



HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

Hugvísindasvið

Fact or Fiction?

***An Examination of Historical Accuracy in John Buchan's
A Lost Lady of Old Years and an Assessment of Buchan's
Influences***

Ritgerð til B.A.-prófs

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May 2012

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Abstract

This essay is an examination of the Scottish writer John Buchan (1875-1941) and his historical novel *A Lost Lady of Old Years* which was published in 1899. The thesis has two main purposes; the first is to examine the historicity of the novel and how Buchan makes use of historical events while creating his characters and storyline. The second objective of the dissertation is to examine Buchan's goals and inspirations while writing the novel, where his influences come from and why he wrote the book, his aims of education and of entertainment. It will assess the effect writers like Robert Louis Stevenson and Sir Walter Scott had on Buchan's writing and then considers how Buchan's upbringing and personal opinions appear in the novel.

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Part I: Introduction

John Buchan (1875-1941) was one of Scotland's most prominent writers and even though he died in 1940 his literary reputation as a writer of both fiction and non-fiction still lives to this day. He wrote over one hundred books but his most well known works are probably the adventure novels and thrillers *The Thirty-Nine Steps* and *Greenmantle*. Buchan was exceedingly interested in history and in 1899 he published a historical novel by the name *A Lost Lady of Old Years*, in which he writes about the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745 in Scotland, and the effect the rebellion had on people's lives, particularly those of Francis Birkenshaw, Margaret Murray and John Murray. This essay begins by providing important background information on John Buchan and *A Lost Lady of Old Years* and then moves on to explore the novel's historicity; how he develops historical characters and how he uses his knowledge of Scottish history while producing the novel's storyline. While writing the novel Buchan drew on influences from many sources. Robert Louis Stevenson and Sir Walter Scott served as remarkable role models to him and affected the way he wrote a great deal, both his literary style and his treatment of history. This is an examination of historical accuracy in the novel *A Lost Lady of Old Years* and an evaluation of Buchan's motives and influences.

Part II: Background

2.1 John Buchan

John Buchan was born at Perth in 1875 into a clergy family. Buchan studied at Glasgow University, where he learned Latin, Greek, mathematics and history among other subjects (Smith 31), and later at Oxford University where he studied law. He practiced as a barrister and became very involved in politics, with the result that he became a Member of Parliament. Buchan started writing while he studied at Oxford and continued doing so throughout his life (Smith 50). However, he always considered his writing as a sort of hobby and a secondary career (BBC.co.uk, "John Buchan") so it is ironic that to this day his main prestige lies in his literary works and not his political dealings. Buchan was very interested in history; for a long while he occupied himself with the Oxford Preservation Society (Smith 338) and later grew to be the president of the Scottish Historical Society (Virtual Scotland, "John Buchan"). Buchan drew on this interest and experience in his writing and became widely known

for his historical novels. Buchan married a woman named Susan Grosvenor and had four children with her. They traveled the world on his political missions and he became very popular in Canada where he was appointed Governor-General in 1935 (Tweedsmuir 218).

2.2 *A Lost Lady of Old Years*

Buchan's historical novel *A Lost Lady of Old Years*, was first published in 1899. The story is based on the events of the unsuccessful Jacobite risings of 1745 in which Charles Stuart, grandson of James VII, returned to Scotland in order to recover the throne for his banished father (Lynch 334). The book traces the endeavors of Francis Birkenshaw, a young man from Edinburgh, who decides to set out on a quest for adventures and by the influence of a beautiful woman gets caught up in the Jacobite cause. Birkenshaw becomes involved with many people related to the cause; the beautiful Margaret Murray, her husband Secretary Murray and Lord Lovat among others. Birkenshaw travels the Scottish Highlands, observing battles and trials, and witnesses allegiances being made and betrayed. After the Jacobite rising is crushed he returns to Edinburgh where he becomes a successful businessman but never marries or has children. *A Lost Lady of Old Years* is not among Buchan's most well known works and has, unfairly, been rather neglected. In fact the novel did not sell very well when it was first published but since then at least five more editions have been printed (Robertson ix).

Part III: Characters

As in all literature, the characters play a vital role in *A Lost Lady of Old Years*; it is through them that the reader experiences the events at hand as they make the story come to life. Authors of historical fiction have different methods of creating characters for their novels; some invent a fictional character and place him or her in a historical context while others write about genuine characters in fictional circumstances but Fleishman argues that as a general rule of thumb a novel requires a minimum of one historical character to classify as a historical novel (Fleishman 3). This does not mean that the main character of each historical novel must be a historical figure; rather it means that the main character must come in contact with a figure of that sort in one way or another. In fact, most writers of this genre take it upon themselves to use the former method of concocting a fictional character, as

writing about well known public figures poses many limitations on the writer. In addition, most historical novels center on a very average individual or a small group of individuals in order to give the reader a sense of how particular historical events, such as wars, uprisings, catastrophes and so on might influence people's existence (Fleishman 10).

