

ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

Sunset Song : Ideology

Sunset Song is rich in thematic references – implicit and explicit – to ideologies from a range of political, historical and philosophical sources.

(a) **Politics**

Capitalism : right-wing economic system based upon individual enterprise

Toryism/Unionism : political forerunner of Conservatism promoting capitalist values

Liberalism : mildly left-wing belief in democratic ideals

Socialism : left-wing political/economic system based on the principles of equality of opportunity and the redistribution of wealth

Marxism : radical left-wing political/economic vision establishing the principle of class conflict and the proletarian right to determine their own destiny

Communism : radical left-wing political system promoting the rights of the working classes to assume power by revolutionary means

Anarchism : radical system advocating popular egalitarianism achieved by means of establishment of a ‘no-rules’ society

(b) **History**

Diffusionism : view that civilisation occurred by accident, following discovery of the annual flooding of the Nile Valley; agriculture, social organisation and formal religion developed from this unique event and were then “diffused” throughout the primitive, natural world; human evolution represents a degeneration from a natural norm

Evolutionism : view that civilisation developed naturally and

independently, at different times and in different ways, throughout the natural world; human evolution has been a gradual progression upwards from primitive beginnings to sophisticated and organised modes of behaviour (see Darwin's *The Origin of Species*)

(c) Philosophy

Humanism : belief that human life (and welfare) is of paramount importance

Theism : belief in God

Atheism : disbelief in God

Agnosticism : state of not knowing if God exists

Nihilism : belief in “nothing”, that life is completely devoid of spiritual meaning

Pantheism : belief that God exists in, and is evident in, nature

Paganism : belief in the creative life force of the organic world

Materialism : theory that nothing exists but physical matter and its movements; there is no ulterior spiritual dimension to existence

Throughout *Sunset Song*, various political, historical and philosophical ideologies are alluded to, sometimes by name. For example, Chae's character is largely defined by his fiery brand of socialism and his open minded agnosticism, while Rob is defiantly atheist.

However, in the final analysis Gibbon's own ideological vision, like Chris's, is an individualistic mixture of various influences – of socialism and communism, diffusionism, humanism, nihilism, pantheism, paganism and materialism !