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*Regina B. Oost*

“False Friends, Squeamish Readers, and Foolish Critics”:  
The Subtext of Authorship in Hogg’s *Justified Sinner*

James Hogg’s *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* was begun during the autumn of 1822,<sup>1</sup> the third in a series of novels designed to finance a new farm that the writer had leased in 1820. Hogg later reflected that even though he knew the farm had “ruined two well-qualified farmers in the preceding six years,” he was optimistic in believing that “if I could not *make* the rent, I could write for it.”<sup>2</sup> In his autobiography, Hogg recalls that between 1822 and 1824 he was “writing as if in desperation,” producing texts that he later considered flawed as a result of his haste (p. 50). Ironically, none of these texts earned Hogg the money he had hoped to generate from his frenetic literary outpouring. As David Groves notes, despite Hogg’s later boast that he was skilled at feeling “the pulse of the public” (*Memoir*, p. 23), during the

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<sup>1</sup>See Williston R. Benedict, “A Story Replete with Horror,” *Princeton University Library Chronicle*, 44 (1983), 249, where the author speculates that Hogg worked on *Justified Sinner* from the autumn of 1822 until the spring of 1824.

<sup>2</sup>James Hogg, *Memoir of the Author’s Life and Familiar Anecdotes of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. Douglas S. Mack (Edinburgh, 1972), p. 54. In his autobiography, Hogg attributes textual problems in his novels to the haste with which he produced the works. He writes: “In 1822, perceiving that I was likely to run short of money, I began and finished in the course of a few months, ‘The Three Perils of Man...’ Lord preserve us! What a medley I made of it!” (p. 55) Henceforth *Memoir*.

early 1820s he seemed "to be trying his hardest to offend upper-class book-buyers."<sup>3</sup>

The tension between pleasing readers and resisting their expectations is evident in *Justified Sinner*. Even though Hogg needed the money that authorship could generate and seems generally to have enjoyed his literary reputation, *Justified Sinner* does not appear to be written to please an audience. Indeed, the novel leaves readers in a lurch: it taunts them with irreconcilable information that thwarts their attempts to piece together the various accounts of Robert Wringhim's history. Moreover, Hogg refuses to provide readers with a single authoritative narrator, instead introducing three speakers—Robert Wringhim, a frame editor, and himself in the persona of the Ettrick Shepherd—whom he discredits, thereby depriving readers of a trustworthy guide through the text's many ambiguities and discrepancies.

Hogg's simultaneous need to please bookbuyers and tendency to alienate them constitute a subtext that undergirds *Justified Sinner's* more conventional (and more frequently discussed) representation of religious piety run amuck. For while the novel is certainly about Robert Wringhim and the abuses of religion, it is also about James Hogg and the abuses of authorship. Author figures abound in this novel, from the "justified sinner" Robert Wringhim (who resolves to pen his memoirs when he flees to Edinburgh to escape prosecution for a number of crimes, including the murder of his mother), to the frame editor who finds and presents Robert's narrative, to the Ettrick Shepherd who has written a letter to *Blackwood's Magazine* describing the grave of a suicide. Through its examination of these figures' activities, the novel subtly reveals Hogg's quarrel with the literary establishment and ambivalence toward his readers.

Robert Wringhim, the "justified sinner," has the training to engage in two professions. As the protegee of his foster-father the Reverend Wringhim, Robert has from early life been "designed for his assistant and successor in the holy office."<sup>4</sup> Along with his theological training, the boy has also received a liberal education and deems himself "a first-rate classical scholar" who "would gladly turn my attention to some business wherein my education might avail me something" (Hogg, p. 213).

Late in his narrative, Robert is forced to decide between these two professions. Wanted for a number of crimes, he flees Dalcastle, and on the road to Edinburgh contemplates how best to earn a living. Initially Robert considers preaching, reflecting that

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<sup>3</sup>David Groves, *James Hogg: The Growth of a Writer* (Edinburgh, 1988), p. 133. Henceforth Groves.

<sup>4</sup>James Hogg, *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, ed. John Wain (London, 1986), p. 110. Henceforth Hogg.

Though I had somehow unaccountably suffered my theological qualifications to fall in desuetude...I had nevertheless hopes that, by preaching up redemption by grace, pre-ordination, and eternal purpose, I would yet be enabled to benefit mankind in some country, and rise to high distinction (Hogg, p. 205).

Yet when he reaches Edinburgh, Robert quickly finds a position in a publishing house and begins writing his own memoirs without a word of explanation as to why he did not carry out his resolve to preach.<sup>5</sup> Robert's motives for writing, though, clearly link this literary activity to his former religious aspirations. Early in life, even before meeting Gil-Martin, Robert declares:

I conceived it decreed, not that I should be a minister of the gospel, but a champion of it, to cut off the enemies of the Lord from the face of the earth, and I rejoiced in the commission, finding it more congenial to my nature to be cutting sinners off with the sword, than to be haranguing them from the pulpit, striving to produce an effect, which God, by his act of absolute predestination, had for ever rendered impracticable (Hogg, pp. 130-31).

In thus proclaiming himself "champion" rather than minister of the gospel, Robert once and for all rejects the first profession for which he is qualified. This does not mean, however, that he rejects religious activity altogether. On the contrary, under Gil-Martin's influence, Robert's desire to "cut off sinners with the sword" is refined to a more self-serving pitch. Reflecting on what he believes is Gil-Martin's eminent social position, Robert states:

It instantly struck me that this was no other than the Czar Peter of Russia, having heard that he had been travelling through Europe in disguise, and I cannot say that I had not thenceforward great and mighty hopes of high preferment, as a defender and avenger of the oppressed Christian Church, under the influence of this great potentate (Hogg, p. 137).

Robert's religious ambitions thus have two clear components: first, they reveal Robert's sense of superiority to what he elsewhere terms "the sinful creatures crawling on [earth's] surface" (Hogg, p. 125). Second, they betray his desire for personal gain.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>See Barbara Royle Bloede, "James Hogg's *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*: The Genesis of the Double," *Etudes Anglaises*, 26 (1973), 174-86, where the author provides a provocative discussion of Robert's rejection of his father-surrogate the Revd. Wringhim. It is possible to extend Bloede's argument to conclude that Robert's refusal to preach is a part of his larger rejection of Wringhim. Henceforth Bloede.

<sup>6</sup>Although Wain in his introduction to the novel claims that "ordinary mercenary greed is not among [Robert's] failings" (Hogg, p. 23), many of the novel's critics agree that Robert's religious designs are largely self-interested and materialistic.

