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Wyvern Poets



Confessions 2020

*Marking (almost) Two Hundred Years of
Justified Sinning*

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Justified Sinning*

The Wyvern Poets

In association with the Centres for Scottish Culture and
Critical and Creative Cultures (4C) at the School of
Humanities, University of Dundee

UniVerse

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Introduction

Welcome to the fourth collection by Wyvern Poets, in collaboration with the University of Dundee. December 2020 marks the 250th anniversary of the birth of James Hogg and heralds the bicentenary of *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824). Hogg's novel is a milestone in Scottish Gothic fiction, with disturbing and ongoing resonances. Its theme of duality not only challenged Calvinist doctrines about a predestined elect, but made the idea of split psyches – individual and cultural – globally imaginable through influencing Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886). This collection considers the many ways in which Hogg's double vision still speaks to our time and beyond.

Keith Williams
University of Dundee

A Psychological Breakdown

I wear a mirror
in my heart pocket
a benediction and memento
for my flesh.

When I deny
the shadow in me
a weapon appears
in my open right hand.
A curse for the sinner
who questions
my word.

Heart mirror fogged
I forget my own sins
a confession
with no contrition
a persona
with no flesh.

The shadow lingers
Undeniable

V. Rivers



Grave-diggers

His grave was an
archaeology of the mind.
First to rise were his
bones, some teeth
then flesh hanging
in dark flitters
above the spine.
Water, heavier
than guilt, seeped
into his garments,
a toorie, his plaid
kemp from his shoes
- a witches brew.
His skeleton snatched
at us, mocked us,
its eyes a torrent of hate.
Our horses startled
sensed danger
shod hooves sounded
on clay. I shouted.
May the Lord be with Us.

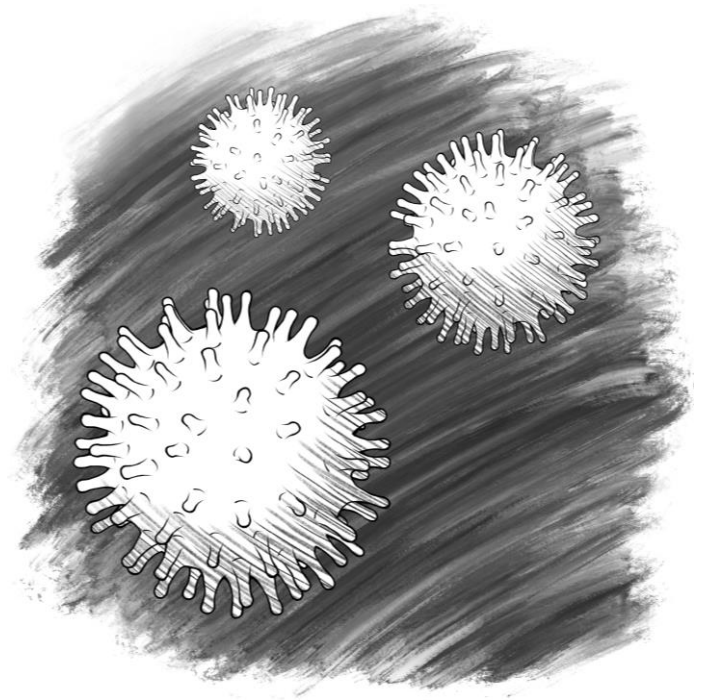
Roy Canning



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This is the usurper
that has no life but what it takes,
that multiplies in Avogadro numbers,
that chokes its victims on their own debris.
This is a crown of thorns,
that was born of the first sin,
that dies unjustified.

Ann Prescott



Goad Bless yer Buttons, Alan!

Ah'm sittin ensconced in a Black Buhl chair
an tryin tae sook up thi atmosphere.
This howff wiz frequented bi Colwan's crowd
an ghaists o' srievers an worthies abound.

Are ye list'nin, Hoagy, are ye list'nin.
Thon 'Confessions' o' yours hiz me windrin:
Is a 'Justified Sinner' an oxymoron;
please gie me an answer tae ma question.

Seen throu the een o' reprobate Robert,
a misguided Mahdi Ah've discovered.
The miscreant murdered George, his brither,
yet spared Raby, the adult'rous mither.

Hoagy, yer novel is so rhetorical
seemly soondin phantasmagorical.
Yer poesy's so much easier tae handle
'The Metric Shepherd's' a worthy title.

Ah'm hearin voices gawn roond in ma heid
noo someone's appeared richt bi ma side.
This fine figure's in tweeds an tartan
Glory Be! Ah've just summoned
Gil-Martin.
'You fae the Scotsman?' Ah hear im
spierin.
'Perhaps, Mister Hogg. Thank ye fir
comin.'

