

The Mill, the Mirror and Identity: Representation of the Divided Self in Wojciech Has's Film Adaptation of James Hogg's *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*

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**THE MILL, THE MIRROR AND IDENTITY:
REPRESENTATION OF THE DIVIDED SELF IN WOJCIECH HAS'
FILM ADAPTATION OF JAMES HOGG'S
*PRIVATE MEMOIRS AND CONFESSIONS OF A JUSTIFIED SINNER***

Jessy Neau

*Il y a dans la somme d'un et un quelque chose qui n'existe
ni dans l'un ni dans l'autre, le plus sans doute, et qui veut qu'un plus un fassent trois,
de sorte que de l'opposition de Jekyll et Hyde naît l'Indifférent.*

Louis Aragon, *La Mise à mort*

Published in 1824, *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, by James Hogg, offers two versions of the same story, the first by an editor and the second by the protagonist. These two narrators tell us a story, set in the 18th century, of the devil appearing to a young man, Robert, who is indoctrinated by antinomian beliefs popular in 18th-century Scotland. The devil masquerades as Robert's double, exacerbates his religious fanaticism until Robert kills his own brother George and finally commits suicide. The editor's version aims to be objective, while that of Robert is presented as the testimony of a madman, but neither version of the story is consistent. Even the editor of the story turns out to be unreliable, as are the many characters who appear as witnesses. James Hogg went so far as to stage himself in the epilogue scene, thus making us constantly oscillate between the Gothic and satire. Since its rediscovery by André Gide in 1947, this text has been an object of interest in literary studies, because of various elements, including the mix of parody of a terror novella, denunciation of religious fanaticism, judicial and playful satire, and post modern tone.

Far less known, the screen adaptation directed by the Polish filmmaker Wojciech Has in 1985, *Memoirs of a Sinner* (*Osobisty pamiętnik grzesznika przez niego samego spisany*) can be said to perform a *des-indigenization* of the cultural content of the novel: we are no longer in Scotland, but instead in a colonial-era farm left geographically indeterminate. I propose to see what strategies are adopted to transpose the constant interferences between narrative and comment, the motives of the false story and the game of blurred identities unfolded by the presence of the *Doppelgänger*. My analysis of Wojciech Has's film also reveals some aspects that illuminate several previously unlit zones of the novel. Therefore, this study will try to expose the representation of a thematic of illusion between truth

and falsehood and that of a carnival aesthetic by several journeys back and forth from 1824 Calvinist Scotland to the surrealist Polish universe of Wojciech Has.

From Krakow to Saragossa: Wojciech Jerzy Has (1925-2000)

A long time unknown outside of Poland, Wojciech Has is today considered as one of the foremost Polish filmmakers. The Krakow-born Wojciech Has started his career in 1957 with *The Noose*, and directed his fourteenth and last film in 1991. The two films that, despite the limitations to dissemination posed by the Iron Curtain, had the greatest international exposure are his masterpieces, *Saragossa Manuscript*, adapted from the 18th-century novel by Jan Potocki, and *The Hourglass Sanatorium*, which won the jury prize in Cannes in 1973.

This should not overshadow an entire filmography that has been re-discovered since his death: an iconoclastic and flamboyant *oeuvre* that started in the 1950s with a touch of expressionism and then progressively developed a surrealist and baroque line, yet with an extremely personal signature. A “film roll poet of the past, the surreal and the ephemeral” (Douin),¹ his artistic temperament was quite distinct from his Polish peers by his refusal to film great historical subjects.

His filmography’s features are based on fantasia; as early as his first movie, *The Noose (Petla)*, the “descent into hell” of the alcoholic protagonist resembles more a sublime black-and white nightmare than the social portrayal of a sick man. From the ruins of post-war Warsaw emerge a profusion of oneiric objects and figures. His movies execute an attempt to stage heterogeneous elements such as objects, books, musical instruments, candles, put together in a saturated frame drowning the eye of the spectator, reminiscent of Walter Benjamin’s words about 19th-century capitalism as the “commodity-like character of things” (156). But these commodities are always rendered surreal in Has’s films by a profusion of oneiric effects reinforced by the fluidity of the editing, mostly realized through the use of tracking shots. Slow and ironical dialogues, embedded narratives and *tableaux vivants* translate a philosophical and aesthetical idea of existential absurdity.

