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Positive and Negative Empathy in James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*

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Introduction

Try and ask someone a few names of some important Scottish writers. Many will answer Walter Scott, Robert Louis Stevenson, or the contemporary Irvine Welsh. Few, if any, will say James Hogg. Yet Hogg, also known as "the Ettrick Shepherd", was an interesting and prolific writer of his age, appreciated by authors such as Lord Byron, William Wordsworth and Walter Scott, and was a model for many successive writers, one for all Robert Louis Stevenson. Nonetheless, he passed into oblivion after his death and remained basically unknown until the French writer André Gide rediscovered in the 1920s what is considered his masterpiece and the topic of this thesis: *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*.

Published in its original form in 1824 under anonymity, Hogg's enigmatic novel did not gain much success due to its theological debate and peculiar structure, so that after his death it suffered a severe bowdlerisation that effectively rendered it a poor work which was soon forgotten. In 1924, André Gide was fortunately given a copy of the *Confessions* by a friend and got so "voluptuously tormented"[1] by it that he inquired all the English and Americans in Algiers, and later in France, if they had ever read this novel. None of them knew it. Luckily enough for us, he immediately recognised its significance and wrote a seminal introduction to its Cresset Press edition of 1947 that triggered all its successive critical attention, in particular with regard to the puzzling figure of Gil-Martin.

The purpose of this thesis is then to contribute in my own little way to the rediscovery of such an interesting writer as James Hogg, dealing in particular with his most celebrated novel, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, analysed in the wider context of the Scottish Enlightenment. James Hogg can be in fact considered to be the

[1] André Gide, Introduction to *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, London: Cresset Press, 1947, quoted from *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1970, p. 232.

product of two antithetical worlds within Scotland: the Scottish Borders, where he was born and lived most of his life, characterised by a strong presence of the supernatural, and Edinburgh, the cradle of the Scottish Enlightenment and the city that enabled him to pursue a literary career.

The first chapter of this thesis deals then with James Hogg's life, from his childhood as an illiterate shepherd in the Scottish Borders who has to teach himself how to read and write, to his passion for literature and the fortunate encounter with Walter Scott who would help him morally and financially throughout his life. Hogg was in fact regarded as "an intruder in the paths of literature"[2] due to his humble origins and was for this reason treated ungraciously by the Edinburgh intelligentsia and his own colleagues who maliciously invented the literary persona of "the Ettrick Shepherd".

The second and third paragraphs of the first chapter are devoted to the description of the cultural life of Edinburgh in the 19th century, when it began to be defined "the Athens of the North" because of the importance it had gained as a major cultural and publishing centre characterised by the presence of some influential periodicals such as the *Edinburgh Review* and *The Blackwood's Magazine* which saw Hogg as one of its main contributors. Hogg's problematic relationship with the cultural scene of Edinburgh and its members is then taken into account, and in particular his connection with Walter Scott, John Gibson Lockhart and John Wilson.

Never really in nor out the cultural scene of the city, Hogg had to face many difficulties but gained however a discreet success with his poems, in particular with *The Queen's Wake* (1813), and produced any kind of work, from his own periodical *The Spy* (1810-11) to the compendium of religious and moral discourses *A Series of Lay Sermons* (1834). These two works are partly analysed in the fourth paragraph of the first chapter in order to provide some

[2] James Hogg, "Memoir of the Life of James Hogg", in *The Mountain Bard*, Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1821, p. LXVIII.

evidence of Hogg's own point of view regarding religion and rationalism, as well as a few instances of an embryonic representation of the figure of the doppelgänger, all elements that can be considered the cornerstones of the *Confessions*.

The second chapter focuses entirely on Hogg's puzzling novel initially providing an historical overview of the time period in which it is set, so at the turn of the 17th and 18th centuries. This period was characterised by many important historical events and religious debates which are to some extent taken into account in the novel and provide the basis for a fuller understanding of the political and religious division that exists between the Colwans and the Wringhims.

Robert Wringhim's peculiar life is, however, the focus of the novel, and is notoriously recounted by two antithetical narrators, the Editor and Robert himself, who are analysed in the fourth paragraph of this second chapter - after the plot summary and the list of characters - as fundamental for the distinctive instability of the novel. The Editor is, in fact, a representative of Hogg's contemporary Enlightenment whose intention is to provide an objective, rational explanation of Robert's apparently supernatural experience. Robert, on the other hand, is a young antinomian fanatic who writes his "Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Sinner" in order to recount how he was urged to commit his heinous crimes by the puzzling figure of Gil-Martin, an apparently diabolical being who has been - and still is - the focus of much critical attention.

The fifth paragraph of the second chapter is then devoted to the analysis of the problematic figure of the doppelgänger and its presence in the novel taking into account the different explanations that have been given about the existence of Gil-Martin as a demonic being or just a figment of Robert's troubled mind.

Finally, the third and last chapter analyses how James Hogg has widely and heterogeneously represented in the *Confessions* one of the most important concerns of the Scottish Enlightenment: empathy. Drawing in particular on the idea of empathy - or rather

"sympathy" as it was called in the 18th century - as developed by two of the most important philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment, David Hume and Adam Smith, the five paragraphs of the second chapter provide evidence of how empathy is widely represented in the novel under different forms, from its absence in Robert Wringhim to its perversion in Gil-Martin, finally taking into account its righteous form in some minor, humble characters such as Mr Blanchard or Samuel Scrape.

The first paragraph is then devoted to the analysis of Robert Wringhim's unsympathetic character and the motives that lie behind it, as for instance his antinomian education and his difficult family situation that make him an easy prey to Gil-Martin whose perversion of sympathy and extreme interpretation of Antinomianism are analysed in the fourth paragraph.

In the second and third paragraphs, instead, our empathy as readers is analysed, and my principal point in this thesis is that, despite the inevitable antipathy we feel towards such an unsympathetic, religiously-delusional character, we can still empathise with him. In fact, Robert's first-person narrative, the depiction of his persecution by a diabolical being - be it supernatural or just a figment of his mind - and the opportunity we have to know his background story as well as his thoughts and motives, inevitably link us to him to the point of regarding him rather as a victim of his uncritical reception of a perverse religious belief than as a real criminal.

If moderate, the empathy we feel towards a murderous religious maniac can be actually regarded as positive and self-improving since it allows us to enter into Robert's mind and commit his same crimes and mistakes without facing the consequences, which makes it possible for us to learn from his experience and come out of the novel purified. The risk, however, is that our empathy towards him becomes so totalising to elicit our uncritical approval of the sinner's actions misled by his same perverse beliefs. A distance must be then kept between us and the protagonist, always keeping in mind that we are not actually in his

position but only spectators who empathise with him in order to understand the motives behind his actions and to see the human being who lies behind the mask of the monster.

Furthermore, in the third paragraph we will see how even our empathy as readers is as unstable as the novel itself because of the different points of view we are given. The result is that while reading Robert's story we tend to empathise with him, whereas when reading the Editor's Narrative we empathise with Robert's victims and in particular with his brother George Colwan.

The fifth paragraph is devoted to the analysis of the righteous form of empathy felt by some minor, humble characters such as Mr Blanchard and Samuel Scrape who prove themselves to be the real vessels of the Christian message of empathy and charity.

Finally, the sixth paragraph analyses how the continuous shift of perspective alongside the subtle irony which permeates the novel inevitably create a detachment between the reader and the story thus damaging our empathic response towards the characters.

The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner is a multi-layered, haunting novel that has defied any categorisation with its satirical depiction of Calvinism, its historical setting, Gothic atmosphere, psychological implications, and its fine line between reality and fiction, right and wrong, truth and lie, that has puzzled readers since its publication. All these elements make the *Confessions* a novel to be rediscovered not only because of its artistic value which was evidently not understood during Hogg's lifetime, but also because of the many inputs it provides for the analysis of our contemporary society characterised by narcissism, pride, religious extremism and totalitarianism. Because, as Italo Calvino argued, "a classic is a book which has never exhausted all it has to say to its readers"[3], and the *Confessions* still has a lot to say to us.

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[3] Italo Calvino, *Why Read the Classics?*, trans. Martin McLaughlin, New York: Vintage, 2000.

1 James Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd?

1.1 A brief biography of James Hogg

"The world has a thousand times witnessed what mighty things can be accomplished by the assistance of learning, but it has never yet ascertained how much may be accomplished without it".

James Hogg, *The Spy*, No. 52

James Hogg can be certainly considered a fascinating figure. Born in 1770 in Ettrick, a small village in the Scottish Borders, he was the son of a tenant farmer. At the age of seven, after just a few months at school, he was obliged to get a job as a shepherd due to the difficult financial situation his family was in and, as we know through his various autobiographies, he was for this reason almost an illiterate up to his 20s, and taught himself how to read and write.

Growing up in a world full of folklore and ballads told by his mother, the daughter of Will o'Phaup - reportedly the last man in Ettrick to converse with fairies - he soon became interested in literature, as recollected by his brother William: "Our mother's mind was well fortified by a good system of Christian religion, which our grandfather with much care and diligence had given all his family; yet her mind was stored with tales and songs of spectres, ghosts, fairies, brownies, voices, &c. […] These songs and tales which were sung and told in a plaintive, melancholy air, had an influence on James's mind […]; they raised into existence the seeds of poetry"[4].

Hogg's interest in literature, however, was understandingly not appreciated by his family which discouraged him from "the perusal of every book that was not some religious tract or

[4] Letter from William Hogg to James Gray, 20th November 1813, in "Some Particulars Relative to the Ettrick Shepherd", *The New Monthly Magazine*, April 1836, Vol. 46.

other; so that he had neither access to books, nor money to purchase them with"[5]. His family was in fact aware that the Ettrick community regarded his interest in literature with mistrust, and considered him for this reason an unreliable person, too much distracted by books to be able to properly work as a shepherd. Their worry was eventually proved to be correct because, later in life, it became increasingly difficult for Hogg to be employed as a shepherd due to his parallel literary career.

Nonetheless, despite his family's attempts to inhibit him, Hogg started composing some poems and ballads that gained him a local reputation as "Jamie the poeter"[6], until he finally met who would become his mentor and life-long friend, Walter Scott, who enlisted him to collect some local ballads for his *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802). After this first experience, his own first collection of poems, *The Mountain Bard*, was published in 1807, and in 1810 he moved to Edinburgh to pursue a literary career there.

Never really in nor out the cultural scene of Edinburgh, Hogg was always considered, and considered himself, an outcast, a figure that would always interest him[7] and that he represented especially in his most important novel *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824). Over the years, the question of the authorship of the novel has been widely debated since many scholars considered it too complex and innovative to have been devised by a man who was deemed only a "peasant poet". However, even in absence of the manuscript, the speculations about other writers' authorship of the novel - in particular John Gibson Lockhart was considered for a long time the author of the *Confessions* without any evidence - have been denied by the discovery of Hogg's daughter's claim in 1895 to have the manuscript in the handwriting of her father in her possession, as well as by the

[5] Ibidem.
[6] James Hogg, "Memoir of the Author's Life", in *Altrive Tales*, London: James Cochrane and Co., 1832, p. XIV.
[7] See John Carey, Introduction to *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969, p. XIV.

presence of some outgoing letters from Hogg's publishers in London addressed to him regarding the novel.

For instance, in a letter that Owen Rees - a partner of the publishing company that would publish the *Confessions*, Longman & Co. - wrote to Hogg on 25th October 1823, we can read: "We will with pleasure undertake the publication of 'Memoirs of a Suiside' [*sic*] on the same plan as we have done your other works", that is *The Three Perils of Man* (1822) and *The Three Perils of Woman* (1823)[8]. Moreover, other letters exist in which the publishers discuss with Hogg about other aspects of the novel, so that there is now an almost unanimous agreement on recognising him as the author of this puzzling book, also considering the diversity of his other works besides the *Confessions*. What it has been noticed is in fact that, during his life, Hogg had always been a shape-shifter, as much as his Gil-Martin in the *Confessions*, writing ballads, poems, short stories, and lay sermons, producing his own periodical, *The Spy* (1810-11), but also writing novels such as *The Three Perils of Man* (1822) and *The Three Perils of Woman* (1823), so that it was not unconceivable for him to have also written a novel of that kind.

The *Confessions* was harshly criticised and unappreciated at the time of its publication, both for its structure and for the themes discussed in it, and Hogg himself was the first one to recognise the peculiar nature of his novel to the point that he decided to publish it anonymously because of the horror he was sure it would have provoked in the public[9]. This can be considered one of the reasons why he decided to depict himself into the novel not as the narrator or the editor of the story, but as a shepherd that denies helping the Editor in finding Robert's grave, as if Hogg the writer wanted to detach himself from the same story

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[8] See Peter Garside, Introduction to *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, ed. P.D. Garside, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002, pp. LV-LVI.

[9] "The next year, 1824, I published 'The Confessions of a Sinner;' but it being a story replete with horror, after I had written it I durst not venture to put my name on it: so it was published anonymously" – James Hogg, *Memoir of the Author's Life, and Familiar Anecdotes of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. Douglas S. Mack, New York: Barnes & Noble, 1972, p. 55.

he was telling. With regard to this, Hogg's choice to picture himself as a shepherd cannot pass unnoticed, since he was better known in his times as "the Ettrick Shepherd", a name that surely underlined his origins and of which he eventually became proud, but which was also - as it will be discussed later - the mischievous making of his former friends and colleagues John Wilson and John Gibson Lockhart, who Hogg depicted too in the novel in a semi-incognito.

Throughout his life Hogg was then both a shepherd and a writer, part of the cultural scene of Edinburgh but also an outcast, and all these elements can be found in some sort in the *Confessions*, from the theme of the "diabolical" persecution he had somehow endured in his life, to the presence of a double self, "the Ettrick Shepherd", who committed deeds and said things he was unaware of.

Despite the great importance the *Confessions* has today as a pivotal work of British and Scottish Romanticism, at the time of the publication and for a century after that, this peculiar novel did not have the success it deserved, as it has happened with many other works that were probably too ahead of their times and are now appreciated exactly for the reasons why they were rebuked in the past. Due to the presence of two antithetical narrators who tell the same story without ever giving a definitive version of it, the puzzling figure of Gil-Martin whose real nature is impossible to grasp, and the theological debate produced in the novel, the *Confessions* did not obtain a great success during Hogg's lifetime, and was published in its original form only in 1824. After that, the novel suffered a severe bowdlerisation that erased its most important parts, thus rendering it effectively a poor work, and this bowdlerised version remained current for a long time until a new edition with the original text was published in 1895.

The importance the novel regained in the 20th century is to be attributed, however, to the French writer André Gide who in 1947 wrote a seminal introduction to the Cresset Press edition of the *Confessions* that finally awakened "the belated glory to which I believe it has

the right"[10]. Since then, many critics have been interested in the novel and have analysed many different aspects of it, thus proving the incredible complexity and multi-layered nature of the *Confessions*.

The *Confessions* strikes, in fact, for its innovations not only in the structure that - as we will see in Chapter 2 - provides a double telling and a double perspective of the same story, a devise which can be considered highly hazardous, but also for the presence of Hogg himself in the novel as a character, a literary convention that would become typical of Postmodernism, a movement that, as we know, arose more than a century after Hogg wrote his bewildering novel.

1.2 Edinburgh: a modern Athens for Romantic writers

"In February 1810, in utter desperation, I took my plaid about my shoulders, and marched away to Edinburgh, determined, since no better could be, to push my fortune as a literary man"[11]. Unable to be hired again as a shepherd after having appeared to the community of Ettrick as a poet, Hogg found himself obliged to try a literary career in Edinburgh for an income.

In the early 19th century, Edinburgh was one of the most important literary centres of Europe, rivalling London in the publishing industry to the point that the *Blackwood's Magazine* described the two cities in that period in these terms: "While London is the Rome of the empire […], Edinburgh might become another Athens, in which the arts and the sciences flourished, under the shade of her ancient fame, and established a dominion over the minds of men more permanent even than that which the Roman arms were able to

[10] André Gide, Introduction to *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, p. 238.
[11] James Hogg, *Memoir of the Author's Life, and Familiar Anecdotes of Sir Walter Scott*, p.18.

effect"[12]. Edinburgh was in fact becoming the "Athens of the North", the new cradle of the arts and the sciences, and so of the Scottish Enlightenment, as a result of the New Town project which, developed in several stages from the 1760s to the 1830s, brought a new energy to the commercial and cultural life of what was before a small, overcrowded town. The noblemen who had moved to London thus decided to go back to Edinburgh, and so many financial and educational institutions were built there, as well as many grand public buildings.

Starting from 1802, a new period is then considered to have taken place in Edinburgh, a period marked in particular by innovations in the publishing industry regarding both the role authors were given and the type of works that were made. This period is now recognised as the "post-Enlightenment". According to Ian Duncan, this Edinburgh-based post-Enlightenment can be divided into three different periods: the first one goes from 1802 to 1813 and encompasses both the vogue for national ballads and the publishing of Constable's *Edinburgh Review*, characterised by the publication of contents related to the Enlightenment but directed to the marketplace; the middle period goes instead from 1814 to 1825 and represents the heyday of Scottish literary production with the rise of prose fiction and *The Blackwood's Magazine*; finally, the third period begins with the financial crash of 1825-6 that ruined both Constable and Scott, and ends with Scott's death in 1832. This last period was characterised by a decline of Scottish fiction, both in quantity and in quality, and its end can be marked by two important works: John Gibson Lockhart's *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott, Bart.* (1837-8), and Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* (1833-4)[13].

The date 1802, with which the first period of the post-Enlightenment begins, coincides with the publication of the first number of the *Edinburgh Review* (1802), one of the most

[12] "On the Proposed National Monument at Edinburgh", *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, July 1819, 5:28.
[13] See Ian Duncan & Douglas Mack, "Hogg, Galt, Scott and their Milieu", in *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature, Volume 2: Enlightenment, Britain and Empire (1707-1918)*, ed. Ian Brown, et al., Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007, 211-220, p. 212.

important magazines on the cultural and political life of Scotland published by Archibald Constable, a central figure in the development of a new Scottish literature. Notoriously the main editor of Scott's work, Constable changed the rules regarding the status of the contributors to the magazine and the wages they received. This was, in fact, a major concern for all those writers who wanted to write for a living but were not assured adequate wages, being thus obliged to have another job. For example, as we know from Hogg himself, he had decided to publish his own periodical at his arrival in Edinburgh exactly because the contributors to magazines were nearly unpaid, and so it was impossible to do that for a living[14]. Constable changed this situation paying high fees to the contributors and editors of the *Edinburgh Review* and moved then from the figure of tradesman to that of an enlightened patron, thus rendering a writing career a real option[15].

During this period, another important publisher was making his way into the publishing industry of Edinburgh: William Blackwood. *The Blackwood's Magazine* (1817) immediately became the main rival to the *Edinburgh Review* promoting a new Romantic ideology that manifested itself in the innovative style of the periodical and, most of all, in the novels that would be published in it. Blackwood would in fact promote a renovated interest in writings dealing with Scottish national, regional and historical themes, characterised by rural settings and traditional manner, which would become one of the trademarks of European Romanticism.

This tradition had already had a first impulse with Allan Ramsay and later with Robert Burns - one of Hogg's main models - but particularly thrived with writers such as Hogg himself - whose tales *The Brownie of Bodsbeck* (1817), *Winter Evening Tales* (1820), and

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[14] "On going to Edinburgh, I found that my poetical talents were rated nearly as low there as my shepherd qualities were in Ettrick. It was in vain that I applied to newsmongers, booksellers, editors of magazines, &c. for employment. Any of these were willing enough to accept of my lucubrations, and give them publicity, but then there was no money going – not a farthing; and this suited me very ill" – James Hogg, *Memoir of the Author's Life, and Familiar Anecdotes of Sir Walter Scott*, pp. 18-19.

[15] See Ian Duncan, *Scott's Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007, p. 25.

The Shepherd's Calendar (1823) were grounded on the popular traditions of the Scottish Borders - and John Galt, who would look back at the previous century as the last truly Scotch age, usually considering it in nostalgic terms[16]. With regard to this, the Act of Union (1707) had indeed been considered by many Scots one of their best achievements, since it had unquestionably bettered the commercial trade of Scotland and thus its economic situation, but it had also led to a split, to a "twin dimensionality"[17] of being both Scottish and British. This ignited in many Scots the desire to recover their roots, their language, and their folklore, and they initially did that through poems and ballads, and then with more or less nostalgic novels about the history and the cultural traditions of Scotland. Therefore, the post-Enlightenment period can be regarded as predominantly characterised by this new Romantic sensibility that was particularly interested in the past of Scotland, in its national identity and in the elevation of sentiments over reason, and Hogg gave an important contribution to its success.

Edinburgh was then in full bloom when Hogg moved there in 1810 and started his literary career producing his own periodical *The Spy* (1810-11), which wanted to provide a critical view of the city and its inhabitants as seen by an outsider. Following the failure of this project after only a year, Hogg became one of the main contributors to the influential *Blackwood's Magazine* and experimented with many literary forms, often mixing them, being thus nowadays rightfully recognised as a Romantic writer, also considering his interest in the folklore and the national history of Scotland.

Taking into account for instance the specific topic of this thesis, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, this novel can be hardly categorised as a singular genre since it has in itself so many layers that it is difficult to deem it only a Gothic novel - as many critics have sustained - a satire of religious fanaticism, an historical novel, or a

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[16] See ibid, p. 35.
[17] R. J. Morris & Graeme Morton, "Where Was Nineteenth-Century Scotland?", *The Scottish Historical Review*, 73:195, April 1994, 89-99, p. 97.

psychological thriller. It would be more appropriate to consider the *Confessions* the result of a mixing of all these genres since Hogg was certainly "one of the most exciting and daring genre-mixers"[18] of Romanticism and, as discussed by Ian Duncan, "wrote in a wider variety of literary forms than almost any contemporary"[19]. Moreover, in the *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* there are some elements which were typical of a certain strain of Romantic literature in Europe, in particular the pact with the devil and the figure of the *doppelgänger*, which had great importance for instance in E.T.A. Hoffmann's *The Devil's Elixirs* (1815), which was interestingly published in English by Blackwood the same year of the *Confessions*.

