The ‘Other’ in Hogg’s *Justified* Sinner: Man, and God, Robert Wringhim and Gil-Martin.

The Gothic Tradition (EN42029)

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'Religion has degraded the very idea of "man;" its ultimate consequence is that all goodness, greatness, and truth are superhuman, and are bestowed to grace alone.'[1]

Frederich Nietzsche wrote extensively on the flaws of religion, specifically Christianity. His *Critique of Religion* confronts the dangers of placing all 'good' on an abstract, metaphysical, figure of divinity. Consequently, Nietzsche wrote that 'man has never dared to attribute all of his strong moments to himself.' James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (*Justified Sinner* henceforth*)* is set a century prior to Nietzsche's religious criticisms in 19th century Scotland. It follows the morally corrupt life of Robert Wringhim as he embarks on a series of brutal murders and his eventual suicide. Influenced by his 'double' and a figure who can be understood as a representation of the Devil, Gil Martin persuades Robert he is one of the elects and is predestined for salvation, manipulating Robert's beliefs to convince him murder is the only course of action.

Hogg's novel is a satirical take on Calvinist extremism, which manifests itself across the novel, firstly in the title itself with the contradictory concept of a 'justified sinner.' Hogg reverses Nietzsche's idea of all good being superhuman and plays with the idea of all bad being bestowed on the Devil. Resonant with Nietzsche, although through different literary mediums (fiction vs non-fiction), Hogg too critiques the lack of agency and accountability inherent to intense religious devotion by satirising the idea of being 'possessed by the devil' through the enigmatic Gil Martin, whom Robert uses as a moral remedy for his sins.

Through application of Nietzsche's religious philosophy, it will be argued that Gil-Martin functions not as a literal double but as a literary 'Other' an externalised projection of Robert's religious fanaticism that allows Hogg to satirise Calvinist ideas of predestination and moral justification.

[1] Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Critique of Religion' in *Penguin Great Ideas: God is Dead. God Remains Dead. And We Have Killed Him,* (London, Penguin Random House), pp.1-50. (p.4).

GIL MARTIN AS A LITERARY 'DOUBLE' TO SATIRISE THE 'OTHERING' OF HUMAN ACTIONS TO GOD

Robert (and his alter-ego Gil) is a satirical embodiment of the religious fanatic, as seen in both 'The Editor's Narrative' and 'Confessions of a Sinner.' Alicia Tomero explains that:

> 'The religious fanatic is often convinced that **their way of believing is the only true one** and that everything that deviates from their doctrine is **error, heresy, ignorance, or even evil**. From there, the idea of imposing one's own convictions "for the good of others" or "in the name of God" is **easily justified**, leading them to accept any means to defend their cause.'[2]

Although 'The Editors Narrative' provides a much more objective account of Robert's behaviour his fanatical mindset is still portrayed, even if it is a more rational interpretation of his character and actions. From childhood, it was ingrained in Robert by his pseudo-father Pastor Wringhim, that he must 'only pray to the elect' and 'doom to all that were aliens from God to destruction.' The Editor describes Robert as holding those aliens 'in **utter abhorrence** and prayed against then every day' and as hoping they 'be carried quick into **hell**.' [3]

Robert's most impressionable years were shaped by a religious zealot; it is no surprise his thought-process became so warped. The aggressive, yet objective, language used by Hogg provides an accurate depiction of Robert's psyche (in contrast to the unreliable narrative of 'Confessions') and demonstrates his genuine belief of being an elect destined for salvation. 'Othering' is evident here in Hogg's use of 'alien,' inferring that Robert has been repulsed by those who do not share his mindset from youth. Gil later persuades him, that he must be the one to 'carry them quick to hell.'

When Gil, who declares himself Robert's 'second self,' appears there are various attributions to youthfulness. Hogg's use of repetition is impactful as Robert describes Gil as a 'young man of

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[2] Alicia Tomero, 'What is Religious Fanaticism', *Postposmo,* 14 December 2025 < What is religious fanaticism, causes, examples and consequences> [Accessed 03 March 2025].