Wojciech Has is a great screen adapter of literature: great in the sense of the eclectic and prestigious nature of the texts he selects for adaptation, from the works of Bruno Schulz (*The Cinnamon Shops* and *The Hourglass Sanatorium*) to a short story by Anton Chekhov (“A Dreary Story”) and the

¹ My translation.

Saragossa Manuscript, deemed unfilmable as Boccaccio's *The Decameron* was, because of its embedded narratives. His talent as an adapter is expressed by his unique approach to adaptation: his films are "over-faithful" to the text, as Anne Guérin-Castell puts it (462-3), especially with regards to the dialogues and read sentences from the narrative in *voice over*. But on the other hand, the transference of ideas and plotlines is mastered with an extremely personal approach, a unique use of scenography that both introduces irony and shifts the tales towards a surrealistic universe. The ingenious forms employed for the visual transfer of *Private Memoirs* make his screen adaptation of James Hogg's work a particularly interesting example of Has's relationship with literature.

"Des-indigenizing" James Hogg's *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*

In his foreword to the novel, André Gide frequently mentions his correspondence with his friend Dorothy Bussy, who helped him recover some territorial and historical aspects of the novel. As she puts it, James Hogg's novel is "Scotch to its very marrow" (IX). It is in fact a gothic story whose background is the context of theological disputes and in 18th-century Scotland, mostly between the neonomians – Calvinists who believe in the role of works and faith to gain salvation – and the antinomians who only believe in grace and justification.

The chief protagonist, Robert Wringhim, is a young man indoctrinated by the Antinomian dogma preached by his father. Antinomians follow a distorted Calvinist belief of excessive *sole gratia*, an obsession with the idea of a divided world between the elect and the reprobate. Robert is thus taught to "pray only for the elect, and, like David of old, doom all that were aliens from God to destruction." (Hogg 14). Robert's parents raise him in the hate of his half-brother. One day, just as his father announced to him that Robert has been "welcomed into the society of the just made perfect" and that his "redemption is sealed and sure" (79), the young man encounters an enigmatic man, leading to a sheer fantastic *momentum*:

As I thus wended my way, I beheld a young man of a mysterious appearance coming towards me. I tried to shun him, being bent on my own contemplations; but he cast himself in my way, so that I could not well avoid him; and, more than that, I felt a sort of invisible power that drew me towards him, something like the force of enchantment, which I could not resist. As we approached each other, our eyes met and I can never describe the strange sensations that thrilled through my whole frame at that impressive moment [...]. (80)

The “thrill” is followed by a description of the stranger told in a classical fragmentation of the body that fantastic narratives often deploy, especially to assert the figure of the double: “the clothes,” “the form,” “apparent age,” “the color of the hair” and “the eyes” of this elusive character are precisely identical, being “*the same [...] the very same*” (80) as Robert’s features.

As the *Confessions* proceeds, the stranger, whose name is Gil Martin, goads Robert’s tendencies to fanaticism, leading him to persecute and finally murder his brother George. Robert will also be accused of crimes and actions he does not remember committing. The dynamics of lies and appearances will steadily increase in intensity, in a dramatic *crescendo* building a trap for Robert, as he is forced to escape, hide in several places and finally commit suicide. The fantastic figure of the devil-double is so obvious in Hogg’s novel that it is no surprise that it has been linked to gothic stories, between Edgar Allan Poe’s “William Wilson” and Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. James Hogg’s novel can also be placed in a series of famous literary texts in which the narrative backbone is a contract with the devil: Christopher Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus*; E.T.A. Hoffmann’s *Die Elixiere des Teufels*; *Adam Blair*, written by his contemporary fellow Lockhart; “Wandering Willie’s Tale” by James Hogg’s friend Walter Scott, and Charles Robert Maturin’s *Melmoth the Wanderer*.