3.1 Francis Birkenshaw

Buchan's creation of Francis Birkenshaw is a fine example of a method used very often by writers of historical fiction. Birkenshaw is a fictional character that has been placed right in the middle of the Jacobite risings of 1745 in Scotland and has connections with many famous people of Jacobite history. With Birkenshaw's creation Buchan follows in the footsteps of works such as Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley* (1814) and Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) and sets the example for authors like George MacDonald Fraser in novels like *Flashman* (1969). Through Francis Birkenshaw the reader gets to experience history firsthand as he witnesses the events of the Jacobite Rebellion and people's actions. The novel is written as a third person narrative so it focuses on Birkenshaw's outlook on events and Buchan allows the reader to become acquainted with Birkenshaw's thoughts and feelings.

In his narrative, Buchan imitates Sir Walter Scott's method of building his character. As Scott does in *Waverley* (1814), Buchan spends four chapters on introducing the character to the reader without many critical events and he felt that this was very necessary in any story building. In fact, Buchan wrote a criticism of Scott's *Waverley*, in which he stated that:

The fullness with which the hero is realised and expounded provides the reader with a basis of judgment, a standpoint from which to view the whimsicalities and the heroics of the other characters. (Quoted in Smith 357)

In other words, it is critical to develop the main character to give the reader a good understanding of his actions and his interactions with other characters of the story. With this it is easier for the character to draw the reader's sympathies in times of trouble; after spending so much time getting to know the character the reader will want the character to do well in his endeavors, or, depending on the author's intentions, to fail in his ventures.

However, this is not the only way that Buchan's novel is similar to Scott's novels regarding characterization. Lukács talks about how Scott's main character or hero is usually only a simple man, an "average English gentleman" who is rather, but not outstandingly, bright, quite moral and usually gets caught up in some cause without being captivated by it (Lukács 33). In his biography on Walter Scott, Buchan stresses this fact also as he writes:

They are passive people for the most part, creatures of the average world, not majestic men and women of destiny. But they are not unreal, for the earth is full of them; they are the more natural for being undistinguished. (Buchan, *Sir Walter Scott* 342)

In other words: the more mundane the hero is, the more believable he or she becomes. This description fits Francis Birkenshaw perfectly, he is merely an ordinary man swept up by and thrown into an uprising that he really has no opinion of or devotion to, as Buchan tells us:

For a little he tried to fathom his own political feeling, but could find no more than a personal sentiment. The enterprise had no charms for him; he had as little care for the Prince's success as for the Prince's person. (Buchan, *A Lost Lady* 147)

Not only is Birkenshaw a very commonplace hero but he is also an especially flawed personality, much like Scott's *Waverley* is at the beginning of his book; Birkenshaw has a very short temper and easily gets very angry, he frequently gets into fights and cares for nothing and no one save for his mother and sisters but not even his love for them is enough to keep him grounded (Buchan, *A Lost Lady* 25). Very early on it becomes very obvious that Francis is not weighed down by moral integrity; he breaks into the Murray's house, misrepresents himself and feels he has no moral obligation to the Jacobite cause. However, as he makes his journey around Scotland and England he starts to develop a conscience that he has not had before (Robertson vii). He finds new loyalties, first to Margaret Murray and then to Simon Fraser, Lord Lovat and with them comes a devotion to a great cause:

In his soul he knew that each was better apart, living for the other's memory, fighting the battle with the other's name on the lips. But for aught else he was cold and careless; for his nature was capable of the heroic virtues, but unfit for the little moralities. He was ever in revolt

from the domestic, the eternal wanderer in the ways of the world.
(Buchan, *A Lost Lady* 292)

Birkenshaw's love for Margaret Murray has forever tied him to the Jacobite cause but he has not changed enough to find the quiet joy and nobility of a domestic life.