Despite the neglect Hogg suffered both during his life, when he was considered only for his being a self-instructed "peasant poet", and after his death, he has been then one of the most daring and interesting writers of British literature in the 19th century and has influenced many important writers, one of which was most certainly Robert Louis Stevenson with his seminal novel about duality *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) but also *The Master of Ballantrae* (1889).

As a proof of the influence the *Confessions* - apparently unconsciously - had on him, Stevenson wrote in a letter: "The book [*Confessions*] since I read it in black, pouring weather on Tweedside, has always haunted and puzzled me. […] I never read a book that went on the same road with the *Sinner*. […] It is odd that somewhat a similar idea exercised me for some time, and the *Sinner* damped it out; though perhaps unconsciously it came again in a new form"[20], probably that of *The Master of Ballantrae*, which he began writing some five

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[18] Meiko O'Halloran, "Five Questions: Meiko O'Halloran on James Hogg and British Romanticism", interview by Matthew Sangster, BARS Blog, 8th March 2016, http://www.bars.ac.uk/blog/?p=1115

[19] Ian Duncan, "Introduction: Hogg and his Worlds", in *The Edinburgh Companion to James Hogg*, ed. Ian Duncan & Douglas S. Mack, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012, 1-9, p. 3.

[20] Letter from Robert Louis Stevenson to George Saintsbury, 17th May 1891, in *Robert Louis Stevenson Reconsidered: New Critical Perspectives*, ed. W. B. Jones Jr., Jefferson, North Carolina, and London: McFarland & Company, 2003, p. 164.

years after reading the *Confessions* and which has many connections to it, from the representation of two conflicting brothers to the presence of a diabolical double.

1.3 Scott, *The Blackwood's Magazine* and the Ettrick Shepherd

As mentioned above in Chapter 1.1, Hogg's literary and also personal life completely changed when he met one of the most important writers of Scotland, Walter Scott. Hogg still worked mainly as a shepherd when they first met and was introduced to Scott because of his great knowledge of the ballads and folklore of the Scottish Borders which the Edinburgh lawyer and poet needed in order to write his *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802). Despite his humble origins, Hogg immediately struck Scott with his natural genius and attitude to literature, that of a man who, without having received education, was nonetheless able to compose beautiful and sincere poems. Scott would in fact later describe him in a letter to Lord Byron - who had also shown his appreciation for Hogg's work, and in particular for *The Queen's Wake* - as "a wonderful creature for his opportunities, which were far inferior to those of the generality of Scottish peasants"[21].

With regard to this, Hogg's main model had been another Scottish "peasant poet" who had thrived in the previous century, Robert Burns (1759-1796). Considered a pioneer of Romanticism and widely regarded as the "National Bard" of Scotland, Burns had however received "an education not much worse than the sons of many gentlemen in Scotland"[22], an aspect which rendered Hogg's genius still more astounding but not for this reason comparable to that of Burns, according to Scott[23]. Moreover, he had been writing in a period - the 1780s - in which the Romantic figure of the peasant poet and his "natural" genius were

[21] Letter from Sir Walter Scott to Lord Byron, 6th November 1813, in *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. Sir Herbert Grierson, London: Constable, 1932-37, Vol. III, p. 373.
[22] Ibidem.
[23] See ibidem.

highly valued, but unfortunately it was not so when Hogg was writing in the 1820s, so he never reached Burns's reputation. On the contrary, he was utterly disliked by the Edinburgh intelligentsia, made of lawyers and graduates, and was able to enter its literary circles only through Scott's patronage and friendship.

Going to Edinburgh was then a great leap for Hogg, who wanted to have a literary career but, as we have seen, continued in the meantime to work as a shepherd, probably feeling uncertain about this possibility. However, he was received with coldness by the other writers, "the learned part of the community", who considered him "an intruder in the paths of literature"[24] because of his humble origins, and was initially supported only by Scott, who helped him publishing his first collection of ballads and poems, *The Mountain Bard* (1807), and supported him morally and financially throughout his life. The great success of his books, most of all *The Queen's Wake* (1813), and his contributions to the *Blackwood's Magazine*, proved his real worth as a writer and he thus managed, despite everything, to become part of the literary scene of Edinburgh.

His friendship with Scott was nonetheless made of highs and lows. Despite their mutual respect and appreciation, Scott in fact tended, as the other writers, to patronise him both with regard to his work and social behaviour. Repeatedly in his letters he refers to Hogg as "the Ettrick Shepherd (for I will not mention him by the unpoetical name of Mr. James Hogg)"[25], clearly alluding to the similarity of the writer's surname to the word "hog", a "young sheep" in Scots; he also calls him "a miserable son of the Muses"[26], and describes him as a man who, despite possessing a natural genius, "is sadly deficient not only in correct taste but in common tact"[27]. This was one of the main reproaches made by Scott and the other writers to Hogg: his style, both in his writings and in his life, was considered too coarse by the

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[24] James Hogg, "Memoir of the Life of James Hogg", p. LXVIII.
[25] Letter from Sir Walter Scott to Lady Charlotte Campbell, 12th December 1806, in *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott*, Vol. I, p. 328.
[26] Ibidem.
[27] Letter from Sir Walter Scott to John Murray, 1818, in *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott*, Vol. V, p. 140.

intellectuals and the people in Edinburgh and, most of all, his lack of "delicacy" in dealing, for instance, with subjects such as prostitution was considered unacceptable for an upper-class readership.

For this reason, his poetical success was not regarded positively and the other writers of the literary circle he was part of, that of the *Blackwood's Magazine*, tried to push him back into what they considered was his real place, that of the shepherd. This made him feel an outcast, someone who was not considered a shepherd by his local community nor a poet by the Edinburgh literary society, and in one of his many autobiographies he said about his condition: "No wonder that they should view an intruder, from the humble and despised ranks of the community, with a jealous and indignant eye, and impede his progress by every means in their power"[28].

By 1817, however, Hogg had become part of the important literary circle of Edinburgh associated to the publisher William Blackwood and his periodical *The Blackwood's Magazine*, even if Peter Garside has convincingly argued that Hogg's role for the creation and subsequent success of the magazine was far more significant than previously thought[29]. Hogg claimed in fact in his "Memoir" (1821) to have been "the beginner, and almost sole instigator of that celebrated work, BLACKWOOD'S MAGAZINE"[30], a declaration that was widely mocked by his contemporaries as well as by the successive critics of the period. In the same way it was mocked his other claim to have written *The Brownie of Bodsbeck* (1818) before Walter Scott's *Old Mortality* (1816) - which represented the same period although very differently - thus suggesting that the most important writer in Scotland had been influenced by the peasant poet, the Ettrick Shepherd[31].

[28] James Hogg, "Memoir of the Life of James Hogg", p. LXVIII.
[29] See Peter Garside, Introduction to *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, pp. XXXV-XXXVI.
[30] James Hogg, "Memoir of the Life of James Hogg", p. LXIII.
[31] See Ian Duncan & Douglas Mack, "Hogg, Galt, Scott and their Milieu", p. 219.

Yet the surviving documentary evidence seems to support Hogg's claims. In particular with regard to the *Blackwood's Magazine*, it is plausible that Blackwood asked for Hogg's advice because of his previous contributions to other magazines, as well as having published his own periodical *The Spy*, and also because of his contacts with other contributors that could have been interested in writing for the *Maga*, as the *Blackwood's Magazine* was also called. In fact, it would seem that it was Hogg himself who pushed Blackwood to enlist John Wilson and John Gibson Lockhart as contributors to the magazine, and that it was also him who provided its artistic momentum with the publication of the satirical *Chaldee Manuscript* about the rivalry between Blackwood's Tory magazine and Constable's Whig *Edinburgh Review*[32].

In any case, were these claims true or not, Hogg initially seemed to have found in the *Blackwood's Magazine* a place where to finally develop his talent and experiment with his writings, considering the innovation Blackwood was willing to bring to the Scottish publishing industry, but he met instead a strong opposition. Praising him only for his poems and natural genius, Blackwood declined publishing Hogg's new prose work, considered coarse and indelicate, and what was worse, Hogg began to receive anonymous ruthless attacks published on the same *Blackwood's Magazine*. This was an unexpected offence which made him temporarily break with Blackwood[33] and work instead for Constable's *The Edinburgh Magazine and Literary Miscellany* (1817-1826) despite Walter Scott's own attempt to downplay the offense: "MY DEAR HOGG,—I am very sorry to observe from the tenor of your letter that you have permitted the caricature in Blackwood's magazine to sit so near your feelings […]. No human being who has common sense can possibly think otherwise of you than he did before after reading all the tirade of extravagant ridicule with

[32] See Peter Garside, Introduction to *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, pp. XXXV-XXXVI.

[33] "If you really had it in your power to have repressed this piece of beastly depravity and did not do it I must consider you as worse than the worst assassin out of hell" – Letter from James Hogg to William Blackwood, 4th September 1821, *NLS*, MS 4007, Fol. 38.

which the article is filld—it is plain to me that the writer of the article neither thought of you as he has expressd himself nor expected or desired the reader to do so. He only wishd to give you momentary pain and were I you I would not let him see that in this he has succeeded […]. The public has shown their full sense of your original genius & I think this unjust aggression and extravagant affectation of depreciating you will make no impression upon their feelings"[34].

These attacks, he later discovered, had been written by two of his colleagues and supposed friends, John Wilson and John Gibson Lockhart, who was also Scott's son-in-law. The offence thus turned into an unexpected betrayal since Hogg had always deemed Wilson in particular as a dear friend, someone he could hardly stay away from and whom he trusted[35]. This attack apparently struck him so much that many have supposed to see in the figure of Gil-Martin, Wilson's own representation, who alongside Lockhart, Hogg had repeatedly described in his letters - although initially playfully - as "two devils"[36].

Furthermore, Wilson and Lockhart launched what would become Hogg's cross and delight throughout his life: the character of "the Ettrick Shepherd". In 1822, the cycle of the *Noctes Ambrosianae*, a series of imaginary colloquies that satirised on the literary and political life of Edinburgh, began to be published on the *Blackwood's Magazine*. These fictitious dialogues were mostly written by Wilson, but he would also publish some contributions as Hogg's own even though they were not through the character of "the Ettrick Shepherd", a coarse, outrageous and virile shepherd poet or, as they called him in the *Noctes*, a "boozing buffoon"[37].

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[34] Letter from Sir Walter Scott to James Hogg, 1821, in *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott*, Vol. XII, p. 446.
[35] See John Carey, Introduction to *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, pp. XVII-XVIII.
[36] "[A]s for the two devils, the thing is implanted in their very natures and I must bear it though I believe they have banished their too much loved society it may make me angry for an hour or two at a time but shall never make me admire or love them the less" – Letter from James Hogg to William Blackwood, 21st July 1818, *NLS*, MS 4003, Fol. 97.
[37] "Noctes Ambrosianae", *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, March 1831, No. LV.

Although initially Hogg must have been almost amused by this figure considering the playful tone of the *Noctes*, after a while people began to think that he was as depicted in the dialogues, and he thus personally experienced what it was like to lose one's own identity and agency in the presence of a double self as Robert does in the *Confessions*. This was then another severe attack for Hogg, but it is also true that this literary persona gained him lot of fame throughout Britain and its colonies, to such an extent that he later published his work as "James Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd".

However, willing to act more freely, Hogg decided to disentangle himself from the constrictions enforced by publishers, writers, and society, and this implied a detachment from Scott too. In fact, not only with regard to his conduct, but also with regard to his writings, Scott was a patronising figure for Hogg. From the publication of *Waverley* in 1814, Walter Scott had indeed become the protagonist of the literary scene of his period, as well as a model and patron for many writers, changing the rules of the literary marketplace by displacing poetry in favour of the novel - since then considered only a minor, feminine genre - and by establishing the trend of the historical fiction, which would become the leading genre of the period and contributed to the rise of Edinburgh as an eminent literary centre[38].

Initially the *Confessions* can appear as an historical novel in the fashion of Walter Scott's work since it takes place in a specific historical context and is concerned with important political and, most of all, religious issues of the time. Nonetheless, it immediately changes direction, revealing itself extremely distant from the typical historical novel proposed by Scott: first of all, the historical events are just hinted at and develop in the background of the principal story, whereas in Scott's novels history is the protagonist; there is not an external narrator who tells the story and gives a direction in the interpretation of the events; on the contrary, the novel proposes two different versions of the same story, of which one comes

[38] See Ian Duncan & Douglas Mack, "Hogg, Galt, Scott and their Milieu", p. 211.

directly from the protagonist; finally, there is a predominant presence of the supernatural which, however, was also in part present in Scott's own novels.

Considering then their literary and personal opposition, but also the admiration Hogg felt towards Scott, some critics have recognised in their relationship a similarity with that between Robert Wringhim and Gil-Martin in the *Confessions*, described as "not only a nightmarish sibling rivalry but bondage to a mysterious potentate who tenders the delusive promise of a glorious career"[39]. According to this view, as the mighty potentate Gil-Martin promised Robert a glorious life while in the meantime ruining it, so was Scott a powerful figure who, despite helping Hogg, tried at the same time to inhibit his literary ambitions.

Furthermore, a famous controversy occurred between Hogg and Scott after the latter's controversial depiction of Covenanters in *Old Mortality* (1816). Scottish society was, in fact, divided at the time between those who had welcomed Scotland's new role as part of the British Empire after the Act of Union of 1707, and those who feared an English colonisation and a subsequent loss of their language, history, and traditions. Whereas Scott immediately adjusted to the new situation and took advantage of it as an elite member of Scottish society, the rest of the population - and Hogg among them - continued to support Scotland's Presbyterian tradition and its principal defenders, the Covenanters, who were then reserved two opposing treatments in *Old Mortality* and the *Confessions* according to the two writers' different viewpoints. While Scott gave in *Old Mortality* an image of 17th-century Covenanters as extremely violent and fanatic, and so prone to making a revolution that would have threatened the social order and stability reached after the Act of Union, James Hogg in *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, despite describing a Presbyterian fanatic as a dangerous figure as Scott had done, he also allowed through Robert's own

[39] Ian Duncan, *Scott's Shadow*, p. 172.

narrative to see the humanity behind his fanaticism and thus to empathise with him as a fellow human being[40].

Despite their complicated relationship and controversies, Hogg would however always appreciate Scott, to the point that he wrote in the *Familiar Anecdotes of Sir Walter Scott* (1834) that "he was truly an extraordinary man; the greatest man in the world. What are kings or Emperors compared with him? Dust and sand!"[41]. But even in this case another controversy arose, this time between Hogg and Lockhart, Scott's official biographer and son-in-law. Probably annoyed by his writing an unauthorised biography, Lockhart harshly criticised Hogg's *Familiar Anecdotes of Sir Walter Scott* describing it as tactless and coarse in that he had reported some private events which, according to him, ridiculed both Scott and his wife. Such was his dislike of Hogg that in his own Scott's biography he described his death in these terms: "James Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd, must also be mentioned. He died on the 21st of November 1835; but it had been better for his fame had his end been of earlier date, for he did not follow his best benefactor until he had insulted his dust"[42]. Apparently offended by having been passed over by someone he considered only a peasant poet, Lockhart can be then almost considered the epitome of that Edinburgh society Hogg was never able to fully penetrate due to his manners and social background, and which always considered him a curious figure but never a real writer.

Nevertheless, despite his difficult relationship with the other writers, Hogg continued to work, even if occasionally, with Blackwood and his magazine throughout his life, but later considering the criticism and attacks he had received, he claimed: "Your taste and

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[40] See Ian Duncan & Douglas Mack, "Hogg, Galt, Scott and their Milieu", pp. 216-217, 220.

[41] James Hogg, *Memoir of the Author's Life, and Familiar Anecdotes of Sir Walter Scott*, p. 124

[42] John Gibson Lockhart, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott*, *Bart.*, Philadelphia: Carey, Lea & Blanchard, 1838, Vol. VII, p. 316.

imagination are exclusively your own, and therefore you should be ashamed either to laugh or cry, to abuse or to commend, at the fiat of any save your own taste and judgement"[43].

Funnily enough, Hogg's claim to artistic independency would be violated after his death when the original text of the *Confessions* suffered a severe bowdlerisation that erased the most important parts of the novel, mostly the theological ones, to adapt it to the taste of the Victorian public. Nowadays, instead, the novel is particularly appreciated exactly for the reasons why it was then rebuked: the criticism to religious fanaticism, the diabolical persecution, but also the empathy towards the protagonist, "the greatest wretch on whom was ever stamped the form of humanity" (p.189)[44], which are the elements that have gained the novel its well-deserved importance in literature**.**

1.4 Hogg's non-fictional works and the *Confessions*

Despite being better known for his poetical work and for his puzzling novel *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, James Hogg was also a contributor to some important magazines - most notably the *Blackwood's Magazine* – as well as the editor of his own periodical, *The Spy*. It is worth considering then for the purposes of this study some of his contributions, especially the ones to *The Spy* – given that these were surely his own whereas the real authority of the pieces on the *Blackwood's Magazine* is less certain - as well as another of his non-fictional work, *A Series of Lay Sermons* (1834). In fact, if in *The Spy* it is possible to recognise some early elements that Hogg would later examine in the *Confessions*, in *A Series of Lay Sermons*, published a year before his death and ten years

[43] James Hogg, *A Series of Lay Sermons on Good Principles and Good Breeding*, London: James Fraser Regent Street, 1834, Sermon X, p. 272.
[44] James Hogg, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, ed. Ian Duncan, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. This Oxford edition will be cited throughout this study.

after the novel, he expressed his own opinions about religion and rationalism, which are two pivotal components of the *Confessions*.

As we have seen, Hogg started publishing *The Spy* in 1810 after having recently moved to Edinburgh to start a literary career principally because he needed to profit financially from his writings. However, being still an unknown writer, initially no printer wanted to print his periodical, fearing that he would be unable to pay them, and only after long research James Robertson accepted to print the first 13 numbers of *The Spy*[45] which unexpectedly had quite a success.

The aim of *The Spy* was to give an impartial perspective, that of an outsider, on the society of Edinburgh, and would usually contain in a space of eight pages an essay and one or more poems. Most contributions were by Hogg himself, but the periodical distinguished itself also in having other contributors that were not from the upper class but people that usually worked as schoolteachers, printers, or were women writers[46]. However, the periodical appeared only for a year, from 1st September 1810 to 24th August 1811, and Hogg attributed its failure to the discovery of his authorship by "the learned, the enlightened, and polite circle of this flourishing metropolis, [who] disdained either to be amused or instructed by the ebullitions of humble genius"[47].

Composed of 52 issues, Hogg wrote over half of them, and there are in particular two pieces which are worth noticing for the purposes of this study: Number 1 and 48. Starting from the first issue of the periodical, "Spy's Account of Himself", the editor - who introduces himself as "Mr. Spy" - writes about his life and his intentions to give his opinion on the society of Edinburgh and, in particular, on its writers. While writing about his childhood and his experiences at school, he describes an interesting episode about his relationship with his

[45] See Gillian Hughes, Introduction to *The Spy*, ed. Gillian Hughes, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000, pp. XIX-XX.
[46] See Ian Duncan, *Scott's Shadow*, p. 156.
[47] James Hogg, "Spy's farewell to his readers", No 52, 24th August 1811, *The Spy*, ed. Gillian Hughes, p. 514.

teacher which resembles Gil-Martin's later attitude to mimic other people to the extent of assuming their "very same appearance and character" (*Confessions*, p. 95) just by contemplating them: "Our teacher was a man of peculiar manners, and I could not help regarding him often so earnestly, that I fell insensibly into a habit of imitating him in all his singular attitudes and distortions of feature. I had the same ridiculous loud ha, ha, of a laugh; the same shake in my walk, with my arms set akimbo, and my hat a little on one side; and even the same way of spitting, and adjusting my neckcloth". But while in the *Confessions* this ability is of a supernatural nature so that Gil-Martin effectively becomes the person he contemplates, in this anecdote all it brings for the boy is punishment from his teacher.

Even more interesting is what he later says about himself being a minute observer: "I am now become an observer so accurate, that by contemplating a person's features minutely, modelling my own after the same manner as nearly as possible, and putting my body into the same posture which seems most familiar to them, I can ascertain the compass of their minds and thoughts, to a few items, either on the one side or the other, - not precisely what they are thinking of at the time, but the way that they would think about any thing". This is interesting to notice because it closely resembles what Gil-Martin says to Robert about his "cameleon art" (p. 95) of changing his appearance: "If I contemplate a man's features seriously, mine own gradually assume the very same appearance and character. And what is more, by contemplating a face minutely, I not only attain the same likeness, but, with the likeness, I attain the very same ideas as well as the same mode of arranging them" (p.95). The similarity between the two passages is striking, and the first could be considered an embryonic interest in the figure of the double that Hogg would later problematically develop in the *Confessions*.

In "Evil Speaking Ridiculed by an Allegorical Dream" (No. 48) the editor reports instead the story of a man who goes to meet an illustrious philosopher, "Mr. A.T.", who initially seems to enlighten the man about the reality of the world he lives in. While he thinks to live

in the best of all possible worlds, considering the difficult situations his ancestors had had to tackle, this renown philosopher convinces him that the world is a spoiled place full of immoral people, and that even the ministers of the gospel are only "drunkards, wine bibbers, and friends of publican and sinners".

