



**Narrative and Ambiguity in *the Private  
Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified  
Sinner***

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## I. Foreword

My supervisor first made me aware of *the Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. It was a difficult book to appreciate after an initial reading, but it proved all the more rewarding after the fourth. The book has taken me abroad to Edinburgh and has showed me the alleyways and parks of the city. I have learned much from the book and hope that this paper will perhaps educate others, or at least spark an interest by reading the discussion.

*Laukvik, 05.05.10*



## II. Introduction

James Hogg was born in 1770 on the farm of his parents, Robert Hogg and Margaret Laidlaw, in the parish of Ettrick in South East Scotland. His childhood was clearly a happy one up until around 1777 when his father, Robert Hogg, went bankrupt after dealing in sheep. As a result, James and his siblings were sent to work for local farmers to help the family economy. During this period James' mother, Margaret Laidlaw, was responsible for James' initial education; on late nights when the children's work was done she would teach the Bible and especially the psalms, which James learned by heart. Margaret Laidlaw was also James' source to the unknown and the supernatural. She had a reputation as a storyteller and had no qualms about delivering the young children frightful stories of ghosts and specters and of death and sorrow. In fact, by the account of James' brother, William Hogg, it was their mother's stories, which made them both afraid of going out when it was dark (Hughes:8).

Hogg spent most of his adolescence working for other farmers and based on his first publication for 'Scots Magazine' in 1794, critics believe that he did not start writing poetry until he was 23 years of age. Hogg's great idol was Scotland's national poet Robert Burns, but it was his close relationship to Walter Scott, a future national poet himself, which would prove most rewarding for Hogg, both personally and artistically. The paths of James Hogg and Walter Scott crossed when Scott was collecting material for his 'Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border' (1803) in 1801. Hogg was referred to Scott by a fellow acquaintance because of the local songs and poems Hogg had written down. Their shared interest in preserving the material of the oral traditions in writing, as well as a shared interest in their own personal story-telling, laid the foundation of a life-long friendship. Walter Scott was James Hogg's way into

the literary circle of Edinburgh by relying heavily on Scott's contacts in the city, as well as receiving funding from him almost at Hogg's own will. After a few publications containing ballads and songs ('The Mountain Bard' in 1806 and 'The Forest Minstrel' in 1810) his first success was in 1813 with 'The Queen's Wake'. 'The Queen's Wake' is a narrative poem about a poetic contest between different bards who each share a resemblance to several of Hogg's personal friends. The publication made him a respected member of the literary circle of Edinburgh and he was accepted into the higher classes of society.

In the years that followed Hogg struggled to achieve the same enthusiasm about his works as 'The Queen's Wake' had achieved; he wrote a play called 'Hunting of the Badlew' which was received poorly by his friends and publishers; his poem 'Pilgrims of the Sun' (1815) was received better by his friends, but publishers still refused it; his 'Dramatic Tales' (1817) was published, but received only one review on February 2 in the *Edinburgh Evening Courant* - which called the tales 'a poor schoolboy's performance'. During this period he also wrote a short text called 'Translation of an Ancient Chaldee Manuscript' in which he satirically (and anonymously) portrays a battle between two of Edinburgh's main publishers, Constable and Blackwood. Hogg had been involved with both parties and wrote this text in a biblical language that was meant to lightly make fun of both of them. 'Blackwood Edinburgh Magazine', however, which received the article, edited and magnified both its content and its reason for being written, leaving Hogg utterly embarrassed and producing a stain on the relationship between Blackwood's and Hogg. After the publication of the Chaldee Manuscript, 'Blackwood Edinburgh Magazine' became an instrument of gossip, personal attacks on Hogg, as well as becoming highly popular. During this period Hogg found his name signed on articles

he had not written, his works ridiculed and his character harshly attacked. An especially popular series in 'Blackwood Edinburgh Magazine' called the 'Noctes Ambrosianae' revolved around Hogg, as "The Shepherd", and his friends at a drinking establishment, drinking and discussing everything on the agenda in the whole of Britain. The character "The Shepherd" was an image of Hogg, but a terribly distorted one. Hogg was angry at these attacks, but nonetheless, he seems at times to appreciate and actually partake in the building of his "mock" character by sending Blackwood's songs to be sung by "The Shepherd". Hogg's relationship to Blackwood's and the 'Noctes' was ambiguous, but Gillian Hughes offers an explanation to this ambiguity by noting that "the series was undoubtedly good publicity for his work throughout the British empire, although it probably had a negative effect on the nature of his fame" (Hughes:185). Perhaps is Hogg drawn between the prospect of a bigger audience and the danger of losing his integrity as a writer. The strained relationship between Hogg and his publisher and the ambiguity of Hogg's involvement in the 'Noctes' has led critics such as John Carey and Susan M. Levin to believe that the character Robert Wringhim in Hogg's 'The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner' is somewhat inspired by, if not based on, events from Hogg's own life (Levin:101-102).

'The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner' was published in 1824 by Longman's, Hogg's London publisher. It received poor reviews and sold very few copies. The *Westminster Review* claimed the author "managed the tale very clumsily"<sup>1</sup> and the *New Monthly Magazine* called it "dull and revolting".<sup>2</sup> Much of the criticism seems also to be aimed at the "twice-told tale" and the vulgarity of the text (Carruthers:106). Not until the middle of the 20th century, when the French writer

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<sup>1</sup> October 1824.

<sup>2</sup> London: E. W. Allen. November 1824.

André Gide wrote a passionate introduction to a republication (1947) of the 'Confessions', did the text become elevated to the strong position it holds in British literature today. Already in 1824 Gide was taken with the psychological aspects of the text and it was largely by Gide's enthusiasm that critics started to analyse its content. Through the years the text has been praised for its modernistic structure in narrative and framing devices and the ambiguity of the novel is still fervently discussed among critics. Gerard Carruthers tries to explain the text's initial impact in 1947 by suggesting that "Hogg's *Confessions* is a very pertinent book after the Nazi death camps, Gide identifying the novel as one of the greatest fictional accounts of fanaticism and megalomania" (Carruthers:106). After Hogg's success with 'The Queen's Wake' and the bad reception of the 'Confessions', Hogg himself could surely not have foreseen that it would be the 'Confessions' for which the world would remember him best.

Ever since André Gide's admiration for the 'Confessions' brought the book critical attention, its ambiguous quality has never ceased to be discussed. The ambiguity largely centres around two prominent elements of the novel: the character Gil-Martin and the narratives of the Editor and Robert Wringhim. The criticism related to the ambiguity of Gil-Martin experienced a shift in focus the same decade as Oxford University Press published their first critical edition of the *Confessions* (1969); L. L. Lee was instrumental in this shift when publishing in 1966 a much quoted article even today where he argues that the novel is "deliberately ambiguous" (Lee: 232). Critics before him had mostly leaned to one side or the other, discussing the appearance of the supernatural as either physically real or as a result of a delusional mind. Lee suggested that the novel's ambiguity stemmed from Hogg's own vision of evil: "evil exists but we can never be sure of its form" (Lee: 239). In other words, the ambiguity



regarding Gil-Martin's character helps to paint a more frightening, and more real, image of evil; to make the novel wholly unambiguous would be to demystify evil completely.

Although the ambiguity of Gil-Martin's character is the source of an important discussion, this paper will not focus on this element of the novel. As the larger part of the two elements, the ambiguity of the two central narratives provides a far more interesting and rewarding discussion. The ambiguity in the narratives of the Editor and Robert is mainly rooted in the inconsistencies both narratives share, and the failure of each narrative to supplement the other. Critics have pointed to the fact that neither of the two narrators are trustworthy; Rebecca A. Pope looks at the flaws in the Editor's 'strive for a kind of objective reportage' (Pope:220) by noting that achieving such objectivity is at odds with the Editor's devaluation of Robert's narrative (Pope:220) – a devaluation that is necessary in order to strengthen the empiricist framing of the Editor; L. L. Lee believes the Editor's objective narrative is satirical and humorous, but also that the Editor's objectivity suffers from his sole aim to portray Wringhim only as a madman (Lee:232-233); David Oakleaf sees Robert as the narrator who is not only inconsistent, by omitting several important passages of his life, but who admits to his reader that his testimony is "not the truth" (Oakleaf:59). As the criticism shows, much of the inconsistency in each narrative stems from an unclear or shifting relationship between what is *represented* and what is *presented*; the Editor represents objectivity and empiricism, but his narrative occasionally presents him as a subjective moralist; Robert represents the image of the devout, but sinning, Christian, whose assurance of acceptance above renders any atonement for his sins superfluous - his narrative, though, presents him as a Christian so strongly led astray that he in the end is unable to see his erroneous way and repent.

