

Portrait of the Calvinist as a Young Killer: Confessions, Fanaticism, and Satanic Horror  
in Hogg's *Justified Sinner*

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by  
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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled

Portrait of the Calvinist as a Young Killer: Confessions, Fanaticism, and Satanic Horror  
in Hogg's *Justified Sinner*

presented by Zachary Johnson,

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and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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## **DEDICATIONS**

For:

**Carlie**, for your unending support and patience with me, despite my penchant for irreverence, blasphemy, and wildness. You have my love, support, and hand, always.

**Olivia (5)**, for your determination, stubbornness, tough love, and perception. You are the perfect movie buddy.

**Henry (3)**, for your sensitivity, sweetness, kindness, and conversation. Your singing is fantastic.

**Nora (2)**, for your sassy, mischievous demeanor, and her hand-holds before bed. Stay a hellion to the end.

And lastly:

**Hail Gil-Martin.**

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## **PREFACE**

Sin and the supernatural have always played a prominent role in my life and system of morality. Though I am no longer religiously affiliated, my Judeo-Christian upbringing left a strong impression on my worldview. Sometimes it feels inescapable. As if, even though I left religion behind, its imprint is always there, influencing my interactions and relationships.

If this seems a strange way to open my thesis, maybe it is. But it offers a bit of context, I think, for when I say the following: that my religiously-themed works function as testimonies of my struggle with God and my upbringing. My senior seminar paper as an undergraduate (the most extensive paper I had written up to that point,) focused on apocalyptic influenced underpinnings in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, and how the drama speculates on whether or not Utopias are possible. The case I made was that only God could create and sustain a Utopia (a point indicated in *Tempest*); but I also lamented this idea for its implications on the lesser nature of humankind. At the time of writing that paper, this was my philosophic struggle—the omnipotent paradoxes at work in *The Bible* and *The Tempest*.

In any case, my interest into the more troubling aspects of religious thought and behavior has led me through myriad explorations of how interpretations of God's presence and influence in the world dictate the moral and humanistic outlooks of individuals, and how this in turn affects social interactions and behavior. James Hogg's *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* provided me with perhaps the most influential text to explore these themes in the whole of my undergrad- and graduate experience. Hogg's novel, concerning a young, impressionable Calvinist and his Devilish

sidekick as they go on a killing spree in 17<sup>th</sup> century Scotland, is a satire like no other: its gallows humor, eerie tone, and strong grasp of Scottish folklore elevate it from being merely a critique on religious fanaticism to an interrogation of novel and genre forms, such as dialectal representation, gothic tropes, confessional literature, and horror fiction. Simultaneously it meditates on religion as a social system: its political, economic, and spiritual implications collide with each other to intriguing and sinister ends.

Chapter 1 of this paper will focus on the dialectal significance of high and low speech in *JS*. One of the important things to consider with Hogg is that, unlike his literary Scottish contemporaries, such as Scott, Hogg represented a bridge of sorts between the un- and educated classes. In Hogg's time, this seemed to work to his detriment by other "literary" writers who considered his style lacking and uneven; though now it is reasonable to argue that this melding of the folklore of the lower class and the literary goals of the higher class is Hogg's subversive genius. There are several key moments in the novel in which a lesser educated character argues or converses with someone of larger means and status. These interactions disrupt the belief—by now much scrutinized, but perhaps less so in Hogg's era—that higher financial and political status indicate moral and spiritual superiority. This is, of course, a ridiculous notion, and *JS* uses such high-and-low interactions to illustrate the absurdity of believing that such hierarchies a) should exist, and b) are somehow objectively guaranteed.

Chapter 2 will build on the previous chapter by exploring three types of confession: religious/moral, legal, and literary. In keeping with its goal of bringing together paradoxical ideas and forms, these three confessions are present within Hogg's novel, though none fit together as compatibly as might be expected. In fact, often one will

obscure the other. For example, if we read *JS* as Robert's moral confession of his crimes, his words as a legal confession are useless, and vice versa. Robert believes that Gil-Martin, his doppelganger who also happens to (probably) be the Devil, is the one responsible for his crimes, for the latter can make himself appear as anyone he chooses. Therefore, Robert thinks he has no moral responsibility for the murders he is accused of, nor is he able to recall details of his crimes clearly enough to consider his "confession" a reliable testimony in a legal court. And of course, Gil-Martin being a supernatural entity also challenges the legal confession since metaphysical forces are obviously inadmissible in a court case. But this issue doubles back again, for there is indication that Gil-Martin is really the Devil, and that Robert is not the only one to see Gil-Martin's demonic powers at play. Therefore, Robert may be telling the truth, and his moral and legal consciences are clean. As a literary confession, the novel also fails because whereas a confessional novel seeks to explicate an author's life and guilt for perceived or attributed misdeeds by justification, *JS* refuses to offer either a solid defense or condemnation of Robert precisely because of his relationship to Gil-Martin. Even if Robert is always an unsavory character, the audience cannot help but pity him slightly for the manipulation he experiences at the hands of his Reverend father and Gil-Martin.

Finally, Chapter 3 translates many of the ideas previously discussed, into a study of *JS*'s effect on horror fiction. In my reading, the most fascinating and disturbing aspect of *JS* that seems to be both innovative in the time the novel was published, and currently a staple of sophisticated horror, is the power of ambiguity. What I mean is that horror is most effective and cerebral when it refuses to rationalize its supernatural happenings, and commits to exploring human depravity as an equally horrific force of evil. The analogy I

use is *The Shining*. In Kubrick's film, Jack Torrance is a monster even before he meets the ghost of the Overlook Hotel. And once there, his interactions with them is never about solving what happened to them per se—why they linger in the hotel—but rather, how Jack's viciously-flawed personality can be pushed to the edge and over the ledge of madness. Similarly, Robert's contact with Gil-Martin leads the young man down an incredibly destructive path, though it seems more and more apparent throughout that Robert and his upbringing are strongly responsible for his actions, not Gil-Martin on his own. I see these examples as a collision of sorts between super- and natural evil, and argue that this is the superior kind of horror precisely because to lack such ambiguity rationalizes one side or the other. If Robert is not responsible for his crimes, he becomes a tragic character; but if Gil-Martin has no influence in how Robert acts, then the former loses much of his strange, formidable ominousness.

**CHAPTER 1:**  
**POLYGLOSSIA AND THE CARNIVALESQUE IN SCOTTISH**  
**DIALECTS**

Though going biographical with an author is not always the most supportable style of literary criticism, it is difficult to dismiss several parallels between James Hogg's life, and events and characters in *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (hereon *JS.*) Now before you assume I am accusing Hogg of being a fanatical murderer with the Devil for a sidekick, let me explain.

Much has been written on Hogg's life, and several biographies, such as Karl Miller's dense, engaging *The Electric Shepherd*<sup>1</sup>, report interesting and insightful accounts of Hogg in his rural upbringing and later literary circle. Ian Duncan, a Hogg scholar, writes in the introduction to the *Edinburgh Companion to James Hogg*, that Hogg's life in Ettrick was tainted early on by his family's poverty and bankruptcy, which prevented the budding author from formal education (xi). But this lack of higher learning did not stop Hogg from becoming one of Scotland's most influential writers. And though Scottish authors like Walter Scott are generally better known, I read Hogg's genius as more subversive and complex because of his *dual persona*. In a simple sense, he was a man of the common people: born and raised in laborious circumstances. But Hogg also aspired to the heights of the literary elite. Perhaps no one can represent Hogg's ambitions and "double" persona more succinctly than Hogg himself: in his *Memoirs of the Author's Life*, he records that "having appeared as a poet, and a speculative farmer besides, no one would now employ me as a shepherd...therefore...in utter desperation, I took my plaid

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<sup>1</sup> Miller, Karl. *Electric Shepherd: A Likeness of James Hogg*. Faber & Faber, 2005.

about my shoulders, and marched away to Edinburgh, determined since no better could be, to push my fortune as a literary man” (18). We get the impression in Hogg’s words that writing was not simply a creative outlet for him to express his talents; it was a means of making a name for himself beyond the stereotypes of peasant, farmer, and shepherd, all three of which he either failed at or hated being. In short, writing was one of Hogg’s last resorts.

But again, this life on both sides of the cultural and financial spectrum was beneficial for the “Ettrick Shepherd,” and Duncan believes that “Hogg cherished his roots in traditionary culture, and kept imaginative channels between them and his literary work” (1). It is no surprise then, that *JS*, arguably Hogg’s most psychologically dense and challenging work, critiques and innovates the novel as a medium of possibilities by embracing its dualistic themes, tone, and characterizations in a way not common in literary culture at that point. Susan M. Levin, in *The Romantic Art of Confession*, supports Duncan’s point by citing several instances in *JS* when Hogg seems to be drawing on occurrences from his own life, such as the “broken spectre” George sees at Arthur’s Seat having been experienced by the author in his short piece, “Nature’s Magic Lantern” (101). But particular occurrences like this are not quite as compelling in the biographical sense as Hogg’s seeming desire for literary innovation.

A strong way this idea manifests in *JS* is Hogg’s strong grasp of Scottish vernaculars. Though the editor’s prose and Robert’s confession are written by educated hands, several of the secondary characters speak in varying Scottish dialects that allow Hogg to bridge the low and high speech forms, as it were, between non- and educated Scots. This was a significant challenge to different modes of the novel popular during

Hogg's time. Rather than record peasant or folk dialect "from above," or "outside of," much in the way Walter Scott often does in his fiction, Hogg's work derives its power by recording various ways of speaking and utilizing them to subliminal, disturbing effect. This is not a slight to Hogg's fellow writers (and it is generally true that Scott was, and has been, more studied and well-received than the "Ettrick Shepherd,") but I read *JS* as an answer to texts that sought to embrace progressive values by eradicating antique systems of belief. This would have a totalizing effect on Scottish linguistics, and perhaps more dangerously, national and political representation. Accordingly, I do not read Hogg's satire within the novel as one-sided. In order to innovate the novel as a medium, he needed to find a way to represent the Scots as a population—not just one or two individuals. And though we only read two versions of Robert's life and crimes, each account contains specific instances in which Scottish dialects come into conflict; and interestingly the lesser-educated vernaculars generally subvert the more educated ones through humor, wit, deprecation, and self-awareness. This has the fascinating effect of challenging higher education and more prosperous upbringing as indicative of moral, social, and divine superiority. But before I get into the specifics of linguistic effect in *JS*, I will turn to Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin to establish the theoretical context of my argument: that the collision of high and low forms of speech in *JS* innovates the novel by offering a unique view of the Scottish populace and its supernatural beliefs, legal attitudes, and the unreliability of truth.

## **I. JS AND PREDICTIONS OF POLYGLOSSIA AND CARNIVALESQUE**

One of Bakhtin's most intriguing theories concerns polyglossia, the idea that multiple voices and varieties of language coexist and interact with each other; and that when these voices or dialects collide with one another in a chaotic, but realistic composition of the world and its differing social, political, and cultural forms is created. Bakhtin's primary example of this theory is also the medium that he championed as the facilitator of dialogic expression: the novel. In his essay, "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse," published in *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin posits that the novel, unlike many previous genres, such as "the epic poem, the lyric, and the drama" allows for multiple viewpoints to be expressed by many different characters, which results in complexity of circumstance and meaning (49). What is more, a character can say and think two separate things—and the reader can be granted access to both. Therefore, character motivations can become cloudy, and reactions to characters and decisions can range into ambivalence.

This idea is perhaps troublesome to an ordered, structured view of the world and its hierarchies, but Bakhtin believes that the integration of the high and low, an idea he calls the "carnavalesque" in his work on Dostoyevsky and Rabelais<sup>2</sup>, is a more accurate representation of speech, culture, and social behaviors coming into contact with each other in literature. The effect of these collisions is a literary medium that negates dominant ideologies and hierarchies that intentionally or unintentionally eliminate the possibility of dialogic ideas. Essentially, the world is not black and white, and the past and future are not as severed from each other as we may sometimes believe.