Francis Birkenshaw is a fine example of how people can get caught up in incidents that they never planned on engaging themselves with. Stevenson discussed chance in great detail in his *A Gossip on Romance* and described romance as "the poetry of circumstance" (Stevenson 237); he believed that the unexpected events of life could be the most beautiful ones. In *A Lost Lady of Old Years* Buchan uses chance a great deal. By a coincidence Birkenshaw meets Dod Craik at a bar but Craik is the one that brings Francis to Murray's house where he first meets Margaret (Buchan, *A Lost Lady* 65) and another twist of fate leads him to meet Margaret Murray again in Edinburgh (Buchan, *A Lost Lady* 99). Buchan stresses this further by using sentences such as "now it chanced that Fate took it upon her to order events" (Buchan, *A Lost Lady* 28) and "Fate had still further tricks to play on him" (Buchan, *A Lost Lady* 31), thus suggesting that Francis is not entirely in control of his life and destiny but simply caught up in some cosmic arrangement. This unexpected turn of events in Francis' life ends up having a great effect on him as it changes his entire character. He is no longer only a restless young man seeking trouble but a man on a mission, he has found a higher purpose.

While Francis Birkenshaw is simply an ordinary man caught in an unusual situation, Buchan tries to bring out some heroic elements in him, both physical and emotional. For instance, one time when Francis is being followed by the king's men he shows remarkable physical capability:

With a moment's thought he kicked off his shoes, tossed the oars into the water, and dived overboard, and a minute later was clambering up the bowsprit of the vessel. (Buchan, *A Lost Lady* 214)

The reader might easily believe this act as Buchan has already described Francis to have a "strong and fierce" body (Buchan, *A Lost Lady* 25), but his mental heroism is not quite as easily believed. Francis tries to be loyal to Margaret Murray on his mission and thus show some heroic traits but Buchan rather fails here as Francis broods over the difficulties that face him for a long while. In addition, his loyalty to Lord Lovat seems rather superficial, as Buchan suggests: "When he did not look at the litter he was prepared to serve this fallen chieftain to the last, but a sight of the

heavy face and his nice senses revolted” (Buchan, *A Lost Lady* 193). Francis finds his master repulsive and as he tells us this we do not truly believe him when he says he is loyal to this old lord.

3.2 Margaret Murray

The reason for Francis Birkenshaw’s first involvement in the Jacobite rebellion is a beautiful lady by the name of Margaret Murray, wife of John Murray who served as secretary to Prince Charles Stuart. Buchan portrays Mrs. Murray as a resilient and beautiful woman who is quite active in fighting for the Jacobite cause in Scotland. As it happens, Margaret Murray is indeed a historical character, just like her husband. Margaret Murray, maiden name Margaret Fergusson, was the daughter of Col. Robert Fergusson of Cailloch in Nithsdale. She was very involved in the Jacobite rising and believed firmly and openly in the cause. Margaret’s beauty was very useful when it came to engaging young men in the cause and some say that she lured many men to their deaths. Buchan emphasizes this aspect of her personality: “This was the famous lady whom he had so often heard of, *she* who *was* the Cause, the Prince, and the King to so many loyal gentlemen” (Buchan, *A Lost Lady* 73, emphasis added). Buchan makes the reader well aware of the fact that many men did not join the Jacobite cause out of allegiance to the prince but out of commitment to her; her beauty and charisma made men want to do her bidding.

Buchan describes Mrs. Murray’s life as somewhat glorious and magnificent as she travels in horse carriages and stays with rich friends whenever she needs to. Buchan tells her story as she escapes from Scotland after the Jacobite defeat, and full of shame after her husband’s betrayal leaves for France where she joins the convent of St. Thérèse by Arras (Buchan, *A Lost Lady* 293). However, this is not quite accurate. Sources claim that she became a fugitive who was hunted through the land, slept under the bare skies, starved and became very sick while separated from her four children and pregnant with the fifth (Wotherspoon). However, Buchan simply omits her children and this pregnancy as there is not a single mention of them. This he probably does to romanticize her image; in the novel she is portrayed as almost saint-like, as someone who sticks by what she believes in until the very end. Putting an image of four abandoned children and a dead infant into the mind of the reader would tarnish this image a great deal. In reality, Margaret did manage to find a safe haven with some wealthy friends, where she recovered from her illness and

gave birth to her fifth child, who only lived for a few days. After her husband was arrested and had turned traitor Margaret was devastated as she still firmly believed in the cause. She spent months trying to find herself a fare to Europe but none were willing to take her as her husband's reputation preceded her. Finally, she got to London where she found a fare to Holland under a false name. Since she used an assumed name after she got to Holland, no records with information on the rest of her life exist (Murray of Stanhope, "The Beautiful Recruiting Sergeant"). Buchan's representation of Margaret Murray is quite exceptional and as Robertson claims in his "Introduction" the relative lack of historical accounts about her allows Buchan to develop her into this romantic heroine that she is in *A Lost Lady of Old Years*.