While listening to the philosopher's speech, the man falls asleep and has a very peculiar dream about a minister in the likeness of the philosopher Mr. A.T. turning into the Devil: "You know, Sir, there is an old Scotch proverb, that 'one had better dream of the deil than the minister'; but I dreamed of them both, and mixed them so completely together that they seemed to be one and the same person". The story then continues with the man trying to defend himself from the Devil with a punch to the face, the only problem being that that is only a dream and he actually hits the philosopher.

Besides the anecdote in itself, it is interesting to notice here the mixing of the figures of the minister and the Devil in the same person since also in the *Confessions* the Devil presents himself as a preacher to the community of Auchtermuchty, and Robert never fully sees, or does not want to see, the Devil in Gil-Martin mostly because he seems to be speaking reasonably and is utterly attuned to Robert's own religious ideas. How can he be the Devil, Robert and also Reverend Wringhim think, if he shares their own religious beliefs?

An answer to this question is later provided by the popular knowledge of the women of the little village of Auchtermuchty who, as a response to Scrape's defence of Robert in which he excluded any possibility of a friendship between his master and the Devil saying that "he's a strict believer in a' the truths o' Christianity, my master", they reply, "Sae was Satan. […] Sin' the Revolution that the gospel had turned sae rife, he had been often driven to the shift o' preaching it himsel, for the purpose o' getting some wrang tenets introduced into it, and thereby turning it into blasphemy and ridicule" (p. 147). What persuades Robert to believe in Gil-Martin's ideas is, in fact, the conviction of his being a wise and religious man, and not the Devil described by the women of the village as a man with "the cloven foot" (p.

152). However, what he later understands is that, whether the Devil or not, Gil-Martin is a "tormenting, intolerant, and bloody reformer" and that "the form of his counsels was somewhat equivocal, and if not double, they were amazingly crooked" (p. 153) .

Unlike Robert, the man of the story immediately understands that what the Devil/philosopher says, even if reasonable, cannot be right: the world cannot be made only of sinners, reprobates, and sin; there is also goodness and sympathy. Finally, he concludes his story reporting two different viewpoints about religion, the one proposed by the philosopher and the one proposed by a minister he knows: "It was impossible to be in his company [the minister's], without conceiving a higher opinion of the goodness of the Almighty, of his love and kindness towards his creatures, and of his wisdom displayed in the government of the universe. On the contrary, it is impossible to be long in the company of Mr. A.T. the philosopher, without conceiving that Being who is all goodness, to be a tyrant, who has created man, and woman in particular, for the sole purpose of working mischief, and then of being punished eternally for that very mischievous disposition which is an ingredient in the composition of their natures".

He then invites the readers to choose which one is, according to them, the right form of religion, and it is possible to notice in this passage the difference underlined in the *Confessions* between the religion proposed by Mr Blanchard, based on sympathy and forgiveness, and the perverse one proposed by both Reverend Wringhim and, to a further extent, Gil-Martin, namely an elitist religion that sees sin in every man, woman, and action, and creates a society that detaches itself as much as possible from the company of the ones it considers to be "damned".

Keeping on this subject, the true nature of religion is also a main topic of *A Series of Lay Sermons on Good Principles and Good Breeding* which, published ten years after the publication of the *Confessions* in 1834, is a series of eleven religious and moral sermons about different topics. Especially in Sermon VIII ("Virtue the Only Source of Happiness"),

Hogg harshly criticises those sectarians that have such a fundamental part in the story of the *Confessions*, saying: “It is piteous to hear certain sectarians preach and believe that there is no salvation to be had out of their own community. […] We are all flowers of the Almighty’s garden, and though of different hues, shall all bloom together with him in Paradise”.

Despite his clear disapproval of religion as proposed by sectarians, considered extreme and perverse in its ideology, it is interesting to notice that he does not approve the rationalism of the moral philosophers either. Throughout *A Series of Lay Sermons*, in fact, he repeatedly attacks the deists and the moral philosophers who, according to him, not only destroy the idea of faith in a religion by saying that it is based on ignorance and fear, but do not even propose a substitute for it. Hogg then - as we will also see in the *Confessions* - does not side with either of the two ideologies: he does not like the extremism proposed by the sectarians, but he does not approve the cold rationalism of the philosophers of the Enlightenment either.

In conclusion, it is impossible to say how much these elements really have a connection with the writing of the *Confessions*, but being his own work, we can certainly recognise in them some of his ideas and personal beliefs that he would later discuss in his enigmatic novel.

2 *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*

2.1 The historical and religious context of Scotland in the late 17th and early 18th centuries

The following account is based on the book The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism[48]

Despite being written in 1824, the *Confessions* is set in the time period between 1687, when the elder George Colwan succeeds to the Dalcastle estate, and 1712, when Robert kills himself. Historically, this had been a turbulent period for Scotland and some important events are hinted at in the novel, even though they are never given particular relevance but only stand in the background of the principal story.

The first historical event worth mentioning is the English Civil War, also known as the "Puritan Revolution", which occurred between 1642 and 1651, so a few decades before the story of the novel takes place. After the death of Queen Elizabeth I in 1603, her cousin King James VI of Scotland succeeded her to the throne becoming the first king of England, Scotland and Ireland as James I of England. The king's ambition was to unite the three kingdoms into a single one but the differences among them were immense, especially with regard to religion, which became one of the main issues of the civil war. Divided by different religions, namely Anglicanism in England, Catholicism in Ireland and Presbyterianism in Scotland, King James wanted, in fact, to unite the three kingdoms also through one uniform faith, that of the High Anglicanism, which was more Catholic than Protestant.

Of the same mind was his son and heir, King Charles I, who continued promoting the spread of High Anglicanism in spite of the reformed tendencies of many of his subjects, mostly Scottish, who requested instead a change in the Church of England, if not its dissolution, in favour of a more puritan one. However, this request was unacceptable to the

[48] Ed. John Coffey & Paul C.H. Lim, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

king since it would have meant renouncing to the bishops and priests through whom he wielded the power in the kingdom.

Moreover, after countless hostilities between King Charles I and the Parliament of England, he decided to dissolve it in 1629 and avoided calling it for a decade after that, a period which became known as “the personal rule of Charles I”. During this time, the king kept trying to impose High Anglicanism both in England and Scotland, but here he met strong resistance. When he tried to impose the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* with the assistance of Archbishop Laud, a violent protest took place in Scotland and the Scots decided to sign the National Covenant (1638), an agreement against the Anglican reforms wanted by King Charles I in which they pledged to defend the Kirk by any means necessary. Considered by the king as an act of rebellion, he tried to reassert his authority by force but, after some major defeats at the hands of the so called “Covenanters”, he was forced to sign a peace treaty, and the Covenanters took control of Scotland.

In the meantime, two opposite sides had emerged in the dispute on the governance of England: the “Royalists”, loyal to King Charles I, and the “Roundheads”, the mainly puritan supporters of the Parliament, guided by Oliver Cromwell. The rebellion in Scotland had been a deciding factor for the successive English Civil War since it had obliged the king to recall the parliament which began to pass many acts limiting his power, thus leading to a war between these two factions. The king was executed in 1649 for high treason and a republic known as the “Commonwealth of England” was declared under the guidance of Cromwell, which lasted until the Restoration of 1660.

Although the English Civil War is pivotal for the understanding of the division that exists between the Colwans and the Wringhims regarding their political and religious beliefs, the first historical event that chronologically occurs during the *Confessions* is the Glorious Revolution of 1688-9, which notably saw the deposition of the last of the Stuarts, James II and VII, and his replacement by William III of Orange and his wife Mary II. This event

exacerbated the hostility between the two factions of Tories - also known as “Cavaliers”, “Jacobites”, or “Royalists”- loyal to the Stuarts, and Whigs - or “Puritans”, or “Covenanters”- supporters of the supremacy of Parliament and of a Presbyterian Church, and this conflict is exemplified in the novel in the opposition between George Colwan senior and his son, who stand for the Tories, and Reverend Wringhim and Robert, who obviously side with the revolutionary Whigs[49].

Nonetheless, the real conflict between the two brothers, and so between the two factions, occurs during another important historical event that took place in the period in which the novel is set, that is the Parliamentary Session of 1703 in Edinburgh. During this session, the English and Scottish parliaments discussed the conditions of a possible union that eventually became effective in 1707 with the Act of Union, and Hogg makes George Colwan senior and his son George, as well as Reverend Wringhim and Robert, participate in it. However, the parliamentary session is merely glossed over and the real tension between the two brothers and their respective factions breaks out later in a chaotic and absurd scene in which Tories and Whigs fight each other without even knowing the reason or who they are actually attacking. Neither the plot nor the historical events then reach a synthesis, since, as argued by Ian Duncan, “politically, as at other levels, ‘union’ remains an impossible condition in Hogg’s text”[50].

Despite the great significance these events had in the history of England and Scotland, the most important aspect worth considering for the purposes of this study is the religious situation of Scotland at the time of Robert Wringhim’s life. As mentioned above, Scotland established a predominantly Calvinist church - also known as the Kirk - in the wake of the wider context of the Protestant reformations that were occurring in Europe since the 16th

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[49] See Enrica Villari, Introduction to *Confessioni di un Peccatore Eletto*, Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1995, pp. XII-XIII.

[50] Ian Duncan, Introduction to *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, ed. Ian Duncan, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, p. XXVI.

century. In particular, John Calvin (1509-1564), one of the pivotal representatives of the Protestant Reformation, had proposed since 1517 his own concept of a reformed Church that is now known as “Calvinism”.

Calvin’s purpose was to organise a Church that would create a community of “elect” composed of those who God had chosen as His people in the world. The central principle of Calvinism is, in fact, the theory of predestination according to which everything is predetermined by God who has chosen from the beginning who will be saved and is thus an “elect”, and who will be damned. This means that no human action has importance because everything is under the authority of God and it would be blasphemous to believe that any of our actions could influence God’s decisions; for this reason, all that man can do is to submit to His will.

According to this belief, man has no free will, he cannot decide to be either good or evil and so punished for his bad actions and rewarded for his good ones, as it is instead for Catholicism; on the contrary, his actions are merely the ones that God wants him to perform. Good actions can be then considered the signs of a divine favour whereas the bad ones are the proof that a person is out of grace. For this reason, even though the absence of free will could have rendered people passive, it actually made them want to act at their best to prove that they were in the grace of God. Furthermore, the elect are chosen by God only according to His grace and for this reason they can never fall out of it. Calvinism is then founded on five points:

- Total depravity: man is so corrupted by sin that everything he does is inevitably invalidated by it.
- Unconditional election: God has predestined from eternity the people who will receive His grace - the elect - and those who will be damned, without considering their deeds.

- Limited atonement: Jesus Christ sacrificed Himself and obtained grace only for those people that God had chosen as the elect.
- Irresistible grace: the elect are granted salvation and cannot fall out of grace.
- Perseverance of the saints: the elect will do good works and believe in God until the end of their life.

Calvinism was introduced in Scotland by John Knox (1505 or 1513/14 – 1572), who had embraced it in the 1550s while in Geneva. Upon returning to Scotland, he was one of the main contributors to "The Scots Confession" - a Confession of Faith that declared Calvinism the state religion and abolished the papal jurisdiction - which was eventually approved in 1560 by the Parliament of Scotland. The Kirk had then come out of this period of Protestant reformations thoroughly reformed, unlike other countries, and in particular England.

During the 16th and 17th centuries a religious movement influenced by Calvinism had in fact taken shape within the Church of England as well: Puritanism. Puritans, as discussed above, wanted to reform the Church of England, considered too Catholic, in favour of a more Calvinist one. As Calvinists, they were particularly interested in personal salvation and argued that everything happened according to God's will and so, also in this case, people were divided between elect and damned. To prove themselves to be elect and to reduce the acute anxiety that this doubt caused them, in their daily life Puritans would behave at the best of their possibilities to show that their actions were a sign of God's grace.

Their attempt to reform the Church of England failed, however, and many Puritans had to flee to North America to avoid persecution. This rejection of Puritanism maintained the Church of England more moderate if compared to the Kirk, and this can be considered one of the reasons why some religious sects developed more easily in Scotland, and among them one which is particularly worth noticing for the purposes of this study being the sect the Wringhims are members of: Antinomianism.

"Antinomianism" literally means "against or opposed to the law" and was used by Martin Luther (1483-1546) to polemically describe this new doctrine introduced by Johannes Agricola (1494-1566) who argued that the principle of salvation by faith and divine grace alone implied that the elect are not bound to the moral law. This does not mean, however, that they can behave immorally, but that their obedience to the law is motivated only by their faith[51]. Antinomians would then reject any kind of law since, if elect, none of their actions would imperil their salvation according to the principle of the "irresistible grace", whereas, if damned, they could do nothing to be saved.

The antinomian belief was based on the distinction between the "Covenant of Works" and the "Covenant of Grace": the first covenant had been established between God and Adam - the representative of all human beings - and declared that man would have been granted eternal life if he did not violate God's only commandment; however, Adam's transgression broke the covenant, and man's works ceased to be meritorious in the eyes of God. He then made a new covenant with Christ, which promised eternal life to all the people who would have faith in Him who had sacrificed Himself to obtain grace for them.

Antinomianism is then based on a disjunction between the two covenants of works and grace in favour of the latter[52], and is thus described in *A Dictionary of All Religions* (1704): "Antinomians, a sort of Christian hereticks, so denominated for rejecting the law, as a thing of no use under the gospel dispensation: they say that good works do not further, nor evil works hinder salvation; that the child of God cannot sin, that God never chastiseth them, nor punisheth any land for their sin, that murder, adultery, drunkenness, etc., are sins in the wicked but not in them, that the child of grace, being once assured of salvation, afterwards never doubteth, that no man should be troubled in conscience for sin"[53].

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[51] See David D. Hall, *The Antinomian Controversy, 1636-1638: A Documentary History*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1990, p. 3.
[52] See ibid, pp. 17-18.
[53] *A Dictionary of All Religions, Ancient and Modern*, London: James Knapton, 1704.

For its extremism, Antinomianism was considered a calumny by Calvin himself and declared heretical by the Church of Scotland for its misinterpretation and misapplication of the Scriptures, which is exactly the sort of perverse theology Reverend Wringhim and Lady Dalcastle indoctrinate Robert with, and the one Gil-Martin draws on in order to convince him that all his misdeeds are for a better cause and that, being an elect, he cannot be possibly acting wrong. As Robert's own mother asserts: "How delightful to think that a justified person can do no wrong!" (p.13).

The *Confessions* can be thus read, among other things, as a criticism and a satire of extreme Calvinism, following the Scottish Enlightenment idea of the dangers of "enthusiasm", as argued in particular by Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury (1671-1713). Shaftesbury was particularly interested in understanding why in the 17th century there had been such a surge in the formation of religious sects, and found a reason in the fact that the Church of England had been unable to control the many faiths that were arising after the ideological and religious ideas proposed by John Calvin. Furthermore, he figured out that the emergence of different sects instead of a singular new faith had depended on the fact that each of them had so much enthusiasm for what they believed in that they thought their own vision was the only right one.

According to Shaftesbury, this kind of enthusiasm was extremely dangerous because it urged people to create small societies made only of members of the same faith that were, and wanted to be, totally detached from the rest of society[54]. And this is exactly what we can see in the *Confessions,* where Lady Dalcastle first detaches herself from the rest of society, and in particular from the Laird of Dalcastle who "dared to doubt of the great standard doctrine of absolute predestination" (p.12), and is for this reason considered "a limb of Antichrist" (p.12), and then finds a companion only in Reverend Wringhim, with whom she

[54] See Anthony Ashley Cooper (3rd Earl of Shaftesbury), *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, London: John Darby in Bartholomew-Close, 1714.

talks of the “different kinds of faith” (p.13) and “whose righteousness consists in splitting the doctrines of Calvin into thousands of undistinguishable films” (p.15). Robert is then made to grow up into this little society made of enthusiasts and supposed elect, and is thus always described as a gloomy, friendless young man, extremely concerned about his and others’ state of grace. A concern which will influence his vision of the world and the Colwans to very sad outcomes.

2.2 Plot

The story begins with the marriage in 1687 of George Colwan, a jolly, wealthy man who has recently succeeded his uncle in the lands of Dalcastle, and Rabina Orde, a gloomy, strictly religious woman who immediately despises her husband because of his disregard of religion. Already on their wedding night, Rabina insists that they both pray but the Lord of Dalcastle repeatedly refuses and falls asleep, thus leaving his wife in utter desperation. Feeling neglected and despising her husband, Rabina goes back to her father who, instead of pretending justice for what she considers a disrespectful behaviour from her husband, beats her and locks her up in a chamber until the Laird of Dalcastle rescues her.

Once back, the two decide to live separately under the same roof so that each has “a separate door, a separate stair, a separate garden” (p. 12), and is free to meet whoever s/he likes. The Laird of Dalcastle then finds a mistress in Miss Arabella Logan, whereas Lady Dalcastle continuously encounters her spiritual adviser, Reverend Robert Wringhim, with whom she has long conversations about religion, even though it is implied that their relationship may be also of another nature.

Despite her annoyance towards her husband, Lady Dalcastle is deeply disturbed by the presence of Miss Logan in the house as the Laird’s mistress and eventually gives birth to a son who is acknowledge by the Laird as his own and given his same name, George Colwan.

A year later she delivers another son but this time the Laird does not acknowledge him, so he is eventually named after Reverend Wringhim, who becomes his surrogate father – and it is also strongly implied that he may be his natural father too. It is decided that the two boys must never meet and are then raised in two different places: George is brought up by the Laird and Miss Logan, and is an amiable, charming boy; Robert, on the other hand, is brought up by Lady Dalcastle and Reverend Wringhim, two radical antinomians who instil in him since his childhood the perverse doctrine of unconditional election alongside a deep hatred towards his other family, the Colwans, who are made to appear as reprobate and, for this reason, damned.

The two brothers finally meet as young men in Edinburgh on occasion of the Parliamentary Session of 1703 where, even in this case, they represent two opposite sides: the Laird of Dalcastle and his son George stand for the Tory party, whereas Reverend Wringhim and Robert support the Whig faction, "blowing the coal of revolutionary principles" (p. 18). One day, Robert sees his brother playing in a tennis match and does everything to disturb him and his friends, but he is not recognised by George as his brother, who takes him instead "for some impertinent student of divinity […], a lad with black clothes, and a methodistical face, whose countenance and eye he disliked exceedingly" (p. 19).

From that day on, Robert stalks George everywhere he goes and, in a successive tennis match, he annoys his brother so much that George eventually hits him in the face with a racket "rather slightly, but so that his mouth and nose gushed out blood" (p. 21), and finds out from a stranger that Robert is his own brother. Being an amiable man, George offers his apologies to Robert, who responds with a kick instead, and tries that same night to follow him into the tavern where he is dining with his friends. The landlord prevents him from entering and has him arrested, so that Reverend Wringhim has to get him out.

Once released, Robert tells his own very biased version of the story to a group of Whigs and, being Edinburgh in that moment a powder keg where everyone "wanted only a ready-blown coal to set the mountain on fire" (p. 23), a conflict takes place between the two factions. The matter is taken to court and Reverend Wringhim does all he can "to inflame both judges and populace against the young Cavaliers, especially against the young Laird of Dalcastle" (p. 27) and, even though this has no legal consequences for George, "the populace retired to their homes impressed with no very favourable opinion of either the Laird of Dalcastle or his son George" (p.27). From this moment on, George feels that he is no longer esteemed by the populace and, being also continuously persecuted by Robert, decides to seclude himself.

After some time, George makes the resolution that he has to try to talk and reconcile with his brother, but Robert seems to have disappeared. He is incredibly relieved by this and decides to make an excursion to the top of Arthur's Seat. Here he feels in complete harmony with nature until "the idea of his brother's dark and malevolent looks" (p. 34) comes into his mind and he sees, to his great amazement, Robert's features into the cloud in front of him, "twenty times the natural size" (p. 34). Horrified by the vision, George flees but runs into Robert with whom he starts a fight until he begs him to spare his life. George asks him how he could know where he was and Robert answers that a friend had told him, without revealing his name. George releases him but is still deeply disturbed by the vision he has had on the hill and talks about it with his friend Adam Gordon who tries to give a rational explanation of the event that does not fully convince George.

In the meantime, after the fight with his brother on the hill, Robert goes back home and tells Reverend Wringhim of George's attack that had, according to him, "very near murdered him" (p. 38). George is arrested but soon after released when it comes out that it was actually Robert who had stalked him all the time and that, most certainly, wanted to kill his brother pushing him headlong from the cliff. To celebrate his release, George and his friends go

drinking, but he has a little quarrel with his friend Thomas Drummond, who decides to leave. Not long after, someone knocks at the door asking for George, who goes out assuming, as the rest of the company, it is Drummond.

George is found dead the next morning, having been stabbed, and all the accusations obviously fall on Drummond who has to flee the country to hide from authorities. The Laird of Dalcastle is destroyed by the news and dies shortly afterwards. Robert comes then into possession of the estate and moves there with his mother, forcing out Miss Logan, who suspects the Wringhims have something to do with George's murder.

Returning home one evening, Miss Logan finds her house upside down and many items stolen, so a few days later she is asked to go to town to survey some articles that have been found. Once there, she is accosted by a young girl who brings her to prison to talk with a woman whose life, she says, is in her hands. There she meets Bell Calvert who asks Miss Logan not to recognise the items as hers so that she will be released and her items returned. Miss Logan does not accept at first but is highly interested in Bell Calvert since she seems to know something about George's murder. At the trial, first the maid Bessy Gillies, and then Miss Logan herself, testify in favour of Bell Calvert and she is released.

To show her gratitude, Bell Calvert decides to tell Miss Logan all she knows about George's murder. She begins by telling the story of her unfortunate life made of wrong men, poverty, and shame, which has obliged her to become a prostitute. The night of the murder she had seen a group of men and, hoping to find a customer, she had followed them and had easily found one in Thomas Drummond whom, however, having been told by Bell of her sad life and situation, had decided to leave. While he was going away, another man had rushed in and gone with her into the apartment, from where she saw a shocking scene: while Drummond was going one way, she saw coming from the opposite side two men, of which one looked exactly like Drummond although she knew he could not be him, since he had gone another way.