These same two components underlie Robert's resolution to turn writer. He once again proclaims his intention of scourging the unworthy:

In the might of heaven I will sit down and write: I will let the wicked of this world know what I have done in faith of the promises, and justification by grace, that they may read and tremble, and bless their gods of silver and of gold, that the minister of heaven was removed from their sphere before their blood was mingled with their sacrifices (Hogg, p. 111).

As in his comments on religion, Robert here depicts his readers as the "wicked of this world" and himself as the scourge sent to make them feel their unworthiness. And through this activity, Robert still hopes to attain the eminent social position he feels he deserves:

I thought if once I could print my own works, how I would astonish mankind and confound their self wisdom and their esteemed morality—blow up the idea of any dependence on good works, and morality, forsooth! And I weened that I might thus get me a name even higher than if I had been made a general of the Czar Peter's troops against the infidels (Hogg, p. 214).

Robert's turn to authorship is thus motivated by the same desires that prompted his activities at Dalcastle. Even though he has experienced spectacular failures in his attempts to scourge the citizens of his home town (failures so tremendous that Robert flees the town with a price on his head), his self-conception is unshaken, and his goal unaltered.

Perhaps not surprisingly, in the end Robert has no more success as a writer than he would have had as a preacher. Just as the brand of self-righteous haranguing that Robert learns from the Reverend Wringhim irritates rather than conciliates many members of the community, so Robert's self-aggrandizing prose alienates rather than impresses his readers. His first reader, the printer Mr. Watson, shows Robert that writers can no more afford to scorn their audiences than preachers can their congregations. Upon reading Robert's work, Watson grows so angry that he destroys all but one copy, putting an end to Robert's hope of gaining social eminence through his writing (Hogg, p. 215). Robert finds himself despised and rejected, and his second reader, the frame editor, grants him an epithet no more flattering than that earned by the Reverend Wringhim. Whereas the Reverend's zealous discourses won him the title "the crazy minister from Glasgow" (Hogg, p. 48), Robert's narrative prompts the frame editor to call him "the greatest fool [and] the greatest wretch, on whom was ever stamped the form of humanity" (Hogg, p. 242).

Is it just Robert's comments about readers that so alienate Mr. Watson? Certainly Robert's pose of superiority is not likely to earn readers' affection. Other aspects of the confessions also betray Robert's ineptitude as a writer, however. His voice is self-involved and self-pitying, and nowhere is a reader offered relief from this voice by Robert's attempting to adopt a perspective

broader than (or at least different from) his own. This unremitting self-centeredness is exacerbated by Robert's complete lack of humor: he notes that Gil-Martin "was never truly amused with any thing"<sup>7</sup> (Hogg, p.139), but he never realizes that he shares Gil-Martin's deficiency.

Robert's lack of humor and his self-centeredness are thrown into relief by the frame editor, whose tone is markedly different from Robert's. The frame editor's descriptions are often playful, as illustrated by his depiction of the Colwans' wedding night. After the Laird retires to bed,

[Lady Dalcastle] felt that she was left rather in an awkward situation. However, to show her unconscionable spouse that she was resolved to hold fast her integrity, she kneeled down and prayed in terms so potent, that she deemed she was sure of making an impression on him. She did so: for in a short time the laird began to utter a response so fervent, that she was utterly astounded, and fairly driven from the chain of her orisons. 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 peal, till the concord of sweet sounds became so truly pathetic, that the meek spirit of the dame was quite overcome (Hogg, pp. 32-3).

This humorous description is a far cry from Robert's dour account of the wedding night: "As well might they have conjoined fire and water together, in hopes that they would consort and amalgamate, as purity and corruption: She fled from his embraces the first night of marriage..." (Hogg, p. 109). Thus Robert dispenses with his mother's history so that he can get back to his own complaints.

Robert's intense and exclusive focus on himself is further contrasted by the frame editor's presentation of material from various sources representing several viewpoints. In the first lines of his narrative, the frame editor says that his information comes from oral tradition and local parish records, and later he includes the letter from *Blackwood's Magazine*, as well as an account of his own visit to the grave the letter describes. The editor's story is communally generated: he does not insist upon his own particular version of truth, but collects for the reader's consideration a range of anecdotes and opinions. Moreover, he does not harangue readers as Robert does, but encourages them to join

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<sup>7</sup>Given this and several other points of resemblance, it is possible to conclude with many of the novel's critics that Gil-Martin is a psychological phenomenon, a phantasm that resembles Robert because he is invented by Robert and exists only in his troubled imagination. On the other hand, several critics prefer to think of Gil-Martin as a real devil, an embodiment of evil who torments Robert for his spiritual pride. Douglas Gifford nicely resolves the dilemma by pointing out that the novel is constructed so that both readings are possible. Gifford speculates that the effect Hogg sought was an "ambiguity of interpretation" that would deliberately unsettle readers. See Douglas Gifford, *James Hogg* (Edinburgh, 1976), p. 139. Henceforth Gifford.

him in evaluating the text he finds in the suicide's grave: "I have now the pleasure of presenting my readers with an original document of a most singular nature, and preserved for their perusal in a still more singular manner," the editor writes immediately before he reproduces Robert's narrative. "I offer no remarks on it, and make as few additions to it, leaving every one to judge for himself" (Hogg, p. 106).

Robert is so enamored of his own voice that when he begins writing, it does not occur to him to produce anything other than autobiography. Nor is he able to adopt a literary persona. Twice Robert invents a pseudonym: at the weaver's cottage he calls himself "Cowan" (Hogg, p. 206), and when he hires on with Mr. Watson he uses the name "Elliott" (Hogg, p. 213). To publish his memoirs, however, Robert imprudently discards his pseudonym, apparently forgetting or no longer caring that he is a wanted man: "I saw what numbers of my works were to go abroad among mankind, and I determined with myself that I would not put the Border name of Elliot, which I had assumed, to the work" (Hogg, p. 215). Incapable of foregoing an opportunity for self-aggrandizement, Robert cannot re-invent himself either for his own safety or for the edification of his readers. His refusal to mask his name and to tell a story other than his own betrays his unshakeable self-centeredness and his conception of authorship as yet another means by which to demonstrate his superiority to the "groveling creatures" that surround him (Hogg, p. 14).

When Robert Wringhim sets off for Edinburgh and decides to become a writer, he fleetingly resembles his creator James Hogg. Hogg's autobiography tells of his turn to authorship after he failed as a sheep farmer:

For a whole winter I found myself without employment, and without money, in my native country; therefore, in February 1810, in utter desperation, I took my plaid about my shoulders, and marched away to Edinburgh, determined, since no better could be, to push my fortunes as a literary man. It is true, I had estimated my poetical talent high enough, but I had resolved to use it only as a staff, never as a crutch; and would have kept that resolve had I not been driven to the reverse (*Memoir*, p. 18).

