

BURNS, HOGG AND THE DANGEROUS ART

This paper follows a consideration of a habit of mind which seems to have been deeply characteristic of some sections of Scotland, and some parts of the Church in Scotland. It is all too easy to dismiss certain habits of mind and codes of behaviour as 'Calvinistic', a form of critical (or uncritical) shorthand far too common today. Always alert to the dangers of confusing Calvin's work with the development of its ideas by his successors, and equally aware of the danger of confusing 'Calvinism' as a system with a code of behaviour, I would describe the area of interest of this paper as that tradition in Scotland which finds most distasteful any attempt to comprehend the infinite Nature and Power of God in merely human terms – to confuse God with mortal powers or capacities, or to try to contain Him in a system which is wholly the product of a merely human intellect.

It would be not too difficult to trace a line from the efflorescence of image-breaking and anti-idolatory which followed the Reformation to the modern taste for bare churches, plain glass, even the distaste still felt for elaborate music in worship. Kinraddie's peasants exemplified this attitude of mind exactly in Lewis Grassie Gibbon's description of Arbutnott Church in *Sunset Song*:

But the windows of the main hall, though they were coloured, they had never a picture in them and there were no pictures in there at all, who wanted them? Only coarse creatures like Catholics wanted a kirk to look like a grocer's calendar. So it was decent and bare-like, with its carved old seats, some were cushioned and some were not, if you weren't padded by nature and had the silver to spend you might put in cushions to suit your fancy. Right up in the lithe of the pulpit, at angles-like to the rest of the kirk, were the three seats where the choir sat and led the hymn-singing; and some called it the calvie's stall.

The tone here is beautifully caught; it is a tone of contemptuous no-nonsense philistinism, a virtuous philistinism self-justified in its conviction that sound theology and bare walls were inseparable.

Literary analogues are not difficult to find, perhaps the most obvious being Davie Deans in *The Heart of Midlothian*. To him life is a serious business, lived out in the gaze of an ever-present all-seeing God, and there is no room in such a life for artistic aids of worship. When art intrudes, in the shape of Effie's singing and dancing, the father's condemnation is quick and killing, and so

Effie's confidences to her sister are interrupted, and the tragedy set under way. Davie Deans is happy late in the novel to sit in a bare kirk, listening to long sermons directed at the art of living well. His daughter sufficiently follows her father's tenets to distrust at sight the artistically more pleasing nature of Mr. Staunton's Church in England. The Devil might lurk in every pleasing note of music, every whirl of decoration.

Jeanie Deans, declining to attend family worship in an English rectory, says

'I thank your honour, but I am doubtful if my attendance would be to edification.'

'How', said the Rector, 'so young, and already so unfortunate enough to have doubts upon the duties of religion!'

'God forbid, sir', replied Jeanie; 'it is not for that; but I have been bred in the faith of the suffering remnant of the Presbyterian doctrine in Scotland, and I am doubtful if I can lawfully attend upon your fashion of worship, seeing it has been testified against by many precious souls of our Kirk . . . though the waters [of salvation] may be alike, yet, with your worship's leave, the blessing upon them may not be equal.' The Rector civilly does not press the point, so Jeanie's conscience is unstrained by an attendance on Episcopalian worship. (ch. 34).

At best, the writer can exploit this subtlety to excellent effect, and at his best Scott can do this, in Fairservice's speeches in *Rob Roy*, and throughout *Old Mortality*.

An example is how Andrew Fairservice guides the conversation in chapter 18 of *Rob Roy*. His peasant shrewdness easily overcomes the impression of simplemindedness which his broad Scots might convey.

'I tell you, all I want to know is the road I must travel; I will pay the fellow to his satisfaction – I will give him anything in reason'.

'Ony thing', replied Andrew, 'is naething; and this lad that I am speaking o' kens a' the short cuts and queer bye-ways through the hills; and –'

'I have no time to talk about it, Andrew; do you make the bargain for me in your own way'.

'Aha! that's speaking to the purpose,' answered Andrew. – 'I am thinking, since sae be that sae it is, I'll be the lad that will guide you mysell.'

A more complex case is *Old Mortality*, for here the Scots of the Covenanters (though not of other characters like Cuddie Headrigg) is heavily influenced by Biblical English.