3.3 Secretary John Murray

Margaret's husband, John Murray, is a very well known historical figure who was intimately linked to the Jacobite cause in Scotland. He served as secretary to Prince Charles Edward Stuart during the Jacobite risings of 1745-1747. In *A Lost Lady of Old Years*, Buchan is at times quite unsympathetic towards Murray in his descriptions of the secretary. Buchan describes how Murray was nowhere near the Battle of Culloden, how sickly he was, and how he immediately turned traitor on the Jacobite cause after the defeat of Prince Charlie's armed forces. Moreover, Buchan's account of events leads the reader to believe that Murray's word was the only evidence needed and used to convict Simon Fraser, Lord Lovat, of treason (Buchan, *A Lost Lady* 271). As it happens, events were not quite so black and white.

Murray believed firmly in the Jacobite cause and believed that Prince Charles was the rightful king of Scotland. For a long time Murray was loyal to the prince and became his right hand man, and the Prince was once witnessed to claim that "Murray was worth a thousand men to the standard" (Murray of Stanhope, "Sir John Murray of Broughton"), meaning that Murray equaled a thousand "ordinary" men. Murray took part in raising funds, arms and followers for the cause. Unfortunately, early in the year 1746 Murray became sick and quickly deteriorated and as a result he was no longer able to take active part in fighting for the cause. Due to his sickness Murray was nowhere near the Battle of Culloden, which was the last military encounter between the armies of Prince Charles and King George II (Britannica, "Battle of Culloden"). After Murray found out about the overwhelming Jacobite defeat in the battle, though still weak with sickness, he went out and traveled the Highlands,

conversing with different clan chiefs, trying to raise support to continue fighting for the cause, but he was unsuccessful as the clans were no longer willing to put themselves in harm's way, for him or anyone else (Murray of Stanhope, "Sir John Murray of Broughton").

After this, Murray tried to escape to Holland, separated from his pregnant wife and four children but the king's men arrested him. He was imprisoned in the Tower of London and as the British government was aware of the fact that Murray had been an important person to the cause, he was interrogated time and time again until he gave in and provided the government with information (Murray of Stanhope, "Sir John Murray of Broughton"). However, no remarkable historical source mentions any sign of torture but Murray's health had deteriorated greatly at this point so arguably it would not have been very difficult to press him for information. Murray was quickly condemned as a traitor to Prince Charles and the Jacobite cause. Still it is possible to defend his actions and claim that he never switched sides but remained loyal to the Jacobite cause as Murray only gave the government information regarding people that he believed had disappointed the Jacobite cause and not those who had actively fought for the cause (Britannica, "Sir John Murray, Baronet"). However, the government only used information given to them by Murray in one court case, that against Simon Fraser, but historical documents suggest that Fraser's conviction was based only partially on the evidence achieved from Murray (Murray of Stanhope, "Sir John Murray of Broughton").

As a method of self-preservation, Murray decided to turn his back on Prince Charles and the Jacobite cause and pledge allegiance to King George's government and subsequently he was acquitted of all charges of high treason and released from prison, but his former friends and allies labeled him as a traitor and a crook and turned away from him. His wife having already left him, he began a relationship with a woman by the name of Dorothy Webb and spent the remainder of his life with her, and as he had gained many enemies in Scotland he decided to stay in England (Murray of Stanhope, "Sir John Murray of Broughton"). Most of this information is omitted by Buchan in the novel, and he simply hints at the fact that Murray exchanged information on followers of Prince Charles for his freedom. This is the last that is seen of the secretary as Buchan does not talk about his life after being released from prison, most likely because Murray lived a very secluded life after the

events of the Forty-Five and his life after the events has no influence on the conclusion of Buchan's book.

3.4 Simon Fraser, Lord Lovat

In *A Lost Lady of Old Years* Francis Birkenshaw becomes much attached to an old man by the name of Simon Fraser. The man in question is the historical character also known as the 11th Lord Lovat and he was the chief of the clan of Frasers. However, historians are not certain when he was born although they believe it was sometime between 1668 and 1676. Buchan describes Lord Lovat as a man who changes tempers very quickly and this description seems quite accurate as Lovat was widely known for his ill tempers and violent behavior. Almost everything Simon Fraser ever did was to satisfy his own individual goals. Thus he secretly wrote letters both to Prince Charles and to King George II, claiming his support. He then forced his eldest son to lead his men into battle for the Jacobite cause. This he did so that if the cause was lost then at least he would be able to deny any knowledge of his son's actions and portray the situation as the treachery of a son to his father. By the time the Battle of Culloden took place, Lord Lovat was so weak and feeble that he was nowhere near the battlefield and, in fact, he only met Prince Charles for the first time after the battle took place. Lord Lovat's scheme was unveiled and after the Jacobite cause had been defeated he decided to flee his estate to avoid being apprehended. He did not escape arrest for very long and was imprisoned in the Tower of London where he was held for five months before his trial took place. This trial was in fact witnessed by novelist Horace Walpole who wrote accounts of it in letters to Sir Horace Mann (Walpole). Lovat, now in his eighties, had grown very frail but did his best to defend himself, even cracking a few jokes. Nevertheless, he was sentenced to death for high treason. Lord Lovat was beheaded in the Tower of London on April 9th 1747, the last man in England to receive this punishment (Maclean 291).