Unlike Robert, however, Hogg looked upon authorship as an opportunity to remake himself. He started playing with his identity as early as 1810, when he assumed the mask of "The Spy" for his short-lived periodical of the same name. Hogg experimented with several different personae until he hit upon the one that proved both popular and profitable: a rustic "natural songster" (*Memoir*, p. 19).

By the time he wrote *Justified Sinner* in 1824, Hogg had refined this natural songster into the Etrick Shepherd, a character who appeared regularly as part of *Blackwood's Magazine's* "Noctes Ambrosianae" series and whom readers often conflated with Hogg himself. Perhaps hoping to trade upon the character's popularity, Hogg presents himself as the Etrick Shepherd in *Justified Sinner's* concluding frame. When approached by the frame editor and his

companions who ask him to lead them to the grave of a mummy lately unearthed, the novel's "Hogg" responds:

'Od bless ye, lad! I hae ither matter to mind. I hae a' thae paulies to sell, an' a' yon Highland stotts down in the green every ane; an' than I hae ten scores o' yowes to buy after, an' if I canna first sell my ain stock, I canna buy nae ither body's (p. 236).

While Hogg truly was concerned about money when he wrote *Justified Sinner*, in this portrait of the Ettrick Shepherd, Hogg exaggerates his own situation, making the sale of his wares the Shepherd's only concern. Although Hogg's readers liked to believe that he really was the Ettrick Shepherd, in reality this self-portrait owes as much to the popular image of Scotsmen—blunt, profane, not in the least interested in esoteric matters such as books, editors, or "hunder-year-auld banes" that they have no time to "houk up" (Hogg, p. 236)—as to Hogg's own circumstances.

Hogg's persona as an outspoken rustic and a natural poet was carefully crafted over time. In his *Memoir*, which he revised upon several occasions to bolster the sales of his works, Hogg described himself as:

A common shepherd, who never was at school; who went to service at seven years of age, and could neither read nor write with any degree of accuracy when thirty; yet who, smitten with an unconquerable thirst after knowledge, would leave his native mountains, and his flocks to wander where they chose, come to the metropolis with his plaid wrapped about his shoulders, and all at once set up for a connoisseur in manners, taste, and genius (p. 21).

Such a picture "has more the appearance of a romance than a matter of fact," Hogg acknowledges, but he clings to the verity of his description: "a matter of fact it certainly is" (p. 21). Actually, Hogg manufactured parts of this description to make himself seem more rustic than he really was. His claim that he "never was at school" is simply not true. Granted, his formal education was of short duration and he was hired out as a shepherd at an early age; still, he did receive some schooling. In addition, Hogg's claim that he "could neither read nor write with any degree of accuracy when thirty" is questionable, since in other autobiographical notes Hogg claims that he learned to read at twenty, and in one essay he discusses participating in a reading-and-debating society well before his thirtieth birthday.<sup>8</sup> Hogg fictionalized his autobiography in order to emphasize his rural origins, and ultimately to make his writing seem more wondrous to the book-buying public and increase the sales of his works. As

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<sup>8</sup>See Gillian Hughes, "James Hogg and the Forum," *Studies in Hogg and His World*, 1 (1990), 59, where Hughes quotes a passage from Hogg's essay "The Storm" in which Hogg recalls participating in a reading circle in 1794, when he was 24 years old.

Emma Letley observes, "Hogg as subject of the *Memoir*, is a literary device."<sup>9</sup>

By creating literary personae and fictionalizing his autobiography, Hogg demonstrates his willingness to play with his own identity, treating himself as a character whose experiences he can write into being. Assuming new faces, voices, and histories, Hogg seems almost a benign Gil-Martin figure, a shape-shifter who changes his features as the situation demands. Significantly, even before he wrote *Justified Sinner*, Hogg played with the idea of shifting shapes: in *The Spy*, Hogg assumed the mask of one Mr. Spy, a prototype for Gil-Martin who could enter others' thoughts by assuming their physical characteristics. In becoming Mr. Spy for the periodical, and later in crafting the rustic image of himself that readers found so appealing, Hogg did what Robert Wringhim could never do: step outside of himself to imaginatively engage new perspectives.

Given Robert's stalwart insistence upon the inviolability of his own identity, it is not surprising that in his story, he fears and deprecates the shape-shifter. Perfectly satisfied with his status as one of the elect, Robert has no desire to imitate Gil-Martin's impersonation of others or to allow Gil-Martin to impersonate him. He "start[s] violently" and is thrown into a "quandary" when he sees such a performance (Hogg, p. 139). This aversion to shifting shapes is precisely what makes Robert a bad writer, however. He cannot, like Hogg, remake himself for the literary marketplace. He cannot anticipate readers' reactions and build upon their expectations, as Hogg did in his creation of the Ettrick Shepherd. Robert's rigidity and self-centeredness contrast Hogg's own treatment of his identity as malleable, and through his depiction of Robert's failure as an author, Hogg suggests that malleability is an indispensable quality for writers hoping to achieve success in the literary marketplace.

Unlike Robert, who cares little about what his readers think or feel, Hogg prided himself upon his ability to gauge readers' tastes. In his memoirs he boasted that early in his career, he learned to feel "the pulse of the public, and precisely what they would swallow, and what they would not" (*Memoir*, p. 23). However, despite Hogg's confidence in his ability to please the public, his literary ventures consistently missed the mark, earning him little money and no great prestige. According to David Groves, between 1810 and 1813, Hogg attempted to satisfy the book-buying public by "avoid[ing] vulgarity, politics or any challenge to set morality" (p. 18). Groves further notes that both the *Forest Minstrel* (1810) and *The Spy* (1810-11) were calculated to respond to "the sentimental, subjective expectations of [Hogg's] genteel audience" (p. 22). But neither was very successful, and shortly after the magazine folded, Hogg

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<sup>9</sup>Emma Letley, "'The Management of the Tongue': Hogg's Literary Uses of Scots" in *Papers Given at the Second James Hogg Society Conference*, ed. Gillian Hughes (Aberdeen, 1988), p. 13.

was reduced to accepting food, clothing, and money from a few of his Edinburgh friends in order to survive.