'He hath spoken the word', said one of the assembly – 'he hath avowed his carnal self-seeking and Erastianism; let him die the death!'

'Peace yet again', said Macbriar, 'for I will try him further. – Was it not by thy means that the malignant Evandale twice escaped from death and captivity? Was it not through thee that Miles Bellenden and his garrison of cut-throats were saved from the edge of the sword?'

'I am proud to say, that you have spoken the truth in both instances', replied Morton.

'Lo! you see', said Macbriar, 'again hath his mouth spoken it. – And didst thou not do this for the sake of a Midianitish woman, one of the spawn of prelacy, a toy with which the arch-enemy's trap is baited? Didst thou not do all this for the sake of Edith Bellenden?'

'You are incapable', answered Morton, boldly, 'of appreciating my feelings towards that young lady . . .' (ch. 33)

Complex feelings here are being manipulated by the coarseness of the language used by the questioners against the simple dignity of the replies. Yet no easy equation can be made, for elsewhere in this novel, and particularly in *The Antiquary* the equation of simple dignity and Scots language is made by Scott.

Oldbuck finds Mucklebackit mending the boat, from which his son Steenie had drowned.

'I am glad', he said, in a tone of sympathy, 'I am glad, Sunders, that you feel yourself able to make this exertion.'

'And what would ye have me to do', answered the fisher gruffly, 'unless I wanted to see four children starve, because ane is drowned? It's weel wi' you gentles, that can sit in the house wi' handkerchers at your een when ye lose a friend; but the like o' us maun to our wark again, if our hearts were beating as my hammer.' (ch. 34)

At worst, the embodying of this attitude produces crude philistine caricatures. Often the caricature is all the more wicked for having a good grain of truth, and the example of Holy Willie comes readily to mind. Holy Willie's position would be untenable if he were not thoroughly convinced of the rightness of his own cause, for he calls vengeance from heaven on his opponents. By opposing him, they earn Divine wrath. Holy Willie is secure in his life-style, and his religious convictions, so secure that he can shelter behind them as behind an unalterable system. He and his fellow-elders, put to shame by Aiken, are nevertheless right; what put them to shame was mere art, rhetoric:

O Lord, my God; that glib-tongu'd Aiken,
 My vera heart and flesh are quakin
 To think how we stood sweatin, shakin,
 An' pish'd wi' dread,
 While Auld, wi' hingin lip gaed sneaking
 And hid his head . . .

Gavin Hamilton, too, escapes rightful vengeance because he has 'sae monie takin arts'. Arts are not what counts: what counts is the way of life, adherence to a code of morals, and here Willie thinks himself unassailable.

Burn's art here is so exactly to catch Willie's tone that the audience can respond to the poem on two levels at once. They can, of course, believe in Willie, accept the fictional presence. The address is so winningly presented, so neatly catches the holy whine, that it can be read to good effect, and recited with applause. Yet the audience is *simultaneously* aware of something terribly, monstrously incongruous in what is being said. What is wrong is not merely the incongruity of the style of what is said to the person being addressed. Willie's style of address to God is consciously low, unartistic, informal, in contrast to Gavin Hamilton's 'takin arts'. The later low style is in fact emphasized by Burns, in the over-formal opening and closing lines:

O, Thou, that in the Heavens does dwell
 Wha, as it pleases best Thysel
 Sends ane to Heaven an' ten to Hell
 A' for Thy glory . . .

But Lord remember me and mine,
 Wi' mercies temporal and divine
 And a' the glory shall be Thine –
 Amen! Amen!

Here the glib repetition of pulpit phrase, and well-worn cliché is the holy whine, the tone which Claverhouse's soldiers are quick to satirise in Burley's speeches at the opening of *Old Mortality*. At its best, this way of using pulpit speech for everyday situations can be dignified and becoming, as it is in John Maxwell in Lockhart's *Adam Blair*.

John Maxwell (ch. 17) unwittingly breaks the news of Charlotte's death to Mr. Blair.

'Oh! sir,' said John, 'if you knew it not before, I have done much amiss.'

'Speak out – let me hear – have you brought me evil tidings of my child? I charge you speak out. I am prepared for all things! – what blow can be too great?'

