

**“THE OVERLAP OF MYTH AND HISTORY”:  
SCOTTISH IDENTITY THROUGH  
WALTER SCOTT TO JAMES ROBERTSON  
IN *THE TESTAMENT OF GIDEON MACK***

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The aim of this paper is to look at the works of Walter Scott and James Robertson through the lens of Scottish identity representation, and study Scott's influence on *The Testament of Gideon Mack* by Robertson. The work takes a postcolonial approach to conceptualizing national identity. Scott's influence on Robertson's novel can be traced at different levels. Gérard Genette's theory of transtextuality is used to discover all types of literary dialogue between the two authors. The analysis of *The Testament of Gideon Mack* is performed with the purpose of identifying the echoes and connections with Scott, on the one hand, and Robertson's original techniques of portraying Scottish identity, on the other.

**Key words:** Scottish identity, Caledonian Antisyzygy, transtextuality, narrative, historiography.

Gregory Smith coined the term “Caledonian Antisyzygy” to refer to fictional representation of Scottish identity: “[Scottish] literature is remarkably varied, and becomes, under the stress of foreign influence and native division and reaction, almost a zigzag of contradictions” [Smith 1919: 20]. Today the term is associated with the colonial frame of thinking. Schoene argues that in the postcolonial discourse, “racist critical concepts like that of a ‘Caledonia antisyzygy’, which regards the Scottish psyche as profoundly harmed by its historical experience to the extent that it has become irrevocably schizophrenic, do not any longer apply” [Schoene 1995: 116].

There have been several attempts to redefine the concept as a tendency towards depicting a wide range of dichotomies, clashes, and conflicts, stemming from the multifaceted idea of Scottish identity. Thus, Martin refers to Caledonian Antisyzygy as “a conflict between rational and romantic,

canny and reckless, moralistic and violent, an idea of duelling polarities within one entity” [Martin 2009: 84–85]. Sassi defines the phenomenon as “a continuous tension and fluctuation between opposite tendencies, a love for ‘domestic’ realism on the one side and a love for the supernatural and the fantastic on the other” [Sassi 2005: 148]. Jelínková introduces the term “Caledonian Polysyzygy” based on Bakhtin’s definition of polyphonic novel to describe a multilateral perspective of contemporary Scottish fiction [Jelínková 2019: 24]. In this paper it was decided not to use the term “Caledonian Antisyzygy” as promoting the image of dominating England as “the Other” [Said 1977: 1], but to admit the coexistence in Scottish literature of the polarized visions of Scottish history, identity, and tradition that merge and create a synergetic effect.

Walter Scott’s *Rob Roy* encapsulates the 19<sup>th</sup>-century vision of Scottish identity representation. The narrator is Francis Osbaldistone, an English nobleman whose figure represents an outsider’s point of view, and a neutral ground where contrasting principles can be integrated. He embodies the typical features of an English gentleman: prudent, polite, well-mannered, and moderate: “the identity produced by its gentlemanly narrator is shaped by the values of a system of power” [Lincoln 2002: 44]. He encounters the highlander Rob Roy MacGregor, one of the leaders of the 1715 Jacobite rising. Rob Roy’s split identity exemplifies oppositions typical for the national image of the self: Highland versus Lowland, and imperial values versus Scottish nationalism.

Rob Roy possesses a unique talent of mimicry. At the first meeting he is described as an average gentleman from the North “trying to avoid peculiarities of idiom or dialect”, dressed modestly but in a “decent” way and treating others with “cool and condescending politeness” [Scott 1995: 28]. But wearing the national costume, he produces a different impression on Francis: “His appearance had acquired to my eyes something so much wilder and more striking than it before presented, that I could scarce recognise him to be the same person” [ibid: 329]. In terms of language, Rob Roy shifts easily from English to Scots and Gaelic, and in the latter case his speech seems most natural and powerful. Criticizing MacGregor’s radical political views, Francis is fascinated by his charisma, dignity, and leadership qualities, and portrays Rob Roy as a legend and a Gaelic hero. So, the duality of this image creates an appeal that is both national and universal.

