

2001

Violence and the Victimization of Women: Engendering Sympathy for Hogg's Justified Sinner

Warren Fox

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



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

Recommended Citation

Fox, Warren (2001) "Violence and the Victimization of Women: Engendering Sympathy for Hogg's Justified Sinner," *Studies in Scottish Literature*: Vol. 32: Iss. 1.

Available at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/vol32/iss1/16>

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

Warren Fox

Violence and the Victimization of Women: Engendering Sympathy for Hogg's Justified Sinner

During the past three decades, critics of James Hogg's 1824 novel, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, have tended to follow three lines of inquiry: the theological, the epistemological, and the psychological. Despite these differing emphases, however, there has been widespread consensus among the critics on a large number of points about the novel and more or less general agreement about its central issues and concerns. Hogg's novel is most obviously a work of religious satire, targeting not merely the potentially morally crippling effects of certain radical tenets of Scottish Calvinism as espoused in the seventeenth century, but inflexible religious doctrine of any sort. In place of such doctrine, critics have claimed, Hogg offers the reader a humanist philosophy of tolerance and forgiveness. Nelson Smith's conclusion, that Hogg's novel "warns not against Calvinism nor even literally against antinomianism; rather, it exposes the vice of unreasonable enthusiasm and upholds [Hogg's] often-preached ideals of moderation, common sense, and perfectibility," is typical of this view.¹ Douglas Gifford's oft-cited analysis of the novel in *James Hogg*, while focusing primarily on epistemological issues, nonetheless concludes that Hogg's desire is "to replace formal theology of this restricting and dangerous kind...with an instinctive and heart-centered humanitarian conscience."² David Groves has stressed repeatedly Hogg's rejec-

¹James Hogg (Boston, 1980), p. 160

²James Hogg (Edinburgh, 1976), p. 180.

tion of the extremes of rationalism and dogmatism in favor of a middle way based on values of humility and human community.³ For such a satire to be effective, the writer must occupy and the reader must come to occupy a position from which moral judgments can be made based on a knowledge of the facts. Hogg's novel, however, does everything possible to undermine such a position, such judgments and such knowledge. With two unreliable narrators and the machinations of what may be the devil producing conflicting versions of its central events, the novel forces discussions of its theological and moral concerns to inevitably shade over into epistemological issues as readers seek grounds for understanding and passing judgment on Robert Wringham, the title's "justified sinner."⁴

The ambiguity produced by Hogg's novel, its ability to suggest rather than decide, gives it both its most puzzling and its most powerful aspects. Any attempt to determine the truth, or the Truth, of Hogg's novel, to determine what has actually happened and what the correct response on our part is to be, inevitably fails. Instead, the power of Hogg's novel, as a number of commentators have testified, lies in its ability to evoke a strong emotional response in its reader, a response borne of our ability to put ourselves in Robert's position and to feel with him as he undergoes his experiences. "It is long since I can remember," André Gide wrote in his essay on *Justified Sinner*, "being so taken hold of, so voluptuously tormented by any book."⁵ The theological issues raised in the novel and, to no less an extent, the Scriptural echoes, which are a

³See "Parallel Narratives in Hogg's *Justified Sinner*" in *Scottish Literary Journal*, 9:2 (1982), 37-44; "James Hogg's 'Singular Dream' and the Confessions" in *Scottish Literary Journal*, 10:1 (1983), 54-66; "Other Prose Writings of James Hogg in Relation to *A Justified Sinner* in *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 20 (1985), 262-5; and *James Hogg: The Growth of a Writer* (Edinburgh, 1988).

⁴Concern about the difficulty of discovering truth in the novel has led critics to approach it from a variety of angles. To name a few, David Oakleaf's "'Not the Truth': The Double-ness of Hogg's *Confessions* and the Eighteenth-Century Tradition," in *SSL*, 18 (1983), 59-74, examines the two narrators in the intellectual context of eighteenth-century theories of knowledge; Rebecca Pope's "Hogg, Wordsworth, and Gothic Autobiography," in *SSL*, 27 (1992), 218-40, sees the novel as a critique of the genre of autobiography and its claims to a kind of heightened realism; and Jonathan Glance's "Ambiguity and the Dreams in James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*," in *SSL*, 28 (1993), 165-77, sees the function of dreams and dream-like episodes as increasing the sense of ambiguity and the difficulty of deciding between what Gifford characterizes as the "rational" and "supernatural" readings of the novel. For a reading which carries mistrust of what the novel's two narrators tell us to almost paranoid extremes, see Douglas Jones, "Double Jeopardy and the Chameleon Art in James Hogg's *Justified Sinner*," in *SSL*, 23 (1988), 164-85.