The aim of this paper is to first show how the inconsistency *in*, and *between*, the narratives stems largely from each narrator's strive for sympathy from the reader – sympathy that is necessary for both narrators in order to strengthen their own narrative, as well as undermine that of the other. In trying to create this sympathy, each narrator must frame his own and the other's narrative by focusing on different elements of the story, and it is this shift in focus that is the source of inconsistency between the narratives. Secondly, this paper will try to try *lessen* the inconsistency concerning the narratives by claiming that the discrepancy between what the narrators represent and what their narratives present is not as salient as critics tend to think it. As criticism shows, the Editor, the narrator that is first introduced to the reader, is represented as the historian who through out the whole novel must retain his objectivity, but whose narrative presents him more as a subjective moralist. Such a view, however, is finally too simple to adopt, as the Editor's narrative shows signs of a more complex structure. I argue that the Editor deliberately shifts roles, from function to character, when he divides his narrative into two parts – a division that in itself helps to denote the shift - and that some critics' disregard for this shift has wrongfully attributed more inconsistency to the narrative. In the first part of the Editor's narrative he performs mainly a function, as this part of his narrative serves only to oppose that of Robert's, and in the second part he shifts from function to character in the novel. This shift from function to character is important, as it allows the Editor to comment fully on Robert's narrative without the restraints of objectivity. In the first part of the Editor's narrative, the Editor's objectivity helps him oppose the narrative of Robert, but although this trait in the Editor is necessary in the first part of his narrative, it does not exclude his own subjective response in the latter part. The last chapter of this paper will continue to diminish the ambiguity of Robert's narrative

by addressing what some critics believe to be ambiguous elements. Robert is viewed as the sinner who is unable to see the error of his commitment to Antinomianism and thus deems it unnecessary to repent for his sins. What this paper suggests, however, is that Robert indeed sees the folly of his Antinomian zealotry in the end. The key to Robert's narrative - a key he mentions in the text, but does not provide - is perhaps to view his memoirs as a confession of a sinner and not as an Antinomian confession of a *justified* sinner. By looking at Robert's narrative as a complete memoir, and not as a fragment, as some critics have treated it, the narrative appears trustworthy and thereby lessens the ambiguity.

The 'Confessions' is set in the beginning of the 18th century and revolves around the narratives of the Editor and the Sinner himself, Robert Wringhim. The novel divides the narrative into three parts by placing Robert's narrative between the two narratives of the Editor. The reader is first introduced to the narrative of the Editor - a narrative, which he states, is based on traditional accounts, eye witnesses and law registers (1). While Editors normally strive to be objective and not partake in the story, the Editor in the 'Confessions' continually interferes in the text and even becomes a character in the last part of the novel. It is through the Editor the reader initially learns about the faith of the two brothers, George Colwan and Robert Wringhim. Their parents' marriage is an unfortunate one, as their mother, Lady Dalcastle, abhors her husband from the very beginning. She is an extremely pious woman who spends long periods of time reading and discussing the Bible, enjoying especially the company of her minister and friend, Rev. Robert Wringhim, an extremely pious person himself, as well as a Calvinist. George Colwan, on the other hand, Lady Dalcastle's husband, is not a man who cares as much for religion as he perhaps should. He does not enjoy his wife's zealotry, as he is much more fond

of drinking than of spiritual conversation.

The couple lives apart in a great mansion, but Lady Dalcastle eventually gives birth to a child - a boy who will become the young George Colwan. Lady Dalcastle continues to enjoy the company of Rev. Robert Wringhim as one Arabella Logan frequently visits George Colwan. However, a year after George is born, Lady Dalcastle gives birth to another boy. There are obviously rumours about the parentage of the newborn and matters are not made easier by naming the child after the minister himself, Robert Wringhim. George Colwan and Lady Dalcastle are further split by this event and the two factions become divided in all sectors: religion, family, property and name. The two boys grow up apart in almost completely opposite environments; George with his father and Mrs. Logan and Robert with his mother and Rev. Wringhim; George becomes a "generous and kind-hearted youth" (18) who excels in sports and physical prowess, while Robert is "taught to pray twice every day, and seven times on sabbath days" (18) and excels at school in learning, writing and religious discussions. The two brothers never see each other during their childhood, but each is brought up to detest the other faction. The separation of the two brothers and their families and the mirroring effect this oppositional divide creates is the one of the first signs of the text's almost exhaustive play on duplicity and doubling.

The first time the brothers meet is at a tennis-match in Edinburgh. George is one of the participants in the game and Robert is among the audience. George does not recognize the person who is ruining his game by straying into his path and ridiculing him in front of the others. They are engaged in melee when George falls into Robert and the latter attempts a deadly kick in George's direction. At this point George learns the identity of his adversary and from this moment the apparition of his

brother - his double - starts to haunt George wherever he goes. The tennis players retreat to an inn at the centre of Edinburgh, but the presence of the bloody Robert among them excites a mob of people into violent acts against the inn, forcing the innkeeper to summon the city guards and have Robert arrested. When Rev. Robert Wringhim learns that George has injured Robert and has had him arrested, he is furious and appalled at the seeming injustice of the matter. He uses his influence to immediately set Robert free and takes him back to the Whig assembly, with whom the minister has dined. When Robert is displayed to the Whig Assembly as a victim of bad moral, matters escalate at a rapid pace; as the Assembly is "perhaps a little excited by the wine and spirits" (26) it does not take long before someone believes that the men at the inn are planning a plot. As the rumour of treason at the inn spreads through the city, and the mob and the inmates at the tavern start fighting each other, the differences between the two brothers at the tennis court is turned into a social, political and religious dispute of national proportions; the lord-commissioner decides to break up every party in the city "great and small" (30) and although everyone suspects it to be a party scuffle - no small matter in itself - the whisperings of treason still hangs latent in the air. Later it is revealed that it had all been a misunderstanding and neither of the brothers receives any penalties.

The apparition of his brother continues to haunt George and his social life is laid in ruins. The apparition is always at his right hand a few paces away from him and George starts to believe that this must be the work of some demon. At Arthur's Seat, an enormous hill in the middle of Edinburgh, a beautiful apparition of terrestrial glory, which George, as well as the Editor, is infatuated with, suddenly becomes twenty times its natural size and starts to act threatening. Turning to flee, George stumbles over the real body of his brother and again a melee ensues. After the brawl,

the case is eventually brought before the High Court where it is established that Robert attempted to kill his brother, acquitting George and leaving Robert with heavy penalties and securities. To celebrate the acquittal, George and his friends meet at their usual tavern, but eventually end up at a bagnio<sup>3</sup>. George quarrels with a gentleman named Thomas Drummond and when George later disappears at the summons of a person at the door, everyone assumes that it is Drummond who wishes to see George. The next day George is found murdered and Drummond has disappeared. At the trial, the court is divided, but Drummond is eventually found guilty of the murder. In the course of events George Colwan the elder dies and Robert subsequently takes possession of his estates.

Before George Colwan the elder dies he hints at the possible guilt of the Wringhim's in connection with the murder of his son. Arabella Logan, mistress of George Colwan the elder and very fond of his son, decides to investigate the murder more carefully. She reveals, by the aid of an eye witness named Arabella Calvert, that it was in fact Robert and an accomplice who murdered George, and not Thomas Drummond. Mrs. Calvert explains that she saw and heard Robert Wringhim and a man who looked like Mr. Drummond plotting to murder George Colwan. However, the man who looked like Drummond could not have been the actual Drummond, as she saw and talked to and watched the real Drummond disappear right before his double appeared. Calvert further explains how the double tricks George into fighting him and in the end it is Robert Wringhim who strikes the final - and lethal - blows. Mrs. Logan takes Mrs. Calvert to see Robert Wringhim in order to identify him as George's murderer. The two women find him walking down the road with a companion that he calls Gil-Martin, and it is Gil-Martin who makes Robert aware of the two women

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<sup>3</sup> brothel

spying on them. Robert attacks the women, but finds himself overtaken by them and abandoned by his companion. The women tie Robert's hands and feet and leave him in the middle of the road before they depart for Edinburgh to relate their story to the authorities. Wringhim, however, disappears and the Editor concludes the first part of his narrative with a report on the further life of Thomas Drummond, as well as a promise to present to the readers an "original document of a most singular nature" (93): the confessions of Robert Wringhim himself.

The narrative that follows is the autobiography of Robert Wringhim, although he states early in the text that he is "writing only from recollection" (113). His childhood is filled with uncertainty as his real father abandons him and his new father - which is what Robert calls Rev. Robert Wringhim - proclaims that Robert's future, as one of the elect,<sup>4</sup> is not certain. Robert's mind is torn over his own religious state as he goes from "sinning every hour" (100) to feeling "great indignation against all the wicked of this world" (100): he lies to his father about the servant John Barnet, forcing the servant to leave; he lies about and forges the handwriting of one of his competitors at school, M'Gill, so that he as well is forced to leave. Robert always justifies his sinning against other persons by claiming them to be the wicked of the world - but as for his own sinning, he claims that "he never sinned from principle, but accident" (113) and since "the grace of repentance [is] being withheld" (113) from him, he cannot be held accountable for this drawback in his character.

Immediately after Robert learns from his father that he has finally been accepted as one of the elect, the ominous figure of Gil-Martin enters Robert's life in the same way as he enters the text: as a "mysterious" (116) presence. Gil-Martin convinces Robert that no crime or sin, however atrocious, can make one of the elect

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<sup>4</sup> In Calvinism, the Elect were predestined by God to receive salvation by grace. Those who were not of the Elect faced eternal damnation.

fall from their elevated position. More so, he claims that it is in fact Robert's duty as one of the just<sup>5</sup> to rid the world of its wicked inhabitants. Robert is swayed by Gil-Martin's tongue and praise of him, as well as an unaccountable trait in Gil-Martin's character that makes it impossible for Robert to disagree with him. Together they set out to seek "the wicked" (97) and destroy them.

Their first victim is the pious Mr. Blanchard, to whom they have talked and listened to several times, and whom Gil-Martin believes is preaching deprecated doctrines (133). Robert experiences a lack of faith in Gil-Martin's creed at the crucial moment in which Mr. Blanchard's faith is to be sealed, but his gun goes off nonetheless and kills Mr. Blanchard. Afterwards, Gil-Martin displays his powers to change into any person that he sees when he imitates one of the local ministers and frames him for the murder. After this initiation, Gil-Martin believes that Robert is ready to destroy one of the really wicked ones of the world: Robert's own brother, George Colwan. As prior to the murder of Mr. Blanchard, the energetic discussion concerning the justification of the act falls in Gil-Martin's favour. Robert introduces himself to his brother during the tennis match by "boldly" (148) striking him with his foot to punish him for taking the Lord's name in vain thrice. Robert is sent to prison and on his release he starts following George wherever he goes. During this period Robert also experiences a strange distemper, which makes him conceive himself as two persons. His other self is always a few paces off his left hand and, curiously enough, neither of the two persons he finds to be himself, but the images of his brother and Gil-Martin. As Gil-Martin's influence over Robert grows stronger, the doubling of characters that both George and Robert experience turns into a triangle in which Gil-Martin controls the life of Robert and the destiny of George.

