

DISCUȚII – DISCUSSIONS

Rebeka Juhászová

Literary works as a means of promoting cultural heritage, on the example of *Outlander*

Key words: cultural heritage, *Outlander*, literature, educational tool, Celts, history.

Cuvinte-cheie: patrimoniu cultural, *Outlander*, literatură, instrument educațional, celți, istorie.

Rebeka Juhászová

Literary works as a means of promoting cultural heritage, on the example of *Outlander*

Cultural heritage plays a key role in shaping the collective identity of nations while also providing an important context for language and cultural education. This paper examines literary works as an effective means of promoting cultural heritage, with a focus on *Outlander*, written by Diana Gabaldon, as the primary text for further interpretation. The main goal of the paper is to demonstrate, through the lens of a historical approach, that cultural heritage is not a static phenomenon but a living and dynamic element actively used in the creation of contemporary literary works, and to show that literary texts incorporate and reinterpret elements of heritage, making them accessible and meaningful for contemporary audiences. At the same time, the paper highlights that literature enables readers to internalise historical and cultural contexts more effectively by embedding them within engaging storylines and emotionally resonant experiences. Methodologically, the article employs close reading, textual analysis, and thematic analysis. Based on interpretation, the paper discusses the broader potential of literature as a tool for promoting cultural heritage both within formal educational settings and beyond them, contributing not only to cultural awareness but also to the development of cultural tourism and regional growth.

Rebeka Juhászová

Operele literare ca mijloc de promovare a patrimoniului cultural, pe exemplul romanului *Outlander*

Patrimoniul cultural joacă un rol esențial în formarea identității colective a națiunilor, oferind totodată un context important pentru educația lingvistică și culturală. Acest articol examinează operele literare ca mijloc eficient de promovare a patrimoniului cultural, având ca text principal pentru interpretare romanul *Outlander*, scris de Diana Gabaldon. Scopul principal al lucrării este de a demonstra, din perspectiva unei abordări istorice, că patrimoniul cultural nu reprezintă un fenomen static, ci un element viu și dinamic, utilizat activ în crearea operelor literare contemporane, precum și de a arăta că textele literare integrează și reinterpretează elemente de patrimoniu, făcându-le accesibile și relevante pentru publicul contemporan. În același timp, articolul evidențiază faptul că literatura le permite cititorilor să interiorizeze mai eficient contextele istorice și culturale prin integrarea acestora în narațiuni captivante și experiențe cu puternic impact emoțional. Din punct de vedere metodologic, articolul utilizează lectura atentă, analiza textuală și analiza tematică. Pe baza interpretării, lucrarea discută potențialul mai larg al literaturii ca instrument de promovare a patrimoniului cultural atât în cadrul educației formale, cât și în afara acesteia, contribuind nu doar la conștientizarea culturală, ci și la dezvoltarea turismului cultural și la dezvoltarea regională.

Introduction

Cultural heritage represents an important part of national identity and collective memory. Including traditions, customs, folklore, language or literary production that have been passed from generation to generation, heritage, in contemporary society, is no longer understood only as a preserved remnant of the past, but also as a dynamic phenomenon that continues to influence modern cultural production. Literature, in particular, is one

of the most effective means of preserving and promoting cultural heritage because it enables readers to engage emotionally and intellectually across different historical and cultural contexts. In this process, and in the literature, historical fiction plays a significant role. Through narrative structures, fictional characters, and reconstructed historical settings, literary works make historical periods more accessible to contemporary audiences. Readers are often introduced to traditions, social structures,

myths, and different practices that might otherwise remain distant or unfamiliar. Moreover, literature frequently inspires interest in historical locations, traditions, and communities, contributing not only to cultural awareness but also to cultural tourism and regional development.

One literary work that effectively demonstrates this phenomenon is *Outlander*, written by Diana Gabaldon [1991]. Combining elements of historical fiction, romance, fantasy and adventure, the novel presents 18th-century Scotland through detailed depictions of Scottish Highland culture, political conflicts, clan traditions, historical events and language. Through its narrative, the work reinterprets Celtic and Scottish heritage for modern readers while simultaneously increasing international interest in Scottish history and culture.

This paper examines literary works, with *Outlander* as the primary text, as a means of promoting cultural heritage. Through a historical approach, the paper seeks to demonstrate that cultural heritage is not static but rather actively incorporated into contemporary literary production. Furthermore, the paper explores how literature enables readers to internalise cultural and historical contexts through emotionally engaging storytelling. Finally, the paper discusses the broader educational and cultural potential of literature to promote heritage in formal educational settings and beyond.

