

1980

## Hogg's Confessions and the Heart of Darkness

Ian Campbell

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Campbell, Ian (1980) "Hogg's Confessions and the Heart of Darkness," *Studies in Scottish Literature*: Vol. 15: Iss. 1.

Available at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/vol15/iss1/14>

This Article is brought to you by the Scottish Literature Collections at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Studies in Scottish Literature* by an authorized editor of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact [digres@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:digres@mailbox.sc.edu).

*Ian Campbell*

Hogg's *Confessions* and the  
*Heart of Darkness*



James Hogg's masterpiece, the *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, is beginning to receive the critical attention it deserves. Since its anonymous publication in 1824 it has been frequently out of print, and still more frequently misunderstood or interpreted according to partial readings of the text. The purpose of this paper is to examine a crucial area of the plot towards the end of the book, and with a comparison of Conrad's handling of a similar theme in *Heart of Darkness*, to attempt to clear the ground for the eventual proper critical evaluation of the *Confessions*.

The form of the novel is brilliant; Hogg's reasonable, rational editor-figure introduces a story of religious fanaticism, family dissension and eventually of violence and murder. The story is told with little emotion or comment, little indeed being necessary as the audience becomes intimately familiar with a family of perverted Calvinist antinomians, professed Christians without clarity but with excessive pride and argumentation, without love for their fellows but with unshakeable conviction in their own righteousness and their own eventual salvation, regardless of their actions--being antinomians, they were regarded as being "beyond the law" which governed the moral actions of others.<sup>1</sup> Protected by this belief they see little harm in arrogance and persecution of others, but the

main point of the story is the perversion of Robert, youngest and weakest of this family, into acts of violence, rape and murder by a mysterious stranger who easily overrules his will and twists his religious beliefs by the most plausible arguments. Clearly to the reader, but not to the characters trapped in the action, the mysterious stranger who thus channels and intensifies perverted enthusiasms is the devil, and so shaky is the Wringhims' theology that there is little difficulty in achieving the devil's purposes.<sup>2</sup>

Hogg's brilliance lies not primarily here, but in his immediate re-telling of the same story through the eyes of the chief protagonist, Robert Wringhim. Robert's diary amplifies the action, and intensifies our appreciation of his twisted thought-processes. Moreover, in failing to tally in places with the objective narration of the first part, it helps undermine our confidence in Robert's basic honesty. A marvellous picture emerges, mostly vividly clear, in places deliberately obscured for artistic reasons. Hogg delights in allowing crucial scenes to pass unobserved, or observed by unreliable witnesses in poor lighting conditions. In this way the plot moves from the explicable to the inexplicable, to a use of imprecision whose results can be argued to be of a high order of artistic excellence.

The quality of narration is heightened by the remainder of Hogg's novel, following the sudden cessation of Robert's supposed diary. Interrupted in writing it by the devil figure (now only partly recognised) waiting to carry him off to Hell for a mounting tally of crimes, Robert succeeds in concealing the diary for posterity. An objective narration resumes (though not in the same tone as the first), recounting the digging-up of the mysteriously preserved body of the suicide, popular tradition having it that the earth would not accept, nor decompose, such a disgusting piece of mortality. The "editor" (like the reader) is at a loss to decide what is objective reality, so he asks friends for advice. They in their turn recommend a prominent Border figure, Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd famous from John Wilson's satirical portraits in the *Noctes Ambrosianae*. In a final stroke of excellence, Hogg writes a portrait of himself into the novel, a satirical scene where as a country bumpkin he rudely answers to the queries of the "editor" that he has no interest in suicides' graves and other rubbish like that, having more important matters on hand --the buying and selling of sheep. The baffled "editor" retires, and concludes the narrative with a shrug:

It was a bold theme for an allegory, and would have suited that age well had it been taken up by one fully qualified for the task, which this witer was not. (254)<sup>3</sup>

Absolving himself in this way from the task of explaining the features of uncertainty which he built into his own novel, Hogg throws the burden of explanation on to the reader--and incidentally studiously avoids the necessity of public exposure of private beliefs.