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<sup>2</sup> *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics* (1972) and *Rabelais and His World* (1965).

Though the technical details of Bakhtin's ideas came much later than Hogg's era of writing—Bakhtin wrote 150 years later in a time when modern and postmodern literary movements were taking root—his emphasis on polyvocality in the novel is incredibly relevant to the forces at work in Hogg's *JS*, particularly when considered in conjunction with Hogg's dual-persona: his pastoral vernacular and his literary urbaneness.

## II. DIALECT AND DIALOGUE AS SUBVERSIVE SATIRE

As mentioned earlier, the editor's and Robert's language display a higher level of education and literacy. Though neither depicts the details of Robert's crimes accurately (to say the least), the editor and Robert both write in Standard-English. Within each part though, there are "low voices" present—those of uneducated Scots. And each time Scottish dialectal vernacular is used in *JS*, Hogg reveals interesting dynamics at work in the collision of "high" and "low" speech.

Jonathan H. Grossman, in *The Art of Alibi*, refers to an integral courtroom scene of the novel in which the editor's "narrating voice, [is] displaced by the storytelling" of Bessy Gillies, Mrs Logan's servant (169). Though Grossman is more interested in the function of the court in this scene, I will examine how linguistic interplay affects the progress and outcome of the trial.

Up to this point, the editor has given the straight facts of the case in his own words, based on the oral accounts of others, but the court scene is culled from a judicial record. In effect, this one of the first instances in *JS* in which vernacular Scottish interrupts Standard-English, and Bessy's subversive humor disrupts the order of the court. Bessy is tasked with proving that several valuable pieces of silver utensils that

rightfully belong to Mrs Logan were stolen by Miss Calvert. When asked what she and Mrs Logan found at the latter's home on the morning of the robbery, she replies, "What found we? Be my sooth, we found a broken lock, an' toom kists" (46). Essentially what Bessie states here is that, by her "sooth [truth]," she and Mrs. Logan found the broken lock and "toom kists [empty coffers]" from which Miss Calvert stole the cutlery. In this moment Hogg moves away from the language the editor uses; and the effect is extraordinary as the interplay between the court and Bessie's testimony continues. When confronted with the evidence in question, the stolen silver, Bessie claims to have no knowledge whether or not the silverware is Mrs Logan's. The depute-advocate (Scottish equivalent of a prosecutor) then points out that the utensils "are all marked with a C," to which Bessy fires back, "[s]ae are a' the spoons in Argyle, an' the half o' them in Edinburgh I think. A C is a very common letter, an' so are a' the names that begin wi't...[t]hey [the spoons] are marked wi' her [Miss Calvert's] ain name, an' I hae little doubt they are hers" (47). Bessy's replies grow increasingly carnivalesque in tone, especially considering that the court is a place somewhat averse to carnivalesque disruptions as it tries maintain an impartial, ordered atmosphere.

Another instance of this occurs after Bessy refuses to say whether or not the silver is her mistress' utensils, for she cannot be certain, and the judge insults Bessy and her argument. He declares that her "scrupulousness [immorality]" will "thwart the purposes of justice," and Bessy retorts with a crude joke: "For my part I am resolved to keep a clear conscience, till I be married, at any rate" (48). This linguistic collision is, on the surface, a strong example of how Hogg destabilizes the relationship between the educated and uneducated Scots. The judge views Bessy's inability to identify the silver, as well as

her crass demeanor, to be indication of immorality. He derides her, even as she subverts his words by revealing a more complex issue at play in *JS*. Trivial as the stolen silver and trial may seem in the totality of the novel, the situation microcosmically reveals what is really at stake in Hogg's satire. The silverwares, though likely Mrs. Logan's, may very well be "doubles" or copies, since half of Edinburgh may have silver marked with a C. More largely, Robert is likely the killer of his brother, mother, Mr. Blanchard, and others; however, so might Gil-Martin be, since we can never be fully certain by Robert or the editor's account. In essence, Hogg is concerned with knowledge and veracity as represented in the genres he both satirizes and employs, such as the confession, and gothic and mystery fiction. *JS* features many such scenes that outwardly disrupt social hierarchies; thus Hogg solidifies his innovation to the novel as a form that complicates perceptions and expectations of reality by exploring colliding networks of power, be it high, like the judge and court, or low, like Bessy and her servant status.

These dialectical interactions become even more prominent in Robert's confession. Even if many lack the same carnivalesque humor as the court scene, they more than make up for it in their chaotic underpinnings. As a young man, Robert despises one of the Reverend's servants, John Barnet, though Robert fears that Barnet "might be one of the justified," so he is hesitant to cause trouble for the man (69). Even still, after Barnet chastises Robert for lying, Robert declares that Barnet has no authority to judge him, for God made "one vessel to honour, and another to dishonour, as in the case with myself and thee" (70). Barnet's reply boils down to "like-father like-son"—that Robert and the Reverend are so alike in their fanatical strain of Calvinism, they both exercise a nasty form of hierarchical power (70). As Robert is the educated son of a Reverend, his

affluence and status in society, though lesser than his brother George's, is higher than that of Barnet, a servant. And even though Barnet's discipline to Robert for lying is warranted, Robert utilizes his "holier-than-thou" worldview to raise himself above reproach from the servant.

But Robert, in an early demonstration of his capacity for cruelty, is not content merely to backtalk Barnet. He uses an authority figure (in this case the Reverend, and later Gil-Martin) to reinforce his own superiority, though this requires him to twist and contort ideologies. When Robert goes to his father figure and reports that Barnet had slandered their family, Reverend Wringham is initially skeptical of Robert's story, though his language is very telling as he assesses Barnet very similarly to Robert: "While we are in the world, we must mix with the inhabitants thereof...and the stains which adhere to us by reason of this admixture, which is unavoidable, shall all be washed away" (71). Interestingly, the Reverend gets angry only after Robert suggests that Barnet accused the Reverend of being Robert's father, a claim likely true, though never proven. But even if the Reverend were not Robert's biological parent, his vitriol upon hearing that he is reputed to be the boy's father is telling of power dynamics as represented through language.

As such, polyglossia as a hierarchical collision is omnipresent in the novel, and especially this scene. The "Elect" that the Reverend and Robert belong to (in their minds) must interact with those around them, as it would be impossible not to. But the problem is that the unordered nature of the world, here represented by linguistic exchanges, is something that the Reverend and Robert believe they must actively fight against, even to the extreme of "cutting sinners off with the sword, rather than to be haranguing them

from the pulpit” (84). Their goal, in a sense, is to stabilize a chaotic world they see as the antithesis to a God-ordered universe. It is no wonder that a fanatical mindset is so strongly rooted in Robert, for even from an early age, his paternal figure instills in him a superiority complex that is sanctioned by divinity. How else should one interpret the Reverend’s threat upon hearing Barnet’s speculation on Robert’s parentage: “He durst not for his soul’s salvation, and for his daily bread, which he values much more, say such” (86)? To be fair, the Reverend is Barnet’s employer, so on a simple level, his anger at being insulted is not completely unexpected; but his dismissive pronouncements of John’s moral character and the man’s ineligibility for salvation is, though ridiculous, very telling.

When the Reverend confronts his worker about Robert’s accusation, and asks if Barnet is grateful for his work as a servant out of God’s mercy, the servant slyly responds, “we’r a’ ower little thankfu’, sir, baith for temporal an’ speeritual mercies; but it isna aye the maist thankful heart that maks the greatest fraze wi’ the tongue” (71). John’s closing innuendo regarding humility, or the lack of, is not lost on Reverend Wringham, who is angered by Barnet’s (honest) assessment of his character. Reverend Wringham replies that Barnet’s “dark hints are sure to have *one* very bad meaning” (72)—that somehow Barnet’s words are of lower truth or insight because they are delivered in a lesser-educated vernacular. But Barnet does not miss a beat in his reply: “it’s only bad folks that think sae. They find ma bits o’ gibes come hame to their hearts wi’ a kind o’ yerk, an’ that gars them wince” (72). Then, at the Reverend’s request, the men each compare the Reverend’s character to that of a biblical character. The Reverend sees himself as Melchizedek, for he claims to be a “preacher of righteousness”; though

Barnet likens him instead to the “Pharisee...saying i’ your heart, “God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are, an’ in nae way like this poor misbelieving unregenerate sinner, John Barnet” (72). It is interesting that the Reverend views himself as a humble and virtuous shepherd of humankind, whereas Barnet sees him as an arrogant, officious character notorious for clashing with Jesus Christ over their duplicitousness. And in one final moment of anger when responding to Barnet’s retorts, the Reverend again tries to equate his moral status with his social one: “the language of reprobation cannot affect me” (73), and after this Barnet throws his keys into the dust and quits his job, unwilling and/or unable to hide his feelings of contempt for the Reverend’s delusions any longer.

I have spent the last two paragraphs primarily quoting from the text, but this has partly been to solidify my use of Bakhtin’s theories of the carnivalesque and polyglossia, particularly in the context of religious and moral conflict. The Reverend and Robert exercise their education and the reverence afforded them as a symbol of their morality; they boost themselves up by creating hierarchical divisions. Now of course, in a chaotic world, even Bakhtin would probably admit that such hierarchies will constantly arise, and that polyglossic conflicts result from such arguments as the one Reverend Wringham has with Barnet. But in a different sense, I read Bakhtin’s use of chaos as a more *hopeful* form of instability, with regards to linguistics and the novel. Both offer potentialities, possibilities. But neither would realize these possibilities if the dominant hierarchies and ideologies (often based on a flawed logic that propagates dominance with little objective support) were to eradicate the voices of others.

In “Epic and the Novel,” Bakhtin focuses on transitions of form from precursor genres to the novel, such as the titular epic poetry. One of the contentions that Bakhtin

has with previous genres is that they generally offer totalizing views of the world. He writes that in Greek and Roman eras of classical writing, the genres of ““high” literature ...harmoniously reinforce[s] each other to a significant extent; the whole of literature...becomes an organic unity of the highest order” (4). So even as these genres sought “wholeness,” this totalizing tendency had the effect of limiting potential modes of thought that disestablished dominant ideologies and hierarchical binaries. At this point we can translate Bakhtin’s work in two ways: first, Hogg’s aspiration to innovate the novel benefits from his awareness of the limitations of a singular, monoglossic text, particularly a confessional one. Because he blends the literary confession with a mystery story, one account would not be sufficient to understand Robert’s crimes in their complexity; and the natural inclination is to think that another perspective on Robert’s crimes would yield clarity; but Hogg’s satirical aim is to demonstrate how problematic multiple voices can be. But in reference to my earlier point about the “hopeful” qualities of the novel, Bakhtin—and as I read, Hogg before him—emphasizes that even if many voices further problematize notions of truth, the macrocosmic goal of polyglossia is to more accurately depict this problem as a representation of the world and its colliding perspectives. Because truth is relative, there is a particular satisfaction, I feel, in knowing that the world need not be overarchingly-ordered. There is profundity in diversity. And to try to eliminate this diversity is to seek a truth that is not so much truth as a subjective, personal version of it. This problem is found in Robert’s, and the Reverend’s view, and Gil-Martin’s facade, that the world needs to be cleansed of sinners, literally by death.

If Robert and Gil-Martin were to kill every last unjustified nonbeliever in the world, there would briefly exist a dominant group—the justified. And if each member of

this group had the exact same belief system, polyglossic potential would be absent. No one would disagree with the other. This is, of course, a hypothetical scenario at most. For even in the event that such a group might arise, in little, if any, time at all, some members of the group would find ways of presenting themselves as superior to the other members of the group. Hierarchies would be constructed based on interpretations of ideologies and tenets of faith. This example translates Bakhtin's emphasis on language and form to psychological characteristics of the fanatical mind, which Robert develops early on in life to his severe detriment—a discussion that will be made in a later chapter on fanaticism and horror fiction.

