

Cristian Ștefan Vîjea

University of Bucharest

## ***METAMORPHOSES OF THE COVENANTERS IN SCOTTISH HISTORICAL FICTION***

**Keywords:** *stereotypes, discourse, radicalism, postmodern revisiting, contextual factors, intertextuality, tropes, power relations.*

**Abstract:** *In this paper I will focus on fictional representations of the Scottish Covenanters and I will highlight a few important differences in the way their image is constructed by postmodern novelists, like Harry Tait and James Robertson. The Scottish Covenanters were staunch defenders of Presbyterianism and upholders of the National Covenant of 1638 or the Solemn League and Covenant of 1643 signed between Scotland and England, which purported to establish and protect Presbyterianism.*

*The following novels will be referred to: Old Mortality, by Walter Scott, Witch Wood, by John Buchan, The Ballad of Sawney Bain, by Harry Tait, and The Fanatic, by James Robertson. I will pass the fictional Covenanters' discourse through the filter of Hayden White's theory of the tropes. The Covenanters construct a radical discourse, and, in some novels, they seem to be taken over by it.*

*I will point out some salient differences in the way the fictional Covenanters and their enemies construct their discourse and stereotypes, and also some changes in the representation of the Covenanters' enemies. For example, the image of Montrose and Claverhouse varies, from Walter Scott and John Buchan to the more recent writers. For Buchan, James Graham is a model conservative, exponent of a balanced Christianity, while in Tait's novel he is just another fanatic with a different creed, driven by his own master narrative. Christianity itself is questioned as a master narrative, and small, once unheeded voices of divination and witchcraft are given a voice.*

*So, what happens when postmodern novelists like Harry Tait and James Robertson revisit a period of history, the religious wars of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, which has been powerfully represented by classic writers of historical fiction like Walter Scott and John Buchan? Are there important differences? If so, what are the contextual factors which shaped these differences?*