Scott was one of the first authors to portray space as an essential component of Scottish identity, creating a strong bond between the general idea of Scottishness and a particular place. Thus, the savage beauty of the Highland landscapes thanks to Scott came to represent the Gaelic culture, and, especially for readership outside the country, Scotland in general. The hybridity

or “in-betweenness” [Bhabha 2004: xx] of Rob Roy’s identity is emphasized by the descriptions of threshold or crossover places associated with his image, such as the road, the border between England and Scotland, the river where he throws himself to escape from captivity, and a “barrier rock” in a solemn and picturesque place in the Highlands where water falls from the mountain “through a dark and narrow chasm” to the lake [Scott 1995: 294]. The latter place can be viewed as a literary prototype of the Black Jaws featured in *The Testament of Gideon Mack*.

The figure of Rob Roy MacGregor embodies the main conflicts ingrained in Scottish identity. Changes in his clothes, language and behaviour reflect the image of an individual torn apart by such opposing forces as the highlanders’ scorn of business and trade and the lowlanders’ shrewd pragmatism and matter-of-factness, advocacy of Scottish nationalism and staying loyal to his English friends. His portrayal also combines contrasting principles: emphasis on his passionate strive against the English monarch and typically English anesthetization of the romantic hero struggling alone against the established rule. Another important feature of dual identity representation in *Rob Roy* is its projection onto the fictional landscapes that can be defined as borderline and transgression spaces.

The study of *The Testament of Gideon Mack* reveals several levels of connections with Walter Scott. Genette’s theory of transtextuality, or textual transcendence can be used to describe them. According to Genette, transtextuality comprises all the elements that bring a text “into relation (manifest or hidden) with other texts” [Genette 1992: 81]. He identifies five different types of transtextuality: intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality, hyper-textuality, and architextuality.

Intertextuality is viewed as “the literal presence of one text within another” [Genette 1992: 81-82], e.g., quotations and allusions. In *The Testament of Gideon Mack* there are two direct quotations from Walter Scott. One of them, from his *Memoirs*, can also be treated as paratextual reference under the assumption that the “editorial framing” and Gideon Mack’s narrative itself represent two different levels of the text. The fictitious editor of *The Testament* observes, “Sir Walter Scott, with whose work, as you will read, the Reverend Gideon Mack was intimately familiar, once described publishing as ‘the most ticklish and unsafe and hazardous of all professions scarcely with the exception of horse-jockeyship works’” [Robertson 2006: 8]. Another quotation is provided by the narrator: “Our passions are wild beasts: God grant us the strength to muzzle them” [ibid: 50].

There are several implicit allusions to Scott as well. Gideon’s mother’s last name is Campbell that was MacGregor’s clan name. The surname of fictitious folklorist Menteith, apart from being a lake in Scotland, is used as a

character's name in Scott's *A Legend of Montrose*. The name Montrose also appears in Robertson's novel as a toponym. Another mentioned in the novel scholar, folklorist and author of *The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns and Fairies* Robert Kirk is a historical figure who published his book in 1815 with the help of Scott.

Genette defines metatextuality as "the transtextual relationship that links a commentary to the text it comments on" [Genette 1992: 82]. Robertson's novel contains several metatextual comments on Scott. Gideon dwells on modern reception of this author: "I can't imagine anybody under sixty reading Scott nowadays" [Robertson 2006: 59]. Gideon's father accuses Scott of conformity to the English literary tastes: "Scott had already turned the heads of too many silly women and romantically minded boys with his kind of history, and the generations that followed believed in it" [ibid: 88]. In a long conversation between the father and the son about Scott, Gideon's father arrives at a disputable conclusion that "there is no comparison between him and the Bible" [ibid: 89].