'God be praised, the bairn was well two days ago, and I trust is so now. – It was not of her that I spake.'

'Of whom spake you?'

'Oh sir . . . I spake of Mrs. Campbell.'

Maxwell, who speaks a very 'thin' Scots, heavily influenced by Biblical English, is a clear spokesman for order and morality when 'sinners' like Blair and Campbell speak English. In the case of Holy Willie it is a travesty, and one which warns the audience to be on their guard, to take the poem on more than one level. For the rest of the monologue does not measure up to this 'high' style. The more heart-felt the emotion, such as human vanity, and open hate for others, the less 'high' and sincere the style of address to God. Holy Willie's style in the prayer comes closer and closer to the gossiping of Barbie's bodies in *The House with the Green Shutters*, in its greedy condemnation of Gavin Hamilton and the Presbytery of Ayr. Worse, it reaches the level of sexual innuendo:

O Lord! yestreen, Thou kens, wi' Meg –
Thy pardon I sincerely beg –

'Thou kens' – the secret is between the All-Seeing and Willie, but it is delivered with a knowing nudge, and the second line and its mention of 'pardon' is terribly incongruous. As the stanza goes on, the nudge becomes more violent:

An' I'll ne'er lift a lawless leg
Again upon her.

Besides, I further maun avow –
Wi' Leezie's lass, three times, I trow –

Always just avoiding the explicit, the sexual references are on the level of bar-room gossip, totally out of keeping with the quasi-serious intention of this poem. If this is formal confession, the unburdening of sins, it starts formally, and ends with the due ascription of glory, but the central section, as Burns intended, is out of key.

The intention is to counterpoint the expected style with the actual. Thus the audience is given ample indication by the words to take their meaning seriously, or with reservation. On the most superficial level, this poem has a unity in the sense that it is a continuous address to God, in the privacy of a confessional prayer. This prayer of confession and intercession could be made either in public as part of the service, or in the context of private or family worship; in this case it is private, and it is just credible as such.

Yet we return to the two levels on which Burns is operating. Underneath this superficial unity, there is a fundamental disunity, and that is signalled by the quality of the language, in particular

by the disharmony between the style of the petition, and the fact that it is addressed to God. The art which the prayer shows is a fossilized one, accepted from the daily and weekly use of public and private prayer. The real matter of the poem is in conversational Scots, and it accords badly with the intention of the prayer, which is self-abasement and humility. In earlier centuries, admittedly, there had been notable cases of preachers using Scots, fluently and idiomatically, but by Burns's time this practice had declined, and 'moderate' preaching would not have countenanced such low style. The words used by Willie have no art; their style is too low for their purpose, and so the situation is exposed as ludicrous. The coarse tone accords ill with the continuous 'Thy' form, addressing God; the holy tone reasserts itself only to signal some monstrous hypocrisy:

Maybe Thou lets this fleshly thorn
 Buffet Thy servant e'en and morn,
 Lest he owre-proud and high should turn
 That he's sae gifted:
 If sae, Thy han' maun e'en be borne
 Until Thou lift it.

The hypocrisy of this stanza – justifying unbridled lust as a 'thorn in the flesh' sent from Heaven to test Willie, is made even worse by the self-abasement of the tone, no trace of bar-room conviviality remaining, but pure 'pulpit' quasi-biblical usage characterizing the whole stanza. The 'art' here reasserts itself, in what Willie imagines to be a direct address to God, summing up a whole section of the argument. The audience of Burns's time might see more closely than we do today the implicit Biblical reference to 'a thorn in the flesh' which Paul wrote of as 'the messenger of Satan to buffet me' (II Cor. 12:7), although they would also see the twist which has taken place in Willie's mind, by crediting to God something which Paul credited to Satan. The overall point is that the attempt to be more artful in this stanza merely heightens the hypocrisy: style and sense go hand in hand, and a climax is reached in the hypocrisy and self-deception of the monologue.