Finally, in 1813, Hogg produced a work that better suited the public taste. *The Queen's Wake* established him as a literary figure, and went through six editions in his lifetime, but Hogg made no profits from early editions of the work, as his publisher went bankrupt. Still, Hogg was lionized as a result of this publication, and thenceforth he cultivated the reputation of natural poet that granted him a place in the otherwise elitist Edinburgh literary circle, a circle that derided the pretensions of upstarts such as Keats and Hunt.<sup>10</sup> After *The Queen's Wake*, Hogg's works never again achieved great popularity, although during the 1810s and 20s Hogg hoped to rekindle the public's interest in his writings in order to fund his farms. Groves says that during this stage of his career, Hogg wrote fewer verses and more fiction that would appeal to a "wider, more dependable, less educated market," a market in which readers "wanted gossip, personality, and humour, at the expense of imagination, ideas, and wit" (Groves, pp. 81-82). It was during this period and for this audience that Hogg wrote *Justified Sinner*.

Hogg's own literary failures stand in ironic contrast to the observations he makes on authorship through Robert's tale. By the time he wrote *Justified Sinner*, Hogg knew perfectly well that a writer could not guarantee the success of his work simply by trying on different voices and attempting to anticipate readers' tastes. He had done this repeatedly throughout his career, but was none the richer for his efforts.

To what did Hogg attribute his literary failures? Partly to the fickle tastes of the reading public, and partly to a literary establishment that he believed singled him out for victimization. Hogg's comments on readers indicate that as early as 1811, he was disappointed with them. In the final number of *The Spy*, Hogg castigates the "false friends, squeamish readers, and foolish critics"<sup>11</sup> whom he held responsible for the magazine's demise and his own financial difficulties. Later his memoirs expanded upon these reflections:

As usual, I despised the fastidiousness and affectation of the people, and continued my work. It proved a fatal oversight for the paper, for all those who had given in set themselves against it with the utmost inveteracy. The literary ladies, in particular, agreed, in full divan, that I would never write a sentence that deserved to be read (*Memoir*, p. 20).

Hogg's disdain of fastidious readers did not lessen his financial dependence

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<sup>10</sup>Bloede cites John Gibson Lockhart who wrote "Mr. Hunt cannot utter a dedication or even a note without betraying the Shibboleths of low birth and low habits." Bloede asks, "Why should [Lockhart] be expected to treat a mere shepherd any better?" (p. 181)

<sup>11</sup>Nelson C. Smith, *James Hogg* (Boston, 1980), p. 25. Henceforth Smith.

upon them, though. Although, as Groves remarks, in his later works Hogg could not keep his bitterness out of his writing (p. 133), he still desperately hoped to please readers well enough to profit from his labors.

Hogg also blamed publishers, printers and critics for his economic difficulties. In his *Memoir* he frequently comments on machinations of publishers that deprived him of the revenues he expected to earn from his works. For example, he recounts his disagreement with George Goldie, publisher of *The Queen's Wake*, over the author's right to dispose of his text:

It was in vain that I remonstrated, affirming that the work was my own, and I would give it to whom I pleased. I had no one to take my part, and I was browbeat out of it—Goldie alleging that I had no reason to complain.... I durst not say that he was going to break and never pay me; so I was obliged to suffer the edition to be printed off in Goldie's name. This was exceeding ill done of him—nothing could be more cruel (*Memoir*, p. 28).

Hogg reports that he tried to avoid employing booksellers "whom I...began to view as enemies to all genius," and he reflects that his experiences "ought to be a warning to authors never to intrust booksellers with their manuscripts" (*Memoir*, p. 45). So disconcerted was Hogg by the practices of publishers and booksellers even early in his literary career that he began to feel singled out for persecution. He describes his search for a publisher for *The Spy*:

"D—m, them," said I to myself, as I was running from one to another, "the folks here are all combined in a body." Mr. Constable laughed at me exceedingly, and finally told me he wished me too well to encourage such a thing.... David Brown would have nothing to do with it, unless some gentleman, whom he named, should contribute (*Memoir*, pp. 19-20).

Hogg's sense that the publishers were combined in a body against him dogged him his entire life:

For my own part, I know that I have always been looked on by the learned part of the community as an intruder in the paths of literature, and every opprobrium has been thrown on me from that quarter. The truth is, that I am so. The walks of learning are occupied by a powerful aristocracy, who deem that province their own peculiar right; else, what would avail all their dear-bought collegiate honours and degrees? No wonder that they should view an intruder, from the humble and despised ranks of the community, with a jealous and indignant eye, and impede his progress by every means in their powers (*Memoir*, p. 46).

According to Douglas Gifford, Hogg thought himself the victim of "a conspiracy of the gentry against him,"<sup>12</sup> a sensation that was bolstered on several oc-

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<sup>12</sup>Gifford, p. 142. In his reading of *Justified Sinner*, Gifford considers Hogg's feeling of

casions by the fact that individuals whom he had considered friends savaged his writing in their reviews. Hogg often complained of the “bestly depravity” of critics’ insults to his work and to him (Bloede, p. 181). At other times, Hogg felt his works were not given proper notice by influential critics. Of Francis Jeffrey, editor and reviewer of the *Edinburgh Review*, Hogg wrote:

From that day to this Mr. Jeffery [sic] has taken no notice of any thing that I have published, which I think can hardly be expected to do him any honour at the long run. I should like the worst poem that I have since published to stand a fair comparison with some that he has strained himself to bring forward (*Memoir*, p. 27).

Hogg felt especially set upon around the time that he published *Justified Sinner*. When his usual publisher Blackwood declined the work, Hogg approached the Longman firm. Hogg soon clashed with his new publisher:

The same year [as *Justified Sinner* was published] I offered them two volumes 12mo of “The Lives of Eminent Men,” to which they answered, “that my last publication had been found fault with in some very material points, and they begged leave to decline publishing the present one until they consulted some other persons with regard to its merits.” Oho! thinks I, since my favourite publishers thus think proper to take two thousand volumes for nothing (“Queen Hynde” and the “Confessions of a Sinner”), and then refuse the third, it is time to give them up; so I never wrote another letter to that house (*Memoir*, p. 56).

Hogg’s battle with publishers and readers taxed not just his patience, but also his livelihood. “Desperate” (Hogg’s term) for the rent money, he found publishers unwilling or slow to pay him for the works he produced. In his memoirs he puzzles over the secretive measures of publishers and booksellers upon whom his livelihood depended. “I never received into my own hand one penny for these...works,” Hogg complains. “It is probable that they may have sold them off at a trade sale, and at a very cheap rate too; but half of the edition was mine, and they ought to have consulted me, or, at least, informed me of the transaction” (*Memoir*, p. 56). Complaining that the schemes of the publishers have “to this day continued a complete mystery to me” (p. 56), Hogg documents several occasions upon which he worked but received no royalties due to the inscrutable or imprudent dealings of his publishers. Responding to the widely-held suspicion that Hogg’s complaints about publishers were unfounded, Peter Garside concludes that Hogg indeed had cause for complaint.<sup>13</sup>

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persecution the key to unraveling Robert’s relationship with Gil-Martin. The story of Robert’s entrapment and Gil-Martin’s trickery mirrors Hogg’s own relationship with the *Blackwood’s* group, Gifford suggests.