In private life we know Hogg to have been a sincere and practising Christian, well acquainted with the Bible, and I have suggested elsewhere<sup>4</sup> that a close knowledge of the King James Bible is a necessary aid to a full comprehension of this densely-textured novel. While in that case the use of Biblical quotation, echo and reference was argued to help understand the character of the protagonist, and the author's attitude towards the characters, the same use of outside material may now be argued to perform a still more important function--to elucidate the reasons for the suicide at the end of the novel, and in particular the reasons for the collapse of Robert's will to resist temptation to what he knew to be a damning sin. The crucial part of the book will be seen to be the concluding hours of Robert Wringham's life, as he closes for the last time his journal which constitutes the second part of the novel.

There certainly is enough sin in this novel to justify Wringham's damnation, and the arrival of the devil figure (assuming the reader accepts the presence of a real devil, and not, as has been suggested, a mere projection of the guilt-feelings of the sinner)<sup>5</sup> is quite understandable to an audience familiar with Christian preaching in general, and with Marlowe's *Dr Faustus* in particular. Murder, rape, lying, perversions of various kinds are a formidable tally, though Hogg's recent and most acute critic reads the text more closely to see the prime cause of damnation, as "that final unpardonable sin" of suicide.<sup>6</sup> Suicide would come from an ultimate and unbearable awareness of sins, some remembered, some forgotten. Committed perhaps under "possession" (for Robert, as for us, there are blanks in the plot of this book), perhaps wittingly, the sins mount to an intolerable indictment which would force Robert to "embarrass God further" by the damning sin of suicide. The whole deplorable mess would induce a mood of "despair and guilt" making Christian forgiveness seem unattainable, and so cancelling out in the individual consciousness the promise of salvation at any time which is part of the Christian message. If Robert were to lose his belief in possible salvation, suicide would be the only remaining course of action.<sup>7</sup>

Undoubtedly, the uncertainty with which Hogg surrounds the motives for suicide tallies well with the uncertainty of the narrative texture. The motives, like the devil himself, are unsettlingly imprecise, yet personally credible: as André Gide aptly remarked in his 1947 preface to the novel, the devil's power is made to appear "always of a psychological nature;

in other words--always admissable, even by unbelievers."<sup>8</sup> The dualism of the characters (made much of by Kurt Wittig<sup>9</sup>) and the deliberate ambiguities of the writing are now joined to a theological scheme sufficiently denatured to be acceptable for argument's sake to unbelievers. We begin to see why the novel is still so powerful in a sceptical century.

Yet the reader has to proceed with extreme caution. The novel is not Christian, any more than it is anti-Christian. It is not really a novel of reconciliation either,<sup>10</sup> any more than it intends to show the disintegration of a whole society extrapolated from the fate of a solitary individual as eccentric as Wringhim. If its *power* can be felt by a wide cross-section of readers, its precise significance is more localised. After all, the Biblical passages which illuminate its text were self-evidently important to an author whose scanty formal education had been supplemented by much hard work, and access to very few books.

I was often nearly exhausted with hunger and fatigue. All this while I neither read nor wrote; nor had I access to any book save the Bible. I was greatly taken with our version of the Psalms of David, learned the most of them by heart, and have a great partiality for them unto this day.<sup>11</sup>

The man who knew his Bible, and his metre Psalms, knew his book of Job. This, we argue, is crucial, as we turn to the text of the novel, immediately preceding the conclusion of the journal.

After the main part of his life, after exhausting days of flight across the moors of the Southern Uplands fleeing the law by day, and truly horrifying daemonic visitations by night, reduced to a wreck by physical exhaustion and sleeplessness, Wringhim is tempted by his daemonic, but still unrecognised, friend.

Ungrateful as you are, I cannot give you up to be devoured; but this is a life that it is impossible to brook longer. Since our hopes are blasted in this world, and all our schemes of grandeur overthrown; and since our everlasting destiny is settled by a decree which no act of ours can invalidate, let us fall by our own hands, or by the hands of each other; die like heroes; and, throwing off this frame of dross and corruption, mingle with the pure ethereal essence of existence, from which we derived our being. (234)

The clever devil knows how to touch the spring of Wringhim's reasoning, for the justified sinner is besotted with his unscriptural but at one time popular doctrine of "election" to eternal salvation by "justifying grace," assured of eternal life whatever his deeds on earth. This doctrine was uncritically and totally accepted by the Wringhims, and the devil cleverly twisted this belief, throughout the novel, to his advantage. If the devil can brush aside murder as a small thing, he can paint suicide in the same way since Wringhim has convinced himself--on dreadfully flimsy evidence--that no earthly act can affect his heavenly reception.