To conclude, I will examine one other memorable portion of the book, in which Robert hears a folktale so eerily similar to his own situation, that his first impressions of Gil-Martin come dangerously close to wearing quite thin. Not only is it a fascinating look at Scottish folklore, but it also functions as a tale-within-a tale—a representation of the narrative it is housed in.

Robert, upon waking up from one of his several “black outs,” this time in excess of six months, meets his servant, Samuel Scrape, who claims that Robert hired him and has always paid his wages on time, without fail. Robert has no recollection of this, nor of the many crimes Scrape says Robert has been accused of by the Scottish villagers, who believe he is in communion with the Devil. Robert believes the accusations to be a result of witchcraft—ironic, considering his and Gil-Martin's relationship—and tells Scrape so (136). In reply, Scrape tells Robert of the “rigidly righteous...town o' Auchtermuchty,” and how it came to be tricked by the Devil (136). Scrape's Scottish dialect is somewhat more refined than that of Bessy or Barnet, though occasionally he lapses into slang

vernacular. What is more important though is his presentation of many Scots as a superstitious people: one that valued oral storytelling. Scrape says that Auchtermuchty was so fervent in its devotion to prayer, preaching, and scripture, it riled up the “deils” in hell (137). Robin Ruthven, a man from the village, hears several crows one night cursing the town and its “vile sounds...bumming up the hills” (137). The crows vow to deceive the townspeople rather ominously, “with their [the townspeople’s] own bait” (137). Implied in the crows’ plan is to turn the townspeople’s steadfastness into its downfall, a clear connection to Robert’s relationship to Gil-Martin, who similarly twists Calvinism against Robert until he has lost his way to the point of murder. The following morning, as the townspeople flock to church, the regular preacher does not show up, and instead a “strange divine” enters and delivers a rapturous sermon that accuses the townspeople of iniquity, evil, and pride, all of which Satan will consume the town and its inhabitants for (138). Robin, having heard the Devil in the guise of one of the crows, tries to warn his fellows about the danger they face, though they, taken in by the preacher’s zealous delivery, reject his claims. However, Robin yanks off the preacher’s cloak, and the townspeople realize that the preacher has “cloven feet” (139)—indicating that he is Satan.

It is fitting that Scrape story is related to him by “auld wives,” considering the folk characteristics associated with such tales. But these “auld wives” are real, and the story they tell Scrape is a parable that they believe rivals Robert’s own inability to see the devil in his company. Michelle D. Brock’s *Satan and the Scots: The Devil in Post-Reformation Scotland, c. 1560-1700* presents the complex history of religious and supernatural beliefs in the years leading up to and after Scotland became a predominantly

Protestant country. Though its national religion up to that point, Catholicism, had a firm root in the country for a long time before the reformation, Protestant values championed by John Calvin in Geneva and John Knox, a native Scotsman, slowly, but steadily overtook the Scottish Church. Most intriguing in Brock's study is her use of, as she terms them, "self-writings," which she defines as first-person, usually autobiographical writings that include letters, spiritual diaries, political memoirs and personal covenants (75).

While neither Brock, nor I, rely on these or any autobiographical texts as proof of the existence of Satan or the demonic encounters Scots describe, these documents are useful because when compared, they reveal the concerns and beliefs of Scots in how sin and the Devil function in the world; and none of the accounts have the same perspective. This is polyglossia in full effect—a collision of cultural beliefs, from which emerges an ambiguous, but fearsome depictions of the Devil. Some Scots believed in Satan as a physical entity, capable of tempting, flattering, and even possessing individuals to sin, whereas others believed that the inherent depravity of humankind (one of the tenets of Calvinist theology) was evidence of Satan as an internal, intimate enemy. So perhaps the Devil would not appear as a cloven-hoofed demon, but rather a psychological influence.

But as is the case of much folklore, vices and virtues can take on physical form—in this instance the Devil changes his appearance to both a crow and preacher, akin to the way Gil-Martin changes his appearance to look like other people. Whether or not the old wives actually believed the story of Auchtermuchty is unclear—in fact it may be a story older than themselves, also passed down to them by other old wives. But the fact remains that these women equate the story to Robert's own (140). And though Robert blames Gil-Martin for his actions and trouble, these women do not indicate that they know about Gil-

Martin, or that he is friends with Robert, so I read their story of an external Devil (the villainous Preacher) as translating to a warning about internal devils (Robert's fanaticism).

This should not remove suspicion from Gil-Martin for impersonating Robert and committing crimes. Instead, it indicates that even as the religious culture of Scotland transitioned into a predominantly Protestant system, its theological and ideological issues dispersed into a diverse population with different ideas about faith, salvation, and the supernatural. With this in consideration, Calvinism receives a great deal of criticism and satire, though Hogg does not isolate the denomination as the only religion that inspires fanaticism. At some point in time, all religions have dealt with members acting in horrific and violent ways, using religion as a justification. Instead of being willing to accept the chaotic world as a place of carnivalesque possibility, the fanatic, such as Robert and the Reverend attempt to create hierarchies founded on unverifiable, subjective conclusions, ones they take as divinely ordained and commanded of them. But this is not a failure on Bakhtin's part, that polyglossia affords the possibility for radicalism, given diverse perspectives, But the fanaticism in question makes its quest to eliminate the very system that allows it to exist in the first place. To use the lesser known part of a rather cliché phrase, "Power tends to corrupt."<sup>3</sup>

### **III. TWISTS AND TURNS AS THE FIRE, HOTTER, BURNS**

I will offer one more correlative point that moves away from a difference in language and speech, and further into the psychological realm of Robert's fanatical mindset. Nearly every time Robert meets Gil-Martin, he is enraptured by his double's

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<sup>3</sup> From John Dalberg-Acton's famous saying, "Power tends to corrupt, and *absolute power corrupts absolutely*. Great men are almost always bad men" (my emphasis).

capacity to twist the principles of their religion to support Gil-Martin's evil desires and intentions. Though I maintain that the Reverend is equally complicit in polluting Robert's mind, Robert admits that even the Reverend's "religious dissertations" began to comparison to Gil-Martin's endless knowledge of Calvinism (89). The longer the "pair" interact, the easier it becomes for Gil-Martin to ease Robert's concerns and fears before acts of violence and depravity. And even as their relationship deteriorates due to Robert's increasing fear of his double's true identity, Gil-Martin's words always soothe Robert into re-pledging himself to the noble cause of God's will: killing sinners.

In a telling passage of both Gil-Martin's origin and true identity, the fiendish fellow admits that, "My former days were those of grandeur and felicity. But, would you believe it? *I was not then a Christian.* Now I am. I have been converted to its truths by passing through the fire, and since my final conversion, my misery has been extreme" (132). That Robert does not pick up on the rather blatant reference to the fall of Satan seems inconceivable; but then we are left to wonder, is Robert's mindset really so clouded by his "justified" status, that he too, like the Auchtermuchty congregation, thinks himself infallible to the temptation and bidding of the Devil?

## **CHAPTER 2:**

### **CONFESSIONAL QUANDARIES IN *JS***

In *JS*, we are given two distinct portraits of the life and crimes of Robert Wringham. The first, which bookends the novel, is entitled “The Editor’s Narrative,” in which the editor pieces together a story of Robert, alleged son of George Colwan (though more likely of Reverend Wringham,) and brother to George Colwan the Second. The other half of *JS* is called, “Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner,” written by Robert himself. Given that *JS* takes its title from Robert’s section, which comes in the middle of the book, Hogg’s decision to open his novel with a lengthy “Editor’s Narrative” is intriguing. We will look at confessions in a variety of forms, and consider how *JS* incorporates and alchemizes each form with the others to innovative, yet troubling results.

There are two kinds of confession pertinent to my argument: the moral, legal, and literary confession. It is important to understand the nature of both in order to contextualize *JS*’s destabilization of the relationship between all three, and show how the novel influences the way readers understand the veracity of confessions as a genre. Although confession has, more or less, become a mostly secular, legal term in the last 500 years (confession, *n.*), it transitioned to this form from a more spiritual, intimate act—the moral confession.

#### **I. MORAL CONFESSION**

In the religious sense, we understand moral confession to be a ritual performed when a penitent individual acknowledges and feels sincere contrition for misdeeds of a moral nature. The act of confession may be delivered internally or spoken in private to

God; in intense meditation; or in some faiths, such as Catholicism, recited to a priest, who offers God's absolution (depending on the circumstances and seriousness of the sin.) And while Robert Wringham's denomination in *JS*, a peculiar strain of Calvinism, would have little need for confession, its relevance in the novel is extraordinary. As Ian B. Cowan writes in *The Scottish Reformation*, Protestantism was uncommon during the sixteenth-century decades (1540-1550's) leading up to the Scottish Reformation (89). The country was overwhelmingly Catholic, and thereby observed Catholic customs. Denis McKay, in his essay, "Parish Life in Scotland, 1500-1560," notes that for Pre-Reformed Scots, confession took place in the "chancel [near the altar] behind a veil or the rood screen" (106). This narrowly predates, according to McKay and also the OED, the now standard use of a confessional: the "box, in which the priest sits to hear confessions" (confessional, *n.*). Regardless of the actual setting in which a confession is made, privacy allowed for the confessor to speak frankly about his or her sins in order to unburden the sin(s) and be forgiven of them by Christ's mercy. But this practice was soon altered when the Protestant movements started by Martin Luther and his reformers spread to the Scottish laity. It was not an immediate transition, as Brock reports in *Satan and the Scots*, for the "Protestant faith slowly overtook the vibrant, sensual Catholicism of medieval Scotland" (2). Of course there was some resistance from Catholic parishes and influential leaders in government; however, Protestantism worked its way into Scottish life, primarily by way of John Knox's embrace of much of John Calvin's theology.

Cowan reports that Knox, a native Scot, played an integral part in the reception of Protestant tenets of faith by traveling through Scotland and engaging with many notable and powerful associates within the religious system, who subsequently incorporated

Knox's Calvinist-leaning Presbyterian values (110-1). Maurice Taylor, in his article, "The Conflicting Doctrines of the Scottish Reformation," also supports this point, noting that Knox's time in Geneva, where Calvin resided, had a significant impact on Knox's understanding and interpretation of Protestant theology, which would be the foundation for, in 1560, Knox's co-authored publication of the "Confession of Faith," or the "Scots Confession" (257-9). This confession, a literary document, featured several of the more controversial ideas of Calvinism, such as predestination and the "justified elect." Although this document would later be overtaken by the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, the basic ideas embraced by Knox and others leading up to 1560 had a profound impact on the Scottish way of life and the overthrow of Catholic influence in the nation.

But of course, this Reformation occurred at least one century before the events of the book, and nearly three before Hogg's era of writing. This is important to consider in light of Hogg's fascination with "doubling" in *JS*. As Robert meets his double, Gil-Martin; as Bessie cannot verify that the stolen silverware are her mistresses'; and even as Robert is torn between two fathers, readers witness a kind of devolution in Robert's morals, character, and sanity. He transitions from what is already an extreme, subjective form of Calvinism into a more sinister, murderous one. He, like his religion, has "doubled" in the years he grows and the years the religion has been passed down. Thus, by the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, Calvinism and Presbyterianism were firmly rooted in the country's religious tradition, though exponentially "doubled" versions of the religion also existed, propagated by several centuries of interpretation.

One of the most interpreted and therefore dangerous parts of Calvinism are the "Five Points," as adhered to since the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, published in 1646

by the Westminster Assembly, a council of English and Scottish theologians. More modernly, the points have been explicated well in David N. Steele's and Curtis C. Thomas' 1963 philosophy book *The Five Points of Calvinism: Defined, Defended, Documented*. The first, "total depravity," asserts that no human has the authority to save him- or herself from damnation; "unconditional election," posits that God has already determined the persons born and unborn that will be eternally saved and damned; "limited atonement," suggests that only the sins of those saved by God were atoned for by Jesus Christ's sacrifice, and not the sins of those damned; "irresistible grace" implies that those saved cannot resist or lose God's salvation; and finally, "perseverance of the saints" proposes that all who are saved will either stand firm in their faith or be forgiven of their sins, but those not saved will sin without grace afforded to them (18). These five points have a centralized connection: that God has saved whom he will, and that his decision will never be altered.