Overall, the poem is clearly intended for recitation, and the reciter may control the audience-response to a very considerable extent by modulating his tone. Yet independent of this, there is the rhetoric of the words themselves, and Burns is clearly manipulating the style within the poem. Willie tries to be 'artistic' at times, consciously twisting his word-patterns into something obviously dead and alien because he associates it with the Bible and pulpit usage. This sounds strained and false, yet worse follows when he attempts the informal low-style speech of man-to-man conviviality

with God, which curiously is probably the more sincere form for him. He transgresses the common conventions of style used in addressing God, which is bad; he makes thinly-veiled sexual innuendoes for the Almighty's amusement, which is worse; he deceives himself without deceiving one of his audience, which is worst of all, for it defies the ostensible reason for the whole monologue, which is a prayer of confession and self-abasement.

Holy Willie's Prayer achieves not self-abasement, but self-revelation. Although broad to the point of parody, it is a triumph for Burns, not so much in the allusion to local ecclesiastical controversy, witty though this is, nor in the broad satire of the belief in justification of the elect, simultaneously with the irrevocable damnation of the remainder of mankind – a doctrine which pervades the early stanzas. The real triumph of Holy Willie lies in the manipulation of styles, of expected styles and unexpected, unexpected by Willie, by his then audience, by the audience today. The tone shifts continuously, and subtly indicates the extent of debasement in the words. The art of the poem is enormous, and partly concealed, in the best traditions of the classical dictum that 'ars est celare artem'. The art is very largely concerned with the *absence* of art in Willie's theological world. Not for Willie the service-book, the music, the ritual of worship. Self-consciously he seeks to follow out the theories of his Calvinistic world-picture, and communicate directly with his God. His self-consciousness is revealed in his use of art, at second-hand, in Biblical language. Yet when this passes, and he quite rejects rhetorical art, the offence is worse still. Willie's sin, hypocrisy, cannot be hidden: *Holy Willie's Prayer* is a subtle triumph in the art with which it exposes Willie's blundering art.

The attitude of Man to his Creator in a Calvinist world-picture is also a subject of considerable importance in Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, and the points made in the discussion of Burns above may be used to open a fresh discussion on some aspects of that subtle and far-reaching satire of human pride and malignity disguised as religious feeling. I have argued elsewhere¹ that in Hogg's time the audience of the novel would have been far more aware of exact Biblical parallel and reference than some modern audiences, and that Hogg himself would have had a close and detailed acquaintance with the Bible, and the forms of Scottish worship, from his earliest youth. In some cases this leads to a near-parody of the Bible, designed to show up some characters as evil or ill-informed by implicit comparison with the Biblical originals which are being travestied.

In Hogg's novel we find a situation similar to Burns's work concerning Man's connection with his Creator. Some characters are well-adjusted, sound individuals. The Laird, though not overtly

religious, is a sincere and well-meaning man, and his speech shows little evidence of Biblical or Church influence. John Barnet, the minister's servant, on the other hand, is a pious well-living man and (like Scott's Andrew Fairservice) speaks a working-class Biblical Scots, strongly contrasting with his employer's more secular English. The balance between languages is subtle, of course (sometimes the English is more Biblical than Barnet's Scots), but almost always John Barnet is in control of his speech in a way which suggests that the Bible is part of his everyday thoughts and words, and so creeps in unbidden. His speech on being asked whether he claimed the Justified Sinner is the minister's son is typical:

'Man's thoughts are vanity, sir; they come unasked, an gang away without a dismissal, an' he canna help them'. I'm neither gaun' to say that I *think* he's your son, nor that I think he's *no* your son: sae ye needna pose me nae mair about it.' (Oxford edition, p. 106)

The tag with which it begins fits perfectly, and runs naturally on in the thought which follows. Hogg's own parents no doubt spoke the same language, strongly interlaced with quotation or adapted quotation from the Bible. The effect in Hogg's hands of this sort of interchange almost always redounds to the advantage of the poor man, whose Biblical language is part of his everyday speech.

'Well, John, this is a fine day for your delving work'.

'Ey, it's a tolerable day, sir'.

'Are you thankful, in your heart, John, for such temporal mercies as these?'

'Aw doubt we're a' ower little thankfu', sir, baith for temporal an' speeritual mercies; but it isna aye the maist thankfu' heart that makes the greatest fraze wi' the tongue. (p. 104)

The minister's tone is the catechist's stern English, calling to mind the scene in Neil Gunn's *Silver Darlings* where the missionary goes round the room of poor working people, testing their soundness in the catechism. John Barnet is fully a match for the minister's tone, and can even use non-Biblical tags to puncture the minister's formal pose in this whole scene. The minister loses, and is driven to threats; John Barnet loses his job, but wins the argument.