George C. Robertson



Colloquiu wi Rab

Eh ken yir torment as life unravels,
yir lang quest tae seek oot the richtfu wye.
Amidst tortured doots and unanswered cry
seeds o anguish are sown in yir travails.
Through sworn-blind faith you see Goad's hand direct
life's miracles, Nature's floorin, therein,
love an charity o human caring
aa pointin tae the path o the Elect.
Yet in plehn sicht the Deil his work enacts,
the evils trespassed on the innocents,
wahr an the scabbèd scourge o pestilence,
demonry that incites yir ain foul acts.
Tae ease yir fankle, Eh feel Eh maun tell,
only man's daein maks Heaven an Hell.

Fran Baillie



The Gatekeeper Delivers a Letter, by Hand

Dear Robert, Rev. Wringhim's wee Bobby,
Alas, alack, I weep. For you were a hack
Burgeoning in false reasoned piety.

You were born a delusional toady,
Your self-estimation without reservation,
And were always a friend to cruelty.

At each crossroad you played the fool
Taking and scheming, blaming and dreaming
Never once minding that old golden rule.

And when you were deemed Elect
Your good intent was so easily bent
By him who you held suspect

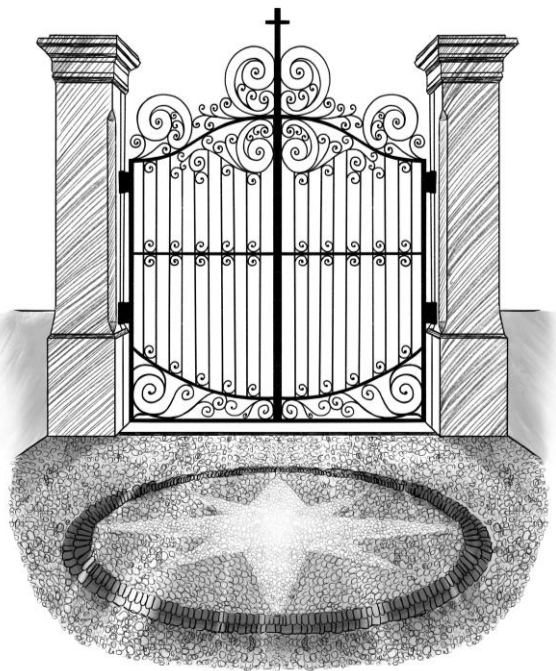
Of royalty Czar-like with plans divine.
Failed to pledge me gratitude, melted by his platitude
And you became ever more supine.

You forgot the fisher of men to follow—
And so, shall gain no access at this gate—
Your bogus election used as bait
By the poacher supreme—to my sorrow.

Yours truly,

Your Maker

R. Veritay Neville



'Nature's Magic Lantern'

Shepherding round Etrick
As if on Faust's Brocken
A vast shape loomed above
The summits of its hills

Prismatic bands
Haloed its face
Angel or devil?
I could not tell

My - self - split before me
By the sun's projector
On cloud particles
(So Brewster said)

On Salisbury Crags
Like the Student of Prague's
His image strode out
The mirror screen
And dogs our every step

Keith Williams



All Splintered

I am two women – my double and my primal self
Reflected in a glass, the Same Being - three paces to the left
If one of us is visible, the other must be lost
But which of us is missing, all splintered, half-remembering?

Reflected in a glass, the Same Being as myself three paces to the left
A veil draws over us, a mist that hisses
'Are you missing or is she missing, all splintered, half-remembering?'
Two souls for certain, but worse, there is a third

A veil draws over us, a mist for choking,
blocking vocal chords. Is it mocking us?
Two souls for certain, but worse, here is the third
dark heart - never missing, relentless as a shadow,

blocking vocal chords. Shocking! Are you mocking us?
You! Witch, Familiar, Proxy, Appalling Visitor,
Dark Heart! Never missing, relentless as a shadow
grafted to our shoulder, cloaked in black

Leave us Witch! Imposter, Proxy, Necromancer
Fallen Outcast, Nemesis, Abnormal Influencer
grafted to our shoulder, cloaked in black
day on day on day on day, no sanctuary

Fallen outcast! Nemesis! Auld Simmie's flesh
reflected in a glass, the Same Being - three paces to
the left
day on day on day on day, no sanctuary, all splintered
We are three women, three souls possessed.

Bet McCallum



Who Shall Confess?

'A body canna help his thoughts' said the man.
Can we tell who is friend or foe?
Inner temptations,
unspoken wiles
are masked by the smiles we bestow.