The two men have a discussion, and the one looking like Drummond finally knocks at a door asking for George Colwan. George is drunk but is incited to fight the man whom, at one point, calls the other man who had been hiding in the shadows and gives George two deadly wounds in the back. Bell and his companion see the whole scene and yell at them, but the pair run away in the dark. Miss Logan recognises in the man in black Robert Wringhim and asks Bell to help her bringing him to justice for what he has done.

The two women decide to go to the Dalcastle estate where they see Robert walking arm in arm with another man who looks exactly like the deceased George. They are both shocked by the vision being sure that George is dead and thus decide to investigate further. They go again to Dalcastle and see the two men walking, so they hide in a thicket. The one looking like George seems to know they are there and walks with Robert in front of the thicket making him confess all he has done. During his confession, Robert also admits that he would like to punish Miss Logan, so the other man points out the place where she is hiding.

Robert seizes her but Bell manages to stop him, and the two women accuse him of having murdered George. They go back to Edinburgh where they report Robert to the authorities but, once they go to Dalcastle to arrest him, neither Robert nor his mother are to be found. This is the conclusion of the Editor's narrative, who finally declares that "an original document of a most singular nature" (p. 71) is going to be presented for the readers to peruse without his intervention.

Here the "Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Sinner: Written by Himself" begins. Robert starts telling his own story from the beginning, when he was born "an outcast in the world" (p. 75), disclaimed by the man he considers to be his real father, the Laird of Dalcastle, and found another one in Reverend Wringhim. Robert is very much concerned about his state of grace and, not knowing if he is one of the elect or not, despite praying fervently, he sins continuously. Some of his sins are discovered by Reverend Wringhim's man, John Barnet, with whom Robert has a lively discussion in which he suggests that Robert

is actually the Reverend's natural son. Irritated by his behaviour, Robert tells the Reverend about John's allusion, which angers him very much, so that he decides to confront him. Despite the Reverend's threat to dismiss him, John claims his right to think and say what he likes and resigns.

Robert then narrates of a boy at school who was better than him in every field, whose name was M'Gill. Envious of his superiority, Robert does everything to get M'Gill into trouble; he manages to have him leave school due to some drawings, and they eventually have a fight that is brought to an end by the same John Barnet.

Besides these episodes, Robert does not remember much about his early years, and so moves to what he considers the most important period of his existence. In fact, on the 25th of March 1704, on his eighteenth birthday, Reverend Wringhim announces to Robert that he is now part of "the community of the just upon earth" (p. 88). Robert is speechless and exultant about his new condition, being now free from all sins and unable to fall out of grace, and goes into the fields to celebrate. While there, he sees a young man walking towards him; he tries to shun him at first, but feels "a sort of invisible power […], something like the force of enchantment" (p. 89) that makes him want to meet the stranger. As they come closer, Robert sees, to his great astonishment, that the young boy looks exactly like him. Flattered by his words, he spends the rest of the day with the stranger who seems to be perfectly attuned to all of his beliefs. Already while returning home, however, he feels with a little trembling that this man is going to influence the rest of his life and that he will hardly get rid of him.

Once at home, both his mother and the Reverend see something different in him and ask him with whom he had been the whole day, afraid he might have met the Devil. Robert reassures them describing his new friend rather as "an angel of light" (p. 92) but, to be sure about his identity, the Reverend asks: "Did this stranger, with whom you met, adhere to the

religious principles in which I have educated you?” (p. 93), to which Robert answers in the affirmative. The Reverend is thus convinced that the stranger cannot be a wicked person.

The next day, Reverend Wringhim blesses Robert with a dangerous discourse about the importance of being a weapon into the Lord’s hands in order to destroy sinners. Robert is very much impressed by his words and decides that the purpose of his life is to cut off sinners from the world. During the successive months, Robert continues meeting the stranger whom instil in his mind a perverse interpretation of the infallibility of the elect and the preordination of all things, convincing him that Christ’s atonement has provided the salvation of all the elect, no matter their sins. Robert is often unconvinced by the stranger’s reasoning but always falls prey to his eloquence. Reverend Wringhim and Lady Dalcastle are worried about this exclusive friendship and point out to Robert that, after all this time, he does not even know the name of the stranger. When the two meet again, the young man says that his name is Gil-Martin and that he has no parents save one, whom he does not acknowledge.

One day they run into Mr Blanchard, “a worthy, pious divine” (p. 99), and an immediate antipathy arises between him and Gil-Martin. The minister explains to Robert that his friend is a dangerous person and that his religious ideas have been taken to a dreadful extreme. After parting with Mr Blanchard, however, it is Gil-Martin who talks ill of the minister and convinces Robert that they have to kill him. He is utterly shocked by this suggestion but, as usual, through his reasoning, Gil-Martin is able to show his resolution as the right thing to do if they want to cut off sinners from the world, saying: “If the man Blanchard is worthy, he is only changing his situation for a better one; and if unworthy, it is better that one fall, than that a thousand souls perish” (p. 102).

The next morning, the two wait for Mr Blanchard to pass by while they are hiding behind a bush but, when the time comes, Robert does not have the courage to shoot, so Gil-Martin intervenes wounding the minister and Robert eventually kills him. They run away, but Gil-

Martin, in the shape of a young preacher, passes in front of some men holding two pistols, so the preacher is unjustly charged with the murder of Mr Blanchard.

After this first episode, Gil-Martin says to Robert that he must kill his reprobate father and brother. Again, he refuses at first but is eventually convinced of the righteousness of his actions. Here Robert recounts the story the Editor has already told in his narrative, so the first time he meets George, the persecution of his brother, his arrest, but all from his viewpoint. After being released, Robert is incited by Gil-Martin to continue his persecution of George until one day he is seized with a strange distemper that makes him conceive himself to be two people, George and Gil-Martin. He is then confined for a month but understands that his brother is still being persecuted by someone that looks like him.

Once recovered, he meets Gil-Martin, that we now understand is the one who tells Robert of George's plan to go to Arthur's Seat. Robert follows George up the mountain to kill him but, while climbing, his resolutions abandon him, and he sees "a lady, robbed in white" (p. 119) who tells him to go home and save his soul. Gil-Martin intervenes and Robert decides to go on with his resolution but, when the time comes, he is not able to kill his brother. In the meantime, George sees Robert's figure in a cloud and runs away clashing into him, with whom he has a fight. As we already know from the Editor's narrative, George releases Robert but the case is taken to court where Robert is considered guilty of having persecuted his brother.

Nonetheless, Gil-Martin devises another plan to kill George and, in the likeness of Thomas Drummond and with the help of Robert, they eventually murder him. The Laird of Dalcastle dies too, but of grief, and Robert inherits his possessions. Despite being pleased by his new situation, Robert becomes distressed when a woman accuses him of having corrupted her daughter and a lawyer claims he has signed some documents according to which this woman's lands are now his. Robert says he knows nothing of all this and feels

like his identity has been stolen. He has no recollection of what happens “one-half, or two-thirds of my time” (p. 137) and even the presence of Gil-Martin has become irksome to him.

One day he receives the visit of Reverend Wringhim, who brings him some joy and has an interesting conversation with Gil-Martin about their religious principles which “tallied in every point” (p. 138). The next day he wakes from a profound sleep and finds a new servant instead of his former one, a man named Samuel Scrape. To Robert’s great astonishment, Scrape tells him that the former servant had died six months before and that Robert himself had hired him; moreover, in the meantime both his mother and Gil-Martin have disappeared. Robert is relieved by Gil-Martin’s disappearance but this does not last long; after a while, the two meet again and Gil-Martin informs Robert that he is accused of having murdered both his mother and the young lady he had supposedly seduced. Robert denies everything and decides to seclude himself, but still he is accused of deeds of which he declares himself to be totally ignorant. His sole companion is now his servant Scrape, who tells him that everyone thinks he is friend to the Devil and narrates an interesting story about a man who was able to recognise the Devil in the likeness of a preacher, thus saving the people of the village of Auchtermuchty. Robert cannot believe Scrape is alluding to the fact that Gil-Martin can actually be the Devil even though he admits that his counsels had always been “equivocal, and if not double, they were amazingly crooked” (p. 153).

“On the first of June 1712” (p. 153), a mob seeking for justice goes towards Dalcastle after the bodies of Robert’s mother and the young lady are discovered by Gil-Martin. Robert does not know what to do until the same Gil-Martin enters the room; they have a little discussion but he eventually provides Robert a disguise that enables him to escape. Penniless, he goes looking for shelter: the first night he finds one in the house of a weaver, but he and his wife send him away the day after suspecting he has something to do with the murders. He then goes towards Edinburgh and finds a new place to share with a man named Linton who works for the printing house of Mr James Watson where Robert gets a job too.

There he asks his employer to print his own work, telling him it is a religious parable such as *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

Here the story takes the form of a diary: Robert's journal is lost once Gil-Martin goes to the printing house and Mr Watson finds out what is actually written in it, consigning it to the flames. He flees first to a yeoman's house, then finds refuge in an inn, and is finally hosted by a hind and later by a farmer who also engages him as a shepherd, but everywhere he goes he is haunted by some evil demons. Persecuted by both Gil-Martin and these demons, Robert decides that the only way to free himself from them is to commit suicide, and with this decision his memoirs end.

The Editor resumes his narrative and publishes the extract "from an authentic letter, published in *Blackwood's Magazine for August*, 1823" (p. 179) about the exhumation of a suicide. The man is supposed to have hanged himself but the rope was so brittle that the local people cannot believe he managed to do it if not with the assistance of the Devil; moreover, a driver that was passing by could give his word he had seen two people circling around the rope.

Two young men decide to open the grave and find the corpse, as well as the rest, "all as fresh as that day it was laid in!" (p. 181), so they cut off some portions of his clothes and distribute them around as curiosities. Here the Editor tells us that this letter has been written by a man named James Hogg and that he had been so fascinated by the story that he had decided to investigate further.

He journeys to visit a friend, Mr L——t of C——d, and they go looking for Hogg alongside Mr L——w. Once they find Hogg, however, he refuses to accompany them to the grave and they look for another guide. They reach the spot and find out that what had been dug up is now in tatters; even the skull is not complete but damaged by a spade. However, everything that is in the part of the grave that had not been opened is in perfect condition. In particular, they find "a leathern case" (p. 187) which, to their great astonishment, contains "a *printed*

pamphlet" (p. 187). They attribute to it the perfect preservation of the body and the other items, and the Editor eventually decides to publish it, even though he dares not venture a judgment with regard to it.

However, this is more an intention than a matter of fact because, immediately afterwards, even if he admits that some events may have occurred as described, he says that "it is certainly impossible that these scenes could ever have occurred" (p. 188) and that he accounts "all the rest either dreaming or madness; or, as he says to Mr Watson, a religious parable" (p. 188). In any case, he ends considering this story unconceivable for the present (enlightened) generation, and describes Robert as "not only the greatest fool, but the greatest wretch, on whom was ever stamped the form of humanity" (p. 189), who thus "consigned his memory and his name to everlasting detestation" (p. 189).

2.3 Characters

The novel mainly revolves around Robert Wringhim and the ambiguous Gil-Martin, but even the minor characters are worth analysing for the purposes of this study in order to fully comprehend the opposing viewpoints proposed in the novel. Therefore, I provide here an almost complete list of the characters that appear in the *Confessions*.

George Colwan senior is the new Laird of Dalcastle when the novel begins. He is a jolly, wealthy, and not particularly religious man, as well as a Tory Member of Parliament, who marries a zealously religious woman, Rabina Orde. Despite their immediate and mutual antipathy, they have two sons, but George acknowledges only the first-born, George Colwan. He raises him with the help of his mistress, Miss Arabella Logan, and dies of sorrow shortly after George's murder.

Rabina Orde, later Lady Dalcastle, is a strict religious woman who is married to the rich George Colwan senior. They have opposing opinions about religion, and after some attempts

to convert him, she eventually chooses to spend her time with her spiritual adviser Reverend Robert Wringhim. However, she supposedly has two sons with the Laird of Dalcastle but raises only the second child, whom she names after the Reverend (and possible real father), Robert Wringhim. She goes missing and is found dead, probably murdered by Robert/Gil-Martin.

Reverend Robert Wringhim is the spiritual adviser and personal confidant of Lady Dalcastle. He is a strict antinomian and inculcates into Robert's mind (who is alluded is his son) a perverse interpretation of predestination and the infallibility of the elect. He is the one who announces to Robert he is part of the community of the elect, but cannot recognise the danger he is into when he befriends Gil-Martin.

George Colwan is the first-born son of the Laird and Lady Dalcastle. He is raised by his father and Miss Arabella Logan and turns into an amiable, well-mannered young man. His ruin begins the day he meets his brother, Robert Wringhim, who persecutes and obliges him to seclude himself. He is eventually killed by Robert and Gil-Martin, but the fault falls on his friend Thomas Drummond.

Robert Wringhim is the second son of George Colwan senior and Lady Dalcastle, even though it is alluded Reverend Wringhim may actually be his father. He is not acknowledged by the Laird of Dalcastle and is thus raised by the Reverend and Lady Dalcastle who, since his childhood, instil into his mind a perverse interpretation of predestination and the infallibility of the elect. He thus becomes a gloomy, fanatically religious young man, who is extremely concerned about his and other people's sins, and about his state of grace. Having found out he is one of the elect, he befriends the mysterious Gil-Martin, who convinces him to commit murders in order to free the world of sinners. Even though he sometimes questions the righteousness of Gil-Martin's theology, he kills a minister, his own brother George, and probably his mother and a young lady. He tries to escape Gil-Martin and the other demons that persecute him, but eventually finds a way out only in suicide.

Gil-Martin is the most puzzling character of the novel. He is supposed to be the Devil or a figment of Robert's deranged mind who persuades him through his reasonings and flattering words to cut out sinners from the world. He is, moreover, a shape-shifter who can assume other people's likeness as well as understand their innermost thoughts. He convinces Robert to kill Mr Blanchard and later his own brother George, and probably usurps his agency to commit other crimes and deeds Robert knows nothing about. He persecutes and finally persuades Robert to kill himself. With regard to his name, "gille-martuinn" means "fox" in Gaelic, so it is probably a reference to his wiliness.

Miss Arabella Logan is the mistress of the Laird of Dalcastle and a mother to George Colwan. After George's murder and the Laird's death, she is convinced the Wringhims have something to do with the assassination and decides to investigate further with the help of Bell Calvert. The two women obtain the proof they need to charge Robert with the murder of his brother, but he disappears.

Bell Calvert is a prostitute who witnesses George's murder by the hands of Robert and Gil-Martin. She is as shocked as Miss Logan when they see Robert walking arm in arm with his deceased brother George (who is actually Gil-Martin) to the point of questioning her own senses, but eventually has a fundamental role in finding out the truth about the assassination.

Thomas Drummond is a friend of George who is wrongly accused of his murder. Gil-Martin takes his appearance to commit the assassination, but Bell Calvert is a witness to his innocence. He has to flee the country to avoid the charge, and eventually dies during a Jacobite rising.

Mr Blanchard is a worthy minister who fosters a religion based on sympathy and moderation. He has an immediate antipathy for Gil-Martin and warns Robert about the dangers of his perverse theology. Gil-Martin in turn convinces Robert that Mr Blanchard is a blasphemous man who has to be killed. He is the first person Robert kills with the help of Gil-Martin, but a young preacher is charged in their place.

Adam Gordon is a friend of George to whom he confides his fears after he has seen his brother's figure appearing in a cloud on the top of Arthur's Seat. Adam is the voice of the Enlightenment since he tries to give a rational explanation to an apparently supernatural event.

John Barnet is Reverend Wringhim's man. He freely displays his disdain for Robert and tells him Reverend Wringhim is his natural father. He is confronted by the Reverend but claims his right to think and speak freely, eventually quitting his job.

Samuel Scrape is Robert's new servant, apparently hired by him during the six months he has no recollection of. Samuel is a humble, loyal man, and Robert's sole companion for a while. He tells him people think he is friend with the Devil, and eventually warns him when an angry mob goes towards the estate after the bodies of Lady Dalcastle and the young lady are found.

Bessy Gillies is Miss Logan's maid. She testifies at court for the case of the stolen items Bell Calvert is charged with. She amazes everyone with her answers that show great sharpness and sympathy towards a woman who has acted out of distress.

M'Gill is one of Robert's classmates. He is very clever and is better than Robert in every field. For this reason, Robert does everything he can to discredit him in front of their teacher and succeeds in his intent, which can be considered an early sign of Robert's pride and feeling of superiority. Moreover, the name M'Gill eerily resembles the name Gil-Martin, perhaps signalling their disturbing pre-eminence on Robert which he both admires and despises[55].

The weaver and his wife give Robert a shelter the first night after he has left the Dalcastle estate. Even if the weaver is immediately suspicious of Robert, his wife shows great

[55] See Karl Miller, *Doubles: Studies in Literary History*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987, p. 8.

sympathy towards him and convinces her husband to host him. Robert himself is struck by her sympathy and simplicity.

The farmer is another minor character who shows sympathy towards Robert and decides to engage him as a shepherd even though it is evident he does not know how to properly herd a cattle.

The Editor appears as a character in the second part of his narrative. He says he was intrigued by a letter published by James Hogg on the *Blackwood's Magazine* about the incredible preservation of the body of a suicide. He investigates the matter with two friends and visits the grave where he finds Robert's memoirs and eventually publishes them.

James Hogg is a shepherd and the author of the letter published on the *Blackwood's Magazine* about the suicide. When the Editor and his friends ask for his help to find the grave, he refuses saying that selling sheep is more important. It is interesting that Hogg decided to depict himself as a shepherd who does not want to be involved in the story, most of all if we consider that the novel was published anonymously.

Mr L——t of C——d and Mr L——w are two friends of the Editor who help him in his investigation. Under these concealed names critics have recognised John Gibson Lockhart of Chiefswood, a Scottish writer and former friend of Hogg, and William Laidlaw, a mutual friend of Hogg and Scott.

2.4 Structure

The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner lies within the Gothic and prominently Scottish tradition of the "found manuscript" that can be traced back to the publication of James Macpherson's Ossian poems in 1761 and had since then become a trope in many novels. The core of the novel, Robert's "Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Sinner", is in fact presented as an authentic manuscript from the previous century found by

the Editor in the grave of a suicide, which he decides to edit for its singularity. The *Confessions* is thus divided into three parts: the first and the last parts consist of "The Editor's Narrative", where the enlightened Editor provides what he considers to be the "objective" story of Robert Wringhim drawing on historical sources and tradition, as well as reporting the account of his discovery of the manuscript; the second and central part, "The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Sinner", provides instead Robert's first-person narrative of his story.

Even though the presence of two narrators was not unusual at the time, what is singular about this narrative is that they both tell the same story, and in the same chronological order, so that one version does not give any further information about the other and vice versa[56], save Robert's telling of his escape from Dalcastle and his final decision to kill himself that we do not get to know in the Editor's narrative. Apart from telling the same story, Robert and the Editor are extremely different but somehow also very similar, thus constituting another instance of duplicity in a novel deeply characterised by this theme[57]. In fact, the Editor presents himself as a rational man of the Enlightenment keen on providing an objective version of an apparently supernatural, uncanny story. Robert, on the other hand, tells his story from the viewpoint of a justified person who interprets life according to his debatable religious beliefs. Despite this significant difference, however, it is also possible to notice some similarities between them.

For instance, both Robert and the Editor are characterised by pride and an extreme arrogance that do not allow them to take into consideration alternative perspectives[58], so that the Editor is utterly unsympathetic towards Robert, who can be considered instead a victim of the perverse doctrine his parents have instilled into his mind since his childhood.

[56] See Elizabeth W. Harries, "Duplication and Duplicity: James Hogg's *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*", *The Wordsworth Circle*, 10:2, 1979, 187-196, p. 187.
[57] See David Groves, "Confessions of an Artist", in *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, London: Penguin English Library, 2012, p. 225.
[58] See ibid, p. 228.

Likewise, Robert is locked into his antinomian interpretation of reality which detaches him from the rest of society and does not allow him to consider the absurdity of his actions and the righteousness of Mr Blanchard's warning. Both narrators are then characterised by an illusory sense of superiority, even if it is based on antithetical tenets, one rational and one religious. Hence, Hogg's purpose was probably to represent the two narrators as products of their times and societies[59], with Robert living in a still extremely religious 17th century, and the Editor living during the extremely rational Enlightenment; a difference which, nonetheless, does not prevent them from sharing some human similarities.

However, what comes out at the end of the novel is that both narratives result incomplete and deeply biased because of the narrators' prejudices and narrow-mindedness which make them utterly unreliable. A full explanation of the events that have occurred to Robert or to the other characters is then never given to the reader who has to make up his own mind about the veracity of the story he has read.

Duplication in the structure, as well as in the characters, then implicates instability and incompleteness, which is the feeling many readers have at the end of the novel, that the whole story has not been told, that many questions have remained unresolved. In fact, even if after Robert's own "Memoirs" the Editor continues with his narrative, this appears to be more an introduction than a conclusion since he tells the story of how he has learnt about the singular preservation of a suicide's body and the later discovery of the manuscript, but does not give us further information or elucidations about the story we have been reading. With regard to this peculiar choice of layout, it has been perceptively noticed how Hogg reverses the typical sequence of Gothic novels presenting first the Editor's Narrative and then Robert's Memoirs, whereas we would have expected the opposite, as for instance in Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), in order to later receive a rational explanation

[59] See ibid, p. 227.

of some apparently supernatural events[60]. In the *Confessions*, on the contrary, no clear explanation is provided, and the reader is let free to give his own interpretation of the events.