⁵James Hogg, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (New York, 1959). Introd. by André Gide, p. x.

ubiquitous feature of Robert's discourse, impress the reader with a sense of the importance of the work's subject. The epistemological doubts raised by the novel's structure and the manifest limitations of its narrators activate the mind of the reader, forcing him or her into the process of evaluating the evidence and attempting to piece together a coherent version of the story. But it is our interest in the growth and development of Robert's mind, our sympathy and even identification with him as he descends into madness, despair and, ultimately, suicide, which keep us engaged with this often difficult and puzzling tale.

While the critics have noted the importance of our emotional response to Robert and his story, however, they have said little on the subject of how such a response is produced by the text.⁶ In this essay, I will argue that the powerful effect created by Robert's story arises from his association with a group of characters to whom critics have paid surprisingly little notice—the women in the novel. Generally speaking, these women have been lumped together by critics with male counterparts (Robert's mother with the Rev. Wringhim, Arabella Logan with the old laird, Bessy Gillies with Samuel Scrape) with similar observations being made about the men and women. However, two important points emerge when the novel's female characters are examined as a separate group; first, they are frequently victims in the novel and, in particular, victims of physical violence; and second, they are often seen in the active pursuit of the truth of some matter with these investigations being carried out through private rather than public inquiry. In these two respects, Robert, who not only suffers but often seems to court physical violence and whose "private memoirs and confessions" are nothing if not an investigation into the truth of his own spiritual standing, can be seen as feminized according to the novel's particular representation of the feminine. And it is precisely these two aspects of Robert's character which awaken the interest and the sense of fellow-feeling in the reader. The novel, in effect, having elicited certain emotional responses from the reader to the experiences of its female characters as presented in the Editor's account then replicates those responses as Robert describes himself undergoing more or less similar experiences.

⁶Among the critics who see the engagement of the reader's sympathies for Robert as a crucial part of the novel's strategy in teaching its moral lessons, see particularly John Bligh, "The Doctrinal Premises of Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*," in *SSL*, 19 (184), 148-64, and Magdalene Redekop, "Beyond Closure: Buried Alive with Hogg's *Justified Sinner*," *ELH*, 52 (1985), 159-84. Bligh sees the double-narrative structure of the novel as evoking first hatred, then pity for Robert, an "educative experience" for the reader who comes to hate the doctrine of Antinomianism but to feel pity for those who adhere to it (p. 161). Redekop's highly theorized analysis ultimately comes to a similar conclusion: "Hogg enables the reader to confront the full horror of his identification with the sinner. Through empathy, horror becomes pity," and the reader's role is "not to judge or even to understand, but to forgive" (p. 181).

Critics who have focused on the psychological aspects of Hogg's novel and particularly of Robert's character have, with good reason, tended to highlight figures who serve as doubles for the protagonist.⁷ Certainly, the episode in which Robert, suffering from "a strange distemper," conceives of himself as being two people encourages such an approach, and when he further tells us that he himself is neither of the two people, that they are instead his brother George and his companion Gil-Martin, we have doubles aplenty with which to begin this line of inquiry.⁸ But George and Gil-Martin should not be seen as the two halves which make up the whole of Robert. Indeed, aside from being his brother (or half-brother) by blood and his "brother...in...belief of the same truths" respectively, George and Gil-Martin seem to have little in common with Robert, who lacks the self-confident ease of either (p. 117). On the other hand, they are clearly the descendants of Robert's two fathers; that is, George is very much the son of the social Laird of Dalcastle whereas Gil-Martin espouses and seems the very product of the dogmatic teachings of the Rev. Wringhim. As a result, we see a repetition among the younger generation of characters of the configuration which governed the opening of the novel. Now it is Robert caught between the conflicting values and demands of social intercourse and spiritual instruction. A generation earlier, that position had belonged to Lady Dalcastle, his mother.

Like Robert, Lady Dalcastle had been inculcated early with the principles of a radical Calvinism: she had learned "not the tenets of the great reformers, but theirs mightily overstrained and deformed" (p. 2). Her May-December marriage to the Laird of Dalcastle is not only a mismatch in point of age, but in religious principle as well. And, after a wedding night's disagreement with her new husband over the necessity of saying prayers, a flight and subsequent recapture of the bride in which she is more or less bound and gagged in being returned to the bedchamber, and a full morning of being locked in this room with only her husband paying her "several visits," young Rabina understandably takes the first opportunity to flee Dalcastle and return to her home (p. 8). Home is no help to her, however, as her father, Baillie Orde, determines that as

⁷Virtually every critic of the novel has noted in some way its use of a Doubles motif, and several have found in Hogg's psychologized portrait of Robert a modern sensibility rather ahead of his time. Gide, for example, finds the bulk of the work "psychologically explicable, without having recourse to the supernatural" and likens it in this respect to James's *Turn of the Screw* (p. xv). Iain Crichton Smith, in "A Work of Genius: James Hogg's *Justified Sinner*," in *SSL*, 28 (1993), offers the view that "the novel seems...to be psychologically far in advance of Hogg's time and can only be properly understood in the twentieth century" (p. 2). Smith deems Dostoevski the most appropriate point of comparison and makes an interesting connection between the doctrine of the elect and a modern "totalitarian philosophy" (p. 5).

