

FROM ACCLAIMED FILMMAKER TERENCE DAVIES

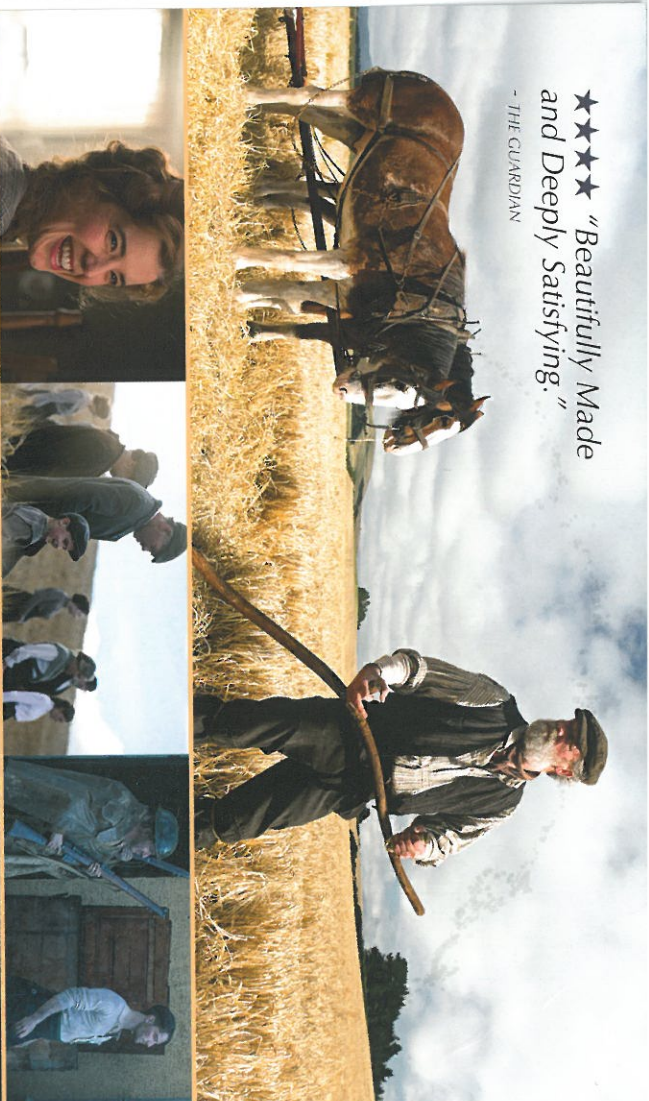


"Visually stunning and emotionally engrossing...
SUNSET SONG breathes life into Lewis Grassie Gibbons' epic
Scottish novel about an independent-minded young woman
living on a farm in the years preceding World War One."
THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER

SUNSET SONG



★★★★ "Beautifully Made
and Deeply Satisfying."
- THE GUARDIAN



SUNSET SONG is an epic, award-winning film set in Scotland from acclaimed filmmaker, Terence Davies (*The Deep Blue Sea*, *Time and the City*), starring Agyness Deyn, Peter Mullan (*My Name is Joe*) and Kevin Guthrie (*Sunshine On Leith*).

Based on Lewis Grassie Gibbons's novel, widely considered the classic Scottish novel of the 20th century, SUNSET SONG is the story of Chris Guthrie, a young woman, living on a working farm who must battle tradition, change and society's expectations to forge her own voice. As World War One looms, and with moments of heartbreak and pain, celebration and joy, Chris stands strong, drawing from the ancient land in looking to the future.

★★★★★

"A Lyrical Triumph."
- THE GUARDIAN

"A Tour de Force
of Drama, Composition
and Colour."
- SCREEN DAILY

IN CINEMAS
SEPTEMBER 1



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and nudity.