3.5 Other characters

Buchan mentions many other historical characters in his novel but these are not all given equal significance in the story. Some take active part while others are simply mentioned as a way of giving more background information in order to bring authenticity to the book, and to give the reader a sense of the atmosphere at hand.

Buchan talks of the dealings of Duncan Forbes, Lord President of the Court of Session, an extremely loyal subject of King George II, who traveled the Scottish Highlands in order to raise funds and support for the government. Followers of the Jacobite cause came to see Forbes as “the man that obstructed them more than anybody in this country” (Kingsford), and Forbes has been given the main credit for defeating the Jacobite cause as he managed to convince some of Scotland’s most dominant clans to stay loyal to the king (Britannica, “Duncan Forbes”). Other historical characters are mentioned in the context of the Tower of London, these include the Earl of Kilmarnock and Lord Balmerino who were decapitated and their heads put on display as a warning for others, and General Williamson, who was the Lieutenant-Colonel of the Tower of London when Lord Lovat was beheaded.

3.6. Buchan’s use of the Highland clans

As well as talking about individual people, Buchan also tells the reader a bit about the division of clans between the two causes, but the Highland clans played an extremely significant role in the Jacobite rising of 1745 as the clans were the only source of military strength that Prince Charles had access to (Mackillop). Buchan informs us that the clans of Cameron, Macdonald, Fraser and Stewarts fought alongside Prince Charles and the clans of Macleod and Mackay were for King George (Buchan, *A Lost Lady* 133). This he tells us very straightforwardly but he does mention many other clans the loyalties of which the reader must figure out. These include the clans of Grants, Thrieplands and Ogilvies who were in fact for the prince. Here Buchan uses the Highland clans in order to bring validity to his novel as these clans were quite active in the Jacobite rising; for example Lord Ogilvy brought 600 men to the cause (Maclean 99) and the Camerons brought about 800 men to battles (Maclean 45). The clan of Mackay on the other hand was very much against Prince Charles. However, Buchan completely fails to mention the fact that many of the clans were divided between the two causes, and in *A Lost Lady of Old Years* all the clans seem to be a completely unified body of men when this was far from being the truth. The Grants he mentions were in fact at odds, as were clans such as the Mackenzies and Gordons. Macleod of Macleod, a Member of Parliament for Inverness-shire (Maclean 28), in fact had to go to great trouble in order to convince all members of his clan to follow him in his support of King George’s government.

This internal disagreement within the clans was in large part due to the power Duncan Forbes held among the Scottish Highland clans (Maclean 98).

Part IV: Geographical historicity

A Lost Lady of Old Years not only reflects John Buchan's deep interest in history, but also his profound knowledge of Scotland's geography. As a child Buchan traveled very much with his family and his parents gave him and his siblings considerable freedom to explore the country around them. As a young man Buchan kept on doing this on his own, traveling all over Scotland, taking note of the landscape and of place names (Smith18). Even after he started his own family with his wife, Susan, he continued to spend much of his free time roaming around the countryside at Elfield, his home, either by himself or with his children (Tweedsmuir 282). For the most part Buchan, along with his family, lived in England but they spent most of their holidays in Scotland where he discovered and rediscovered his country over and over again (Tweedsmuir 47). However, his immediate surroundings did not constitute the only geographical knowledge he acquired as he studied the layout of countries he had not even visited yet from books and maps, and thus was able to point out their topography to his companions on arriving there (Tweedsmuir 285).

