mitchell and Lilias Grassic Gibbon's three sons and he was born into their Aberdeenshire crofting household in 1901. When he was eight the family moved away from Aberdeenshire to a croft called Bloomfield in the Mearns district of Kincardinshire. Leslie Mitchell grew up loving the land itself, but hating the life-style imposed by hard agricultural work. His work emphasises the drudgery of this life. This passage about the way of life he knew in his youth demonstrates that he did not sacrifice reality to nostalgia in his writing:

> men and women still lived largely on the
> foodstuffs grown in the districts - kale
> and cabbage and good oatmeal, they made
> brose and porridge and crisp oatcakes,
> and jams from the blackberry bushes in
> the dour little, sour little gardens.
> But that is mostly a matter of the past.
> There are few who bake oatcakes now-
> adays, fewer still who ever taste kale.
> Stuff from the grocer's, stuff in
> bottles and tins, the canned nutriments
> of Chicago and the ubiquitous Fray Bentos,
> have supplanted the old-time diets.
> This dull, feculent stuff is more easy
> to deal with, not enslaving your whole

> life as once the cooking and serving did in the little farms and cottars' houses - cooking in the heat of such a day as this on great open fireplaces, without even a range. And though I sit here on this hill and deplore the fusionless foods of the canneries, I have no sympathy at all with those odd souls of the cities who would see the return of that 'rich agricultural life' as the return of something praiseworthy, blessed and rich and generous. Better Fray Bentos and a seat in the pictures with your man of a Saturday night than a grilling baking of piled oatcakes and a headache withal.[1]

As in any crofting family, the Mitchell children were expected to help with the farm work, but Leslie hated this and, whenever possible, escaped to pursue his own interests. According to his biographer Ian Munro[2], Leslie was as passionately interested in archaeology as the young Ewan in Cloud Howe, and like Ewan he scoured the neighbouring countryside looking for those flints, cairns and standing stones which indicated the existence of earlier civilisations. He retained this interest in adult life and eventually became an enthusiastic supporter of the Diffusionist school of archaeology. Astronomy was his other great childhood

enthusiasm and his books on exploration show that he retained an interest in unknown worlds. His youthful reading reflected his interests, and his predilection for science led him to Darwin, Huxley and even coloured his tastes in fiction, so that his favourite writers were Rider Haggard, Conan Doyle, Jules Verne and H. G. Wells. The Wellsian brand of romance spiced with ideas was particularly attractive to Mitchell and Wells' ideas on religion, politics and science were extremely influential during these formative years. Leslie Mitchell's parents had difficulty in understanding their strange son whose views were so alien to them, and they were not at all sympathetic to his ambition to become a writer. He was, however, very fortunate in receiving the constant support and encouragement of his schoolmaster Alexander Gray. Mr. Gray persuaded the Mitchells to allow Leslie to take up a bursary to Mackie Academy in Stonehaven, but their original doubts must have seemed vindicated when Leslie left under a cloud only a year later after a series of scenes and confrontations.

Leslie Mitchell refused to consider working on the land, and in 1917 he went to Aberdeen as a cub reporter on the Aberdeen Journal. He enjoyed Aberdeen, but only a year later he was tempted to Glasgow by a better-paid post on the Scottish Farmer. In both cities he observed the industrial and social problems of postwar Britain. When he was in Glasgow, the terrible living conditions of the poor (to which he bears witness in his essay 'Glasgow'[3]) and the prevailing atmosphere of industrial unrest prompted him to join a left-wing political group. There were many of these

on 'Red' Clydeside (as it was called) and it is not known which one Mitchell joined. He was not a member for long, for in 1919 he was dismissed from his post on the Scottish Farmer for dipping into the petty cash. After a suicide attempt he returned briefly to the Mearns, but his relationship with his parents was too stormy for comfort and so, to escape from a life on the land, he joined the Army.

He was in the Army for the four years between 1919 and 1923, and during this time he travelled in India, the Middle East and Central Asia. According to Ian Munro,

> he was able to do some research with an archaeologist he met in Cairo. He saw and pondered on the beginnings of civilisation in Mesopotamia and Egypt.[4]

It is difficult to imagine how the sensitive young Mitchell survived the restrictions and rigours of army life. In his novels he emphasises the brutalising effects of service life. In Sunset Song (1932) Ewan Tavendale is completely demoralised by his army experiences, and in Stained Radiance (1930) John Garland's attitude may well reflect Mitchell's own:

> He hated the Air Force. Like ninety per cent of those in the ranks, he had enlisted under the compulsion of hunger and unemployment. His stomach had conscripted him more surely than any Man Power Act could have done.

He had never forgiven the Service the fact of its feeding him.[5]

It can only be conjectured that Mitchell reacted to service life in the same way as his characters, since he left no written record of this time. He had planned to deal with this period in his biography Memoirs of a Materialist, but he died before he could accomplish this. It is not even certain when he wrote the synopsis which was discovered after his death, but since he usually worked at considerable speed and under great pressure, it is reasonable to assume that the synopsis was written shortly before his death in 1935. The biography was to have been divided into five sections, the third of which was to have dealt with his life in the Army. The synopsis of this third part shows not only that Mitchell intended to use film terminology in this work, but also reveals those particular areas of army experience which were important to him:

Reel III: 1918-1921

The Camera Eye	(VI)	Troopship Intaglio
Scenario Script	(VI)	The English Soldier
The Camera Eye	(VII)	A Barge on the Tigris
Scenario Script	(VII)	The Beginnings of Civilisation
The Camera Eye	(VIII)	Bethlehem: Xmas Eve
Scenario Script	(VIII)	Anti-God
Still	(III)	Colonel Gregori Saliaeff [6]

At least two of these titles suggest areas which he had already found of sufficient importance to deal with in earlier writings. Stained Radiance contains a vivid descrip-

tion of Christmas Eve in Bethlehem, as well as an indictment of the English Serviceman. Perhaps Colonel Gregori Saliaeff provided the model for Colonel Anton Saloney of Mitchell's Middle Eastern romances, and the scenario title, 'The Beginnings of Civilisation', bears out Munro's claim that Mitchell pursued his archaeological interests while he was in the Army.[7] The arrangement of Memoirs of a Materialist shows that Mitchell intended dividing the biography into distinct periods. The first 'Reel' was to deal with his formative years; the second with his journalistic career; the third with his life in the Army. The fourth 'Reel' is dated 1921-1928 and was to be chiefly concerned with the author's developing interest in Diffusionism; and the fifth was to be centred on his life as a writer in England.

Although Mitchell tried to write during his period in the Army, he was not ready to earn a living as an author when he left the Army in 1923. He spent several depressing months trying to earn a living as a door-to-door salesman. In The Thirteenth Disciple (1931) Mitchell's portrait of Malcom Maudsley trying to survive as a salesman in London may well be drawn from this experience. After Mitchell's failure in civilian life, he joined the Air Force as a clerk. He spent the six years between 1923 and 1929 in the Air Force and throughout this time he continued to write. He was encouraged in this by Rebecca Middleton, the daughter of a Mearns neighbour. She had come to London to work as a civil servant and she and Leslie saw a good deal of each other. They were eventually married in 1925. When Leslie Mitchell's engagement with the Air Force ended, he

had published some short stories as well as his first full length work: Hanno: or the Future of Exploration (1928). He felt hopeful enough about his prospects as a writer to leave the Air Force and devote himself to writing full time. His success gathered momentum and in the years until his sudden death, Mitchell's literary output was prodigious. Between 1928 and 1934 he published ten novels, two romance cycles and five non-fiction works as well as numerous articles and short stories. At the end of 1931 the Mitchells moved to Welwyn Garden City. This New Town remained their home and after Leslie's death, his widow stayed there. They both liked the tranquillity of the pleasant tree-lined town which was conveniently near the bookshops, publishers and libraries of London.

It may seem a strange choice of home for the author of A Scots Quair, but the late Mrs. Mitchell recalled that neither she nor Leslie had wanted to live in Scotland.[8] She claimed that when Leslie was writing Sunset Song he had no idea that it was going to be such a success. To him it was one novel among many and he adopted the Scottish pseudonym so that his 'English' readers would not be confused by the totally different work. A return to the Mearns after the publication of Sunset Song would have been very difficult indeed, as Mitchell undoubtedly drew on local characters to people his trilogy. In his biography of Mitchell, Ian Munro devotes considerable space to the reception of the trilogy in Scotland, demonstrating the parochial attitudes of the Scots. Mitchell himself entered into the controversy that inevitably followed the publication of any of his Scottish works.

For example, in a letter to the Glasgow Evening News (24 February 1934), he replies to criticism of his biography of Mungo Park:

> This is the great drawback the Scotsman writing a book has to face - the misfortune to have been born in Scotland. For Scotland kent his faither - inevitably; in other words, it knows he's a Scotsman, and reached for his latest book with a gley-eyed sneer - Him write a book? who's he, a Scotsman, to be writing books, when all that Scotland had to say in books was said a hundred years ago by Rabbie and Sir Walter?[9]

In Welwyn he could conduct his battles from a distance, but even so the enormous pressure under which he lived and worked eventually proved too much and in February 1935 he died of peritonitis after an operation for a perforated gastric ulcer. Tributes poured in from all sides. The trilogy at least had been recognised as a major contribution to Scottish literature. In a letter to Mrs. Mitchell (15 February 1935) Hugh MacDiarmid wrote:

> Leslie's untimely death is a serious blow to Scottish literature. I think his best work was still to come - he was just getting into his stride. All the same he had achieved a very remarkable tale of work and won a

> definite place in the history of Scottish literature. The Scots Quair has a permanent value which will preserve his memory.[10]

So far this chapter has briefly outlined the course of events in Leslie Mitchell's life, but it remains to examine some of the ideas which preoccupied him during his writing career. Although Mitchell showed an immense determination to become a writer, he saw himself primarily as a communicator of ideas. In an article in Left Review (February 1935) he claimed to be a revolutionary writer whose 'books are explicit or implicit propaganda'.[11] His business was communication rather than art. His Scottish work demonstrates that communication is best achieved through the perfection of a suitable art form, but his early work sacrifices form to content as he concentrates on ideas. Leslie Mitchell was extremely sensitive to human suffering. In Glasgow, the moral outrage he felt drove him to join a left-wing group, but this proved to be his last attempt to express his indignation through organised political activity. Instead he found a satisfactory political philosophy in the Diffusionist theory of civilisation. It is not known exactly when Mitchell became a Diffusionist, but Ian Munro refers to Dorothy Tweed's memories of meeting Mitchell in 1924 when he was most enthusiastic about Diffusionism.[12] Diffusionism provided Mitchell with a comprehensive philosophy which could absorb and re-define his socialist views. The most important Diffusionists were Grafton Elliot-Smith, H. J. Massingham and W. J. Perry. Diffusionists opposed the

Cartesian and Darwinian concepts of the evolutionary progress of mankind. They denied the accepted idea that all peoples will develop in similar ways, albeit at different times. They denied that man was making inevitable progress. Perhaps the shortest and clearest account of Diffusionism is that given by H. J. Massingham in The Golden Age. He cites cases of primitive peoples in various parts of the world 'who have escaped the moulding hand of civilisation'[13] and who retain their natural peacefulness and their harmonious lifestyle. He writes:

> More and more has progress come to be interpreted in terms of prosperity, success and accumulation, rather than in terms of the abundance of life itself. We have ceased to ask ourselves the Socratic question - What is the good life?[14]

The Diffusionists believed that 'civilisation' did not develop independently in different parts of the world. As Mitchell himself writes in The Conquest of the Maya (1934):

> Civilisation rose from the midst of primitive freedom, with comparative suddenness, revolutionising human life and spreading abroad the planet much as the technique of the Solutrean blade from one accidental point in the old world.[15]

That accidental point was Ancient Egypt; for in Egypt, the Diffusionists claimed, the accident of the tidal wash

of the Nile favoured the natural growth of cereals and led to the beginnings of agriculture. They argued that from man's deliberate cultivation of cereals there developed a primitive religion centred around a god who could control the flow of the Nile and who therefore had to be propitiated. Of this archaic culture Mitchell writes:

> Agriculture was its basis, the bait that drew primitive man to apparent security of existence and actual slavery - worship of its dead and mummified King its central rite, the search for Life-Givers its principal urge.[16]

Diffusionists believed that this type of culture was spread throughout the world in the search for precious objects to placate the flood god:

> the prospectors of the Archaic civilisation penetrated far and wide into the countries of the Food-gathering peoples. These in time themselves took to agriculture, upbuilt their state religions, modified the superstructure of the Archaic culture in their own likeness, and sent abroad their own travellers and prospectors in the unceasing search for gold and precious stones.[17]

The Diffusionists believed that the original food-gathering peoples were peaceful and truly civilised. W. J. Perry maintains in The Growth of Civilisation:

> the most primitive communities of which we have knowledge, the food-gatherers, have no class system. They consist of family groups, the members of which are bound together by ties of relationship. They have no juxtaposition to other family groups, their hunting grounds adjoin, but they do not intermingle. This is the fundamental form of human society.[18]

Mitchell re-interpreted his personal distaste for the agricultural life in terms of a Diffusionist analysis and came to view it as a restrictive, warping evil. Despite his distaste for farming, Mitchell thought of himself as a peasant and he felt an affinity for the land itself. In his work he repeatedly places the land in its prehistoric context. In Stained Radiance, Dreachie has no difficulty in relating to the prehistoric skeleton once it has been identified as that of a farmer. In Sunset Song, both Chris and Chae see visions from an ancient past. The prehistory of the area is symbolised by the ancient stone circle from which Chris draws peace of mind. A minister preaches a sermon on the Golden Age. In Image and Superscription (1933) Gershom Jezreel and April Caldon search for Lorillard, a city from the Golden Age. For Mitchell, the Fall from the Eden of his earliest childhood was represented by the drudgery of a crofting life. The whole of civilised life, as he observed it, represented a fall from grace, and he recreated the symptoms of this in his work. For

Mitchell, war was one of the worst evils of civilisation, and his novels are full of anti-war propaganda. Gershom Jezreel, Malcom Maudsley and Ewan Tavendale are all psychological casualties of war. His most complete indictment of war is in Sunset Song, in which he demonstrates how the secondary effects of a war can devastate a whole community. For Mitchell war was the ultimate barbarity of civilisation, but his Diffusionist beliefs reinforced his sense of injustice in many other spheres. The Diffusionists believed that in the ideal society there had been sexual equality. According to the late Mrs. Mitchell, Leslie was outraged by the way in which modern society degraded women,[19] and therefore Diffusionist theory once again coincided with a personal belief. In Stained Radiance Thea Mayven and Norah Casement suffer more than their husbands from the world's shabby treatment of them. Domina Riddoch, the heroine of The Thirteenth Disciple, defines her relationship with her forebears in an avenging role:

> I'm going to live every unenjoyed life of those starved mothers of mine who were killed and eaten in cannibal rituals, starved to death, beaten to death, crippled in crinolines and ghastly codes, robbed of fun and sunshine and the glory of being fools and disreputable for over six thousand years... And I'm going to get every woman alive to do the same![20]

In Sunset Song Mitchell explores the world of Kinraddie through

the consciousness of a woman, Chris. His awareness of the unequal lot of women comes through clearly in Chris's reaction to her pregnancy:

> She felt neither gladness nor pain,
> only dazed, as though running in the
> fields with Ewan she had struck
> against a great stone, body and legs
> and arms, and lay stunned and bruised,
> the running and the fine crying in
> the sweet air still on about her,
> Ewan running free and careless still
> not knowing or heeding the thing she
> had met. The days of love and holiday-
> ing and the foolishness of kisses -
> they might be for him yet but never
> the same for her, dreams were fulfilled
> and their days put by, the hills climbed
> still to sunset but her heart might
> climb with them never again and long
> for tomorrow, the night still her own.
> No night would she ever be her own
> again, in her body the seed of that
> pleasure she had sown with Ewan burgeon-
> ing and growing, dark, in the warmth
> below her heart. And Chris Guthrie
> crept out from the place below the
> beech trees where Chris Tavendale lay
> and went wandering off into the waiting
> quiet of the afternoon, Chris Tavendale

heard her go, and she came back to
Blawearie never again.[21]

Throughout the trilogy Chris is acutely aware of her feelings and reactions and she continually explores the relationship between her individuality and the rest of the world.

Diffusionism offered Mitchell a method of interpreting the world. As a committed Socialist, Mitchell deplored the evils of class division he had observed in Aberdeen and Glasgow. Similarly, he had reacted against his stern Presbyterian upbringing by becoming an atheist, but it was Diffusionism which enabled him to link together these seemingly different forms of oppression by providing a coherent doctrine for understanding them. The Diffusionists had no clear policy for the future. Neither they nor Mitchell were naive enough to suggest that it was possible for civilised man to return to the primitive life, but characters in Mitchell's novels undoubtedly use the Diffusionist ideal of harmonious co-operation as a signpost to the future. In The Thirteenth Disciple, Domina Riddoch and Malcom Maudsley found a society whose aims are to eradicate oppression and establish some sort of ideal anarchistic society. Socialism might provide the way, but the goal was Diffusionist inspired. This is not to suggest, however, that Mitchell's political awareness was in any way naive. In Spartacus, Cloud Howe and Grey Granite Mitchell explores the concept of leadership and analyses the bases of power. Robert's ideal in Cloud Howe is a new Golden Age, but he is ineffectual and makes little mark on the folk of Segget. Spartacus and Ewan in Grey Granite are both strong leaders, but their dubious abilities raise

questions about the ethics of leadership, the nature of democracy and the morality of political action. Both Spartacus and Grey Granite demonstrate that Mitchell was well aware of the ambiguous complexities of revolutionary action in a sophisticated society. He offers no easy answers, limiting himself to arousing the reader's awareness of these problems. Although Mitchell is never simplistic, Diffusionist theory encouraged him to optimism, for Diffusionist political theory was essentially optimistic in positing a belief in the essential goodness of man. If man was good and happy once, the theory ran, he could be so again. It is this optimism which forms the basis of his writing. His work communicates both hope and idealism. Mitchell chose the same quotation from Tennyson's Ulysses for the title pages of his first book Hanno and his last book Nine Against the Unknown (1934) and a reproduction of this quotation hung in his home in Welwyn. It expresses the quality of the optimism that pervades his work:

> Come my friends,
> 'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.
> Push off, and setting well in order smite
> The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds
> To sail beyond the sunset; and the baths
> Of all the western stars, until I die.
> It may be that the gulfs will wash us down:
> It may be that we touch the Happy Isles.[22]

Mitchell left synopses of several projected works. One of these was The Story of Religion, and an extract from the final chapter, which is entitled 'Karl Marx and the Kingdom

of God on Earth' demonstrates an ironical acknowledgement of the limitations of Marxism:

> Economic change is the supreme motivation. Human history is the history of class war. The last class but one is now in the saddle. Below it, the last class, the proletariat, rises to overthrow its oppressor. Then, in a classless world, Equality will come, the Millenium be established.
>
> He creates the First International, rules the Socialist Forces of Europe, dies in obscurity but thirty years after is the deified inspiration of a great Church embracing millions of followers - the Communist International.[23]

Some knowledge of Leslie Mitchell's life and intellectual background helps the reader to understand the philosophy that underlies his work. This background information does not demonstrate what made his novels, for it takes no account of the 'art' of the writer, but it does provide a gloss for the reader. Mitchell's English novels in particular, are primarily concerned with ideas, and as these tend to overbalance the artistic structure, a knowledge of the man and his thought can add an extra dimension to the bare bones of these works.

