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It is a strange thing that in a biography of James Hogg written by Sir George Douglas and dated September 1899, there are only three references to the *Memoirs of Justified Sinner*, the most substantial of these occurring in a footnote rebutting an opinion apparently held by Andrew Lang that John Gibson Lockhart had a hand in the novel.[1] There is no attempt at an analysis of the book.

Yet this is a towering Scottish novel, one of the very greatest of all Scottish books. We know that Scott and Hogg were acquaintances and that their relationship was sometimes uneasy. Douglas writes:

> His [i.e., Hogg's] principal grounds of irritation against Scott were the consistent abstinence of the latter from recognizing him in any of his published writing: his sometimes gratuitous and unhelpful criticism of the prose pieces. . . . and his rather inconsiderate recommendation of Hogg to the post of head shepherd to Lord Porchester, the condition of that appointment being that he should put his 'poetical talent under lock and key for ever.'[2]

Yet I believe that Scott wrote nothing as artistically satisfying, as brilliant in conception and execution and continuous logical power as Hogg's

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[1]George Douglas, *James Hogg* (Edinburgh & London, 1899), p. 104.

[2]*Ibid.*, p. 109. The quotation is from Hogg's *Domestic Manners of Sir Walter Scott.*

novel. When we set beside it the Walpoles and the Radcliffes one can see that Hogg moves in an altogether different dimension.

The story is easily told.

A life-loving laird called Colwan marries a religious zealot whose implacable spiritual adviser, a minister called Wringhim, believes utterly in the Calvinist Law of Election by Grace. Two sons are born of her, one called George whom her husband acknowledges as his and who is an amiable average normal boy, the other Robert (whom the laird does not acknowledge on the grounds that he has been separated from his wife who now lives with Wringhim). Robert is educated into the strict Calvinist religion and is persuaded of the truth of the Law of Election. Robert one day meets a young man who speaks to him about religious things but is really the Devil. On the latter's instructions he kills a minister, his brother George and possibly his mother. At the end of the book—his psyche tortured beyond endurance—he kills himself.

Now it is no use comparing Hogg with Scott or, as far as I can see, with anyone in his century (born in 1770, Hogg died in 1835).

This novel seems to me to be psychologically far in advance of Hogg's time and can only be properly understood in the twentieth century. (I believe this also to be true of Dostoevski with whom Hogg can without chauvinism be compared) I have often thought that there is a resemblance between Scottish and Russian writers in their primary concerns. The Scot is a metaphysical philosophical being, and, in general, refuses to rest content with the description of manners. It is no accident that Macdiarmid, for example, writes often of the Russians. In *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* he asks for a share of Dostoevski's "appalling genius." I believe that Hogg had more than his share, especially (and probably exclusively) in this book.

Time and time again we are reminded of Dostoevski and of no one else. (If one compares the book with, say, Gogol's *Diary of a Madman* we are, I think, in a different world.)

One is reminded of Dostoevski first of all in the fact that both writers are capable of inducing a sense of vertigo in the reader. It is difficult to explain this clearly but I mean that one seems to be caught up in a curiously dizzy mechanism so that the normal appears strange and foggy and inverted. One thinks for instance of the Vision at Arthur's Seat which is metaphysical in its implications and much more sophisticated than the grotesque visions, say, in *The Castle of Otranto*.

Again, one gets, now and again, a scene in Hogg which reminds one directly of Dostoevski, that is, the proud glorying in abasement and injury as in the following. Robert is trying to spoil George's tennis game and has been hit:

> In the meantime, young Wringhim [i.e., Robert] was an object to all of the uttermost disgust. The blood flowing from his mouth and nose he took no pains to stem, neither did he so much as wipe it away; so that it spread over all his cheeks, and breast, even off at his toes. In that state did he take up his station in the middle of the competitors; and he did not now keep his place, but ran about, impeding everyone who attempted to make at the ball. They loaded him with execrations, but it availed nothing; he seemed courting persecution and buffetings, keeping steadfastly to his old joke of damnation, and marring the game so completely that, in spite of every effort on the part of the players, he forced them to stop their game and give it up. He was such a rueful-looking object, covered with blood, that none of them had the heart to kick him, although it appeared the only thing he wanted; and, as for George, he said not another word to him, either in anger or reproof.[3]

In another passage we get another Dostoevski theme, the contempt of the absolute man for the liberal. The passage begins:

> He [i.e., Robert] then raised himself on his knees and hams, and raising up his ghastly face, while the blood streamed over both ears, he besought his life of his brother, in the most abject whining manner, gaping and blubbering most piteously (p. 41).