Cultural Heritage and Literature

Cultural heritage could be broadly defined as the legacy of physical and intangible attributes inherited from previous generations and preserved for future ones [UNESCO 2009]. Its contemporary understandings increasingly emphasise its dynamic nature, highlighting that heritage is continuously reinterpreted and reshaped in response to the needs and perspectives of present-day societies.

Literature occupies a particularly important position in this process because literary texts function as cultural artefacts that preserve historical memory while simultaneously adapting it for contemporary audiences. Hence, they are an inseparable part of a developed, prosperous, and educated society [Bíziková 2015]. Historical novels, myths, legends, and folklore-inspired narratives often reconstruct forgotten or marginalised aspects of national history and identity. Through

storytelling, literature transforms historical facts into emotionally meaningful experiences, allowing readers to connect with distant historical periods in a more personal and accessible manner.

In addition, literature contributes to intercultural understanding and cultural education. Literary texts provide readers with insights into the values, traditions, and beliefs of particular communities. They can therefore serve as educational tools not only in literature classes but also in cultural studies, history or foreign language education. By engaging with literary representations of heritage, readers develop cultural awareness and empathy while strengthening their understanding of historical continuity. Moreover, education should respond to the changing cultural and social conditions of contemporary society. As V. Bíziková suggests, the dynamic nature of sociocultural processes in the twenty-first century leads to constant changes in the requirements for cultural competence, making cultural education an integral part of both general and professional education [Bíziková 2015].

The relationship between literature and heritage becomes especially visible in historical fiction. This genre frequently reconstructs real historical events while combining them with fictional characters and personal narratives. Such an approach allows authors to humanise history and present cultural heritage as lived experience rather than abstract historical information. As a result, readers often become more emotionally invested in historical and cultural contexts than they would through purely academic or factual texts.

Heritage in *Outlander*

The contemporary phenomenon created by Diana Gabaldon, *Outlander* [Gabaldon 1991], is deeply rooted in Scottish and Celtic cultural heritage through its plot, characters, historical background, and setting. This historical dimension is closely connected to Diana Gabaldon's own approach to writing historical fiction, as she herself admitted that she decided to use her academic research skills in the creative process and, as she claims, *if I turned out not to have an imagination, I could steal things from the historical record* [Flood 2021]. As a result, the novel combines historical research with fictional storytelling, allowing cultural heritage and historical events to be

reinterpreted and experienced through an engaging narrative.

The narrative follows Claire Randall, a twentieth-century former military nurse who is mysteriously transported to 18th-century Scotland shortly before the Jacobite uprising of 1745. “People disappear all the time. Ask any policeman. Better yet, ask a journalist. [...] Disappearances after all, have explanations. Usually” [Gabaldon 1991, 9]. With such an introduction, Gabaldon creates an atmosphere of suspense and mystery, foreshadowing Claire’s unexpected journey through time, which introduces readers to the social, political, and cultural realities of Highland Scotland and the gradual disappearance of the Highlander way of life. The narrative gradually reveals whether her disappearance can truly be rationally explained, and the motive of time travel serves as a getaway into the past.

One of the most significant aspects of the novel is its representation of Scottish clan culture. Clan loyalty, kinship, honour, and communal identity are central themes throughout the narrative. “There was a thunder of hooves, and several ponies came charging in my direction, kilted Scots atop them, yodelling in Gaelic” [Gabaldon 1991, 61].

The Highland clan system is portrayed not merely as a historical backdrop but as a living social structure that shapes interpersonal relationships and political alliances. Through detailed descriptions of clan gatherings, customs, and social obligations, the novel familiarises contemporary readers with aspects of Scottish heritage that remain culturally significant today.

The novel also incorporates elements of Celtic heritage, particularly through folklore, mythology, and spiritual beliefs. Standing stones¹, prophecies, folk healing, and supernatural motifs connect the narrative to Celtic traditions and reinforce the mystical atmosphere associated with Scottish cultural identity. Today’s countries, rooted in Celtic heritage, are rich in oral traditions, which served as a solid basis for valid and reliable sources for Gabaldon [MacDonald 1994]. The previously mentioned circle stones play an impor-

1. Monuments, also known as stone circles that can be found mostly in the Western part of Europe known to be used for various pagan rituals often performed by Druids for different purposes such as giving thanks, praising, cherishing nature, etc. [Lucas 2007].

tant role throughout the whole plot as they are the main “means of transport” for the protagonist to travel between times. Deriving from the past, the shape of a circle alongside solid rock is attributed with magical powers, which again reflects Celtic culture and belief in the supernatural [Zaczek 1997]. Besides fairies, circles, and marriage, other strong aspects of heritage were represented in the novel. Here, the bond of marriage is depicted not only as a social union but also as a sacred, almost mystical connection between two individuals. The marriage ceremony includes the exchange of rings as well as the symbolic joining through blood, reflecting upon older Celtic pagan traditions in which blood symbolises loyalty, spiritual connection and unity [Walter 2014]. At the same time, this ritual overlaps with Christian understandings of marriage, as the vow is made before God and represents fidelity.