All Leslie Mitchell's works were published between 1928 and 1934 and it would be surprising if he had maintained a consistently high literary standard as his output was

prodigious. It is not relevant to discuss his works on archaeology and exploration at any length in this thesis. It suffices to note that in these non-fictional works Mitchell expounds Diffusionist ideas and explores their modern application. Of his other works, that is his English novels, Stained Radiance, The Thirteenth Disciple, Spartacus and (to a limited extent) Image and Superscription can be classed as serious novels which are of interest to the critic. Apart from these, Mitchell wrote pot-boiling romantic story cycles and pedestrian science-fiction novels. Both Three Go Back and Gay Hunter are examples of the second genre. The plots creak and groan as they progress through amazing series of coincidences and both novels are dominated by the crude application of Diffusionist doctrine. Diffusionist ideas pervade the romances too. It is hard nowadays to understand what demand there could have been for such wooden works as Persian Dawns, Egyptian Nights (1932), The Lost Trumpet (1932) and The Calends of Cairo (1931). These are characterised by exotic settings, fantastic coincidences, predictable plots and unlikely characters. They are essentially escapist adventure stories and both these and the science-fiction novels are artistically mediocre.

The English novels are of interest to the critic, although Spartacus is the only one to have been reprinted since the thirties. They purport to be serious literature and they are informed by many of the ideas which also inform the Scottish trilogy. They are unlike the trilogy, however, in that the ideas dominate both structure and plot. In Stained Radiance, The Thirteenth Disciple and Image and

Superscription Mitcehll unsuccessfully attempts to blend realism with the conventions of the adventure story. Douglas Young calls Stained Radiance 'a genuine and quite sophisticated work of art'[24], and remarks that 'The strength of the book lies in the well-established and consistently maintained ironic tone which runs throughout'[25], and certainly both the realism and the adventure are overlaid by the irony which provides the novel's dominant tone. To demonstrate the pattern of this irony, the characters change their ideological positions diametrically as the novel progresses. Despite these drastic changes, the techniques of irony seem to be absent. This is because Mitchell pays little attention to developing credible interaction between the characters. The irony of Stained Radiance does not operate through the disclosures occasioned by the different characters' various visions of reality. It is merely an ironic tone which the pervasive presence of the author maintains since he constantly invades the novel with his superior knowledge. This is illustrated by the way he presents the characters. His description of Norah Casement brings the authorial voice into the novel as a cynical presence:

> She was twenty-three years of age, her eyes blue, her hair black. She had a short nose and the pretty contemptuous face of a sane, uneasy, cultured monkey. She loved words like Miggod and Biggod and Divvle, for they stamped her with Irishy, good-heartedness and irresponsibility. But behind their

cover she regarded the world scaredly,
and with a greedy pity.[26]

This superior stance detracts considerably from the reader's belief in the characters as autonomous beings. The plot itself develops along lines which seem too predictable and the novel lacks the psychological, emotional and moral conflicts which the dramatic interaction of character and event should disclose. In fact, the novel lacks realistic credibility, for there is little to engage the reader's interest other than the ideas discussed, and these ideas are not exhibited as part of an artistic whole, but are crudely obtruded on the reader's consciousness. Through John Garland, the implied author serves up chunks of his views on Diffusionism, modern literature, Service life, the alienation of man in modern life, the debasing role of religion in modern life and the nature of political commitment. The identification of John Garland's views with those of the implied author can be inferred from Garland's pronouncement on the modern novel:

> The world is sick of mere matings and baitings, bickerings and successes and failures in novels. It's grown up, has the world, and knows our characters for mere sawdust puppets. 'We'll accept the puppets - if they're projections of yourself', it cries. 'Live through them. Make them tell us your thoughts, your vision of life, your hopes, your hates, your beliefs. Never mind them

> acting in character - damn their sawdust little characters - it's you we want, if your're worth the having.' [27]

Although the characters act as illustrations of the implied author's ideas, in Stained Radiance Mitchell does not explore the reality of the country of the mind. That was to come in Cloud Howe, with Chris and Robert inhabiting a cultural tradition whose boundaries are suggested by constant reference to poetry and myth and the world of nature. This consistent spiritual reality is absent from Stained Radiance, although occasionally the world of nature is used to reinforce a theme. Chris's vision of a dead night sky in Cloud Howe is foreshadowed by Koupa's:

> Outside, all London lay in the grip of an iron frost. It held the skies and streets and the roof spaces in a web of steely, salted rime. The skies were burnished and garnished with stars. He looked up at the Milky Way that glimmered like a tiara. And all London was strangely silent. The end of the world might come, life dead and frozen and forgotten, a thin twittering ended and foregone beneath the iceglow of the stars. So it would end some time.[28]

This steely sky is like that perceived by Chris and Ewan just before Robert's death when they:

> looked on a sky that was burnished in steel, rimed with a pringling frost of

stars, nothing moved or lived, the
yews stood black, the garden hedges rose
up in the silence as if to listen to
the void star glow.[29]

Although the passages are very similar, that from Cloud Howe is only one in a pattern of references establishing a complete poetic and spiritual dimension of reality. The passage from Stained Radiance is an isolated one, however, its existence suggesting an intensity of feeling which is absent from the rest of the novel. There are other hints of the excellence that is to come in A Scots Quair. Thea's loyalties are divided between English and Scottish values. This foreshadows not only the personal dilemma of the young Chris in Sunset Song, but also the complex debate on the many aspects of nationalism which is raised in Grey Granite through the cultural, linguistic and emotional conflict between Chris and Ewan. The puppets of Stained Radiance project the ideas, concepts and themes that are brought out in the Scottish trilogy by the developing interaction of characters and circumstances. The skill with which Mitchell fuses content and style in the trilogy is absent from Stained Radiance, where the style is often crude and obtrusive, as for example in the rendering of dialect:

Ere, sit dahn. Gord, you aint sife.
Worse'n that loopy old bawsted,
Crookshenks, at the meeting this
evening. Only it was ell and fire an
brimstone an burnin an screamin that
got im. You're nutty on the Unborn.[30]

Mitchell has failed to integrate the various elements of Stained Radiance and the result is a stylistically flawed novel in which the ideas dominate both plot and character.

This imbalance persists in both The Thirteenth Disciple and Image and Superscription. Both are primarily novels of ideas in which the development of an organic interaction between plot and character is subordinated to the development of these ideas. Image and Superscription is particularly badly written and is full of the most unlikely coincidences. Not only is Gershom rescued from the slums by a rich uncle, but this rich uncle is an explorer who allows his very young nephew to accompany him to South America on his adventures. These adventures are not in the least gripping. No drama or suspense is generated. The adventures merely provide a peg on which Mitchell can hang his Diffusionist ideas. In both novels these ideas are presented by particular individuals - Domina and Metaxa in The Thirteenth Disciple and April Caldon in Image and Superscription, and these proselytizers are even more wooden and unconvincing than the rest of the novels' characters. Both novels draw heavily on the traditions of the adventure story and their heroes are relatives of those right-wing neo-Renaissance heroes of Buchan's, men like Sandy Arbuthnott:

> Sandy was the wandering Scot carried to the pitch of genius. In the old days he would have led a crusade or discovered a new road to the Indies. Today he merely roamed as the spirit moved him, till the war swept him up and dumped him down in my battalion.[31]

Although Mitchell's heroes differ ideologically, they are cast in the same literary mould. Metaxa is a 'drunkard, vagabond, scholar, explorer'[32] who preaches adventure to Malcom Maudsley. Mitchell's characters are the same literary 'types' as Buchan's. The men are accomplished all-rounders; the women are brave, beautiful and slightly remote. These stock characters of the adventure story provide a common base for very different novels, however, for not only do Mitchell's characters and Buchan's differ ideologically, but the dynamics of their novels are radically different. Buchan succeeds in writing adventure stories, whereas Mitchell does not. Buchan's adventure stories are limited by his stock characters, but within those limitations he achieves a high degree of artistic integrity. Plot and character are interdependent and the spiritual satisfaction of the successful quest is realised as an integral part of the adventure. Mitchell's heroes lack the clarity and definition of Buchan's and they expound their ideas rather than demonstrate them through action. Mitchell's English novels promise adventure but do not deliver it. Buchan maintains the 'mode' of adventure throughout and this is the basis of his success. Mitchell, however, wavers from one mode to another, and this uncertainty prevents the author from creating credible, autonomous universes in his novels. Both Image and Superscription and The Thirteenth Disciple begin realistically. Both degenerate to a form that is neither fully realistic nor fully romantic and they succeed on neither level. In both, form is sacrificed to content. Both the castration of Dreachie in The Thirteenth Disciple and the lynching of the pregnant negress in Image

and Superscription are histrionic interpolations which are not integral parts of the plot. These indulgences mar the novels further, adding to the sense of imbalance created by the shifting of modes.

Of the English novels only Spartacus is a successful literary achievement. Hugh MacDiarmid claimed it as 'perhaps his finest achievement'[33] and Ian Munro records the favourable critical reception of the novel, drawing particular attention to the review in the Manchester Guardian in which Mitchell's achievement in Spartacus is compared with Flaubert's in Salammbo.[34] Mitchell creates and sustains a credible universe in Spartacus. The novel's success is partly due to the limitations Mitchell imposes. None of the characters is burdened by too many roles, and Spartacus is an effective leader who comes to identify completely with the cause of the slaves. This gradual development is delicately portrayed:

> For he found himself entering their hearts and thoughts, with a new and bitter impatience upon him - often; yet also a comprehension, an understanding, as though somehow he himself were these men, these women, these lost stragglers of rebellion against the Masters and their Gods; as though the life in their bodies was a part of his, he the giver of Life to this multitude that had risen about him in the storm of days and shaken the Republic to its foundations. As

> though he were all of the hungered dispossessed of all time; as though at moments he ceased to live, merging his spirit in that of the horde, his body in that of a thousand bodies, bone of their bone, flesh of their flesh.[35]

In this passage and throughout the novel, Mitchell establishes a referential dimension of reality which is absent from the other English novels. Spartacus sees himself as a 'giver of Life'. Diffusionists named certain substances 'Life Givers' because they had a special significance in early civilisations. Gold and malachite were initially coveted because their colours symbolised fruition or regeneration, but gradually they were imbued with magical powers and assumed a key role in the development of religions. The phrase also has Christian associations and suggests that Spartacus has a greater spiritual authority than the ordinary man. This reference to Christianity is continued as Spartacus merges,

> his spirit in that of the horde, his body in that of a thousand bodies, bone of their bone, flesh of their flesh.[36]

The language of the Bible is recalled by the sonorous repetition of the archaic phrases. The emotional restraint, the appeal to a spiritual world outside the novel's immediate boundaries, Spartacus' sympathetic identification with the slaves and the rhythm and balance of the language all help to establish a framework within which the characters interact

credibly and engage the reader's sympathetic attention.

The reality of the universe of Spartacus is carefully established. The consciousness of the novel is either a slave consciousness, or it is that of the committed and sympathetic author. Spartacus is characterised by a wholeness of vision. The identity of the slaves is established both by a careful account of their present reality and by the sense of the spiritual dimension of their lives created by constant reference to their various gods. This emphasises their human dignity. The main characters are well differentiated. Kleon, for example, is memorable as a eunuch and a Platonist. Although he interprets the world of the novel for the reader, such interpretations are carefully limited by his defects. It is clear that he is not acting as the voice of the implied author, but as an autonomous intelligence. The interaction of the main characters allows Mitchell to develop their ratiocinative processes, and it is this portrayal that gives the novel a dimension of intellectual credibility. Ideas are not served up in stodgy chunks, but arise naturally as individual commentary on the developments of the plot, and are circumscribed by the limitations of the individual characters. Kleon may be a Platonist, but it is the application of his ideas to the present situation which occupies his mind as he says of Spartacus:

> 'There is your leader. He might change
> the order in Italy as no man before,
> casting down the Masters and raising
> the slaves, for the Republic is weak
> and its armies scattered, he could

seize and hold all southern Italy,
and carve it out the state that Plato
dreamt.'

Elpinice would have spoken again,
but Spartacus motioned her to silence,
his eyes on Kleon.

'Of this matter we'll speak while
we ride. Now we'll ride'.[37]

Here Kleon's concept of Spartacus as a leader who can build a Platonic state is incorporated in the action of the novel. This brief passage simultaneously forwards the action, demonstrates to the reader the workings of Kleon's mind and shows Spartacus' authority over his companions. It is an excellent illustration of the integration of form and content which is maintained throughout.

The consistency of mode is indicated by the strangely Latinised style which forwards the action at a lively pace:

When Kleon heard the news from Capua he
rose early one morning, being a literatus
and unchained, crept to the room of his
Master, stabbed him in the throat,
mutilated that Master's body even as
his own had been mutilated: and so
fled from Rome with a stained dagger
in his sleeve and a copy of The
Republic of Plato hidden in his breast.[38]

Such archaic phrases as 'and so fled' and 'even as', help to suggest a historically remote world. The occasional Latin word, together with the strange arrangement of clauses,

creates a prose reminiscent of a Latin translation: Kleon 'rose early one morning, being a literatus and unchained, crept to the room of his Master'. This is not a conventional modern English clause order. The world evoked by this curious style is that of the Rome known to every schoolboy from his Latin text books. The hung clauses have the familiarity of the disordered translation. As in the works of Homer or Virgil, the characters are given individuality only in those aspects of themselves which are relevant to the development of the plot and this is emphasised by the strange syntax. In Spartacus Mitchell achieves a heroic effect by using this fast moving Latinised style and by the consistency of his mode of presentation. In this novel he achieves an artistic integrity which is lacking in his other English novels where the ideas dominate the structure, and the linguistic universe is inadequately realised.
Douglas Young was right when he found in Spartacus 'clarity and assurance, a freedom from affectation, which have not been previously evident in Mitchell's English writing.'[39]

Leslie Mitchell found the essay form a more suitable vehicle than fiction for his ideas. He collaborated with Hugh MacDiarmid to publish Scottish Scene: or the Intelligent Man's Guide to Albyn (1934). Seven of the essays in this volume are by Mitchell and in 1967 they were reprinted in A Scots Hairst. These are fascinating for they deal with many of the problems and ideas which concern Mitchell in both his English and Scottish novels. In 'Religion', for example, he deals very directly with those repressive aspects of Presbyterianism which rule Kinraddie and wreck

the happiness of the Guthrie family in Sunset Song. Chris's complicated relationship with the land in the same novel is reflected in the subject-matter of 'The Land'; but although the content of the essay is similar to the content of a part of the trilogy, the effects achieved by each are spectacularly different. In Sunset Song Chris's relationship with the land is developed within the framework of a realistic novel and the theme emerges as an integral and organic part of the plot. In the essay the ideas are more logically and succinctly developed but they do not engage the reader on the same level. Despite the inherent limitations of the genre, Mitchell's essays are excellent. They are clear, interesting and logical and they reveal him as one of the most intelligent and interesting people writing in the thirties on the problems of modern Scotland. In both his essays and his Scottish novels he is concerned with the issue of Scottish identity; with the position of the Scottish artist; with the implications of the Anglicization of Scotland, and above all, with the quality of modern industrial democratic society. His best work stimulates the reader to an engaged and sympathetic awareness of these issues.

Sunset Song, Cloud Howe and Grey Granite were conceived as the parts of a trilogy. None of the English works was linked to any other, and A Scots Quair was a much more ambitious and complicated project. It is important to distinguish the novels as separate entities and not to regard them merely as the three named parts of the larger entity of the trilogy. This raises the question of defining a trilogy, and it is important to do this in terms of the

dissimilarities of the separate parts, as well as in terms of their similarities.

The novels are linked by a realistic time sequence. Sunset Song is set in the period of the Great War; Cloud Howe centres around the postwar years and the General Strike; Grey Granite is set in the thirties. Time is measured not only by these outer events, but by the life of the central character Chris, and it is the accidents of her life which ostensibly account for the various settings of the novels - Sunset Song is set in a small agricultural community, Cloud Howe in a small town in north-east Scotland; Grey Granite in the city of Duncairn.

The novels are linked by their language. All are written in a unique lilting rhythmic prose, and in all three reality is mediated through a multiplicity of characters. All three novels are obviously written by an author who is committed to an examination of the political and social problems of the particular period of each novel. The novels are alike too in that in all of them Mitchell concerns himself with problems that are specifically Scottish. Geoffrey Wagner identifies the trilogy as a political allegory in which Chris 'Caledonia' tries out various types of alliance through marriage, but finally stands alone:

> There are three books in A Scots Quair and three marriages for its principal character. None of these marriages, as Chris herself points out, is lucky for the men concerned. Scotland must live by itself, as it does at last, when Chris returns, completed and

unconquered, to Blawearie at the end.[40]

The complexity of the Scottish political problem is identified in A Scots Quair as the author examines the nature of Scottish culture and language, and the problems of parochialism, Presbyterianism and nationalism.

Despite the considerable continuity of both form and content that persists throughout the trilogy, too often critics judge Cloud Howe and Grey Granite to be artistically inferior to Sunset Song. A common criticism is that these novels lacked the 'realism' of Sunset Song. William Montgomerie criticises the Duncairn of Grey Granite on these grounds, writing:

> If Lewis Grassic Gibbon, instead of attempting the task of creating a new city, where one does not exist, had spent as much imagination - as he does in his essays on Glasgow and Aberdeen - interpreting the personality of one of the existing cities, he would have been in the tradition of the great novelists.
>
> He would also have done for Aberdeen or Dundee, or Edinburgh, what those novelists have done for some of the cities of Europe. He actually did it for the land in Sunset Song. But he knew the Brown God in a way that he did not know the Grey God.[41]

Here Montgomerie is interpreting Grey Granite within the terms of reference which he found to be applicable to Sunset Song. In Sunset Song Kinraddie is created within a realistic frame-

work, within the 'tradition of the great novelists'. Sunset Song is a magnificently successful realistic novel in which realism is an appropriate vehicle for the creation of the world of Kinraddie, which is a world governed by traditional values. Both Cloud Howe and Grey Granite centre around much more complicated worlds and the realistic representation of these worlds is not the novelist's primary objective. The language of each novel provides the key to its particular integrities. In Cloud Howe, for example, the language reflects the disunited postwar world in which old values have been overturned. The language is polarised to form distinct 'modes' of experience, and each 'mode' is distinguished by its particular idiom. Grey Granite poses a greater critical problem, for it is the most ambitious novel of the trilogy. The characters are made to perform too many roles and their credibility suffers; yet it is the only novel of the trilogy which deals with the complexities of contemporary city life and F. R. Hart's analysis of the Scottish novel has particular significance for a critical appraisal of Grey Granite. He suggests that Scottish novel writers follow a specifically Scottish tradition which reflects a separate and distinctive culture. His argument illuminates the problem of the relationship of Scottish literature to the mainstream of the English critical tradition. His exploration of a separate Scottish tradition suggests the possibility of a more sensitive reading than such earlier critical attempts as that of William Montgomerie. Grey Granite must be approached within its own terms of reference and not through comparisons with the totally

different artistic values of either Sunset Song or Cloud Howe.

The novels of the trilogy are linked in many ways. Geoffrey Wagner claims that an analysis of the novels' section headings demonstrates that they 'existed as an entity in Gibbon's mind before he sat down to Sunset Song'.[42] Undoubtedly the unity of the trilogy is maintained by the character of Chris, by the sequential time scheme, by the geographical settings and by Mitchell's highly individual use of language. Despite these unities, each novel centres around an imaginatively distinct world and the text of each establishes its own individual value system.

1. S.H., pp. 76-77.

2. Ian S. Munro, Leslie Mitchell: Lewis Grassic Gibbon (Edinburgh, 1966), p. 11. This book will in future be referred to as: Munro.

3. S.H., pp. 82-94.

4. Munro, p. 34.

5. James Leslie Mitchell, Stained Radiance (London, 1930), p. 30.

6. Memoirs of a Materialist. Unpublished synopsis of projected autobiography shown to me by the late Mrs. Ray Mitchell in October 1977.