<sup>13</sup>Peter Garside, “James Hogg’s Fifty Pounds,” and “Three Perils in Publishing: Hogg and the Popular Novel,” in *Studies in Hogg and His World*, 1 (1990), 128-32 and 2 (1991), 45-63.

Given Hogg's discontent with readers, publishers and critics, it is unlikely that he believed the simple object lesson for authors that he embeds in Robert's story. Having tried for years to anticipate readers' tastes and make himself into various personae in an effort to gain their favor, Hogg knew that nothing so simple could guarantee a writer's success. Certainly Robert might have had a better chance of literary success if he were as tractable as the frame editor, but even the editor has his problems. First, he is unable to do what he wants with the manuscript he finds because his publisher restricts his activities. The frame editor reflects, "I altered the title to *A Self-justified Sinner*, but my bookseller did not approve of it" (Hogg, p. 241). Second, he cannot reconcile discrepancies between his own experiences, Robert's manuscript, and the letter through which he learns of the suicide's grave, because the only person who might help him, the taciturn Ettrick Shepherd who wrote the letter, refuses to act as his informant (pp. 235-6). No matter how reliable and amenable an author the frame editor seems at the novel's outset, in the end, partly due to the actions of others involved in the novel's creation, the frame editor disappoints his readers. "What can this work be?" the editor asks, echoing his readers' question without being able to provide them an authoritative answer (p. 230).

The novel's comments on authorship are even further complicated by Hogg's depiction of himself as the Ettrick Shepherd. Whereas Robert is seemingly ignorant of how to please readers, and the frame editor tries but cannot wholly succeed, the Ettrick Shepherd of the novel's concluding frame neither tries nor cares to please readers. He is more interested in selling his wares (in the novel's frame, his sheep) than in clearing up questions that his writing (here, the letter to *Blackwood's Magazine* reproduced in the novel) has raised for his readers. If Hogg the writer, whom I will separate from Hogg the character, knew that successful authors conciliate rather than confuse or antagonize their readers, why then did he portray himself as singularly unwilling to work for and with them? Why, when he needed the money that a popular tale could generate, did Hogg leave his novel in so rough a state that various parts of the tale frustrate readers' attempts to reconcile them?

The portrait that James Hogg includes of himself in the concluding frame of *Justified Sinner* is calculated to amuse readers and increase the book's sales rather than to flatter the author. Readers enjoyed the Ettrick Shepherd's appearances in *Blackwood's Magazine*, and Hogg probably included the character in his novel to capitalize upon his popularity. By the time the novel was published in 1824, however, Hogg was having some problems with the persona. The rustic image the writer initially cultivated to gain a place in the Edinburgh literary world had so captured the fancy of the public that publishers and readers alike treated Hogg as if he were in fact the Ettrick Shepherd. This confusion was fueled by Hogg's colleagues at *Blackwood's*, for which he had started writing in 1817. At first the magazine and the writer mutually benefited from their association: Hogg depended upon the magazine to publish his works, and he was sure that the magazine profited from his contributions.

However, by the time the “Noctes Ambrosianae” series was begun in 1822, Hogg’s relationship with *Blackwood’s* had become tense. As John Carey describes the situation,

Early in the 1820s it dawned on him that the magazine which had at first welcomed and profited from his help was easing him out; “no wonder I begin to feel a cold side to a work which holds such an avowed one to me,” he wrote to Blackwood. His articles were rejected and, worse, articles he had never written, associating him with *Blackwood’s* policy, appeared instead. He tried to guard against this by signing all contributions, but Wilson and Lockhart [two of the “Noctes” contributors] “signed my name as fast as I did.”<sup>14</sup>

Hogg started writing the Ettrick Shepherd pieces for *Blackwood’s* in December of 1822, but by August of the next year, Wilson was making up the Shepherd’s speeches (Carey, p. xx). Wilson’s discourses were attributed to Hogg, and since readers conflated Hogg with the Ettrick Shepherd, the writer found himself held accountable for opinions he had never professed. To make matters worse, the other writers who created the Shepherd’s speeches depicted him “as a kind of Caliban, boozing, brawling, and bragging” (Groves, p. 88), and Hogg discovered that the public attributed the character’s behavior to the writer himself. Hogg’s wife came to dread the publication of each new issue of the magazine (Carey, p. xx), and in letters Hogg railed against the *Blackwood’s* coterie, complaining bitterly that not only did they plant objectionable ideas in his mouth, but they insulted his intelligence by rendering the Shepherd’s speeches ungrammatical (Groves, p. 88). In his *Memoir*, Hogg later reflected on Blackwood and his magazine:

[Blackwood] has driven me beyond the bounds of human patience. That Magazine of his, which owes its rise principally to myself, has often put words and sentiments into my mouth of which I have been greatly ashamed, and which have given much pain to my family and relations, and many of those after a solemn written promise that such freedoms should never be repeated. I have been often urged to restrain and humble him by legal measures as an incorrigible offender deserves. I know I have it in my power, and if he dares me to the task, I want but a hair to make a tether of (p. 59).

Hogg’s fear for his reputation was justified, for he later found his character permanently injured by his affiliation with the Shepherd. Carey reports that “readers of the ‘Noctes’ who, like William Howitt, met the actual James Hogg later, were astonished to find him ‘smooth, well-looking and gentlemanly’” (p. xx). Despite the magazine’s ill-treatment of him, however, Hogg was not in a position to sever his ties with it or to disown the Ettrick Shepherd character.

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<sup>14</sup>James Hogg, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, Introd. by John Carey (Oxford, 1969), p. xix. Henceforth Carey.

As David Groves notes, even though Hogg "strongly resented the 'beastly usage' of him by Blackwood and his 'assassins'" (p. 88), he still depended upon the magazine for his livelihood.