⁸James Hogg, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (Oxford, 1969), pp. 153-4. Henceforth Hogg.

the old laird has so badly mistreated his daughter, he will get his revenge by punishing the old laird's wife. Accordingly, he begins to beat Rabina with a great show of rage, administering "many stripes" which, the Editor assures us, were "far drawn, [but] lightly laid down" as the baillie seeks to encourage his daughter to return to her new home (p. 9). The Editor's assurance, however, and indeed his comic style throughout his relation of the newlywed couple's story, is belied by the weeping and praying of the "poor afflicted woman" who undergoes these punishments and is then locked up in her chamber, five stories high, in her father's house until her husband finally comes to retrieve her.

These opening scenes, with Rabina caught between two men and two forms of physical coercion, set the pattern which will determine the remainder of her life. After returning to the old laird's house (and failing in her attempt to covert him to her beliefs), she establishes a separate residence for herself on the top floor and begins to receive visits from her spiritual guide, the Rev. Wringhim, in "her elevated sanctuary" (p. 12). Their long hours of debate and discussion on spiritual matters apparently turn into something more, however, if we accept the old laird's claim, as virtually all commentators have, that Rabina's second son Robert is not his child, but that of Wringhim. Michael Steig, however, has raised the interesting suggestion that in fact both boys may have been the children of Rev. Wringhim, certainly not inconceivable given the relations between the old laird and his wife.⁹ How Wringhim and Rabina came to have a child together, if indeed they did, is left to the imagination, but the novel does offer some interesting clues. First, the centerpiece of Wringhim's teaching is the infallibility of the elect—"To the wicked, all things are wicked; but to the just, all things are just and right"—among which elect he includes himself and Rabina (p. 13). Second, when Wringhim and Rabina are in disagreement, it is Wringhim who carries the day as is seen when he overrules Rabina's misgivings about Robert's changed appearance after his first encounter with Gil-Martin. It is clear, then, that Wringhim can impose his will upon Rabina in a manner precisely analogous to that in which we continually see Gil-Martin impose his will upon Robert, using the same predestinarian doctrines and the same powerful rhetorical skills to overcome doubts about performing what for the non-elect would be sinful acts.

After her removal from the old laird's house at Dalcastle, Rabina next finds herself in a position of relative powerlessness between her son Robert and her spiritual guide Wringhim, and this time the physical violence done to her results in her death. Wringhim's command to her—"Woman, hold thy peace!"—after she points out that the stranger Robert has taken to be "an angel of light" might actually be the devil in disguise, indicates his lack of respect for

⁹Michael Steig, "Unearthing Buried Affects and Associations in Reading: The Case of the Justified Sinner," in Daniel Rancour-Laferrière, ed., *Self-Analysis in Literary Study* (New York, 1994), pp. 197-8.

her (p. 121): and Robert's own account makes numerous references to his growing contempt for her. "Though I knew her to be a Christian," Robert writes, "I confess that I always despised her motley instructions, nor had I any great regard for her person" (p. 113). Later, with Robert now well along on his murderous career, he writes,

In this state of irritation and misery, was I dragging on an existence, disgusted with all around me, and in particular with my mother, who, with all her love and anxiety, had such an insufferable mode of manifesting them, that she had by this time rendered herself exceedingly obnoxious to me. The very sound of her voice at a distance, went to my heart like an arrow, and made all my nerves to shrink (p. 184).

At a crucial moment in his youth, Robert had sworn to shun all women and the temptations they represent and explicitly included his mother in that vow—an act of massive repression. What matters here, however, is the emotional energy which Rabina expends in the attempt to recover her son's affection and the utter fruitlessness of this attempt. All of her efforts to draw him closer have only the effect of driving him farther away, and we can hardly help feeling an emotional jolt when we learn almost immediately thereafter that Rabina has apparently died a violent death at the hands of her own son.

Even as our feelings are engaged by such events, however, we must continually remember to include qualifying words in discussing the novel's action. As readers, we cannot be certain when, how or even if Rabina has died, because we have no reliable narrator's account of this event. We may always have doubts about what we read, of course, but caution is particularly advisable in a work in which one narrator is so belated, the other so mentally unsound, and the devil himself is manipulating the plot at every turn. Furthermore, the central events of this novel are acts of murder, acts which inherently involve the keeping and discovering of secrets, and *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* has at least this much in common with the genre of mystery or detective fiction: its characters and its readers are continually engaged in the project of acquiring information and piecing together solutions to unanswered questions.

