

**Sir Walter Scott: *Waverley* (1814) Penguin**

**Robert Louis Stevenson: *Kidnapped* (1886) Penguin**

**Sunset Song: *A Scots Quair* (1932) Amazon**

**Janice Galloway: *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* (1989) Vintage**

**Alan Warner: *Morvern Callar* (1996) Vintage**

**Louise Welsh: *The Cutting Room* (2002) Canongate**

*Waverley*, a young Englishman arrived in Scotland, suddenly finds himself caught up in the Jacobite Rebellion of Bonnie Prince Charley in the years 1744-45. Charles assumes the Scottish crown, takes over Edinburgh and Carlisle and prepares to march on London... Sir Walter Scott's novel was the first of its kind, the so-called Historical Novel, with settings not only in the Scottish Lowlands during the Enlightenment, but also in the Highlands with its stunning contrasts between realism and romance, historical progressivism and the past.

Robert Louis Stevenson's 'Kidnapped' is placed in the years after the '45. It is now 1751 and a young man, David Balfour, having lost both parents, walks to Edinburgh and a new into a new life, only to discover that the distant uncle he has never met wishes him harm. Kidnapped by pirates, he sets sail for the periferies of the East and West coasts. A Highland Jacobite, Alan Breck rescues him before both are caught up in the post-45 terrors of the English red-coats. With a price on his head, how can David ever return to civilization? This is not really a 'boy's own story', but a clash between civilisations: Stevenson follows the older Romance tradition.

'Sunset Song' was written as the first part of trilogy in 1932 by Lewis Grassie Gibbon, the so-called Scotch Quair trilogy. Chris Guthrie, the strong heroine of the trilogy, is born into a farming background in the Mearnes of North-East Scotland, a hard life set against a disfunctional family (the mother commits suicide after killing her two twins) and a father intent upon raping his own daughter. For a time she wants to be a school mistress, but the land is all she has before her lover Ewan is sent to the fronts of the First World War.

'The Trick Is To Keep Breathing' is a very unusual novel. The female protagonist Joy Stone is a school teacher in Glasgow who goes seriously downhill when her most recent lover dies in a bathing accident in Spain. The text itself begins to drop off the pages (the apparent disolution of the text) with the result that the reader has to decide whether the text we are reading is itself sound. This correlates with the female figure: she tries to but loses control, gives up eating, visits Tesco only to look at the labels, works in a bookies Saturdays and is asked out by males she does not want. The background of irregularity, poor treatment from doctors, phone calls late at night and her strange sister result in a broken mirror of identity. Will she survive and if so how?

Alan Warner's 'Morvern Callar' can take your breath away. A 21-year-old supermarket worker discovers her boyfriend has committed suicide. It is Christmas in a Port on the West Coast (Oban). Morvern is very shy, also an orphan. Will she call the police? No (Nut). It's one of the very few attempts by a male author to create a new female type. After partying, she thinks it best to strew his pieces across the landscape(s) before leaving on a Spanish holiday with the cash. Is this immoral? The music featured in this literary work is perfectly real.

'The Cutting Room' by Louise Welsh is a superb first novel set in Glasgow and environs. The main protagonist, Rilke, is a gay forty-year-old and also the narrator. While working as an auctioneer, he comes across erotic books and a highly questionable set of photos (hence the Cutting Room of the title) whilst emptying the bin. Are the cuts real and who is involved? This is partly a mystery story, partly a crime novel and with Tartan Noir rolled into one against the classic background of the city of Glasgow.