When Hogg depicts himself as the Ettrick Shepherd in *Justified Sinner*, he demonstrates that despite his misgivings about the character, he is willing to use the persona if it pleases readers and helps market the book. Nevertheless, Hogg does not lose this opportunity to interrogate readers' preference for the character and to suggest that the Ettrick Shepherd is not the adequate stand-in for Hogg that readers often imagined. To begin with, the Shepherd cannot be trusted: he misleads readers by giving them incorrect information. His letter to *Blackwood's Magazine* bemuses the frame editor, who comments upon two of its writer's errors: he misidentifies the site of the suicide's grave, and he mistakes the type of bonnet the suicide wears. To verify the grave's location, the editor recounts that he:

read to our guide Mr. Hogg's description, asking him if he thought it correct? He said there was hardly a bit o't correct, for the grave was not on the hill of Cowan's-Croft, nor yet on the point where three lairds' lands met [as Hogg's letter had asserted], but on the top of a hill called the Faw-Law, where there was no land that was not the Duke of Buccleuch's within a quarter of a mile. He added that it was a wonder how the poet could be mistaken there, who once herded the very ground where the grave is, and saw both hills from his own window (Hogg, p. 236).

As for the bonnet, the editor says he is "puzzled" by it, for it is "neither a broad bonnet [as the Shepherd had claimed], nor a Border bonnet; for there is an open behind, for tying, which no genuine Border bonnet, I am told, ever had" (p. 239). There are several other discrepancies between the Ettrick Shepherd's letter, the oral history that the frame editor records, and the editor's own account of exhuming the body. Apparently the Shepherd either lied or was mistaken in his letter, for when the frame editor sets out to check the information, he discovers that the letter is unreliable. This discovery does not really surprise the editor, though, for in his eyes neither *Blackwood's Magazine* nor the Ettrick Shepherd was credible even before he traveled to Scotland. Of *Blackwood's*, the editor says "so often had I been hoaxed by the ingenious fancies displayed in that Magazine, that when this relation [Hogg's letter] met my eye, I did not believe it" (p. 234); and of the Shepherd, "God knows! Hogg has imposed as ingenious lies on the public ere now" (p. 235).

The editor gives the Shepherd the chance to explain himself, but as we have already seen, the Shepherd is more interested in selling his sheep than in answering the editor's questions. He refuses the role of authority figure that the editor wants to grant him, leaving the editor, and the novel's reader, without explanation of his letter, guidance to the suicide's grave, or help in sorting through and reconciling the various documents the editor collects about this grave. Given the Shepherd's lack of credibility and his indifference to the editor's plea for help, he is hardly a figure in whom a reader can place confi-

dence. Yet this is the figure whom readers of *Blackwood's Magazine* applauded and whom they expected Hogg to be. In giving readers exactly what they want and simultaneously exposing the limitations of the Shepherd, Hogg subtly questions their taste and judgment.

Hogg does not allow the Shepherd's shortcomings to take over the novel, however; his appearance is limited to a relatively short space in the novel's concluding frame. By evoking and then dismissing the character, Hogg demonstrates that his range as a writer is much broader than readers familiar with just the "Noctes" series might expect. Hogg can at will assume the Shepherd's voice, but he can also put that voice away to try on others—Robert's, or the frame editor's—with equal aplomb. Through this exhibition of his range and versatility, Hogg challenges readers' tendency to conflate the writer with a single literary persona.

Hogg in his novel thus shows that the Shepherd's is just one of many voices he can assume, but he also demonstrates that the Ettrick Shepherd can do more than readers of the "Noctes" series might have been led to believe. Lest readers continue conflating the Shepherd with Hogg despite the writer's exhibition of other voices, Hogg restores to the Shepherd the intellect and sensibility that *Blackwood's* contributors took away in their depiction of him as "a kind of Caliban." The novel attributes to the Ettrick Shepherd two distinct styles of speech. The first is the dialect speech of the uneducated rustic; the second is the polished prose of a man of letters. We have seen an example of the first style in the Shepherd's dismissal of the frame editor, and the second is apparent in the letter the Shepherd wrote for *Blackwood's*:

On the top of a wild height called Cowanscroft, where the lands of three proprietors meet all at one point, there has been for long and many years the grave of a suicide marked out by a stone standing at the head, and another at the foot. Often have I stood musing over it myself, when a shepherd on one of the farms, of which it formed the extreme boundary, and thinking what could induce a young man, who had scarcely reached the prime of life, to brave his Maker, and rush into his presence by an act of his own erring hand, and one so unnatural and preposterous (Hogg, p. 230).

This writer seems a very different individual from the sheepdealer at the ewe fair. If the latter cannot be bothered with such curiosities as hundred-year-old bones because, as he says in his Scottish dialect, "I hae mair ado than I can manage the day" (p. 236), the former finds time not just to compose the grammatically perfect letter, but also to muse over the suicide's grave, pondering questions about the young man's motivation and relationship to the Almighty. Through this apparent disparity Hogg suggests that the individual the frame editor meets at the fair cannot be adequately judged by his appearance. What initially strikes the frame editor is the Ettrick Shepherd's rude speech and offensive manner, but this abrasive exterior belies the Shepherd's fine imagination and facility with language.

If one of the themes of Robert's narrative is that appearances cannot be trusted, Hogg also develops this motif in the novel's frame by calling the editor's initial impression of the Ettrick Shepherd into question. Like the people of Auchtermuchty who learn to distrust appearances through their encounter with the demonic preacher, and like the people of Dalcastle who discover that Robert Wringham's demure exterior hides his propensity to lie and his carnal nature, the novel's reader learns that the Ettrick Shepherd is also not what he initially seems. The frame editor, however, does not appear to notice the difference in sensibility between the shepherd and the letter-writer. In overlooking this discrepancy, the frame editor reveals that he is as insensitive to the Shepherd's chameleon nature as Hogg's readers were to his. And as Groves says, "by gradually unveiling the...obtuseness of this 'editor,' Hogg [enjoys] a gleeful revenge" on those who unfavorably judged him and his works (Groves, p. 115).

Hogg thus uses the character of the Ettrick Shepherd in several ways in the novel: he includes him as a marketing device, but he also subtly calls readers' expectations into question first by demonstrating that the Ettrick Shepherd is not a good substitute for the author himself, second by emphasizing that the Shepherd is just one of several personae the writer can assume, and third by showing that even this limited persona is intellectually capable of more than most readers have been led to believe. In sum, Hogg restores to the Shepherd the desirable qualities that the *Blackwood's* cabal had taken from him,<sup>15</sup> yet Hogg still insists that readers recognize the difference between himself and the persona. Hogg does not want to disown the character completely: indeed, he depends upon the Shepherd's popularity to generate the money he needs. But through his novel Hogg warns readers that they are not recognizing the Shepherd for what he is, a performance rather than an accurate depiction of Hogg himself.