Rabina herself launches the novel's first investigation, sending her maid Martha to learn from other servants the identity of "that fat bouncing dame that visits the laird so often, and always by herself" (p. 11). Subsequently, a far more important investigation is carried out by two women when Arabella Logan, the "fat bouncing dame" who is the old laird's mistress and Bell Calvert, a prostitute, endeavor to learn the identity of George's murderer. After this murder and the subsequent death of the distraught old laird, Arabella begins investigating the possibility that the Wringhim faction may be responsible for the crime, an investigation carried out through "a thousand sly and secret inquiries" made independently of the legal system which has fixed its attention on the wrong man (p. 57). Her hopes of discovering "a cue, which, if she

could keep hold of the thread, would lead her through darkness to the light of truth” suggests that her sleuthing is more a spiritual matter than a criminal one (p. 57). Certainly, the extraordinary circumstance which enables her to break the case, the fact that the plate which has been stolen from her is found in the possession of Bell Calvert and the wretch Ridsley (the only two eyewitnesses to George’s murder), makes it appear that divine providence itself is guiding her course in bringing the crime home to the actual culprit, Robert Wringhim.

Of course, as we later realize, it is Gil-Martin who has arranged all of these matters, but it would be a mistake, I believe, to conclude that these women are simply made the dupes of the devil. After all, their investigation does indeed shed “the light of truth” on the crime, and furthermore, we as readers inevitably root for them to succeed for two reasons. First, George is the most engaging figure in the Editor’s narrative, and we are, like Arabella, anxious to seek his killer brought to justice. By the same token, we have little reason at this point to care much for his sulky, obstinate brother Robert and are only too happy to have him identified as the culprit. Second, despite the moral questions we might initially have about the laird’s mistress and the prostitute, we learn enough about their plights to be sympathetic rather than harsh in our judgments of them. Arabella had been the subject of rather vicious attacks by the Wringhim sect while the old laird was alive and is unceremoniously run out of her home at Dalcastle by them after his death and Robert’s assumption of the property. Bell Calvert’s story, which occupies a good portion of the Editor’s narrative, is that of an English woman, who, as young Drummond judges, “from her manner and address should belong to the first class of society” (p. 72), but who has instead become an Edinburgh prostitute “on account of her resolute and unmoving fidelity and truth to *several* of the very worst of men, every one of whom abandoned her to utter destitution and shame” (p. 69, italics in original).

That several faithless men have been responsible for Bell’s downfall, coupled with our knowledge of Rabina’s and Arabella’s lives, suggests the world of the novel as one in which women are abused, mistreated and victimized by men more or less as a matter of course. For example, while the details of Bell’s downfall are largely elided in the novel, we do hear of Drummond’s attention being drawn to “some of the casual stripes” on her arm, recalling for us the “stripes” which Rabina’s father inflicted upon her (p. 72). There are points in the novel, however, when women are seen not merely as victims of male domination, but as in some way acting in opposition to it. One such moment occurs when Arabella’s maid Bessy Gillies, testifying at Bell’s trial for robbery, not only refuses to implicate her, but makes a strong point in her defense, saying, “It was nae woman’s fingers that broke up the bolts an’ the locks that were torn open that night” (p. 66). Bessy’s further refusal to identify positively the stolen property or even to swear to anything at all—“Bless you, sir, I wadna swear to my ain fore finger, if it had been as lang out o’ my sight, an’ brought in an’ laid on that table” (p. 67)—makes neither the judge nor the

depute-advocate (both men, of course) very happy, but when Arabella's testimony essentially matches that of Bessy, they have little choice but to dismiss the case. As critics have frequently noted, Bessy's testimony fits in with the novel's overall theme about the unreliability of one's perceptions and the difficulty of knowing anything for a certainty. However, it is not often noticed that her testimony about the locks offers what we would today call grounds for reasonable doubt, and while it must be admitted that the two women tell something less than the whole truth in failing to identify the property, nonetheless they do so to promote what they realize to be a greater truth, that Bell, or indeed any woman, could not have been responsible for the theft.

Of course it might be argued that Arabella at least has an ulterior motive here, that she perjures herself so that Bell will tell her what she knows of George's murder. Bell had already withdrawn her offer to make this bargain, however, and in addition, no such incentive operates for Bessy. Their combined testimony seems to be a disinterested act of justice and kindness, and it spawns the gratitude which leads Bell both to return the property and to tell Arabella what she saw on the night of the murder. Her story of the man in black with the distinctive gait who stabbed young George in the back leads them to journey to Dalcastle, and the obliging Gil-Martin contrives to throw Robert across their path at every turn. The successful climax of this project is, interestingly enough, not the arrest of Robert but a physical and verbal attack upon him, one in which, for a change, a man is rendered powerless by the strength of two women:

The two women, when they heard what jeopardy they were in from such a wretch, had squatted among the underwood at a small distance from each other, so that he had never observed Mrs. Calvert; but no sooner had he seized her benefactor [Arabella], than, like a wild cat, she sprung out of the thicket, and had both her hands fixed at his throat, one of them twisted in his stock, in a twinkling. She brought him back-over among the brushwood, and the two fixing on him like two harpies, mastered him with ease.... He was in the two women's mercy, but they used it with moderation. They mocked, they tormented, and they threatened him; but, finally, after putting him in great terror, they bound his hands behind his back, and his feet fast with long straps of garters which they chanced to have in their baskets, to prevent him from pursuing them till they were out of his reach (pp. 88-9).