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LEWIS GRASSIC GIBBON

A Scots Quair

Sunset Song • Cloud Howe • Grey Granite

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY DAVID KERR CAMERON

'It would be impossible to overestimate Lewis Grassic Gibbon's importance ... A Scots Quair is a landmark work: it permeates the Scottish literary consciousness and colours all subsequent writing of its kind' — David Kerr Cameron

A passionate and revolutionary writer, Lewis Grassic Gibbon died tragically early, shortly after completing the final book of this outstanding trilogy. The story of Chris Guthrie, torn between her love of the land and her desire to escape from the narrow horizons of a peasant culture, is the thread that links these three works. In them Gibbon skilfully interweaves the personal joys and sorrows of Chris's life with the greater historical and political events — the First World War, the General Strike and the hunger marches of the thirties — to create a portrait of a country and its people.

Rich in nuance and meaning, *A Scots Quair* was Gibbon's salute to his native North-east Lowlands and in it 'he takes us closer than anyone to the heartbeat of that old society that lived by the soil'.

'His three great novels have the impetus and music of mountain burns in full spate' — *Observer*

The cover shows a detail from *Young People in the Country* by James Cowie, courtesy of the artist's daughter.



A PENGUIN BOOK
Fiction

U. K. £8.99
N. Z. \$21.95
(incl. GST)
CAN. \$14.95

ISBN 0-14-018091-5



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LEWIS GRASSIC GIBBON *A Scots Quair*

ISBN 0 14 018091 5



LEWIS GRASSIC GIBBON
A Scots Quair



PENGUIN TWENTIETH-CENTURY CLASSICS

A SCOTS QUAIR

Lewis Grassie Gibbon was the pseudonym of James Leslie Mitchell. Born in 1901 in an Aberdeenshire croft, he spent most of his boyhood in Kincardineshire, the setting of *A Scots Quair*. At the age of sixteen he became a junior reporter on the *Aberdeen Journal*, and in 1919 he joined the Royal Army Service Corps, where he spent the next four years. From 1923 to 1929 he was a clerk in the R.A.F. The army offered him the opportunity to travel in Central America and the Middle East, and resulted in various works written under his own name. His first novel, *Stained Radiancè*, was published in 1930. During the years between his discharge from the R.A.F. and his death in 1935 he wrote sixteen books, but though encouraged by such established writers as H. G. Wells and Hugh MacDiarmid he met with no great financial success. He is principally remembered for his trilogy *A Scots Quair*, published under this collective title in 1946. It consists of *Sunset Song* (1932), *Cloud Howe* (1933), and *Grey Granite* (1934). For the last four years of his life, he lived in Welwyn Garden City. He was married with two children.

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PENGUIN BOOKS

LEWIS GRASSIC GIBBON

A SCOTTS QUAIR

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Sunset Song

Cloud Howe

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Grey Granite

Introduction by David Kerr Cameron



PENGUIN BOOKS

INTRODUCTION

It would be impossible to overestimate Lewis Grassie Gibbon's importance. His trilogy, *A Scots Quair*, is a landmark work: it permeates the Scottish literary consciousness and colours all subsequent writing of its kind.

It gathers to it all the elements of an old language and an even older culture; it encases myth and folklore and legend. It encapsulates an essential 'Scottishness' that might well have perished as the genteel taint of provincialism, and it brings brilliantly into play, transmuted and at times heightened to a poetic intensity, the old Doric-based dialect of the region, still far from dead but, alas, in decline as the kirkyard claims those who once spoke it most fluently.

In Gibbon's pages the knowledgeable ear can listen to that old speech reborn in an acceptable, Anglicized form or seek for the first time the taste of its earthy rawness.

It is a folk-prose immeasurably rich in nuance and meaning that grows out of the soil of Gibbon's native North-east Lowlands, in close harmony with the flow of the days and the turn of the seasons; it makes all the slow, discursive convolutions of everyday conversation; it is the speak of the Lowlands heart and of the fields. For Lewis Grassie Gibbon is the voice of that northern landscape as no other is, or is ever likely to be.