[3] James Hogg, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner,* (Oxford University Press, 2010) p.17.

mysterious appearance,' 'a stranger youth,' and an 'extraordinary youth' whom he conceives as his 'guardian angel.'[4] Gil proclaims that:

> 'I am indeed your brother, not according to the flesh, but in my belief of the **same truths**, and my assurance in the same mode of **redemption**, than which, I hold nothing so **great** or **glorious** on earth' and that he is to become '**a humble disciple** of yours (Robert); to be initiated into **the true way of salvation**.'[5]

Robert, who never knew his brother George, has likely always sought companionship with someone of similar views to him; Gil (a fellow fanatic) is his dream, which is precisely why Gil should be considered as a manifestation of Robert's psyche and not a tangible being. Hogg's repetition of 'youth' reinforces this child-like dream Robert has of companionship and brotherhood; but that is precisely what Gil is, a mere dream. Subsequently, by establishing Gil as a figment of Robert's imagination and ideation of brotherhood, Hogg critiques notions of predestination and redemption as false and delusional. Gil is the brother Robert wishes he had but never got.

The biblical language utilised by Hogg furthers the notion of Robert genuinely believing he is an elect (a completely banal concept in-itself). The language of Gil - 'truths,' 'redemption,' 'disciple', 'salvation', 'glorious'- expresses everything Robert wants to hear; its like taking a child into a sweetshop. In understanding Gil as part of Robert's psyche, it is evident that Robert has deep delusions of being freed from sin by God, despite his subsequent horrific acts.

Gil is a manifestation of Robert's devout, unwavering, fanaticism, which began in childhood. Gil's youthfulness is symbolic of Robert's first dwellings with the idea he is an elect, and now Gil, in a similar situation to young Robert, wants to learn all he can about being an elect, which Robert relishes. Robert has finally met somebody who shares his radical ideals and is euphoric, thus Gil can

[4] Hogg, p.89.

[5] Hogg, pp.89-90.

therefore be understood as a manifestation of the radical ideologies which were ingrained in Robert from childhood.

The fact that Gil is a sheer psychological imagining satirises the concept of being 'close with God' or 'possessed by the Devil' because at best they are divine figures, and at worst, pure fiction. Hogg places the Devil within this context of companionship because it is more alarming and sinister; if Robert were to be possessed by God it would likely be read as a conventional, unproblematic religious tale. Applicable to Hogg's purpose is Nietzsche:

> 'In so far as everything great and strong in man was thought of as *superhuman* and *alien,* **man diminishes himself into two parts**, one very **wretched** and weak, the other very **strong** and startling, and set them in their **separate spheres**, calling one 'Man' and the other 'God.''[6]

Gil, who is dissimilar to Robert 'in flesh' but the same 'in spirit' embodies this separation of spheres, where all evil acts committed by Robert can be attributed to his devilish, non-existent companion Gil.

Nietzsche confronts this danger from two sides; anything 'great' and 'strong' in man is disregarded not as the capabilities of man, but of the higher workings of a divine being. Conversely, all 'strong' acts of violence and evil can be attributed to the work of the Devil. Robert's certainty in predestination means he can separate himself from moral responsibility and accountability.

By attributing his violent impulses to the demonic influence of Gil, Hogg reproduces the division Nietzsche identifies between the self and supernatural forces. Thus, Gil is less of an independent supernatural being but a manifestation of Robert's extremism. By externalising his violent impulses onto a demonic figure, Robert maintains the delusion of spiritual righteousness while murdering.

'DOUBLING' TO HIGHLIGHT 'THE OTHER.'

The notion of the double is immensely popular in gothic-fiction and modern culture; Hogg's novel is one of the earliest examples of this trope. William Hughes highlights that:

[6] Nietzsche, p.4.

> ‘Doubling foregrounds the motif of **mirroring**, in particular the projection of one’s fears, **desires**, and anxieties onto the other, which becomes an uncomfortable reflection of ugly traits that the self **refuses to acknowledge**. The other thus reveals the social ills and moral decay that society tends to ignore.’[7]

Hugh’s definition is textbook for *Justified Sinner* and later gothic-fiction. Gil’s function as a double emphasises his ‘otherness’ as a Devil figure in relation to Robert. Further echoing Nietzsche as Hugh conveys this sense of ‘othering’ between God and Man, which Hogg uses to critique Calvinist extremism. Not only is Gil a double, but Robert’s ideological reflection. Rather than functioning as a typical gothic double, readers are left confused as to whether he is a physical double (e.g. Dorian Gray, Mr Hyde) or a psychological vision (Fight Club). Gil highlights a logical endpoint of Robert’s Calvinist worldview; his actions exceed the boundaries of traditional religion and venture into the fanatical and antinomian.