7. Munro, p. 34.

8. In a conversation with me in October 1977.

9. Munro, p. 143.

10. Ibid., p. 208.

11. Lewis Grassic Gibbon, 'Controversy: Writers' International', Left Review, vol. 1, no. 5 (February 1935), p. 179.

12. Munro, p. 43.

13. H. J. Massingham, The Golden Age (London, 1927), p. 83.

14. Ibid., p. 78.

15. James Leslie Mitchell, The Conquest of the Maya (London, 1934), p. 46.

16. Ibid., p. 48.

17. Ibid., p. 49.

18. W. J. Perry, The Growth of Civilisation (London, 1926), p. 180.

19. In a conversation with me in October 1977.

20. James Leslie Mitchell, The Thirteenth Disciple (London, 1931), p. 205.

21. Lewis Grassic Gibbon, A Scots Quair. This was first published as a trilogy in 1946. New edition, re-set, June, 1950. Refs. below are to the 1950 ed. This book will in future be referred to as: S.Q.

22. Tennyson, 'Ulysses', The Poems of Tennyson, ed. Christopher Ricks, Annotated English Poets (London, 1969), lines 56-63.

23. Unpublished. Quoted from ms. shown to me by the late Mrs. Mitchell in October 1977.

24. Young, p. 32.

25. Ibid., pp. 32-33.

26. Mitchell, Stained Radiance, p. 15.

27. Ibid., pp. 87-88.

28. Ibid., p. 286.

29. S.Q., p. 345.

30. Mitchell, Stained Radiance, p. 95.

31. John Buchan, The Four Adventures of Richard Hannay (London, 1930), p. 153.

32. Mitchell, Stained Radiance, p. 128.

33. Hugh MacDiarmid, 'Lewis Grassic Gibbon: 1901-1935', Our Time, vol. 11, no. 2 (September 1948), p. 307.

34. Munro, p. 108.

35. James Leslie Mitchell, Spartacus (London, 1933), p. 173.

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid., p. 74.

38. Ibid., p. 15.

39. Young, p. 65.

40. Geoffrey Wagner, 'The Greatest since Galt: Lewis Grassic Gibbon', Essays in Criticism vol. 11, no. 3 (July 1952), p. 309.

41. William Montgomerie, 'The Brown God: Lewis Grassic Gibbon's Trilogy', Scots Magazine, December 1945, pp. 222-223.

42. Wagner, 'Lewis Grassic Gibbon', p. 298.

CHAPTER 2

SUNSET SONG

Sunset Song opens with a Prelude which is remarkable as much for its style as for its content. The style is of such crucial importance that were its Scots idiom to be translated into Standard English, the meaning of the content would be significantly diminished. Consider the opening paragraph:

Kinraddie lands had been won by a Norman childe, Cospatric de Gondeshil, in the days of William the Lyon, when gryphons and such-like beasts still roamed the Scots countryside and folk would waken in their beds to hear the children screaming, with a great wolf-beast, come through the hide window, tearing at their throats. In the Den of Kinraddie one such beast had its lair and by day it lay about the woods and the stench of it was awful to smell all over the countryside, and at gloaming a shepherd would see it, with its great wings half-folded across the great belly of it and its head, like the head of a meikle cock, but with the ears of a lion, poked over a fir tree, watching. And it ate up sheep and men and women and was a fair terror, and the King had his heralds cry a reward to whatever knight would

23 ride and end the mischieving of the
24 beast.[1]

The passage states that the work is set in 'the Scots countryside', but a Scottish setting alone does not distinguish a piece of writing as Scottish rather than English. Although the passage contains a few Scots words and idioms, the effect is not dramatically altered if the approximate English substitutions are made in the following manner: man for 'childe' (line 2); people for 'folk' (line 5); twilight for 'gloaming' (line 14); great for 'meikle' (line 17); and if the phrase 'a fair terror' (lines 20/21) is shortened to 'a terror' and 'waken in their beds' (lines 5/6) is altered to 'awaken'. The dramatic impact of this passage owes more to the unorthodox clause arrangement than to the occasional interpolation of Scots words. If the clause arrangement is altered to fit a conventional Standard English pattern, the changed rhythm totally lacks the power of the original:

> A Norman, Cospatric de Gondeshil, won Kinraddie lands in the time of William the Lyon. Animals such as gryphons roamed the Scots countryside then and folk would be woken at night by the screams of their children as wolf-like creatures came through the hide windows and tore at their throats. One such beast had its lair in the Den of Kinraddie and spent the daytime in the woods. All over the countryside its

> awful stench could be smelt. At gloaming a shepherd would see it with its wings half folded over its belly and its head, which was like that of a meikle cock but with the ears of a lion, watching over the top of a fir tree. It devoured sheep and men and women and was a terror. The King told his heralds to announce a reward for the knight who would ride out and end the beast's wrongdoing.

This 'translation' imparts the necessary information but loses the 'magic' of the original. The Scots original suggests that the story has some dimension of reality for the anonymous folk narrator who is recounting it, while the conventions of Standard English tone down the episode and place it in the remote world of fable. This opening episode begins to establish the minds of the Scottish peasants and Gibbon's prose demonstrates that the rhythms of the Scots tongue are an integral part of this culture.

Throughout the Prelude Gibbon establishes a cultural ethos around the folk narrator. Kinraddie is placed in its historical and geographical setting, but it is the way in which the 'facts' are mediated through the peasant mind that establishes the important realm of cultural realism. The narrator selectively highlights the historical events which shaped the Scottish consciousness. The second part of the Prelude extends this cultural identity to the whole of the peasantry of Kinraddie. The 'voice' of the anonymous narrator blends into the 'speak', the collective folk voice

which reflects the common opinions and attitudes of the folk of Kinraddie. As this happens, the language becomes even more colloquial and the punctuation reflects the pauses and parentheses of a natural speaking tone:

> So that was the Mains, below the Meikle House, and Ellison farmed it in his Irish way and right opposite, hidden away among their yews, were kirk and manse, the kirk an old, draughty place and in the winter time, right in the middle of the Lord's Prayer, maybe, you'd hear an outbreak of hoasts fit to lift off the roof, and Miss Sarah Sinclair, her that came from Netherhill and played the organ, she'd sneeze into her hymnbook and miss her bit notes and the minister, him that was the old one, he'd glower down at her more like John Knox than ever.[2]

The language of the 'speak' is as important as its content in defining the limits of the peasant mind. The presence of the 'speak' throughout the novel establishes a sub-structure of cultural and social realism.

The Prelude establishes that the folk of Kinraddie judge their neighbours shrewdly. They are anti-Catholic, but their deepest contempt is reserved for the gentry. Although these prejudices conform to received ideas about the Scottish peasant, Gibbon creates a depth of characterisation which ensures that the folk of Kinraddie are not mere stereotypes. He achieves this not through careful individualisa-

tion, but by creating a world of imaginative richness and depth. The language, the careful selection of historical detail, the mixture of fact and fantasy and the referential world of history and literature (which includes Wallace, Dr. Johnson and Boswell, the French Revolution and the Highland Clearances) all combine to produce this effect. The final paragraph of the Prelude suggests links between Kinraddie and the worlds created in other Scottish fiction:

> So that was Kinraddie that bleak winter of nineteen eleven and the new minister, him they chose early next year, he was to say it was the Scots countryside itself, fathered between a kailyard and a bonny briar bush in the lee of a house with green shutters. And what he meant by that you could guess at yourself if you'd a mind for puzzles and dirt, there wasn't a house with green shutters in the whole of Kinraddie.[3]

Although the folk narrator is mystified by the references, they will extend the competent reader's cultural appreciation of Kinraddie. In the Prelude Gibbon creates a set of values for Kinraddie and he re-examines these throughout the novel. As Kurt Wittig suggests, 'the story moves on three distinct levels: personal, social, and mythical'.[4] I would accept this basic approach, although I would extend the 'social' level to include the dimension of culture.

On the personal level, Chris Guthrie emerges as the central character. She also plays important mythical and

cultural roles. She is never set totally apart from her community. She differs in degree rather than type, and her individuality lies in possessing a greater sensitivity, a keener intelligence and a better education than the rest of Kinraddie. This difference of degree makes her credible in her roles as spokesperson for, and interpreter of, her community. Her mind is shaped by the same forces as the rest of Kinraddie and it is important to recognise that she is linguistically defined as part of Kinraddie. The opening paragraph of the first section, 'Ploughing', establishes that her language is as Scots and her immediate world as local, as that of the rest of Kinraddie. She is distinguished, however, by her sensitivity to the animation of the world around her:

> Below and around where Chris Guthrie lay
> the June moors whispered and rustled and
> shook their cloaks, yellow with broom
> and powdered faintly with purple, that
> was the heather but not the full passion
> of its colour yet. And in the east
> against the cobalt blue of the sky lay
> the shimmer of the North Sea, that was
> by Bervie, and maybe the wind would
> veer there in an hour or so and you'd
> feel the change in the life and strum
> of the thing, bringing a streaming
> coolness out of the sea.[5]

Here nature is animate. It has a life of its own. The moors whisper and rustle. The full bloom of the heather is its

'passion'. The wind too seems to have a discretion and when it alters it will bring with it the properties of the sea. This Romantic animation of the natural world is a constant accompaniment to Chris throughout Sunset Song. On a personal level, this suggests that she has a greater sensitivity than others to the world around her. As she relates details of the drought it is clear that her attitudes and the language with which she expresses them are a part of the peasant consciousness of Kinraddie:

> You could go never a road but farmer billies were leaning over the gates, glowering at the weather, and road-menders, poor stocks, chapping away at their hillocks with the sweat fair dripping off them, and the only folk that seemed to have a fine time were the shepherds up in the hills. But they swore themselves dry when folk cried that to them, the hill springs about a shepherd's herd would dry up or seep away all in an hour and the sheep go straying and baying and driving the man fair senseless till he'd led them weary miles to the nearest burn. So everybody was fair snappy, staring up at the sky, and the ministers all over the Howe were offering up prayers for rain in between the bit about the Army and the

> Prince of Wales' rheumatics. But feint the good it did for rain; and Long Rob of the Mill said he'd heard both Army and rheumatics were much the same as before.[6]

This passage demonstrates that on the personal level, Chris is well equipped to narrate Kinraddie's life. As the daughter of a crofter she is precise about details of the weather and the farming life. More than any other individual character Chris develops the themes of Sunset Song. Her mythical and cultural roles are so inextricably mingled with the details of her personal life that these themes seem to arise 'naturally' in the course of events. The effect is never overbearing or didactic. In her mythical role she connects Kinraddie with its past. For Chris the Standing Stones provide refuge and comfort, and it is she who correctly identifies them as the work of the first crofters, while the rest of Kinraddie dismisses them as 'Druid stones'.[7] Eventually they are utilised as a Memorial to the 'sunset of an age'[8] and Chris's interpretation of their significance is confirmed. Chris is receptive to the distant past too. She 'sees' a Greek from the remote past when her family crosses the Slug road and at Dunnottar she identifies emotionally with the Covenanting cause. This connection with the past is intimately linked with the events of her personal life, but it is in the operation of her cultural role that she analyses the nature of the community's relationship with its past.

The major theme of Sunset Song is the debate about, and the analysis of, Scottish values, and this persists throughout the novel. It is Chris who first indicates that there is a

clash between English and Scottish values:

> 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 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. 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 the 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.[9]

In this passage Chris raises the interrelated problems of education and culture in Scotland. She identifies the Scots language as the essence of the life of Kinraddie. She perceives that English is the language of education and advancement, but that to progress in the wider world, she would have to cut herself off from her cultural and linguistic roots. For Chris, English is not only alien to the life of her community, but is neither an appropriate nor an adequate tongue to express that way of life. She is raising one of the central problems of the traditional Scotland which came into being after the Act of Union. Scotland was absorbed into the larger unit of the British Isles, but as a lesser partner. The traditions, culture and language of England were dominant. Scottish education became increasingly Anglicised, and although Scotland traditionally had a more flexible class system, the ambitious child who rose from the proletariat had to communicate in the more genteel English language. Gibbon shows her to be caught on the horns of a traditional Scottish dilemma. On the personal level Chris resolves the problem by choosing to live in Kinraddie. She recognises her bond with the land and its values:

> 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.
>
> The kye were in sight then, they stood in the lithe of the freestone dyke that ebbed and flowed over the

shoulder of the long ley field, and they hugged to it close from the drive of the wind, not heeding her as she came among them, the smell of their bodies foul in her face - foul and known and enduring as the land itself. Oh, she hated and loved in a breath! Even her love might hardly endure, but beside it the hate was no more than the whimpering and fear of a child that cowered from the wind in the lithe of its mother's skirts.[10]

Chris makes this decision on a personal level in response to a particularly acute situation.

Although the other inhabitants of Kinraddie are not called upon to analyse the problem in such depth, the paradoxical nature of Scottish culture is apparent. Although they can dismiss education as 'teaching your children a lot of damned nonsense',[11] the problems of the Scots language are more complicated. Like Chris they identify the Scots tongue with the life of the land and see English as the language of social advancement. The problem is encapsulated in the discussion at Chris's wedding:

> And Rob said <u>You can tell me, man, what's the English for sotter, or greip, or smore, or pleiter, gloaming or glanching or well-henspeckled? And if you said gloaming was sunset you'd fair be a liar; and you're hardly that, Mr. Gordon</u>.
>
> But Gordon was real decent and

reasonable, 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, they must use the English, orra though it be.[12]

Although this passage forms the only direct discussion of the problem, the Scottish cultural tradition is foregrounded throughout the novel by the ballads and traditional songs that are sung, whistled and recalled. Pooty's attempts to recite the poetry of Burns suggests that this too is an accepted part of their cultural tradition. The finest flowering of this tradition is exhibited at Chris's wedding when almost everyone contributes a traditional song or ballad to the entertainment. It is Chris, the interpreter of Kinraddie, who identifies the relationship between these songs and the environment which engendered them:

it came on Chris how strange was the sadness of Scotland's singing, made for the sadness of the land and sky in 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, 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.[13]

It is important that Gibbon gives the text of several of these songs. They form an essential part of the consciousness of Kinraddie. As the novel progresses it becomes clear that Kinraddie is a microcosm of traditional Scotland. In the Memorial sermon the minister identifies the Kinraddie dead as 'the last of the Old Scots folk'.[14] The language of Sunset Song is Scots, and Gibbon combines the linguistic arrangement of the novel with Chris's personal life and the social organisation of Kinraddie to achieve a harmony between style and content that successfully endorses his celebration of the traditional values. It is Ewan's death that serves as the ultimate vindication of Kinraddie's value system. While Chris believes that he died fighting a remote, alien war, she cannot accept his death:

> He wasn't dead, he could never have died or been killed for nothing at all, far away from her over the sea, what matter to him their War and their fighting, their King and their country? Kinraddie was his land, Blawearie his, he was never dead for those things of no concern, he'd the crops to put in and the loch to drain and her to come back to. It had nothing to do with Ewan this telegram. They were only tormenting her, cowards and liars and bloody men, the English generals and their like down there in London. But she wouldn't bear it, she'd have the law on them,

cowards and liars as she knew them
to be![15]

The value system of Kinraddie has been so successfully established that when the truth of Ewan's death is revealed, the effect is one of pure relief. Only within the terms of the novel's debate can Ewan's death as a deserter be acceptable. Ewan's final decision to attempt to regain Kinraddie at any cost forms the ultimate repudiation of an external value system and the climax of the novel's endorsement of Kinraddie.

Although the debate about Scottish culture forms the central theme of the novel, Gibbon discusses such other aspects of traditional Scottish life as Kinraddie's relationship with the gentry, the problem of emigration, and the nature of Scottish religion. He equivocates least about religion. The Reverend Gibbon is the only character in the novel who is totally incredible. He is portrayed as a complete buffoon. He is lecherous, drunken and utterly hypocritical, and his standing in the community rests on a blind regard for his office. Realistic characterisation is incompatible with the demands of his role in Grassic Gibbon's indictment of Presbyterianism. Gibbon's sensitive exploration of the impact of religion on the life of John Guthrie is much more subtle. Linguistically and culturally he belongs to Kinraddie, but he is portrayed as a strong individual within Kinraddie's terms of reference. He is characterised by his integrity and it is his faithfulness to the prejudices of his culture that ultimately leads to his downfall. His staunch dislike of the gentry loses him the leases of two

farms and his religious principles finally destroy his family. His religion warps and perverts his better nature. John Guthrie uses his religion to endorse his lust and justify his refusal to attempt to limit his family and his wife eventually kills herself when she finds that she is yet again pregnant. He humiliates Will mercilessly and even threatens to castrate him for taking the name of God in vain. He perverts the scriptures in an effort to make Chris have intercourse with him. John Guthrie may call himself a Presbyterian, but Gibbon suggests that he is also heir to an older religious tradition. In common with the rest of Kinraddie, he experiences an increased sexual drive at harvest time and Chris notices the connection between his increased strength and the harvest:

> it was as if he grew stronger and crueller then, ripe and strong with the strength of the corn.[16]

Despite this mythical role of harvest god, John Guthrie remains a credible character. Although his religion forms the moral mainspring of his response to his environment, the operations of his daily life anchor the religion to reality. Unlike the minister, he is meant to be taken seriously. It is he who voices the first premonition of the approaching end of his society:

> Now also it grew plain to him here as never in Echt that the day of the crofter was fell 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.[17]

Although Gibbon's treatment of religion is totally negative, the part played by John Guthrie does not disturb the unity of Kinraddie. At his funeral Chris recognises his essential goodness and her praise is a eulogy of those peasant virtues which he embodied. In the discussion of religion John Guthrie is portrayed as a representative of his community, while the minister's class, education and character set him apart, and his cynical exploitation of the community makes John Guthrie's downfall more poignant.

Emigration was a part of Scottish life throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Gibbon demonstrates, however, that movement away from Kinraddie is effected by class and education, not by mere miles. Both Chae and Will leave Scotland but their return does not disturb the unity and consciousness of Kinraddie. Although their experiences provide them with anecdotes, their hearts, minds and speech remain essentially the same. In the Prelude there is a brief account of Chae's travels in Alaska, California and South Africa, but his speech remains that of Kinraddie; and while his Socialism distinguishes him from the rest of Kinraddie, his address to the election meeting demonstrates that it is a home-grown Scottish variety:

> The God of old Scotland there was, aye fighting on the side of the people since the days of old John Knox, and He would

yet bring to an end the day of wealth
and waster throughout the world,
liberty and equality and fraternity
were coming though all the damned
lordies in the House of Lords should
pawn their bit coronets and throw
their whores back in the streets and
raise private armies to fight the
common folk with their savings.[18]

Although Will declares that Scotland is finished and that he will never live there again, he remains as Scottish as Chae in both mind and tongue. Despite their travels they both retain Kinraddie's value system. Gibbon demonstrates the effects of emigration from within the community.

Throughout the novel, Kinraddie's attitudes and prejudices are reiterated by the many voices of the community. For example, although certain individuals are foregrounded by their dislike for the gentry, the attitude is a constant part of the peasant mind as the anonymous folk narrator reveals in the Prelude:

The leases were one-year, two-year, you
worked from the blink of the day you
were breeked 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.[19]

Although violent class conflict is not an aspect of Kinraddie, past events have created a class wariness. For Chris the Covenanting cause symbolises the Scottish struggle, merging the issues of religion, class and nationhood:

> There the Covenanting folk had screamed and died while the gentry dined and danced in their lithe, 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.[20]

The class issue is set in the context of the wider cultural debate, and is an integral part of the life of Kinraddie.