The image of Bell springing on Robert like a wild cat, the raw physicality of her hands closing on his throat (perhaps belying Bessy's testimony about the locks), and the selfless loyalty evinced by one woman's coming to the rescue of another combine to make this a striking scene, disturbing in its use of a kind of sadistic violence even as it satisfies our desire to see Robert held accountable for his crime. That these are two women using a perhaps supernatural strength to overcome and render helpless a man is emphasized by their characterization as "harpies"—in his own description of the scene, Robert will refer to them as "two viragos" (p. 205)—but it is difficult to regard the return of

violence for violence, torture for torture, with feelings of unmixed triumph. The investigation into the crime by these two women seems admirable; the climax of this investigation, however, is simply bizarre.

The success of these women in bringing home his crime to Robert is an exception, however. More typical in the novel is the experience of Mrs. Keeler, a poor widow who comes to Robert to accuse him of seducing one of her daughters and ends up losing all of her property to him as well thanks to the machinations of Lawyer Linkum. Her daughter, who never appears in the novel and about whom we learn nothing except that she is “a young lady of great beauty” (p. 181), is nonetheless an important figure because she is closely linked with Rabina, the two of them apparently murdered together, buried together, and then unearthed together. The Editor’s narrative includes two potentially dark suggestions about Rabina’s fate—Arabella’s overhearing Gil-Martin trying to persuade Robert to “make away with his mother” and then a report that Robert’s mother was “lost” and that “suspicions attached to some of the farmers and house servants, to whom she was obnoxious” (pp. 91-2)—but makes no mention at all of Mrs. Keeler’s daughter or of the discovery of their bodies. The words of Gil-Martin as reported in Robert’s own account are our only source of information about the murders of these two women and Robert’s responsibility for them. It may be a case of convenient amnesia (as it almost certainly must be when Robert swears he has no memory of seducing Mrs. Keeler’s daughter), but Robert claims to have no recollection of having committed these crimes. Why this should be, given that he has no reticence about recalling and narrating for us the murders of Mr. Blanchard and George, is a question which takes up deep into the workings of the mind of the novel’s protagonist, the justified sinner.

From the outset, Robert has a peculiar relationship with women, seeing them as the epitome of evil against which his extreme doctrine is directed. To his conscious mind at least, they represent the temptations of sin, and as a youth, he determined to avoid as much as possible the company of women and their attractions:

I brought myself to despise, if not to abhor, the beauty of women, looking on it as the greatest snare to which mankind are subjected, and though young men and maidens, and even old women (my mother among the rest,) taxed me with being an unnatural wretch, I gloried in my acquisition; and to this day, am thankful for having escaped the most dangerous of all snares (p. 113).

As he is in all likelihood a bastard, an idea John Barnet rather uncharitably puts before him early in his life, Robert would naturally be sensitive about the temptations to sin offered by the beauty of women. The parenthetical “my mother among the rest” here suggests the low regard he has for her opinion, particularly on the subject of relations between men and women, and if Robert suspects that Barnet’s hint about his illegitimacy is correct, he seems to place

all of the blame on Rabina while continuing to hold Rev. Wringhim in the highest esteem. Given this view, it is not surprising that Robert's liaison with Mrs. Keeler's daughter (assuming this event did indeed take place) is so incompatible with his own image of himself that his conscious mind simply blocks out the memory of it. The murders of George and of Mr. Blanchard have been committed by Robert for reasons which he can articulate and reconcile with his self-image. He explicitly refers to these acts as the doing of his duty, the eradication of the enemies of God. The seduction of the young lady, by contrast, and, furthermore, the murders of this young lady and of his own mother resist Robert's ability to articulate them as events in either his own memory or his autobiographical narrative.

If Robert cannot see or describe himself in the performance of these actions, however, it must be noted that they are highly satisfactory to him. After Gil-Martin has confirmed for Robert the particulars of his seduction of Mrs. Keeler's daughter, Robert writes,

Here I must confess, that, highly as I disapproved of the love of women, and all intimacies and connections with the sex, I felt a sort of indefinite pleasure, an ungracious delight in having a beautiful woman solely at my disposal. But I thought of her spiritual good in the meantime (pp. 181-2).