Hogg's depiction of writers and literary personae becomes even more complicated when we realize that the Ettrick Shepherd is not the only character in the story to use different speech, one vernacular, the other literary. As oral tradition has it, the suicide who wrote Robert's narrative used a dialect resembling the Ettrick Shepherd's when he spoke to a local boy: "Then, if ye winna stay with me, James, ye may depend on't I'll cut my throat afore you come back again" (Hogg, 231). Yet when this dialect-speaker wrote, he produced a

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<sup>15</sup>See Ian Duncan, "Shadows of the Potentate: Scott in Hogg's Fiction," *Studies in Hogg and His World*, 4 (1993), 12-25. Duncan suggests that through this reclamation, Hogg distances himself from the Edinburgh literati, represented by the editor and his cohorts, who engage in "the unseemly business of exhuming the traditions of his countryside for the gratification of a prurient public" (p. 21). Duncan notes that ironically the writer Hogg does exactly what the novel's Ettrick Shepherd disparages. What Duncan does not take into account is that the Shepherd is indeed implicated in the "unseemly business" by his having written the *Blackwood's* letter that leads the editor to him.

text as polished as the letter the Ettrick Shepherd submitted to *Blackwood's Magazine*. The first-person account of Robert's history is rhetorically sophisticated, as the elevated diction and parallel construction of its opening sentence demonstrate: "My life has been a life of trouble and turmoil; of change and vicissitude; of anger and exultation; of sorrow and of vengeance" (p. 109). Like the Ettrick Shepherd, the suicide adopts different styles for different situations: he linguistically remakes himself when he takes up a pen, much as Hogg did when he created his literary personae. Here, however, we reach an apparent impasse: if the suicide was capable of shifting shapes when he wrote, how then can we equate him with Robert, who is incapable of such flexibility? To begin answering this question, we need to ask another: might the suicide be somebody other than Robert who merely assumes that persona to tell the justified sinner's tale, just as Hogg takes on the Ettrick Shepherd persona for his writing, and the Ettrick Shepherd becomes the man of letters? If so, then Hogg is complicating his tale even further to once again warn audiences against reading too literally and confusing characters with their creators.

If we entertain the possibility that Robert is a literary persona, a first-person narrator that some unnamed writer invented to tell his tale, then it is possible to account for many of the novel's inconsistencies. While several of the novel's critics have developed provocative arguments to examine these inconsistencies, only Michael York Mason suggests that the person buried in the suicide's grave might not be Robert. As Mason argues, we have no conclusive proof from the text that the mummified body is indeed Robert's; in fact, the scant evidence we do have suggests just the opposite. For instance, local history has it that the suicide dwelt "a considerable time in the place," whereas the chronology of Robert's tale suggests that he killed himself within a month of arriving in the area. The suicide apparently had blond or brown hair, whereas Robert's was dark. And the contents of the suicide's pockets in no way accord with the life Robert was said to be leading at the end of the manuscript: why would the religious zealot-turned-cowherd be carrying samples of cloth? Such disparities cast doubt upon the identity of the person buried in the grave, suggesting that he may not have been the first-person narrator of the pamphlet.<sup>16</sup>

From the text that this unnamed writer produced, we can speculate upon his motive for constructing so unusual a story as Robert's, whose history is set in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. It appears that the un-

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<sup>16</sup>See Michael York Mason, "The Three Burials in Hogg's *Justified Sinner*," *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 13 (1978), 15-23, in which Mason cites inconsistencies in the text to argue that three separate graves may have been discussed and excavated: the grave of the young man whose story oral tradition tells, the grave of the mummy that the youths disturb and that the Ettrick Shepherd describes for *Blackwood's*, and the grave that the editor visits (which Mason distinguishes from the *Blackwood's* grave). While it is somewhat difficult to track the logic by which Mason distinguishes the three sites, his point that the mummy is not necessarily Robert is a good one.

named writer lived at approximately the same date. Thus, when in the tale Robert consults Mr. Watson about printing his memoirs, the advice the printer gives him presumably reflects market conditions, not just of Robert's era, but also of the unnamed writer's. Robert states: "He [Mr. Watson] advised me to print it close, and make it a pamphlet, and then if it did not sell, it would not cost me much; but that religious pamphlets, especially if they had a shade of allegory in them, were the very rage of the day" (Hogg, p. 214). From the condition of his body, it is evident that the unnamed writer did not have much money when he died. When the frame editor goes through the suicide's pockets, he finds items such as a comb, a pocket knife, a pair of knee-buckles, and the cloth samples, but no money (p. 239), and the Ettrick Shepherd's letter to *Blackwood's* observes that the suicide "had been very near run of cash, which I daresay had been the cause of his utter despair; for, on searching his pockets, nothing was found but three old Scots halfpennies" (p. 234). It is possible that, in need of funds, the writer decided to write a moral tale that would be "the very rage of the day." The moral he fixes upon is simple: religious pride goes before a fall. In viewing this fall from the perspective of the zealot himself, the impoverished writer may have tried to lend his tale the "shade of allegory."

Is Robert's tale allegorical, then? The frame editor speculates that it is when he reflects, "What can this work be? Sure, you will say, it must be an allegory; or (as the writer calls it) a religious PARABLE, showing the dreadful danger of self-righteousness? I cannot tell" (p. 230). Apparently the editor is confused about the work's status because, as he admits, "I do not understand it. I believe no person, man or woman, will ever peruse it with the same attention that I have done, and yet I confess that I do not comprehend the writer's drift" (p. 241). Nevertheless, even though he asserts that he "dare not venture a judgment" on the work (p. 241), the frame editor is not in the least reticent to judge its writer: "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" (p. 242). Even though he repeatedly calls the work an allegory, the editor is unable fully to comprehend it. It seems that he is missing some information that would help him make sense of Robert's tale.

Perhaps this information is what Robert, whom we must remember to distinguish from the unnamed writer here, promised to give a reader in his first-person narrative: "I must now furnish my Christian readers with a key to the process, management, and winding up of the whole matter; which I propose, by the assistance of God, to limit to a very few pages" (p. 215). Robert never provides this key, however, for at the moment he proposes to do so, the printer Mr. Watson reads his history, is angered by it, and "consigns" all copies but one "to the flames" (p. 215). Instead of finishing his tale in the manner he initially proposed, Robert describes Mr. Watson's ire and complains that the printer's actions ruin his hopes for literary success (p. 215).

Once again the frame editor overlooks an important detail in the narrative, for he seems not to notice that Robert's tale is incomplete due to Mr. Watson's

actions and Robert's reflections upon them. The frame editor castigates the unnamed writer of Robert's first-person narrative, whom he conflates with Robert, for not producing a clear allegory, but he does not realize that the unnamed writer might have left Robert's story incomplete for a purpose: to draw attention to the printer's role in Robert's demise.