“Ye are Blood of my Blood, and Bone of my Bone,
I give ye my Body, that we Two might be One.
I give ye my Spirit, ’til our Life shall be Done”
[Gabaldon 1991, 195].

Language represents another important aspect of heritage within the novel. The use of Scottish Gaelic expressions and dialectal forms strengthens the narrative’s authenticity while introducing readers to linguistic aspects of Celtic identity. “The words were not English, and yet not quite not English, either. It was a strange tongue, but one I felt that I should know, as though the words were spoken just below the level of my hearing. I felt my hands begin to go numb, and I wanted to move them from their folded position in my lap, but they wouldn’t move. Her even voice went on, soft and persuading. Now I knew that I understood what was being said, but still could not summon the words to the surface of my mind” [Gabaldon 1991, 515]. Even though the text remains accessible to international audiences, the integration of Gaelic vocabulary preserves the cultural specificity of the setting and highlights the relationship between language and heritage. At the same time, the use of Gaelic immerses readers in the cultural environment of eighteenth-century Scotland and enhances the narrative’s authenticity. “I know it does, *mo duinne*. And that’s why you’ll go now. He drew me close again, kissed me gently and whispered in Gaelic” [Gabaldon 1991, 533]. For Claire, who initially does not fully un-

derstand the language, Gaelic symbolises both her outsider position and her gradual integration into Highland culture.

Among the most visible and strongest elements of the novel, real historical events also play probably the most important role in the novel, namely the Jacobite uprising and the Battle of Culloden, where a Scottish Jacobite army stood against a professional British army nearly twice their size and within an hour laid dead on the field, dooming Bonnie Prince Charlie's campaign to reclaim the British crown for the Stuarts [McGarry 2021] form a major historical framework of the story. Through both fictional and non-fictional characters and personal relationships, readers encounter the political tensions between the Scottish Highlands and the British Crown. At the same time, the novel offers detailed insights into other aspects of 18th-century life, including clan meetings, social hierarchies, and customs. Such a narrative approach not only interprets and revitalises cultural heritage for contemporary audiences but also highlights the educational potential of literature. Several studies have demonstrated the educational potential of integrating literature into language teaching and cultural education. For instance, J. Łękańska in her study "Elements of Western Culture and History in Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere*: A Possible Resource for Teaching English as a Foreign Language", analyses how Neil Gaiman incorporates elements of Western culture and London's history into the novel *Neverwhere* [Gaiman 2017]. Her study highlights that literary texts can simultaneously support linguistic skills and cultural awareness through engaging narratives and metaphorical language. Similarly, A. Dewhurst points out that Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* may serve as an effective tool for teaching cultural and historical topics due to its strong connection to Anglo-Saxon traditions [Dewhurst 2017]. Last but not least, comparable conclusions were drawn by A. Ounissa, whose research on teaching American history through African American poetry demonstrates that literature may function as a "cultural archive" while encouraging critical thinking, empathy, and a deeper understanding of stereotypes [Ounissa 2024]. Similarly, *Outlander* does not simply reproduce historical reality. Instead, the novel reinterprets cultural heritage through the lens of contempo-

rary storytelling. Modern themes are integrated into the historical setting, making the narrative relevant for present-day readers. In this sense, the novel demonstrates that cultural heritage remains dynamic and continuously reconstructed within modern literary production.

Cultural Tourism and Regional Development

Beyond educational contexts, literature can significantly influence cultural tourism and regional identity, as seen in Scotland and *Outlander*. The popularity of *Outlander* has contributed substantially to tourism in Scotland. Numerous historical sites connected with the narrative, including castles, battlefields, and Highland locations, have become popular tourist destinations. Readers and viewers seek authentic experiences related to the fictional world, thereby increasing international interest in Scottish history, traditions, and landscapes. Among the most famous sights which have been mentioned in the original books are the Culloden battlefield, which is also historically the most significant; Inverness, Fort William, an important military location connected with the British occupation and conflict with the Highlanders; Glencoe Natural Reserve, and last, but not least, although it is a fictional place, Craigh na Dun [National Trust for Scotland 2026], the place where Claire – the protagonist travels through time. Even though the standing stones are inspired by real prehistoric stone circles found throughout Scotland, they don't really exist, not the ones mentioned in the book; they are connecting the story with Celtic spirituality and folklore, and people are visiting the place in the hope of "miracles".