Shortly thereafter, Robert experiences a similar "ungracious delight" when he hears that his mother has disappeared and is apparently dead, news which makes his "spirits considerably buoyant" (p. 187). That Robert's pleasure turns to fear when the bodies of Rabina and the young lady are unearthed and brought by a mob to his gate suggests that at some level he knows that he is indeed responsible for their deaths, but even as he flees the premises, Robert feels "a strange and unwonted delight in viewing this scene, and a certain pride of heart in being supposed the perpetrator of the unnatural crimes laid on my charge" (p. 208). Such feelings on his part do not necessarily make us feel sympathetic towards Robert, of course, but they do make him decidedly more interesting to us. At such moments, we recognize Robert's denial of the beauty of woman as a powerful act of repression—one which seeks to deny the needs and desires of his own body, its very existence in the physical world, and one which is continually belied by an attraction towards women and a desire to gain physical control over them.

One explanation for this desire is that Robert himself is so frequently in the characteristic position of women in this novel, that is, the relatively powerless victim of physical coercion. Unlike the novel's female characters, however, Robert has a highly ambivalent attitude towards his own body—consciously rejecting its needs and desires, unconsciously seeking to fulfill them—producing the peculiar sense that he is at once a masochist and a coward. In disrupting the tennis game among George and his friends, Robert appears to have no regard for his body, suffering a blow from George's racket to his face

“so that his mouth and nose gushed out blood” and then holding his ground even though he is “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” (pp. 23-4). Later we learn that for Robert, standing firm and taking punishment from such sinful, tennis-playing men is a spiritual act, and he is more than willing to suffer the pain of martyrdom. Something very different occurs, however, on the top of Arthur’s Seat when George subdues his brother by first seizing him by the mouth and nose and then delivering a blow to the temple:

His [Robert’s] nose, however, again gushed out blood, a system of defence which seemed as natural to him as that resorted to by the race of stinkards. He 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 blubbing most piteously (p. 43).

So much for the religious martyr. The uncontrollable flow of blood which the body releases in a gesture of self-defense and the apparently as uncontrollable pleading for his life which Robert allows to escape him suggest that he places a kind of value on his earthly existence which is at least recognizably human if not necessarily compelling or attractive. The gore displayed in these early scenes not only reminds us that the mysterious, off-putting young man in black is a fellow human being, but also prefigures numerous other points in the novel where violence is done to Robert’s body to which we cannot help responding at a visceral level, just as we do to the stripes laid upon Rabina and Bell Calvert.

For example, we learn that early in life Robert suffered “bodily chastisements” for the telling of lies (p. 108), and that, having succeeded on two occasions in getting his childhood rival M’Gill severely whipped for infractions he did not commit, Robert was roundly beaten by M’Gill in return: “I was knocked down and mauled most grievously.... The ruffian was kicking and cuffing me at his will and pleasure” (p. 112). Robert then gives his own version of his two fights with George, and while he presents himself as decidedly more heroic than the Editor had, his own blood is nonetheless prominently featured once again. Similarly, he indicates that he felt his life was in peril in the encounter with Arabella and Bell, the two viragos. After he flees Dalcaster, Robert passes through a series of violent episodes. First, he is subjected to another beating, this time at the hands of the weaver as he hangs upside down and naked in the weaver’s web. Next, he is seized by the throat and hair and pulled from a barn full of mad and rearing horses, awakening to find himself naked on a kitchen table with “something like a horse’s rug thrown over me” (p. 226). Finally, the suspicion that he is the devil causes the innkeeper’s daughter, the lass Tibby, to remove him forcibly from his bed and deposit him

outside, where he is "surrounded by a number of hideous fiends, who gnashed on me with their teeth, and clenched their crimson paws in my face" (p. 233).

Quite possibly this last set of injuries, inflicted by the fiends, is imagined rather than actual, but it does contribute to our sense of the punishment and wasting away of Robert's body. As he tells us near the end, "My body being quite exhausted by suffering, I am grown weak and feeble both in mind and bodily frame, and actually unable to resent any insult or injury" (p. 237). It is something of a relief, then, when we hear of his committing suicide by hanging himself on a hay-rick, but oddly enough, what should be the final act of violence done to his body is in fact followed by more such acts. We hear from a member of the group which buried Robert's body that, the corpse being a bit too long for the grave and already grown stiff, the group's leader "set his foot on the suicide's brow, and tramped down his head into the grave with his iron-heeled shoe, until his nose and skull crashed again" (p. 248). More than a century later, Robert's grave is opened up by two young men, who find the corpse remarkably well preserved and pull it up to a sitting position by the rope which remains around its neck. Their violation of the corpse and removal of some clothing for distribution among their acquaintances are nothing, however, compared to the violence done to the body by the Editor and his party, who remove "part of a skeleton...but no flesh, save a little that was hanging in dark flitters about the spine." They discover that the skull has been damaged by "a spade" (presumably not the same injury inflicted by the gravedigger's iron-heeled shoe), and apparently destroy the lower limbs, which "seemed perfect and entire, but could not bear handling. Before we got them returned again to the grave, they were all shaken to pieces, except the thighs, which continued to retain a kind of flabby form" (pp. 249-51).