The passage continues, later on:

> "Well, Robert, I will believe it. I am disposed to be hasty and passionate: it is a fault in my nature; but I never meant, or wished you evil; and God is my witness that I would as soon stretch out my hand to my own life, or my father's, as to yours." At these words, Wringhim uttered a hollow exulting laugh, put his hands in his pockets, and withdrew a space to his accustomed distance (p. 42).

There is a curious effeminacy (combined with absolutism) in Robert who, one senses, would have admired George more if he had been totally ruthless and not liberal.

Another Dostoevskian characteristic is the humor of the book. The opening section where the laird's wife sits up with a prayer book in her hand on her wedding night and refuses to come to bed is brilliantly funny, especially when the laird himself drops off to sleep in the middle of her prayers and begins to snore:

> He began, in truth, to sound a nasal bugle of no ordinary calibre—the notes being little inferior to those of a military trumpet. The lady tried to proceed, but every returning note from the bed burst on her ear with a louder twang, and a longer

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[3]James Hogg, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (New York, 1959), pp. 23-4. Further references will be to this edition and will appear in the text.

> peal, till the concord of sweet sounds became so truly pathetic that the meek spirit of the dame was quite overcome; and, after shedding a flood of tears, she arose from her knees, and retired to the chimney-corner with her Bible in her lap, there to spend the hours in holy meditation till such time as the inebriated trumpeter should awaken to a sense of propriety (p. 7).

True, this might appear to be pawky humor but a careful analysis will show that it is very purposeful. Hogg is asserting human values against absolute ones gone mad. He has learnt (what Walpole and Mrs. Radcliffe haven't) that there is a place for humor in the he kind of book he is writing, as Dostoevski also knew. Much of his other humor is on a more purely metaphysical level as for instance at the end of the book where the Devil gets into the printer's shop—a printer's devil. This is a nice metaphysical pun.

But there are many other instances of this nature, for the story belongs to the kingdom of the absurd. A number of names are bandied about in connection with Hogg, for example, Defoe, Poe, and Henry James in a book such as *The Turn of the Screw*. The latter, I think, is closer to him in conscious art: as for Defoe and Poe I cannot see that they are very like him. Poe is far more morbid than Hogg, and Defoe doesn't have his sense of ideology. It seems to me that the chosen theme suggests more the milieu of a Dostoevski in its ambiguous explorations of the spirit. And to find a writer treating a Dostoevskian theme in the eighteenth century—what a miracle!

I can in fact think of no other Scottish book which is a miracle of this kind. How did Hogg—a minor poet and minor prose writer in his other work—make this transcendental leap? It seems to be inexplicable except that in some strange fashion—perhaps in a hallucinatory logical vision—he was given the sight of this particular extreme form of religion carried to its ultimate conclusion, and worked out the implications with the instantaneous grasp of genius.

The crucial discovery he made is overwhelmingly simple. It is this. What if the Doctrine of Divine Election is actually a doctrine not of God but of the Devil? What if the Devil should find himself able to acquiesce quite sincerely in the implications of the doctrine? What if the Devil should on these terms admit that he is a Christian and really mean it?