Though Hogg's satirical depiction of religion in *JS* is non-exclusive, in that it does not satirize *only* Calvinism, it primarily targets Calvinist theology by taking these five points to deviously extreme conclusions. Referring back to my interest in confession, then, in conjunction with the Calvinist five points, confession as a religious act loses some of its significance within a Calvinist system. In the Catholic tradition, confession is an integral part of renewing moral covenants with God. The individual that confesses should feel and express sincere guilt for misdeeds, and then disavow their sin. To put it simply, confession affirms the Catholic doctrines of faith and works as the prerequisites to be saved; whereas Protestant faiths, such as Calvinism, emphasize God's divine grace as the only guarantor of eternal salvation.

And although confession was (and still is) practiced in several Calvinist strains, Hogg indicates that it loses a great deal of its potency because, by virtue of the five points, nothing is at stake in the instance that God has already determined who will and will not be saved. If humankind is totally depraved, and only those unconditionally elected by God are eternally saved from damnation, then the act of confession problematizes salvation by faith alone by functioning as a ritual that only makes redundant the first point of Calvinism that humans are inherently sinful and cannot save themselves. I hesitate to imply that a reformed Scot would not confess to sins for the sake of feeling at ease with him- or herself, especially given that many Scots were either brought up in, or at least understood their Catholic heritage. But even still, *JS* implies that in the instance that salvation has already been determined, confession is theoretically stripped of its spiritual relevance and essence.

This is not to say that Calvin and his followers downplayed the role of sin and the Devil, or encouraged immorality. Brock's *Satan and the Scots* offers a comprehensive and compelling account of how the Scottish Reformation affected the Scot's understanding of moral and spiritual evil. Her most salient point, which will be used throughout the rest of my argument, is that the Devil had a strong hold over the lives and minds of Scots, pre- and post-reformation, though in the latter case, beliefs and understandings of his nature and powers became more complex. Brock posits that Satan was discussed in "print, from the pulpit, in the courtroom, on the streets and in the intimate pages of personal writings," and often to terrifying ends (1). As well, she notes that Calvin, though he did not write at length about the physical characteristics of the Devil and demonology, very much believed and taught that Satan and his servants were

real (26). Implicit in Brock's summation of Calvin's ideas is that Satan as a preternatural entity had both an external and internal impact on how Scots understood themselves and their relationship with others.

Turning our attention to the novel itself, Robert's confession is a strong account of a young Scot at war with his "total depravity," though perhaps not in the way he thinks. One of the inherent problems with reading Robert's confession as a moral one is that his understanding of Calvinist theology negates the need for confession to be sincere. What I am not arguing here is, to reiterate, that Calvin encouraged sin—quite the opposite. But the five points of Calvinism that he championed are disturbing when taken to extreme conclusions, which is exactly Robert does in *JS*—propelled on, at first, by his Calvinist mother and father, and then later by his doppelgänger, Gil-Martin, the novel's embodiment of Satan.

Reverend Wringham's revelation one morning about Robert's "justified elect" status is a significant turning point in the narrative of Robert's confession. The Reverend tells his son that he has "wrestled with God...not for a night, but for days and years...but that he had at last prevailed, and had now gained the...desired assurance of [Robert's] acceptance with the Almighty, in and through the merits and sufferings of his Son" (79). On a simple level, in this passage the Reverend underscores each of the five points of Calvinism, and accordingly, Robert cries "for joy to be thus assured of...freedom from all sin, and of the impossibility of my ever again falling away from" his status (80). But more troublesome is the license by which the Reverend claims knowledge of Robert's elect status. Even in a moral confession, which implies some level of supernatural belief, the absolute knowledge of one's salvation is, to put it lightly, subjective; and put more

strongly, suspect. To be fair to Robert, he does not come to the conclusion that he is one of the “elect” of his own volition. He is a young, impressionable teenager, easily influenced by such an authority figure as the Reverend. But Reverend Wringham is rather clever in his bestowment to Robert. It is not simply a revelation, but a gift, for the Reverend claims to have “wrestled with God” for “years” to ensure Robert’s eternal salvation. Robert’s reception of his gift is no less than grateful, and I argue that this moment strongly demonstrates Hogg’s fascination with the fanatical mind: how it is manipulated by other voices, and how eventually such a mind mistakes arrogance and amorality for knowledge and justification.

And herein lies the another significant problem with Robert’s confession when we view it from a moral lens. If Robert does not believe that he is morally corrupt, and can never be so, the most basic tenet of moral confession—contrition—is not likely to be found in his writing. It is very telling of Hogg’s aim in the section of Robert’s confirmation that *immediately* after being told of his eternal salvation, Robert meets Gil-Martin. As the two approach, Robert articulates his impressions of the other boy, and his internal response to him:

I can never describe the strange sensations that thrilled through my whole frame at that impressive moment; a moment to me fraught with the most tremendous consequences; the beginning of a series of adventures which has puzzled myself, and will puzzle the world when I am no more in it.

That time will now soon arrive, sooner than anyone can devise who knows not the tumult of my thoughts and the labour of my spirit; and when it hath come and passed over, when my flesh and my bones are decayed, and my

soul has passed to its everlasting home, then shall the sons of men ponder  
on the events of my life; wonder and tremble, and tremble and wonder  
how such things should be. (80)

The above description of meeting Gil-Martin and the ominous recollection of things to come is striking. Robert is at a loss for words to describe his friend and enemy. This lack of speech implies the kind of ambiguity we can expect from Hogg. Rather than give a straightforward description of Gil-Martin's form and physical features (which we later learn would be fruitless anyways, given his shape-shifting power) the aura and psychological impression that radiate from him penetrate Robert's inner thoughts and feelings. It is a singular moment in his text, too, because it breaks with the "in-the-moment" style Robert typically employs in his writing. It forecasts danger on the horizon, and gives immense gravity to Robert's life and crimes. This is an especially salient point given that up until this point Robert's misdeeds have been mischievous and cruel, but never as serious as taking the life of another human being. This quandary eradicates any affordance of reliability to Robert and his confession. Of course, because the "confession" comes after the editor's damning portrait of Robert in his opening narrative, Robert never seems reliable in the first place. But isolated from the "Editor's narrative," Robert's confession is still just as, if not moreso, unreliable.

To make matters worse, a few days after Robert is told about his "elect" status, Reverend Wringham lays his hands upon Robert to bless him that he should be "a sword into the hand of his sovereign, wherewith to lay waste to his enemies...to destroy, and overcome, and pass over; and may the enemies of Thy Church fall down before him" (84). Robert internalizes this to be a "decre[e]...to cut off the enemies of the Lord from

the face of the earth” (84). These ominous moments, as well as the previous affirmation of his election, undermine Robert’s authority even within his own confession, as they change Robert’s perception of his crimes from murder to very literal “spiritual warfare.” And although Gil-Martin is not the original instigator of Robert’s hellish descent into madness—I read that the Reverend is—Gil-Martin certainly pushes Robert’s youthful idealisms to macabre, diabolical ends.

Take for example the killing of Mr. Blanchard, Robert and Gil-Martin’s first victim. The three parties walk in a field together one day, arguing about theology and religion, to which Mr. Blanchard and Gil-Martin’s staunch oppositional views cause the two to form a strong dislike for each other. Gil-Martin finally leaves in anger, and Mr. Blanchard warns Robert of Gil-Martin’s dark counsel and intentions: “He [Gil-Martin], indeed pretends great strictness of orthodoxy regarding some of the points of doctrine embraced by the reformed church; but you do not... perceive that you and he [carry] these points to a dangerous extremity...there is nothing so dangerous to man as the wresting of...its [religion’s] principles, or forcing them beyond their due bounds” (90). If only Mr. Blanchard were Robert’s guardian and friend, rather than the Reverend and Gil-Martin, respectively.

Accordingly, Robert’s reception of Mr. Blanchard’s warning, and his perception of the elder man to be one of the “enemies” of whom his father and Gil-Martin encourage him to smite from the earth, is a damning moment in which Robert is positioned between two choices, each with the utmost severity of consequence. But of course, readers would not be reading about Robert in *JS* if he had refused to kill Mr. Blanchard and resolved

himself to the straight and narrow path. We are perversely fascinated by the fanatic, depraved mind that desires to kill

When he and Gil-Martin plan to kill Mr. Blanchard, Robert records a bizarre vision in which “golden weapons of every description” (95) rain down from the heavens; and later Gil-Martin, exhibiting one of the first explicit examples of his supernatural power, produces two pistols of gold—of the same material and design as Robert envisioned (95). Robert, now referring to himself as an “assassin in the cause of Christ and His Church” (96), takes one of the pistols, and the two ready themselves for their plan. Admittedly, when the time comes to shoot Mr. Blanchard, Robert hesitates; though when Gil-Martin’s shot misses Mr. Blanchard, and the elder man rushes the pair in anger, Robert shoots and kills the man with his golden pistol. Hogg cleverly writes this occurrence as akin to self-defense rather than outright murder, though he also implies that Gil-Martin’s poor shot was intentional.

The moral complexity of the situation is enormous here. Robert believes himself a weapon wielded by God, though when the time comes to perform his religious duty (as he sees it,) he hesitates. In this moment, readers may be tempted to view Robert as second-guessing whether or not his killing Mr. Blanchard is truly justified—a point I have no problem conceding, though the novel does not indicate why he holds off. But the fact remains that Mr. Blanchard *is* killed by Robert’s hand, and Gil-Martin’s sly orchestration of events does not lessen the moral severity of Robert’s choice. One could argue that in Robert’s perception, he was defending himself and Gil-Martin from attack, which may be true to Robert himself. But Hogg infuses a form of dramatic irony here, by allowing Robert’s words to betray him. Robert recounts: “Gil-Martin’s ball had not taken

effect, which was altogether wonderful, as the old man's breast was within a few yards of him" (96). I read the "wonderful" in this passage as more akin to strange or curious than exciting or pleasant, which is how we typically use the word now. Because of this, Robert does not comprehend how Gil-Martin could have missed. As Mr. Blanchard runs at the boys after the missed shot, Robert's "piece [is] discharged" (97). Robert does not admit that he pulled the trigger—it is though the gun acted of its own volition. He describes it this way, though the reader understands what has happened. Though Robert may not feel that he has not sinned or committed a crime, the moral reader knows he has: by conspiring to murder from the outset, and more severely, by putting himself in the situation and performing the murder at the behest of Gil-Martin. We would not be reading *JS* if Robert hypothetically threw down his weapon and fled from Gil-Martin, and remained steadfast in disavowing his dangerously zealous leanings. But that is not the choice he makes. And as Robert descends down the murderous rabbit hole, as it were, even his claims of being unconscious or unaware when he kills, do not exempt him from accountability. At one point, he claims to black out for several weeks, during which time he is accused of raping and impregnating a young woman, and in a longer blackout span, nearly six months, he allegedly kills the girl, her unborn child, and also his mother (131).

Even if the reader indulges Robert in his claim that Gil-Martin takes on Robert's guise to kill—which we know Gil-Martin is capable of doing—Robert's account as a moral confession is never clear because it lacks the two things that would make it acceptable to the reader who accepts the existence and power of the supernatural. First, at no point does Robert express explicit penitence for his crimes. By declining to acknowledge participation in the crimes, by claiming to be unable to account for lengthy

stretches of time, and by misrepresenting details of the way the crimes played out, Robert refuses to admit his complicitness in the deaths of many people, including his own mother and brother. Second, and directly related to the last point, Robert's refusal to acknowledge his guilt eliminates his authoritative presence in the confession. Though he titles his work a "memoir and confession," readers cannot discern exactly *what* Robert is confessing to, nor whether the detail of events is true. Jonathan H. Grossman, author of *The Art of Alibi: English Law Courts and the Novel* (which I will use more extensively in my discussion following this section,) writes that in Robert's case, "even if we happen to be unconscious of our acts or find them inexplicable, they are still *ours* as we each uniquely move through time and space [which is one of the fundamental problems with Robert and the editor's accounts, when juxtaposed]" (171). Grossman's point, also supported by Bakhtinian philosophy, essentially argues that Robert *must be* held accountable for his choices precisely because he fails to provide a sufficient alibi for his crimes. Even though his memoir and confession is, in his words, meant to "justify" his life and decisions, the only thing that is revealed, by Hogg, is that moral confessions, particularly when contained in legal or literary confessions, are problematic because personal beliefs and "immoral" sins are subjective.