The unearthing of Robert's corpse has important thematic implications as a commentary on the cold, callous attitude of the scientific-minded Editor, but it is no less important for the disgust and indignation on Robert's behalf which it evokes in the reader. Violence done to a living body, depending on the character of the individual in question, may produce a variety of responses; violence done to a corpse, however, seems merely gratuitous even in an age when the bodies of executed criminals were generally put on display or dissected. This unearthing of Robert's corpse also offers a striking parallel to the unearthing of the bodies of Rabina and the young lady—physical signs of a crime which is then brought home to its perpetrator, Robert. On that occasion, Samuel Scrape had offered the dark threat that the mob was bringing the bodies (called "bloated and mangled carcasses [*sic*]" by Robert) to Robert's home in order to make him "touch them baith afore witnesses," suggesting that the physical laying of hands on the body by the murderer would somehow reveal that person's guilt (p. 206). Robert's death is a suicide, of course, but the paralleling of these scenes of disinterment invites us to see the young sinner, too, as a kind of victim and the gravediggers, the young men, and the Editor and his party who handle his corpse so roughly as bearing a kind of responsi-

bility for his death. While Robert has no doubt done his part to exile himself from society, that society, past and present, has also done its part to misunderstand the young sinner and his story.

The most important act of disinterment in the novel is not the excavation of Robert's remarkably well-preserved corpse but the recovery of his remarkably strange autobiographical pamphlet, titled "The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner: Written by Himself" (p. 253). That Robert himself gives his pamphlet this title and that he concludes his story with the words, "I will now seal up my little book, and conceal it; and cursed be he who trieth to alter or amend!" (p. 240) provide us with some clues about his character and purposes in writing this work. The phrase "justified sinner" has occupied much critical attention and indeed neatly captures the paradoxical nature of Robert's religious beliefs. That these are private memoirs and confessions should also be noted, however, as the phrase suggests the individual, even secret, nature of Robert's narrative. Of course, Robert's stated intention in writing the pamphlet is to set himself up as a virtuous example for others to follow, and he does make an attempt to publish his story, failing in his own lifetime though succeeding more than a century later. The publication, however belated in this case, of a document of his private life associates Robert with a feminized, subjective form of writing, following in the tradition of Defoe and Richardson, in contrast to the masculine, Fieldingesque voice of the Editor. Further, the pride of authorship suggested by the phrase "Written by Himself" and the final injunction against any attempt to "alter or amend" his account indicate that Robert's purpose is not only to narrate the events of his life, but to fix his identity, to find a permanence of self which will not change over time.

It is, however, the impermanence of self in the physical world which leads Robert to undertake the writing of his memoirs and to try to come to grips with who and what he truly is. The deeper his investigation into himself goes, the more fully this fluidity of the self is revealed, and while it is a source of continuous frustration and anxiety to Robert himself, it is also an important means by which he draws the interest and even the sympathy of the reader. To understand our reaction to Robert, we must first realize that the character does in fact change during the course of his narrative. This fairly obvious point is not often remarked on by critics whose interest is in seeing Robert as the embodiment of monstrous pride or the product of extraordinary acts of repression and self-delusion. Nonetheless, Robert is reading his own story reasonably well when he characterizes it as "a religious parable such as the Pilgrims Progress" (p. 221), and he later comforts himself with the notion that "the believer's progress through life is one of warfare and suffering" (p. 227). That his own mind is evolving in some way is most apparent in his growing doubt and distrust of Gil-Martin, whom he initially sees as his "guardian angel" (p. 117), but later bluntly refers to as his "enemy" (p. 222). Significantly, this shift in attitude towards Gil-Martin is accompanied by an increasing variety and even

warmth in his dealings with other human beings, suggesting that Robert's "progress" is not that of the isolated Christian finding the path of righteousness, but that of the isolated sinner finding a way into the world of human relations and human contact. That the sins upon his head have made it too late for Robert to do so, and that the demons which pursue him make it impossible for him to remain for any length of time in the society of other human beings, only heightens our own emotional response as Robert repeatedly joins and then is driven away from his fellow men and his fellow women.