Even so, Wringhim hesitates, for suicide is a dreadful idea, and he points out "the sinfulness of the deed, and...its damning nature" (234) but as usual he is no match for the devil in argument.<sup>12</sup> And in any case, continues Wringhim's friend, think of *my* plight.

Involuntarily did I turn round at the request, and caught a half glance of his features. May no eye destined to reflect the beauties of the New Jerusalem inward upon the beatific soul, behold such a sight as mine then beheld! My immortal spirit, blood, and bones, were all withered at the blasting sight; and I arose and withdrew, with groanings which the pangs of death shall never wring from me. (235)

This crucial passage, which has attracted surprisingly little comment, insinuates the all-important motivating discussion of suicide. A few days later, the nightly persecution of the devils becoming unbearable, Robert is very close to committing even the damning act. His "friend" offers help:

He then repeated the ejaculatory prayer, which I was to pronounce, if in great extremity. I objected to the words as equivocal, and susceptible of being rendered in a meaning perfectly dreadful; but he reasoned against this, and all reasoning with him is to no purpose. (238)

The awful moment arrives, and in an agony of torture, "hung by the locks over a yawning chasm, to which I could perceive no bottom," he repeats "the tremendous prayer," and "I was instantly at liberty; and what I now am, the Almighty knows! Amen!" (239)

The Wringhims had lived by endless talking and strained interpretations of Scripture. Their arguments grew warm, we are told, "always in proportion as they receded from nature, util-

ity, and common sense" (12). Mrs. Wringhim's doctrines are specifically described as being not those of the Reformed Church, but (in the words of the neutral editor-figure) "theirs mightily overstrained and deformed" (2). Such people are easy victims to a loquacious and subtle fiend. He plays with Robert: "It is not my *Christian* name; but it *is* a name which may serve your turn." Again, "I have no parents save one, whom I do not acknowledge" (129-30). We see one meaning, Robert quite another: "...it instantly struck me that this was no other than the Czar Peter of Russia" (130). No further comment on Robert's intelligence is necessary. Robert is deaf to daemonic equivocation. "Ah, you little know with how much pleasure I will accompany you, and join with you in your elevated devotions'," says the devil fervently on their first meeting (117). Curiously pre-echoing the devil-figure of *Young Goodman Brown*,<sup>13</sup> Hogg's innocent monster describes his subjects as sincere Christians. "'All my European subjects are, or deem themselves so ...and they are the most faithful and true subjects that I have'" (136). Robert, who sees no humour in this, is equally blind to the complexities and ironies in injunctions to murder and treachery couched in quasi-Biblical language. If he wants weapons, he is told "'The God whom thou servest will provide these...if thou provest worthy of the trust committed to thee'" (138). In the light of the persecutions of the fiends at the end of the novel, there is a terrible ironic double meaning to "'Doubt thou not, that he whom *thou* servest, will be ever at thy right and left hand, to direct and assist thee'" (138). The devil's use of *double-entendre* is masterly throughout, and it is perhaps significant that Robert's sensitivity to *double-entendre* develops only as he approaches Hell--and recognises the equivocal meaning of the "tremendous prayer."

Hogg's readership would have been more alert than the suffering sinner: they would have been alert to the Biblical allusion behind the "tremendous prayer," and they would have recognised the allusion to Job, chapter 2, as easily as would Hogg when he inserted it. In that chapter Job, tried by almost unbearable suffering, is tempted (by his wife) to curse God, to blaspheme, and so to die, for this is the ultimate sin.

7. So went Satan forth from the presence of the Lord, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown.
  
9. Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die.

This is what Job refuses to do; in verse 10, it specifically makes clear that "in all this did not Job sin with his lips."

In chapter 42, after many anguished debates, he is restored to his former possessions and happiness, though it is stressed markedly that this happened only because in addition to his integrity, he retained his humility.

Humility is not the distinguishing characteristic of the book-learned, slow-witted but arrogant Wringhims. Yet fear is a perfectly natural characteristic in Wringhim, and as human in him as it was in Faustus; in referring to the proposed prayer as "perfectly dreadful" Wringhim is no doubt referring to the prospect of being released from the clutches of these present fiends, only to fall into the far greater evil of eternal damnation. Yet like Faustus he allows present, temporary pain to distract him from the fear of future damnation--and the knowledge of what he is doing--and uses the escape-prayer, "and what I now am, the Almighty knows! Amen!" No clearer indication could be needed that this is the moment of his damnation. "What I now am": already he talks in the equivocal language of the damned. We know what he means, presumably he does too, but he is allowed a few hours more of earthly life--a subtle psychological torture, in fact--to contemplate damnation before the fiends arrive to carry him off. Conveniently, he also has time to finish and conceal his journal.