Born in an Aberdeenshire croft in 1901, and laid in his mother's plaid in the shelter of a stook while she helped with the harvest, he wrote out of a deep folk-consciousness, steady and sure in all his responses. He was a man possessed by landscape, looking constantly back to the idyll of the primordial men who once littered it with its old cairns and standing stones. He knew the poetry of the plough and the blitheness of haytime. His writing imbibed the smell of the soil, the odour of dung in cowbyre and stable, land and language perfectly synthesized. Images tumbled and jumbled one upon another, occasionally contradictory but all part of a descriptive torrent that brought magically alive the barren moor and the distant majesty of the blue Grampian hills.

The land of his song, the land his crofter parents moved to when he was eight, was the red-clayed Howe of the Mearns, a segment of the county of Kincardine now bureaucratically embalmed in the greater conglomerate of Grampian. Yet he spoke for that entire wind-scoured North-east coastal region – and particularly for the sturdy folk who once cultivated its lonely, cloud-capped hinterlands.

His world in *Sunset Song* is that of the old farmtown folk, that itinerant society of wandering cottars moving on with each May-term

day from one tied cottage to the next, of footloose bothy lads, crofters and small farmers. Elsewhere, in his splendid essay 'The Land', he called them the 'aristos' of Scotland, proud of his own association. They were dour, awkward, argumentative, malicious and foul-mouthed folk, slow-stepping to the turn of the year, the needs of livestock and the labour pattern of the fields, moving stoically from seedtime to harvest.

Theirs was a society caught finally in that long farming depression that followed from the growing inflow of imports and the subsequent draining of wealth from the countryside; they were figures trapped in a landscape of unrelenting toil, locked in a love-hate relationship with the soil and frequently with each other.

In the early 1930s, as Gibbon wrote the trilogy that would be the keystone of a literary output comprising thirteen other books under his own name of J. Leslie Mitchell, as well as an outpouring of some fine essays and short stories, that society had already begun to crumble, to fragment itself under the influence of better general education and improved communications, not least due to the astonishing social impact of the bicycle.

What Gibbon gave us was a last glimpse of those peasant days: the portrait of a social grouping caught at the precise moment of its disillusionment as the great modern drift from the land began and men finally slackened their ancient deep involvement with the soil. It was a society that bred hard men and durable women: men like the dark-gloving John Guthrie of *Sunset Song*, a fine creation, convincingly drawn, a thoroughly obnoxious, prideful monster driven by a rampant Presbyterianism, intolerance and a monstrous work ethic but, without, not at all untypical of his kind, a man soured of all tenderness in his unending duel with the soil. He is a man flawed by his own despair, as are so many of Gibbon's characters.

For all his love of the land, Gibbon well knew how it could trap and destroy people. To his story of heartbreak and toil he added the agony of filial disenchantment. The tenant of Blawearie's cruel acres knows in his heart that he will be the last of his name to live close and life-long in that old compact with the seasons. His son will leave, unable to bear longer his father's contempt; his daughter Chris, whose odyssey is the thread of Gibbon's trilogy, faces a dilemma deeper and even more profound. It is the eternal dilemma of the country child: to dull the mind to the wider cultural horizons or to turn one's back for ever on an ancestral landscape, aware of the betrayal in the blood? Chris is trapped between two cultures and between the past and the future. It was the fate of Gibbon's own generation.

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 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.

Sunset Song is a splendid hymn to the soil; it is also a love story, deep and true. But Gibbon is a many-layered writer. He has been called Joycean; he is as capable of the cosmic sweep as of detailing the minutiae of harvest. In Chris Guthrie's story rests the sad reality of the drift from the land and the old rooted values the writer himself so admired. In an even heavier symbolism one might detect in Chris's plight (as many have done) the fate of Old Scotland herself as she passes from a poor, brave past into a new age that will besmirch her proud dignity and blur her identity.