Buchan's interest in geography comes clearly to the surface in *A Lost Lady of Old Years* as the novel produces some very colorful landscape images. Sentences such as "the September sunrise had been a masque of purple and gold, the clear air a divine ether" (Buchan, *A Lost Lady* 110) and "the slopes gloomed black and wet, every burn was red with flood, and the sparse trees dripped in dreary silence" (Buchan, *A Lost Lady* 61), bring dramatic images into the reader's mind. Through Francis Birkenshaw's travels, Buchan introduces the reader to the Scottish Highlands with vivid descriptions of local conditions and the natural characteristics of the country, always making sure to provide the reader with the names of villages, mountains, rivers and so on. He portrays Birkenshaw's travels in such a way that with a good map the reader will be able to trace Birkenshaw's route quite accurately. In this way, the novel is very similar to Robert Louis Stevenson's *Kidnapped* (1886), where the author remains very loyal to Scottish topography, but Buchan held Stevenson in high esteem, especially early in his career when Stevenson served as a role model to him and he molded his stories in a similar pattern to Stevenson's (Smith 355). These geographical details are important in adding authenticity to the story,

and this way Buchan *shows* rather than tells the reader where the events in question took place. The comprehensive descriptions bring clear images to the mind of the reader and thus, in a way, transport the reader to a romanticized version of the Scottish Highlands.

Along with describing the landscape Buchan always provides the reader with an account of the weather and how the weather impacts Birkenshaw's moods. Nature, in consequence, plays a vital role in *A Lost Lady of Old Years*, and it is possible to argue that nature has become an entire character on its own as it is personified with phrases and descriptions such as "mournful weather" (Buchan, *A Lost Lady* 48), "frowning hills" (Buchan 196), and "the glen was asleep" (Buchan 222).

Part V: Historical events

A Lost Lady of Old Years is set during one of Scotland's greatest historical events, the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745. The roots of the Jacobite rebellions go all the way back to 1707 when the Parliaments of Scotland and England were united into a British Parliament that was situated in London but this union was detested by most of Scotland's people (Harris). In 1745 Prince Charles Edward Stuart hoped for the French to support him in his invasion of Scotland but he was disappointed. Despite his disappointment he decided to set sail for Scotland and managed to raise considerable support from many Highland clans (BBC, "The Making of the Union"). Along with his supporters Prince Charles seized control of Edinburgh and then traversed the English border. He traveled all the way to Derby before his advisers, out of fear of the government's army, pressed him to retreat back to Scotland. Once there, Prince Charles' army diminished significantly and his cause was finally thwarted in the Battle of Culloden (Britannica, "Charles Edward").

Buchan addresses some of these issues but omits others. He writes about Prince Charles' recruitment of soldiers and supporters and the atmosphere in Scotland during the rebellion, as well as describing the atmosphere in Edinburgh and at the Battle of Culloden. However, he does not discuss the causes behind the rebellion at all or address the question why people were so unhappy with the political union between England and Scotland, perhaps because he felt it was irrelevant or unnecessary to complete the story; readers of the book do not need to know every

detail regarding the Jacobite rising in order to understand the effect it has on Francis Birkenshaw. As Lukács writes in his book *The Historical Novel*:

What matters therefore in the historical novel is not the re-telling of great historical events, but the poetic awakening of the people who figured in those events. (Lukács 42)

People know history; they have studied it in school and other contexts and therefore Buchan does not have to recount every historical aspect related to the story, he simply aims to show the reader how history affected the life of a few selected persons and how they dealt with making difficult decisions in the face of these events. This general knowledge of history poses limitations on writers of historical fiction as there is nothing that the writer can do to surprise his reader concerning great historical events and so the reader has in a way gained an undeniable control over the story (de Groot, 8). However, any writer can bring his own interpretation of history into his writing but arguably this would lead to a greater element of fiction than historicity.

Part VI: John Buchan's goals and inspirations

Now, what inspired John Buchan to write this historical novel? What, if anything, influenced his writing and his depiction of events? Did folk memory in his area of upbringing, Broughton, affect his sympathies with characters of history? Did his own opinion on the political relationship between Scotland and England affect the way he wrote? And what was his aim or goal by writing it? Did he aspire to educate or entertain his readers? Or perhaps both? Now the focus will shift from the historicity of the novel in an attempt to answer these questions.

6.1 Motivations for writing *A Lost Lady of Old Years*

As mentioned above, Buchan was exceedingly interested in history and especially the history of Scotland, so much so that some of his more serious critics have viewed him as a historian (Tweedsmuir 283). He believed that people could learn and benefit from history. As Fleishman writes: “men of the present look back to the men of the past not merely to understand them but to understand themselves” (13). Buchan was proud to be a Scotsman and enjoyed exploring historical documents and objects and felt very strongly about people's access to history, both in schools and libraries, and therefore took active measures to improve libraries and university resources (Smith 351). Buchan believed that he had a duty to share his