The point of the devil's argument is not, we therefore argue, to convince Wringhim to suicide. Despite the detestation of the sin (one thinks of the arguments about burying Ophelia in *Hamlet*, V, i) and the well-known location of suicides' graves at lonely cross-roads, far from hallowed ground, this is not a sufficient explanation of the power of feeling involved in this scene, nor of the devil's lengthy attentions to Robert at this crucial moment. The emphasis Hogg lays here has been argued to be a different one. Hogg is not stressing the decision to commit suicide, but the decision to abandon a central, vital code of ethic (the belief in predestination and justifying grace) and knowingly to commit a fatal sin which the Bible clearly signals as irrevocable--to curse God, and die. The decision, and the sin, are fearfully personal: we do know very little about the mechanics of how Wringhim committed physical suicide, but the dreadful act of blasphemy is intimately understood.

L. L. Lee reminds us that "Gil-Martin is first a creature of the art work, of the novel..."<sup>14</sup>; we return to the text of the novel, and to the ghastly moment when Robert looks at the devil, and experiences something so terrible that he is from that moment weakened to the extent of contemplating a fatal act of blasphemy. He has to escape immediately (235) to a poor cottage to rest and several days pass before he is even strong enough to be tortured again. When the climax comes, it is the easier to concede defeat because of this earlier shock.



We look in Wringhim himself for some explanation of the crucial change in him: we find particular help in Coleman Parson's description of Hogg's use of the supernatural as "a corridor leading to the ultimate strangeness, that the individual is both tempter and tempted."<sup>15</sup>

The devil, we note, is particularly able to assume the appearance of his victim. Gil-Martin betrays himself by a hungering resemblance to Drummond (81) and to the good preacher Blanchard (131) at the moment he thinks he has their souls. The stranger who meets Robert at their first encounter is "a young man of mysterious appearance" whose mystery is eventually cleared when Robert realises "that he was the same being as myself!" (116). Tempter and tempted here are not the same, but they look the same. The reader is reminded irresistibly of the sham adopted by the devil in Stevenson's *Thrawn Janet*, in the counterfeit revellers of Scott's *Wandering Willie's Tale*. In Stevenson's *Markheim* the devil figure is eerily difficult to see,

...at times he thought he knew him; and at times he thought he bore a likeness to himself; and always, like a lump of living terror, there lay in his bosom the conviction that this thing was not of the earth and not of God.<sup>16</sup>

The devil changes his disguise often, of course: in *The Confidence Man*, the variety of disguises is at the heart of Melville's brilliant strategy, and Young Goodman's fate depends on the half-understood, unverifiable sighting of a number of potential devil-figures. In the same way Hogg's devil crops up throughout the *Confessions*, simply impersonating Robert, or arguably impersonating others in an attempt to precipitate parts of the action, or confuse reader and witnesses alike. The closer he comes to success, the more he assumes the disguise of his victim; we may ask ourselves what he would look like near the end of the plot, when he asks Robert to look at his face, and Robert has the terrible shock to his system.

Robert, we argue, sees something analagous to the experience of Kurtz in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, and a comparison between the two treatments has distinct value, despite the distance which separates the two novels. Kurtz, sailing upriver into savage Africa in search of some mysterious truth, sees the truth at the source of the river. He penetrates the mysteries of existence, at the cost of immense suffering and indomitable will, and when he finds the truth, in the heart of darkness, it is too much for him. "The horror! The horror!"; with these words, he quickly slides into physical debility, and death. This, we conclude, is akin to the experience of

Robert Wringhim seeing what he saw at the devil's prompting at the end of his will to resist. Hogg is careful to leave imprecise the details of *what* he saw, but clearly the suggestion is there that he must have seen something akin to himself. The devil, close to success, must have had an irresistible urge to assume the appearance of Wringhim. But this is not enough to drive Robert over the edge. Like Kurtz, he must have seen something more than his own image, for he saw that at the first meeting with the devil, and experienced only mild shock. He must have seen his own heart of darkness, and it is a reasonable deduction from the novel that what he saw--unbearably--was the truth from which he had been hiding throughout the action so far. The truth is what breaks his resolve, and makes him prepared to abandon his Christianity, and commit the blasphemy which is far more effective than corporal suicide.