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<sup>5</sup> one of the elect.



After Robert's recovery he follows George to Arthur's Seat and, aided by a dagger procured by Gil-Martin, he aims for his brother's life. However, at the crucial moment Robert again hesitates and, Gil-Martin not being there to help him, George overthrows him. Afterwards, Robert is appalled at the High Court, which acquits George for his "rude" attack (163) and leaves the heavy penalties to himself. After Robert is released from prison once again, Gil-Martin proposes a third attempt on George's life by challenging him to a duel and the same discussion as before ensues. This time, however, Robert is adamant that he will absolutely not challenge his brother. Gil-Martin says that he will "do the deed" (168) himself then and places Robert in a dark alley close to the duel ground armed with a rapier. Gil-Martin lures George into dueling with him, assuming the shape of George's enemy, Thomas Drummond. Their fight is seemingly even, but in the end they get close enough to the alley to allow Robert to spring forward and kill his brother. Drummond is charged for the murder and after George Colwan the elder shortly after passes away, Robert is free to take possession of the Dalcastle estate.

At Dalcastle, Robert finds himself accused of doing things which he cannot account for: continuous assaults on his neighbours' daughters; long periods of drunkenness; forging of law documents. During this period he also becomes less impressed by Gil-Martin and is relieved when he one day disappears. Robert's bliss does not last long, though, for when Gil-Martin reappears again, his voice has changed to the 'sounds of the pit' and he vows to never leave again until he can "carry [Robert] in triumph" (189) with him. Robert continues to be accused of increasingly cruel things, including the murder of his mother. He eventually decides to quit Dalcastle and head back to Edinburgh. Without possessions and without money Robert tries to flee not only the law, but Gil-Martin as well. In Edinburgh Robert meets

a man named Linton who agrees to help Robert print his “journal”, which is the name Robert uses for his autobiographical narrative (221). The motive behind Robert’s writing of his journal is found in his desire to “blow up the idea of any dependence on good works, and *morality*” (221) and the journal ends with the joyous Robert admiring his first page off the printer.

Robert’s narrative is not complete, however, as he continues by listing diary entries<sup>6</sup> written after the printed version. His situation now suddenly sounds desperate, as Gil-Martin once again has found him and Robert is forced to flee from Edinburgh. Robert’s diary, and his narrative, ends with Robert fleeing from farmhouse to farmhouse, only to have Gil-Martin eventually appear before him and force Robert to make one final sacrifice: Robert’s own life. The second part of the Editor’s narrative then follows, as the Editor presents the reader with an “extract from an authentic letter” (240) by James Hogg, published in 'Blackwood Magazine' in August, 1823 – which is just a year before the 'Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner' was published. In the letter, Hogg explains how a suicide grave at a hill called Cowanscroft had been dug up and how the corpse, over a hundred years old, had been perfectly preserved along with some of its earlier possessions. Hogg also provides a short anecdote from tradition about how the devil must have helped this poor man in committing the suicide, as it would be impossible for just one man to make the necessary arrangements. The Editor then returns to finally reveal how he came across this text by Robert Wringhim, as he explains how he and some friends, impressed by Hogg's letter, travel to Thirlestane to seek the truth about the “Scots mummy” (246). Hogg himself appears as a character in the novel when he refuses to guide the Editor and his friends, explaining that he has better things to do than

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<sup>6</sup> Robert also calls these entries 'my journal' (235), but to avoid confusing them with the printed version, the entries will be referred to as his 'diary'.

“ganging to houk up hunder-year-auld banes”<sup>7</sup> (247). The party finally finds the right spot (which is a hill called Faw-Law, and not Cowanscroft) and by digging up the grave again they eventually stumble upon the pamphlet that consists of Robert’s narrative – a pamphlet that bears the title:

“The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner.

Written by Himself.

Fideli Certa Merces”<sup>8</sup>

The Editor ends by saying that he does not understand the text, although he believes that no person will ever peruse it with the same attention that he has.

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<sup>7</sup> “Dig up hundred year old bones”

<sup>8</sup> “To the faithful, reward is certain”

### III. Inconsistency in the Narratives

The *Confessions* can in many ways be looked at as a battle between the Editor's narrative and the narrative of Robert Wringhim, or at least they exist, as Jonathan C. Glance suggests, in a "state of tension" (Glance: 166). What they both wish to achieve is sympathy and acknowledgment from the reader and that their own view be treated as the natural way of perceiving the elements, outcome and conclusion of the story. The elements of the story - events, actors, time and location; what Mieke Bal refers to as the *fabula* (Bal: 5) - are the same in both narratives. However, the Editor and Robert present these elements in such a way that both narrators achieve their own separate effect on the reader. This arranging of the *fabula*, or "colouring" of the text, is necessary to produce the right framing of their own and each other's narrative, but it also enhances the ambiguity of the narratives by making them more inconsistent. As this chapter will show, the inconsistency in, and between, each narrative stems from the narrators' strive for sympathy. They seek sympathy by presenting different elements of the *fabula* to the reader and by framing the other's narrative as secondary to their own. The chapter will further try to lessen the inconsistency in the Editor's narrative by first looking briefly at the Editor's subjectivity as a result of the subjectivity that is already latent in history and tradition, and secondly by treating the Editor not only as a function or a character in the novel, but as both.

Both the Editor and Robert are eager to establish the proper framing of their narratives from the very beginning; the Editor assumes the position of empirical historian as he opens his narrative:

"It appears from tradition, as well as some parish registers still extant, that the lands of Dalcastle (or Dalchastel, as it is often spelled) were possessed by a family of the Colwan, about one hundred and fifty years ago, and for at least a century previous to that period. That family was supposed to have been a branch of the ancient family of Colquhoun, and it is certain that from it springs the Cowans that spread towards the border. I find, that in the year 1687, George Colwan succeeded his uncle of the same name, in the lands of Dalchastel and Balgrennan" (1)

The Editor has seemingly delved deep into both family history and general history to uncover the facts about the Colwans, as he has found "some parish registers still extant" and the exact year that George Colwan took possession of Dalcastle. That only some registers are still extant means that many are lost and this implies that the Editor has produced all the sources available to him. The Editor also focuses on the plurality of sources he has examined by referring to the variations he has found in the name "Dalcastle" and by mentioning the "*ancient* family of Colquhoun" (emphasis added) his dive into history seems much more laborious. Also, by starting a sentence with "I find [...]" the Editor evokes the action of searching - a trait he must entertain lest he be judged an ill-fitted historian. Later in his narrative, in the trial against Arabella Calvert, the Editor procures a full dialogue between the witness, Bessie Gillies, and the judge - a dialogue which spans across four pages (65-68) and is only interrupted once by the Editor's narrative. The Editor makes small notes in this embedded narrative where he puts the actor's name in brackets and italics to verify the identity of the actor:

"perhaps you are not aware, girl, that this scrupulousness of yours is likely to thwart the purposes of justice, and bereave your mistress of property to the amount of a thousand merks?' (*From the Judge.*)" (67-68)

"*The Judge.* 'This is the singular most perversion I have ever witnessed" (68)

The effect to which this embedding of the courtroom dialogue aspires shows the integrity of the Editor as a historian. Since law registers are available in this specific instance, the Editor must quote these instead of merely explain what happened. In doing so, he leaves it to the reader to make up his own mind about the courtroom dialogue, and thereby adopting the appearance of objectivity - the highest virtue of a historian. The brackets and italics used to verify the actors must be assumed to be a design of the Editor himself and not a part of the original register, as they appear outside the quote marks. Although this identifying of actors could be deemed trivial, it certainly adds to the station of the Editor as an objective historian by showing that he only intervenes in the embedded narrative by making small notes where matters of identity (seemingly) are unclear. Also, it underlines the Editor's attention to detail; his position as historian requires that details should be given if anything is unclear in his narrative.

While the Editor begins his framing by seeking sympathy for his own narrative, Robert tries to create the same kind of sympathy, not only for his narrative, but also for himself as narrator. By claiming that he "was born an outcast in the world" (97) Robert attempts to pull the reader in his direction by relying heavily on being a victim:

"I was the second son of this unhappy marriage, and, long ere ever I was born, my father according to the flesh disclaimed all relation or connection with me, and all interest in me, save what the law compelled him to take, which was to grant me a scanty maintenance" (98)

Robert adopts an almost fatalistic view when he sees himself as a victim before he is born. His father, George Colwan, deprives him of both money and status by disclaiming him and Robert's faith is thus to be born "an outcast". Just like the Editor's narrative this attempt to create sympathy comes at the very first pages of Robert's narrative and serves to leave the reader with the important first impression - an impression which, in both the Editor's and Robert's case, must be of a positive and benevolent nature. As Robert learns that his spiritual father, Rev. Robert Wringhim, has received no sign of his acceptance into the Elect, his fatalistic view continues:

"If my name is not written in the book of life from all eternity, it is vain for me to presume that either vows or prayers of mine, or those of all mankind combined, can ever procure its insertion now" (100)

Because of this awareness, Robert lives "for several years [in] a hopeless and deplorable state of mind" (100). The fatalistic view Robert adopts helps to evoke sympathy in the reader, as Robert portrays himself as only a youth, but already aware of his deterministic departure to hell. The ordeal of knowing his bleak future clearly weighs heavy on his mind and by stretching the time span to "several years" he intensifies the growing despair. As Robert writes his memoir in a time when

religion governed the minds of most men and much of society, it is fair to assume that his emphasis on his devout character is also a tool by which sympathy is gained.