## II. LEGAL CONFESSION

In the last section, I discussed several examples of how Robert's sense of morality is both tainted by his upbringing and also by Gil-Martin's influence, and subsequently impact have impacted his inability to morally "confess." But many of the problems that preclude Robert from confessing his moral sins also affect the way his attempt at legal confession is insufficient; and several *new* problems complicate matters further.

Hogg's decision to use the word "confession" in the title of Robert's account and for the book as a whole is interesting because even though Robert's confession contains indications that Robert or his double kills many people, Robert is so fanatically blinded to his participation in the crimes that he writes as though his confession were really an alibi of sorts. It is here that the "Editor's Narrative" becomes an integral part of understanding the legal act of confessing—a point not lost on several other scholars such as Grossman, who was introduced earlier. Grossman writes about representations of the English Legal system in Victorian-era fictional works; and just as the title suggests, he contextualizes his legal-centric argument by equating texts to "cases" to be examined, interrogated, and sentenced by readers who act as "judges." Though surprisingly Grossman does not give *JS* its own chapter, he briefly discusses in his conclusion how fascinating *JS* is for commenting on this reader-text relationship (168-9). In a point both he and I picked up on from the novel, Grossman writes that the editor's "ostensibly objective version of the story turns out to be nothing more than another representation" (172). That said, I will adapt this point to examine how *JS* is set up in a meta, three-party construct: if the reader is the judge, and the text is the case, then in my scenario the editor and Robert are opposing witnesses. Though the "Editor's narrative" is not a confession—morally, or legally—its relationship to Robert's confession is integral to *JS*'s subversive satire on crime and complicity. This is why I feel comfortable considering it and Robert's confession both as "witnesses," even if not entirely the same genre of writing.

Now, I think a clarification should be made before we proceed. *JS*, in its own hypothetical world, is not a real case in which Robert is *literally* on trial for his crimes. Given that Robert's life, crimes, and suicide occur long before the editor pieces together a

patchwork history of the story (“hunder-year-auld banes,” as James Hogg *the character* calls the editor’s quest when the latter hopes to dig up Robert’s corpse (170)) a deceased individual could not be put on trial and *legitimately* punished for a crime<sup>4</sup>. Yet the case/courtroom/trial/judge/witness analogies are helpful, I think, precisely because Hogg’s decision to juxtapose the two accounts next to each other helps readers to better understand the problems that arise when temporality and spatiality cannot be mediated.

In any case, the editor’s reliability in his narrative is immediately suspect. In the first paragraph of his account, he admits the unclear history of the Dalcastle estate and its inhabitants, they being: George Colwan Sr. and Jr.; Mrs. Colwan, George Sr.’s wife, Jr. and Robert’s mother, who leaves her husband and takes Robert with her; and Miss Logan, George Sr.’s mistress. The editor states that it is through “tradition [i.e. oral history]” and several “parish registers” (3) that he has compiled his account of what happened to Robert and his family. So rather than the editor being someone intimately acquainted with the Colwans and Wringhams, as well as their houses and estates, he is far removed by many miles and some hundred years. With regard to the former, this would be of lesser consequence in the modern era, given the monumental advances in transportation and communication; but even today, the channels of information that could accurately represent what one hundred years ago was like would be, while significantly improved from 17<sup>th</sup> century Scotland, still problematic.

Because of this, I do not outright condemn the editor for his inability to substantiate what he claims. If anything, his research is admirable in its ambition and revelation, if not

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<sup>4</sup> Though the Catholic and Anglican church have an interesting history of trying this very thing, most notably—or notoriously—in the Cadaver Synod trial of 897, in which Pope Stephen VI exhumed and tried Pope Formosus for perjury and for rising to the papacy dishonestly. Formosus’ papacy was voided to him.

exactly verifiable in any real capacity. But this is, to reiterate, the problem in *JS* as a whole text: that Hogg holds up the editor's version of events in comparison to Robert's version and tasks the reader with attempting to mediate between the two. I have discussed the many issues with Robert's credibility in a moral sense, but essentially, continuing the courtroom analogy, the editor's evidence is what is modernly referred to as hearsay: "information received by word of mouth, usually with implication that it is not trustworthy" (hearsay, *n.*) Hearsay is inadmissible in any court of law precisely because even though it may have some root in truth, the details—often the precise points needed to either convict or acquit a defendant—cannot be reliably verified.

The editor's secondhand account disallows him to craft a full portrait of Robert—very similar to how Robert's fanatical mindset and his perception of Gil-Martin's power, in a way, makes him a secondhand witness to his own actions. The editor gives readers what he presents as the straight facts: George Colwan Sr. marries a woman in every way his opposite, particularly in terms of age, religion, and faith. As such, their relationship is cold and short-lived. And though Mrs. Colwan bears George a son, also called George, and another son, Robert (though likely not fathered by George Sr., but rather the Reverend Wringham,) she leaves Dalcastle and brings up Robert under the Reverend's Calvinist care and guidance. Robert's teenage years are fraught with anger and pettiness: tangible jealousies arise as he interacts with George Jr., his elder brother and heir to Dalcastle. Robert feels himself cheated out of George's easier, more affluent life, one that affords happiness, friends, and financial stability. Because of this conflict, the two brothers butt heads, though their altercations are soon cut short by George's murder, attributed to one Thomas Drummond, a companion of George, whom the latter quarrels

with one evening in an inn. Upon the news of his son's death, George Sr. dies of a broken heart, and since he and Miss Logan never married, she is removed from Dalcastle, which goes to Robert. In many instances, this would be the end of the tale. Not a particularly happy one, but the loose ends have been tied up, if not satisfactorily so.

But up to this point in the editor's narrative, there is never a mention of the supernatural, Gil-Martin, or an alternative perspective on the incidents. In a way, the editor's narrative resembles a court case that is being conducted simultaneously with the investigation of the crimes, though neither the investigation, nor the court, can keep up with the dearth of possibilities. Said differently, the editor presents the pertinent highlights of the case and asks the reader to make a judgment, despite there being still much ground to cover, the likes of which the editor and his sources are ill-equipped to understand.

After George Sr.'s death and Robert's seizure of Dalcastle, Miss Logan commits herself to uncovering the circumstances of George Jr.'s death, for she, rightly so, suspects that Robert had a hand in the deed, despite Drummond being put on trial *in absentia* (due to his fleeing the country upon hearing he was a suspect.) Eventually, though, a rather curious circumstance permits Miss Logan the chance to hear a different account of the night of George's murder.

After some of Miss Logan's cutlery and utensils are stolen, the woman blamed for the theft, Miss Calvert, claims that she witnessed the murder, and that Drummond was innocent of the crime attributed to him. Her account verifies Miss Logan's suspicion that something was amiss in Drummond's conviction. It is here that we first learn of Gil-Martin—though the details are scant—for Miss Calvert, who turned to prostitution to

support herself and family, admits that she was with Drummond in an inn room the night of George's death—and though Drummond leaves before George is killed, Miss Calvert, from the room's window, watches him disappear in one direction only to see at the very same moment, Robert and Gil-Martin emerge from the opposite direction (51). Gil-Martin, who as we know can change his appearance, appears as Drummond to Miss Calvert, which frightens her. And who could blame her for fearing such a seeming impossibility? Interestingly enough, Miss Calvert's testimony, though seemingly ridiculous, comes closer to the truth of *JS* than the editor has, up to this point, been able to do. When I say "truth," of course I do not literally mean "truth," as this novel lacks it truth throughout; just that Miss Calvert is the only person that can verify that Gil-Martin does exist and that he has a hand in George's murder. Without her interaction with Drummond in the minutes leading up to the crime, she could have been easily duped by Gil-Martin's altered appearance, and hypothetically serve as a witness against Thomas Drummond in the trial.

Interestingly, Gil-Martin is thus a factor in both narratives, but Robert's treatment of him differs so sharply from the editor's that it fails to corroborate the first account. Gil-Martin's shape-shifting abilities are not limited to physical appearance, as he admits early on to Robert: "my countenance changes with my studies and sensations...by looking at a person attentively, I by degrees assume his likeness, and... I attain to the possession of his most secret thoughts" (86). In this admission, Gil-Martin reveals his most fearsome ability. He can, in a sense, possess a person: the individual's physical appearance, voice and vernacular, as well as the person's innermost thoughts and feelings. It is as though he were him or her—just like how he "is" Robert and "not" Robert at the same time. What is

more, he is also aware of the thoughts and actions of those around him, which he manipulates to his own devious ends.

This comes into play as Miss Calvert recounts the night George is murdered. When Gil-Martin and Robert walk toward the inn where George and Drummond have just recently quarreled, and where George remains, Gil-Martin looks directly at Miss Calvert standing in the window and, imperceptible to Robert, winks and makes a strange motion of greeting to her, as though he is aware she is watching (53). He does exactly the same thing to Miss Calvert *and* Miss Logan when the pair set out to Dalcastle to confront Robert about George's murder. The women stay the night in a small room just outside of the Colwan estate before they plan to accost Robert the next day, though while they sit near a window in the room, Robert and Gil-Martin walk by. As they pass the window, Gil-Martin turns to the women and makes "a sly signal...biting his lip, winking with his left eye, and nodding his head"—the very same signal he made to Miss Calvert "on the night of the duel, by the light of the moon" (57). Now there are two witnesses to Gil-Martin's existence. And the icing on the cake, as it were, is that as Gil-Martin passes by, arm-in-arm with Robert, he appears as George, Robert's murdered brother. The significance of this is not difficult to recognize, for Miss Logan, who was a mother figure to George, sees her murdered child physically linked at the elbow to his murderous brother. But Hogg has not finished incorporating troublesome variables into the scenario, for readers are left to wonder if Gil-Martin, since he appears to Robert in the guise of Robert himself, can appear differently to two people *at the same time*? Additionally, is he privy to the thoughts and feelings of anyone, anywhere, whether mimicking them or not?

Now, before I make my claim, I will clarify here that many scholars have not been willing to take a stance on whether or not Gil-Martin is actually the Devil. Though of course I endorse the value and practice of literary interpretation, I read Gil-Martin's motion—his acknowledgement that Miss Calvert, and later Miss Logan, will witness what is about to occur—as a very substantial indication that he is, in fact Satan, and furthermore, that his orchestration of events may very well extend much further than either the editor or Robert can foresee or understand.

I am not suggesting here the reality of Satan, nor am I saying that the two accounts offer enough evidence between them to explicate Gil-Martin's power. In fact, this overlap is why I place the two as opposing witnesses in the trial analogy. A supernatural character ties the two together, but also ensures that neither can be authoritative in objective ways. For how does an author depict an encounter with the Devil in a way that readers will not interpret with their own ideas of Satan and sin? Of course even "objective" testimony, used in real-life legal cases, is subject to some level of interpretation and creativity, as has been proven time and again in trials that put to the test the very practices the court uses to discern truth from fiction. And thanks to the fairly recent implementation of forensic evidence, witness testimony is, while still valuable, not always an authoritative trying or acquitting a person accused of a crime.