knowledge with other people and frequently took young writers who interested him as a Scot, such as Catherine Carswell and Edwin Muir, under his wing and guided them along on their creative path (Smith 353). At the time of Buchan's death his personal library included numerous books with inscriptions from the writers, thanking him for his kindness and assistance (Smith 341). It was very likely this passion for history and his delight in sharing it with others that drove him to writing his historical works: *A Lost Lady of Old Years* is far from being his only historical project since he wrote more historical fiction as well as some biographies, such as those of Sir Walter Scott and Oliver Cromwell. His historical works were his jewels, the works that he was most proud of and a great amount of labor lay behind them as he read, researched and made an endless amount of notes, but this was work that greatly delighted him (Tweedsmuir 281). In fact, Buchan did not really worry about how critics received his thrillers, but reviews of his historical works mattered a great deal to him as he loved those works because they had the ability to both entertain the reader and teach him something (Smith 358).

With *A Lost Lady of Old Years* Buchan has given a voice to a woman who has in a way been sidelined by history. Margaret Murray took active part in the Jacobite rising and, as stated before, raised both funds and support for the cause. Despite this there is not much mention of her in historical books or other accounts. Buchan believed that women had a great influence on the world just like men and that they should be given due credence because of this:

He was never a feminist, but he believed that women had a great part to play in the life of the nation, and he took up the cudgels for any woman who he thought had done some outstanding work and was not getting her due meed of appreciation. (Tweedsmuir 92)

Buchan strongly believed that women's contributions should not be taken for granted but appreciated and received with gratitude no matter the time. With the novel he has drawn Mrs. Murray out into the spotlight as a strong woman and brought the reader's attention to a female character from history that he or she might not have heard of otherwise. By doing this Buchan has achieved one of his supreme goals; to teach the reader a little bit about Scottish history.

Women were not the only aspect of history that Buchan felt had often been marginalized by historians and this is very clear in the novel. Buchan felt that all aspects of people's lives, and therefore history, were greatly affected by coincidences

and that events do not always take place according to people's plans. He claimed that everything people do, every choice they make, will influence what comes next. Buchan wrote a historical account, *History of the Great War*, about World War I, in which he quoted Edmund Burke: "A common soldier, a child, a girl at the door of an inn, have changed the face of fortune and almost of nature" (quoted in Smith 359). He believed that every single person could change and help shape the world's history and *A Lost Lady of Old Years* shows some good examples of this; as discussed above, Francis Birkenshaw meets Margaret Murray as result of chance and by another coincidence he meets the Lord President, Duncan Forbes. It is simply a fluke that Francis gets involved in the Jacobite risings.

6.2 Buchan's role models

Not only is it possible to see the influence Stevenson had on Buchan in the geographical aspect of the story but the novel also has traces of romantic elements similar to Stevenson along with stylistic similarities to Sir Walter Scott. Buchan was greatly inspired by Stevenson's *A Gossip on Romance* and his ideas on what qualified as romance came from this piece. This does not concern romance as it is classified today, the love and relationship between a man and a woman, but the love of a country, of bravery and how lives can be affected by circumstance (Smith 89). In *A Gossip on Romance*, Stevenson writes about what he believes to be romantic elements in literature. Nowhere does he mention love but talks of how landscape, the use of words and "charm of circumstance" (Stevenson 247) constituted a romance and could have great impact upon the reader:

Other things we may forget; we may forget the words, although they are beautiful; we may forget the author's comment, although perhaps it was ingenious and true; but these epoch-making scenes, which put the last mark of truth upon a story and fill up, at one blow, our capacity for sympathetic pleasure, we so adopt into the very bosom of our mind that neither time nor tide can efface or weaken the impression. (Stevenson 243)

Stevenson believed that all literature that had this impact on its reader could constitute as romantic. He also adds that "True romantic art, again, makes a romance of all things" (Stevenson 250), and discusses how romance can be found in such mundane objects as a "post-chaise," an "ostler" and a "nag" (Stevenson 235). The

subtitle of *A Lost Lady of Old Years* is “A Romance” and so it is clear that Buchan intended to write a romantic novel. The romantic element appears in different ways, both fitting the way Stevenson defined romance and the modern day interpretation. It goes without saying that the most obvious element is the love of a man for a woman; Birkenshaw’s love and his desire to please the woman he is in love with is what leads him to swear allegiance to the Jacobite cause, as has been discussed in some detail above. However, the biggest romantic component in the book is a love for one’s country. This does not refer to Birkenshaw’s feelings but Buchan’s own sentiment which is all too clear in the narrative. The author’s choice of words when describing the scenery transports the reader into the Scottish Highlands and firmly plants an image of the country in his mind. Such phrases as “the glory of the morning,” “extraordinarily fresh” (Buchan, *A Lost Lady* 55), “great hills” (Buchan, *A Lost Lady* 60) and “a great wide country of meadow and woodland” (Buchan, *A Lost Lady* 79), undisputedly have greater effect than descriptions such as “a beautiful morning,” “big hills,” and “a vast country of pasture and woods.” The descriptions of landscape are very much an element of romance in the old definition and fall very nicely into Stevenson’s definition of romance.