Robert states, again at the beginning of his narrative:

"I missed no opportunity of perfecting myself particularly in all the minute points of theology in which my reverend father and mother took great delight; but at length I acquired so much skill, that I astonished my teachers, and made them gaze at one another" (98)

Later, when he learns that he is not one of the elect, he prays "three times every day, and seven on the sabbath" (100). Hard work and dedicated studying are general virtues and Wringhim has even dedicated this studying to one of the most respected sectors of society: religion. By framing his narrative as the text of a devout, but suffering, Christian, Robert seeks not only sympathy from his Christian readers, he also makes the general reader view his narrative more respectfully. The image of the suffering Christian puts Robert in a long line of saints and biblical characters, but alludes perhaps most strongly, as one critic points out (Campbell:190), to the story of Job.

The Editor, on the other hand, assumes a rationalist and more scientific position as his narrative unfolds. Some critics refer to his position as the "enlightened" position (Glance:166), while others go as far as to claim it to be "secular" (Hook:26). What is evident, though, is that this enlightened position of the Editor denotes him as a person who does not believe in superstition and who believes that there is reason behind everything; in the much quoted scene from *Arthur's Seat*, the view of the rationalist Editor merges with the empirical mind of



George, Robert's alleged brother:

"a little space from the height, he beheld, to his astonishment, a bright halo in the cloud of haze, that rose in a semi-circle over his head like a pale rainbow. He was struck motionless at the view of the lovely vision; for it so chanced that he had never seen the same appearance before, though common in early morn. But he soon perceived the cause of the phenomenon, and that it proceeded from the rays of the sun from a pure unclouded morning sky striking upon this dense vapour which refracted them. But the better all the works of nature are understood, the more they will be ever admired. That was a scene that would have entranced the man of science with delight, but which the uninitiated and sordid man would have regarded less than the mole rearing up his hill in silence and in darkness" (39-40)

The passage is significant because there is a clear shift in focalizers, from the perspective of George to that of the Editor. This shift is marked by the transition from past tense to present tense, as the Editor notes, after having recounted George's thoughts around the phenomenon, that "the better all the works of nature are understood, the more they will be ever admired". This clear statement from the Editor is important because it is one of the few instances where the reader can be certain that it is the Editor who presents his own view and not the view of "tradition". These divisions in the Editor's narrative between the opinion of his sources and the opinion of the Editor himself becomes even more important as some passages' origin becomes even more ambiguous. The Editor first recounts the feelings of George by using George as the focalizer; George is "struck motionless" by the "bright halo" he has "never seen [...] before". After being confronted with the fantastic effect, George's

motionlessness almost immediately turns into the rationalist's search for cause - a cause that is found in George's succeeding explanation of the effect. The Editor then permits his own view to slip in right after George's rational explanation, supporting the empirical nature of George by stating that "the better all the works of nature are understood, the more they will be ever admired". The Editor's celebration of George's empirical nature continues, as he claims the scene "would have entranced the man of science with delight, but which the uninitiated and sordid man would have regarded less than the mole rearing up his hill in silence and in darkness". This appreciation for George's empiricism stems from the Editor's admiration of George and their shared interest in the same things. As David Oakleaf points out: "the Editor concentrates on George because his hero, like himself, is an empiricist closely related to the world of beauty and the social passions" (63). By polarizing the "man of science" and "the uninitiated", the Editor creates a division between those *enlightened* and those "in darkness"; he does not seem to treat any alternative to science as valid, as he suggests that people who would explain this phenomenon in other ways are simply "uninitiated" - not yet able to comprehend the real "truth" behind it. In doing so, the Editor bonds with George, as the Editor considers them both of the same empiricist cast - in other words, the "initiated".

Such a view as the Editor demonstrates in the above passage may very well be claimed as secular (Hook: 26), as religion is one of the few alternatives to science. However, the Editor also shows signs of a belief that does not entirely revolve around science; after telling how Robert came into possession of Dalcastle, the Editor introduces the story of Arabella Logan's search for truth with religious diction:

"But the ways of heaven are altogether inscrutable, and soar as far above and beyond the works and the comprehensions of man, as the sun, flaming in majesty, is above the tiny boy's evening rocket. It is the controller of Nature alone, that can bring light out of darkness, and order out of confusion" (56)

In this passage the Editor acknowledges that there is a "controller of Nature" and that there are things that man cannot understand - things that can only be described as "the ways of heaven". Like George, the Editor seems to believe that science and religion are not mutually exclusive. George may be of a rational disposition, but he still believes in God, although not as fervently as his brother. Oakleaf rightly notes that George's "willingness to worship with a different congregation is a social strength at odds with his brother's narrow sectarianism" (Oakleaf:64). In this division of the two brothers' perspective lies the motive behind the Editor's focus on George in the Editor's narrative. By celebrating George's empirical nature, the Editor achieves both closeness between himself and George, as well as distance between the two of them and Robert. The Editor frames George as the hero of the story and uses him as a focalizer to portray him as a modern, enlightened man. In this framing, the readers will sympathise with George, as they are presented the text in an era when the Enlightenment has influenced their minds. By creating sympathy for George and identifying himself with him, the Editor also creates sympathy for his himself and his narrative. What Oakleaf notes above also corresponds with the Editor's framing, as the level of piety of George neither puts him at odds with science nor puts him at risk of his brother's overstrained relationship to religion. As the Editor has read the narrative of Robert before writing his own narrative, the Editor can effectively use Robert's religious devotion against him. The Editor takes initially good qualities -

piousness and devotion - and transforms them into symbols of an old-fashioned perspective on the world; Robert is framed as one of the "uninitiated" who zealously trusts only religion and leaves no phenomenon to science. The passage quoted above works even better as a framing device for the Editor when mirrored with one of Robert's own confessional passages:

"An exultation of spirit lifted me, as it were, far above the earth, and the sinful creatures crawling on its surface; and I deemed myself as an eagle among the children of men, soaring on high, and looking down with pity" (116)

By mirroring these two passages, it seems that the Editor frames Robert's passage as a blasphemous attempt to portray himself as a divine being; by stating that "the ways of heaven [...] soar as far above and beyond the works and the comprehensions of man" (56), the Editor mocks Robert's elevated vision of himself as "an eagle among the children of men, soaring on high, and looking down with pity" (116). The Editor effectively gives the impression of Robert as a person who regards himself not as an equal to man, but as someone above him. This will again make the reader more sympathetic towards George.

The Editor's second narrative, which comes after Robert's narrative, makes Robert's narrative situated in the middle of the Editor's narrative and not juxtaposed with it or as part of a sequence, which would have been the case had not the Editor added a portion to his narrative after Robert's. This "structural burial" (Pope:220) of Robert's narrative, as Rebecca A. Pope calls it, is important, as the narrative of the Editor becomes a physical frame surrounding Robert's narrative. The Editor uses his superior placement of his own narrative to further frame Robert's narrative, both

before and after; the Editor's last paragraph before introducing Robert's narrative reveals an implicit disbelief in what will follow:

"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. I offer no remarks on it, and make as few additions to it, leaving every one to judge for himself. We have heard much of the rage of fanaticism in former days, but nothing to this" (93)

Without providing any information on what will follow - no name, reason for writing nor what type of document it is - the Editor promises to make "no remarks on it [...], leaving every one to judge for himself". Yet, in the very next sentence the Editor does exactly that; he shares his opinion on Robert's narrative: "we have heard much of the rage of fanaticism in former days, but nothing to this". The Editor leaves the readers with an impression of doubt before they even know what document they are about to peruse. By alluding to the "rage of fanaticism", the seemingly objective Editor rather bluntly reveals that the following document will most probably not be well received.

The narrative of Robert then follows before the Editor starts the second part of his narrative by again claiming that he "cannot tell" (240) what the preceding work is suppose to be. He continues at the end of his narrative to "not venture a judgment" (253), though he immediately tells the reader that he doubts that Robert killed his brother. Furthermore, the Editor believes that although Robert might have killed his brother, the Editor "account[s] all the rest either dreaming or madness" (254). If the Editor is viewed as a historian that strives to remain objective in the second part of his narrative, then he is unable to fulfil his position:

"Were the relation at all consistent with reason, it corresponds so minutely with traditional facts, that it could scarcely have missed to have been received as authentic; but in this day, and with the present generation, it will not go down, that a man should be daily tempted by the devil" (254)

The aim of the Editor could be to make the reader view Robert's narrative from the Editor's perspective; as a rationalist, the Editor must denounce Robert's fantastic tale, and he continues to frame Robert's narrative by insisting on its implications of "religious parable" (240, 254) instead of as a true account of real events. Rebecca A. Pope also hints at this by suggesting that the "structural burial" of Robert's narrative mentioned above epitomizes "what the editor's narrative must repress" (220). The Editor can entertain the idea of a murderous brother, but not "that a man should be daily tempted by the devil". The Editor also appeals to the readers by claiming that the "present generation" is not as superstitious and "uninitiated", to use the Editor's earlier label, as past generations. He structures his criticism of Robert's narrative so that readers inclined to believe in Robert will find their views not "consistent with reason". Anything that does not fit into the Editor's rationalist frame must be repressed or completely discarded. This paper will later offer another perspective on the second part of the Editor's narrative.