If the texts mentioned above contain many religious connotations, James Hogg pushes this dimension further. The controversy of the antinomians is more than a historical context: it is at the heart of the *Private Memoirs*. The character of Robert and the crimes he commits cannot be explained without reference to this dogma. The constant irony and the binary structure of the text appear to directly emerge from this theme. The Wringhims are constantly commenting and interpreting the Bible, but selecting only the Old Testament and the Pauline epistles. As Ian Campbell has underlined, this makes Robert the perfect victim of “meaning deviation” (192): because of his religious obsessions, he cannot perceive the double nature of Gil Martin.

In fact, if “much Anglo American genre *noir* fiction owes its Gothic ambience to a brooding sense of religious terror which is notably Protestant in its origins and bearing” and if most Gothic novels are “at bottom theological” and involve “the dark rites of sin, guilt and damnation” (Porte 43), James Hogg’s novel stands out among all those texts: it is the binary vision of the world (the elect and the reprobate) induced by the obsessional quest for signs of justification that generate both tensions of the mind and “acute paranoia,” as Carol Margaret Davison has pointed out. The delirium will produce the figure of Gil Martin, an ambivalent incarnation of a perverted projection of extreme rationalism and the supernatural creature of folkloric tales – close to the *coimhneadh* (co-walker), the famous *döppelgänger* of Scots in Irish mythology (Davison 170).

Furthermore, a double perspective on the world – an Enlightened and a fanatical – is embedded within the narrative disposition, given by the enunciative tension generated by an unusual structure, the division of the story between the editor and Robert. His diary, “the Confessions” supposedly found one century after his death, is framed by an editor’s narrative that presents the story with the appearances of objectivity and historical distance. The editor presents the *Confessions* simultaneously as a testimony, a moral warning, a piece of evidence in a famous mystery case, and even a psychiatric chronicle:

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 everyone to judge for himself. (Hogg 64)

This pseudo-neutrality (“leaving everyone to judge for himself”) is the mark of the obsession running through the whole editor’s narrative: the pretense of objectivity. It is supposedly based on facts, witnesses and archives, with a constant use of words such as “parish registers,” “tradition,” “from history,” “his county neighbors” (Hogg 2). Contrastingly, Robert’s diary establishes an *autobiographical pact*, using “I” and a retrospective, self-analytical prose: “My life has been a life of trouble and turmoil [...] (67). The opposition between objectivity and subjectivity, history and personal story, reason and madness, given by the re-telling goes as far as a deeper reference to Scottish structures of the society, according to David Groves: the Editor embodies Enlightened Edinburgh whereas Robert would be an incarnation of early Presbyterian Church; this historical opposition could even be read as a religious one between a conception of an arbitrary and cruel God and an almost deistic vision of the world, close to the idea of Supreme Being.

Adding to the list of symmetrical divisions embodied in the ideas and paradigms of the 18th Century, we should mention that many commentators of Hogg have also noted a translation of aesthetic dichotomy, inspired by Burke, Locke and Coleridge. According to David Oakleaf, the editor’s and Robert’s voices are merely two aspects of the same experience, the Sublime (Robert) and the Beautiful (his brother George, who has the moral approval of the Editor). Of course, any kind of metaphysics based on dual concepts – and the history of Western metaphysics is deeply a history of polarities – could be read in the narrative division found in the *Private Memoirs*.