Buchan also makes use of common objects to create romance in his novel. He uses very average words to create highly romantic phrases and images; for example, “the distance showed lines of blue mountain” (Buchan, *A Lost Lady* 58), “the gallery of his heart” (Buchan, *A Lost Lady* 110) and “the thundering tramping of hooves which seemed to assault the heavens” (Buchan, *A Lost Lady* 175). By themselves, none of these words describe anything romantic but the way Buchan has strung them together creates a vibrant representation of the circumstance in the reader’s mind.

Buchan was greatly influenced by Sir Walter Scott and as a young man Buchan aspired to take after his role model: “If I could ever hope to write anything as good as Scott I’d be happy, but I know I never would”, Buchan told a colleague of his (quoted in Smith 358). In 1931 Buchan took it upon himself to write Scott’s biography and felt that this was unavoidable as he believed that Scott’s literary reputation outshone every other author of the Scottish tradition: “It is a book which I was bound one day or another to write, for I have had the fortune to be born and bred under the shadow of that great tradition” (Buchan, *Sir Walter Scott* 7). For Buchan, Scott simply represented Scotland and accordingly he made use of Scott’s historical novels as a

model for his own (Smith 355). Among other literary elements, this is true of the way Buchan uses landscape descriptions in his novel, as discussed above. In his *Waverley*, Scott gives some very dramatic accounts of nature as he writes descriptions like:

They entered one of the tremendous passes which afford communication between the high and low country; the path, which was extremely steep and rugged, winded up a chasm between two tremendous rocks, following the passage which a foaming stream, that brawled far below, appeared to have worn for itself in the course of ages. A few slanting beams of the sun, which was now setting, reached the water in its darksome bed, and shewed it partially, chafed by an hundred rocks, and broken by an hundred falls. (Scott 76)

This passage, like many of Buchan's descriptions, brings the Scottish Highlands to life. In addition, this paragraph ties the novel in with the romantic elements defined by Stevenson, as previously discussed. The Highlands are romanticized here just as in Buchan's novel.

6.3 Buchan's personal influences

As a child, John Buchan spent much time in Broughton and its surroundings and it is very plausible that this would influence the way he wrote. At the time *A Lost Lady of Old Years* was written, history still played a considerable part in people's lives in the area and they were very aware of the bloodshed that had taken place in valleys and forests in Scotland (Tweedsmuir 47). Buchan heard many stories of the Jacobite rebellion and this influenced him to a certain extent. The most obvious aspect of this would be the way he wrote about Secretary John Murray. As previously mentioned, he seems to have been quite unsympathetic toward Murray and in fact he mostly describes him as a sickly man and leads the reader to believe that Murray was all too happy to give the government information on his comrades in the Jacobite cause. As Murray was still seen as a traitor in Broughton during Buchan's childhood it is easy to believe that the communal opinions influenced him. On the other hand it is not likely that Buchan's own opinions regarding the political union between Scotland and England affected the way he wrote *A Lost Lady of Old Years*. Nowhere does he indicate what those opinions might be or suggest his preference for the victory of either side.

Part VII Conclusion

This essay has examined the historical and geographical accuracy of John Buchan's *A Lost Lady of Old Years* and found that a great deal of work lies behind the novel. His portrayal and development of characters such as Francis Birkenshaw and John and Margaret Murray is for the most part very successful even though it is at times quite inaccurate or even idealistic, especially in the case of Mrs. Murray. It is evident that Buchan researched history to a great extent as his depiction of historical events related to his novel is for the most part realistic and accurate. His interest in nature and geography has become clear in the novel.

Furthermore, the dissertation has looked into why Buchan took it upon himself to write his historical novels and what may have influenced his work while writing *A Lost Lady of Old Years* and what his motives were. After a careful examination of the novel's historicity it is clear that Buchan aimed to educate the reader about Scottish history with his book as well as entertain him or her and for the most part he is relatively successful.

The influence of Buchan's role models, Robert Louis Stevenson and Sir Walter Scott is easily recognized in his narrative, Stevenson's relating to Buchan's use of romance and Scott's in regards to style and use of history and geography. Buchan's love for his country is evident as Scotland and Scottish history are greatly romanticized.

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