Just as the Editor frames his narrative by emphasizing its objectivity and rational tendencies to lend authority to it, so must Robert frame his narrative to attain the necessary authenticity. Robert does so by changing his narrative from autobiography to journal. The autobiography is already a genre that strongly implies that what is written must be considered realism. The shift from autobiography to

journal furthers this notion of realism, as the reading of a journal provides the reader with a seemingly more personal and immediate perspective. The journal becomes more important than the autobiography exactly because of this immediacy; the dates in the journal, which show the exact time and place the entries are written, signal to the reader an authentic account of events, as the account is seemingly written at the instant the events took place; the autobiography cannot entertain such an immediacy, as the account is usually written long after the events have taken place. The autobiography, the account of a life, is a look back in time and is therefore more unreliable than the journal. Although Robert's journal is mostly written in the present tense, his long lapses between entries force him into using the past tense. However, one way in which Robert maintains his journal framing is by using the present tense where the past tense should have been used. His very first journal entry is an example of this, and by doing so he also achieves a sense of the dramatic:

*"Chesters, July 27, 1712. -My hopes and prospects are a wreck. My precious journal is lost! consigned to the flames! My enemy hath found me out, and there is no hope of peace or rest for me on this side of the grave"* (222)

As Robert immediately continues the entry by saying "[i]n the beginning of last week [...]" it is evident that the event for which he is accounting has taken place at least seven days ago and at most thirteen days ago. This time span does little to validate the immediacy and the sense of the dramatic in Robert's account. Yet, for Robert's framing to be successful, he must furnish his very first journal entry with exactly this kind of immediacy and dramatic undertone. By Robert's excessive use of exclamation marks - "My precious journal is lost! consigned to the flames!" - he

creates an atmosphere in which the reader is supposed to acknowledge Robert's misfortune and hopelessness that Robert himself felt when the actual event took place. Since emotions are sometimes hard to adapt to language, Robert must, somewhat crudely, resort to excessive use of exclamation marks. It is worth noticing that the sentence containing the exclamation marks is not grammatically correct: Robert fails to use the capital letter after the first exclamation mark. Although this error might seem incongruous for a man of Robert's intellectual and linguistic capacity - some might even deem it trivial - it is important not to underestimate Robert's rhetorical capacity and sense of structure; the grammatical error emphasizes the immediacy of the scene and gives the impression of a narrator too despaired to be concerned with grammar. Robert's emotions are too strong to be retained by the laws of language and the reader will accordingly sympathize with the loss of which these emotions are a product.

Robert's sense of the dramatic is also evident in the numerous "possible" endings, as Robert gives the impression that he sometimes never knows whether or not he will live through the night; in the latter part of his journal Robert seems to be held forever in a mental state of limbo:

"*August 3, 1712. [...] Perhaps this may be the last sentence ever I am destined to write. If so, farewell Christian reader! May God grant to thee a happier destiny than has been allotted to me here on earth, and the same assurance of acceptance above! Amen.*" (235-236)



"August 30. [...] My last hour is arrived: I see my tormentor once more approaching me in this wild. Oh, that the earth would swallow me up, or the hill fall and cover me! Farewell for ever! (237-238)

"September 18, 1712. [...] My hour is at hand. -Almighty God, what is this that I am about to do! The hour of repentance is past, and now my fate is inevitable. -*Amen, for ever!*" (239-240)

The effect of this state of Robert is that the reader is also constantly held in a state of tension and, of course, suspense. Robert clearly aims for sympathy again from the reader, as he continually foreshadows his imminent death. Robert almost adopts qualities of a classical hero: faced with dangers all around him, he continues to escape death every time. By constantly reminding the reader of these escapes from certain death, Robert is building an image of himself as the hardy and enduring Christian, who, through his devotion to God, is being rewarded with the strength to continue. Robert's use of "amen" after his endings is also significant, as it reinforces the notion of a *religious* ending, as well as giving the entries where the word occurs the quality of a prayer.

It is evident that the two narrators must focus on different aspects of the fabula in order to strengthen their own narrative and undermine that of the other; the Editor focuses his narrative on George and must therefore relate the scenes that do the goodness of George most justice. The scene at Arthur's Seat has been used as an example to emphasize the rational and empirical nature of George. Also, in the Editor's attempt to undermine the narrative of Robert, the Editor includes in his narrative nearly 40 pages describing Arabella Logan's quest for truth and justice (56-

93), as well as embedding several narrators that aid her in her quest. This choice of focus and perspective is surely made at the expense of other interesting perspectives, but the Editor must retain this focus to further sympathize with George; Robert focuses his narrative on his troubled youth to attain sympathy from the reader, but also dedicates many pages of the narrative to his diary in order to create authenticity. By being presented two different perspectives on the story, the reader is drawn between the authenticity and authority of the respective narratives. As the narrators appear to be in opposition, the reader must determine whose narrative is to be trusted. Since neither of the narrators provides the complete story, their attempt to gain sympathy only furthers the inconsistencies between their narratives, and thus enhances the novel's ambiguity.

Critics tend to look at the Editor's narrative as flawed since the Editor seems to represent objectivity and rationalism, but eventually is revealed by his narrative as both subjective and pious. Rebecca A. Pope claims that although the Editor "strives for a kind of objective reportage" (Pope: 220), his narrative is constructed to devalue Robert's narrative – a source which must be regarded "documentary evidence" (Pope: 220); Elizabeth Harries claims that although the Editor has promised to give a "detail of curious traditional facts, and other evidence", the Editor's judgment is still "partial and faulty" (Harries: 194) – a judgment Harries bases, among other things, on the inadequacy the Editor demonstrates by ending his narrative with a report on a "rather uninteresting person" (Harries: 194); Ismael Velasco claims that "the image underlying the Editor's narrative, of a fair and honest account that has attempted to sift truth from falsehood, is found wanting with regard to both factual and ethical integrity" (Velasco: 44). The quoted critics represent a view that treats the flaws in objectivity in the Editor's narrative as a source of its

inconsistency. The latter part of this chapter will show that what can be regarded as a flaw in the objectivity of the Editor is actually a shift in the Editor himself, from function to character. By treating the Editor not solely as a function or solely as a character in the novel, but as both, the inconsistencies in the Editor's narrative will diminish.

First of all it is important to be aware of the fact that the claims of subjectivity regarding the Editor's narrative can be attributed to the sources that the Editor uses. The sources of the Editor's narrative are mostly oral accounts, which relate incidents that happened over a hundred years ago. The people behind these accounts did not have access to Robert's memoir, and as Robert clearly was looked at with scorn after taking possession of the Dalcastle estate, the accounts must have been subjective in themselves. Another example is the scene at Arthur's Seat; as only two persons know what really happened - one whose account is excluded from the Editor's narrative, as the Editor leaves it up to Robert to tell his own story - the perspective of George is the only perspective available. Since George is the person who is attacked, his account will naturally be subjective. In other passages, the origin of the account is uncertain and can therefore not be positively treated as the voice of the Editor; an example of this is found in the scene where Mrs. Logan and Bell Calvert spy on Robert: "the two women, when they heard what jeopardy they were in from *such a wretch*, had squatted among the underwood" (88) (emphasis added). It is impossible to determine whether the emotional outcry "such a wretch" must be attributed to the women, the Editor or tradition.

The Editor's function as a counterpart to Robert and Robert's narrative must denote the Editor as a rational historian. In this framing, the Editor's objectivity helps to complete his function. However, when the Editor in the second part of his narrative

enters his own text as a character, he no longer has to entertain any idea of such objectivity. The Editor is free to do what his role as historian made him unable to in the first part of his narrative: to “judge for himself” (93). The second part of the Editor’s narrative marks this shift from function to character quite clearly; after opening the second part of his narrative with an “extract from an authentic letter, published in *Blackwood’s Magazine for August, 1823*” (240) the Editor immediately casts his verdict on the extract. As a report on an excavation that was made at a mysterious burial ground, the Editor trusts it not, and shows that he has cast his historian role aside: “I did not believe them” (240). The Editor does no longer need to adhere to objectivity – in fact, he does not even pretend to colour his statement with a mark of humility – he steadfastly voices his opinion and calls the extract (which can be treated as a source) a complete falsehood. This strong sentiment can only be marked as a conscious shift in the Editor’s role – from objective historian to subjective commentator. The Editor continues to voice his opinion near the end of the second part of his narrative when he comments on what he could not “offer [...] remarks on” (93) in the first part: Robert’s memoir.

“It is certainly impossible that these scenes could ever have occurred, that he describes as having himself transacted. I think it *may* be possible that he had some hand in the death of his brother, and yet I am disposed greatly to doubt it; and the numerous distorted traditions, &c. which remain of that event, may be attributable to the work having been printed and burnt, and of course the story known to all the printers, with their families and gossips” (254)

The Editor is no longer bound by his shackles of objectivity and this passage shows that there can be no doubt that this is a conscious trait; what he in the first part of his narrative could not “offer [...] remarks on” (93), he now explores in considerable depth. The Editor says it “may be possible”, but then again he “doubt[s] it” – he discusses the memoir with himself and after viewing both sides of the discussion he is not willing to come to a conclusion. This discussion is far from the objective stance that he took in the first part of his narrative, and the fact that the Editor now states that the account he himself gives in the first part of his narrative is “certainly impossible”, only shows that his objectivity is at this point wholly abandoned. The Editor ends by saying:

“It was a bold theme for an allegory, and would have suited that age well had it been taken up by one fully qualified for the task, which this writer was not. In short, we must either conceive him not only the greatest fool, but the greatest wretch, on whom was ever stamped the form of humanity; or, that he was a religious maniac, who wrote and wrote about a deluded creature, till he arrived at that height of madness, that he believed himself the very object whom he had been all along describing” (254)

The Editor says that Robert must either be looked at as “the greatest fool” and “greatest wretch” or as a “religious maniac”. The Editor has by now taken the stance of the subjective moralist, but it is significant that the Editor still does not judge Robert, he only provides the reader with possible interpretations of Robert’s character.