But all of this risks moving too far from the text itself and the problems it creates. Earlier I discussed Brock's *Satan and the Scots* in the context of understanding how Calvinist theology informed understandings of the Devil in a moral sense in Pre- and Post-Reformed Scotland. But a point that Brock makes that is more applicable now is that her study, which focuses almost exclusively on written accounts of various Scots'

demonic encounters, is not intended to prove or disprove the reality of a Satan and whether each account is true. Instead, her book examines how *perceptions of* and *reactions to* these writings shaped Scottish society, philosophy, religion, and personal relationships. Importantly, because the writings Brock examines vary in their depiction of Satan (i.e. some write of Lucifer as a physical entity, while others show the Devil as an internal, imagined being,) these writings represent a polyglossic depiction of Scotland and its cultural and supernatural beliefs. The editor and Robert do nearly the same thing. Each offers a particular perspective of an ambiguous tale, and each fails to either support or negate the other. Because of this, a strong case can be made against Robert for his crimes, but in a court of law, the evidence against him would be troublesome at best, and perhaps inadmissible at worst.

Taking this back to the courtroom analogy, each witness, or account of Robert's life, contradicts the other: the editor's version fails because of its distance from the events and inability to verify the claims made by its characters, not the least of which is Gil-Martin's character, motivations, and actuality. And Robert's account fails because not only does he vehemently claim that Gil-Martin commits not all, but many of the killings under his guise, but Robert also never clearly admits whether or not the killings he performs are morally reprehensible, given that their carrying out was, at least initially, a macabre effort to rid the world of sinners.

## **CHAPTER 3:**

### **SATANIC AND FANATICAL HORROR IN *JUSTIFIED SINNER***

*JS* is known for its blend of genres. It is a confession, a mystery, and a thriller. But there is an undercurrent of Gothic and Horror genre traits within the novel that create a disturbing tone of mounting dread and psychological torment to the novel's events. Robert's confession is a prime example of this. In the final pages, he oscillates manically between doubt, fear, and hysteria; to arrogance, self-deception, and cruelty. In one instance he admits to himself "I am a murderer, and [am] haunted by the spirits of those I have slain" (163); and later, as he prepares to hang himself, he notes that,

My devoted, princely...friend [Gil-Martin], has...convinced me that no act of mine can mar the eternal counsel, or in the smallest degree alter or extenuate one event...decreed before the foundations of the world were laid. (164)

This back-and-forth chronicles a slow-burn descent into madness, the likes of which has fueled many of the psychologically challenging and disturbing horror fiction since Hogg's time all the way up to the present.

In this chapter, I will explore Robert's fanatical mindset and how his interaction with Gil-Martin creates an ambiguous, sinister crossroads at which the super- and natural collide and interact, making it difficult for the reader to decide which party is more at fault for the reign of terror that Robert, and other horror characters, wreak upon the lives of their families and communities. In a move that I think will help to demonstrate many of my points I will correlate *JS*'s innovations to horror by connecting it with a modern

example of what I read and view as a thematic peer to much of *JS*, despite the two being separated by many years, and also medium: Stanley Kubrick's adaptation of Stephen King's *The Shining*.

## I. ***THE SHINING AS FANATICAL GOTHIC HORROR***

When I was eleven, my dad and I went on a trip to see my grandpa after he had heart surgery. While we stayed, I slept in my grandpa's office, where his massive movie collection is stored. Given my love for film—even at that young age—I did not get much sleep during our visit. I stayed awake every night and watched two or three movies in a row, and usually ones I had no business seeing as an eleven-year-old. One of these films was *The Shining*, a terrifying movie with much more on its mind than supernatural scares, though they certainly play a significant role in the narrative.

When viewers meet Jack Torrance, *The Shining*'s main character he accepts the position of winter caretaker for the Overlook Hotel because, firstly he needs the money, but also because he believes that the hotel's seclusion—an aspiring writer's haven—will give him the chance to write his great American novel. Simultaneously, as Jack is interviewing for the job, we learn from Jack's wife, Wendy, that several months prior to the film's opening, Jack, in a fit of drunken anger, broke his son Danny's arm after the boy scattered some of Jack's work papers. Wendy's revelation comes through a conversation with Danny's doctor, and though the doctor is concerned, Wendy rationalizes Jack's behavior by saying that he has since become sober and no longer acts that way. Whether or not Jack intentionally meant to break Danny's arm is never clear; but what is certain are the “demons” that Jack and his wife blame for his abusiveness: anger and alcohol addiction. Jack Nicholson, who plays Jack Torrance, employs his

notoriously wide grin, usually suggestive of mischievous narcissism, to more sinister purposes in *The Shining*, for it only just masks his spite and bitterness. It also reveals a man chained to a debilitating addiction that he never outright rejects, culminating in one of the film's most ominous scenes when Jack hallucinates a bartender called Lloyd, whose devilish smile and knowing eyes silently indict Jack for his lack of willpower, even as Lloyd continues to pour glasses for his customer, whose credit is, and will always be, "just fine" (*The Shining*).

I need not discuss in great detail, I think, the implicit correlation between substance abuse and domestic violence. This is not to, in any way, imply that abusive behavior comes from addiction, or that substance abuse treatment can also treat domestically abusive behavior. In fact, a report on domestic abuse, "Prevalence and Characteristics of Sexual Violence, Stalking, and Intimate Partner Violence," published by Matthew J. Breiding et. al for the Division of Violence Prevention at the CDC, records that abusers are almost always in control of themselves enough to select times and places where abuse can occur with little to no risk of the abuser being caught, confronted about his or her behavior, or stood up to by the victim (1-18). I mention this study to reiterate that it is not alcohol, drugs, sex, or any other kind of addiction that *causes* a person to abuse someone else. These incidents happen whether or not illicit drugs are present. However, substance abuse is very often used as an *excuse* for such behavior, as though the abuser is only violent because of the addiction, rather because of more deep-seated, psychological issues.

And we see this throughout *The Shining*. Jack's drinking, though it began even before he met Wendy, peaks in its severity at a time when Jack's professional and

personal life are unraveling. He is only a part-time teacher, and has yet to write his novel. All of these “failures” in his life are, as he claims, the result of being trapped in marriage and fatherhood by Wendy and Danny. He accuses them of needing him constantly, and of holding him back from his true potential. To combat what Jack sees as wrongs against himself, he drinks. Not just casually, but heavily. He is an alcoholic. And while it may be true that Jack would be “freer” without Danny and Wendy, and possibly more successful, the crippling hold alcoholism has on him is the excuse he tries to justify his violent behavior towards them with. In this way, he descends—taking Wendy and Danny with him—into a vicious cycle of anger, blame, and verbal and physical abuse that culminates in him trying to murder his family.

The above points are integral to understanding what I perceive to be the true terror of Kubrick’s film. For me, the Gothic horror tropes of *The Shining*—the secluded location, the lack of communication, the ghostly characters, dark hallways, giant gardens—*aid* in the atmosphere of dread, but do not *create* it. What is more frightening is that Jack’s characteristics are all-too-realistic to be confined *within* fictional horror. His unfulfilled aspirations feed his anger, which he tries to subdue with alcohol, though it only further inflames his self-hatred. And Wendy’s constant defense and self-blame for Jack’s abuse is sadly indicative of how many abused spouses internalize their self-worth and refuse to escape the hand and voice that hurts them. Were Wendy or Danny to speak out or retaliate against Jack, their actions would be considered by Jack to be a sin against him, even though Wendy and Danny are the victims, not the abusers. In *The Shining’s* horror scenario, then, I see Jack increasingly develop a fanatical mindset in which Wendy and Danny represent an ideal that Jack despises. Rather than recognize his shortcomings,

though, Jack displaces responsibility for his actions on alcohol and lack of writing success. These “demons” fester inside him, only further solidifying his bitterness, to the point that he threatens the emotional well-being and physical safety of his wife and son—and all of that even before he tries to kill them with an axe. Essentially, I consider Jack a fanatic horror character not because he has a religious or political agenda; but rather, he seeks to eliminate the voices of those around him who both suffer from and reflect back to him his ugliness. His vision of himself is a totalizing one: if not for his wife and son, he would not be an alcoholic, and would have financial and critical success as a writer. This is his view of course, not the reality of the situation, but it offers a disturbing view of portrait of Jack’s psyche as it becomes disillusioned by his warped perception of reality.

But of course, *The Shining* is not merely a thriller about a crazed father trying to kill his family. Kubrick problematizes Jack’s character by pitting him against (or perhaps in league with) the supernatural ghosts of the Overlook Hotel. Though the perceptive viewer understands that the demons of addiction are complicit in Jack’s behavior, so too are the supernatural ones. At one point, the spirit of Delbert Grady, a previous caretaker who killed his family in the hotel, even lets Jack out of a locked food pantry after Jack promises to kill Wendy and Danny. And in the aforementioned scene with Lloyd, the bartending spirit conjures up alcohol to give to Jack that ends his self-professed “five miserable months on the wagon, and all the irreparable harm that it’s caused me” (*The Shining*). In these two scenes, like many other moments in the film, the violent, natural urges of Jack and the haunting urges of the supernatural, collide with each other to vicious ends. Grady’s past violence must be carried on, so he inspires Jack to reenact the crimes of the past. Lloyd knows Jack and his addiction better than anyone, so he gives

Jack the very thing the man uses as a crutch to behave however he wants with no lasting repercussions. In short, there is no doubt that the ghosts are evil, and that they reside in the Overlook Hotel for evil purposes. And when they are at work in tandem with the darkness in Jack's heart, he becomes fanatical in his belief that, in order to escape the binds of being a husband and father, killing his family is the escape. It makes him a murderer, of course, but in his mind, this is only a distant consequence, if it is one at all.

## II. *JS*, BAKHTIN, AND THE ROLE OF AMBIGUITY IN HORROR

*The Shining* is merely one example (though one of the finest) of contemporary Gothic, and I believe that Hogg's satirical, troubling examination of evil in *JS* stands as a towering precursor to horror fiction like the film. In my argument, Hogg sets a standard in *JS* that derives its horror by interrogating both the mind and the uncanny. Its terror is cerebral, not gruesome or exploitive. Horror in this vein is predicated largely on the delicate collision of human deviancy and supernatural forces. I say delicate because a tip of the scale either way has problematic implications: if the horror comes solely from the character's behavior, and the supernatural is rationalized or "explained," the horror of the piece loses much of its sublimity; but if the supernatural overtakes or replaces the shortcomings of the natural human subject, the character comes across as flat or non-complex. Hence, ambiguity is a crucial aspect of balancing horror and maintaining its power.

This is explicated in Walter Kendrick's *The Thrill of Fear*. Kendrick feels that the most effective kind of horror is that which represents "hallucination and fact...in exactly the same way" (161). A strong example of this is *The Shining*: at no point is there an acknowledgement that characters are hallucinating (though, and I will talk about this

later, the ghosts they see are oddly personalized to the character witnessing them.) Unlike many horror fictions or films that feature a monster or ghost intruding into the natural world in a blatantly disruptive way to many people, Kubrick de-emphasizes the supernatural qualities of the ghosts by writing them to interact with Jack in seemingly banal ways, though to the cerebral reader or viewer, these “ordinary” interactions are anything but. They play off Jack’s demons, notably alcohol and anger. Similarly, though Gil-Martin exhibits some incredible powers, his interactions with Robert and others are never distinguished as particularly outstanding as compared to the rest of the events of the story. He “exists” like Robert knows the people around him to exist, such as the Reverend, or Robert’s mother. As such, it is difficult to parse super- and natural forces in the novel, for both interact in seemingly normal ways.

Proceeding forward, I will translate Bakhtin’s concepts of polyglossia and the carnivalesque to study *JS*’s depiction of psychological motivations, agency, and fanaticism. I think this important to understanding how *JS* fuses high and low forms of horror to sublime literary effect. I argue that *JS* innovates Gothic literature by using the form of the novel to critique the tendency of other Scottish Gothic writers, such as Scott, to rationalize the supernatural and champion enlightened modernity as the way forward. Hogg uses a fanatic character and his supernatural double to bring together high and low horror forms, like that of high and low language, to compare temporal and supernatural “demons,” and question which is more fearsome.