Furthermore, Hogg never seems to show a preference for either narrative but, on the contrary, he is critical of both. In fact, he does not appreciate the rationalism, coldness, and narrow-mindedness of the enlightened Editor - who probably reminded him of the literary intelligentsia of Edinburgh, which had tried so persistently to debase him during the 1820s - but he does not appreciate the religious fanaticism and the unsympathetic nature of the protagonist either, even if he tries at the same time to show Robert's humanity and misfortune in being trapped into such a perverse doctrine. Thus, the two narratives never reach a synthesis and provide the reader instead with multiple interpretative possibilities based on who is telling the story in that moment.

Due to their significant difference in time and personality, it is also worth noticing that the two narrators display two different tones: in fact, even if the language they use is the same - English - the Editor and Robert use two different styles. Since the beginning of his narrative, the Editor employs an impersonal, objective, subtly-ironical style, and adopts "the polite dialect of literary Edinburgh"[61]. Robert, on the other hand, writes in a more personal, passionate style and, even if he writes in English as well, it is the English of the Scriptures, full of Biblical echoes and religious rhetoric.

Apart from the Editor and Robert, there are other narrative voices in the novel who display instead instances of vernacular Scots, for instance John Barnet, Bessy Gillies, but most of all Samuel Scrape, who tells an oral tale about the Devil's wiles that is a gem on its own. With regard to this, Hogg does not conform to the stereotypical division of English-speaking good characters and Scots-speaking humorous ones. On the contrary, in the *Confessions* his Scots-speaking working-class characters are not there to be derided but are

[60] See Elizabeth W. Harries, "Duplication and Duplicity: James Hogg's *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*", p. 189.
[61] Ian Duncan, Introduction to *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, p. XXIII.

instead frequently given morally positive speech, whereas English-speaking characters are frequently depicted using their language to deceive others, as for instance Reverend Wringhim and Gil-Martin do[62].

In conclusion, Hogg has provided us with two irreconcilable narratives of the same story which have puzzled readers since the publication of the *Confessions*, but in doing so he has also let us free to make our own judgment of this peculiar story, breaking the chains imposed by the ruling genre of the time that wanted to give readers a unique and preestablished view of the events narrated.

2.5 Doppelgängers

Besides the double narration of the same story, other doublings render the novel unstable: the doppelgängers. The term appeared for the first time in the novel *Siebenkäs* (1796), written by the German Romantic writer Jean Paul (1763-1825)[63], and literally means "double goer". According to tradition, doppelgängers are harbingers of evil and death, and are able to instil malevolent intentions into the mind of the person they appear to, whom they closely resemble. Furthermore, once someone has seen his doppelgänger - who can also appear to friends or relatives of the persecuted, thus creating confusion and astonishment - he is destined to be tormented by it for the rest of his life, a situation that often leads to his suicide.

Besides this folkloristic explanation, the sudden appearance of a doppelgänger has been also interpreted on a psychological level: in this case, the double self would appear as an expression of the subconscious representing the inner thoughts and repressed desires of the real self[64]. The self would then exteriorise some repressed feelings in a morally opposite

[62] See Ian Campbell, Afterword to *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, ed. P.D. Garside, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002, pp. 183-4.
[63] See Otto Rank, *Double: A Psychoanalytic Study*, trans. Harry Tucker Jr., Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1971, p. 14.
[64] See ibid, p. 76.

figure which can be attractive or repulsive, or as it happens with Gil-Martin, both, but which is at the same time eerily similar in his appearance, as Robert Wringhim says when he first meets his doppelgänger Gil-Martin: “We approached till not more than a yard intervened between us, and then stood still and gazed, measuring each other from head to foot. What was my astonishment, on perceiving that he was the same being as myself! The clothes were the same to the smallest item. The form was the same; the apparent age; the colour of the hair; the eyes; and, as far as recollection could serve me from viewing my own features in a glass, the features too were the very same” (p. 89).

The doppelgänger then becomes a proxy for thoughts and actions the real self cannot carry out for moral or social reasons, thus avoiding any responsibility, but in the end it gains the upper hand and becomes a tyrant, to the point of stealing the real self’s own identity: “‘This is unaccountable,’ said I [Robert]. ‘It is impossible that I can have been doing a thing, and not doing it at the same time. But indeed, honest woman, there have several incidents occurred to me in the course of my life which persuade me I have a second self; or that there is some other being who appears in my likeness’” (p. 133). The real self is thus entangled in a web he cannot get out of and, what is worse, he is unable to escape his persecutor since they are the same person.

The doppelgänger can be then considered the expression of a person’s relationship with himself, a relationship often characterised by extreme narcissism, imposing egoism and the inability to love, so that funnily enough, the person he loves the most - himself - becomes his tormenting persecutor[65]. Furthermore, this doubleness obviously complicates everything since the self is at once innocent and guilty, accessory to the crimes but also uninvolved in them, to the point that it is difficult to say where the real self ends and the doppelgänger begins.

[65] See ibid, pp. 71, 74.

"Doubles may appear to come from outside, as a form of possession, or from inside, as a form of projection"[66]: whatever the origin, a person perceives himself to be two, and in literature this doubleness has been often associated to solitary people, and especially to orphans. The orphan, being alone in the world, is liable to imagine a second self, and usually identifies it as a father figure that he wants both to supplant and to emulate, or as a brother he deeply envies. In a typical situation, the orphan is persecuted and oppressed by a dominating figure who incites him to misbehave or directly usurps his agency until the orphan, annihilated by this doppelgänger, finds a way out in death alone[67].

In the *Confessions*, Robert is represented almost as an orphan due to his difficult family situation and is characterised by a deep solitude that is apparently resolved by the arrival of his new brilliant friend Gil-Martin, with whom he establishes an exclusive relationship. As an expression of his solitude, Gil-Martin appears mostly when he is alone and so frailer, as Robert himself tells us: "[T]he great personage who had attached himself to me, and was now become my greatest terror among many surrounding evils, generally haunted me when I was alone, keeping aloof from all other society" (p. 164). The lack of friends, as well as of a solid family, makes then Robert particularly vulnerable to such a wily, diabolical friend[68], and as a projection of his split, delusional mind, it is impossible for him to escape someone who is actually himself, now his own worst enemy, no matter how hard he tries.

Hence, this is the kind of narrative we find in the *Confessions*, and Robert's relationship with his doppelgänger Gil-Martin can be considered either of a psychological or of a supernatural nature. Their first meeting occurs on Robert's eighteenth birthday, the same day he receives from Reverend Wringhim the assurance of being part of the community of the

[66] Karl Miller, *Doubles*, p. 416.
[67] See ibid, pp. 22-23.
[68] "[W]henever the human mind is unagitated by society, and left to brood over itself in solitude, rather than want company, it will create visionary beings for itself" – Letter from William Hogg to James Gray, 20th November 1813, in "Some Particulars Relative to the Ettrick Shepherd", *The New Monthly Magazine*, April 1836, Vol. 46.

just made perfect. When they approach each other in the field, Robert is bewildered by the young man in front of him: “What was my astonishment, on perceiving that he was the same being as myself!” (p. 89), but considers him initially as a guardian angel - as it happens to many literary characters who see their doppelgänger[69] - and in turn he answers that he is indeed his brother, “not according to the flesh, but in my belief of the same truths” (p. 89). Robert is easily captivated by the flattering words and superior intelligence of this mysterious, puzzling figure, but at the same time he immediately feels “an involuntary inclination to escape from his presence” (p. 90), already perceiving the irresistible influence Gil-Martin has on him. This will be proved impossible and Robert will be haunted by Gil-Martin for the rest of his days until his inevitable suicide.

In his “Memoirs”, moreover, Robert admits that he cannot recollect long periods of his life in which it seems he has acted unconsciously: “I was under the greatest anxiety, dreading some change would take place momently in my nature; for of dates I could make nothing: one-half, or two-thirds of my time, seemed to me to be totally lost” (p. 137). Psychologically, this could be explained as a case of multiple personality. William James (1842-1910), seminal psychologist and Henry James’s own brother, described this disorder thus in *The Principles of Psychology* (1890): “The phenomenon of alternating personality in its simplest phases seems based on lapses of memory. Any man becomes, as we say, inconsistent with himself if he forgets his engagements, pledges, knowledges, and habits”[70]. These cases of amnesia are called “fugues”, states of physical and temporal dissociation which occur in the attempt to avoid responsibility for some deeds, a circumstance which closely corresponds to Robert’s situation, who also frequently remarks how he conceives himself to be two people, being accused of misdeeds he does not remember: “I have two souls, which take possession

[69] See Otto Rank, *Double*, pp. 22-23.
[70] William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1890. Public Library UK, www.public-library.uk/ebooks/50/61.pdf

of my bodily frame by turns, the one being all unconscious of what the other performs" (p. 144).

From a psychological, rational standpoint, Robert's case could be then considered that of a person suffering from multiple personality disorder, that of "a religious maniac, who wrote and wrote about a deluded creature, till he arrived at that height of madness, that he believed himself the very object whom he had been all along describing" (p. 189), and André Gide gave the same explanation in his seminal introduction to the Cresset Press edition of the novel in 1947, arguing that: "The personification of the Demon in Hogg's book is among the most ingenious ever invented, for the power that sets him in action is always of a *psychological nature*; in other words — always admissible, even by unbelievers. *It is the exteriorized development of our own desires, of our pride, of our most secret thoughts*"[71] (emphasis mine). Hence, the doppelgänger would be in this case the expression of the subconscious which represents the inner thoughts and repressed desires of a self - Robert - who feels a deep uneasiness with them, and so projects them on an outer, different, but at the same time identical, double self - Gil-Martin.

Nevertheless, this psychological explanation of Gil-Martin leaves many questions unresolved. One above all, how is it possible that everyone can see him if he is only a figment of Robert's mind? In other cases mentioned by André Gide, for instance Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), the real presence of the ghosts is debatable because the only person who can see them is the probably delusional governess - as in the similar *Green Tea* (1872) by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, the only one who can see the diabolical black monkey is the persecuted reverend, who eventually kills himself[72]. In this case, on the contrary, everyone

[71] André Gide, Introduction to *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, p. 237.
[72] In J.S. Le Fanu's *Green Tea* (1872), Reverend Jennings is persecuted by a diabolical black monkey - whose nature we never fully grasp - which continuously utters blasphemies and urges him to kill himself. As in the *Confessions*, the reverend's "confession" of his sad situation is embedded between a first and a last part composed of some translated letters of the doctor he has reported his case to. Even in this case, the novel is divided between a rational and a supernatural interpretation of the circumstance.

from Mr Blanchard to Bell Calvert and Miss Logan, as well as Scrape and the rest of the villagers, often see Robert in the company of this young man who would be otherwise invisible had he been only in Robert's mind, and this has contributed to the endorsement of a supernatural interpretation which identifies Gil-Martin with the Devil.

In his appearance, Gil-Martin actually lacks any typical characteristic of the medieval representation of the Devil - as for instance the cloven hoof the women of the village suggest may be a hint of his true nature - even though, when he looks for Robert in the printing house, he is described as a gentleman wearing a "Green Circassian hunting coat" (p. 166) which is considered one of the Devil's typical garments[73]. In the Middle Ages, in fact, the Devil was represented as a hunter wearing green, as argued for example by Pierre Bersuire (c. 1290 – 1362): "The devil is a hunter, that is to say, a hypocrite, who wears green clothing. He puts on honest conversation so that with a pretence of exterior honesty he can attract beasts (that is, the simple) to himself; and as long as they cannot guard against the ambushes of his malice, he can ensnare and cheat them. Therefore, it is well said in Matthew 7: 'Look out for false prophets, who come to you in the clothing of sheep, but inwardly are ravenous wolves'"[74], which is also what one of the women of the village says to Scrape[75].

As we can notice, that would be a perfect description of Gil-Martin, who ensnares Robert with his apparently honest and reasonable ideas as the Devil typically does but, apart from that, Gil-Martin is utterly different from the Devil as traditionally represented and is particularly striking precisely because of his ordinariness. For instance, Linton, the young man Robert briefly lives with, quite comically describes him thus: "Rather a gentlemanly personage – Green Circassian hunting coat and turban – Like a foreigner – Has the power of

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[73] "He wore Odin's dress of either a grey mantle with a broad hat pressed down on the head or a green coat with a feather in his hat" – Ernest Jones, *On the Nightmare*, London: Hogarth Press, 1931, p. 162.
[74] Pierre Bersuire, *Opera*, quoted from *Signs and Symbols in Chaucer's Poetry*, ed. J.P. Hermann & J.J. Burke Jr, Tuscaloosa, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1981.
[75] "There are many wolves in sheep's claithing, among us, my man" (*Confessions*, p. 148).

vanishing in one moment though – Rather a suspicious circumstance that. Otherwise, his appearance not much against him" (p. 166).

There are also other elements that may encourage this supernatural reading. The Devil is in fact said to have extraordinary powers, most of all regarding the weather, which he can control[76], and this would explain for instance the sublime scene at Arthur's Seat where George, while enjoying a sunny and serene morning, sees the figure of his brother, "dilated to twenty times the natural size" (p. 34), in a cloud. More than this, however, the Devil's most typical power is that of transforming himself: he has the capacity to assume any human (or animal) form and can be thus easily related to the figure of the doppelgänger, who closely resembles the person he appears to.

As will be further analysed, Gil-Martin does not just attain Robert's appearance but repeatedly assumes the likeness of many other characters, some of which may also elude our recognition: he appears as George, as Drummond, and also as the young preacher who is charged with the murder of Mr Blanchard, but we cannot exclude the possibility that it is always him who appears to George as his friend Adam Gordon, since this would explain, for instance, how he always knows where George goes, being Adam and his father the only people he tells about his movements.

Despite appearing as all these characters, however, Gil-Martin is Robert's doppelgänger, to the point that he says: "I am wedded to you so closely, that I feel as if I were the same person. Our essences are one, our bodies and spirits being united, so, that I am drawn towards you as by magnetism, and wherever you are, there must my presence be with you" (p. 170). Robert and Gil-Martin could then almost appear as the same person, so strong is their bond[77]: they are always together, they commit crimes together, and are both unwell at the end of the novel. In fact, the mighty potentate is not the same as before either, his appearance has now

[76] See Ernest Jones, *On the Nightmare*, p. 161.
[77] See Karl Miller, *Doubles*, p. 6.

changed into one “of haggard despair” (p. 170), and so Robert sincerely hopes that Gil-Martin will die with him.

Another element which links them so closely is that both of them can be considered orphans, rejected sons who want to supplant their fathers[78]. As we know, Robert is disclaimed by the man he considers to be his real father, and Gil-Martin too, when asked about his name, says that this is not his Christian name, “but it *is* a name which may serve your turn” (p. 98) since he has “no parents save one, whom I do not acknowledge” (p. 99), a statement which can be read as an allusion to Satan’s relationship with God. This can be then considered another passage which promotes a supernatural reading of the figure of Gil-Martin as the Devil, as well as eliciting a certain irony towards Robert who never seems to grasp the supernatural grandiosity of his friend, no matter the subtle hints he gives and the incredible powers he displays: on the contrary, he is sure Gil-Martin is the Czar Peter of Russia.

Despite their similarity, it is evident that Robert sees in Gil-Martin also a father towards whom he feels both reverence and repulsion. In fact, as we have seen, both Robert and Gil-Martin have a dislike for their “real” fathers, but despite this Robert, having been abandoned by the man he considers to be his natural father, is always looking for a substitute to whose authority he wants both to submit and to elude, and finally finds it in Gil-Martin.

Furthermore, an important element which complicates a psychological explanation of Gil-Martin’s existence is, as mentioned above, his being seen by other people besides Robert. With regard to this, it is important to bear in mind that Gil-Martin does not have a real self, so he invades others and usurps their agency to commit his crimes, thus always appearing as a different person. The first instance we have of this is when, after having killed Mr Blanchard, Gil-Martin does not run away as Robert does, but changes his appearance

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[78] See Philip Rogers, “‘A Name Which May Serve Your Turn’: James Hogg’s Gil-Martin”, *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 21:1, 1986, 89-98, p. 90.

into that of a young preacher who passes in front of a group of men with a pistol in his hand. Obviously, the preacher is unjustly charged with the murder and the pair get away with it.

Later, Gil-Martin takes on the identity of Thomas Drummond, George's friend, in order to find a credible culprit for the assassination. Even in this case, both Bell Calvert and the man she is with see Robert with a man who looks like Drummond but is not according to what Bell has previously seen, which is Drummond going the opposite way of the pair. Nonetheless, he is charged with a crime he has not committed and is obliged to flee the country.

Finally, Gil-Martin repeatedly appears in the likeness of the deceased George and is recognised as such by both Miss Logan and Bell Calvert when he is seen walking arm in arm with Robert: "'Who do you think the young man was who walked in his company to night?' […] 'It is he [George Colwan], I believe,' said she, uttering the words as it were inwardly. 'It can be none other but he. But no, it is impossible! I saw him stabbed through and through the heart; I saw him roll backward on the green in his own blood, utter his last words, and groan away his soul. Yet, if it is not he, who can it be?'. 'It *is* he!' cried Mrs Logan, hysterically" (emphasis in original, p. 64).

In conclusion, there can be no final and definitive interpretation of Gil-Martin's true nature since the psychological and the supernatural explanations are not mutually exclusive but, on the contrary, they paradoxically co-exist. Both interpretations of Gil-Martin as a figment of Robert's mind or the Devil are plausible, and Hogg never gives a final explanation to it. So, even in this case, the question about his real existence is left unanswered and the reader is free to interpret it according to his own beliefs, being it explainable either from a rational and a supernatural standpoint without losing his credibility and terror.

As well as Gil-Martin, however, it is worth noticing that Robert can be considered to have another double in the novel: his brother George. Robert and George are opposites: the first is a gloomy, zealously religious young man who has been raised since his childhood

with the perverse tenets of Antinomianism; George, on the other hand, is described as a good-natured, popular man, full of friends and deeply loved by his father. Robert despises him as well as his "real" father because he has been taught that they are both "reprobates, cast-aways, beings devoted to the wicked one" (p. 110) merely because the Laird and his son are not very religious and sometimes indulge in alcohol or a game of cards.

Nonetheless, as discussed before, the double usually appears in the shape of a father or a brother as a representation of the rivalry between the two, and typically displays an opposite temperament, so it is possible that George appears to Robert as his double in that he sees in him the fulfilment of the person he would have liked to be, and could have been, had it not been for his family and their religious tenets. In fact, more or less unconsciously, Robert seems to long for the acknowledgment of his real father, for friends, for freedom, and sees in George everything he would like to be but is not. For this reason, when he admits to conceive himself as two people, these are George and Gil-Martin: "The most perverse part of it was, that I rarely conceived *myself* to be any of the two persons. I thought for the most part that my companion was one of them, and my brother the other" (p. 116).

His desire to be a mighty, intelligent person as Gil-Martin, and an amiable, sociable man as George, makes him find a double in them both, whom he admires and despises at the same time, but this eventually annihilates his own identity to the point that he does not recognise himself as such anymore.

3 Feeling with the villain and the different shades of empathy in the *Confessions*

3.1 The absence of empathy in Robert Wringhim

As it is possible to notice in the novel, a major feature of Robert's personality is his lack of empathy towards other people which, alongside his religious fanaticism, enable him to commit heinous crimes. "Empathy", a 20th-century translation of the German term *Einfühlung*, can be described as "the power of projecting one's personality into (and so fully comprehending) the object of contemplation"[79], and is elicited by witnessing, hearing, or also reading, about someone else's circumstances.

Typically regarded as the premiss of pro-social behaviour, empathy has been always considered a pivotal characteristic of human beings to the point that already Juvenal in the early 2nd century AD in his *Satires* underlined its importance for society[80], and it later became one of the main issues discussed by moral philosophers in the 18th century. The school of the Cambridge Platonists was, for instance, among the first to stress the importance of empathy for society rejecting the negative representation of human beings as naturally sinful and egotistic as proposed by Calvinism and Thomas Hobbes, and the same concept was later notably developed by two pivotal philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment, David Hume and Adam Smith, whose theories will be taken into account in this study.

Those who lacked empathy were then in general considered - and are still extensively considered - monstrous, inhuman, diabolical beings, prone to having a sociopathic behaviour often related to the profile of the serial killer[81]. In fact, although there is no clear evidence

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[79] *Oxford English Dictionary*, second edition, 1989.

[80] "For what good man […] believes that any human woes concern him not? It is this that separates us from the dumb herd; and it is for this that we alone have had allotted to us a nature worthy of reverence, capable of divine things, fit to acquire and practise the arts of life, and that we have drawn from on high that gift of feeling which is lacking to the beasts that grovel with eyes upon the ground. To them in the beginning of the world our common maker gave only life: to us he gave souls as well, that fellow-feeling might bid us ask or proffer aid" – Juvenal, Satire XV, quoted from *Juvenal and Persius*, trans. G.G. Ramsay, London: Heinemann, 1928, pp. 299-301.

[81] See Suzanne Keen, *Empathy and the Novel*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 9.

of a connection between empathy and pro-social behaviour, the first is considered a very important tool for our understanding of others' predicaments, and so for our concern towards them[82] which inevitably creates a bond between human beings that leads to the creation of a society.

For this reason, we mistrust those who lack empathy and consider them monstrous and inhuman, prone to criminal behaviour, and in the *Confessions* this concern is endorsed by the fact that Robert's lack of empathy actually results in a sadistic murderous career that makes him even "have a longing desire to kill my brother, in particular [...] such a desire too as a thirsty man has to drink" (p. 111), so that he is repeatedly described by the Editor and the other characters as an "unaccountable monster" (p. 22), an "unnatural monster" (p. 66), and "a monster of nature" (p. 156).