Discussion of these issues is not superimposed on the realistic level of the novel but arises from the events of daily life in Kinraddie. Sunset Song is totally credible on a realistic level. This is not to say that it reflects accurately and naturalistically the workings of a small Scottish community of the period. Whether or not it achieves this is largely irrelevant. Gibbon successfully creates and sustains a multi-dimensional world for the characters of Kinraddie, capturing the peasant mind by combining his innovatory use of Scots, his careful selection of historical detail, his preservation of Kinraddie's linguistic and cultural unity and his establishment of a rich referential world. He firmly anchors this mind to the demands of the agricultural year and the life of the land. The physical community of Kinraddie is almost completely self-contained with the inhabitants operating almost entirely within this world. Occasionally they need to visit Stonehive, but the outside world with its alien value system is never allowed to

displace the consciousness of Kinraddie itself. In the Memorial sermon the minister identifies Kinraddie as a microcosm of traditional Scotland, and Gibbon never diminishes its credibility by sentimentalising either its values or the life to which they belong. The hard labour of the agricultural life is emphasised throughout. Cooking, cleaning, ploughing, caring for the animals, are all hard drudgery. At harvest time whole families work round the clock to bring in the crop. Pregnancy and childbirth are wearing to the point of becoming intolerable. Farm life is shown as a lifelong struggle between man and his environment. It is in these terms that Chris recognises her father's courage:

> and she minded then, wildly, in a long, broken flash of remembrance, all the fine things of him that the years had hidden away from their sight, the fleetness of him and his justice, and the fight unwearying he'd fought with the land and its masters to have them all clad and fed and respectable, he'd never rested working and chaving for them, only God had beaten him in the end.[21]

This daily struggle provides the framework of the novel and both Chris's progress and the cultural debate are inseparable from this background. The personal, cultural and social levels of the novel are successfully interwoven. Chris's wedding admirably demonstrates this achievement. On the eve of her wedding Chris is isolated in a world of icy,

but animate nature:

> She sat by the window, it was a night
> that was rimed with a frost of stars,
> rime in the sky and rime on the earth,
> the Milky Way shone clear and hard and
> the black trees of Blawearie waved
> their leafless boughs up against the
> window, sparkling white with the hoar.[22]

This passage reinforces the special bond between Chris and nature. It helps to endorse her views and visions by highlighting her sensitivity. This is important now when the personal is merging into the mythical. She recognises that the land will endure long after her wedding has been forgotten:

> this marriage of hers was nothing, that
> it would pass on and forward into days
> that had long forgotten it, her life and
> Ewan's, and they pass also, and the face
> of the land change again in the coming
> of the seasons and centuries till the
> last lights sank away from it 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.[23]

The snow that comes down on the wedding morning has a dual function. It provides a picturesque setting and symbolises Chris's purity and untarnished life. These imaginative and mythical levels of meaning are backgrounded by the demands of farm life. The realism is sustained by the everyday chores

of feeding the horses and hens and scrubbing the kitchen. The presents are practical - cutlery, counterpanes, biscuit barrels, a pair of hens. The folk of Kinraddie are described with the characteristic blend of shrewdness, humour and mild malice that reflects the peasant consciousness:

> Cuddiestoun and his wife sat opposite her, it was like watching a meikle collie and a futret at meat, him gulping down everything that came his way and a lot that didn't, he would rax for that; and his ugly face, poor stock, fair shone and glimmered with the exercise. But Mistress Munro snapped down at her plate with sharp, quick teeth, her head never still a minute, just like a futret with a dog nearby.[24]

The details of this meal are listed, for a feast like this is an important gastronomic as well as social event for Kinraddie. It is against this busy, realistic setting that the cultural debate arises:

> Up at Rob's table an argument rose, Chris hoped that it wasn't religion, she saw Mr. Gordon's wee face pecked up to counter Rob. But Rob was just saying what a shame it was that folk should be shamed nowadays to speak Scotch...[25]

The ensuing discussion reaches the heart of the cultural

dilemma, illustrating the reality of the division between English and Scottish values. The Kinraddie folk have a low opinion of the Scots tongue. Lacking Chris's sensitivity, they fail to make the connection between the language and the value system. They are concerned with effects rather than causes:

> And a fair bit breeze got up about it all, every soul in the parlour seemed speaking at once; and as aye when they spoke of the thing they 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, from the blink of day till the fall of night, no thanks from the soss and sotter, and hardly a living to be made.[26]

The discussion is not superimposed on the action. It seems to arise 'naturally' in the development of events. It is expressed in the language of the people and conducted on a level that is relevant to them. They do not discuss their cultural inheritance; instead they effectively display it in the entertainment that follows the dance. The effect of this entertainment is to place the novel's cultural level of existence in its proper context. The scene of the dance is carefully set. This is a peasants' wedding and the dance

takes place in the barn which is warmed by a brazier. The music is supplied by Long Rob on his fiddle and Chae on his melodeon. A sack is hung up to shield them from the draught. Brief snatches of conversation are highlighted as people dance past. The busy scene with the folk absorbed in the dancing recalls the liveliness of a Brueghel canvas. The entertainment elevates the scene, however, giving the participants a fuller measure of human dignity. Gibbon reproduces the text of many of the songs and ballads, thereby simultaneously emphasising their intrinsic beauty and their importance to the community. By cleverly utilising traditional Scottish sentimentality, he successfully establishes an imaginative, artistic dimension for Kinraddie. The wedding episode successfully operates on many levels - the personal, the mythical, the social and the cultural. These are blended together inseparably and form part of the total 'organic' unity of Kinraddie.

The War poses the greatest threat to this unity. Gibbon faced a considerable artistic problem in depicting the disintegration of this community without disturbing its credibility. The Memorial service emphasises that the War has ended a whole way of life:

> With 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.[27]

Despite this statement of the new minister's, Kinraddie's disintegration is not reflected by any linguistic alteration. The tone and attitudes of the speak are of the same quality

in the Epilude as in the Prelude. The Epilude opens with the phrase 'folk said', and the analysis that follows is a product of the same mind that was revealed in the Prelude:

> Folk said that winter that the War had done feint the much good to Mutch of Bridge End. In spite of his blowing and boasting, his silver he might as well have flung into a midden as poured in his belly, though faith! there wasn't much difference in destination. He'd gone in for Irish cattle, had Mutch, quick you bought them and quick you sold and reaped a fine profit with prices so brave.[28]

This continuity of linguistic mode preserves the credibility of the community. Gibbon purposely creates a certain division between form and content, in that the indications of Kinraddie's moral disintegration are 'content' oriented, and are not reflected by any change in the language. The first indication of this disintegration is the community's attack on Long Rob. The folk are easily swayed by the Reverend Gibbon's fire-eating sermon and the abnormal pressures make them behave uncharacteristically. Many of the changes are slow and insidious. When Chae Strachan returns on leave he notes that Kinraddie is experiencing changes of values as well as the changes to the land caused by the tree-felling. As new opportunities are presented, the folk are turning from the land and their traditional way of life:

> But 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.[29]

The wasteland image is reiterated by the new minister in the Epilude:

> And that was the way things went in the end on the old bit place up there on the brae, sheep baaed and scrunched where once the parks flowed thick with corn, no corn would come at all they said, since the woods went down. And the new minister when he preached his incoming sermon cried <u>They have made a desert and they call it peace</u>.[30]

The breakdown of the old way of life and the traditional values are reported by the more reliable and intelligent members of the community. The majority of the folk are unable to understand the full implications of the changes. The persistence of their linguistic identity and cultural consciousness reveals a community in transition. The War has not yet been fully absorbed into the folk mind. On the social and cultural levels the War is distanced by Gibbon's technique of using commentary rather than direct revelation. On the

personal level, the effect is more dramatic. Ewan provides the novel's most extreme example of moral disorder. When he returns from training in Lanark he is totally brutalised. He spends his leave drinking, lazing in bed and abusing his family. He has betrayed those instincts which bound him to Kinraddie and the result is disastrous. He behaves like a stereotype of a thug, and he reflects this in his speech by retreating into lazy clichés:

> So he made his own tea, grumbling and swearing, a fine send-off this for a man that was going to France to do his bit. And Chris listened to the catch-phrase, contempt in her heart.[31]

Ewan eventually recognises his spiritual links with Kinraddie and realises that it is imperative for him to regain his place in Kinraddie. Because this personal drive conflicts with the demands of the War he is shot as a deserter. His explanation of his desertion is expressed in his native tongue and focusses on the familiar world of Kinraddie:

> And Chae said to him, they sat together in the hut where he waited the coming of the morning, <u>But why did you do it, Ewan? You might have known you'd never get free</u>. And Ewan looked at him and shook his head, <u>It was that wind that came with the sun, I minded Blawearie, I seemed to waken up smelling that smell. And I couldn't believe it was me that stood in the trench, it was</u>

> just daft to be there. So I turned
> and got out of it.[32]

Ewan's death represents the final fulfilment of Kinraddie's value system. Ironically, Ewan sacrifices his life just as the framework of the traditional values is irrevocably destroyed. In the Memorial service the minister speaks of 'the sunset of an age and an epoch'.[33] This sermon clarifies and unites the novel's major themes. The minister refers to the dead as 'the last of the Old Scots folk',[34] and makes it clear that a whole culture has died with them:

> It was the old Scotland that perished
> then, and we may believe that never again
> will the old speech and the old songs,
> the old curses and the old benedictions,
> rise but with alien effort to our lips.[35]

The dead and the passing cultural epoch are lamented by a piper playing The Flowers of the Forest. Gibbon reproduced the text of this song in the wedding scene; he now reproduces the music. The native speech, Scots culture and the peasants' bonds with the land, are all part of the dying age for which the Standing Stones form a fitting memorial. Chris has identified these as having been erected by the first farmers on the land. The sermon is the only overtly didactic part of the novel and it arises quite credibly from the action. The character of Robert Colquohoun has been sympathetically outlined in the Epilude. His credentials as an interpreter of Kinraddie are impeccable. He is the son of the old minister who preached about the Golden Age. He went through the War as a plain soldier and, while he condemns Kinraddie's errors,

he has the idealism to work for a better future. He is a perceptive, principled and authoritative character whose comprehensive analysis forms a superb ending to the novel. The hope he holds out for the future is mirrored by the novel's final image:

> they saw the minister was standing behind her, waiting for her, they'd the last of the light with them up there, and maybe they didn't need it or heed it, you can do without the day if you've a lamp quiet-lighted and kind in your heart.[36]

Sunset Song is distinguished by an intensity of thought, feeling and physical experience. Gibbon creates and maintains a multi-dimensional world in which his characters interact on cultural, social, spiritual and personal levels. The language of the common people forms an essential part of their existence on all these levels and Gibbon succeeds magnificently in creating an idiom to reflect a cultural heritage as well as the life of a viable community. Although the War destroys the community, Gibbon is careful not to let it fragment the linguistic integrity of the novel, and the resulting intensity firmly embeds the central debate within the realistic framework of a living, organic community. Neither the characterisation nor the development of the linear plot are overbalanced by too explicit a concern with ideas. Gibbon celebrates the traditional values of Scotland without sentimentalising them and this celebration is achieved in the linguistic and cultural spheres as well as the cerebral. His innovatory and highly sensitive manipulation of the resources of the Scots tongue creates a rich and complex novel.

1. S.Q., p. 15.
2. Ibid., p. 19.
3. Ibid., p. 31.
4. Kurt Wittig, The Scottish Tradition in Literature (Edinburgh, 1958), p. 330.
5. S.Q., p. 32.
6. Ibid., p. 33.
7. Ibid., p. 23.
8. Ibid., p. 192.
9. Ibid., p. 37.
10. Ibid., p. 98.
11. Ibid., p. 74.
12. Ibid., p. 123.
13. Ibid., p. 130.
14. Ibid., p. 193.
15. Ibid., pp. 177-178.
16. Ibid., p. 61.
17. Ibid., p. 67.
18. Ibid., p. 82.
19. Ibid., p. 17.
20. Ibid., pp. 101-102.
21. Ibid., p. 95.
22. Ibid., p. 116.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid., p. 122.
25. Ibid., p. 123.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid., p. 193.
28. Ibid., p. 183.

29. Ibid., p. 156.

30. Ibid., p. 189.

31. Ibid., p. 172.

32. Ibid., p. 179.

33. Ibid., p. 192.

34. Ibid., p. 193.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid., p. 194.

CHAPTER 3

CLOUD HOWE

An examination of Gibbon's use of language in Cloud Howe must be the proper starting point for a critical appreciation of the novel. Like Sunset Song, this second part of the trilogy is set in the Mearns district. Although it opens in Kinraddie, most of the action takes place in Segget, and the Segget district is described as carefully as was Kinraddie in the earlier novel. Cloud Howe inherits the main surviving characters of Sunset Song, including the 'speak'. The novel begins where Sunset Song ended - that is, at the beginning of the twenties. The sense of continuity is maintained by Gibbon's sustained use of the Scots language. Superficially, the Proem of Cloud Howe seems very similar to the Prelude of Sunset Song. Both establish the geographical and historical backgrounds of Segget and Kinraddie respectively. In Sunset Song, however, the Prelude outlines Kinraddie's moral and cultural dimensions, creating a unity that distinguishes the world of the novel. This unity is missing from the universe of Cloud Howe. The language of the novel exhibits a postwar world that is fragmented, and a careful examination of the Proem reveals that language is used to create three distinct styles or linguistic 'modes' - the poetic, the dramatic and the social. A linguistic 'mode' I understand as being not merely an artistic device, but the complete and appropriate use of language within the demands of an established literary framework. The integrity of the community in Sunset Song required a unity of 'mode' throughout the novel, while in Cloud Howe the different 'modes' establish their

respective areas of concern and are distinguished by their own special 'languages'.

The Proem opens in the poetic 'mode'. The first paragraph describes the location of the modern Segget and the opening sentence appears to be very factual:

> The borough of Segget stands under the Mounth, on the southern side, in the Mearns Howe, Fordoun lies near and Drumlithie nearer, you can see the Laurencekirk lights of a night glimmer and glow as the mists come down.[1]

The short phrases and clauses pile up on one another in the lilting manner that is so reminiscent of Sunset Song. The effect of this 'style' is perhaps best demonstrated by 'translating' the sentence into Standard English, thus:

> Drumlithie is slightly nearer than Fourdoun to Segget, which lies in the Mearns Howe under the southern side of the Mounth, from where the Laurencekirk lights can be seen shining on misty nights.

This 'translation' could be a sentence from a school geography book. The effect is colder and more distancing than the original. The reader is given the same information, but he is not included in the description as is Gibbon's reader with the phrase 'you can see'. There is no 'magic' in the Standard English version. The real power of Gibbon's language can be understood better if the passage is written as verse, thus:

The borough of Segget stands under the Mounth,
On the southern side,
In the Mearns Howe,
Fourdoun lies near and Drumlithie nearer,
You can see the Laurencekirk lights
Of a night
Glimmer and glow
As the mists come down.

Although this follows no recognisable verse form, the 'poetic' force of the language becomes plain. When the passage is written like this, the reader will become more alert to the use of those artistic devices 'proper' to poetry. He will notice that the alliteration of 'Mounth' and 'Mearns', of 'Laurencekirk lights', of 'glimmer and glow', the rhyme of 'lights' and 'night', and the echoing repetition of 'near' and 'nearer', combine to create a verbal music. Rhyme, alliteration and echoing repetition are artistic devices more commonly exploited in poetry and therefore their existence in a novel jolts the reader into a different kind of critical expectation. The language is linked to that of a referential 'poetic' world. The phrase 'on the southern side' is exactly that which Browning used to describe the Weser washing Hamlyn's walls in 'The Pied Piper of Hamlyn'. In the nineteenth century the fairy tale became an accepted part of the 'poetic' universe, and the passage draws on this tradition. The lights that 'glimmer and glow as the mists come down' have a sinister and magical effect. They are made to seem more like marsh lights than town lights and the mist seems malevolent, with a will of its own. The world of nature has

an animation and an almost communicating consciousness. The effect recalls the Romantic recognition of natural forces. These references and echoes suggest that the world of poetry is real and substantial, embodying its own distinctive vision. Gibbon gives his novel an additional dimension of existence by linking it to the poetic world of Romantic and Victorian writers.

This nineteenth century poetic tradition conveys a more sophisticated value system than does the earlier ballad tradition. It is through skilful reference to the ballad tradition that Gibbon introduces the dramatic'mode'. Re-writing part of the Proem as verse demonstrates the insistent rhythm which is so akin to the ballad form:

> So Kenneth was dead
>
> and there followed wars
>
> Finella's carles
>
> builded the Kaimes
>
> A long line of battlements
>
> under the hills
>
> Midway a tower
>
> that was older still
>
> A broch from the days
>
> of the Pictish men.[2]

When 'falsified' in this manner, the language is reminiscent of both the ballad tradition and the earlier Old English verse form which splits the line into two equally stressed parts. The starkly told story of Finella and King Kenneth is imbued with the violence and the concepts of revenge and honour which pervade the ballads, and the tale of the Sheriff being

made into broth rivals any of the horrors of the ballads. The ballads are essentially dramatic. They are bleak and direct and although they may deal with the fates of individuals, the characters of the protagonists are never analysed in the way the reader would expect in a realistic novel, for example. This does not lessen the effect of the horror, nor does the reader cease to believe in the cruelty, treachery and revenge. Obviously different literary forms arouse different expectations in the reader. For example, in The Dowie Houms o'Yarrow it is enough to know that Sarah loved her man, that she sincerely mourns him:

> She kissed his cheek, she kaimed his hair,
> As oft she did before;
> She drank the red blood frae him ran,
> On the dowie houms of Yarrow;[3]

and that she spurns her father's offer to find her a better man. Were this to be the theme of a novel, the reader would expect to be told a lot more about Sarah, about her family and about the circumstances which led up to the killing. The reader would be much more curious about the psychology involved. In the Proem the ballad effect is totally acceptable. It is used to recount stories of the past about which ballads might have been composed. This prefaces the stark modern drama of class confrontation which is the business of the dramatic mode in Cloud Howe.

The last part of the Proem introduces the social 'mode'. It reveals the divided social world of modern Segget. In Sunset Song the 'speak' represents the view-point of a whole community, but in Cloud Howe the 'speak' is the voice of the

bourgeoisie, of the respectable folk of Segget, who regard their fellow citizens, the spinners, as 'a swarm of lice' who live in Segget only 'by their leave'.

> Segget still tried to make out that the spinners were there only by their leave, the ill-spoken tinks, with their mufflers and shawls; the women were as bad as the men, if not worse, with their jeering and fleering in Segget Square.[4]

These respectable folk are totally alienated from their fellow townsfolk. In Sunset Song Kinraddie functions as a viable community and the gossip, however ill-natured, is concerned with the actions of people who are perceived as individuals. The ways in which these individuals depart from the mores of the community is the stuff of gossip, and this has a practical function in preserving the values and life of the community. Segget folk do not see the spinners as individuals. They are described en masse, as the undifferentiated proletariat, in their mufflers and shawls. Clearly the social universe of Cloud Howe is very different from that of Sunset Song. Its values are those of a fragmented, changing modern world, and the social 'mode' examines the moral and social implications of the alienation of men from their fellows.

In the Proem three distinct literary 'modes' emerge. It opens in a 'mode' that is both implicitly Romantic and consciously 'poetic', blending the imaginative forces of poetic tradition with a vision of an animate natural world. The dramatic 'mode' is approached through reference to the

value system of the ballad. Expectations of characterisation within this 'mode' are minimal, and this 'mode' is developed throughout the novel in the dramatic confrontations between Mowat and the spinners. The third 'mode' is the social one, and the theme of alienation is developed in this 'mode' throughout the novel. I have indicated that these three 'modes' co-exist in the Proem, and I maintain that they persist throughout the novel, and that none is given a subordinate role.