Today, festivals, guided tours, museums, and cultural events are happening all around Scotland thanks to Diana Gabaldon and her phenomenon, creating opportunities for cultural exchange and public engagement with history. Among the many, for example, there is The Land Con [2026], one of the biggest fan meetings dedicated to *Outlander* and its TV adaptation. The event brings together fans, actors, organisers, and Scotts over a few days. Secondly, the Jacobite Festival [2026] is held annually across Scotland and focuses on preserving and presenting Jacobite history and heritage. The programme includes various exhibitions, historical talks, guided tours, storytelling

and family activities connected with the Jacobite era. Last but not least, there are a large number of guided tours, for example, those organised by Visit Scotland, which actively promote *Outlander*-inspired tourism through themed walks around castles, Highland landscapes, ruins, and more. Many tours intentionally incorporate visible markers of Scottish heritage, including guides dressed in traditional kilts, storytelling, music, and presentations on clan history [2026].

Conclusion

Cultural heritage represents an essential component of collective identity and cultural continuity. In contemporary society, literature serves as one of the most effective means of preserving, reinterpreting, and promoting heritage for modern audiences. Through emotionally engaging narratives and accessible historical representation, literary works enable readers to connect with cultural and historical contexts in meaningful ways.

Outlander by Diana Gabaldon demonstrates how historical fiction can successfully integrate elements of Scottish and Celtic heritage into

contemporary storytelling. Through depictions of clan culture, folklore, language, and historical conflict, the novel presents cultural heritage as a living and dynamic phenomenon rather than a static remnant of the past. This particular example is only one of many, since such a demonstration is visible throughout other literary works, focusing on other cultures.

The analysis also highlights the broader educational potential of literature. Literary texts contribute to cultural awareness and intercultural competence while providing emotionally engaging learning experiences. Moreover, literature extends its influence beyond formal education by contributing to cultural tourism, regional development, and public interest in history and heritage. Ultimately, literary works have the unique ability to bridge the past with the present, transforming cultural heritage into an accessible and meaningful experience for readers. Through this process, literature not only preserves cultural memory but also actively shapes modern cultural identity.

Bibliography

- Bíziková 2015:** V. Bíziková, Kultúrne dedičstvo ako súčasť kultúrnej edukácie. Kontexty kultúry a turizmu, 1, 2015, 34-37.
- Dewhurst 2017:** A. Dewhurst, The Melding of Anglo-Saxon Themes in The Lord of the Rings. Feudal Endeavour: Open Access Undergraduate Journal of Medieval Studies, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2017.
- Flood 2021:** A. Flood, *Outlander* author Diana Gabaldon: 'I needed Scotsmen because of the kilt factor'. The Guardian, 2021.
- Gabaldon 1991:** D. Gabaldon, *Outlander*. (New York 1996).
- Gaiman 2017:** N. Gaiman, *Neverwhere*. (Headline Book 2017).
- Łękawska 2021:** J. Łękawska, Elements of Western Culture and History in Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere*. A Possible Resource for Teaching English as a Foreign Language. Patchwork Student Journal, Vol. 6, 2021, 37-51.
- Lucas 2007:** P.C. Lucas, Constructing Identity with Dreamstones: Megalithic Sites and Contemporary Nature Spirituality. *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 2007, 31-60.
- The Land Con 2026:** Official *Outlander* Conventions. Land Con in Scotland 2027, <https://thelandcon.com/landcon-in-scotland-2/>
- MacDonald 1994:** A.D. MacDonald, Migratory Legends of the Supernatural in Scotland: A General Survey. *Béaloides*, Vol. 62/63, 1994, 29-78.
- McGarry 2021:** S. McGarry, The Battle Of Culloden: The Irish Connection. *History Ireland*, Vol. 29, No. 2, 2021, 22-25.
- National Trust for Scotland 2026:** National Trust for Scotland. Discovering *Outlander*, <https://www.nts.org.uk/stories/outlander-filming-locations>
- Ounissa 2024:** A.B. Ounissa, Teaching History Through Poetry: The Case of African American Slave Songs and Poems. *Algerian Scientific Journal Platform*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 2024, 819-828.
- UNESCO 2009:** Unesco Institute for Statistics. Framework for Cultural Studies, <https://uis.unesco.org/en/glossary-term/cultural-heritage>

Visit Scotland 2026: Visit Scotland. Alba. Outlander filming locations in Scotland. (2026), <https://www.visitscotland.com/things-to-do/attractions/tv-film/outlander>

Walter 2014: P. Walter, *Christian Mythology: Revelation of Pagan Origins*. (Simon and Schuster 2014).

Zaczek 1997: I. Zaczek, *The Book of Kells*. Parkgate books. (London 1997).

Rebeka Juhászová, Mgr., Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Education, Trnava University, Priemyselná 4, 917 02, Trnava, Slovakia, e-mail: rebeka.juhazova@tvu.sk, ORCID: 0009-0002-5838-5807.