Useful as the comparison is, there is a major difference behind the two authors' use of the idea. Conrad's search is an expression of the exceptional character of Kurtz himself, reflecting Kurtz's willingness to struggle against the mysterious forces of a Universe where Christian certainties seem far away. "The heavy, mute spell of the wilderness" is the main protagonist, and life itself,

that mysterious arrangement of merciless logic for a futile purpose....It is the most unexciting contest you can imagine. It takes place in an impalpable grayness, with nothing underfoot, with nothing around, without spectators, without clamour, without glory, without the great desire of victory, without the great fear of defeat, in a sickly atmosphere of tepid scepticism, without much belief in your own right, and still less in that of your adversary.<sup>17</sup>

This terrible summing up, reminiscent as it is of Sartre's grim later summing-up at the end of *Huis Clos*, "Eh bien, continuons,"<sup>18</sup> evokes the ambiguous nature of struggle in these circumstances. One could add the example of Markheim and Jekyll struggling against their fates in Stevenson's universe, trying to destroy themselves to destroy a negative *alter ego* whose existence they by no means acknowledge as their responsibility. Each meets his heart of darkness; each person gives up the struggle as futile.

Hogg's world, as has already been emphasised, is one where Christian values are existing and explicit; the satire of the perverted Christianity of the Wringhims makes clear that this is not a tract against Christianity as such, and the often-repeated conventional description of the *Confessions* as a sa-

tire of Calvinism is self-evidently absurd, if Calvin's works are studied at all in relation to Hogg's arguments. This novel is a satire of personal perversions of Christianity, and of doctrinal absurdities which can become dangerous as well as absurd. The function of the devil, a personal and terribly unsensational one, is to encourage and amplify existing possibilities of deviation, pride and absurdity, to provide arguments in a language already familiar to the Wringhims, to justify actions by pseudo-Christian and pseudo-Biblical speeches, in other words to behave like one of the Wringhims. Hogg goes out of his way to make the point early that the mysterious stranger of Robert's walks completely follows the teachings of Robert's father (121). The devil worms his way closer and closer to Robert's personality and citadel of belief, preserving the pathetic evasions and partial arguments of the sinner until he is so committed to sin that Gil-Martin can afford to expose to him their full horror, confident that the sinner will fall into despair rather than choose the redemption which, as a book-learned student of the Bible, he should know conventional Christian doctrine assured him was still available. The devil knows his victim terribly well, and Robert reacts to the terrible truth about himself as expected, by despair. *This* is the heart of darkness for him, *this* is truth.

Marlowe, who spectates and narrates the career of Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*, is profoundly affected by the experience, and leads a lonely outsider's rôle in society afterwards, although unlike Kurtz he survived. He could not be the same man again, any more than could Young Goodman Brown after his experience in the forest, which drove him to a solitary and eccentric life although he survived the attacks of the devil-figure. The reader of the Hogg version survives, too, and the narrative is too complex for a single figure to be profoundly affected by the experience of following Wringhim's career. The editor figure on the last pages dismisses the book with a shrug; the reader finds it less easy. Interestingly, Hogg has made another character affected by the damnation of Robert, and that is the devil himself, for no more than Milton's Satan is Gil-Martin able to profit from his success. He approaches at the climactic moment "furiously--his stern face blackened with horrid despair!" (240), and it is clear that while he is allowed success, he suffers even at that moment.

We do not credit Hogg with extravagant claims of originality in putting this reading on the end of the *Confessions* for while he pre-echoes Stevenson and Conrad interestingly, he is also to be seen against the background of contemporary writing in the Gothic genre. Professor Carey has pointed out the possible influence of Hoffmann's *Die Elixiere des Teufels*,<sup>19</sup> and we have

seen the Faustian theme treated from Marlowe's well-known version of the legend. There is a striking treatment of some similar themes in the most famous novel of Hogg's friend Lockhart, *Adam Blair*, published in 1822 by another friend, Blackwood. The dreadful fiends which crawl through Adam's nightmare after his single night of infidelity with Charlotte, the sight of the chasm into which he almost flings himself until melodramatically rescued by Charlotte herself, the strong self-condemnation willingly assumed as an act of self-damnation preferred to eternal salvation for short-term motives are strongly reminiscent of Hogg's treatment.<sup>20</sup>