As both function and actor in the fabula, the Editor's stance might sometimes seem unclear, which in turn serves as a basis for critics' claim of inconsistency. However, if the two parts of the Editor's narrative are treated as two different narratives instead of one narrative divided by Robert's memoir, the narratives will seem less ambiguous. This diminishing of the ambiguity is the result of a clear border between the Editor as a function in the novel and as a character. When the Editor enters the novel as a character in the second part of his narrative, his action and comments suggest that he is consciously crossing the border between objective historian and subjective commentator.

To conclude this chapter, the inconsistency in, and between, the narratives of the Editor and Robert is highly evident, but not as salient as some critics would like it to be. In each narrative there is a strive for sympathy in the reader that frames each narrative and each other's narrative and makes them more ambiguous: the Editor represents an objective historian by emphasizing his attention to detail and his hesitation to pass judgment on what he conveys. His strive for sympathy in the reader, however, leads to his objectivity being tainted, as he clearly frames Robert as a religious extreme to mirror the enlightened nature of George – the Editor's sharer of scientific delight – as well as transgress his own rule of not passing judgment on what he is conveying; Robert represents a devout, but suffering, Christian by showing his strong sense of religion and lamenting his hardship through life. As he seeks sympathy from the reader, however, his dramatic confessions soon see him as someone untruthful and exaggerating. To add to the ambiguity, neither of these two narratives gives the reader all the facts regarding the events that took place. However, it is important to remember that some of the ambiguity of the narratives might stem from ambiguity in the sources themselves. Although some critics regard

the narratives as wholly inconsistent and ambiguous, the latter part of this chapter shows that the ambiguity is not as salient as these critics perceive it to be. By treating the Editor as a station with two different roles, the ambiguity diminishes; as a function the Editor serves to oppose the narrative of Robert and frame his narrative as the lesser of the two; as a character in the novel the Editor serves to step away from his role as objective historian and freely comment on the memoir as a subjective observer. By treating the Editor as both a function and a character in the novel, and looking at his narrative in two separate parts, the inconsistency in his narrative, and consequently the ambiguity, will diminish.

#### IV. Ambiguity in the Memoir

“My life has been a life of trouble and turmoil; of change and vicissitude; of anger and exultation; of sorrow and of vengeance. My sorrows have all been for a slighted gospel, and my vengeance has been wreaked on its adversaries. Therefore, in the might of heaven I will sit down and write: I will let the wicked of this world know what I have in the 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” (97)

The above passage is one of the key passages in the *Confessions* and has been quoted numerous times by several critics. In their interpretation of the novel, its introductory quality has led many of these critics to refer to this passage in their attempt to grasp and explain the character of Robert Wringhim; Regina B. Oost claims the passage is one of the motives behind "Robert's resolution to turn writer" (Oost: 89), as it is in this passage his religious ambition to rid the world of "the wicked" (100) is first shown - an ambition which is realized when Robert later finds himself in printing office (221); Elizabeth W. Harries sees the passage as evidence of Wringhim's "rage of fanaticism" (Harries: 92) and claims that "Wringhim's sense of causality, as well as his sense of identity, is askew". She bases these allegations on the grammatical and "rhetorical duplicity" of the passage - "change and vicissitude [...] anger and exultation" - and attacks in the same sentence Robert's use of the word "therefore" by claiming it is "alogical" due to the absence of a "cause and effect relation between what precedes and what follows it". The arguments of these quoted



critics, and others who follow their path by referring to this opening passage, are based on observations that this chapter will offer a completely new perspective on. I believe the passage's true origin and function has suffered from a trait that Ian Campbell, an authority on James Hogg, has attributed to the text as a whole: "frequently misunderstood or interpreted according to partial readings of the text" (Campbell: 187). Indeed, a number of critics seem to have misinterpreted this crucial passage's place in the text as a result of a partial reading of the text. I am proposing a new perspective on the journal of Robert Wringhim by making a claim about the opening passage as controversial as it is simple: it was not written as the initial passage of the journal, but was, in the true nature of introductions one might add, implemented at a later stage. The implications of such a statement might at first seem irrelevant. As this chapter will show, however, the statement will demystify many of the journal's enigmatic passages by targeting their ambiguity: firstly, this chapter will try to separate the initial passage of Robert's memoir from the rest of his journal by looking at the passage as Robert's "true" confession; furthermore, the chapter will cement this separation by looking at cohesive ties between the initial passage and Robert's last two diary entries; lastly, the chapter will offer an explanation regarding perhaps the most coveted literary artefact of the *Confessions* – "the key to the process, management, and winding up of the whole matter" (222) (emphasis added) – and thereby diminish the ambiguity of Robert's confessional memoir.

Firstly it is important to justify the separation of this initial passage, as it will be referred to henceforth, from the rest of Robert's journal by identifying it as Robert's "true" confession. This separation excludes his last two diary entries and the passage that is found between the end of his printed work and the beginning of his diary. The

latter passage that is referred to is the one that starts with '[t]hus far [...]' (222) and the reason for its exclusion will become evident later as the interpretation of this passage will support the arguments. It is highly possible that Robert's initial passage is actually written on his deathbed and that is not an ecclesiastical confession to God to seek forgiveness for his sins, but a "true" confession to himself and to his readers by which he acknowledges the corruption of Gil-Martin and his own responsibility in the killing of innocent people: "[m]y sorrows have all been for a slighted gospel, and my vengeance has been wreaked on its adversaries" (97). The "slighted gospel" could be that of Mr. Blanchard: the true gospel of the *Confessions* which serves as counterpart to Gil-Martin's gospel by embracing tenets such as "it was every man's own blame if he was not saved" (135). This initial interpretation of the "slighted gospel" might at first seem feasible, as it would imply that Robert is referring to Blanchard's "tenets scarcely short of blasphemy" (135) as the elected Robert calls it. This implication, however, is flawed since Blanchard's gospel's adversaries would consist of men like Robert's supposed legitimate father, George Colwan the elder, and other "wicked men". Admittedly, there is a connection between the "slighted gospel" of Blanchard and the rejection of it by George Colwan the elder. However, the sentence would then be lacking a "cause and effect relation", as Harries phrased it (although for different reasons than Harries' coarse analytical dismissal of the word "therefore"). To use George Colwan the elder as an example: Either Robert despises George Colwan because the latter is opposing an inherit "slighted gospel" - a notion that is unbelievable as George Colwan makes no distinction between gospels, it is the very tenets of religion he loathes; or, Robert despises George Colwan because the latter is opposing a "slighted gospel" exactly because it has been slighted: a notion that is equally unbelievable, as George Colwan's level of piety is not likely to

change whether the gospel has been "slighted" or not. The "slighted gospel", though, is most likely that of Gil-Martin: a gospel that has been corrupted and given improper tenets. Robert confesses that his "vengeance has been wreaked on its adversaries" (97), and as Robert has contributed to the deaths of mostly morally good people, the gospel must be of a nature that is the opposite of good moral.

Following Robert's initial confession about the "slighted gospel" is a passage to which Oost wrongfully assigns the motive behind Robert's decision to write his journal: "[t]herefore, 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 the faith of the promises, and justification by grace" (97). The passage is not the motive for writing his journal - it is the motive for writing his "true" confession. The word "therefore", which Harries finds "alogical", is necessary for Robert as it binds together his "true" confession with his "true" sin: he has embraced the gospel of Gil-Martin by trusting the supreme principle of Antinomianism and wreaked vengeance on innocent people, believing firmly in the infallibility of the elect. It is important to note the colon that succeeds Robert's determination to "sit down and write". The colon eliminates any suggestion that the reason for his writing is to merely let the world know that he has been led astray by a "slighted gospel"; it is important for him to mention Antinomianism as the catalyst: "what I have done in the faith of the promises, and justification by grace". In short, the word "therefore" takes on a cataphoric quality instead of an anaphoric one - the latter being the one that readers tend to embrace - and thus making the word in fact anything but 'alogical'.