Not only is Robert himself ‘doubled’ but the novel is structured in a similar capacity in that it is a twice-told tale. Ian Duncan explains that:

> ‘Hogg divides the novel's narration between an editor, who compiles an **antiquarian**, objective, third-person history **according to Enlightenment canons**, and the justified sinner, Robert Wringhim, whose early eighteenth-century memoir, dug up with his corpse, is exhibited as a specimen of "**the rage of fanaticism in former days**."’[8]

The novel’s doubled narrative structure mirrors Robert’s divided consciousness, where the two accounts (Editor’s and Sinner’s) contradict each other, creating an uncertainty about truth for readers.

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[7] William Hughes, David Punter, and Andrew Smith, ‘Doubling’ in *The Encyclopaedia of the Gothic*. (Wiley-Blackwell, 2013) <Glossary of the Gothic: Doubling Glossary of the Gothic: Doubling | Glossary of the Gothic | Marquette University> [Accessed 03 March 2026].

[8] Ian Duncan, ‘Fanaticism and Civil Society: Hogg’s Justified Sinner’ *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 42.2 (2009), pp. 343–48. (p.343) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27764326>

The dual narrative externalises the fragmentation within Robert's mind, as does Gil, dramatizing the tension between internal selves and allowing the reader to experience the dissonance of his mental state.

The technique of doubling creates an 'other' since the self is projected onto another being or entity, yet there are clear disparities between the self, and 'the other' self. This is seen through Gil and Robert, the doubled narration, and the characterisation of Robert and George.

Hogg contrasts George and Robert as opposites, yet since they are brothers, they are in a sense 'doubled,' with George functioning as 'the other' in relation to Robert. Hogg juxtaposes the two brothers to highlight the differences between George's humanity and Robert's fanaticism. George is described as a 'generous and kind-hearted youth: always ready to oblige, and hardly ever dissatisfied with anybody' whilst Robert 'had ardent and ungovernable passions, and, withal, a sternness of demeanour from which other boys shrunk.'[9]

Robert's characterisation throughout the text represents delusion and extremism whereas George acts as a foil figure, symbolising rationality, and morality. The two are moral opposites and are resonant of biblical parables such as Cain and Abel, resonating further with the concept of the double. Yet, the 'other' is integrated into this automatically because with doubling, there is always an 'other'; man and God, Robert and George, Robert and Gil, Cain and Abel, God and Satan.

This sense of an 'other' inherent to the trope of the double allows for the separation of spheres Nietzsche spoke of; there is always blame to be laid on the 'other' and the potential for a lack of accountability for one's actions, whether positive or negative. To further the analogy of Robert and George, a relation is clear to religious fanaticism, and the antinomianism sect of Calvinism Robert belongs to, which guiding philosophy is a rejection to the law. Feilding highlights that:

> 'The novel traces a violent collision between **two forms of compulsion: a modern, legal, civic order versus a religious conviction that takes no heed of historical variation**. (These

[9] Hogg, p.17

> two forms do not, of course, fit neatly into the novel's two narratives.) Confessions addresses the problem of right action. Should we act from inner conviction? From precedent? Or according to an agreed code?'[10]

In this light, Robert is the obvious fanatic, and George represents moderation and moral code. Meridith Evans furthers this by explaining that '(antinomianism's) threat is great enough to **paralyze law** and its guiding notion for, by resisting their terms and procedures, it directly opposes itself and insists instead on a **transcendental immunity** to their potentially restorative powers.'[11]

Like the comparisons made by Nietzsche of God and man, the same binaries can be argued for Goerge and Robert. In civilised society, Robert is indeed the 'other' who does not conform to moral codes. Hogg again uses inversion and instead places George in the role of the 'other', creating psychological horror and ensuing fear in readers to satirise the removal of human accountability when attributes of both good and evil are placed in supernatural beings.

THE CREATION OF FEAR THROUGH METAPICTION

The fear created in the novel lies in Robert's characterisation; his mental instability generates fear as readers cannot tell if Gil is real or imagined as the boundaries between reality and delusion blur. Robert's erratic account of events is a stark contrast to the objective (characteristic of enlightenment ideals) account presented by the Editor, the opening paragraph of his 'confessions' makes this clear:

> 'I will let the **wicked of this world** know what I have done in the **faith** of promises, and **justification by grace**, that they may read and tremble…the **minister of heaven** was removed from their **sphere** before their **blood** was mingled with their **sacrifices**.'