Linguistic security, then, is frequently linked with strength of character. Men like John Barnet are not attacked, nor is George Colwan, nor the Laird. The narrative staple is a calm, slightly Scottish English, without affectation or Biblical quotation to excess. What *is* satirised could be described as 'Biblical English'. In Hogg, as in Burns, the audience which is alert to the finer shades of tone

is warned to be on its guard against certain characters, just by their use of words, particularly words from the Bible.

The Justified Sinner, Robert Wringhim, his 'father' (the minister) and his mother, speak the language of art. It is rarely natural or unforced, and even at an early age the Justified Sinner learns to speak this dialect. When (p. 99) he catechizes his own mother, while he is still a mere schoolboy, and confounds her with the wire-drawn subtlety of his thought, she admires him intensely.

'What a wonderful boy he is!' said my mother.

'I'm feared he turn out to be a conceited gowk', said old Barnet, the minister's man.³

The anti-climax fits perfectly the moment; the preceding paragraph has been full of boyish learning and strained allusion, and the trenchant good sense of the working man cuts it down to size. Yet this is almost the last time such good sense is allowed to comment on the Justified Sinner before he grows too old to accept such comment. He is learning the language of art, and when he can speak it to perfection, he is ready to be received into the Society of the Just.

The theological point behind the novel is the fearful extent to which some people convinced themselves of the ultimate efficacy of the doctrine of salvation by election and justification. The sinner is 'justified' when he has been persuaded that he is of the smaller number of those chosen by God for eventual salvation. For this there is some scriptural basis, but the rest of the doctrine, that no deed done on earth can interfere with this salvation, and that everyone not of the charmed circle is automatically doomed to damnation, regardless of their earthly life, is as theologically unsound as it is unchristian. Hogg and his audience would largely have recoiled from the idea, and the Wringhim family were living out a fantasy which would immediately have earned them the scorn and real hate of most of their readers aware of the theological position they took.

This is important, for the Wringhims are a family apart, very conscious of their situation as the elect who, like Holy Willie, can look around and see the rest of the world doomed to eternal torture. 'I deemed myself as an eagle among the children of men', writes Wringhim (p. 116), 'and looking down with pity and contempt on the grovelling creatures below.' The apartness of the Wringhim family is expressed partly by the behaviour, but only partly, for their devoutness is just a refined form of everyday piety. Their real separateness is expressed to the outside world by their speech, and their speech is conditioned by their secure self-conviction in their justification and ultimate redemption. Hogg's minister is closely to be compared with Burns's Willie in his blasphemous

attitude of comradely equality with God. He accepts his 'son's' talents as a natural consequence, for ' . . . I have prayed for these talents to be bestowed on him from his infancy: and do you think that Heaven would refuse a prayer so disinterested' (p. 99). How disinterested such a prayer might be is a moot point, in the sight of an audience which has very good grounds to suspect that the Sinner is the illegitimate son of the minister. The minister is hypocritical as well as sententious, but his hypocrisy is cloaked in religious terminology, and particularly in this pose of closeness to God and to His Councils. There is a far more flagrant case shortly following.

When the Justified Sinner is told by his parents that he is justified (p. 115), he uncritically accepts the statement from their mouths, and believes it implicitly throughout the remainder of the novel. Like all who believe the doctrine of antinomian predestinarianism, he has to accept a merely human token rather than a divine revelation, but this is a token reinforced by his father's account of a near-divine miracle. 'My reverend father' – which, by the way, is a superbly satirical periphrasis, not quite admitting that the minister is his father, yet not quite denying it – 'my reverend father explained to me how he had wrestled with God, as the patriarch of old had done, not for a night, but for days and years, and that in bitterness and anguish of spirit, on my account; but that *he* had at last prevailed, and had now gained the long and earnestly desired assurance of my acceptance with the Almighty, in and through the merits and sufferings of his Son . . .'. This last phrase merely heightens the grotesque exaggeration of what goes before. The merit of this vision is hypothetically seen as the minister's victory over God, with whom he has wrestled and from whom he has extorted the promise that his son is accepted into the number of the justified. It is a fairly clear Biblical paraphrase, lacking the subtlety of some of the others² in the novel: the reader turns to Genesis 32:24 and consults the story of Jacob wrestling with the Angel. There wrestles 'a man' in the Biblical version, 'till the breaking of the day', and when the match is even, and day approaching, the 'man' puts Jacob's thigh out of joint. The 'man' is urgent to go before daybreak, for the whole contest has taken place in darkness; Jacob is insistent to know his identity, but the 'man' refuses, although he says (v. 28) 'Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed'.