Of these encounters, the most important is with the weaver's wife, who greets the wandering and weary Robert with something he has not previously encountered in the novel, a disinterested kindness. The result is something else unprecedented in the novel, an expression of real warmth by Robert for another human being:

I never was apt to be taken with the simplicity of nature; in general I despised it; but, owing to my circumstances at the time, I was deeply affected by the manner of this poor woman's welcome. The weaver continued in a churlish mood throughout the evening, apparently dissatisfied with what his wife had done in entertaining me, and spoke to her in a manner so crusty that I thought proper to rebuke him, for the woman was comely in her person, and virtuous in her conversation; but the weaver her husband was large of make, ill-favoured, and pestilent; therefore did I take him severely to task for the tenor of his conduct (p. 211).

That Robert is capable of being "deeply affected" by the actions of any human being is a revelation to us, as is his ability to express a conscious appreciation for the comely person and virtuous conversation of any woman. His distressed circumstances, as he says, no doubt play a role in his response to her, and her admiration for the prayer which he later utters gives him a spiritual basis for the bond of affection which develops between them. Nonetheless, this passage reveals a remarkable gratitude on his part for a good deed, considering that he has spent his entire life to this point arguing against the necessity or even advisability of performing good deeds for one's fellow men. Robert then responds with a good deed of his own, coming to the woman's defense against her husband just as Arabella Logan and Bell Calvert had come to one another's defense at different times; and the weaver's wife later returns the favor in stopping the weaver's beating of Robert and in releasing the latter from the web in which he is trapped.

The spectacle of Robert, being beaten while hanging upside down and naked in what the weaver twice calls his "leddy's wab," is perhaps the most striking image in a novel filled with such striking images (pp. 215, 217). The web, which is thus associated with the feminine even though it is the product of a man's labor, becomes a site of physical violence and a symbol for entanglement in the physical world, bringing together ideas I have been discussing in this essay. The more Robert exerts himself to escape from the web, the more deeply he becomes entangled in it, just as his attempts to remove himself

from the physical world serve only to involve him more deeply in it. Robert's own description of the episode encourages us to read it as having such symbolic significance:

This effort made my case worse; for my feet being wrapt among the nether threads, as I threw myself from my saddle on the upper ones, my feet brought the others up through these, and I hung with my head down, and my feet as firm as they had been in a vice. The predicament of the web being thereby increased, the weaver's wrath was doubled in proportion, and he laid on without mercy (p. 216).

It is possible indeed to see the wrath of the weaver, the creator of the web, as enacting the wrath of God, the creator of the world, with the word "vice" conveying the firmness, the cruelty and the sinfulness involved in the trap. It is a painful scene, however, and with Robert, we welcome the arrival of the weaver's wife, representing mercy, to release him from the web. This gesture of mercy, however, is immediately followed by her telling him that he must leave the house at once, and he does so, "hungry, wounded, and lame; an outcast and a vagabond in society" (p. 218). The capacity which we have glimpsed in Robert of forming a real emotional connection with another human being makes all the more poignant the feeling of loss when that connection is severed and Robert is an outcast once again.

That the novel, in this episode and throughout, makes such ready and frequent use of physical violence to engage the feelings of its reader and to teach its lessons raises some questions about its own ethical positions. Are the use of violence and the victimization of women as means to elicit the reader's sympathy appropriate and/or effective vehicles for the novel's moral teaching, or do they operate instead to trouble and disturb the reader, or even to produce a kind of voyeuristic pleasure (suggested by Gide's reference to being "voluptuously tormented" by the book) unlikely to serve the ends of moral instruction? Furthermore, the novel's strategy in consistently portraying its female characters as victims of physical coercion, defining in effect the feminine as marked by victimization and relative powerlessness, and then appropriating that definition and the reader's responses to these characters in order to feminize its protagonist and to create sympathy for him is bound to raise some problems for the modern reader. Is it ethical to use episodes of violence done to women, or indeed violence done in any case, in order to make the reader feel the full force of the novel's lesson about the dangers of distorting or perverting religious doctrine? Are the novel's own "sins" indeed "justified" in the end?

These questions might draw a whole range of responses from readers, but the answer to the last question is "probably not," if "justification" depends on moral didacticism. The process by which violence done to women in the novel is displaced by violence done to Robert, and our sympathy for them is transferred to him is, in a sense, morally reprehensible. It is interesting to ask who bears the responsibility for this act of appropriation: Robert, the master of self-

justification; Gil-Martin, the manipulator of characters and arranger of narratives; or Hogg, the author who introduces himself as a character in the novel, only to wash his hands of the whole affair as quickly as possible? Whoever is responsible for the act, the character James Hogg's refusal to join the Editor and his party in "ganging to houk up hunder-year-auld banes" is an option no longer available to the reader who has, figuratively at least, unearthed the body and the manuscript and must come to some sort of judgment about them. Judged on strictly moral grounds, the novel must be found wanting, and Hogg has probably done well to run away from it. But the power of the novel lies not in its ability to teach moral lessons, but in its power to evoke strong emotional responses, and it is doubtful that many readers would trade it, morally suspect and even reprehensible though it may be, for anything more edifying.

University of California, Berkeley