Through each soul is woven some good said the man
and Evil the same stitching wears.
Though we build ourselves tall,
still to sand do we fall
when Temptation is loos'd from its lair.

If we hesitate are we lost, asked the man.
If we leap will we look and despise
as warmth becomes weakness
and strength becomes sin
and all of our truths become lies?

'Judge not that ye be not judged', quoth the man,
nor take any other to task,
for which of us here
has ne'er glimpsed Satan's glare
while viewing our image in glass?

Moirra Gee



Talk of the Edinburgh Steamie

(tho somewhat indeterminate in space and time)

Ye ken, Effie thon Gil-Martin, he gets everywhere
Still duping hapless souls, like yon young loon hereabouts
Kidding folk into thinking he's doing richt by them
And he bein' the deil of a guid guiser tae

Remember when he had thon wee black moustache?
Thocht he was that funny wee comic until I saw yon emblem
A weird like cross it was. Still sends a chill aroon me.
He just about sent a'body to hell that time

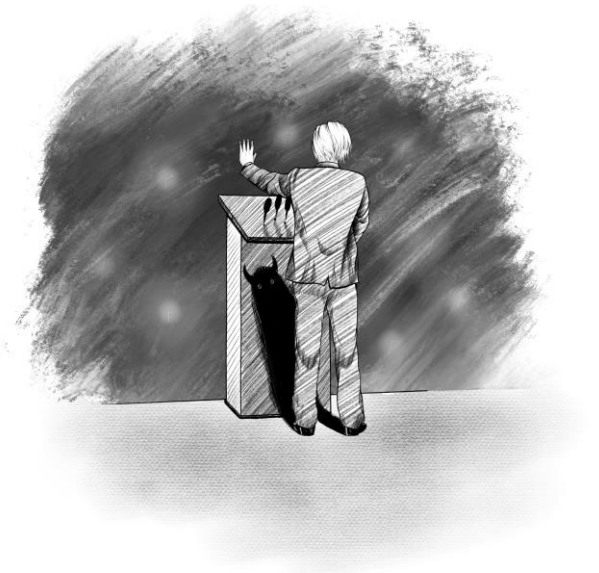
An' he ca'd hisel a real funny name ance
Somethin' like Mickey Moose? Naw, Moosey's Tongue it wiz
Wi' a name like thon how did they fall for his red book haivers
Slithery serpent tongued wiz mair like it

Aye, he's aye had that sleekit charm about him dupin folk
He managed to lee hisel intae thon big white hoose in the Americas
But the deil knows how he got there. They emigrant folk must be muckle thick
Half o'them likely believed a' he said an' they be damned for 't

I see yer still takin in ither folk's washin', Effie
Guid idea tae mak a few extra Scots shillins
That's a muckle lang scarf you've been washin' the day
Wound roon a heid, it wud make an awfie
guid turban so it wud

God bless ye, Effie.

Anita Petrie



Lady Dalcastle

Don't call me Mrs Colwan.
Don't call me righteous.
Don't call me baggage.
Leave me to my meditations,
my ruminations,
my conversations of seventeen hours.
Just don't call me
until breakfast.

Gavin Cameron



Confessions of a Caledonian Antiszygy

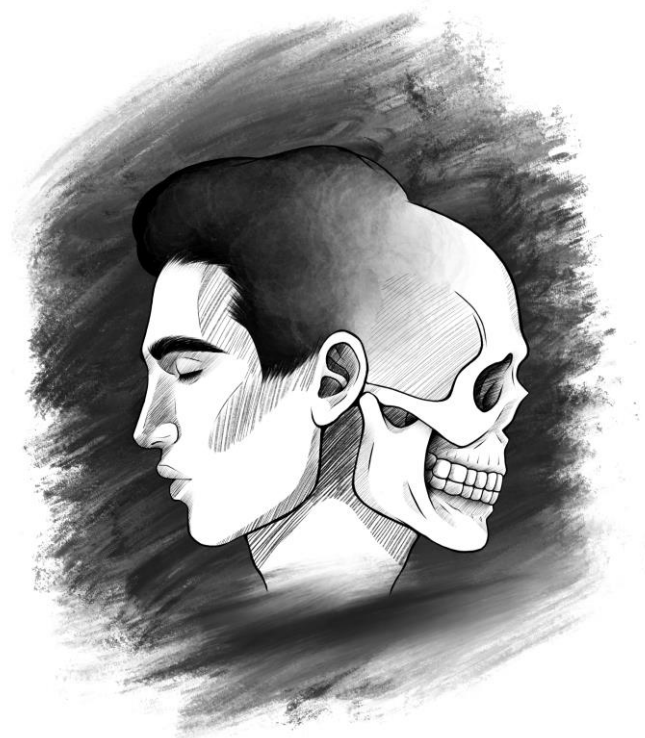
Gil-Martin and Robert; are we so different?
You express the union of opposites:
Apollonian and Dionysian, alive
in Scotland down all the years.
We wrote the Declaration of Freedom at Arbroath,
yet sallied forth to enslave the globe,
that turned pink on maps, like a viral contagion.