### **III. SCOTTISH GOTHIC AND HORROR INNOVATION**

In *Horror Fiction*, Gina Wisker notes that Gothic novels explore “contradictions and unease in social conventions,” which she argues allows readers to question faith, will,

destiny, and more (43). Wisker's assertion is important because of its philosophical connotations. Rather than merely functioning to scare or unsettle, cerebral horror fiction depicts intimate ideas of autonomy and self-identification in collision with belief systems, social conventions, and outward identity. In *The Shining*, Jack Torrance's self-loathing and addiction directly clash with his responsibility as a father and husband. When these bitter emotions are enhanced by sinister supernatural forces, Jack lashes out against his family and their desire for him to stay sober and accept his domestic role.

Ian Duncan localizes Wisker's idea to 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>-century Scotland in "Walter Scott, James Hogg, and Scottish Gothic." He believes that the formative gothic literature from the country during its important religious and social transitions deals with issues of identity for the Scots and their country (71-2). For Duncan, Scotland's loss of political autonomy in 1707, and also the growing divisions between rural and urban dwellers, prompted the country to evaluate its movement toward modernity using Gothic literature, such as that written by Scott, Burns, and Hogg (70). Accordingly, Duncan points out that the necessary innovation to Scottish literary culture during this era was learning how to mediate literature from both high and low culture (72). To form a national identity, both oral tradition and high literacy needed to find common ground. And as the folklore of the lower class collided with the educated works of the upper class, the Gothic genre offered a site where Scotland could acknowledge the alterity of itself and its inhabitants and innovate Horror fiction by fusing together fears of the supernatural with philosophical, political, and social questions, as well as the depths of psychological despair, depravity, and sin. In *Terror and Everyday Life*, Jonathan Lake Crane posits that in superior forms of horror, the whole subject of popular horror storytelling is replaced by a "fractured

subject...who is theoretically unstable,” who can find no “solid footing from which to...view images of the social world and the monsters” (29). Implicit in Crane’s words is that horror works that are conscious of the external and internal forces in the social and private forums, understand that horror utilizes damaged and villainous subjects to explore the bounds of evil. The works dare to ask if evil is a human-made concept, or something more, and do not always offer a definitive answer.

This question has been, and always will be, a potent tool for horror fiction to work so effectively troubling readers and viewers. What is the point of being of being scared if the illusion of horror dies with the closing of the book, or the end-credits of the film? If real questions of the human condition are asked—if the threat remains long after the work is finished—horror has achieved a lofty, even philosophical goal. *JS* asks these questions as it attempts to navigate through Robert’s troubled mind, much in the way *The Shining* depicts Jack Torrance considering killing his family: Robert and Jack may have supernatural “friends” prompting them to violence, but each character’s damaged psyche hints that neither necessarily needs a ghost or the Devil to hurt others. They can do bad all by themselves.

Within Scottish Gothic, divisions between the way the genre was treated by authors varied. Such is the case with Scott and Hogg. Scott’s educated background formed a different perspective for his writing than that of Hogg, especially with regard to classism and folk belief in the supernatural. Duncan points out that whereas Scott tends to explain away the supernatural in Gothic literature by historicizing it, Hogg’s works challenge that tendency (76). In my earlier chapter on Scottish language, I noted that Hogg’s “double” life had an integral effect on his work. Rather than view peasant folk

culture “from above,” “outside of,” or as an antiquated system that will be eventually abandoned in the way Scott often does, such as in *Ivanhoe*, Hogg’s supernatural fiction derives its power from embracing its folk sources from peasant culture. Though *JS* is overtly supernatural, even Hogg’s non-supernatural works of fiction, have strange, inexplicable occurrences, such as in “Basil Lee” from *Winter’s Evening Tales*, when the titular character sees a garrison of corpses in soldier attire marching past a village in the night (50-2). *The Shining* would still be a horror film without Delbert Grady, Lloyd the Bartender, and all the other ghosts. But because Jack’s violence collides with the unsavory undead, the film becomes more compelling, disturbing, and ambiguous. The same can be said for Robert’s encounters with Gil-Martin: even if we read Gil-Martin as the Devil, Robert’s behavior is indicative of both a physical and psychological problem, not merely one or the other.

One of the strongest ways *JS* innovates Scottish Gothic is by separating its story in time and space and refusing to allow either dimension to offer strong closure to the other’s assertions. The impact of this authorial decision is profound. Rather than set the novel fully in the 17<sup>th</sup> century of Scotland, the narrative is told one-hundred years later. The disruption of time and space, as well as super- and natural belief systems, ensures that each half of the tale is both distinct and somewhat impenetrable by the other. The editor’s account does not feature Gil-Martin prominently as a character or invested party, and this could be for two reasons. First and foremost, the editor’s temporal and spatial distance from Robert’s confession prevents him from gathering reputable sources to substantiate Robert’s assertions about Gil-Martin’s manipulation. Who would be able to support such claims? Miss Calvert and Mrs. Logan claim to see Gil-Martin, though they

cannot accurately express his powers; nor did the editor receive either woman's account firsthand.

And this segues into another dilemma. As Brock writes throughout *Satan and the Scots*, personal belief about the Devil and its power is at best subjective and resistant to objective evaluation. So perhaps even if Robert were to publish his confession while still alive and in close contact with an editor, how could the editor provide verifiable support of Gil-Martin's power? Robert is only one person, so his account, presented by him as true, is suspicious. In short, these problems recall the point made earlier about the difference between Scott's and Hogg's treatment of the supernatural: the former considers superstition and folk belief a dying element of the past, while the latter, even if only in his fiction, propagates the power that uncanny notions can have over beliefs and moral systems. Unlike Scott, for Hogg, the past and present cannot be neither unified nor separated—and nor, perhaps, should they be—though ironically this view is a more unified or complete picture of a heteroglossic society in which the population consists of carnivalesque parts of a greater whole.

#### **IV. HORROR AND THE FANATIC**

Any more, fanaticism, particularly of the religious slant, is a typical trope of horror fiction. Perhaps even more disturbing is its reality, outside of literature. We have seen this throughout history, and often on much larger scales than Robert's crimes. Even still, Hogg's *JS* is one of the first works that confronts the realities of fanaticism and its debilitating effect on the mind, all while pitting Robert's sanity against a supernatural "frenemy": Gil-Martin. Ian Duncan's "Fanaticism and Enlightenment in *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*" introduces this point in the context of studying Scotland's political

heritage leading up to when Hogg published *JS*. Duncan reads Robert's religious fanaticism as an eviscerating critique by Hogg of the ultra-conservative values Scotland faced in the years of the Scottish Enlightenment—and these values include those in the realm of secularism *and* religious dispersal. Calvinism and Presbyterianism, though relatively new, had still been around for a little over one hundred years by the year 1687, when *JS* begins. This gave each denomination ample time to be liberally interpreted, adapted, and altered. This case is made in the novel by Mr. Blanchard, who tells Robert after quarrelling over doctrine:

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. (90-1)

Mr. Blanchard's endorsement of religion, yet condemnation of religion's principles pulled away from their original context is one of the notable moments in which Hogg's own voice seems just under the skin of the character he is speaking through. He is not directly attacking Calvinism, but any religious movement that encourages its followers to perceive individuals outside as not only "other," but also "evil," and therefore deserving of punishment.

Interestingly, Duncan articulates that in an enlightened world, fanaticism is not merely a "volcanic excess of feeling," but also a "perverse prowess of philosophical reason" (64). This correlates with Robert and the Reverend's frightening adoption of antinomianism, an extreme doctrine that reasons that, if faith alone is the necessary

requirement for salvation through grace, moral law has no essential purpose. Initially, the pair use this doctrine to exude airs of divine and intellectual superiority. In a political sense, this denotes hierarchies between individuals, something the Reverend enforces continuously, such his class status over his servants, which he interprets as a sign of his “elect” status. An objective outsider might be tempted to ask where and how Reverend Wringham ascertained his salvation, and others’ damnation; but this would likely be a pointless question because it would receive no objective answer. Even still, the point is a bit moot, in that while it is a significant question in the book as to whether or not the Wringhams are truly “justified,” the more important part is that *they believe in their election*. While Reverend Wringham may not intend for his religious pronouncements to be taken to their extreme ends, such as when he calls upon Robert to be “a two-edged weapon in [God’s] hand, and a spear coming out of [God’s] mouth” (84), Robert’s cognition of his “absolute predestination” inspires him to take the Reverend’s commandments literally—to kill those whom he perceives as opposed to the unchanging will of God. He has moved from antinomianism as a form of social status to the kind in which he quite literally commits the most severe of moral crimes, murder, but feels no lasting penitence. Said differently, Robert’s pride in his “elect” status moves from being merely a title to becoming a philosophical destiny to fulfill, with the (human-altered) word of God as support. This tendency provides ripe fodder for horror fiction, such as director Bill Paxton’s *Frailty*, in which a father tries to convince his two sons that he has been called by God to kill “demons” (people) and that they must help him enact the Lord’s work (bury his victims.) In either case, a belief system becomes tainted by delusions of power, or divine calling. And though this superiority complex may be

satisfying enough for a little while, soon such feelings—in the fanatic—alter the moral and legal boundaries between the fanatic and those around her or him.

As such a mindset festers, reliability and truthfulness are jeopardized. Duncan agrees with this point in “Fanaticism.” The first issue Duncan raises is that he believes that Robert and the Editor’s narratives fail next to each other because Robert is never able to “maintain the singularity of his own identity” (62). What Duncan is saying is that no matter which version of Robert’s story is studied, the gaps in time, space, and self-awareness that Robert is unable to clarify eliminate the possibility for the text as a whole to find unity between its parts. If the present cannot overtake the past, the future is threatened by systems that adapt from years-old ideologies. These ideologies threaten progressive values precisely because even when they “change” or are “altered,” the superstitious or supernatural context remains. The Reverend reinforces his opinion that the world is a fallen place, incapable of saving itself; and therefore, he grooms a protégé of sorts in Robert. But Robert goes too far—farther even than his father does. The generational shift is not quite as absolute or smooth, precisely because Robert brings dangerous “solutions” to the problem of living righteously in a wicked world.

This segues into another, perhaps more salient point about Robert’s fanaticism. Duncan discusses that the attempt to enforce a “totalitarian claim on a singular and immediate meaning generates its opposite: an interminable doubling and splitting” (65). This is, in fact, the great irony of fanaticism. By proposing to eradicate diverse ideologies, fanaticism creates a plethora of them (65). David Oakleaf, in ““Not the Truth”: The Doubleness of Hogg’s *Confessions*,” posits that Robert’s theological system...traps the...self in a mental prison” that interprets doctrine in perverse, dangerous

ways (71). He doesn't uphold Calvinist so much as bend it at whim. Were Robert to actually achieve something close to his particular Calvinist strain, his fanaticism would be mimicked by some and altered by others, much in the way that Reverend Wringham and Robert alter the basic tenets of the religion to increasingly severe ends. In this example, we find a disturbing pattern: an exponential growth of fanatic ideology. I envision it as a Venn diagram of sorts, in which the overlapping center contains the original tenets of Calvin and Knox, and the ever-expanding outward circles represent the directions the tenets can go: extreme or moderate.

An excellent example of this “doubling” or “splitting” that offers a grisly parallel is Jim Mickle's *We Are What We Are*, a horror film about a family whose daughters realize that their father has been killing and cooking other humans, and has been serving this at mealtimes to them. Though the girls resist their father's tradition after this discovery, a darkly ironic moment occurs at the end, when they turn on the patriarch: but they do not merely kill him. They eat him. Obviously cannibalism is *always* grisly subject matter, but the daughters' consumption of their father makes their act more intimate. And so the film ends on an ambiguous note: will the daughters continue their cannibalistic ways? Will it become more than cannibalism—incestuous cannibalism, in fact? In a similar example, if Jack Torrance truly resents Wendy and Danny, he has opportunities to leave them in relative peace, such as divorce or separation; but by the end of *The Shining*, this is not an option to him. Only murder can end what his anger inspires him to perceive as his family's tightly wound grip on him. In these examples, I read strong connections to *JS* as a precursor to this kind of horror. It anticipates conflict within the soul as to how to live and deal with frustration. Some people find healthy ways of doing this; whereas

others, like Robert, are not content to allow others to practice and believe what they want. These others are wicked (to Robert) and must be cut down for the Lord.