It is worth thinking about this before we discuss it in more detail. There are plays by Marlowe and Goethe about a man who sells his soul to the Devil. In these plays the man is intellectually brilliant but he knows that he is dealing with the Devil—he is selling his soul to him. It is the ultimate capitalist transaction. The Devil offers, in return, knowledge, luxury and women. But the Devil in this particular book doesn't offer luxury or women. He offers in fact what God appears to offer—Divine Election—and this in itself is the damnable thing because the theory is in its axioms devilish for it states that a certain number are elected to be saved. God does the se-

lection. The inexorable logic of the theory arises from the attempt to deny that good works are enough—for a man could do all sorts of good works and still be a heathen. There is a logic to the theory but it is the logic of madness since it leads unequivocally to the conclusion that ideology is more important than humanity, and it is therefore in essence a peculiarly twentieth-century preoccupation. It is a special instance of a general theory which has perverted our own civilization. It implies the creation of a spiritual elite implacable against all those who do not belong to it. It is a Mensa society of theology. It leads to the kind of thinking that enticed Leopold and Loeb to carry out their murder on the grounds of their own superiority. It is not so unlike the ideas of Nietzche as commonly understood and put into practice, say, by the student in *Crime and Punishment*.

Members of the elite elect each other. Robert Wringhim's father elects Robert as he elected himself previously. One of the victims is not a heathen but a minister. Here we are in the presence of something very modern. The Communist, for instance, hates the Socialist more than he hates the Tory.

Now this theory can also be compared with Dostoevski's work. In *The Brothers Karamazov* Dostoevski begins with the proposition, "If there is no immortality all things are permissible." Hogg begins essentially with the proposition: "If a man knows that he is saved no matter what he does—saved to all eternity—and all good works are irrelevant—then all things are permissible."

Such ideas lead to a totalitarian philosophy. That is why I said that Hogg and Dostoevski can only be fully understood in the twentieth century.

Now Robert does not recognize the Devil for the simple reason that the Devil agrees with all his ideas and does so sincerely since the ideas themselves are devilish. Again and again we find this idea:

> "Tell me this, boy:" [says Wringhim to Robert after he has seen and spoken to the Devil] "did this stranger, with whom you met, adhere to the religious principles in which I have educated you?"
>
> "Yes, to every one of them in their fullest latitude," said I.
>
> "Then he was no agent of the Wicked One with whom you held converse," said he (pp. 110-11). "For a man who is not only dedicated to the King of Heaven in the most solemn manner, soul, body, and spirit, but also chosen of him from the beginning, justified, sanctified, and received into a communion that never shall be broken, and from which no act of his shall ever remove him—the possession of such a man, I tell you, is worth kingdoms. . . " (p. 131).

The Devil quotes the Old Testament in order to justify murder:

> "If the acts of Jehu, in rooting out the whole house of his master, were ordered and approved of by the Lord," said he, "would it not have been more praisewor-

> thy if one of Ahab's own sons had stood up for the cause of the God of Israel, and rooted the sinners and their idols out of the land?" (p. 134).

The most astounding passage of all is this:

> "We are all subjected to two distinct natures in the same person" [says the Devil]. "I myself have suffered grievously in that way. The spirit that now directs my energies is not that with which I was endowed at my creation. It is changed within me, and so is my whole nature. 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" (p. 174).

The methods Hogg uses for involving the reader in this whirlpool are various in operation but similar in essence. They all depend on ambiguity. The quotation just given shows ambiguity operating linguistically and in ideology. We find ambiguity at the very beginning of the book. Robert tries to enter the inn into which George and his companions have gone after their tennis game. They won't let him, and eventually he attracts a crowd to attack the inn saying that it is occupied by Jacobites. However there happens to be a number of Whigs in the inn and the landlord tells them that the crowd is composed of Jacobites whereupon the Whigs sally out and attack their own people, not finding out till the end of the fray what has happened.

The Devil, too, often transforms himself into all kinds of shapes. Sometimes he looks like George, sometimes like Robert, sometimes like a minister. One of the interesting bits in the novel is when the Devil disguises himself as an actual preacher just after he and Robert have murdered Blanchard, the minister, and causes that preacher to be arrested for the crime though he wasn't in the area at all. This does not seem to me to be akin to the horseplay in Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*. It is much more seriously intended and more metaphysical in its implications.