And when no distraction diverts us from our duality,
we do not accommodate it, but become demons
with booze and drugs, while meekly tolerating:
shite trains, shite service, shite government,
instead of a benediction of holy rioting.

Our crusade when woken,
is a self-destructive passion, a disconnect
between Celtic hedonism and
the misogyny and twisted edicts of Calvinism,
that makes moral sinners of us all.

Too busy slagging and squabbling
and too feart to decry tyranny,
we exist in a parallel latitude with Strindberg's Swedes
and Hesse's *Steppenwolf*
in our philosophical bipolarity.

Roddie McKenzie



Damned Elect

Eight faith tenets chosen to harsh select,
predestined to life eternal, elect.
Add five from Rabina in fervid state,
count of twelve, for thirteen is apostate.

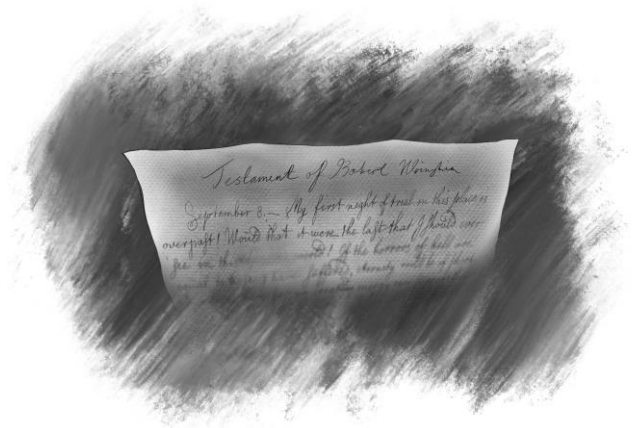
Set she over righteous on her husband
once bond she placed upon laird's lively hand.
Rabina deemed him foulest mortal fiend
even as she scorned their firstborn, unweaned.

Heaven predestined, she kept him at bay,
closeted fervent clergy helps her pray.
Second son, the laird disowned, no matter,
for religious fervour takes the role of pater.

The oldest boy fills life with robust joy
whilst younger brother, cleaved, brooks venom's cloy.
Meet shows Robert scornful, choose to clash,
attempts by George to oil the water, dash.

Robert, God's soldier, anointed elect,
learned to murder and helped to select.
Destroys those he deems hopeless apostate
then last treats himself to that damned state.

Peter Marshall



Epilogue

*Now it's your turn to play doubles
Insert their confessions in the space below*

The Wyvern Poets

Formed in April 2017 and based in Dundee, Wyvern poets meet on a monthly basis to share ideas, try out new poems and support one another with problems and revisions. There is an emphasis on pursuing writing and strong encouragement to publish. To this end, noteworthy poets who live in and around Dundee are welcomed on a regular basis to read their poems and discuss their techniques, working habits and approaches to publication.

The group was founded by Roy Canning and takes its name from a suggestion by Roddie McKenzie that the wyvern has particular relevance to Dundee, being a component on a Dundee Seal of 1900 and appearing in different forms throughout the city.

While members of the group share a passion for having fun with words and experimenting with verse forms, perspectives, tone, imagery and the music of lines, their interests are diverse and their writing styles individual. Among many other themes, those of loss and change, landscape and land, history, memory, emerging technologies and urban life recur across the poets' work, encompassing the spiritual, the personal, the social and the political aspects of life. Poems are written in both Scots and English, and, whether autobiographical or otherworldly, are at times purposefully humorous or meditative or edgy or provocative.

Extremely interested in all things local, Wyverns are keen to and have collaborated with city institutions on different writing projects: Echo at Dundee Contemporary Arts Centre, poetry publication with Friends of Dundee Law, Mary Shelley and *Frankenstein*, the Aquatic and Lunar City projects with University of Dundee - and the combined arts project with Dundee Botanic Gardens.

Group members' poems appear in *New Writing Scotland*, *Lallans*, *Gutter*, *Dundee Writes*, *Northwords*, *Seagate 111* and *The Scotsman*, as well as on numerous online sites based outside Scotland.

Contact details:

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Wyvern Contributors (and Guest)

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