Another point on the initial passage must be made to further this paper's interpretation of it. Again the point to be made is not the result of a fastidious dissecting of the text, it is merely observations made based on a thorough reading of

the text. Robert ends his initial passage by stating to “the wicked” that they can “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” (97). At this point of the discussion it is crucial to be aware of the fact that if the initial passage was indeed written, as most critics agree on, at the beginning of the journal, there can be no discrepancy - taking Robert's state of mind into account - between Robert's initial passage and the passage at the end of the printed work. The reason for this necessary coherence stems from the fact that there are no additional actions being described between Robert's conceiving of the idea of writing and the actual printing of his writing:

“It was here that I first conceived the idea of writing this journal, and having it printed, and applied to Mr. Watson to print it for me, telling him it was a religious parable such as the Pilgrim's Progress. He 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. I put my work to the press, and encouraging my companion to work at odd hours, and on Sundays” (222)

This final passage indicates that his actual writing of the journal could not have taken long, as there are only eight lines - in which Mr. Watson advises Robert on printing and publishing - that separate the moment he “first conceived the idea of writing” and the moment he “put [the] work to the press”. On this basis, it is fair to assume that his initial passage was not written long before his final passage, and that the two passages must be coherent, as his state of mind and current situation in life has not

been altered. What is evident, however, is that these two passages are far from coherent and that Robert's state of mind in the initial passage is wholly different from that of the final passage of the printed work, which, consequently, is true to the text immediately following Robert's initial passage. The assumption that the two passages was written as part of a sequence is impossible to maintain, as Robert claims in the initial passage that he "was removed from their sphere before their blood was mingled with their sacrifices". Robert is addressing the sphere of "the wicked of this world" and leaves the impression that he has been "removed" from it. Significantly, the use of the word "sphere" in this setting evokes the image of the planet. Its relation to "the wicked" and "their gods of silver and of gold" implies that "the wicked" believes only in material things, and consequently, the planet is "their[s]", as they will never know the other realm of true "gods": heaven. If Robert claims that he has been, or is about to be, removed from "their sphere", then he must be aware of the fact that his departure from this "sphere" is imminent. The discrepancy between the initial passage and the last part of his printed work lies exactly in this awareness of Robert's: he knows he is about to leave earth; or, more bluntly put: he is aware of his imminent death. This awareness of imminent death is nowhere to be found in the last part of his printed work; after quitting Dalcastle and lamenting his misfortunes, Robert consoles himself with a hopeful perspective on his future: "I had nevertheless hopes that, by preaching up redemption by grace, pre-ordination, and eternal purpose, I should yet be enabled to benefit mankind in some country, and rise to high distinction" (210). Robert's ambitions to "rise to high distinction" are never altered through the course of his printed work. His ambitious rise to a religious position of power is echoed both in the early part of his printed work – "I conceived it decreed, not that I should be a minister of the gospel, but a champion of it" (122) - and, more

importantly, the late part of his printed work – “I had an inward thirst and longing to distinguish myself in the great cause of religion” (221). The ambitious Robert seems far from worried about a supposed near impending death. It would be impossible for him to entertain any idea of 'high distinction' and, as he reveals towards the end of his printed work, “a name even higher than if I had been made a general of the Czar Peter's troops against the infidels” (221) if he at the same time had been aware of his impending removal from the “sphere”. Based on this perspective on the initial passage, it can be claimed that the passage was written at a later time.

It is also worth noting that other interpretations of “their sphere” would constitute of different meanings than “planet”: the “sphere” of “the wicked” may refer to their “habitat”, to apply a biological term; the environment in which they live and perform their daily tasks. To support this interpretation is the notion that if Robert's plans to reach “high distinction” succeed, then he would most likely become a part of the habitat, or “sphere”, of his peers and in effect be “removed” from the “sphere” of “the wicked”. However, such an interpretation is hard to accept when looking at the connection Robert makes between “high distinction” and “general of the Czar Peter's troops against the infidels”. Robert implies that a “high distinction” is only maintainable through the continued battle against “infidels”, or “the wicked”, and Robert's removal from “their sphere” would only aim to further complicate his goal of achieving this “high distinction”.

In order to justify the initial passage as Robert's “true” confession, the time of his writing of this confession becomes crucial to the reader. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Robert's diary entry for September 18, 1712, and evidently his entry for September 8, as well, is instrumental in the validation of Robert's “true” confession and its displacement from the rest of the printed work. In

this entry Robert shows the insight and honesty he has lacked through out the printed work and his succeeding diary entries: “[m]y hour is at hand. -Almighty God, what is this that I am about to do. The hour of repentance is past, and now my fate is inevitable. -Amen, for ever!” (240). Robert acknowledges the fact that he can no longer justify his sins and that it is futile to confess to gain forgiveness, as his “hour of repentance” is past. The reason for implying that his entry for September 8 also is of consequence is based on the notion of his “hour of repentance” being past already at that time, as it was here he was forced to “repeat the tremendous prayer” (239) that might have sealed his ultimate removal from God and salvation. Whether his fate is inevitable because of his uttering of the “tremendous prayer” or his decision to commit suicide, or even perhaps because of actions committed at an even earlier stage, is difficult to say. What can be noticed in his entry for September 8, however, is another determiner for Robert's awareness of his own fate: “[w]ould that it were the last that I should ever see in this detested world! If the horrors of hell are equal to those I have suffered, eternity will be of short duration there” (239). This last sentence is perhaps the most striking evidence of his awareness of his fate at this time. Robert is hinting at an eternity in hell and the sentence seems to suggest that he is talking about himself. Another interpretation might claim that his comments on “hell” and “eternity” are of a more general character. However, the preceding sentence links “hell” and “eternity” with Robert's own notion of leaving this world: “[w]ould that it were the last that I should ever see in this detested world”. Robert makes a comment on his removal from the “sphere”, to use his previous term, and immediately after makes an assumption of what hell must be like. The connection is striking and should be regarded as one of the key sentences when treating the subject of Robert's awareness of his own fate. This change in his awareness is

evident at this point, as his diary entry from just the prior night states: “[m]y time is expired, and I find relief beyond measure, for he has fully convinced me that no act of mine can mar the eternal counsel” (238). As he the next night is faced with the “yawning chasm” and the repetition of the “tremendous prayer” (239), this must surely mark the definite point of his change of awareness – from being an infallible Elect to being subjected to eternal damnation.

Significantly, there is a segment in the last diary entry, which might further build on the argument of Robert's awareness:

“[a]nd though, sun, bright emblem of a far brighter effulgence, I bid farewell to thee also! I do not now take my last look of thee, for to thy glorious orb shall a poor suicide's last earthly look be raised. But, ah! who is yon that I see approaching furiously - his stern face blackened with horrid despair! My hour is at hand” (239-240)

As a last observation of a dying man, Robert looks to the sky and in a peculiar, almost remorseful, tone he addresses the sun as a “bright emblem of a far brighter effulgence”. Robert implies that the sun is an emblem of divinity and his nearly “last look of thee” is a last gaze on heaven and what he has forsaken, for, indeed, he makes no predictions as to what he might expect after he is dead. The reason Robert makes no comment on the glory of heaven is, as a person denied the salvation of God, his only divine comfort now will be that of a “last earthly look” on the “glorious orb” before him. His pain at being denied this glory is emphasized by the contrasting advance of Gil-Martin who “approach[es] *furiously* - his *stern* face *blackened* with *horrid despair*” (emphasis added). The “despair” in Gil-Martin's face is echoed in



Robert's own despair, as the presence of Gil-Martin serves not only as a reminder of Robert's imminent death, but as a final reminder of what Robert has abandoned 'in the faith of the promises' and "justification by grace" by accepting Gil-Martin into his life.

Interestingly, there is another sentence in the last diary entry that echoes the insight with which Robert wrote his initial passage and thus cements the cohesive ties between the two. Robert says in his last diary entry: "[F]arewell [...] man, whom I have hated; whom, nevertheless, I desire to leave in charity!" (239). The notion that Robert sees his removal from the world as an act of charity towards "man" signals the same insight that is found nowhere but in the initial passage, where Robert tells "the wicked" to "bless their gods" that he was "removed from their sphere". By deciding to "leave in charity" Robert admits that what he has done in the world has been wrong, as his leaving will be an act of goodness. The same logic applies to the initial passage where the notion that he was "removed from their sphere before their blood was mingled with their sacrifices" implies that his spilling of their "blood" was part of the reason he was removed from "their sphere", thus making this removal an act of charity, as it is Robert himself who is doing the actual removing by committing suicide.

As an additional note, it is worth mentioning another discrepancy in the text that is solved by reading the last diary entry as a moment of awareness for Robert. At the end of his printed work Robert fantasizes about "what numbers of my works were to go abroad among mankind" (222). As a last note to the reader in his last diary entry, however, he makes the decision to "seal up my little book, and conceal it" (240). The question the reader is left with is: why conceal a book that is destined to bring fame, and from whom does he wish to conceal it? Two candidates present

themselves: the reader and Gil-Martin. If Robert's goal is to hide the book from the reader, in other words, future generations, then he would go against his own aspirations and ambitions - indeed, against the aspirations and ambitions of any writer; on the other hand, why is Robert trying to hide a book from the very person who participated in its printing: "the devil [...] appeared twice in the printing house, assisting the workmen at the printing of my book" (222); and whom Robert himself claims to have "visited the printing house in order to further the progress my work" (223). The answer to this enigma is simple: the original printed work of Robert, a testament to the devil's power of convincing even a zealot of the church to reject God, is in the best of Gil-Martin's interest to have printed. However, as Robert later adds his "true" confession to the introduction and implies in the last diary entry that he is aware of his damned fate, the book takes on a cautionary quality - ironically mirrored in Robert's lie to Mr. Watson that the work is a "religious parable" (221) - and must therefore be concealed from Gil-Martin, as it would not gain him to have such a parable printed.

As a final point, my own, and Robert's, last promise must be held: the providing of a "key to the progress, management, and winding up of the whole matter" (222):

"Thus far have my History and Confessions been carried.

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" (222)

The passage and its placement in the text is a peculiar one. It apparently occupies a space exactly between the end of the printed work and the beginning of the diary. It seems separated from both, as a line separates it from the printed work and the dating of the entries separates it from the diary. Even more peculiar, and thus, sadly, more neglected by critics, is the revelation that this segment consists in fact of two passages. The indentation of the sentence that starts with "I must now [...]" reveals that the preceding sentence is a passage on its own. It is possible that the reason for this segment's place in the text is that it inhabits the same quality as the initial passage of Robert's memoir: it was written at a later time. Critics have tended to treat this segment as a continuation of the printed work, and the quest for the "key to the process" stems from the myth that Robert was "[i]nterrupted in writing it" (Campbell: 187) and left the printed work unfinished. Robert claims himself in his diary that the printed work is his "unfinished work" (223), but the claim is possibly made due to the fact that he has started writing his diary and thus, with the intention of adding his diary to the work, the book is still unfinished. It is not unlikely that Robert's initial work, his printed work, ends with the line on page 222. Robert states:

"I put my work to the press, and wrote early and late; and encouraging my companion to work at odd hours, and on Sundays, before the press-work of the second sheet was begun, we had the work all in types, corrected, and a clean copy thrown off for farther revisal. The first sheet was wrought off; and I never shall forget how my heart exulted when at the printing house this day, I saw what numbers of my works were to go abroad among mankind"  
(222)

It seems evident from this passage that his work is indeed finished when he has a “clean copy thrown off for farther revisal”. He has no intention of writing more, only revise what he has written. Also, he notes he “saw what numbers of my works were to go abroad among mankind”. When Robert sees “numbers” he sees the amount of copies that will be produced and his “heart exult[es]”. The emphasis here is not on the actual work, but on the copies of it. This means that the process of copying must have begun, and a notion of the work as being unfinished and still in progress becomes less tangible. Robert has fulfilled the function of the journal and his autobiography by writing about his life up to the very point where he actually starts the printing of it.