Keeping in mind that Robert may be a first-person narrator rather than an autobiographical portrait of the unnamed writer, we must realize that Robert's experiences with Mr. Watson are not necessarily his creator's. One conclusion we can reach about the unnamed writer, however, is that when he composed the account of Robert's disagreement with Mr. Watson, he was reflecting upon antagonism between writers and publishers. Although we have no real evidence for why the unnamed writer died in poverty and obscurity, the story he wrote suggests that at some point in his life he may have encountered publishers like Mr. Watson who thwart writers' designs. It is even possible that his negative experience with publishers contributed to his poverty, which—as the Ettrick Shepherd suggests (p. 234)—might have prompted his suicide.

Until the end of the novel the frame editor never speculates that the pauper in the grave might not be Robert. He overlooks dissimilarities between the body he finds, descriptions of Robert in the manuscript, and tales of the suicide that he hears from the locals, and he conflates the writer with Robert to conclude that what is true of the character is also true of his creator: "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" (p. 242). Significantly, at the very end of his narrative, the editor stumbles onto the idea that the writer and Robert might not have been the same person. It is possible, the editor speculates, that the writer "was a religious maniac, who wrote and wrote about a deluded creature, till he arrived at the height of madness, that he believed himself the very object whom he had been all along describing" (p. 242). The editor still attributes Robert's fanaticism to the unnamed writer, but here he briefly entertains the notion that the writer and the object are distinct. In this single sentence the editor unwittingly plants the seed of an idea which, upon retrospect, the narrative supports. Reevaluating the novel in light of this idea, the reader discovers that its discrepancies can be understood if she is willing to do what the frame editor, for all but the last line of his narrative, and Hogg's own readers would not: to separate the writer from his literary persona.

Thus, *Justified Sinner* places great demands upon its audience. In order to make sense of the narrative, the reader must be more thorough and more perceptive than any of the novel's characters.<sup>17</sup> She cannot read literally, as Robert does when he takes up the Bible. She cannot overlook discrepancies in the materials before her, as the frame editor does when he collapses writer and

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<sup>17</sup>Smith (p. 153) comments that the only person in a position to piece together the various parts of Robert's narrative is the novel's reader.

persona. She cannot come to conclusions rashly, lest like Mr. Watson she throws the text aside rather than allowing its ending to provide the key to the tale: the editor's final speculation on the distinction between Robert and the pamphlet writer. Hogg does not make the reader's job easy, for when she turns to the text looking for an authoritative voice to guide her, she is disappointed first by the frame editor, who simply does not have the evidence or the insight to resolve the text's difficulties, and second by the author himself, who, in Magdalene Redekop's words, "dramatizes his own withdrawal from the text" by assuming the Ettrick Shepherd persona and refusing to cooperate with the frame editor.<sup>18</sup>

Hogg's challenge to his readers provokes two potential reactions. At best, readers will view the novel's indeterminacy as an opportunity for interpretation, as does Douglas Gifford when he asserts, "the first enjoyment of this novel lies in the very bewilderment of response, as the imagination and reason battle to control the weird events" (Gifford, p. 170). At worst, readers will lament Hogg's refusal to grant any one figure an authoritative voice and to resolve the novel's discrepancies, as did an anonymous reviewer when the work was first published:

In the supposed autobiography of a victim of superstition, to preserve that unity which is essential to the production of a pleasurable impression on the reader, one or two obvious courses must be consistently adhered to. The phantoms of that superstition must either have a real, external being; or they must exist solely in the diseased imagination of the supposed writer. We can readily become, for the time, either believers or philosophers, to relish a good story; but the author must make his election, and adhere to it. The "Justified Sinner" will not allow us to jog along comfortably with him in either character.... This inconsistency is as great an annoyance as if the audience were compelled to change their dresses three or four times during a performance, instead of the actors (qtd. in Carey, pp. 257-8).

This reviewer's comment that a reader cannot "jog along comfortably" with the novel exactly hits the mark: in this novel, Hogg does not seem to want his audience to be comfortable. Comfortable (or complacent) readers were the "false friends and squeamish readers" of whom he complained in *The Spy*, the "fastidious" and "affected" audience whom Hogg in his *Memoir* said he tried to please to no avail. In *Justified Sinner*, Hogg makes readers' complacency their downfall: he shows readers that they cannot rely upon the Ettrick Shepherd character of *Blackwood's* popularity, or depend upon the conventional authority of a frame editor, but must work actively to make their own sense of the tale.

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<sup>18</sup>Magdalene Redekop, "Beyond Closure: Buried Alive with Hogg's *Justified Sinner*," *ELH*, 52 (1985), 161.

Hogg's determination to undermine readers' complacency has its roots in his dissatisfaction with his position in the literary world. Feeling misunderstood by readers and victimized by publishers, Hogg in this novel touches upon several of the faults he attributes to audiences and members of the literary establishment: careless reading, hasty judgment of literary merit, and, above all, a tendency to collapse writers and their personae and thus to damage writers' reputations. At the same time as he harbors these complaints against readers and publishers, Hogg is still dependent upon them for his livelihood, and *Justified Sinner* bears the mark of Hogg's simultaneous dependence upon and dissatisfaction with readers in its evocation and subversion of literary conventions. First, Hogg provides in Robert's story some easily discernable themes: he warns readers against fanaticism and self-righteousness, and he advocates writers' suiting themselves to their audience. Yet he also calls these themes into question by planting details throughout the frame that complicate or contradict Robert's story, thus suggesting that facile interpretations and superficial judgments are not always dependable. Second, Hogg introduces readers to a figure who would conventionally help them resolve narrative difficulties: the frame editor who finds the manuscript of Robert's tale and amasses historical information to elucidate it. This editor does not fulfill the readers' expectations, however, for not only does he fail to enlist the aid of the one person who might help him account for discrepancies in his material, he also proves himself an imperceptive reader. Finally, Hogg presents the portrait of himself with which audiences of his day were familiar, the Ettrick Shepherd. The Shepherd refuses to act as an author-surrogate, though: even as readers discover that he is not the "boozing, brawling, and bragging" figure that *Blackwood's* led them to believe, they also learn that in this text, he is indifferent to their needs.

When he wrote *Justified Sinner*, Hogg needed money and knew what kinds of tales readers were eager to buy. He willingly produced such a tale, but not without simultaneously scrutinizing the literary establishment in which writers' livelihoods and reputations are threatened by the unreflecting judgments of "false friends, squeamish readers, and foolish critics."

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