War-widowed, Chris moves with *Cloud Howe* from the bed of peasant-farmer Ewan to the bed of the minister of Segget, a small spinners' and weavers' community riven by class demarcation. It is a masterly study, overshadowed by *Sunset Song* but too little regarded, for it shows Gibbon's somewhat hidden talent for the hugely regarded. The novel has a whole gallery of such memorable and kenspeckle figures as Feet Leslie the policeman, scandalmonger Ag Moultrie, that shy seducer Meiklebogs, and Old Leslie, that dreadful bore of a blacksmith whose interminable stories are enough to drive you to take your Clydesdales for shoeing elsewhere. Why, one wonders, have we begrudged him this due recognition?

It is in *Cloud Howe* that we begin to encounter the political thrust of his trilogy. In the final work, *Grey Granite*, it takes over, making it the least successful of the three books. Yet it delineates most perceptibly that march into our modern world of industrial contention. Chris, widowed and keeping a boarding house, has become a creature lost in the anonymity of the city. Her sense of loss, for all we know, may reflect Gibbon's own disenchantment in those depression years as his own links with the land severed and the countryside of his childhood slid slowly towards an era of hard materialism. Chris is now far, far from Blawearie and the sight and sounds of the fields. But it is to these that she flees for solace in her moments of crisis:

... what a fine smell was the smell of the earth, earth in long sweeping parks that rolled dark-red in plunging up the hills of the Howe, earth churned in great acres by the splattering feet of the Clydesdale horses, their breath ablow on a morning like this, their smell the unforgotten stable smell, the curling rigs running to meet the sun.

It is to her roots and her childhood hillside that she returns, her journey ending where it began. She is, finally, alone, as we all are. For her, as for Gibbon himself, only the land endures. Like him, she pines for a primitive landscape in which Simple Man moves innocent and untrammelled. Gibbon's song, after all, is about the death of dreams. Ultimately, it is not his Marxist outlook that matters but his fellow-feeling for the mass of downtrodden humanity; his understanding of the ache and the loneliness, the deep melancholy of the unfulfilled, as

were so many of the old country folk. Perhaps, too, it is a lament for the bewildered and fusionless thing man would allow himself to become.

Sadly, Gibbon died aged only thirty-four, in 1935, almost as he completed the trilogy that would be his outstanding achievement, already aware of the fate of his beloved peasant folk but hardly realizing how important he himself would become. In his work he gave expression to all the things that were dear to him; he took us closer than anyone to the heartbeat of that old society that lived by the soil. *A Scots Quair* was his salute to it; in a way, it was his own requiem.

DAVID KERR CAMERON

but when father applied for his lease again he was told he couldn't have it.

So he took a look at the *People's Journal* and got into his fine best suit, Chris shook the moth-balls from it and found him his collar and the broad white front to cover his working sark; and John Guthrie tramped into Aberdeen and took a train to Banchoory to look at a small place there. But the rent was awful high and he saw that nearly all the district was land of the large-like farm, he'd be squeezed to death and he'd stand no chance. It was fine land though, that nearly shook him, fine it looked and your hands they itched to be at it; but the agent called him *Guthrie*, and he fired up at the agent: *Who the hell are you Guthrie-ing? Mister Guthrie to you.* And the agent looked at him and turned right white about the gills and then gave a bit laugh and said *Al well, Mr. Guthrie, I'm afraid you wouldn't suit us.* And John Guthrie said *It's your place that doesn't suit me, let me tell you, you see doo-licking clerk.* Poor he might be but the creature wasn't yet clected that might put on its airs with him, John Guthrie.

So back he came and began his searchings again. And the third day out he came back from far in the south. He'd taken a place, Blawearie, in Kimraddie of the Mearns.