[10] Penny Fielding, 'The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner: Approaches," in *The Edinburgh Companion to James Hogg*, (Edinburgh University Press 2020), pp. 132–139. (p.138) <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780748655144-020>

[11] Meridith Evans, 'Persons Fall Apart: James Hogg's Transcendent Sinner' *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 36.2 (2009) pp.198-215 (p.198) <**https://www.jstor.org/stable/1346126**>

The unstable narration, which continues for the remainder of 'Confessions' creates uncertainty about the nature of reality in the text, generating a sense of religious paranoia that reflects anxieties surrounding extreme Calvinist belief. The structural division between the novel's two narrators produces a metafictional tension within the novel, forcing readers to question the reliability of both accounts.

In the above quotation, Robert frames his violent actions as divinely sanctioned, using the Calvinist doctrine of election to justify his behaviour. His claim that 'the minister of heaven was removed from their sphere before their blood was mingled with their sacrifices' reveals the extent of his fanaticism, as he interprets murder as a righteous act conducted under divine authority, which further resonates with Nietzsche's discussion on the separation of spheres between man and God.

With this Hogg exposes how theological certainty can be distorted into a dangerous form of moral absolutism. Again, the biblical language Hogg utilises in Robert's narration makes evident his devout belief that he is an elect and ironically, he mentions 'their sacrifices' referring to those who don't share his beliefs, yet it is him who makes the ultimate, 'everlasting detestation' of sacrifice in his suicide.[12]

Chris Baldick adheres that metafiction is:

> '…a kind of fiction that openly comments on its own fictional status…the term is normally used for works that involve **a significant degree of self-consciousness about themselves as fictions,** in ways that go beyond occasional apologetic addresses to the reader.' [13]

Hogg more abrasively employs metafictional elements through his own cameo in the novel, where a letter from Hogg himself, which was 'published in *Blackwood's Magazine for August*,1823' is included, inserting the author into the fiction. This destabilises the reader with a sort of 'falseness' to

[12] Hogg, p.189.

[13] Chris Baldick, 'Metafiction' in *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms, (*Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) <http://libezproxy.dundee.ac.uk/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/encyclopedias-reference-works/metafiction/docview/2137965134/se-2>

the text and forcing them to question the possibility of rational explanation, which they are never granted. Magdelene Redekop describes Hogg's intervention as:

> '…the concluding whirlwind of confusion…by the constant creation and frustration of our generic expectations, **Hogg has created an important new expectation: that all our expectations for rational order will be frustrated**. Since the design of the novel has nourished a healthy suspicion of closure**, the only possible ending is an open one**.[14][15]

Instead of resolving the mystery of Gil's identity, Hogg leaves readers caught between the supernatural and psychological; the ending is unresolved and causes fear in the reader; not simply through Robert's actions, the grave digging, or the Editor's perplexion, but through the confrontation with the limits of rationality itself.

The destabilising narrative mirrors the novel's exploration of the 'other' through doubling, which is primarily exemplified through the complicated relationship between Robert and Gil. Although Gil can be interpreted in many lights (the devil, a double, a projection of Robert's religious fanaticism), for each the case can be made that Gil is symbolic of a force externalised from Robert's psyche.

In this sense, the novel anticipates Nietzsche's critique of religion degrading the idea of humanity by relocating goodness beyond the human realm. Robert's belief in divine election leads him to attribute moral authority not to human consciousness or a tangible reality, but to supernatural grace (God), which allows Gil to emerge as this terrifying 'other' which legitimises violence.

The metaphysical instability readers are confronted with, and the denial of certainty, is purposeful as Hogg forces them to contemplate the disturbing reality that the boundary between man and God (and between Robert and Gil) is fundamentally unstable.

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[14] Hogg, p.179.

[15] Magdalene Redekop, 'Beyond Closure: Buried Alive with Hogg's Justified Sinner' *ELH* 52.1 (1985) pp.159-`84 (p.178) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2872832>

Ultimately, *Justified Sinner* reveals that the 'other' is not a supernatural entity but a psychological and ideological construction produced by religious extremism. Throughout the novel, Robert's belief in predestination and divine election warped his psyche, leading him to displace moral responsibility onto external forces.

Gil-Martin is the literary embodiment of this division: not as a literal double, but a projection of Robert's fanaticism and his desire to reconcile violent impulses with spiritual righteousness. Hogg's satire highlights how the logic of predestination encourages the separation of human agency from moral accountability. Hogg dramatises Nietzsche's division of spheres through the gothic trope of doubling, which creates an 'Other': Robert becomes both man and 'Other', projecting evil onto Gil to maintain the illusion of divine election.

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