Although the reason for the placing of the peculiar segment has been explored, its function has not. It must be assumed that it is written to enlighten the reader on some serious aspect of the book and that it must be written at the latest stage of Robert's life, as he explains that the key lies in the pages that succeed this segment - pages that describe events that have seemingly yet to happen. I believe the peculiar segment was added, as the initial passage, at the time of Robert's last diary entry as a result of his revelation that he is in fact not being handed salvation, but an eternity in hell. The “key to the process” is thus the acknowledgement that, contrary to the essence of his belief in his printed work, he cannot kill innocent people and clergymen in the name of the Lord, curse God, and expect to still be given salvation. To support this theory is the dividing of the peculiar segment into two different passages. The division implies that the first passage's relationship to the next is not as strong as if they had been part of a whole. A reason for the first sentence to stand on its own can be found in the grammar of the sentence. The sentence implies that the word “carried” must be interpreted literally. In other words,

when Robert states “[t]hus far have my History and Confessions been carried” he is saying that he has physically “carried” the papers with his “History and Confessions” up to this point, which is the time and place of Robert's last diary entry. He then makes a new passage and starts a new topic – “the key to the process” - and now he must provide his readers with the “key” that he has discovered over the course of his diary and, consequently, his days of running from Gil-Martin: the awareness that the elect are not infallible.

To conclude this chapter, the narrative of Robert is not as ambiguous as some critics would like it to be. By separating the initial passage of Robert's memoir from his journal and connecting it to his last two diary entries, the initial passage can be viewed not as an introduction to a confession of an Elect, but as a “true” confession of someone who faces eternal damnation. The connection between the initial passage and the last diary entries, and their similar way of depicting Robert's state of mind and position in life, is based on the fact that these passages could have been written at the same time. Evidence of this connection is found in the passages themselves, and in the mirroring of each other. By targeting these important passages and exploring the possibility of a connection, the ambiguity of Robert's memoir diminishes. The reason Robert implemented the initial passage comes from his confession to his readers that predestination does not guarantee infallibility. Robert uses the initial passage to tell his "true" confession: by adhering to the principles of Antinomianism he has effectively abandoned God and the true principles of the church – good moral being an example. The “key” to the *Confessions* lies exactly in this awareness of Robert; that he is damned and that he decides to show the world how he came to this position. In the end, Robert shows the insight that he has been lacking when he identifies himself, not as a champion of Christianity, but as

a blind follower of a 'sighted gospel'; and in this lies the essence of his "true" confession: in the end he is not a "justified sinner", only a sinner.

## V. Conclusion

*The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* has been the subject of critical discussion for a long period of time. The discussions mainly revolve around the inconsistencies and ambiguity of the two narratives in the novel: the Editor's and Robert Wringhim's. This paper shows how some of this ambiguity is warranted, and how some of it is possible to diminish by perceiving the narratives in a different way than some critics do. The novel is an ambiguous one, but since this paper does not directly discuss the character Gil-Martin, some of this ambiguity is missing. The narratives of the Editor and Robert, however, can be viewed as ambiguous because of the effect that the narrators have on the reader. The Editor seeks sympathy from the reader by showing his skill as an objective historian, while Robert seeks sympathy by casting himself as a devout, but suffering, Christian. While striving for this sympathy, the narrators colour their own narrative in such a way that it serves to frame the other's narrative. This framing is making the ambiguity in the narratives more salient. However, by treating the Editor as both a function and a character in the novel, the ambiguity of the Editor is diminished. This is due to the fact that some critics partly attributes the ambiguity of the Editor's narrative to his shift in appearance, or role, throughout the novel. This paper argues that this shift is a conscious one and that it is to be expected when the Editor enters the novel as a character. The narrative of Robert can also be regarded as less ambiguous than some critics treat it. By attempting to separate the initial passage of Robert's memoir from the rest of his journal and connect it with his last diary entries, the ambiguity diminishes by juxtaposing the two resembling passages – the initial passage and the last diary entries. These passages can be looked at as equal in mindset and their connection can possibly explore the true motive behind Robert's confession – that he

is not an infallible member of the Elect, but a sinning murderer who faces eternal damnation. Both narratives can be seen as less ambiguous if the reader acknowledges the fact that both narrators are aware of that they change behaviour during the novel, and that this shift in station is not a mark of inconsistency.



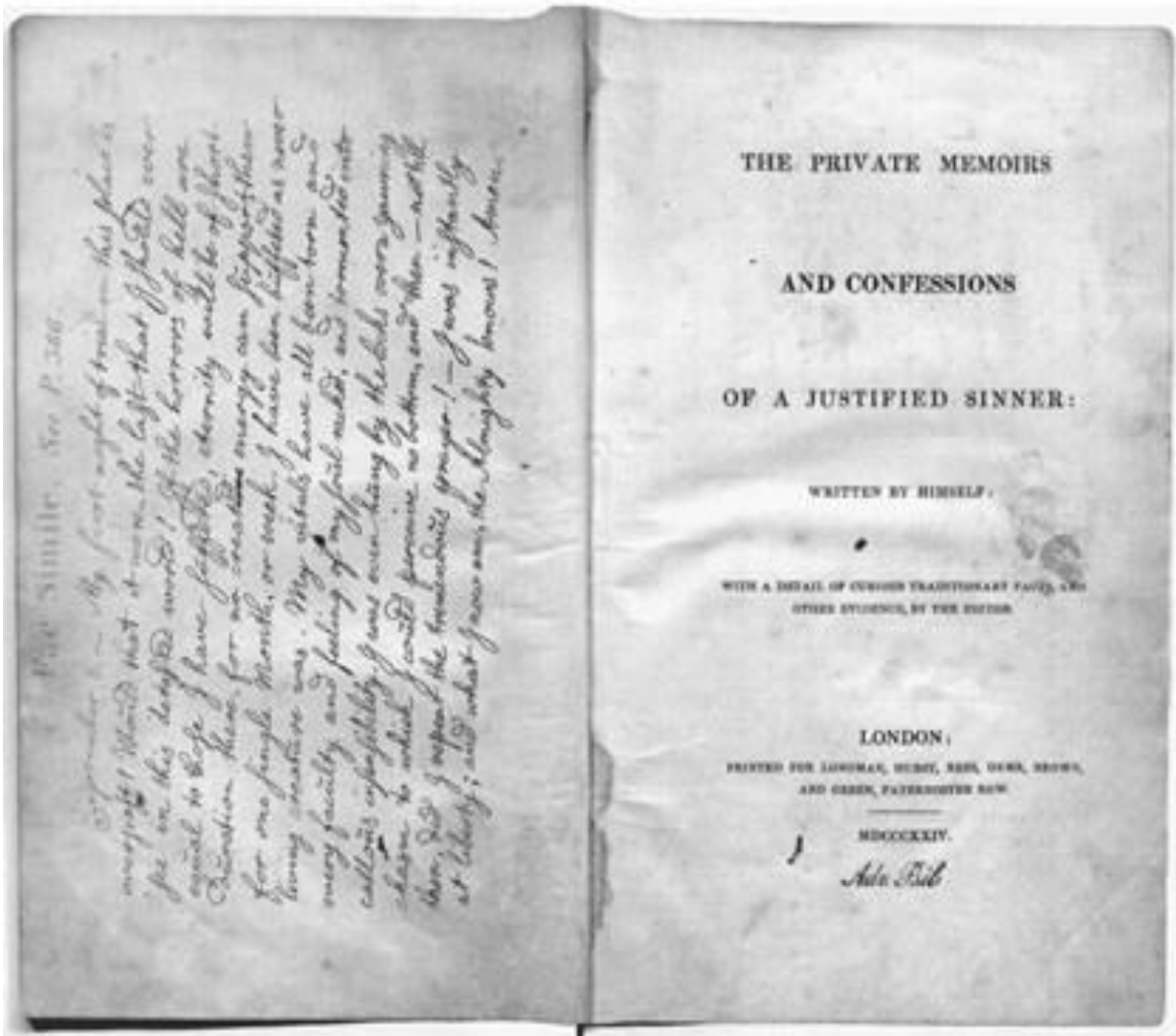
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VII. Appendix I: Frontispiece



Page similar, see P. 266.

My first night of trial in this place is  
unhappy! I think that it was the last that I spent ever  
in this desolate world! Of the horrors of hell are  
equal to those I have felted, eternity will be of short  
duration here for an ~~instant~~ eternity can support them  
for one single month, or week, I have been buffeted as never  
before. My vitals have all been torn and  
every faculty and feeling of my soul maddened, and torn into  
callous insensibility. I was even hung by the heels over yawning  
churns to which I could perceive no bottom, and then - not till  
then, did I repeat the tremendous prayer! - I was instantly  
at liberty; and what I saw on the bloody brow! Amen.