More striking still is the conclusion to Charles Robert Maturin's highly successful *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), possibly the finest example of its genre produced in Britain. Possessed by the devil and doomed to wander 150 years on earth, Melmoth at the end meets one of his descendants and relates his experiences to him before being released from the spell. His last night on earth in his life-in-death he dreams a terrible nightmare while next door the listeners are appalled spectators, helpless to intervene. He longs for repose, but "my existence is still human," and as he says this "a ghastly and derisive smile wandered over his features for the last time."<sup>21</sup> He dreams he falls into a burning chasm as the hour of his damnation approaches, and his attempts at last-minute salvation are hopeless: the scene is written with great vividness. Perhaps the most memorable thing is the strong sense that the devil is suffering, even while successful in wreaking havoc on earth. This, and the chasm scene, are strongly reminiscent of Hogg's treatment.

Another example, from the same year as Hogg's *Confessions*, is Scott's "Wandering Willie's Tale," incorporated into *Redgauntlet*. Steenie descends into Hell and finds the ghostly revellers living in Hell as they did on Earth in Redgauntlet castle, feasting, blaspheming and carousing--but even while he is tempting him, the devil-disguised-as-Sir-Robert "gnashed its teeth and laughed" and around him the revellers' smiles "were fearfully contorted from time to time; and their laughter passed into such wild sounds as made my gudesire's very nails grow blue."<sup>22</sup> Maturin's treatment of the theme has complex plot layers to baffle the reader; "Wandering Willie's Tale" ends neatly enough, though a thoughtful reader can make disturbing links between it and the text to which it sometimes seems a mere embellishment. Clearly Scott was out to show that the devils' state in Hell was one of suffering, whatever picturesque disguise they might adopt. Maturin's devil suffers most terribly at the end of the novel; his spectators are as disturbed, and permanently so, as Young Goodman Brown, and even

as Scott in a more comic way indicates Steenie was after the experiences narrated by Wandering Willie.

The *Confessions* is an enigma, and its handling of the themes we have explored here enigmatic. It lacks the delight in torture and suffering which Professor Praz rightly emphasises<sup>23</sup> in accounting for the success of *Melmoth the Wanderer*, and though the tortures are real enough they are implied in Robert's account, and stimulate their own details from the imagination of the reader. In this way the *Confessions* gain inestimably in power of description over the more explicit examples included in our comparison. The confusion of the horses in the darkness while Robert hides in the loft overhead, the sickening sounds in the darkness outside the cottages which shelter Robert at nights, the questionable but criminal behaviour of Robert, or the devil impersonating Robert, during the "missing" months of his life for which he cannot account, these things are real and terrible enough. But they are implied, and personal to the reader. This paper has tried to add to this analysis an explanation of Robert's suicide as being not just the self-murder which concludes his life, but as being less obviously, and more importantly (certainly to an audience who shared the author's interests and knowledge) the sin of despair and blasphemy, openly and consciously committed as a means of suicide far more effective than hanging. To motivate this Hogg has the long-drawn-out experiences which wear Robert down, and then the moment of truth when he sees in the fearfully distorting mirror of the Devil's face the unbearable truth, after which there is no will left to struggle.

In this way, it can be strongly argued, the book escapes the limitations of its time, its presuppositions, and the more narrow intentions in its satire of religious issues which may seem unimportant today. Conrad's heart of darkness was found in a Universe so negative that Hogg would certainly have found it difficult to give it his personal intellectual assent, but Hogg's own Universe has come a long way since crude schematisations of Heaven, Earth and Hell such as dominated the staging of *Dr Faustus*. The reading of Hogg's novel proposed here is based on the received version of Christianity, augmented by a wholly credible erosion of personal faith, resulting in a *personal* crisis so intense, and so credible, as to be challenging to the reader in a century when the Christian framework which Hogg applied to the struggle, as distinct from the palpable grayness of Conrad's nightmare, may seem less relevant. In this last analysis the *Confessions* is not about Calvinism, or the Church in Scotland, but about personal moral decisions in a narrative framework which is vividly described in terms which throw the burden of interpretation and decision

on each individual reader of any age. As such, the picture of the heart of darkness of the individual is as relevant in Hogg's more distant work to a modern reader as is the fate of Kurtz in a much more recognisable modern Africa. This is the final success of an author who can impudently dismiss his own work in these terms:

With regard to the work itself, I dare not venture a judgement, for I do not understand it. (253)

*University of Edinburgh*

NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Discussions of the novel can be found in D. Craig, *Scottish Literature and the Scottish People* (London, 1961), pp. 188-96; L. Simpson, *James Hogg, A Critical Study* (Edinburgh & London, 1962), pp. 170-99; M. Lindsay, *History of Scottish Literature* (London, 1977), pp. 328-30; and best of all in D. Gifford, *James Hogg* (Edinburgh, 1976), pp. 138-84.