So far some resemblance is seen, although it is a verbal one: Jacob prevailed to the extent of not being overcome, although when the mysterious figure in the dark cared to exert the merest more-than-human power, he easily dislocated Jacob's thigh. The crucial verses are 30 and 31:

And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved. And as he passed over Peniel the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh.

In the Biblical version Jacob trembles to realise how narrow was his escape from death; to touch the Mountain of God (Exodus 19:12), to see God (Exodus 24:17, 33:20; I Kings 19:12-13) was death. Wringhim's father, a man obsessed with Old Testament theology, must have known all this very well. More, he adheres to the Calvinist world-picture which is dominated by an all-powerful Deity, controlling, foreseeing, directing all. The idea of wrestling with God and extorting promises is grotesque and blasphemous, and must have seemed so without hesitation to his contemporaries. Yet he calmly announces this, nay makes it the basis for welcoming his son into the society of the just. He has fallen into Holy Willie's trap: he has tried to by-pass the words of art, the formal forms of worship, and communicate direct with God. Yet it is not possible, and the result is self-delusion, hypocrisy, monstrous pride.

The son, the Justified Sinner, is less hardened in his attitudes early in the novel; although he spends much time with his family, he walks alone, and contemplates different people and particularly worships alone, in the fields. Again, he neglects the normal forms of worship for private communication with God, and again the author who wishes to satirize him seizes on this vulnerable point. Burns attacked Willie's informality before his Maker. Hogg attacks the minister's arrogance in the face of Divine Omnipotence. In the case of the Justified Sinner, he more subtly attacks the youth's genuine passion for communication with God.

As Mrs. Colwan wryly remarks (p. 121), the Devil frequently attacks a person at his weakest point by assuming the form of good, so that the sinner unwittingly falls while striving to rise. The minister, uncharacteristically but ironically, silences her brusquely. But her remark could have saved her son's life. His desire to be alone in the fields, to think out his relationship to his God and his fellow-men is a natural and innocent one, and a healthy counteraction to the excessive pride and presumption displayed by his parents in their attitude to God. Significantly, the first thing the Devil does is to divert the sinner from this pattern of prayer. At once, a pattern of verbal ambiguity is established.

On their first meeting, an electric shock passes through Wringhim's frame: this, he feels, is an exciting man to get to know (p. 117). 'Ah, you little know with how much pleasure I will accompany you, and join with you in your elevated devotions', says the devil. This is true: his pleasure will be in destroying this contact between Creator and created. At once he begins the process, and 'I then

discovered that the purpose for which I had sought the fields had been neglected, and that I had been diverted from the worship of God, by attending to the quibbles and dogmas of this singular and unaccountable being . . . ' (p. 118). The mark of the beast is instantly upon him, for his parents perceive him to be 'translated', but the hold is strong, and the decline to damnation rapid.

The verbal ambiguity of the devil is his chief weapon. His book ' . . . is *my* Bible, sir' (p. 124), and his intention ' . . . to render you all the service of which my poor abilities are capable' (p. 125). His speeches, like those of p. 126, are eloquent in precisely the terms used by the sinner and his father, and so irresistible to the sinner's mind. His name is Gil-Martin, ' . . . not my *Christian* name . . . ' (p. 129), but the distinction is lost on the sinner. The stranger admits that 'I have no parents save one, whom I do not acknowledge' (p. 129): his intention is to wreak havoc, and in sentences like 'Fain would I see the weapon of the Lord of Hosts, begin the work of vengeance that awaits it to do!' (p. 137) he leaves the sinner no chance. The rhetoric is the words of art to which Wringhim is accustomed, the meaning so delicately ambiguous that it can mean either God's work, or the vengeance wreaked (for whatever purpose) by God's servant. The supreme instance of irony is in the devil's assurance (p. 138) that ' he whom *thou* servest, will be ever at thy right and left hand, to direct and assist thee.' This is superb: the audience shivers, realising the sinner is trapped into a hell of trying to escape from an ever-present fiend. Yet the words mean, in the sinner's own terms, no more than a welcome assurance of God's presence, continually justifying the already-justified actions.