Wild weather it was that January and the night on the Slug road smoring with sleet when John Guthrie crossed his family and gear from Aberdeen into the Mearns. Twice the great carts set with their shelvins that rustled still stray binder-twine from September's harvest-home laired in drifts before the ascent of the Slug faced the reluctant horses. Darkness came down like a wet, wet blanket, weariness below it and the crying of the twins to vex John Guthrie. Mother called him from her nook in the leading cart, there where she sat with now one twin at the breast and now another, and her skin bare and cold and white and a strand of her rust-gold hair draped down from the darkness about her face into the light of the swinging lantern: *We'd better loosen up at Portlethen and not try the Slug this night.*

But father swore at that *Damn it to hell, do you think I'm made of slier to put up the night at Portlethen?* and mother sighed and held off the wee twin, Robert, and the milk dripped creamily from the soft, sweet lips of him: *No, we're not made of slier, but maybe we'll lair again and all die of the night.*

Maybe he feared that himself, John Guthrie, his rage was his worryment with the night, but he'd no time to answer her for a great bellowing arose in the road by the winding scurry of peat-moss that lined the dying light of the moon. The cattle had bunched there, tails to the wind, refusing the Slug and the sting of the sleet, little Dod was walling and crying at the beasts, Polled Angus and Shorthorns and half-bred Highland stirks who had fattened and feted and loved their life in the haughs of Echt, south there across the uncounchy hills was a world cold and unclancy.

But John Guthrie dropped the tarpaulin edge that shielded his wife and the twins and the furnishings of the best room and gear good and plentiful enough; and swiftly he ran past the head of the horse till he came to where the cattle bunched. And he swung Dod into the ditch with one swipe of his hand and cried *Have you got no sense, you brat?* and uncoiled from his hand the length of hide that served him as a whip. Its crackle snarled down through the sting of the sleet, the hair rose in long serrations across the backs of the cattle, and one in a minute, a little Highland steer it was, moored and ran forward and fell to a trot, and the rest followed after, slipping and sprawling with their cloven hooves, the reek of their dung sharp and bitter in the sleet smore of the night. Ahead Alec saw them coming and turned himself about again, and fell to a trot, leading up the Slug to Mearns and the south.

So, creaking and creaking, and the shelvins skirting under the weight of their loads, they passed that danger point, the carts plodded into motion again, the first with its hooded light and house gear and mother sucking the twins. In the next, Clyde's cart, the seed was loaded, potato and corn and barley, and bags of tools and implements, and graips and forks fast tied with esparto twine and two fine ploughs and a driller, and dairy things and a turnip machine with teeth that cut as a gullotine cuts. Head down to the wind and her reins loose and her bonny coat all mottled with sleet went Clyde, the load a nothing to her, fine and clean and sonsy she marched, following John Guthrie's cart with no other thing or soul to guide but that ever and now, in this half-mile and that she heard his voice cry cheerily *Fine, Clyde, fine, Come on then, lass.*

Chris and Will with the last cart, sixteen Will and fifteen Chris, the road wound up and up, straight and unwavering, and sometimes they hidded in the fithle and the sleet sang past to left and right, white and glowing in the darkness. And sometimes they clambered down from the shelvins above the laboured drag of old Bob and ran beside him, one either side, and stamped for warmth in their feet, and saw the whin bushes climb black the white hills beside them and far and away the blink of lights across the moors where folk lay happed and warm. But then the upwards road would swerve, right or left, into this steep ledge or that, and the wind would be at them again and they'd gasp, climbing back to the shelvins, Will with freezing feet and hands and the batter of the sleet like needles in his face, Chris in worse case, colder and colder at every turn, her body numb and unhappy, knees and thighs and stomach and breast, her breasts ached and ached so that nearly she wept. But of that she told nothing, she fell to a drowse through the cold, and a strange dream came to her as they plodded up through the ancient hills.

For out of the night ahead of them came running a man, father didn't see him or heed to him, though old Bob in the dream that was Chris's snorted and shed. And as he came he wrung his hands, he was mad and singing, a foreign creature, black-bearded, half-naked he was;