## V. THE SELF, THE SOUL, AND THE SIN

With regard to Duncan's point about "singularity" and "identity," perhaps no one is better qualified than Robert himself to speculate on his mental state:

I have two souls, which take possession of my bodily frame by turns, the one being all unconscious of what the other performs; for as sure as I have at this moment a spirit within me, fashioned and destined to eternal felicity, as sure am I utterly ignorant of [my] crimes. (132)

Robert's inability to account for his actions, in my reading, makes *JS* one of the first literary works that so disturbingly confronts the self as an intricate, self-deceptive being. These issues in *JS* anticipate psychological studies to come by way of Freud and psychoanalysis, and later in the literary world through Bakhtin's study of polyglossia and the carnivalesque. Perhaps this is why even though Robert is such an unsavory narrator and person, I cannot help but feel *slightly* sympathetic to him for Reverend Wringham and Gil-Martin's manipulation of him at such a young age.

In the latter portion of Robert's confession, as he looks back on his teenage years, he admits that many times after Gil-Martin leaves, "the great personage who had attached himself to me...was now become my greatest terror among surrounding evils" (151). Not only has Robert been convinced that the world and humanity are evil by the Reverend, but he has also fallen prey to a stronger, more sinister form of evil not bound to temporal rules or natural laws. And it would be unfair to downplay the moments of doubt Robert has about Gil-Martin. In one telling scene, after the pair have been away from each other

for several months, Robert reveals that: “after all your [Gil-Martin’s] efforts, I do not feel that you have rendered me either more virtuous or more happy” (130). But these fleeting instances of regret come too late for Robert, for up until these points, he believed that without Gil-Martin’s presence, his life was devoid of meaning and purpose (116).

As such, when all is said and done, Robert is still a serial killer, and one with a religious slant. And though he is hardly the first or final fanatic to kill based on religious ideology, his literary depiction of himself is quite compelling because its autobiographical characteristics are both revealing *and* illusory.

The ambiguity between these two qualities is, to reiterate, what Hogg instills almost constantly in his novel and characters. Even before Robert is old enough to be considered fully autonomous, his life trajectory is fractured. He is born to “two” fathers (Colwan and Wringham,) and when the latter takes Robert under his house and wing, he instills in Robert many extreme Calvinist theories that the young man interprets far too literally. But even pure religion, the kind not tainted by radical and/or political interpretation, implies a great divide between divinity and the natural human. Romans 8:7 submits that “because the carnall minde is enmitie against God...it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (*The Bible - 1611 KJV*). This internal struggle is always present in Robert’s confession, and the result is sublime terror of the kind that resonates psychologically—profoundly.

Correlating this to horror, Wisker uses Freud’s term “uncanny” in *Horror Fiction* to describe defamiliarisation as a common trait of Gothic literature as it pertains to the loss of identity. Robert’s affirmation of being justified inspires in him a certain view of himself: he is to be the “sword into the hand of his sovereign [God],” and allegedly can

never lose God's saving grace, no matter what his actions are. In this exaltation, Robert has guaranteed salvation; and therefore, in his mind, stability. And Gil-Martin exploits Robert's security by seeming to reinforce this stability. Recall Brock's record of Calvin's words: "for Satan...exerts all his strength against those who resist him" (28). And how better for the Devil to ensnare a religious believer than to appear to understand the tenets of the religion better than the practitioner? Gil-Martin is such a persuasive, compelling being to Robert precisely because he claims to empathize with Robert's confusions and aspirations. In this way, the natural and supernatural collide, to chilling results. Robert's understanding of Calvinism (which is extreme from the start) is defamiliarized by Gil-Martin because the latter represents interpretations of Calvinism even more extreme than that of Reverend Wringham. And after years of Robert working in conjunction with his doppelganger, the young man loses the ability to record his narrative coherently. He fails to convey the realities and facts of his actions. And I think it important to underscore here that the horror of this loss of stability is that it is both his fanatic mind and Gil-Martin's power clouds Robert's clarity of vision: though often his own story of killing someone differs from Gil-Martin's version, Robert relies "implicitly on his [Gil-Martin's] information...and he could have no motive for saying what was not the positive truth" (118). Gil-Martin, as a supernatural entity, tricks Robert by seeming so transparent, and also by being very in-tune with Robert's weaknesses. *The Shining* also features moments exactly like this: Lloyd serves Jack alcohol precisely because Jack is trying to remain sober; and Grady encourages Jack to kill his family because the former also felt trapped in his own domestic role, and thus chopped his wife and daughters to bits with an axe. He sees this as the only course of action Jack has, which Jack soon picks up on too. In short,

in *The Shining* and earlier in *JS*, the super- and natural are complicit in Jack and Robert's behavior, respectively.

Interesting too is that no one individual sees Gil-Martin in exactly the same form except for Robert. This is why, throughout my previous chapters and here, I feel so comfortable saying that I read Gil-Martin as the Devil. In many traditional Gothic novels published in the general time period as *JS*, the supernatural or uncanny being is witnessed by many individuals in its natural form: *Frankenstein's* Creature interacts with many people; Count *Dracula*, though he changes form (in a limited manner), also appears to many people; and even Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, which takes clear inspiration from *JS*, limits its pro-/antagonist to two forms, very literally good and evil. But this is what makes Hogg's perception of the Devil so distinct: Gil-Martin, the novel's supernatural villain (Robert being the natural one) can appear in any form he wants. Though he may look like Robert to one person, he also appears as George, Robert's half-brother, to Mrs. Logan; as Thomas Drummond to Miss Calvert; and perhaps countless others to other Scots.

This indicates a (malicious) intimacy that Gil-Martin shares with the person looking upon him. He admits that his "countenance changes with...studies and sensations" of other people, which allows him to change his outward appearance, but also he attains "the possession of his [an individual's] most secret thoughts" (86). In *The Shining*, Jack sees Lloyd, Grady, the rotting woman in the bathtub; and Danny sees the twin girls (Grady's dead daughters) and "Tony." There seems to be no particular overlap between the two. This is important because the spirits that each living character sees are pertinent to the qualities of that character. With Jack, as has been mentioned, Lloyd is his

alcoholism, Grady, his rage, and the woman, his lust. With Danny, “Tony” is a place in Danny’s mind that acts as a guide and protector from Jack, similar to how the twin girls warn Danny of the hotel’s eerie past and Jack’s impending breakdown. Gil-Martin knows Robert quite well. He knows his fears, his frustrations, and his anxieties. He is keenly aware of the delicate balance between Robert’s arrogance and insecurity. So Gil-Martin manipulates both extreme behaviors.

And Gil-Martin’s manipulation is the sublime and influential horror topos *JS* revels in. The novel features its fanatic so convinced by his Calvinist ideology that he fails to recognize the polyglossic state of the world, and also be accountable for the crimes he and/or his double commit (I use “and/or” ironically here, as who can decipher which conjunction is more true?) Hypothetically, if Hogg concluded his tale by positing that Gil-Martin/Satan alone was responsible for Robert’s actions, a certain level of pity could be afforded to Robert, for what natural being could stand up to the supernatural entity that could take the natural person’s form, identity, and private thoughts? Similarly, if Gil-Martin were determined to be entirely fictitious, merely a projection of Robert’s subconscious anger, the novel would lose its ambiguous power, precisely because rationalizing closure would negate the novel’s use of the uncanny to instill fear into its readers. Jack G. Voller, in *The Supernatural Sublime*, quotes Patricia Meyer Spacks’ *The Insistence of Horror: Aspects of the Supernatural in Eighteenth-Century Poetry*: once the supernatural is “made a concomitant of purely psychological reality, its theological, and to a large extent its intellectual, significance is destroyed” (6). Said differently, the power of real horror in fiction is an ambiguous representation of reality and character agency.

Perhaps in the beginning of *The Shining* we pity Jack: if not completely, we understand that his demons come from places of pain: stresses in his marriage, fatherhood, and with his career. As the film progresses, though, he becomes much more difficult to sympathize with, primarily because he allows the supernatural to influence his natural demons. It gives him the drink he craves, the woman he desires, and the out from his marriage that he longs for. In this way we understand that the ghosts of the Overlook Hotel *are* evil: and if not similar in degree, at least in kind with the demons Jack allows in his life. He is a tragic figure, I feel, but certainly an evil one. Robert Wringham is remarkably similar as a character. He begins life as, very literally, an outcast from his home. And though he finds a guardian and father-figure in Reverend Wringham, this relationship is a detriment to Robert's mental health. He is slowly, but strongly indoctrinated by the Reverend into delusions of amorality and extreme hierarchical systems, to the point of coming into contact with the Devil and thinking him a friend and spiritual advisor, rather than a manipulator and deceiver. Of course Gil-Martin does not seem evil: his greatest trick is appearing to sympathize with Robert's pain and spiritual ponderings, so as to allow the young man to damn himself by his own hand.

## **VI. THE DEVIL'S IN THE DETAILS**

Though perhaps the connection seems to be, on the surface, a strange one, I see Robert Wringham and Jack Torrance as two of the great horror characters in supernatural literature, and quite similar to boot. Though separated by a century and a half of horror fiction, they are, in my reading, distinctly iconic for the psychological depth granted to them by their respective creators. I read *JS* as Hogg's most unique and challenging work. Hogg's treatment of evil is his novel predicts much of the psychology and cognition of a

troubled mind. His treatment of the self as a site of colliding temperaments and anxieties influences important works to come, such as the already-mentioned *Jekyll and Hyde*, and more modernly, as I have demonstrated, psychological horror films like *The Shining*. These visions of terror benefit from an uncompromising commitment to ambiguity. The generic mystery of circumstance at the center of these fictions is less important than the mystery of the characters: what motivates them, what changes them, how do they transform? But unlike the narrative dilemmas, which often find a culprit or conclusion, mysteries of the self and soul are not so easily settled, especially with the presence of supernatural forces. As a reader, I feel that I know a lot *about* Robert, but I am not so sure I *know* him in the way I typically expect of characters. But such are the qualities and capabilities of modern fictional media: Bakhtin's theories of polyglossia and the carnivalesque reign in the works of authors and auteurs who understand the complexity of experience, the subjectivity of truth, and the horror of losing one's identity.

## CONCLUSION

Perhaps there is no better way to wrap up than to use Hogg himself. In a scene from *JS* that depicts a large mob fighting over, well, no one really knows what, Hogg offers a commentary on the problem of truth: after trying to figure out how the fight began, the court decides that its “investigation disclosed nothing the effect of which was not ludicrous” (23). While I hardly think the issues Hogg raises in his novel are “ludicrous,” the imagery of the mob, composed mostly of Whigs fighting other Whigs, conjures up a chaotic world in which individuals—even ones similarly aligned in beliefs and moral principles—fight each other, and not always for clear reasons. And what is more, trying to decipher the root of contention is, in my reading of Hogg’s worldview, ridiculous precisely because of the problems of time, space, and the relative inaccessibility of another person’s interior thoughts and motivations. When the editor seeks clarity, Robert offers ambiguity; and when Robert is most desperate to justify his behavior, the Editor finds evidence that interrogates Robert’s mental workings. There are many more of these paradoxical comparisons that could be made about the novel, not the least of which is how the super- and natural interact and influence each other. If Gil-Martin is the Devil, is he more responsible than Robert for the crimes; or if he is merely a projection of Robert’s mind, how do Miss Calvert and Mrs. Logan see and hear his power in effect? Ambiguity is the answer: not an answer of closure, but rather one of myriad potentialities.

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