The corruption operating within the social 'mode' precludes Segget's value system from providing a background for the action of the novel. The problems discussed in Sunset Song are inextricably linked to the moral and physical life of the community and are a natural part of the total unity of Kinraddie. While Cloud Howe is as firmly placed geographically and historically as Sunset Song, the novel is anchored to the real world by an accurate tracking of political and social events. The realities of the postwar world, the events leading up to the General Strike and the gloomy details of the Depression are combined to provide a framework for the action. The novel opens in the world of postwar Kinraddie, where the 'speak' still represents the voice of the whole community, although the ways of that community have been destroyed by the War. The day of the crofter is over and neither the ploughmen back from the War nor the new middle class of big farmers have any patience with the religion that used to be the backbone of their culture. The War is seen to have been responsible for the decline in morale and loss of community identity. Despite this, the people of Kinraddie

are still recognisably human. The contrast presented by the Segget folk is marked. I have already mentioned their total antipathy towards the spinners. This persists throughout the novel. Even when the Depression comes, the folk refuse to believe the tales of the spinners' terrible suffering:

> Then the news went round that old
> Cronin was dead, found dead in his bed
> by his young son Chae, Chae blubbered
> the old man had no firewood for days,
> and nothing but a pot of potatoes to
> eat. Folk wouldn't believe that
> blither at all, it couldn't be true,
> for it made you shiver - no, no, 'twas
> only another damned lie, that kind of
> thing never happened in Segget. Would
> you find that news in the Mearns Chief?[5]

The heavy irony is a feature of the social 'mode' and directs the reader's responses to the folk. The reader becomes increasingly alienated from the folk of Segget. There is no ambiguity in their contrast with the spinners, as the Armistice Day service shows:

> all of the spinners that had marched to
> the Square, had War-medals pinned on
> their jackets or waistcoats, they were
> all of them men who had been to the
> War: except the three women, and they
> wore medals sent on to them after their
> folk were dead. Well, that fair staggered
> Feet, and you felt sorry for him,

> especially as you had no medal yourself, you hadn't been able to get to the War, you'd been over-busy with the shop those years, or keeping the trade going brisk in the Arms, or serving at Segget as the new stationmaster. And well you might warrant if the King had known the kind of dirt that those spinners were he wouldn't have lashed out as he'd done with his medals.[6]

The extremism revealed in this passage is a typical reaction of the Segget folk. The 'speak' demonstrates that the collective consciousness of the Segget folk is both morally disturbed and irreconcilably alienated from the oppressed class. The 'mode' establishes its own linguistic and moral dynamics and the reader adjusts his expectations accordingly.

The folk of Segget are as alienated from one another as they are from the spinners. They are uniformly unwholesome. Segget gossip is unbridled spite. For example, as soon as the Colquohouns arrive in Segget, Ag Moultrie starts a rumour that Chris has 'been out all night with a spinner'[7] on the Kaimes. The episode becomes farcical when Else empties a bucket of water over the prowling Feet. This is one of several incidents which evoke a nightmarish atmosphere in Segget. Perhaps the most unpleasant of these incidents is when Dite Peat puts a dead pig in the Sourock's bed for a joke. The scene is one of black comedy as the Sourock rushes round town in his underwear trying to summon help. When he realises that it is a pig and not his wife, all he can say is:

'Man, but it fair looked her image to me'.[8] Such incidents indicate that the nature of the Segget folk is debased and warped. They are disgusted by Dite Peat's tales of his sexual exploits, but it is the spinners, not the folk, who boycott his shop when he mistreats his dying father. Dite Peat represents all the most perverted characteristics of modern man. On the eve of Armistice Day he remembers his pleasure in the wartime killing:

> there was something in blood and a
> howling of fear that kittled up a man
> as nothing else could.[9]

Within the social 'mode' Gibbon consistently employs irony as a technique for disclosing the discrepancy between the moral corruption of the folk and their pretensions to superiority. The social universe of Cloud Howe is dominated by bigotry, stupidity and occasional outright cruelty. Within the 'mode' itself there is no relief. Segget is pervaded by an atmosphere of moral decay. The 'speak' becomes a signal for corruption. The reader comes to expect that the folk will inevitably make the 'wrong' moral choice in any situation. There is no moral progression within the social 'mode'.

Against this background the alternative world of Robert and Chris seems utterly desirable. It is they who inhabit the poetic 'mode', and it is this 'mode', with its internal debate on the nature of reality, that provides a moral and artistic contrast to the social 'mode'. In a novel that is so firmly anchored to political events and issues, Chris is a puzzling and unsatisfactory character. As the novel progresses her motivations become increasingly obscure. Despite

her intuitive identification with the common people, she can neither follow Robert's vision, which she perceives to be 'a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night',[10] nor can she dismiss the problems of the unemployed. Increasingly the land becomes the one certainty in her life, and Robert's ideals come to be seen as clouds that will eventually disperse. Throughout the novel Chris reacts to moves instigated by Robert, but her character is portrayed as static and psychologically undeveloped. The well-rounded character of Sunset Song has given way to a poorly defined a-political character who seems out of place in a novel portraying the harsh life of the twenties. Despite this inadequate characterisation, Chris has an effective existence within the poetic 'mode'. In Cloud Howe each 'mode' establishes its own dynamics and it is the skilful juxtaposition of these that demonstrates the 'heart' of the novel. It is a novel that concerns itself with the nature of social morality, and in the poetic 'mode', problems of perception of reality are polarised into a Shellyan debate between earth and air. The distinctive nature of Chris and Robert's relationship is made plain by Chris as she contrasts it with her first marriage:

> And now she stood by a stranger's side, she slept in his bed, he loved her, she him, nearer to his mind than ever she had been to that of the body that lay mouldering in France, quiet and unmoving that had moved to her kisses, that had stirred and been glad in her arms, in her sight, that had known the stinging

of rain in his face as he ploughed the steep rigs of Blawearie brae, and come striding from his work with that smile on his face, and his clumsy hands and his tongue that was shy of the things that his eyes could whisper so blithe. Dead, still and quiet, not even a body, powder and dust he with whom she had planned her life and her days in the times to be.

In a ten years' time what things might have been? She might stand on this hill, she might rot in a grave, it would matter nothing, the world would go on, young Ewan dead as his father was dead, or hither and borne, far from Kinraddie: oh, once she had seen in these parks, she remembered, the truth, and the only truth that there was, that only the sky and the seasons endured, slow in their change, the cry of the rain, the whistle of the whins on a winter night under the sailing edge of the moon. [11]

The love between Chris and Robert is stated simply as fact. The statement has none of the passion and power that gathers in the remembrance of Ewan. Robert is hardly described - he is a 'stranger'; but the images grow clearer and the verbs stronger as Chris remembers Ewan. As she reflects on the

temporality of life, she again recognises that for her, reality is the natural world. This world may not have a mind, but it is brought more vividly to life than Robert is. The pathetic fallacy is beautifully incorporated into the elegiac strain of her vision. In the last sentence, the sky and the seasons become the subject of the sentence, but the rain too takes on a 'poetic' personality; it has a cry, and the rain and the whins are as active as the human who can name their 'cry' or 'whistle'. The vision is concluded by the highly Romantic, visual image of a 'winter night under the sailing edge of the moon'.

This referential world of poetry, with its Romantic ideas about the empathy between man and the natural world, is the one to which Chris relates throughout the novel. Robert too belongs to the world of the creative imagination, although he has fairly substantial roles to play in both the social and the dramatic 'modes'. He invades the social 'mode' to wage war against the corruption of Segget, and he plays a part in the dramatic struggle between Mowat and the spinners. Even though he is ostensibly the main character, he appears to be insubstantial and shadowy. His character is always exhibited at second hand, by his wife or by the folk of Kinraddie and Segget. The one physical description of him emphasises this characteristic lack of substance: 'his hair lay fair on the pillow's fringe, fair almost to whiteness, his skin ivory-white.'[12] Nor is the development of Robert's character dealt with in any depth. Both he and Chris remain psychologically static. Their true existence within the 'mode' is conveyed by the vision of a

higher truth, which the referential world endorses. This referential world is drawn from a written culture ranging from the Bible to Romantic and Imagist poetry. Their world is pre-eminently one of creation in which animate natural force combines with the created 'truth' of poetic achievement. A shower of summer rain and its effects are as carefully described as any character could be:

> Chris asked what the clouds were, up there by Trusta, they piled up dome on dome in the sky, like the roofs of a city in the land of cloud. Robert said Cumulus, just summer rain, and a minute later - Look, here it comes.
>
> Chris saw it come wheeling like a flying of rooks, dipping and pelting down from the heights, she looked left and saw it through a smother of smoke, the smoke stilled for a minute as it waited the rain, all Segget turning to look at the rain. Then Robert was running and Chris ran as well, under the shelter of the pattering yews. There they stood and panted and watched the water, whirling in and over the drills, the potato-shaws a bend in the pelt, the patter like hail and then like a shoom, like the sea on a morning heard from Kinraddie, the empty garden blind with rain. And then it was gone and

the sun bright out, and Chris heard,
far, clear, as though it had never
stopped; a snipe that was sounding up
in the hills.[13]

In this passage religious reference is blended into the natural, animate world. There is no direct Biblical reference in the 'domes of cloud', but the phrase 'roofs of a city in the land of cloud' suggests a medieval artist's depiction of heaven. The approach of the rain is highly dramatic. The pathetic fallacy is employed to seem to endow the smoke with the power to be still while it awaits the rain, and the rain itself is given the same instinctive faculties as a flock of rooks. When Chris and Robert shelter under 'the pattering yews', the metonymic phrase suggests that the trees themselves are consciously responding to the rain, although the reader knows that the pattering is that of the rain on the yews. As the rain grows stronger, its force is compared to the power of the sea: 'like the sea on a morning heard from Kinraddie'. Clearly Chris is making the comparison. She is a participant in the scene, rather than a mere onlooker. This scene encapsulates Chris and Robert in their world.

A 'content' orientated reading of the poetic passages would demand to know what they were 'about', and seek psychological explanations for the preoccupations of Chris and Robert. The poetic 'mode' can only be properly appreciated if its validity is accepted, and this can be achieved only through careful attention to the ways in which the 'mode' is established - that is, through the construction of its language, and the scope of its references. The poetic 'mode'

utilises the legacy of the Romantic poets in its animation of nature. The imagery is vivid, and sometimes has a lurid, fin de siècle quality, as in a description of the Manse garden at night:

> and next they were out on the shingle,
> it crunch-crunched under the tread of
> their feet, the moon had come and was
> sailing a sky lilac, so bright that the
> Manse stood clear as they turned and
> looked back, the yews etched in ink,
> beyond them the kirk that hadn't a
> steeple, set round with its row upon
> row of quiet graves, the withered grass
> kindled afresh to green, in long,
> shadowy tufts that whispered like
> ghosts.[14]

The images of the dead grass 'kindled' into green, and the moon 'sailing a sky lilac', are as powerful as any to be found in Romantic or fin de siècle poetry. In a passage which describes the night sky during Robert's last illness, the imagery is comparable to that of the Imagist poets:

> But near eight or nine when they went
> to their beds the wind seemed to die
> in the cry of the yews, Ewan went to
> the window and called Chris to look.
> So she did, and stood by his side in
> the dark, and looked on a sky that
> was burnished in steel, rimed with a
> pringling frost of stars, nothing
> moved or lived, the yews stood black,
> the garden hedges rose up in the

silence as if to listen to the void
star glow.[15]

The powerful images evoke an atmosphere in which the discords of nature reflect Chris's mood and seem to portend some momentous event. The discord is contained within individual images rather than in the contrast of one image with another. For example, the sky is seen to be unnatural. It is 'burnished in steel', as though it had been manufactured. It is empty and void. Not even Robert's clouds remain, but the earth beneath is so alive that even the hedges can rise up and 'listen', albeit to the inappropriate 'void star glow'. This passage brings the conflict between the earth world of Chris and the sky world of Robert to a dramatic climax. While Chris comes to realise that for her the only reality is in the land, Robert persists to the end in the role of the idealist who lives by '<u>a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night</u>.'[16] This Biblical metaphor, used to describe the Lord guiding the Israelites on their long journey to the Promised Land, is a recurrent motif in the poetic 'mode'. During a long hill walk they take together, Chris perceives that Robert is a dreamer, a 'Hunter of clouds by day', and she contrasts him with the 'men of the earth'[17] that she has known - farmers like Ewan and John Guthrie. The crisis within the poetic 'mode' develops in harmony with the progress of historical events. With the collapse of the General Strike and the death of his son, Robert sees his clouds threatening to evaporate. Chris, however, manages to find relief in working the earth, and she contrasts the permanence of the earth with the clouds of Robert's ideals:

> Cloud Howe of the winds and the rains and the sun! All the earth that, Chris thought at that moment, it made little difference one way or the other where you slept or ate or had made your bed, in all the howes of the little earth, a vexing puzzle to the howes were men, passing and passing as the clouds themselves passed: But the REAL was below, unstirred and untouched, surely if that were not also a dream.
>
> Robert with his dream of the night before, that Face and that Figure he had seen in the woods. Chris had listened to him with her head bent low knowing she listened to a madman's dream. And Robert to dream it! Robert who once followed a dream that at least had the wind in its hair, not this creep into fear and fancies of old. But she'd seen then, clear and clear as he spoke, the Fear that had haunted his life since the War, Fear he'd be left in the day alone, and stand and look at his naked self.[18]

This passage finally confirms the existence of the conflict between Chris and Robert. The resolution of the personal and philosophical conflicts is linked to a successful resolution of the poetic tension, and this is achieved only

by the death of Robert. As Chris looks at the hills on her last day in Segget, she sees that the clouds have dispersed and the rocks remain:

> she went slow down the brae, only once
> looked back at the frown of the hills,
> and caught her breath at that sight
> they held, seeing them bare of their
> clouds for once, the pillars of mist
> that aye crowned their heights, all
> but a faint wisp vanishing south, and
> the bare, still rocks upturned to the
> sky.[19]

The resolution is necessarily temporary however, and the conflict within the poetic 'mode' which Ewan is to identify in different circumstances as that 'between FREEDOM and GOD'[20] is never finally resolved. Robert, the follower of clouds, dies preaching a sermon that calls on the people to seek a 'stark sure creed that will cut like a knife, a surgeon's knife through the doubt and disease.'[21] Yet even he has a vision of 'Someone' in the aisle of the kirk. Within the context of the poetic 'mode' this is as credible as Chris's view of the bare rocks beneath the cloudless sky, and it is in this way that, while the poetic tension is resolved, both Chris and Robert remain true to their personal visions. Despite the battle between the clouds and the earth, the world of Chris and Robert undoubtedly reflects superior moral responsibility. Their humane responses to the dire social and political events of the period contrast favourably with the mean responses of the warped Segget folk. The

interaction of the social and poetic 'modes' highlights the higher vision of the latter. The power of this vision is expressed by Robert in his last sermon in words that recall Blake's Bard of Experience:

> In the years when the Great War ended the world seemed to turn in its sleep and awake, a new promise cried all about the earth, the promise of the Christ fulfilled in Man - fulfilled in the movements of pity and hope that men called by many names, meaning the same.[22]

It is these ideals that are shared by the spinners' leaders and that link Robert to the universe of the dramatic 'mode'. This third 'mode' of Cloud Howe establishes its own artistic dimensions, and any attempt to invest it with the values of the other two 'modes' invalidates its peculiar power. As argued earlier, the dynamics of this 'mode' are derived from the style and ethos of the ballad. Therefore the 'mode' must be approached primarily through its language, and this, like that of the ballads, is highly selective, and concise in its descriptions. In both the ballads and the dramatic 'mode' of Cloud Howe, there is an almost total lack of psychological interest and explicit motivation. Mowat and the spinners follow their predestined historical courses as inevitably as characters in the ballads do. The spinners are always distanced from the reader by being presented in a crowd. Although they form over half the population of Segget, they are not individualised as the folk are. Either they appear in dramatic confrontations or they are presented

through the distorted gaze of the folk in comments which are more revealing about the folk than the spinners. The grotesquely unsympathetic folk attitude has the deliberately ironic effect of arousing the reader's sympathy for the spinners; but while the reader is able to sympathise with the spinners, he is unable to psychologically identify with them. He has no illusion that these are real people, that is, psychologically rounded characters. They are always seen to be acting out their roles and the reader almost expects to find stage directions in the text. It is only the spinners' leaders, the Cronins, who are given the individuality of names, otherwise the spinners are presented as the representatives of one side of the class battle. The protagonists of this battle are introduced in costume during the Armistice Day service:

> They came marching down through the Close from West Wynd, a twenty or thirty of the ill-getted creatures, with their mufflers on, not in decent collars, their washy faces crinkled with grins, marching along there four by four.[23]

Their appearance is determined by their working lives. Throughout the novel, the effect of the uniformity created by their mufflers and shawls is emphasised. The visual impact they create is highly dramatic, establishing the impression of a standardised working class crowd. This impression is emphasised by the language allowed to their leader. Jock Cronin's speech is the standardised rhetoric of a

Socialist speaker:

> WE went to the war, we know what it was, we went to lice and dirt and damnation: and what have we got at the end of it all? Starvation wages, no homes for heroes, the capitalists fast on our necks as before. They're sacking men at the mills just now and leaving them on the bureau to starve - that's our reward, and maybe it's yours, that's the thing we must mind today. Not to come here and remember the dead, they've a place that's theirs, and we'll share it some time, they're maybe the better compared with some that live here in Segget worse-fed than beasts. It's the living that's our concern, you chaps. Come over and join us, the Labour Party.[24]

This is not the natural language of a Scots railway porter. In a novel in which Scots idiom is employed so effectively, it is significant that Cronin is spouting the stock phrases of contemporary Socialism. He speaks of 'Starvation wages', 'no homes for heroes', and of how 'we went to lice and dirt and damnation'. He even addresses the assembled folk as 'you chaps', which is a very Anglicised and most unlikely phrase in the context of his situation and origins. The speech serves to dispel the reader's illusion of any possibility of sympathetic identification with the spinners, and the standardisation of the Socialist speech helps to establish

an atmosphere in which the historical events of Cloud Howe conform to the broad outlines of 'known' history. The treatment of Mowat too is dictated by historical necessity. He too acts a stock 'character' in the part of a standardised Capitalist villain. He is totally evil throughout the novel. Chris sees him as a frog who will never be a prince:

> He'd a face that minded her of a frog's
> . . . he was charming, you supposed,
> as a prince should be, and very likely
> damn seldom is.[25]

There is no ambiguity in his presentation. The speech that 'was to stagger Segget' is economically indicated by the spelling of a few key words and phrases, and his villainy is evoked by his pronunciation of 'Jahly', 'thenks' and 'Rahly'. This device serves the same purpose as the moustache twirling of the melodramatic stage villain. Confrontations between the two sides are presented in terms of rather unlikely extremes as, for example, when a deputation visits Mowat to protest about the closure of the mill:

> One of the mills had been idle for months,
> though young Mr. Mowat had come back from
> his sail. He was no sooner back than a
> birn of spinners went up to the house in
> a deputation. But when the deputation
> got there, and the servant had shown them
> into the hall, and they stood there
> twisting their caps, fell shy, they heard
> the crackle of a falling bottle and a
> hooting and laughing as though lunatics

were loose; and out of a side door a quean came running, without a stitch on, nothing but a giggle, she looked back and laughed at young Mowat behind her, running and laughing with his wee frog face; and up the stairs the two of them went.

Well, the deputation blushed from head to heel; syne one of them, the oldest operative there, said <u>That's where the cash goes we make in the Mills</u>, and they looked from one to the other, old, hungry, and some of them were gey bitter, most on the dole, on starvation's edge; and they stood in the rich, warm hall and looked round, at the logwood fire and the gleam of the deers' heads, and the patterned walls and the thick, soft rugs.[26]

The contrast is striking but hardly realistic. It emphasises the inherent conflict between employed and employer, and to this end, realism is abandoned within this 'mode'. The dramatic effect is similar to that achieved by nineteenth century melodrama. By effectively distancing the characters, Gibbon achieves a rejection of realistic illusion. This concentrates the reader's attention on the political conflict rather than on the personalities of the protagonists. Yet again in this novel, the use of language proves to be the key to the interpretation of the content. The dramatic 'mode'

is a highly complex structure, drawing on the ballad tradition which presents historical events starkly and without the psychological complication of characterisation, and this is eventually developed into a presentation of political confrontation which abandons the illusion of realism.