However, Robert's sadism could be also deemed as a perverse form of empathy that does not result in compassion but is on the contrary used for evil ends[83], a perversion which is also recognisable in Gil-Martin and is indeed an important aspect of his diabolical techniques - as we will see - but which can be as well distinguished in Robert's gratification in imagining the suffering of his victims whom he dehumanises, blinded by his fanaticism.

Nonetheless, Robert's lack of empathy should not be considered only as an aspect – whether monstrous or inhuman – of his personality, but the education he received as a child and the environment he was raised into should be also carefully taken into account in order to explain it. Close and secure family relationships, for instance, are considered a fundamental aspect in the capacity of feeling with others[84] and, with regard to this, Robert's family situation is complicated and unstable, and this contributes to the shaping of his solitary, mean personality.

[82] See Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 330-331.
[83] See ibid, p. 333.
[84] See Suzanne Keen, *Empathy and the Novel*, p. 3.

We know, in fact, that since their unfortunate marriage, Lady Dalcastle and George Colwan senior's different opinions provoke a conflict that eventually results in Robert's repudiation by the man he considers his natural father and in his consequent hatred for his own kin. Therefore, despite having found a surrogate father in Reverend Wringhim, Robert grieves his having been born "an outcast in the world" (p. 75) and is utterly frustrated by his mother, for whom he has no love nor respect. His family relations are then so irrelevant that the only person he feels respect and a sort of affection for is the only one with whom he thinks he has no blood relationship, that is Reverend Wringhim.

Growing then almost as an orphan, he looks for a powerful father figure that he finds in Gil-Martin, and is convinced due to his arrogance and religious beliefs to have an important purpose in his life, that of liberating the world from sinners. The absence of a secure family can be then considered one of the causes of Robert's personality as well as of his vulnerability: he is easily deceived by Gil-Martin because he finds in him what he is looking for, a powerful father figure who continuously praises his intelligence and supposed natural superiority, which is something that he both needs and wants to hear. This gives us an image of Robert as a lonely, insecure person, always in search of a confirmation of his worth both by God and Gil-Martin, which can be probably considered a consequence of his not having been acknowledged by his real father.

Another element which diminishes Robert's empathy is his extreme pride and sense of superiority. Since his childhood, there are episodes in his life in which he considers himself better than others and tries to degrade them by every means possible without taking into account the suffering he may provoke. Two examples of this can be distinguished in his relationship with M'Gill, whom he unjustly obliges to leave school for some deeds he has not committed, and in his quarrel with John Barnet, which eventually leads to his dismissal, even though John will later prove himself the good person Reverend Wringhim initially

considered him to be when, despite what Robert has done to him, he intervenes in Robert's fight with M'Gill and puts an end to it without receiving any gratitude.

Nonetheless, the person Robert least empathises with is his own brother George Colwan. Considering him reprobate and damned, Robert feels a sadistic pleasure in persecuting his "wicked brother" (p. 113) and causes him pain without ever considering the suffering he is provoking, the same suffering he will go through when he will be the persecuted one. Had he had empathy or had he followed the "golden rule" to do unto others as you would have them do unto you, it would have been impossible for him to inflict further pain on George and consequently on his family, but he understands this too late: "I then went to try my works by the Saviour's golden rule […] and, behold, not one of them would stand the test. I had shed blood on a ground on which I could not admit that any man had a right to shed mine; and I began to doubt the motives of my adviser once more, not that they were intentionally bad, but that his was some great mind led astray by enthusiasm, or some overpowering passion" (p. 152).

However, the major influence behind what Karl Miller has described as Robert's "monstrous misery"[85] can be considered his antinomian education. As we know, both Lady Dalcastle and Reverend Wringhim believe in Antinomianism, which is founded on the distinction between the elect and the damned, and so Robert grows up with the conviction of being better than others, but has the certainty of this only when he is finally assured by Reverend Wringhim that he is one of the just made perfect.

Robert then deems himself "as an eagle among the children of men, soaring on high, and looking down with pity and contempt on the grovelling creatures below" (p. 88), but despite this image he pictures in his mind, he is frequently shown feeling contempt towards sinners, but never pity. On the contrary, as Reverend Wringhim tells him, they inevitably have to live

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[85] Karl Miller, *Doubles*, p. 7.

side by side with sinners, but it is better for them to shun their society being their damnation irredeemable. As far as we can see in the novel then, Robert shuns everyone's society, not only that of the damned: the only person he admires and likes to be with is Reverend Wringhim, but for the rest he has no friends, nor he likes women; on the contrary, he can be described as both a misanthrope and a misogynist.

The only society he longs to be a part of is not worldly but celestial: his desire is to be one of the elect, and he is more concerned with the afterworld than with the world he lives in and the people that inhabits it. His antinomian education, in fact, demands that he obtains a state of perfection which implies a sense of disgust towards all that is human, such as flaws, sensibility, and any kind of carnal pleasure. Such an extreme focus on the self and its perfection damages Robert's capacity to put himself into someone else's shoes and is thus one of the main reasons behind his lack of empathy and compassion[86]: everything revolves around him and the rest of the world has no importance.

This kind of personalities have been defined by psychoanalyst Otto Kernberg as "pathologically narcissistic" - and we have seen in Chapter 2.5 the importance narcissism also has in the experience of a double self - and his description is worth reporting for the great consonance it has with Robert's personality: "These patients present an unusual degree of self-reference in their interactions with other people […] and a curious apparent contradiction between a very inflated concept of themselves and an inordinate need for tribute from others. Their emotional life is shallow. They experience little empathy for the feelings of others […]. These patients experience a remarkably intense envy of other people who seem to have things they do not have or who simply seem to enjoy their lives. […] They are especially deficient in genuine feelings of sadness and mournful longing; their incapacity for experiencing depressive reactions is a basic feature of their personalities. When

[86] See Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, p. 344.

abandoned or disappointed by other people they may show what on the surface looks like depression, but which on further examination emerges as anger and resentment, loaded with revengeful wishes rather than real sadness for the loss of a person whom they appreciated […]. At the very bottom […] lies [an image] of the relationship with external objects, precisely the one against which the patient has erected all these other pathological structures. It is the image of a hungry, enraged, empty self, full of impotent anger at being frustrated, and fearful of a world which seems as hateful and revengeful as the patient himself"[87].

As we can notice, Kernberg's description perfectly fits Robert since he too is characterised by an apparent contradictory conjunction of a sense of superiority with an insecurity that makes him look for approval in both God and Gil-Martin; the hatred he thinks to feel towards his father and brother can be considered more as a form of envy for their freedom and their lives in general, made of joy, women and alcohol; and finally, Robert is forced into a religious cage that results in his emptiness and hatred towards others which inevitably leads to his solitude.

His difficult family situation and his antinomian education can be then considered at the basis of Robert's lack of empathy, and the disconnect between his true nature and the religious expectations he feels the necessity to fulfil result in his split personality, which is evident even before the arrival of his doppelgänger. Before meeting Gil-Martin and conceiving himself to be two persons, namely his diabolical friend and his brother George, already during his adolescence Robert is in fact characterised by a split personality, torn between sin and his anxiety of being acknowledged as one of the elect, and so he admits that he "went on sinning every hour, and all the while most strenuously warring against sin" (p. 77). Nonetheless, he regards himself better than others and, for this reason, justified in judging and condemning, if not later killing, those he considers to be sinners.

[87] Otto F. Kernberg, *Borderline Conditions and Pathological Narcissism*, New York: Jason Aronson Inc. Publishers, 1979, pp. 227-9, 233.

Robert's education then has a great influence on his temperament as well as on his vision of the world and others, for as argued by David Hume in the *Treatise*, "[a]ll those opinions and notions of things, to which we have been accustom'd from our infancy, take such deep root, that 'tis impossible for us, by all the powers of reason and experience, to eradicate them"[88]. So, even if he eventually understands that what he has done is wrong according to reason and common sense, he is so imbued with the antinomian belief that he strenuously continues to yield to Gil-Martin's reasonings, which convince him to murder those he considers sinners, from Mr Blanchard to his own brother George.

In doing so, Robert "does what the Devil does – he attempts to be God"[89], and as it happened with Satan, this attempt of rising above others and supplanting God inevitably leads to a fall that at first makes him an assassin and then brings him to suicide. What Robert does not considered, as it has been pointed out by Douglas Jones, is that according to his antinomian belief it is possible that he is sinning and committing all these heinous crimes according to God's will exactly because instead of being one of the elect, he is predestined to be damned and is thus acting accordingly[90]. What he then seems to understand once he has to flee from the Dalcastle estate is that his dream of omnipotence and sense of superiority were actually delusive. Only in that moment he is faced by his own vulnerability, which he had never considered due to his supposed state of grace, and is thus led to feel some sort of gratitude and fellow-feeling towards others, even if briefly and slightly, as it happens with the weaver's wife[91].

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[88] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. D.F. Norton & M.J. Norton, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007, Book I, Part III, Sect. IX, p. 80.

[89] L.L. Lee, "The Devil's Figure: James Hogg's 'Justified Sinner'", *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 3:4, 1965, 230-239, p. 237.

[90] See Douglas Jones, "Double Jeopardy and the Chameleon Art in James Hogg's *Justified Sinner*", *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 23:1, 1988, 164-185, pp. 170-171.

[91] See Gillian Hughes, "Robert Wringhim's Solitude", in *James Hogg and the Literary Marketplace: Scottish Romanticism and the Working-Class Author*, ed. S. Alker & H.F. Nelson, London: Routledge, 2009, 71-80, p. 78.

However, Robert's change of attitude occurs only when he begins to doubt his religious beliefs, but for his whole life he had neatly distinguished between his in-group of antinomian believers and the rest of society, thus representing a form of categorical empathy according to which he would have been sympathetic only towards the members of his in-group and ruthless with the rest, or as he says: "If I knew a person to be a godly one, I could almost have kissed his feet; but against the carnal portion of mankind, I set my face continually" (p. 83). In fact, as perfectly explained by Lord Kames in his *Elements of Criticism*: "To a zealot every one of his own sect is a saint, while the most upright of a different sect are to him children of perdition"[92], a statement which underlines the risks of not being able to consider alternative perspectives, as it happens with Robert who creates in his mind a Manichean distinction between good and bad, elect and damned, and is thus easily enthralled by Gil-Martin's proposal of liberating the world from sinners.

Only when he has to leave the Dalcastle estate and is repeatedly expelled from every household, Robert begins to open his mind and heart towards other people who are not of his in-group to the point of almost yearning for their society. This happens, for example, with the weaver's wife who shows great empathy and compassion towards Robert's situation and takes him in despite her husband's doubts, so that he feels "deeply affected by the manner of this poor woman's welcome" (p. 157), or later with Linton, "a flippant unstable being" (p. 164) who would have elicited his contempt before but with whom he now gladly shares his lodging[93].

In conclusion, it is undisputable that Robert has acted out of pride and malice, and in fact Hogg never represents him as a blameless victim, but on the contrary, he makes him pay with his life for the crimes he has committed. However, Robert can be also seen as a product of his society, as a victim of the perverse theology, imbued with hypocrisy, his family and

[92] Henry Home (Lord Kames), *Elements of Criticism*, London: G. Cowie and Co., 1824, Chap. 2, Part V, p. 76.
[93] See Gillian Hughes, "Robert Wringhim's Solitude", p. 78.

Gil-Martin have taught him, and he so appeals to us because of the inevitability of his fall. Moreover, we cannot abstain from considering that he has been deceived by a very artful fiend, “The Father of Lies”, so we should avoid judging Robert too severely: we cannot be sure that in his situation we would have acted differently.

3.2 The dangers of living Robert’s own story in his “Private Confessions”

As mentioned above, empathy was one of the main concerns of moral philosophers of the 18th century and was in particular analysed by two of the most important figures of the Scottish Enlightenment: David Hume (1711-1776) and Adam Smith (1723-1790). They did not talk about “empathy”, however, but about “sympathy”, being the first a 20th-century term, as we have seen in the previous paragraph.

Sympathy was then a pivotal concept in David Hume’s moral philosophy: according to him, the majority of human communication is not rational but emotional, that is, people exchange information not only through language but also through an affective communication made of external signs (e.g. tears to show sadness). Following this principle, Hume considers sympathy as a mechanism that works through constant rules: first we notice the signs of a passion in another person, then we believe this passion exists, and finally we prove the same passion as the person we are looking at. So, according to Hume, sympathy “is nothing but the conversion of an idea into an impression by the force of imagination”[94], which means that we just need to imagine what a person is feeling to feel it in turn. Sympathy then produces a mirror effect that makes us feel someone else’s emotions, and this creates a bond between human beings which is at the basis of society.

[94] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book II, Part III, Sect. VI, p. 273.

So mechanical is sympathy according to Hume that he defines it as a "contagion", implying that this transmission of feelings may happen even without our volition. In fact, Hume does not equate sympathy with fellow-feeling, nor does he want to distinguish between virtue and vice: his main interest is to explain how the mind works and how society is based on this quasi-automatic exchange of emotional information, but this implies that both good and bad feelings can be shared.

This idea of sympathy as a form of contagion or infection had already been conceived by Francis Hutcheson (1694 -1746), who explained how "the state and fortunes of others affect us exceedingly, so that by the very power of nature, *previous to any reasoning or meditation*, we rejoice in the prosperity of others, and sorrow with them in their misfortunes [...]. By means of this sympathy and of some disinterested affections, it happens, as by a sort of *contagion* or *infection*, that all our pleasures, even these of the lowest kind, are strangely increased by their being shared with others [...]. Nor on the other hand is there any thing more uneasy or grievous to a man than to behold the distressing toils, pains, griefs, or misery of others"[95] (emphasis mine).

In the *Confessions*, sympathy is often represented as a contagion, as for instance when, while Miss Logan and Bell Calvert are discussing about having both seen the deceased George walking arm in arm with Robert at Dalcastle, the landlady enters the room and starts crying without a reason. Repeatedly in this episode this automatic sharing of feeling is described as an "infection": "An old woman who kept the lodging-house, having been called in before when Mrs. Logan was faintish, chanced to enter at this crisis with some cordial; and seeing the state of her lodgers, *she caught the infection*, and fell into the same rigid and statue-like appearance" (emphasis mine, p. 64). Soon afterwards, she starts crying with Miss Logan: "'It *is* he!' cried Mrs. Logan, hysterically. 'Yes, yes, it *is* he!' cried the landlady, in

[95] Francis Hutcheson, *A Short Introduction to Moral Philosophy*, Glasgow: R. & A. Foulis, 1753, Book I, Chap. I, Sect. IX, pp. 13-14.

unison. 'It is who?' said Mrs. Calvert; 'whom do you mean, mistress?'. 'Oh, I don't know! I don't know! I was affrighted.' […] 'Oh, it is he! it is he!' screamed Mrs. Logan, wringing her hands. 'Oh, it is he! it is he!' cried the landlady, wringing hers. Mrs. Calvert turned the latter gently and civilly out of the apartment, observing that *there seemed to be some infection in the air of the room* (emphasis mine), and she would be wise for herself to keep out of it" (p. 64-5).

This concept of sympathy as contagion received much criticism because, as it is also possible to notice from the previous extract, it would involuntary erase one's own feelings in favour of someone else's and this could have dangerous outcomes depending on the feelings shared, as we will see. In contrast to this criticism and to Shaftesbury's idea of sympathy as dangerous in that it would create small in-groups that fight one another because of their different beliefs[96], Hume argued that, on the contrary, sympathy enabled people to go beyond their differences on the basis of a superior, emotional connection that made them all the same and made communication possible by the fact that "nature has preserv'd a great resemblance among all human creatures, and that we never remark any passion or principle in others, of which, in some degree or other, we may not find a parallel in ourselves"[97]. Therefore, as also underlined by Juvenal[98], sympathy can be regarded as a superior faculty that only human beings have and which is fundamental for our sociability, so that its absence, as we can see with Robert, creates solitude and suffering, and makes mutual understanding and forgiving impossible.

What happens to us as readers during Robert's "Private Memoirs and Confessions" is then that we find ourselves in a situation of contagious sympathy that makes us inevitably feel with Robert despite the aversion we may prove towards him, his actions and his beliefs. This is possible for different reasons and one of them can be considered Hogg's narrative

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[96] See Anthony Ashley Cooper (3rd Earl of Shaftesbury), *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*.
[97] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book II, Part I, Sect. XI, p. 207.
[98] See note 74.

choice to let Robert tell his own story. First-person narration is, in fact, widely considered to promote an identification between reader and narrative voice in that we are able to enter into his mind and know his real thoughts and the reasons behind his actions which may be not be accessible to us in a third-person narration[99] (for example, we cannot fully understand Robert's life and actions through the Editor's narrative). The possibility to see someone's life through his own lenses increases the chances of feeling empathy with him and is thus widely used also by those writers who, as in this case, report the story of unpleasant characters. As Wayne Booth has observed: "*If* an author wants intense sympathy for characters who do not have strong virtues to recommend them, *then* the psychic vividness of prolonged inside views will help him"[100] (emphasis in original).

On paper, feeling empathy for a murderous religious maniac may seem impossible but there are some reasons why it is not necessarily so. For instance, it is possible Hogg wanted us to consider Robert as a very young man who since his childhood has been raised in an extremely religious context which has inevitably shaped his mind and his way of seeing and considering others, and whose anxiety produced by the need to be acknowledged as one of the elect, also because of his sinful life, has made him a fragile person in need of assurance. All these elements make him then a vulnerable prey for a diabolical figure such as Gil-Martin, who not only approves but takes to the extreme Robert's already perverse beliefs.

After a first harsh judgement given on his conduct in "The Editor's Narrative", in "The Private Confessions" we are then able to see the man behind the mask of the monster and Robert becomes such an object of pity to make us eventually feel what he is feeling. His naivety, insecurity and instilled fanaticism make him more a victim of his own beliefs than a real villain and we then put ourselves in his position and live with him his descent into madness, despair, and ultimately, suicide.

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[99] See Suzanne Keen, *Empathy and the Novel*, p. 97.

[100] Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983, pp. 377-8.

What it has been noticed is, in fact, that even if we are very different from the characters we are identifying with, for example according to our morality or religious beliefs, as in this case, we need just a few elements about their situation and identity to feel with them, even if this could also produce in some readers what is called "empathic distress" in that they would feel uneasy in realising that they are empathising with immoral or corrupted personalities[101]. However, the reason why we are so open to empathise with such characters is due to fictionality according to Suzanne Keen, because "fictional worlds provide safe zones for readers' feeling empathy without experiencing a resultant demand on real-world action. This freedom from obligation paradoxically opens up the channels for both empathy and related moral affects such as sympathy, outrage, pity, righteous indignation, and (not to be underestimated) shared joy and satisfaction"[102].

Likewise, Martha Nussbaum has argued that literature helps us to break down the moral barriers that make us dehumanise and "other-ise" those people who, for different reasons, are deemed with disgust by the rest of society. By imagining ourselves in the position of a person we consider different from us due to his circumstances, beliefs, or personality, we are able to see his humanity and so the common traits that link us to them. Hence, by entering their viewpoint from within and living their same experience, we realise that they are not so different from us in some communal human features, and this enables us to expand our mind and understanding, as well as our empathy[103].

It remains a fact, however, that we feel freer in empathising with unpleasant characters in fiction because we know we are running no risk in doing so, whereas in real life it would be unlikely to empathise with murderers. As argued by Adam Morton in "Empathy for the Devil", there is in fact a barrier of decency we experience in real life that makes it difficult for us to empathise with criminals, whereas when we read fiction this barrier does not pose

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[101] See Suzanne Keen, *Empathy and the Novel*, pp. 75-79.
[102] Ibid, p. 4.
[103] See Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, pp. 317-318.

any limit to our emphatic response and we are able to recognise the human behind the criminal and to comprehend his reasonings and motives[104]. This is possible mostly because in fiction, as we have seen, we usually get to know a lot about a character's life and story, and we can then understand the motives behind his actions and in some sort identify with him in some basic human traits.

It has been also noticed how negative states and situations usually promote our empathy more than the positive ones even if our condition is very different from the one depicted[105]. With regard to this, Theodor Lipps (1851-1914) has notably distinguished between a positive and a negative empathy: according to him, in experiencing positive empathy "I welcome the activity inside of me without frictions and I experience, then, a feeling of accord between what has been demanded of me and my spontaneous activity", whereas in experiencing negative empathy "a conflict arises between me and the natural aspiration of my self-activation, on the one hand, and that self-activation I have been asked for or which penetrates me—I thus experience a feeling of conflict"[106].

Although in experiencing a negative empathy with Robert we then feel a sort of resistance in absorbing his ideas and understanding his actions, it has been observed how in literature negative empathy "can be defined as a potentially regressive aesthetic experience, consisting in a cathartic identification with negative characters"[107]. Positive and negative empathy are, however, interconnected and closely related to each other[108], so we would not be able to share a negative empathy with Robert without having first shared with him a positive one. At the beginning of his story, in fact, Robert catches our attention and sympathy

[104] See Adam Morton, "Empathy for the Devil", in *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*, ed. A. Coplan & P. Goldie, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 318-330.
[105] See Suzanne Keen, *Empathy and the Novel*, pp. 70-72.
[106] Theodor Lipps, "Einfühlung und ästhetischer Genuß", *Die Zukunft*, quoted from "Negative Empathy: History, Theory, Criticism", by Stefano Ercolino, *Orbis Litterarum*, 73:3, 2018, 243-262, pp. 244-245.
[107] Stefano Ercolino, "Negative Empathy: History, Theory, Criticism", *Orbis Litterarum*, 73:3, 2018, 243-262, p. 252.
[108] See Sylvia A. Morelli, Matthew D. Lieberman, and Jamil Zaki, "The Emerging Study of Positive Empathy", *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 9:2, 2015, 57-68, p. 60.

through his ostensible sincerity (I say "ostensible" because we are never certain of the veracity of his narrative, being him an unreliable and possibly delusional narrator,) and some human aspects of his personality which inevitably link us to him.