There is also a continuous confusion of identities. At times Robert doesn't know who he is. He is supposed to have killed his mother and seduced a neighboring girl but he has no recollection of such things. There are typical schizophrenic manifestations: indeed Hogg's book can be partly discussed in modern psychological terms.

At the end of the book Hogg, or rather the narrator, writes as follows:

> Were the relation at all consistent with reason, it corresponds so minutely with traditionary facts that it could scarcely have missed to have been received as authentic; but in this day, and with the present generation, it will not go down that a man should be daily tempted by the Devil, in the semblance of a fellow-creature; and at length lured to self-destruction, in the hopes that this same fiend and tormentor was to suffer and fall along with him. 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 writer was not. In short, we must either conceive him not only the greatest fool, but the greatest wretch, on whom was ever stamped the form of humanity; or, that he was a religious maniac, who wrote and wrote about a deluded creature, till he arrived at that height of madness that he believed himself the very object whom he had been all along describing (pp. 229-30).

Now clearly the latter part cannot be true. The woman called Calvert (and her male accomplice) did see Robert Wringhim and a companion kill George. There are other phenomena that can only be explained on the basis that there was a real physical person, Devil or otherwise.

Nevertheless, parts of the narrative reveal perfectly explicable psychological phenomena of a modern kind.

There is no reason for doubting that Robert might, without consciously knowing it, have killed his own mother. By the time that she was killed he was beginning to repent of his association with a person whom he believed to be the Devil and, recognizing perhaps that his mother by her religious bigotry was partly the cause of his own spiritual destruction, he might indeed have killed her. Similarly he might have seduced the neighboring girl. The suffocated Id might have taken its revenge on the Superego. The novel does give a continuous impression of psychological insight as when Robert sees himself divided into two persons, none of them his own, one George and the other his new friend, the Devil.

It would, in fact, have been of the greatest interest to have had a Freudian analysis of this novel which has come out of that country where for long periods the Superego has been rampant. It is clear for instance that the suicide at the end is psychologically right. If all is predestined, the mind can only prove that it is not a machine by asserting at least its right to suicide—if that too is not predestined.

In the second half of the *Memoirs* we feel a certain pity for this tortured being, Robert Wringhim, who has gone irretrievably to the good which at a certain point turns into the bad. It reminds one of the pity one feels for the Frankenstein's monster of Mary Shelley. The righteousness of the parents is visited upon Robert with a vengeance.

Trying to escape, he is at the end enmeshed in a weaver's web and is relentlessly pursued by the Devil with a friendship which is really hatred. One can quite clearly imagine a mind so imprisoned by the Superego of a Calvinism carried to extremes that it would in fact follow the logic contained in this book. The Id would presumably emerge in aggression and pride. Burns's "Holy Willie" occasionally lifted a leg on various girls. Robert doesn't even do this and consequently he might later have seduced the neighboring girl (losing the memory of it in the process).

The possibility of schizophrenia is always present but Hogg didn't as yet have the knowledge to be consistently accurate. One feels, however, that his imagination had seized the essentials of it. If one, for instance, compares this book with *Dr. Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, one recognizes that the latter emerges from a cardboard world manufactured in a metaphysical void.

A very interesting and specially Scottish paragraph is this:

> There was only one boy at Mr Wilson's class who kept always the upper hand of me in every part of education. I strove against him from year to year . . . and I was convinced he had dealings with the Devil . . . and I was at length convinced that it was no human ingenuity that beat me with so much ease in the Latin, after I had often sat up a whole night with my reverend father, studying my lesson in all its bearings (p. 99).

Altogether, in his use of shifting identity, ambiguity as a deliberate device, the cult of the superior mind, a possibly traumatic loss of memory and other methods, Hogg's novel impresses one as being a manifestation of hallucinatory genius which has resulted from intense concentration on a specifically Scottish theme projected itself into the future. It might be worth reminding ourselves once again of the work of Mrs. Radcliffe and Walpole to realize how essentially different Hogg's book is. What he has in fact done is to pursue a logic to its conclusion and then uncover what he finds. The device of describing the events externally in the third person and then shifting to the first person works extremely well especially for this kind of book. He has instinctively realized that a standard of external reality must be given before the Memoir itself is quoted. Otherwise, it would be difficult for the reader to establish himself.