I have already indicated the areas of concern within the social and poetic 'modes' and it is apparent that Gibbon deliberately rejects psychological realism in these 'modes' too. The poetic 'mode' is primarily concerned with Chris' and Robert's perceptions of truth and morality rather than with the development of their characters. Gibbon's main concern in the social 'mode' is to exhibit a corrupt society and he often sacrifices credibility to this end. The society is corrupt because its members subscribe to a false morality and Gibbon uses the technique of ironic disclosure to expose the bigotry and hypocrisy of the folk. Gibbon carefully interweaves the 'modes' so that their juxtaposition reveals the possibility of other moralities, demonstrating that there is a variety of responses to any particular situation. An extraordinary range of possibilities of human choice is demonstrated in the scale of responses to problems that occur in Segget. At one end of the scale is the bestiality of Dite Peat and Dalziell, while at the other is the refined, poetic world of Chris and Robert. The 'modes' counterbalance and illuminate one another. For example, the exaggerated and grotesque bestiality of Dite Peat highlights the seriousness of Robert's idealism when he insists on holding an Armistice Day Service in Segget Square. This service provides the focal point for the opening of the political battle between Mowat and the

spinners. The juxtaposition of the 'modes' gives the novel a density of vision.

Although a sensitive approach to the linguistic structure of Cloud Howe indicates that it is inappropriate to regard this as a realistic novel, it is undoubtedly a novel that poses problems of identification. In certain areas it appears to be realistic. As I have already remarked, it is set in a well-defined historical time, and the action revolves around the social and political events of that period. Cloud Howe has the unity of continuity which is one characteristic of the realistic novel. But this is the limit to the resemblance. Gibbon does not pretend to establish the psychological interest which characterises a realistic novel. He does not attempt to create a facsimile world in which the psychology of the characters is of paramount interest. The problems with which Cloud Howe is concerned are primarily political and philosophical and Gibbon isolates and examines these problems by creating three separate linguistic 'modes' within the framework of the novel. The realistic novel depends on consistency of 'mode' to establish its particular moral universe, and Sunset Song is a magnificent example of the genre. It observes unities of continuity, of psychological progression and of linguistic 'mode'. The problems discussed in Sunset Song are inseparable from the life of the community and the actions of the individuals in that community. Cloud Howe is different. Its problems have an existence which does not depend on psychological progression, but on the development of the historical and political events which form the framework of the novel. The universe of Cloud Howe has already been determined by the established historical

past. The three 'modes' revolve around this core of historical and political events that the reader knows are facts. The reader's knowledge is implied throughout, for there is no attempt at surprise, as a careful reading of the dramatic 'mode' in particular demonstrates. Surprise and discovery are techniques employed by the realistic novelist to enlist the reader's sympathy for, or fuller understanding of, some character or happening. An involvement of this kind could prevent a proper appreciation of the complex questions raised by the essentially non-realistic 'modes' of Cloud Howe. Therefore the characters of Cloud Howe act within the sweep of historical events which are known to be 'real' or 'true'. In The English Novel Dorothy Van Ghent claims that:

> The procedure of the novel is to individualise. As with other art forms, what it has to say that is of collective value is said by inference from individual concrete things.[27]

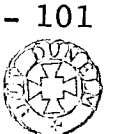
She goes on to compare the novelistic technique of individualisation with the historical, collective approach:

> History, on the other hand, proceeds by generalisation. It treats people as groups; and when individuals appear they appear as catalysts of large collective actions or as representatives of groups, their significance being that of the group forces, the collection, the sum. This is a difference of convention, and on the conventions of an

art depends its special expressiveness.[28]

The overall framework of the novel, and the dramatic 'mode' within this framework, conform to Van Ghent's definition of history rather than the novel. It is historical parallelism which provides the verisimilitude that enables the reader to recognise the validity of the world of the novel and gives the novel a superficial patina of realism. In Cloud Howe Gibbon achieves a highly individual interpretation of this core of events, and he achieves this explication through his blending of the three 'modes' of the novel. Shifting layers of reality and morality are examined as the 'modes' interact, creating a highly complex novelistic universe. In this fine analysis of the fragmented postwar world, Gibbon achieves an integrity of vision which is only accessible to the reader if the linguistic properties of the particular 'modes' are carefully evaluated. Without a sensitive reading of the 'form', the 'content' of this novel is distorted and diminished.

1. S.Q., p. 199.
2. Original prose version S.Q., p. 199.
3. R. L. Mackie, ed., A Book of Scottish Verse, The World's Classics (London, 1934), p. 139.
4. S.Q., p. 203.
5. Ibid., p. 341.
6. Ibid., pp. 267-268.
7. Ibid., p. 225.
8. Ibid., p. 264.
9. Ibid., p. 261.
10. Ibid., p. 321.
11. Ibid., p. 207.
12. Ibid., p. 204.
13. Ibid., p. 237.
14. Ibid., p. 229.
15. Ibid., p. 345.
16. Ibid., p. 321.
17. Ibid., p. 301.
18. Ibid., p. 321.
19. Ibid., p. 351.
20. Ibid., p. 495.
21. Ibid., p. 350.
22. Ibid., p. 349.
23. Ibid., pp. 266-267.
24. Ibid., p. 268.
25. Ibid., p. 273.
26. Ibid., p. 324.
27. Dorothy Van Ghent, The English Novel: Form and Function, Harper Torchbook ed. (New York, 1961), p. 4.
28. Ibid.



CHAPTER 4

GREY GRANITE

Grey Granite is a complicated and problematic novel. It is much wider in scope than its precursors, with a modern city providing the location for its complex actions and reactions. In Sunset Song the representation of the organic community of Kinraddie is satisfactorily organised in the form of a realistic novel, in which the unities of continuity, characterisation, and linguistic 'mode' are observed. Although Cloud Howe is less successful realistically, it is a novel in which Gibbon maintains an artistic integrity through a sensitive and skilful combination of linguistic 'modes' which derive from, but do not depend on, a variety of literary traditions. These 'modes' provide plenty of clues for a successful approach to the text. Were Cloud Howe a narrative poem, the form of the work would alert the reader to the importance of the language. The usual distinction between poetry and prose emphasises the importance of form in poetry and content in prose. This type of critical preconception can lead to insensitive condemnation of any deviation from the accepted 'norms'. The operation of these 'norms' can be observed by examining one's approach to Lyrical Ballads or the narrative poems of Keats. Consider the opening stanza of 'The Eve of St. Agnes':

> St. Agnes' Eve - Ah, bitter chill it was!
> The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold;
> The hare limp'd trembling through the frozen grass,
> And silent was the flock in woolly fold:

Numb were the Beadsman's fingers, while he told
His rosary, and while his frosted breath,
Like pious incense from a censer old,
Seem'd taking flight for heaven, without a death,
Past the sweet Virgin's picture, while his prayer he saith.[1]

The critic will note that this is a Spenserian stanza, the first eight lines of which are decasyllabic and the last an alexandrine. The classical arrangement proclaims the importance of the form, but it is the skeleton of the work. The critic proceeds to concentrate on the associations and references suggested by the verbal structures and on the effects caused by the use of such devices as assonance, onomatopoeia, imagery and metaphor, and it is almost unconsciously that he notices that a plot is unfolding. The critic evaluates the poem in accordance with a set of established standards, thus transmitting and perpetuating the valuative 'norms' of English criticism. Obviously 'norms' are essential or there could not be any critical discussion of literature, but I suggest that there is a danger of misappropriating these 'norms'.

The question of how applicable (or otherwise) English criticism is to the literature of Scotland (or Wales, or Ireland) is a very thorny one. It could be argued that where the work is accessible in English, English 'norms' are applicable. It is obviously impractical to suggest that the reader can only approach A Scots Quair after a thorough study of Scottish history, Scottish literary history and Scottish

sociology. I suggest, however, that the reader can best approach works from a 'minority' culture by turning his attention in the directions suggested by the text, rather than trying too rigidly to fit the text to standardised evaluations. While it is obviously reasonable to criticise a novel which does not conform to certain established 'standards', it is a biased and unfair critic who ignores and fails to evaluate any possible alternative strengths a work of art may possess. If, for example, a novel's strengths fall outside the standards applicable to that type of novel, the critic must re-examine the bases of his judgement and possibly extend his critical criteria. Within the terms of this extension he must evaluate those peculiar attributes which gave rise to the extension. The unique terms of reference of each such extension can only be indicated by the text of that particular work; but if, for example, the novels of one country share several of these 'unique' qualities, the critic can legitimately begin to assess them in terms of a 'national' literature. This method forms Francis Russell Hart's main approach to the Scottish novel. Yet despite the validity of this approach, its initial stages are undeniably somewhat nebulous, and it is valuable to attempt to distinguish (as Hart does) some of the bases of the Scottish novel. He distinguishes at least four ways in which Scottish life necessarily differed from English. He demolishes the myth of national characteristics, while acknowledging that the existence of the myth must influence the way in which a people regard themselves. He comments on the importance of Calvinism in practical as well as spiritual affairs, noting that this had the effect of centring Scottish consciousness on

the parochial rather than the personal. He raises the problem of the linguistic division which made Scots the common spoken tongue, but English the polite written one, and he queries the possible effects on Scottish consciousness of the emigration which affected so many Scots for hundreds of years. Hart acknowledges that he is merely suggesting some of the areas of Scottish life which might have influenced the shaping of the Scottish novel:

> Not all these generalisations need be accepted to convince us that Scottish culture is distinctive enough to have produced substantial variations in the novel.[2]

What is certain, however, is that the rise of the novel in Scotland came 'at a later and different period than that of the novel in England'.[3] The reasons he gives for this are not crucial to my argument, and for a full discussion of them I must refer the reader to Hart's Introduction. It suffices to note that this later emergence and the distinctive cultural climate in which the Scottish novel arose, determined separate areas of concern for Scottish novelists. He pays particular attention to the pervasive influence of Calvinism in civil and personal matters:

> A noteworthy feature of Scottish fiction is the moral primacy of community, the faith (some would say Calvinist in genesis) that community is the ground of individual worth and a condition of salvation.[4]

Hart supports his thesis that English and Scottish novelists are concerned in different areas, and that this gives rise to differences in the novel form, by comparing a large number of Scottish novels. It is obviously impossible to apply this technique to one novel, or to draw any conclusions from a trilogy. In this chapter I shall attempt to define those areas of Grey Granite which have a specifically Scottish interest, and suggest that Grey Granite is a failure as an English novel, but a success as a piece of Scottish prose. I shall not attempt to relate it to any specifically Scottish literary tradition, but rather examine the text which raises a multitude of problems, many of which have a peculiarly Scottish concern. In his essay 'Literary Lights', Gibbon identifies the aims he pursues in Grey Granite as he eulogises his own style:

> The technique of Lewis Grassic Gibbon in his trilogy A Scots Quair - of which only Parts I and II, Sunset Song and Cloud Howe, have yet been published - is 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. His scene so far has been a comparatively uncrowded and simple one - the countryside and village of modern Scotland. Whether his technique is adequate to compass and express the life

> of an industrialised Scots town in all
> its complexity is yet to be demonstrated.[5]

In Sunset Song and Cloud Howe Gibbon successfully exploits this technique to 'compass and express' the changing worlds of Kinraddie and Segget. The problems of Duncairn, the setting of Grey Granite, are necessarily much more complicated, and his technique develops accordingly, although the result is a novel about problems rather than people.

Duncairn is a city of the imagination. It is unlike Kinraddie or Segget in that no prefatory chapter places it in either a geographical or historical setting. It is, in the words of Gibbon's 'Cautionary Note' prefacing the novel,

> merely the city which the inhabitants
> of the Mearns (not foreseeing my require-
> ments in completing my trilogy) have
> hitherto failed to build.[6]

The complexity of the city is revealed through the various 'voices' which disclose a bewildering variety of visions of reality. The opening pages show the Duncairn that Chris perceives. It is an animate world in which buses purr, trams have aching feet, the street lamp flings down 'a long dirty hand to help her'[7] and the hand-rail by the steps is likened to a 'famished snake'.[8] This vision derives from a Romantic tradition which perceives all nature as animate. Gibbon elaborates this to include the paraphenalia of a city, and endows buses, trams, steps, rails and lamps with life and emotions. The image of the 'yellow fog that hung tiny veils on her eyelashes',[9] recalls not only Prufrock's 'yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes',[10] but also the all-embracing fog which shrouds London at the beginning of

Bleak House. These intertextual references, and Gibbon's extension of the Romantic pathetic fallacy to city life, establish Duncairn as a 'real' city of the imagination. They suggest that it exists in the same sphere of the imagination as Dickens' London and the world of the Romantic poets. This is how Duncairn is presented through Chris's eyes, and the description is as revealing about Chris as it is about Duncairn. She is presented as the heir to a rich cultural inheritance, and her curiously disturbing vision of the world persists throughout the novel.

The action of Grey Granite is swift and other 'voices' replace Chris's. The city is realistically presented in that it can be recognised as a reasonable facsimile of a common phenomenal world, but the fact that the characters do not perceive these phenomena in the same way suggests that it is a complicated and bewildering place. The use of so many different 'voices' establishes an authentic sense of a city life in which people are ignorant of the views and motivations of those around them. For example, Ma Cleghorn's view of life is far removed from Chris's, and yet is is through her eyes that the life of the boarding house is described. Ma Cleghorn's is a 'narrative voice' in that her analyses forward the action and help to explicate the density of Duncairn life. Her viewpoint is therefore developed at some length, and her character is assessed by Chris, whose mind and imagination are modified by Ma's perceptions. Ma acts as a filter of Duncairn life for Chris, and the frankness and common sense which appeal to Chris are exemplified in Ma's reflections on Miss Murgatroyd:

> And Ma Cleghorn, watching her taik down the street, would ask who in God's name would be an old maid? She'd often used to think when her Jim was alive and would come back from the fish Market stinking so bad that his shirts hung out on a washing day would bring the cats scraitching for miles around - she'd often used to think I wish I were single, trig on my own, not handled, not kenned, with nobody's seed ever laid in me! But losh, when he died she had minded him sore, night on night and would fain have had him again though he smelt like a kipper mislaid in a drain when he'd cuddle you, feuch! They were sosses, were men, but you'd only to look at the Murgatroyd creature to make you mad to go tearing out and grab the first soss that you met in breeks.[11]

The basis of much of the action of Grey Granite is class conflict, and 'voice' is used in the novel to represent the different classes as well as to promote the viewpoints of individuals. The working class, the petit bourgeoisie and the 'Establishment' are all given a separate 'voice'. The petit bourgeois lodgers provide a choric comment on the events of the novel. Their characters are firmly fixed in the roles defined either by Ma's tags or by their speech mannerisms. It is their commentary which comes nearest to imitating the

'speak' of the earlier novels; it is significant that this is conspicuously absent from Grey Granite. In Sunset Song the 'speak' demonstrates the mores and attitudes of Kinraddie. The community is an undivided one and the 'speak' provides valuable insights into its mechanics. In Cloud Howe, however, the 'speak' becomes the prerogative of a warped and corrupt bourgeoisie, and it illuminates the divisions between the classes. The spinners are totally alienated from the middle-class, yet that middle-class have enough of a corporate consciousness to hold opinions in common. There is no such viable community in Duncairn. The lodgers' attitudes may coincide, but the bases of these attitudes are various and they do not arise from a common morality. Any coincidence of attitude among the boarders arises from their inordinate consciousness of their social position, which manifests itself in a desire to always appear genteel. Insecurity breeds defensiveness, and it is very much their social being which determines their consciousness. At worst the boarders are querulously unpleasant. The middle-class Establishment, by contrast, is presented as unrelievedly sinister. The author offers no excuse for it and the reader is offered no opportunity to sympathise with it. The figures of the Reverend MacShilluck, Bailie Brown and the Provost Wabbling Jimmy, appear throughout as evil clowns, and after the first savagely ironical attack on the middle-class inhabitants of Craigneuks, the name of the district alone is sufficient warning to the reader that 'bourgeois' means 'bad'. It is impossible to give any plausibility to the smug voyeurs who are delightedly scandalised by the biased press reports of

the Strike:

> And next day the Daily Runner came out and told of those coarse brutes the Gowans strikers, and the awful things they'd done to the working folk that were coming decent-like from their jobs. And all Craigneuks read the news with horror, every word of it, chasing it from the front page to the lower half of page five, where it was jammed in between an advert-isement curing Women with Weakness and another curing superfluous hair; and whenever Craigneuks came on a bit of snot it breathed out Uhhhhhhhhhhh! like a donkey smelling a dung-heap, delighted, fair genteel and so shocked and stirred up it could hardly push down its grapefruit and porridge and eggs and bacon and big salt baps, fine butter new from the creamery, fresh milk and tea that tasted like tea, not like the seep from an ill-kept sump. And it said weren't those Footforthie keelies awful. Something would have to be done about them.[12]

The bourgeoisie are never presented in a sympathetic light, and the author's directions to the reader are made very clear in his treatment of the different social classes. The working class of Duncairn is portrayed with a tender sympathy which in itself raises problems. The language which introduces the

Paldy slum dwellers is almost lyrical:

> In Paldy parish as the June came in
> there came a wave of heat with the
> month, it lifted the guffs from the half-
> choked drains and flung them in under
> the broken doors down through the courts
> to simmer and stew, a body could hardly
> bear the touch of his sark as he lay
> in bed by his wife of a night.[13]

The passage is deliberately 'poetic'. June is personified in a style which is more usually associated with Victorian poetry. The first main clause contains seventeen words which could 'translate' into a mere eight, as, 'The June heat wave was felt in Paldy Parish.' The image of the 'wave of heat' is not the usual cliché, for the wave is given the power of the sea as it lifts the odours and flings them 'under the broken doors.' This Romantic animation of nature is cruelly ironic in a description of a repressed, inhuman lifestyle. The sea's associations of freedom and cleanliness contrast bitterly with the context in which they are evoked. The irony serves to arouse pity rather than revulsion, and this is emphasised by the use of the colloquial Scots words 'a body' and 'sark', and by the lilting 'as he lay in bed by his wife of a night.' The language of the working people is plain Braid Scots and its dignity is pointed by the contrast presented by the strangulated 'English' of the socially aspiring John Cushnie:

> Cushnie, red-eared and trying to speak
> English, would call out above the folds

of his tie Will ye pass the cruet?
I'm in a gey hurry. Me and
Mr. Robertson have the Spring Sale on.[14]

Despite the dignity of the language in which the workers reveal themselves, their circumstances mock pretensions to human dignity:

> And a man would get up in a Paldy tenement and go along the passage to the W.C., blasted thing crowded, served a score of folk, not decent, by God what a country to live in. On the Broo since the War and five kids to keep, eating off your head - och, why did you live? - never a minute of quiet to yourself, nothing but the girnings of the wife for more silver, the kids half-barefoot, half-fed, oh hell.[15]