<sup>2</sup> Further discussions of the theology and narrative method in the *Confessions* by the present author as "Hogg's 'Confessions of a Justified Sinner'", *Liturgical Review* (November 1972), 28-33, "Author and Audience in Hogg's 'Confessions of a Justified Sinner'", *Scottish Literary News* Vol. 2, No. 4, 66-76, and "Burns, Hogg and the Dangerous Art", *Liturgical Review* (May 1974), 33-45.

<sup>3</sup> Page references in parentheses are to the Oxford English Novels edition, ed. J. Carey (London, 1969).

<sup>4</sup> See note 2. A further discussion is in D. S. Mack, "Hogg's Religion and 'The Confessions of a Justified Sinner'", *Studies in Scottish Literature* VII (April 1970), 272-75.

<sup>5</sup> Carey and Simpson discuss the question of the devil, and also the supposed authorship of the *Confessions* by Lockhart on the grounds that it is "too good" for Hogg!

<sup>6</sup> Gifford, *Hogg*, p. 174.

<sup>7</sup> Described in Campbell, "Author and Audience"; see note 2.

<sup>8</sup> (London, 1947), p. xv.

<sup>9</sup> K. Wittig, *The Scottish Tradition in Literature* (Edinburgh & London, 1958), pp. 247-50.

<sup>10</sup> Pace D. Eggenschwiler, "James Hogg's 'Confessions' and the Fall into Division", *Studies in Scottish Literature* IX (July, 1971), 26-39.

<sup>11</sup> *Memoirs of the Author's Life*, printed with Hogg's *Familiar Anecdotes of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. D. S. Mack (Edinburgh & London, 1972), 6-7.

<sup>12</sup> An area of ambiguity surrounds an individual reading of Scripture as to the damnable nature of the crime, but arguably it must be some version of a "sin against the Holy Spirit," which turned God in Isaiah 63:10 to fight against sinners as their enemy; this sin is categorically described in the New Testament: "He that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation" (Mark 3:29). The parallel passages at Matthew 12:31 and Luke 12:10 are equally categorical in their denial of forgiveness for such sin. Wringhim's despair, added to his blasphemy, constitute his sins.

<sup>13</sup> Who lists his important and saintly friends on Earth.

<sup>14</sup> L. L. Lee, "The Devil Figure: James Hogg's 'Justified Sinner'", *Studies in Scottish Literature* III (April 1966), 232.

<sup>15</sup> C. O. Parsons, *Witchcraft and Demonology in Scott's Fiction* (Edinburgh & London, 1964), p. 296.

<sup>16</sup> R. L. Stevenson, *Works*, Swanston edition (London, 1911), VIII, 285.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted from *Joseph Conrad, Three Short Novels* (New York, 1960), pp. 80-85.

<sup>18</sup> In Sartre's play, Garcin the hero realises in the concluding minutes that there is no escape from his private and personal hell; he is trapped in it for eternity, with two insupportable companions, and they will torment one another simply by their presence. He realises this, and makes a conscious effort to face up to his knowledge: "Well, let's get on with it." The translation is Stuart Gilbert's, quoted from *Three Modern Plays*, ed. E. M. Browne (Harmondsworth, 1958), 191.

<sup>19</sup> In his preface to the Oxford edition (note 3), pp. xxi-xxii.

<sup>20</sup> Ed. D. Craig (Edinburgh, 1963), pp. 164-66.

<sup>21</sup> Ed. W. F. Axton (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1961), p. 408.

<sup>22</sup> *Redgauntlet*, quoted from Scott, *The Waverley Novels*, Centenary edition (Edinburgh, 1891), XVIII, 112-13.

<sup>23</sup> M. Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, 2nd edition (London, 1970), pp. 118-22.