There is however one other point which might be profitably discussed and that is the use to which Scots has been put in this novel.

Clearly an important thing that Hogg has to do is to establish a mean by which the inhumanity of Robert can be judged. I believe that he has done this by using the Scottish language.

If English is alien to the Scottish consciousness (especially in the eighteenth century) then why not let the alienation of a particular consciousness be expressed in it? Similarly if the Scottish language is the natural language of the Scottish consciousness why not let the normal, the average, the human, be expressed in it?

Consider this passage:

> "Ineffectual Calling? There is no such thing, Robert," said she. [i.e. his mother]
>
> "But there is, madam," said I, "and that answer proves how much you say these fundamental precepts by rote, and without any consideration. Ineffectual Calling is *the outward call of the gospel* without any effect on the hearts of unre-

> generated and impenitent sinners. Have not all these the same calls, warnings, doctrines, and reproofs, that we have? And is not this Ineffectual Calling? Has not Ardinferry the same? Has not Patrick M'Lure the same? *Has not the Laird of Dalcastle and his reprobate heir* the same? And will any tell me that *this is not In*effectual Calling?"
>
> "What a wonderful boy he is!" said my mother.
>
> "I'm feared he turn out to be a conceited gowk," said old Barnet, the minister's man (p. 90).

Now I believe that this last sentence establishes by the use of the Scottish language the reaction of ordinary humanity when confronted by what it senses to be abstract ideological nonsense. And I believe farther that only the Scottish language at this point could have had the power to be so curt and precise and yet at the same time so intimate. The very words recall even in their contempt a human intimacy which Robert has lost. Even more, their gestures, while to be considered as an impatient demolition, invite him into a world which he has abandoned, imprisoned as he is in a language— representative of a world—that will destroy him. Consider another passage: Robert has told Wringhim that Barnet has been insulting him (that is Wringhim). The latter cross-examines Barnet; and concludes as follows in what I consider to be a crucial linguistic confrontation:

> "Hear then my determination, John. If you do not promise to me, in faith and honour, that you never will say, or insinuate such a thing again in your life, as that that boy is my natural son, I will take the keys of the church from you, and dismiss you from my service."
>
> John pulled out the keys, and dashed them on the gravel at the reverend minister's feet. "There are the keys o' your kirk, sir! I hae never had muckle mense o' them sin' ye entered the door o't. I hae carried them this three and thretty year, but they hae aye been like to burn a hole i' my pouch sin' ever they were turned for your admittance. Tak them again, an' gie them to wha you will, and muckle gude may he get o' them. Auld John may dee a beggar in a hay barn, or at the back of a dike, but he sall aye be master o' his ain thoughts an' gie them vent or no, as he likes" (pp. 97-8).

This last sentence I consider of particular importance. It represents the assertion of human freedom against abstract repression true for all ages and all times. It is life rebelling against the ideological.

One further instance should be enough to show this use of the Scots language. Mrs. Logan has lost some valuables and a woman called Calvert has been accused of stealing them. Mrs. Logan's maid refuses to identify certain of the stolen objects in court as belonging to her mistress so that Calvert may not be hanged. Here the values of ordinary humanity—unpredictable and comic—are established again and again in the maid's intimate Scots language. In this passage she talks about herself and Mrs. Logan.

> "What passed, say ye? O, there wasna muckle: I was in a great passion, but she was dung doitrified a wee. When she gaed to put the key i' the door, up it flew to the fer wa'. 'Bless ye, jaud, what's the meaning o' this?' quo she. 'Ye hae left the door open, ye tawpie!' quo she. 'The ne'er o' that I did,' quo I, 'or may my shakel bane never turn another key.' When we got the candle lightit, a' the house was in a hoad-road. 'Bessy, my woman,' quo she, 'we are baith ruined and undone creatures.' 'The deil a bit,' quo I; 'that I deny positively. H'mh! to speak o' a lass o' my age being ruined and undone! I never had muckle except what was within a good jerkin, an' let the thief ruin me there wha can.'" (p. 61).