This 'stream of consciousness' method of presentation helps to secure the reader's sympathy for the plight of the family and direct his anger against their circumstances. Problems of interpretation do arise, however, when the workers interact with other characters. Undoubtedly the confrontation between Chris and Meg Watson's father is designed to illustrate their inability to understand one another, but this raises questions regarding their respective functions in the novel. Throughout Grey Granite Gibbon presents the workers as morally upright beings whose true nature is perverted only by their circumstances. Undoubtedly they behave better than the middle classes, but is the reader to condemn Chris for her failure

to understand them? Gibbon indicates throughout the novel that Chris does have a valid vision of truth, and therefore, if her relationship with the workers is to make any sense, the reader must assume that this 'truth' relates only to another sphere - to that of the ancient Scottish land and its values. This assumption raises the problem of the relationship between ancient values and modern needs, and this is one of the many problems which Grey Granite poses but leaves unanswered. The characters bear the burden of too many roles. No sooner is the validity of one person's or group's viewpoint established in a particular situation, than it is denied in another. While this establishes the 'truth' of partial vision, it also creates an uneasiness in the reader. In posing intellectual problems, the characters lose some of their psychological credibility. This is particularly evident in the relationship between Ewan and the workers. Alick, Bob and Norman, the three 'keelies' who become friendly with Ewan are decent, kindly, moral beings. Sometimes Bob narrates the action, but the tone is indistinguishable from that of the unknown keelie 'voices' which relate the events of the Strike or the P.A.C. March. Bob speaks for all the workers when he outlines his ambitions:

> och, you spoke a lot of stite like the
> others did, about the queans that you'd
> like to lie with, and the booze you'd
> drink, what a devil you were, but if
> you got half a chance what you wanted
> was marriage and a house and a lum of
> your own.[16]

This contrasts with Ewan's visions of Revolution and his cynical attitude towards his friends. In view of the intelligence, decency and rationality with which they are credited, it becomes incredible that the workers follow the Communists at all. Their gullibility is not quite believable. The driving necessity of Ewan's vision becomes clouded for the reader by the callousness of his human relationships. For example, when he goes to tea with Bob, he fails to respond humanely to the situation, seeing only degradation and ugliness:

> That ghastly house that Bob took you
> to - father unemployed for over five
> years, mother all running to a pale
> grey fat like a thing you found when
> you turned up a stone, one of the
> brothers a cretin, rickets - sat
> giggling and slavering in a half-dark
> corner, they couldn't afford to have
> the gas on, a dead smell of dirt left
> unstirred and unscrubbed, disharmonic
> heads and moron brains.[17]

Bob and his family respond to the same situation by seeing through the recognisably bourgeois (and therefore presumably alien) exterior to the person within:

> Him a gentleman, too, as you all knew
> he was though he tried to deny it and
> that time at your home when he came to
> tea had acted so fine, you'd all of you
> liked him, it had been nearly worth
> spending the day before scrubbing out

> the place, and hiding the twin, the daftie, and getting in cakes for the tea.[18]

That Bob is undeniably the more moral man on a human level is demonstrated by his treatment of Jess, which is incomparably better than Ewan's treatment of Ellen. In these situations Bob is isolated to serve as a foil to Ewan, but his 'voice' is that of the working masses. It is not Bob in fact who tells the story of the March, but it could be; names cease to matter:

> The main mob marshalled up in the Cowgate, the Communists crying for the folk to join up - we'll march to the Council and demand admittance, and see the Provost about the P.A.C. And a man'd look shame-faced at another childe, and smoke his pipe and never let on till Big Jim himself came habbering along, crying you out by your Christian name, and you couldn't well do anything else but join - God blast it, you'd grievances enough to complain of. The wife would see you line up with the other Broo chaps, looking sheepish enough, and cry out Will! or Peter! or Tam! Come out of that - mighty, it'll do you no good. And a man just waved at her off-hand-like, seeing her feared face peeking at him.[19]

This perceptive and generous characterisation of the

workers contrasts with Gibbon's picture of the cold ruthless Communists. The characterisation of Ewan is one of the fatalities of this method, and I shall discuss its implications in greater detail later. At this point I am suggesting that is is the very complexity of Grey Granite which engenders its defects, and it is now appropriate to examine the basis of this complexity. The 'voices' interact confusingly, and the multiplicity of problems raised make it difficult to decide which are the novel's main themes. The realistic norms which should govern the presentation of plot and character fail, and it becomes difficult for the reader to suspend disbelief and enter imaginatively into the world of Duncairn. For example, the concluding pages of the novel suggest that the main theme is the ideological conflict between Chris and Ewan:

> There will always be you and I, I think, Mother. It's the old fight that maybe will never have a finish, whatever the names we give to it - the fight in the end between FREEDOM and GOD.[20]

Ewan identifies the conflict, but it is not immediately recognisable as having been an important dialogue between these two characters. The characterisation of the two protagonists is not realistically satisfactory. Their existences are given sharply defined forms, but instead of explicating the characters' development and interaction within the unfolding plot, these forms raise questions about the functions of the characters and the significance of their roles. It is the many roles which Chris and Ewan have to sustain that detract from their

credible realisation. Their different linguistic universes suggest that they perform different functions. As an examination of the opening of Grey Granite indicates, Chris's world is highly animate and referential, with a poetic vision endowing inanimate objects with life. While even the city comes alive for Chris, the land itself is almost deified in a personification of wealth and power:

> there below the Howe of the Mearns,
> crowned, shod, be-belted in green and
> gold, silver chains where the Mearns
> burns wound and spun to the Forthie's
> flow, Stonehaven forward, Bervie behind,
> far off the shimmer where the Grampians
> rode, the farms gleaming below the
> bents, haugh on haugh, tumbling green
> long cornswaths under the wind.[21]

For Chris the country is a powerful life-force. In some mysterious and undefined way the land revitalises her. On a mythical level of interpretation it is quite appropriate that she should eventually return to farm the croft on which she was born. On a realistic level, however, this is unconvincing. Gibbon fails to indicate the bases of her motivation. He fails, too, to adequately outline the development of Chris's philosophy of life. Her acceptance of the inevitability of change is too hastily sketched in to do credit to a character he would have the reader believe to be intelligent, sensitive and rational. Chris is acceptable on a mythical level. Not only does she understand the values of the land, but her linguistic 'mode' derives from many

literary traditions, suggesting that cultural values are somehow linked with those of the land and therefore presumably with that aspect of 'FREEDOM' which she increasingly represents. She does become that '<u>Chris Caledonia</u>'[22] hinted at in <u>Cloud Howe</u>, but this mythical representation is achieved at the expense of her credibility in other spheres. Even the conflict between the city and the country is loaded with significance. Chris's Scottish values, the novel seems to suggest, enable her to perceive the land properly, although it means little to the Communist Ewan, and is a source of fear for the English Ellen:

> Below them all the eastwards Howe lay
> spread, grey saffron and thinly wooded,
> cold-gleaming under the quick Spring
> sun - a bare and wild and uncanny
> land, she'd never be at home here she
> thought with a shiver, though she trilled
> her r's and lived to be a hundred.
> Hideous country, ragged and cruel.[23]

It is not only Chris's and Ewan's ideas which are seen as antithetical, but Chris's and Ellen's too. Gibbon raises the problem of the spiritual aspects of Scottish nationalism without continuing to explore it in any depth. The problems engendered by Chris's roles swamp any exploration of her personality, although her lack of sympathy with the people of Duncairn emphasises the deliberate limitation of the validity of her vision. Her perception of reality precludes any sympathy for the slum-dwellers as her encounter with Meg Watson's father demonstrates:

He dived in a pouch and brought one out, flushing again, but looking at her cocky: There you are, mistress. Enjoy your money while you have it. There's a time coming when your class won't have it long.

Chris's temper quite went with her a minute, silly fool, the heat she supposed, she didn't care:

My class? It was digging its living in sweat while yours lay down with a whine in the dirt. Good-bye.[24]

Even within her sphere of effectiveness, the characterisation seems incomplete. In particular, her marriage to Ake and its hasty dissolution are too sketchily portrayed, and her relationship with her son exists on an ideological, rather than a psychological, level. It is an unsatisfactory characterisation, and Chris's many roles raise problems which are neither fully explored on a theoretical level, nor worked out through the interaction of the characters. Although the fiction flags, on another level, the archetypal figure drawn is intellectually stimulating, in that the portrayal of Chris effectively poses the problem of Scotland's cultural inheritance and its relationship to modern urban life.

Ewan's characterisation is even more problematic. The ideological dialogue between Chris and Ewan is pursued on structural and linguistic levels, and it is on these levels alone that it dominates the novel. They hardly relate to one another in terms of concern or analysis. Ewan is not in the least bothered about Chris's problems and she remarks upon

his progression and development in terms that are metaphorical rather than maternal:

> Queer loon that he was, lovely loon, on
> even him change working its measure as
> sunlight on granite bringing out the
> gleams of gold and red through the cold
> grey glister.[25]

The structural importance of their dialogue determines the roles played by some of the other characters, and there is a balance in a certain parallelism in their lives. Those with whom Chris and Ewan have relationships are disappointed. Both Ake and Ellen are mistaken in their views of Chris and Ewan. Both enter the novel suddenly, Ake coming from the land of Chris's past, and Ellen from the rootless south to offer Ewan a vision of the future. Culturally and linguistically, Ake and Ellen seem to have much to offer their respective partners. Their dismissal from the action may leave the stage free for the final stages of the dialogue, but it is psychologically alienating. Ake and Ellen remark on the stone-like qualities of Chris and Ewan, and the reader is inclined to agree. As Ewan and Ellen part, she notices that 'His face was a stone, a stone-mason's face, carved in a sliver of cold grey granite.'[26] Ake's observation about Chris is similar:

> He'd thought that glimmer in her eyes a
> fire that he himself could blow to a
> flame; and instead 'twas no more than
> the shine of a stone.[27]

While the departures of Ake and Ellen confirm the uncom-

promising integrity of Chris and Ewan and maintain a structural parallel, they make the ending of the novel seem hasty and too contrived. Undoubtedly both relationships illustrate the moral problems concerning the exercise of the individual conscience, but in both cases the decisions seem to be awkwardly forced when they should rather arise 'naturally' from credible interaction among the characters. An expectation of psychological credibility implies that the dominant mode is realistic, and Grey Granite does appear to establish a realistic framework through the use of the different 'voices' representing the complex life of the city. The success of this realism is patchy. It succeeds where not too many other functions are incorporated into particular characters. For example, both Ma Cleghorn and the lodgers are totally credible, and particular scenes are filled with a bustling animation which is completely convincing. One such episode is Ma's outing with Chris to the cinema and to tea in Woolworth's afterwards:

> And in they went in the Saturday crush,
> full of soldiers and bairns and queans,
> folk from the country, red and respectable,
> an eident wife with a big shopping bag
> buying up sixpenny tins of plums and
> her goodman standing beside her ashamed,
> feared he'd be seen by a crony in Woolies,
> and she'd be telling him, Look, Willy,
> such cheap! Mighty, I'll need a pound
> of that; and buy and buy till he'd near
> be ruined.

And hungry Broo folk buying up
biscuits, and queans with their jingling
bags and paint, poor things, trying on
the tin bits of rings, and mechanic
loons at the wireless counter, and
the Lord alone knew who wasn't in Woolies,
a roaring trade and a stink to match.[28]

Such scenes succeed because they are not required to perform any other function. Gibbon actually raises the question of realism within the text. Ma confuses art with reality in her comments to Chris about the film; Ewan questions the role of the artist when he is in the city museum, and towards the end of the novel both Chris and Ewan come to reject what Ewan defines as 'Bunk symbolism',[29] and Chris defines as clouds that disguise the grim inevitability of change:

That the reality for all folk's days,
however they clad its grim shape in
words, in symbols of cloud and rock,
mountain that endured, or shifting sands
or changing tint - like those colours
that were fading swift far in the east,
one by one darkening and robing themselves
in their grave-clouts grey, happing their
heads and going to the dark.... Change
that went on as a hurpling clock, with
only benediction to ring at the end -
knowledge that the clock would stop some
time, that even change might not endure.[30]

In raising these questions Gibbon makes his characters

seem to step outside the realm of their realistic existence, thus creating an imbalance and a sense of artistic impropriety. Gibbon over-burdens the functions of his characters in posing these undeniably interesting and stimulating problems. The crippling effect of multiple-role function is most clearly demonstrated in the characterisation of Ewan. His imaginative universe is directly opposed to Chris's, and his viewpoint, his perceptions of reality, differ totally from hers. These perceptions are expressed in a linguistic 'mode' that owes more to John Buchan than any other Scottish writer:

> The other apprentices, keelies the lot,
> didn't seem anxious to chum up at all,
> thank goodness, it gave him time to
> tackle the books of the trade,
> metallurgy twice as exciting as flints.
> He stacked the books with his coat in
> the sheds, till dinner, and went up and
> scrubbed himself, put on his coat and
> went down to the Docks with books and
> a sandwich and swotted up Castings.
> But the other apprentices stayed behind
> and laughed and joked in the lavatories,
> insanitary devils, no business of his.[31]

Both attitude and language seem to have been borrowed from a Buchan novel. The slang is old-fashioned and Anglicised. Ewan thinks in clichés; his work is 'tremendous fun'; he wants to 'tackle the books of the trade'; and the other lads do not want to 'chum up at all'. Plainly Ewan does not inherit those traditions to which Chris is heir. His language fails to

develop with his growing political awareness. It continues to be as stilted as his personality, for of all the characters, he is the one who is most alienated from normal human feelings and activities. Even when he is tortured in the police-cell, his feelings are expressed in cliches which have the effect of distancing him, putting him beyond the reach of the reader's sympathetic identification:

> He was one with them all, a long wail
> of sobbing mouths and wrung flesh,
> tortured and tormented by the world's
> Masters while those Masters lied about
> Progress through Peace, Democracy,
> Justice, the Heritage of Culture - even
> as they'd lied in the days of Spartacus,
> lying now through their hacks in pulpit
> and press, in the slobberings of middle-
> class pacifists, the tawdry promisings
> of Labourites, Douglasites....
>
> And a kind of stinging bliss came
> upon him, knowledge that he was that
> army itself - that army of pain and
> blood and torment that was yet but the
> raggedest van of the hordes of the Last
> of the Classes, the Ancient Lowly,
> trampling the ways behind it unstayable.[32]

Ewan is realistically unconvincing. His motivation is obscure and unsatisfactory, and he is emotionally repulsive. The human being in him is corrupted by the creed, as his reaction to Gowan and Gloag's explosion demonstrates. Ellen is repulsed

by his callous exploitation of the tragedy:

> Ellen Johns said, sick, it was horrible, horrible, but, Ewan, you know that THAT was a lie. It was sickening of you to suggest that they let loose the gas deliberately .... Ewan, it's just cheating, it's not Communism![33]

Throughout Grey Granite Gibbon demonstrates that this is precisely what Communism is. He is as clear-sighted about the defects of the Left as he is about those of the Right. Ewan is the exponent of that 'stark, sure creed'[34] to which Robert looked forward. There are obvious problems in presenting a character who is essentially repulsive. His lack of common humanity is continually emphasised by the contrast Bob (and others) present. Ewan offers a possible solution to the desperate problems of Duncairn, but the representation of this lacks credibility. Gibbon suggests a satisfactory solution to the problem in intellectual terms, but the fictionalisation of this solution is unsatisfactory. The characterisation of Ewan is burdened not only with Gibbon's analysis of the problems of the Left, but with the peculiarly Scottish problem of the nature of nationalism and its relation to the Left. The structural dialogue between Chris and Ewan illustrates the scope of the problem. As I have already remarked, Ewan inhabits an impoverished, Anglicised linguistic universe. He deliberately rejects Braid Scots as 'that blunted and foolish and out-dated tool.'[35] He repudiates culture, too, as being a weapon of the 'Masters'. Gibbon is questioning the relationship between Nationalism and effective left-wing

political action, and in doing so he adds an extra dimension to Ewan's role in the novel. It is not only Ewan's character which has to bear this extra burden. Gibbon's concern for language is plain in his presentation of the 'keelies', where a Braid Scots is combined with a highly wrought stream of consciousness technique to give a sympathetic credibility to the characters. The contorted English of John Cushnie defines the linguistic elements of nationalism in social terms, demonstrating the Scots' conviction of the lowly status of their speech.

Gibbon exhibits the many facets of the problems he raises, but the complexity of the novel is so bewildering that it eventually raises the question of the novel's primary area of concern. Is Grey Granite primarily 'about' the battle 'between FREEDOM and GOD?'[36] Or is it about the development of a Communist leader in a modern British city? Or is it about the conflict between the eternal values of the land and the transitory ones of the city? Or is it a novel about the problems of perception? Or is it about alienation? Or is it about the position of the artist? Or is it about the dynamics of the class struggle? Or is it about the linguistic, cultural and moral problems of nationalism? Or is it about the nature of political power? The answer is 'yes', it is about all these questions, for all are raised in the course of Grey Granite. Gibbon undoubtedly does succeed in his ambition to 'compass and express the life of an industrialised Scots town in all its complexity.'[37] In so doing, however, he becomes less concerned with making a credible fiction. Some of the problems raised in Grey Granite are obviously specifically Scottish ones, but it is the author's concern for the city as a social

unit, his desire to encompass the intellectual as well as the social problems of modern Scotland, which truly marks off Grey Granite from the tradition of the English novel. There is in Grey Granite that 'swithering from mode to mode'[38] which David Craig finds characteristic of the Scottish novel. Too many questions are raised by too few people in too few situations. The novel is given too many meanings on too many levels. Francis Russell Hart sees this as a feature of Scottish novels, commenting:

> There is no theoretic reason why a fiction cannot have meaning on multiple levels, so long as the levels do not contradict each other in terms of their assumptions about what is real. They sometimes do in Scottish fiction, perhaps reflecting ontological conflict in Scottish consciousness.[39]

Whether or not Grey Granite reflects an 'ontological conflict in Scottish consciousness', the levels of meaning in the novel are undoubtedly contradictory, and the ideological problems are superimposed on a seemingly realistic novel structure and it is this that collapses. Considered as a traditional 'English' novel, Grey Granite is undoubtedly flawed. The unities of characterisation and modality which should preserve the realistic structure are marred. It would be too sweeping to totally condemn the novel on this basis. It is a novel which offers other things than realism - it offers dialectic, raising a whole range of issues. To claim that Grey Granite is a successful piece of Scottish prose obviously raises the

question of whether the problems the novel discusses could have been better dealt with in some prose form other than the novel. A brief passage from Gibbon's essay 'Glasgow' helps to illuminate the problem. Here Gibbon is dealing with one question discussed in Grey Granite - that of the possible conflict between culture (and nationalism) and basic human needs:

> There 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. There is nothing in science or religion. If it came (as it may come) to some fantastic choice between a free and independent Scotland, a centre of culture, a bright flame of artistic and scientific achievement, and providing elementary decencies of food and shelter to the submerged proletariat of Glasgow and Scotland, I at least would have no doubt as to which side of the battle I would range myself. For the cleansing of that horror, if cleanse it they could, I would welcome the English in suzerainty over Scotland till the end of time. 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 - the elementary right of every human being - to those people of the abyss.[40]

This powerful passage clarifies Gibbon's own position, as he intended it should. In Grey Granite the argument becomes more complicated; many viewpoints are demonstrated and the whole issue is made more profoundly disturbing by the open-ended treatment of the matter. The reader is left to continue the dialogue himself, and it is in the successful presentation of these issues through the medium of fiction that the real success of Grey Granite lies. The novel may fail to conform to the strictest demands of psychological credibility, but the fiction is realistic enough to direct the reader's attention to the problems and to stimulate him to work them out within the context which demonstrates them - that is, the context of the modern Scottish city. This is a considerable achievement.

The defects of Grey Granite make it seem the least satisfactory work of the trilogy. Yet it is the only one which deals with contemporary problems. Both Sunset Song and Cloud Howe are necessarily limited by their historical perspectives, while Grey Granite deals with history in the making. Its scope is necessarily wider than that of either of its precursors, and many of the problems raised are still pertinent today. Although the many levels of meaning may partially defeat the realistic effect, Grey Granite is remarkably successful in exhibiting the intellectual and moral nature of a Scottish city as well as the emotional and physical. In the final analysis it is the questions Gibbon raises which are important, not the answers, and Grey Granite is successful in stimulating the reader's intellect as well as his imagination.