This is more than mere verbal trickery, the conjuring and word-catching with which Steenie Mucklebackit is faced in Scott's hell in *Wandering Willie's Tale*.⁴ Rather this approaches the sophisticated verbal trickery of Mephistopheles in *Faust*. In Marlowe, as in Hogg, a man is being attacked at his pride, his weakest point: the devil speaks his language, and traps him in his own net. Wringhim lived by a system which both embraced and discarded 'art'. In the sense that it led men to equate themselves with God, and seek direct communication rather than humble membership of a Church, it discarded 'art'. The devil, seizing this, encouraged Wringhim to commit the most terrible crimes and blasphemies acting as God's direct agent. In the sense that Wringhim's world is over-dominated by 'art', by the verbal contortions and mental sophistries of an intense and unscrupulous knowledge of the Bible and minor theologians, it is also vulnerable to the devil, for the devil again does no more than turn Wringhim's own strengths against him. The art of *The Confessions* is high art in the same sense that the art of *Holy Willie's Prayer* is; in both cases the author restrains his satire to subtle manipulations

of style and level, and uses as his subject matter that art, or the absence of it, which is being turned on the object of the satire. The Holy Willies and Robert Wringhims of Scotland despised art as a mere intermediary between God and themselves, and sought to break through 'art' to a direct communication with Heaven. Their pride and presumption are properly punished. Yet the author simultaneously satirises the verbal eccentricities, over-artful, by which they are made to appear ridiculous, or insincere, or merely over-zealous, to an audience less interested in the finer points of theological satire.

Both authors clearly have as their ultimate object in their satire the sin of human pride. People who accept the doctrine of justification (which reasonable people can reasonably do) are not in that to be held up to ridicule, but those who go on to strain that doctrine to the limits of antinomianism and predestinarianism are ridiculous – and dangerous. They set themselves up as equals with God, who controls all: their pride makes them over-trustful of their 'art', whether the art lies in the theorising behind their world-picture, or in the form in which they express the picture. The Calvinist Universe is controlled absolutely by a sovereign God: I have tried to show in this paper that, in relying too exclusively on human 'art', humans can make themselves ridiculous in trying to oppose, or bend God's sovereignty. What is remarkable in Burns, as in Hogg, is the subtlety of the art which each uses in order to expose the false art of their characters – and in the process to expose them as ridiculous.

NOTES

1. In Author and Audience in Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, *Scottish Literary News* II, 4 (June, 1972), 66-76.
2. An outstanding case, which I discuss in the article cited above, is Wringhim's distortion on p. 138 of Peter's vision of the golden vessel let down from Heaven, in Acts 11: 4-10. For a further discussion of language and its use to indicate religious subtleties, see T. Crawford, *Burns: A Study of the Poems and Songs* (Edinburgh and London, 1960), 52-59.
3. 'Ineffectual Calling', says the young aspirant to justification, 'is the outward call of the gospel without any effect on the hearts of the unregenerated and impenitent sinners. Have not all these the same calls, warnings, doctrines, and reproofs, that we have? and is not this Ineffectual Calling? . . .' (p. 99).
The audience would be quick to spot the unchristian spirit of this wire-drawing, and its clumsy derivativeness from the Dives and Lazarus parable (Luke 16:19-31).
4. In *Redgauntlet*, Book I, letter XI, Steenie is forced to visit Hell (in 'Wandering Willie's Tale') to recover some lost property. The scene is a Scottish baronial hall, with piping and feasting: the indications that it is Hell are all subtle hints, and Steenie has to pass several quasi-folklore 'tests' before he is allowed back to normality from the underworld. The verbal ambiguities by which the audience is warned that they are witnessing a feast in Hell, and not in a Scottish baronial hall, are all couched in Scots, whose subtleties are brilliantly used.

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