This positive empathy later turns into a negative one when we begin to experience Robert's predicaments, but through this empathic identification that makes us live his ordeals, persecution and descent into madness with an insight view of his thoughts and the perverse doctrine he has been taught, we finally come out of the novel purified. Already Aristotle in the 4th century BCE had in fact notably discussed in his *Poetics* how the ultimate aim of the identification between the public and a tragic hero was catharsis, since we go through his same torments, ordeals, and mistakes, but we are at the same time free of the consequences he will face, so we learn morals by fictionally living someone else's experience[109].

In order to give a correct interpretation of the events, however, it is necessary that we remain aware of the fact that, even though we are imagining ourselves in his same situation, we are a different person from the sufferer[110]. Our ability to be simultaneously able to mentally enact the other person's predicament while retaining the awareness of being outside of it, is what allows a righteous - and not delusional - empathy to occur, which can also elicit our compassion. A little detachment is then necessary if we want to prevent a dangerous emotional contagion that could mislead our interpretation of the events.

Hence, it is possible that the *Confessions* teaches us to be more empathic and less judgemental towards other people, but it also teaches us "to ask questions about the life behind the mask, the inner world concealed by the shape"[111]. Negative empathy in literature gives us the chance to empathise with people we would not normally identify with, to see

[109] See Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, pp. 238-244.
[110] See ibid, pp. 327-328.
[111] Martha C. Nussbaum, "Exactly and Responsibly: A Defense of Ethical Criticism", *Philosophy and Literature*, 22:2, 1998, 343-365, p. 350.

the humanity behind the monsters, and this allows us to know more about them and their culture or beliefs, and so about their actions, even if we do not endorse them.

Nonetheless, we should be aware that empathy can be also dangerous. In the 18th century, for instance, sentimental novels promoted deeply empathic and virtuous characters in order to inspire a righteous behaviour in the readers, believing that reading about sensibility would have led to pro-social behaviour, which is, that readers would have become better persons, but this hardly happened. On the contrary, many readers were considered to be deluded by this kind of novels since they proposed an illusory world made of redeemed sinners and illusive love stories that made them more naïve in their life.

The risk in this excessive display of empathy was that readers could eventually become apathetic and indifferent to people's difficult situations in real life because they would get used to the witnessing of distressful events which would no longer have an impact on them or would elicit instead aversion or "empathic distress"[112]. Both extreme empathy and the lack of it can be then regarded as harmful or even dangerous.

However, if the aim of sentimental novels was to promote a pro-social behaviour through the representation of extremely virtuous and empathic characters, in the *Confessions* the situation is totally different. In this case, the protagonist is represented as a negative, unsympathetic, unpleasant young man who commits heinous crimes out of a supposed superiority that detaches him from the rest of society. As argued above, this negative empathy readers share with Robert can be cathartic, but there is also the risk to be eventually corrupted by it to the point of sharing Robert's own perverse beliefs or even hoping that he will get away with his crimes. As rightly observed by Cristina Nehring, in fact, "you can learn anything from a book – or nothing. You can learn to be a suicide bomber, *a religious fanatic* […] You can be as passive as a person in an all-day movie theatre, as antisocial as a

[112] See Suzanne Keen, *Empathy and the Novel*, pp. 44-47.

kid holed up with a video game"[113] (emphasis mine). The danger is then to feel so much with Robert and his situation to forget that he has actually committed heinous crimes and that he has to pay for them, in this or the other world.

Nonetheless, we empathise with him because we recognise that he has no control over the diabolical ordeal he is living, and also because he shows that he could actually change[114]. When he is distant from Gil-Martin, for instance, Robert considers the unrighteousness of his actions and often convinces himself that he will not commit them, but in the end he cannot really oppose them: "I sometimes fumed, and sometimes shed tears at being obliged to yield to proposals against which I had at first felt every reasoning power of my soul rise in opposition; but, for all that, he never failed in carrying conviction along with him in effect, for he either forced me to acquiesce in his measures, and assent to the truth of his positions, or he put me so completely down, that I had not a word left to advance against them" (p. 97). Repeatedly then Robert states his suspicion about Gil-Martin's extreme religious ideas and the crimes he urges him to commit, but every time he is reunited with him his resolutions fail, and he eventually becomes the victim of his own crimes.

In conclusion, as argued by John Bligh: "One of the valuable effects of any tragic story or play is to teach us by experience that our initial, hasty response to a sinner may be unjust or unkind; if we could understand the workings of his mind and the intensity of the provocations to which he was subjected, we should judge him more gently. The purpose of Hogg's twofold narration is to provide us with an instructive experience of this kind"[115]. There can be no justification for Robert's actions, but empathy should help us to understand them, thus refraining us from ruthlessly judging him as the Editor does. Hogg's intention

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[113] Cristina Nehring, "Books Make You a Boring Person", *The New York Times Book Review*, 23, 27th June 2004.
[114] See Warren Fox, "Violence and the Victimization of Women: Engendering Sympathy for Hogg's Justified Sinner", *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 32:1, 2001, 164-179, pp. 176-177.
[115] John Bligh, "The Doctrinal Premises of Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*", *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 19:1, 1984, 148-164, p. 161.

seems, in fact, to condemn the perverse doctrine of Antinomianism and excess in general rather than Robert himself. We should then judge him more gently since in the end we cannot be sure that in his situation we would have acted differently.

3.3 Feeling with George Colwan in "The Editor's Narrative"

Alongside David Hume, another pivotal moral philosopher of the Scottish Enlightenment who analysed the concept of "sympathy" is Adam Smith (1723-1790). Despite elaborating on Hume's own notion of sympathy, Smith diverged from it in that he would not consider sympathy as an automatic mechanism of emotional contagion but as a passion itself. According to him, in fact, we feel sympathy only when we approve of others' emotions in a specific situation: as spectators, we imagine what the other person is feeling and approve or disapprove of his/her behaviour in that situation; our approval then elicits our sympathy, whereas our disapproval provokes a detachment. Hence, Smith argues: "To approve of the passions of another [...] as suitable to their objects, is the same thing as to observe that we entirely sympathize with them; and not to approve of them as such, is the same thing as to observe that we do not entirely sympathize with them"[116].

The appropriateness of an emotional response to a situation is not determined by the single individual, however; at the basis of our approval or disapproval there is a moral code shared by the rest of society that directs our feedback. Thus for instance, we approve of a person shedding tears at a funeral because that is an appropriate reaction to grief, and so we feel sympathy towards him/her; on the other hand, if a person were to laugh in the same situation, our social moral code would consider this reaction inappropriate and so sympathy would not occur.

[116] Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. Dugald Stewart, London: Henry G. Bohn, 1853, Part I, Section I, Chapter III, p. 14.

In the "Editor's Narrative", we can consider ourselves to be in the position of the spectator who judges the characters' response to various situations according to our moral code. Clearly a Tory and an Enlightenment supporter, the Editor however gives us a biased version of Robert's story in which he shows neither sympathy for the protagonist nor he tries to see things from his perspective, but on the contrary, he repeatedly describes Robert as a "monster" and directs all his sympathy towards George, who is instead often defined a "hero" (pp. 19-20-60).

Reading the Editor's version of the story without knowing Robert's, we cannot but agree with him in his contempt towards the young murderous fanatic because our moral code impedes us to prove any sympathy towards a man who is so self-absorbed to accept to kill innocent people for a supposed higher purpose. This implies that we disapprove Robert's actions and direct our sympathy towards the victims of his crimes instead, and in particular towards George Colwan.

The Editor's perspective tends, in fact, to coincide with that of George, in whom perhaps he identifies himself as a rational, commonsensical man against the "hellish-looking" (p. 20), fanatical Robert, and even André Gide argued in his seminal introduction to the Cresset Press edition of the *Confessions* that "[a]ll Hogg's sympathy evidently goes to this charming representative of normal humanity, spontaneous, gay, rich in possibilities and in no wise encumbered with religious preoccupations"[117]. Writing during the Enlightenment, the Editor then appeals with his narrative to all those readers of his generation who do not rely anymore on religion or superstition, but on objectivity, rationality and moderation, and creates thus an insurmountable emotional distance between Robert and the readers, concluding his account saying: "In this day, and with the present generation, it will not go down, that a man should be daily tempted by the devil, in the semblance of a fellow-creature; and at length

[117] André Gide, Introduction to *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, p. 235.

lured to self-destruction, in the hopes that this same fiend and tormentor was to suffer and fall along with him" (p. 189).

Obviously, it is important to notice that both the Editor and Robert try to conquer the readers' sympathy reporting specific episodes that favour one version against the other. So, for example, Robert begins his narrative saying that his life has been "a life of trouble and turmoil" and that he was born "an outcast in the world" (p. 75), disclaimed by the man he considers to be his real father. Already from these first sentences, Robert tries to make us feel pity for him and to understand why he did what he did, probably omitting certain inconvenient episodes and repeatedly underlining how he wanted to oppose Gil-Martin's resolutions but was unable to do so because of his apparently indisputable reasonings and the influence he exerted on him.

On the contrary, the Editor evidently reports in his narrative all those scenes that give us a favourable opinion of George and thus induce us to sympathise with him and his unfortunate situation. Loved by his family, friends, and people in general, George is depicted as an amiable man that tries to reconcile with his brother despite the contempt he feels towards him. A first instance of this occurs for example when, after their first slightly violent encounter at a tennis match, George apologies to his brother for having hit him, even if Robert has done everything to irritate him: "George, at length, came forward abashedly toward him, and said, - 'I have been greatly to blame, Robert, and am very sorry for what I have done. But, in the first instance, I erred through ignorance, not knowing you were my brother, which you certainly are; and, in the second, through a momentary irritation, for which I am ashamed. I pray you, therefore, to pardon me, and give me your hand'" (p. 22), but "his polluted brother" and "forward predestinarian" (p. 22) answers to this pacifying resolution with a kick to his hand.

Afterwards, again showing his mildness and goodwill, George convinces himself that the reason why Robert follows him wherever he goes is because he wants to reconcile with

him; he then feels that he cannot deny appeasement to his own brother: "He never offers to attempt my life; nor dares he, if he had the inclination; therefore, although his manner is peculiarly repulsive to me, I shall not have my mind burdened with the reflection, that my own mother's son yearned for a reconciliation with me, and was repulsed by my haughty and insolent behaviour. The next time he comes to my hand, I am resolved that I will accost him as one brother ought to address another, whatever it may cost me" (p. 32).

After this resolution, Robert disappears for a while, and George feels free to go to Arthur's Seat where he is in full communion with nature and where he beholds "the lovely vision" (p. 33) of a rainbow. Struck at first by the peculiarity of the phenomenon, George immediately provides a rational explanation to it, which again links the enlightened Editor to the likewise enlightened George: "He soon perceived the cause of the phenomenon, and that it proceeded from the rays of the sun from a pure unclouded morning sky striking upon this dense vapour which refracted them. But the better all the works of nature are understood, the more they will be ever admired. That was a scene that would have entranced the man of science with delight, but which the uninitiated and sordid man would have regarded less than the mole rearing up his hill in silence and in darkness" (p. 33). Again, the Editor openly underlines the substantial difference between the rational George who is able to understand and appreciate the greatness of nature being a "man of science", and the "uninitiated and sordid" Robert who is instead indifferent to anything lovely or exceptional due to his grimness and frigidity.

Another element that elicits our sympathy towards George in the Editor's narrative is that, as it later happens with Robert, we witness his persecution by his diabolical brother who eventually kills him, and so we feel with him because of the predicaments he goes through. The difference between the two situations, however, is that George is an innocent victim of a preposterous belief, whereas Robert is the victim of his own crimes.

All these favourable episodes and the Editor's manifest approval of George's behaviour then inevitably and justly elicit our sympathy towards him although the feeling is that we never fully get in touch with him, probably because of the Editor's third-person narration which does not give us the same insights and details of George's life, thoughts and beliefs as we get from Robert's own narrative, so that paradoxically we tend to feel more empathy towards the ostensible villain of the story than towards one of the innocent victims of his crimes.

But perhaps in its challenging nature, what the novel wants from us is exactly to empathise with the villain because putting ourselves in his position and looking at things from his point of view can enhance our capacity to broaden our minds beyond the limits imposed in real life by taboos or decency to the point of being even able to empathise with a murderer, which does not mean that we share his same beliefs and approve of his actions, but that we can see his human frailty and learn through his mistakes without committing them[118].

3.4 The perversion of sympathy and Gil-Martin's theology

"If I contemplate a man's features seriously, mine own gradually assume the very same appearance and character. And what is more, by contemplating a face minutely, I not only attain the same likeness, but, with the likeness, I attain the very same ideas as well as the same mode of arranging them, so that, you see, by looking at a person attentively, I by degrees assume his likeness, and by assuming his likeness I attain the possession of his most secret thoughts" (p. 95): in this brief explanation to Robert it is possible to notice how Gil-

[118] See Suzanne Keen, *Empathy and the Novel*, p. 131.

Martin proposes a complete perversion of the idea of sympathy as theorised in particular by the philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment.

As we have seen, sympathy has always been considered a pivotal element in the creation of society as based on a bond between men, and has always been depicted, and is still depicted, as a positive - if not necessary - characteristic of sociable men. In this case, however, Gil-Martin takes it to a perverse and extreme level using it for his evil intents, as he also does with the principles of Antinomianism, and it is then important to take into account the idea of a righteous, moderate sympathy as proposed for example by Adam Smith to underline how something regarded positively as sympathy, or religion, can be also used for evil ends.

According to Smith, we feel sympathy when we put ourselves into someone's situation and attune our emotions to his to the point of almost becoming the same person, eventually approving or disapproving his behaviour: "By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, *we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him*, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them"[119] (emphasis mine). This technique, however, serves only to regulate our moral code to that of the rest of society, but our emotions remain our own, as the ones of the person we are observing.

What happens with Gil-Martin, instead, is that he perverts and takes to the extreme this form of sympathy so that he does not moderately share the emotions of the person he is beholding, but absorbs his thoughts and beliefs, as well as his likeness, to the point of becoming the same person, thus usurping his agency to commit his atrocious crimes. Sympathy considered in these terms becomes a diabolical mechanism and, instead of

[119] Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Part I, Section I, Chap. I, p. 4.

fraternity and sociality between men, it leads to that uncontrolled sharing of emotions which enhances a dangerous enthusiasm[120].

Moreover, this diabolical sympathy is not only used by Gil-Martin to take the likeness of other people, but also to convince Robert of the righteousness of his actions by attuning his thoughts and religious beliefs to those of the young fanatic. In fact, what he first says to Robert in response to his amazement in recognising himself in the stranger he has in front of him is: "You think I am your brother […] or that I am your second self. *I am indeed your brother, not according to the flesh, but in my belief of the same truths*, and my assurance in the same mode of redemption, than which, I hold nothing so great or so glorious on earth" (emphasis mine, p. 89). As it is later explained to Scrape by the old women of the village, it is exactly the art of the Devil to attune his thoughts and beliefs to that of the person he wants to corrupt, and he feels a greater glory if this person is a religious man like Robert.

Gil-Martin then not only convinces Robert that he is perfectly attuned to his own religious beliefs through his perverse use of sympathy, but employs Robert's greatest flaw, his pride, to persuade him to commit the atrocious crimes he will later commit. This is possible because as underlined by the same Adam Smith: "We are delighted to find a person who values us as we value ourselves, and distinguishes us from the rest of mankind, with an attention not unlike that with which we distinguish ourselves"[121], and Robert is so flattered and lured by the words he had always wanted to hear that he readily falls into the wiles of the Devil, whose main characteristic, according to his typical representation, is indeed his great eloquence and the apparent righteousness and rationality of his reasonings.

Despite our first harsh judgement towards Robert's naivety in not recognising the Devil in Gil-Martin and the unrighteousness of his proposals, we should then consider that the Devil is indeed "The Prince of Lies" and, as said by Eve to Adam in John Milton's *Paradise*

[120] See Ian Duncan, "Fanaticism and Civil Society: Hogg's Justified Sinner", *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 42:2, 2009, 344-348, p. 347.
[121] Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Part II, Section III, Chap. I, p. 138.

Lost, had he had been with her, he would have believed and fallen into the Devil's deception too[122], as we would have probably done in Robert's situation. As argued by David Hume, "[e]loquence, when at its highest pitch, leaves little room for reason or reflection; but addressing itself entirely to the fancy or affections, captivates the willing hearers, and subdues their understanding"[123], and so Robert is unable to oppose Gil-Martin's reasonings because they hit his most vulnerable points: his pride and his Antinomianism.

Also with regard to Antinomianism, in fact, Gil-Martin takes to the extreme an already extreme belief, and even Robert is immediately aware of this: "We then went on to commute about all our points of belief; and in every thing that I suggested, he acquiesced, and, as I thought that day, *often carried them to extremes*, so that I had a secret dread he was advancing blasphemies" (emphasis mine, p. 90).

Nonetheless, Robert admits that "he had such a way with him, and paid such a deference to all my opinions, that I was quite captivated, and, at the same time, I stood in a sort of awe of him" (p. 90), so that every time he shows signs of doubt, as when they have a debate about the infallibility of the elect in which he argues that there are degrees of sinning that can probably make an elect fall from grace, Gil-Martin is still able to mislead him through his perverse, but apparently unquestionable, interpretation of some antinomian principle which puts Robert "not only to silence, but to absolute shame" (p. 96): "'Why, sir,' said he, 'by vending such an insinuation, you put discredit on the great atonement, in which you trust. Is there not enough of merit in the blood of Jesus to save thousands of worlds, if it was for these worlds that he died? Now, when you know, as you do, (and as every one of the elect may know of himself,) that this Saviour died for you, namely and particularly, dare you say that there is not enough of merit in his great atonement to annihilate all your sins, let them

[122] "Hadst thou been there,/Or here th'attempt, thou couldst not have discerned/Fraud in the serpent, speaking as he spake" – John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. G. Teskey, New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005, Book Nine, vv. 1148-1150.

[123] David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. T.L. Beauchamp, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000, Section X, Part II, p. 89.

be as heinous and atrocious as they may? And, moreover, do you not acknowledge that God hath pre-ordained and decreed whatsoever comes to pass? Then, how is it that you should deem it in your power to eschew one action of your life, whether good or evil?' […] I could hardly believe that these sayings were genuine or orthodox; but I soon felt, that, instead of being a humble disciple of mine, this new acquaintance was to be my guide and director" (p. 96).

It is possible to notice here how the principles of the limited atonement and irresistible grace are wrongly regarded as a justification for every action, whether good or bad, and Gil-Martin repeatedly leans on this, as for example when he convinces Robert to kill the pious Mr Blanchard by saying: "If the man Blanchard is worthy, he is only changing his situation for a better one; and if unworthy, it is better than one fall, than that a thousand souls perish" (p. 102), theory which Douglas Gifford has called "the central 'Lie'" of the *Confessions*, "which lies at the heart of Christian theology, and allows for the whole fabric of 'justified' egotism and social evil to result"[124].

Moreover, as poignantly argued by John Carey, what Gil-Martin proposes is "a theology which thrives on the fear of exclusion"[125], and in particular on the fear of being excluded by the society of the elect, thus becoming an outcast, a figure which always interested Hogg and which is widely represented in the *Confessions* in many characters, starting from its archetype: the Devil. Considering Gil-Martin effectively as Satan, he can be in fact regarded as the first outcast since he was *cast out* of Heaven when he dared challenge God, the father he does not longer acknowledge: "'Are you ashamed of your parents, that you refuse to give your real name?' 'I have no parents save one, whom I do not acknowledge,' said he [Gil-Martin] proudly; 'therefore, pray drop that subject, for it is a disagreeable one'" (p. 98-99).

[124] Douglas Gifford, *James Hogg*, Edinburgh: Ramsay Head Press, 1976, p. 179.
[125] John Carey, Introduction to *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, p. XIV.

Robert too, as he says, was born "an outcast in the world" having been disclaimed by his father, and is always going to be one due to his predestinarian belief in the division of people between elect and damned which inevitably detaches him from the rest of mankind. Robert, in fact, turns his back to all those people he does not consider to be elect and is exclusively concerned and worried about being part of the celestial community of the just made perfect, so when in his last days he looks for sympathy and company, he is rejected by everyone, "an outcast and a vagabond in society" (p. 163).

Apart from the more obvious Gil-Martin and Robert, George Colwan and Bell Calvert can be considered to be two outcasts as well. At the beginning of his story George is in fact deeply loved and respected by everyone, but once he begins to fight with his brother, the people that once loved him begin to shun his company so that "the unpopularity of the Younger George Colwan could no longer be concealed from his associates. It was manifested wherever the populace were assembled" (p. 30), and he is then obliged to seclude himself for a long time.

Along the same lines, Bell Calvert - who has been considered by Douglas Jones as "a kind of devil" [126] herself due to some unusual characteristics of her figure - can be regarded an outcast as well since she is a woman who, mistreated and deceived by many men, eventually has to become a prostitute in order to support herself and her "outcast child" (p. 55).

Another problematic outcome of Gil-Martin's perverse use of sympathy is that his appropriation of others' likeness inevitably causes an unreliability of the senses in the characters. According to 18th-century empiricism, we are able to give sense to the world and to our experiences only through our senses, but in a case like the one represented in the *Confessions* where there is the presence of a doppelgänger who - as we have seen in Chapter

[126] Douglas Jones, "Double Jeopardy and the Chameleon Art in James Hogg's *Justified Sinner*", p. 178.

2.5 - can also appear to friends and relatives of the persecuted, confusion reigns and the characters' reliability on their sensory experience is deeply challenged.