1. Keats, 'The Eve of St. Agnes', Keats: Poetical Works, ed. H.W. Garrod, Oxford Standard Authors (London, 1956), stanza 1.

2. Hart, p. 3.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid., p. 401.

5. S.H., p. 154.

6. S.Q., p. 356.

7. Ibid., p. 357.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. T. S. Eliot, 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', T. S. Eliot: Collected Poems 1909-1962 (London, 1963) l. 15.

11. S.Q., p. 363.

12. Ibid., pp. 440-441.

13. Ibid., p. 369.

14. Ibid., p. 365.

15. Ibid., p. 369.

16. Ibid., p. 390.

17. Ibid., p. 405.

18. Ibid., p. 412.

19. Ibid., p. 393.

20. Ibid., p. 495.

21. Ibid., p. 383.

22. Ibid., p. 298.

23. Ibid., p. 462.

24. Ibid., pp. 376-377.

25. Ibid., p. 437.

26. Ibid., p. 490.

27. Ibid., p. 487.

28. Ibid., pp. 316-417.

29. Ibid., p. 489.

30. Ibid., p. 468.

31. Ibid., p. 372.

32. Ibid., pp. 451-452.

33. Ibid., p. 486.

34. Ibid., p. 350.

35. Ibid., p. 464.

36. Ibid., p. 495.

37. S.H., p. 154.

38. David Craig, Scottish Literature and the Scottish People (London, 1961), p. 193.

39. Hart, p. 406.

40. S.H., p. 87.

CHAPTER 5

CRITICAL RESPONSES TO A SCOTS QUAIR

Ian Munro's biography of James Leslie Mitchell provides an excellent account of the reception of the trilogy by both the press and the public, as well as presenting a fascinating account of the author's life. He records that Sunset Song 'was acclaimed immediately by prominent critics and fellow-writers'[1] and quotes from letters from Lewis Spence, Donald Carswell and George Malcolm Thomson and from a press review by Compton Mackenzie.[2] He notes the adverse reaction from such Scottish papers as the Kirriemuir Press, the Aberdeen Bon-Accord and the Fife Herald.[3] He records that George Blake, Neil Gunn, Eric Linklater and Hugh MacDiarmid were all favourably impressed by the novel.[4] Munro's own criticism of Sunset Song, written thirty years later, is mainly concentrated on characterisation and on the possible 'sources' of the characters. It is a biographer's interest rather than a critic's and he ignores the more complex issues of the novel. He finds Ewan's portrayal 'not wholly believable'[5] and his interest in Chris is partly based on discovering similarities between her and the author:

> A part of Chris comes from his wife, a part from his mother, a part from Jean Baxter, who was an intimate friend and an influence in the development of his writing. Unconscious race memory is always present, but beyond everything Chris is Leslie Mitchell himself. A character of this stature springs only

> from profound personal sympathy. Chris is the creature of Grassic Gibbon, she is his voice, and also the voice of the Scottish earth.[6]

The second novel of the trilogy was as favourably received by the press as Sunset Song had been. Munro notes the enthusiastic reception given to Cloud Howe by George Malcolm Thomson, Naomi Mitchison, Compton Mackenzie, Neil Gunn, Ivor Brown and William Plomer.[7] Again Munro concentrates his own critical attention on the characterisation and on the vivid evocation of background:

> The strength of Gibbon's characterisation is matched by the vivid background. His description of the Segget Games is as graphic, turbulent and full-blooded as the equally brilliant and powerful account of Chris's wedding in Sunset Song.[8]

Munro expresses approval of the 'author's social awareness',[9] and of the dramatic presentation of the political scene:

> The changing mood of the workers, and the heart-searching of those with a social conscience are indicated effectively, while incidents arising from the general unrest are depicted with the author's usual dramatic flair.[10]

Grey Granite proves a stumbling block for Munro. He considers that Duncairn is inadequately realised and blames Mitchell's background for this:

> Yet for all his sympathy with the slum dweller's plight Mitchell's peasant background was a bar to complete understanding of an industrial community.[11]

He follows this statement with a sweeping indictment of Mitchell's intellectual abilities:

> Mitchell's view of life was largely intuitive and frequently emotional; because of that he was a better artist than politician.[12]

I maintain that Mitchell was pre-eminently an intellectual writer, whose artistic concern was to discuss ideas, and that it is a grave critical error to discount this. Sunset Song is essentially a realistic novel and Munro's criticism of Grey Granite seems to spring from his assumption that Cloud Howe and Grey Granite must be judged by the same norms as Sunset Song. Munro records that Grey Granite received a mixed reception from the press. Compton Mackenzie, writing in the Daily Mail (15 November 1934), was disappointed with the novel,[13] but George Blake, writing in the Glasgow Evening News (3 November 1934), approved of it as 'a strange and fiery work sustaining the new and exciting note in Scottish fiction'.[14] To an extent, critical reactions to Grey Granite were tempered by individual political attitudes. Munro quotes from James Barke's letter to Mitchell (12 November 1934) praising the artistic achievement of the author while querying the validity of Ewan's response:

> Ewan Tavendale couldn't experience deep 'love' for the working class. Lenin

> had the degree of affection I have in mind. All great leaders have or had it - Spartacus, Wallace, Dimitrov, etc., etc. A C.P. leader especially needs it to carry him through - understanding of historical necessity alone does it rarely.[15]

Such misunderstandings persisted. For example, Hugh MacDiarmid approached Mitchell's work from a political, rather than a literary, standpoint. His most trenchant criticism of Mitchell was published in 1946 when he condemned Mitchell for a mixture of intellectual failure and emotional indulgence. Citing John Lehmann's criticism of Mitchell's excessive emotionalism, MacDiarmid reinterprets this as being the result of a lack of intellectual ability:

> The fact is that in writing upon big political or cultural issues he was indulging in Swiss Winter Sports at Braemar. He lacked the necessary foundation. This is what Mr. Lehmann means when he finds his continual emotionalism a defect; in other words, Gibbon was not an intellectual.[16]

MacDiarmid continues his indictment of Mitchell by analysing and rejecting his political stance. He dismisses the essay entitled 'Glasgow' as a 'purple passage of emotional humanism',[17] claiming that 'this inadequate, because utterly undialectical, attitude of Gibbon's vitiated his whole work'.[18] MacDiarmid continues his essay with an attack on the 'Peter Panism'[19]

of Diffusionism and concludes by damning Mitchell with the very faintest praise. MacDiarmid's political beliefs predetermined the nature of his response to Mitchell, blinding him to the essentially dialectical nature of Mitchell's work. He failed to approach the novels within their individual terms of reference.

The debate initiated by MacDiarmid on the thought and philosophy of Mitchell was not to be continued for thirty years. Most of the early critics concentrated on other qualities of Mitchell's writing. Several critics drew attention to Mitchell's use of language. Neil Gunn, writing in 1938, traced the link between the language of the trilogy and Mitchell's concern for the values of the land:

> I should say that what Mitchell achieved was not a new language but an old rhythm. Apart from a handful of Scots words, the medium used in the Scots novels is English, but the effect produced by the rhythm is utterly un-English. Indeed it is so profoundly of the soil of which Mitchell writes that in an odd moment of reverie the illusion is created of the soil itself speaking. The girl Chris realises she must have this rhythm of words or she will not know herself; Mitchell realises it; and the earth is fecund with it as with the peewit's cry. Mitchell makes the bold stroke of using it, and 'Sunset Song' will justify him till the

> peewit becomes vanellus vulgaris in that language of Cosmopolis towards which he saw the whole world move.[20]

In this essay (which is one of the best short pieces written on Mitchell) Gunn singles out for praise Mitchell's involvement with the problems of Scotland, his commitment to the downtrodden and his ability to balance the roles of 'social reformer and literary artist'.[21] He makes a powerful case for his claim that:

> Mitchell was never static, weighing 'literary values' as if they were eternally divorced from life and change (critics who do something like this fulfil a very necessary if secondary function), but dynamic and deeply committed to human life as it was lived around him, and facing fearlessly and courageously the ominous darkness of the future. In that sense, he was a portent on the Scottish scene and to me at least a portent of incalculable potentiality.[22]

It could be wished that Neil Gunn had written more fully on Mitchell. The points he raises in this essay concerning Mitchell's use of language, his concern for traditional Scottish values and his struggle to reconcile his political and artistic interests, are ones which he discusses in terms of Mitchell's work rather than in relation to external political or critical value systems. Gunn does not allow his

criticism to be hampered by a set of rigid political or artistic preconceptions. Unlike Munro, he recognises that the author should not be identified with his characters:

> I am aware how unfair and misleading it can be to try to get at an author's own convictions or disabilities by way of what he has placed in the thought of one of his imagined characters.[23]

Critics who wrote between 1935 and 1969 tended to stumble over their literary and political preconceptions. Cloud Howe and Grey Granite were often dismissed as failed realistic novels. To such critics, the failure was all the more perceptible since Sunset Song was so obviously a successful realistic novel. These critics tended to concentrate their attention on Sunset Song. For example, William Montgomerie, writing in 1945, comments sensitively on Mitchell's use of language and is perhaps the first critic to demonstrate how akin to poetry it is. He remarks on the debate about language and culture in Sunset Song and writes perceptively on the limiting effect of the Scottish poetic tradition:

> Lewis Grassic Gibbon in choosing to write in prose is handicapped in a way that Hugh MacDiarmid, using the Scottish ballads, or William Soutar, using the ballads and nursery rhymes, is not handicapped. The powerful tradition of the ballad has powerfully affected Gibbon's prose style so that it becomes almost poetry. But this poetic tradition -

> the ballads, Robert Burns, and the best of the songs - is a peasant tradition, limiting rather than freeing the twentieth century artist in style and subject.[24]

His appreciation of Cloud Howe and Grey Granite is not so acute, however, since he persists in seeing them in relation to the terms of reference established in Sunset Song. He complains that the realism of Grey Granite is 'two-dimensional reporter's realism'[25], and he especially bemoans the lack of realism in the presentation of Duncairn:

> Duncairn should either be a recognisable portrait of one of the Scottish cities, or else a new city with a fully developed personality. The demands of fiction are as definite in the case of a city, as in the case of a human character. It is a novelist's task to create the characters of men and women. Few novelists have attempted to build a new city.[26]

Such artistic preconceptions limited Montgomerie as much as political preconceptions inhibited MacDiarmid's response.

The Marxist critic Ian Milner, writing in 1954, concentrates on those aspects of the trilogy which are primarily concerned with politics, economics and the social structure. He too demands a greater degree of realism, in this case in the treatment of the workers in Grey Granite, and he compares the novel unfavourably with The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists.[27] The comparison is hardly a fair or even a relevant one. For

Milner the demands of a particular type of realism distort his appreciation of the novel. The Czech Marxist critic Jessie Kocmanova, writing in 1955, commits the same fault when she deplores Mitchell's portraits of Trease and Ewan. She praises the trilogy because of its significance for 'Social Realism in Britain'.[28]

Neil Gunn and Hugh MacDiarmid are the most perceptive and the most artistically sophisticated of these critics. In 1948 Hugh MacDiarmid contributed a more constructive essay to the body of Mitchell criticism than his 1946 essay, paying tribute to Mitchell's achievement and identifying Mitchell's success as being intimately linked to his use of demotic Scots:

> The language question is in fact a class question. The working class speak Scots. They are taught English in the schools, but they learn Scots at their mother's knee.[29]

He quotes Ian Findlay's definition of the language:

> Scots in itself is not a mere dialect of English, like Cockney or Somerset, but another tongue, with a history and literature of its own, and independent bonds with French and other languages.[30]

He concludes that 'Gibbon cut well down into this great substratum'.[31]

The non-political critics pose problems too. Too often there is a tacit assumption of the validity of certain critical norms. Even Kurt Wittig, writing in 1958, approaches

the two later books of the trilogy through the terms of reference established in Sunset Song. Despite his sensitive appreciation of Mitchell's use of subjective presentation, his assumption of the necessity for a progressive linear realism leads him to claim that the trilogy succeeds only on a mythological level.[32] It is this sort of assumption that led to a decline in the appreciation of Cloud Howe and Grey Granite.

In the seventies there was a revival of critical interest in A Scots Quair. Ian Carter relates this to the resurgence of nationalism in Scotland in the sixties and to the subsequent attempt to reconcile Scottish Nationalism with Socialism:

> Some... wondered how socialists had managed when this inconvenient conjuncture had arisen thirty years before, in the Scottish Renaissance. Thus much of the scholarly interest in Sunset Song during the last decade springs from an attempt by socialists and others to use the novel to get a grip on current Scottish politics.[33]

Carter refers to 'a revaluation of Scottish things within Scottish universities'[34] in the sixties and suggests that the interest of the nation was reflected by the media when a sympathetic drama controller arranged that Sunset Song should be televised. Whatever the reasons for the revival of interest, these do not account for the fundamental change in critical approach. This was occasioned not only by

specifically critical developments, but by the influence of such linguistic investigations as the work of the Czeck Structuralists, of Saussure on the structure of language, and of Jakobson on the principles of linguistic selection. These, together with the growing body of post-Marxist criticism, have helped to create a new critical climate, and this is reflected in the analyses of many of these developments by such critics as David Lodge[35] and Raymond Williams.[36] Essayists like Ian Carter and Marie Peel, critics of Scottish literature like Francis Russell Hart and students of Mitchell's work like Douglas Young, all exhibit a much more flexible critical approach than their precursors.

Ian Carter attempts to analyse the trilogy in terms of its dialectic, defining Gibbon's aim as a synthesis between sardonic and sentimental attitudes:

> Sunset Song is a thoroughgoing attempt at a dialectical novel.
>
> Gibbon counterposes sentimental and sardonic attitudes at four levels - in the language which he uses, in his descriptions of Kinraddie's land and people, in Chris Guthrie's biography and in his underlying model of class structure.[37]

Carter's thesis rests on interpreting Sunset Song within the terms of reference suggested by the last paragraph of the Prelude:

> This strange paragraph, largely unnoticed by literary critics and

historians, unlocks Sunset Song.

> 'So that was Kinraddie that bleak winter of nineteen eleven and the new minister, him they chose early next year, he was to say it was the Scots countryside itself, fathered between a kailyard and a bonny briar bush in the lee of a house with green shutters. And what he meant by that you could guess at yourself if you'd a mind for puzzles and dirt, there wasn't a house with green shutters in the whole of Kinraddie.'[38]

Carter maintains that in this paragraph,

> Gibbon is doing two things. The first is to alert us to the fact that Kinraddie and Arbuthnott are not necessarily identical: Arbuthnott lies in geographical space, while Kinraddie lies in literary space - in a tradition of writing about the Scottish countryside. Gibbon will have no compunction, he is telling us, in bending Arbuthnott until it takes the shape he needs for Kinraddie. The second thing that he is telling us concerns that literary tradition. Kailyard novels and G. D. Brown's gloomy masterpiece are antithetical,

> counterposing sentimental and sardonic structures of feeling. By placing Kinraddie between these two approaches, Gibbon declares his ambitious intention of synthesising them.[39]

Although it would be inappropriate to analyse Sunset Song solely within the terms of reference suggested by one paragraph, Carter's approach is undoubtedly more sensitive to the text of the novels than was much of the earlier criticism.

No modern critic of Mitchell's work denies his intellectual ability. Marie Peel singles out this quality as his outstanding characteristic:

> Grassic Gibbon has explicit intellectual vision, a hardness and forward thrust that makes one think of Zola's Germinal, or Sartre's Chemins de la Liberté. But he is a far finer novelist than Sartre, freer and fuller in incidental life, knowing through and through all kinds and conditions of people, and with a masterly power of interplay between significant detail and profound general consciousness.[40]

She entertains no doubts concerning the excellence of Cloud Howe and Grey Granite:

> The general implication was that Sunset Song was his finest achievement, what followed being marred,

> allegedly, by over haste and excessive pressure of work.
>
> To read the whole is to reverse this judgement and is a revelation. For far from falling off, the other books, Cloud Howe and Grey Granite, complete a superbly fashioned and compelling whole.[41]

Marie Peel's essay implies that A Scots Quair should be placed in the forefront of modern European literature.

Although Douglas Young's claims are not so exalted, he provides an excellent analysis of the trilogy in terms of Mitchell's intellectual background; that is, in terms of a Diffusionist analysis. Unfortunately this method necessarily limits his view, and his re-appraisal of the trilogy remains a partial one, but he substantiates his claim that:

> A Scots Quair itself is revealed not as something separate from his other writing but as the fine flowering of his genius, the most complete expression of a vision of life which can be seen in the making throughout his lesser books.[42]

His real achievement is his success in rescuing the English novels from obscurity. Because Young perceives Mitchell primarily as a Diffusionist writer, his concern with this aspect of the trilogy leads him to ignore the central issues of language and culture, of art and its relationship to politics, and the relationship between nationalism and

socialism which are examined in the course of the trilogy. Despite this, he rarely falls into the trap of positing irrelevant critical norms. He comments on this tendency in earlier critics:

> I think that the critics have dealt too severely with Grey Granite for in their minds it completed a neat pattern to see a steady decline in the three parts of the trilogy.[43]

Young's thesis establishes an excellent case for his claim for A Scots Quair as,

> the most vividly sustained debate in modern times on the great theme of the nature of man in civilised society.[44]

Francis Russell Hart's criticism is directed towards an analysis of the mainstream of Scottish fiction, and he makes a most convincing case for discussing Scottish novels in terms of a specifically Scottish culture and tradition. He argues that the novel arose in Scotland a century later than in England and that its areas of concern and its problems differed significantly from those of the English novel. He suggests that the peculiarly Scottish problem of fiction of 'swithering from mode to mode',[45] can be 'solved in terms of the integrities of individual works'.[46] This is the basis of his approach to the trilogy. His comments on it are brief, but his main contribution is to re-define Wittig's analysis of the trilogy's 'levels of meaning' as 'modes of experience':

> for Kurt Wittig its three levels are the personal, the social, and the

> mythic. But they are less levels than alternating, sometimes conflicting, sometimes coalescing modes of experience and understanding.[47]

His criticism is exciting in that not only does he consider each work within the terms of reference it establishes, but he also manages to relate these individual integrities to a specifically Scottish tradition.

In conclusion, I wish to emphasise the increased sensitivity to the texts displayed by critics writing in the seventies. The alleged 'Peter Panism'[48] of Mitchell's concern with Diffusionism has proved no obstacle to these critics, as Douglas Young, in particular, demonstrates. While early critics concentrated their attention on Mitchell's treatment of tradition, his echoes of the ballads and his faithfulness to the Mearns district, recent critics have been more interested in the dialectical nature of his writings. This has re-established a place for Cloud Howe and Grey Granite as works of art in their own right and has re-defined Mitchell as a writer who was passionately interested in political, artistic and cultural ideas and in the operation of these ideas in the lives of both individuals and communities.

1. Munro, p. 74.
2. Ibid., pp. 74-75.
3. Ibid., pp. 76-77.
4. Ibid., p. 75.
5. Ibid., p. 86.
6. Ibid., p. 91.
7. Ibid., chap., XVI.
8. Ibid., p. 114.
9. Ibid., p. 115.
10. Ibid., p. 116.
11. Ibid., p. 175.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., p. 182.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., p. 175.
16. Hugh MacDiarmid, 'Lewis Grassic Gibbon: James Leslie Mitchell', Scottish Art and Letters, no. 2 (Spring 1946), p. 41.
17. Ibid., p. 43.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Neil Gunn, 'Nationalism in Writing', Scots Magazine, October 1938, p. 30.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., p. 31.
23. Ibid., p. 28.
24. William Montgomerie, 'The Brown God: Lewis Grassic Gibbon's Trilogy', Scots Magazine, December 1945, p. 217.
25. Ibid., p. 219.
26. Ibid., p. 222.
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