As a postmodern novel, *The Testament of Gideon Mack* is full of transtextual connections, and Walter Scott's novels serve as one of the layers of hypotext. Hypertext relates to hypotext as its transformation, modification, extension, or parody. The description of Reverend Mack Senior as a man "over six feet tall, with a long, straight back and arms that reached almost to his knees" [ibid: 49] is a caricature of Rob Roy whose "arms, though round, sinewy, and strong, were so very long as to be rather a deformity" [Scott 1995: 179]. The Devil is also in a way parodying Rob Roy: "His voice was soft and neutral and had no obvious accent. (...) Although he didn't look it, he was clearly immensely strong" [Robertson 2006: 256]. The two novels have a common motif of jumping or falling in the river as an act of deliverance. Besides, it can be suggested that the figure of an English postmodernist installations designer William Winnyford is mocking Scott's Francis Osbaldistone as an outsider and artist intoxicated with Scottish authenticity.

Genette's architextuality designates two texts as belonging to the same literary genre. Philip claims that Robertson's novels are "narratives of national history and identity" [Philip 2011: 179], so they continue Scott's tradition of historical novel. The architextual connection between the two authors can be seen, first, in their description of the conflicting sides of the self, and second, in the "use of the land of Scotland as part of a Scottish national identity" [Philip 2011: 185]. The protagonist of *The Testament of Gideon Mack* takes Scott's methods of dual identity portrayal to a supreme level. His personality is a crossroad of many cultures. His name comes from the Old Testament, and the surname Mack reminds of the typical for the Scottish

names Gaelic prefix mac meaning “son of”. His mother was from the Highlands, father – from the Lowlands, but at home the family spoke English. His identity keeps evolving throughout the novel. The story of his personal crisis, however serious, can be treated as an ironic nod to the “Antisyzygy” tradition.

As well as Scott, Robertson uses spatial images, such as the Stone and the underwater cave of the Black Jaws, to emphasize the duality of the protagonist’s nature. Unlike overlapping borderline spaces of Scott, Robertson’s spatiality is vertically polarized: the upward direction of the Stone is contrasted by the symbolism of the cave as an entrance to hell. In the tradition of Hugh MacDiarmid, Lewis Gibbon, etc., standing stones embody the quintessence of Scottish spirituality. At the same time, the connection of both the Stone and the cave with the Devil as “non-human other” [Philip 2011: 186] defies unambiguous one-way representation of the national self.

Displaying important similarities with Scott in the fictional representation of history, Robertson, however, employs a different approach, writing metaphysical history rather than the history of events. His historiography can be described as juxtaposition of several antagonistic points of view: dogmatic Presbyterianism, Communism, agnosticism, or multiculturalism. Metaphysical history narrative focuses on the historians of the past (Kirk and Menteith) and present (John Moffat, Catherine Craigie, and William Winnyford). All in all, the amalgam of diverging perspectives and incoherent stories serves the purpose of narrating the Scottish identity evolution. It can be said that the novel advocates not dualistic but “polyphonic” principle of identity representation [Bakhtin 1981: 430].

A conclusion can be made that at Genette’s architextual level, *The Testament of Gideon Mack* follows Scott’s principle of history writing, although Robertson’s novel is concerned with metaphysical history rather than with milestone events and political figures. Scottish identity is compared to a polyphonic narrative in which overlapping voices challenge and complement each other.

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## **“ПЕРЕПЛЕТЕНИЕ МИФА И ИСТОРИИ”: ШОТЛАНДСКАЯ ИДЕНТИЧНОСТЬ ОТ ВАЛЬТЕРА СКОТТА ДО РОМАНА ДЖЕЙМСА РОБЕРТСОНА «ЗАВЕЩАНИЕ ГИДЕОНА МАКА»**

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В статье исследуются основные принципы репрезентации шотландской идентичности на материале романов В. Скотта и Д. Робертсона с позиций литературной теории постколониализма. Литературный диалог двух авторов рассматривается в аспекте транстекстуальности Ж. Женетта. Целью анализа романа «Завещание Гидеона Мака» является выявление интертекстуальных связей со Скоттом, а также специфических для Робертсона способов отображения шотландской идентичности.

**Ключевые слова:** шотландская идентичность, Caledonian Antisyzygy, транстекстуальность, нарратив, историография.

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