Such an ambiguity of the double can be observed in the episode in which Bell Calvert and Miss Logan cannot deny that who they have seen walking arm in arm with Robert at Dalcastle is the already deceased George, even if this cannot be in reality: "'The thing cannot be, Mrs. Logan. It is a phantasy of our disturbed imaginations, therefore let us compose ourselves till we investigate this matter farther.' 'It cannot be in nature, that is quite clear,' said Mrs. Logan; 'yet how it should be that I should *think* so - I who knew and nursed him from his infancy - there lies the paradox. As you said once before, we have nothing but our senses to depend on, and if you and I believe that we see a person, why, we do see him. Whose word, or whose reasoning can convince us against our own senses?'" (emphasis in original, p. 65). The problem is that Gil-Martin's existence blurs the boundary between what is real and what is not thus disconcerting us readers as much as the characters of the story, taking away from us every certainty about what is real and what is right.

In conclusion, a fundamental teaching of the *Confessions* is that extremisms should be avoided because even what seems to be inherently good, such as sympathy and religion, if taken to the extreme can become diabolical and blasphemous. As we have seen, in fact, despite its positive connotation, sympathy can become dangerous when it brings forth enthusiasm which creates an alarming uniformity among men who should instead display a variety in sentiment and opinion in order to create a righteous society, as argued by Lord Kames: "Different countenances in the human race, not only distinguish one person from another, but promote society, by aiding us to chuse a friend, an associate, a partner for life. Differences in opinion and sentiment have still more beneficial effects: they arouse the attention, give exercise to the understanding and sharpen the reasoning faculty. With respect to religion in particular, perfect uniformity, which furnisheth no subject for thinking nor for

reasoning, would produce languor in divine worship, and make us sink into cold indifference”[127].

Tolerance, empathy and forgiveness are then the keys to the creation of a righteous society.

3.5 A righteous ideal of empathy

One of the many interpretations given on *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* is that of being a satire on extreme Calvinism along the lines of Robert Burns’s poem *Holy Willie’s Prayer* (1789) which satirically reports the prayer of a self-justifying sinner, Willie Fisher - a real-life Kirk elder - who asks God to forgive him for his numerous sins but at the same time to condemn others for his very same transgressions. Both in the *Confessions* and *Holy Willie’s Prayer* is then represented a sinner who asks for grace considering himself to be one of the elect, but who also demands of God to destroy his enemies and to ignore their prayers since he regards them as damned according to the Calvinist doctrine of predestination which is thus ridiculed throughout the poem because of its evident hypocrisy.

In his introduction to the 1969 Oxford edition of the *Confessions*, John Carey rejects this interpretation of the novel as a satire in that he argues that Hogg was a very religious man, “punctilious about religious observances”, so that “the implications of his novel are nearer to the Bunyanesque ‘Then I saw that there was a way to Hell even from the Gates of Heaven’, than to the jocularity of *Holy Willie’s Prayer*, with which it is often compared”[128].

[127] Henry Home (Lord Kames), *Sketches of the History of Man*, Glasgow, 1819, Sketch III, Sect. II, pp. 298-299.
[128] John Carey, Introduction to *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, p. XVI.

According to what it is possible to gather from Hogg's *A Series of Lay Sermons*, however, his idea of religion seems to be more similar to that of Mr Blanchard, so a moderate religion based on sympathy and tolerance, than to the one based on fundamentalism and extreme orthodoxy, so that it is possible that the *Confessions* was actually intended as a satirical attack on Antinomianism and on extremisms in general. As we have seen, Hogg was in fact not only critical of religious fundamentalism but also of extreme rationalism, and can be then considered a promoter of moderation, sympathy and common sense along the lines of the Moderate Party, an important group of clerics in the Kirk during the 18th century which held concepts such as the disapproval of the Puritan enthusiasm and a particular interest and sensibility for tolerance and reason[129] that were apparently shared by Hogg as well.

In the novel, Mr Blanchard holds such moderate views and can be then considered to represent Hogg's own opinions about fanaticism and the nature of true religion, as when in his discourse to Robert about the dangers of carrying religion to extremes he says: "Religion is a sublime and glorious thing, the bond of society on earth, and the connector of humanity with the Divine nature" (p. 100), which clearly recalls Hogg's own statement in *A Series of Lay Sermons*: "Wo to him who would weaken the bonds with which true Christianity connects us with Heaven and with one another!"[130].

Mr Blanchard then proposes what can be considered true religion, based on love and sympathy, and is for this reason chosen by Gil-Martin as their first victim. He is in fact deeply disturbed by Mr Blanchard who had almost equalled his eloquence in convincing Robert about the dangerousness of his new friend: "I never saw any body I disliked so much in my life, Mr. Robert […]. There is a sublimity in his ideas, with which there is to me a mixture of terror; and when he talks of religion, he does it as one that rather dreads its truths

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[129] See Douglas S. Mack, "Hogg's Religion and The Confessions of a Justified Sinner", *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 7:4, 1969, 272-275, p. 273.
[130] James Hogg, *A Series of Lay Sermons,* Sermon VIII, p. 224.

than reverences them. He, indeed, pretends great strictness of orthodoxy regarding some of the points of doctrine embraced by the reformed church; but you do not seem to perceive, that both you and he are carrying these points to a dangerous extremity. Religion is a sublime and glorious thing, the bond of society on earth, and the connector of humanity with the Divine nature; but there is nothing so dangerous to man as the wresting of any of its principles, or forcing them beyond their due bounds: this is of all others the readiest way to destruction. […] I can easily see that both you and he are carrying your ideas of absolute predestination, and its concomitant appendages, to an extent that overthrows all religion and revelation together; or, at least, jumbles them into a chaos, out of which human capacity can never select what is good" (pp. 99-100).

Despite this heartfelt speech, Gil-Martin still manages to convince Robert to kill the minister on the basis of his preaching about the possibility of salvation by good works as well as by faith, a belief considered by Robert utterly blasphemous and so deserving the ultimate punishment, being "better that one fall, than that a thousand souls perish" (p. 102). His hold of different principles together with Gil-Martin's convincing reasoning about the necessity of destroying the enemies of the Church thus results in the assassination of an innocent, pious minister, a first instance of the diabolical pattern Robert has fatally got into.

Besides Mr Blanchard, other characters believe in and foster this form of pure, pro-social, disinterested sympathy, and it is interesting to notice that most of them are Scots-speaking, humble characters. In particular, the character that presents more than the others an instance of brotherly fellow-feeling and gives us the key to the creation of a righteous society can be considered Robert's servant, Samuel Scrape. Scrape is "a very honest blunt fellow, a staunch Cameronian, but withal very little conversant in religious matters" (p. 145) who, with his simplicity of nature, is able to become a loyal and trustworthy servant to Robert. Despite Robert's arrogance and bad manners, Scrape is in fact frequently depicted feeling empathy towards him and his peculiar situation made of lapses of memory and

accusations and, according to his honesty and goodwill, he eventually feels the need to tell Robert what the other people think about him. At the end of his account, he then tells his master how the Devil was exposed in a nearby village by looking at his cloven foot but warns him that there is another way to detect evil: the Golden Rule.

The Golden Rule is a principle that can be found in slightly different variants in almost every religion, from Judaism to Buddhism, Islam, or Hinduism, and requires to do unto others as you would have them do to you[131]. According to this principle, if someone's actions do not pass this test, even if he is convinced of the righteousness of his principles, he is actually tending towards evil, as Robert is: "I then went to try my works by the Saviour's golden rule, as my servant had put into my head to do; and, behold, not one of them would stand the test. I had shed blood on a ground on which I could not admit that any man had a right to shed mine; and I began to doubt the motives of my adviser once more, not that they were intentionally bad, but that his was some great mind led astray by enthusiasm, or some overpowering passion" (p. 152). Here again is stressed the danger "enthusiasm, or some overpowering passion" can pose to a man's mind, but unfortunately this intelligence arrives too late to Robert, when his doom is already sealed.

Even if Scrape does not know what the Golden Rule says[132], he is a natural bearer of its teaching and applies it later on when an angry mob goes to Dalcastle looking for Robert after having found the bodies of his mother and the young lady he has seduced. Despite being convinced of his master's guilt, Scrape warns Robert to run away before their arrival, showing in this instance a brotherly, disinterested fellow-feeling towards him, as well as a genuine empathic fear for his situation: "Samuel entered, with eyes like to start out of his head, exclaiming, 'For God's sake, master, fly and hide yourself, for your mother's found, an' as sure as you're a living soul, the blame is gaun to fa' on you! […]. You hae not a

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[131] See Suzanne Keen, *Empathy and the Novel*, p. 163.

[132] "The auld witch didna gie me the rule, an' though I hae heard tell o't often an' often, shame fa' me an I ken what it is!" (*Confessions*, p. 152)

minute to lose, for there's proof, sir, strong proof, an' sworn proof, that ye were last seen wi' them baith; sae, unless ye can gie a' the better an account o' baith yoursel an' them, either hide, or flee for your bare life'" (p. 154).

Once Robert runs away, he looks for shelter in different places and, alongside diffidence, he also experiences instances of fellow-feeling. The first house he lodges in is that of a weaver who receives him ungraciously and tries to propose him other places where to stay. His wife, however, is sympathetic towards Robert's situation and offers him a shelter: "'Come awa, honest lad, in by here; sin' it be sae that you belang to Him wha gies us a' that we hae, it is but right that you should share a part. You are a stranger, it is true, but *them* that winna entertain a stranger will never entertain an angel unawares'" (emphasis in original, p. 157). Robert sincerely appreciates her sympathy and simplicity, and is here for the first time grateful to a person he would have regarded with contempt before.

Another character who later gives him shelter out of sympathy is a poor farmer who despite Robert's incapacity of working as a shepherd, decides to host him anyway: "The farmer engaged me as a shepherd; and finding him a kind, worthy, and religious man, I accepted of his terms with great gladness. I had not, however, gone many times to the sheep, before all the rest of the shepherds told my master, that I knew nothing about herding, and begged of him to dismiss me. He perceived too well the truth of their intelligence; but being much taken with my learning, and religious conversation, he would not put me away, but set me to herd his cattle" (p. 176). These instances of empathy towards him and his albeit embryonic appreciation of others give us then some hints that maybe, had he been finally free of Gil-Martin's persecution and aware of the extremism of his beliefs, a change could have taken place in him, but unfortunately it is too late to find out at this point.

There are two other characters who show an unexpected, pro-social sympathy, and they are John Barnet and Bessy Gillies. As we have seen in Chapter 2, John Barnet was Reverend Wringhim's man but decided to quit his job after having a discussion first with Robert, who

he utterly despised, and with the Reverend himself, in which he claimed his intention to "aye be master o' his ain thoughts" even if this meant to "dee a beggar in a hay barn" (p. 82), because nothing is more important than having a mind of your own, an interesting remark made to an antinomian preacher and a young fanatic who dies exactly because he is unable to be a master of his own thoughts anymore. Despite the great antipathy John Barnet feels towards Robert, he is later made a representative of pro-social behaviour when he intervenes in a fight that is occurring between M'Gill and Robert in which the latter is evidently losing.

Robert himself is struck by John Barnet's benevolence, thinking at first that he will join M'Gill in his beating as a revenge: "I saw a man hastening toward us; on which I uttered a shout of joy, and laid on valiantly; but my very next look assured me, that the man was old John Barnet, whom I had likewise wronged all that was in my power, and between these two wicked persons I expected any thing but justice. […] I was knocked down and mauled most grievously, and while the ruffian was kicking and cuffing me at his will and pleasure, up came old John Barnet, breathless with running and at one blow with his open hand, levelled my opponent with the earth" (p. 86). M'Gill tries to convince John Barnet to move aside and let them finish their fight since, according to him, Robert deserves a severe punishment for being "a liar and a scoundrel" (p. 86), but John Barnet answers with great wisdom and common sense: "'I ken he's a' that ye say, an' mair, my man, […] but am I sure that ye're no as bad, an' waur? It says nae muckle for ony o' ye to be tearing like tikes at ane anither here'" (p. 86). Robert feels greatly indebted to John but, instead of thanking him, he complains of his interference to his mother, so that he does not get any thanks for his good deed.

On account of what had happened between him and Robert, John Barnet would have had every good reason to join M'Gill in his beating, but shows instead great sympathy for the bad situation the young boy is in and decides to help him despite everything, thus displaying

a disinterested empathy which cannot be limited only towards some people as Robert thinks, but towards every human being, no matter how different.

Another similar episode in which a disinterested sympathy is shown is during Bell Calvert's trial. In this case, Miss Logan is already aware of Bell's guilt in robbing in her house but despite everything both her and her maid Bessy decide to testify in her favour. Miss Logan's testimony, however, comes out of interest because she wants to have some information about George's murder to which Bell was a witness, whereas Bessy's testimony is truly an act of common sense, justice and kindness towards a woman who "has seen better days" (p. 53).

In conclusion, among other things, Hogg has dealt in the *Confessions* with a relevant issue of his time: empathy. Represented in its different shades, from Gil-Martin's perverse one to its righteous form in minor characters, empathy has an important role in the novel, and the empathic, sensible, and in many cases humble characters are revealed to be more capable of teaching us morals through their actions than the Wringhims through their hypocritical words and precepts which condemn harmless acts and forgive heinous ones.

Religion then, not fanaticism; morality, not moralism: that can be considered the message Hogg wanted to send us through his puzzling novel, that religion is not made of strict principles and arrogance, but of sympathy and forgiveness, and that frequently the vessels of sincere morality are humble people, not the rhetoricians. This could be one of the keys to interpret the *Confessions*, but in the end it is impossible to really grasp its true nature since we find ourselves in a haunting vicious circle of which we cannot find the way out, but which makes this novel so eerily fascinating.

3.6 Empathy, ambiguity and detachment

We have seen in this chapter how Hogg has extensively represented in the *Confessions* one of the main concerns of the Scottish Enlightenment, but what was his real authorial intention in providing so many different shades of empathy? Did he want us to empathise with Robert or with George? Do we as readers experience what Suzanne Keen has called "empathic inaccuracy"[133] in empathising with Robert?

It has been pointed out in Chapter 1.3 how the *Confessions* was published as a polemical response to Walter Scott's controversial depiction of Covenanters in *Old Mortality* with the purpose of representing the humanity that lies behind those who are superficially regarded as fanatics without taking into account their motives and history. This is not to say that Hogg provided a positive depiction of religious fanatics in the novel, quite the opposite. Robert is described as an unsympathetic, narcissist young man who pays for his crimes suffering a diabolical, inescapable persecution that inevitably leads him to commit suicide.

Nonetheless, Hogg's narrative choice to let Robert tell his own story has been widely interpreted as the author's intention to make us empathise with the young fanatic in order to consider him rather a victim of a religious belief he uncritically accepts than a genuinely evil person. While reading the *Confessions* the impression is then that "Hogg's novel is directed against 'the rage of fanaticism', but is kind to its fanatic, and is planned to show him as one of the many victims in the world"[134].

This empathic response towards Robert could be, however, at cross-purposes with Hogg's real intention, which we cannot obviously know. As pointed out by Suzanne Keen, authors may sometimes evoke empathy unintentionally thus provoking in the readers an "empathic inaccuracy" that makes them feel with a specific fictional character - in this case

[133] See Suzanne Keen, *Empathy and the Novel*, p. 137.
[134] Karl Miller, *Doubles*, p. 19.

a villain - in contrast to the author's real purpose[135]. The author is, however, usually able to guide the readers' response towards his characters, but what makes the *Confessions* so ambiguous is precisely its continuous shift of perspective which makes it difficult for us to give a definite empathic response that is directed first at George and then at Robert.

So, if while reading the "Editor's Narrative" the fictional editor evidently directs our empathy towards the innocent, amiable George, in the "Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Sinner", Robert appeals for our sympathy with his pitiable story, and in my opinion he manages to do this in many situations, but as soon as our empathic response towards him risks to become excessive to the point of almost dismissing his crimes, irony intervenes to control it.

What is particularly appreciated by the contemporary readership of the novel is in fact the subtle irony that permeates the text in its entirety. In the "Editor's Narrative", for instance, we read Robert's story from a rational standpoint, that of a man living during the Enlightenment who ridicules religious fanatics by stressing the hypocrisy and absurdity of their doctrines, thus making it impossible to feel any connection with a person so distant from us in every respect.

In the "Private Memoirs and Confessions", on the other hand, it is Robert himself who unintentionally ridicules himself and his antinomian belief, and this irony works as a shield against our excessive empathic response towards him. We may then empathise with him but this feeling is continuously interrupted by bathos, as when Robert, in a moment when Gil-Martin seems to give away his identity as Satan, becomes convinced that he is instead the Czar Peter of Russia: "'I am a being of a very peculiar temper, for though I have servants and subjects more than I can number, yet, to gratify a certain whim, I have left them, and retired to this city, and for all the society it contains, you see I have attached myself only to

[135] See Suzanne Keen, *Empathy and the Novel*, p. 137.

you. This is a secret, and I tell it you only in friendship, therefore pray let it remain one, and say not another word about the matter.' I assented, and said no more concerning it; for it instantly struck me that this was no other than the Czar Peter of Russia" (p. 99).

This irony, alongside the double perspective of the two antithetical, unreliable narrators, create then a deep ambiguity that bewilders the reader in his interpretation of the events and in his empathic response which continuously shifts from one character to another, thus provoking a sort of detachment between the reader and the text.

Feeling empathy towards Robert, however, was not an option when the *Confessions* was published in 1824 since Hogg, as pointed out by Peter Garside, stood up "for an ideology […] quite distinct from that prevalent in post-Enlightenment Edinburgh"[136] in his partial defence of Covenanters, who were mainly regarded by the rest of society as dangerous and fanatic. For the contemporary readership uninvolved in the theological debate of the time it is instead easier to appreciate the irony of the novel and to empathise with a problematic character such as Robert, even if the question of empathy - which I have argued has a great importance in the novel if considered in the wider context of the Scottish Enlightenment - is today completely overshadowed by Hogg's use of proto-postmodern narrative techniques and by the analysis of the enigmatic Gil-Martin.

Yet Hogg's analysis of empathy, and more importantly of the lack of it, combined with the uncritical acceptance of an extreme belief apparently destined for a higher purpose, is of great relevance for our contemporary society. Robert's lack of empathy towards the ones he considers to be damned leads, in fact, to a dehumanisation of others that closely recalls the Nazis' dehumanisation of Jews, who were seen as objects they had to get rid of in order to purify German society[137], as Robert killed sinners in order to purify the church.

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[136] Peter Garside, Introduction to *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, pp. XXXVII-XXXVIII.

[137] See Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, pp. 334-335.

The fervour for a cause can then create this diabolical device of dehumanisation that can lead a person to commit any kind of atrocity, and the *Confessions* finally turns out to be an urgent warning against the dangers of extremism and insensibility in every age.

Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis has been to analyse James Hogg and his captivating novel *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* taking into account an aspect that has not been widely considered by critics and the general readership but has a fundamental role in the novel: empathy.

Empathy was one of the main concerns of the Scottish Enlightenment and this thesis aimed to prove how much James Hogg was involved and interested in this debate which permeates the whole novel to the point of representing it in its different shades, from its absence to its excess. Taking into account important studies about empathy, this research has demonstrated the significance it has always had as the starting point for the creation of a righteous, charitable society, but also the problems it can create when taken to the extreme.

The analysis of Robert Wringhim has shown, for instance, that the lack of empathy is not necessarily a natural aspect of someone's personality but can be provoked by external factors such as education and family relationship. Robert is thus almost a victim first of his parents and then of Gil-Martin who uses his frailties for his own heinous intents and proposes a perverse and extreme version of empathy. Gil-Martin is then an almost absent character who dominates the novel[138] exemplifying the irrationality of religious extremism and the dangerousness positive things such as religion and empathy can reach if taken to the extreme.

My main argument in this study has been, however, that despite Robert's unsympathetic and arrogant nature imbued with religious fanaticism, he still manages in his "Private Memoirs and Confessions" to elicit our sympathy. Hogg's choice to let Robert tell his own story, in fact, inevitably leads to our involvement in his same predicaments, from his father's repudiation to his encounter with the diabolical Gil-Martin and his successive fall into despair and madness. After a first harsh judgement given on the basis of the Editor's version

[138] See Ian Campbell, Afterword to *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, p. 187.

of the story, while reading Robert's "Confessions" our blame falls then not so much on the young fanatic, but rather on Antinomianism, and in this study it has been shown how much Hogg despised religious fanaticism and any kind of excess.

Even if potentially dangerous, it has been pointed out how sympathising with such a negative character can be actually good for us as readers since it allows us to go through the same predicaments and commit the same crimes and mistakes of the protagonist without facing any consequence, thus understanding the motives that lie behind certain decisions. By keeping a moderate distance between us and the protagonist, we finally come out of the story purified and aware of the risks extremism and the uncritical approval of any ideology can cause.

The aim of this thesis has been then to analyse the important theme of empathy in *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, but being such a multi-layered novel, other elements have been taken into account for a fuller understanding of this puzzling work. In particular, this study aimed to provide some evidence of Hogg's interest in the most important debates of his age such as religious extremism and rationalism which he tackled either in his fictional and non-fictional work that have been partly analysed throughout this thesis.

Moreover, the brief excursus on James Hogg's peculiar life and his difficult relationship with Edinburgh and its intelligentsia has shown how some personal experiences have influenced the creation of this captivating novel and of its most enigmatic character that still bewilders readers, Gil-Martin. The figure of the doppelgänger would in fact become a trope for many Romantic writers, but Hogg created a character that still amazes and terrifies people because of his ambiguity produced by a double interpretation of his existence as a figment of the protagonist's deranged mind or as the Devil.

In conclusion, the purpose of this study has been to contribute to the rediscovery of James Hogg, an underrated writer who deserves more recognition for the value of his

heterogeneous work, and of *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* in particular, a novel written almost two centuries ago which defies any categorisation and strikes for the relevance the themes discussed in it still have in our contemporary society characterised by religious fanaticism, solitude and narcissism. A novel ahead of its time that still amazes with its mysterious and haunting allure.

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