Later there is the passage:

> "Perhaps you are not aware, girl, that this scrupulousness of yours is likely to thwart the purposes of justice, and bereave your mistress of property to the amount of a thousand merks." (*From the Judge.*)
>
> "I canna help that, my lord: that's her look-out. For my part, I am resolved to keep a clear conscience, till I be married, at any rate."
>
> "Look over these things and see if there is any one article among them which you can fix on as the property of your mistress."
>
> "No ane o' them, sir, no ane o' them. An oath is an awfu' thing, especially when it is for life or death. Gie the poor woman her things again, an' let my mistress pick up the next she finds: that's my advice" (pp. 62-3).

It is unnecessary to indicate the relevance of this scene (apparently discursive) to the rest of the book. The maid has a sense of proportion: she realizes that a human life is worth more than a thousand marks.

What in effect the Scots language does is to keep things in proportion. It is, as in *The House with the Green Shutters*, a marvellous instrument for deflation, though it can also be cruel.

What then does this book teach us? It teaches us that to go beyond the bounds of humanity is to lose oneself so utterly that one cannot tell God from the Devil.

In a long section about the Cameronian sect this ambiguity is discussed. Apparent irrelevancies in this book turn out not to be irrelevant at all as the book is beautifully made. This is not true of many of Hogg's other stories.

A careful reading of Hogg's other prose shows nothing comparable to the *Memoirs*. The stories, though always readable, are often rambling. One at least, "Welldean Hall," which depends on a ghost who has left a will among the classics in a library, reminds one of Mrs. Radcliffe. However, Hogg tends to be more humorous than she is and less portentous. "The Bridal of Polmood" has a very funny multiple bedroom scene and an interesting detective-story denouement dependent on two bodies both of whose heads have disappeared.

Many of the stories are about devils or wraiths but none shows the metaphysical treatment found in the *Memoirs*. *The Brownie of Bodsbeck*, though apparently about the supernatural, is not: the events are cleared up in a perfectly rational manner at the end. It is interesting too that this story is about the Covenanters, a harried sect almost as fanatical as Robert himself. Though the story tends to ramble a bit I think that, outside of the *Memoirs*, it is his best. The Covenanters are saved by the daughter of a man who is himself on the other side and when praising his daughter for saving them in spite of his own ideological hostility he expresses the humanity which transcends ideas: "Deil care what side they war on, Kate!" cried Walter, in the same vehement voice; "ye hae taen the side o' human nature; the suffering and the humble side, an' the side o' feeling, my woman. . ."[4] The story is notable too for the portrait of Claverhouse but above all for the marvellous Highland soldier, Daniel Roy MacPherson, who says: "Any man will stand py me when I am in te right, put wit a phrother I must always pe in te right."[5]

"The Wool Gatherer" is a nice romantic story with the inevitable happy ending. The stories show interesting though conventional invention. In them Hogg is always strongest on his home ground around the Borders and in Scots of which he has a remarkable command.

However, there is nothing in them to prepare us for the *Memoirs*, though they contain, scattered here and there, many of the themes treated on in that book—including stories about the Devil and the supernatural, stories about religious extremists and ambiguities of motive.

Only, however, in the *Memoirs* do all these themes take on a logical rigor and undeviating development. Only in the *Memoirs* do we sense the continuous shadow of metaphysical meaning running below the external one.

All that this proves is that the productions of genius are ultimately inexplicable.

Tigh na Fuaran
Taynuilt, Argyll

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[4]James Hogg, *The Brownie of Bodsbeck*, ed. Douglas S. Mack (Edinburgh and London, 1976), p. 163.

[5]*Ibid.*, p. 144.