We thus face a double enunciation: a double structure. The double is, from the starting point, a character and an evil figure: the *Doppelgänger*, Gil Martin first appears in the story as a physical twin of Robert. It is, above all, a figure that generates most of the dramatic tensions of the novel, as it is the case in Stevenson’s and Dostoevsky’s stories: Robert is accused of crimes he did not commit, of which he has no memory of. At the heart of the novel lies the enigma of the attribution of actions to an

agent – something Jean Bessière, commenting on Chamisso (*Peter Schlemil*) Maupassant (*Le Horla*) and Nabokov (*Despair*) called “the game of ascription” (14), following Paul Ricoeur’s narrative theory. Ascription is, in Ricoeur’s work, distinct from attribution, because it focuses on the question “Who?” It is a manner of questioning the agent and the strict identity of the subject, allowing for distinction between “idem-identity” (*mêmeté*) and “ipse-identity” (*ipséité*) in terms of actions and things. Yet, stories of doubles often present a dysfunction of the ascription, which is usually asymmetrical (one agent can perform several actions). By attributing a single fact to several agents, stories of doubles reverse the asymmetry.

This category of *Doppelgänger* – leading the main characters to “an exegesis of the Self” (Bessière 15) – has a history of adapting very well to cinema, from *The Golem* (1920) and *The student of Prague* (1913) respectively adapted from Meyrink and E.A. Poe, to Roman Polanski’s *The Tenant* (1976) adapted from *Le locataire chimérique* by Roland Topor. Sometimes, the transposition of medium alters the dynamics of ambivalent ascription for the *Doppelgänger*: the different film versions of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* have sometimes diminished this ambiguity for the purpose of showing the body of Mr Hyde, whereas Stevenson insisted on the indefinable dimension of his character. Clearly, the literary mystery and indeterminacy of the Who? – and Stevenson’s story is, like James Hogg’s novel, conveyed by a narrative division into two distinct parts – has been replaced by the fixation, in the collective imagination, of the physical transformation of Jekyll in Hyde (Menegaldo 195).

The relationship between Wojciech Has and the *Doppelgänger* starts with the ending of his *Saragossa Manuscript* (1965). To the protagonist, Alphonse Van Worden, is revealed that everything he has experienced during his wandering in the Spanish Sierra Morena was a gigantic conspiracy orchestrated by the powerful Gomelez clan. In the 18th-century novel written in French by Jan Potocki, this disclosure of the truth constitutes more or less the ending. Surprisingly, Wojciech Has’s film goes beyond this denouement; Alphonse calls again for truth: “Who are you, really?” Gomelez’ enigmatic smile gives space to a vision where Alphonse sees his own *Doppelgänger* through a mirror.

In this film, the *Doppelgänger* appears as the result of a personal choice of the screenwriter and the director. The same happens in his 1973 adaptation of Bruno Schulz’s short stories (*The Hourglass Sanatorium*): located within a complex narrative construction, a similar sequence of vision of the protagonist’s double is set, whereas there is no trace of such events in Schulz’s eponymous story. Here as well, staging the *Doppelgänger* belongs with an aesthetical view effected in all Has’ films: showing protagonists’ divided identity is a way of suggesting the plurality of existences and the potentialities of accomplishment for the diverse motions of the Self, evolving in film universes that resemble labyrinths.

Thus, the story of Robert Wrinhgim, trapped in his own madness, could be adapted by Has with the same network of significations. The elements of religious terror can be seen as added topics to his career-long interest in dream and madness. And yet, Has's film does not refer to any kind of antinomian faith or Calvinism, and even worse, does not even take place in Scotland. David Grove's assertion that "perhaps no other novel presents a more balanced and multifarious picture of Scottish life" (37) is clearly negated by the film, which is set in a sort of colonial farm of uncertain location; the mill, the house and pastoral landscapes we see could belong in any continent. However, the small town where a few sequences take place looks like any European village, with its thatched cottages and its tavern.

Without the historical and geographical reference, a large part of the plotline vanishes, as it loses its Calvinist element. The only references to protestant faith can be found in the representation of the Reverend, dressed in a black cassock, a cross around his neck; and the recitations of psalms at the opening of the film. But the generic appearance of these elements could be linked with any kind of broad Christian denomination, including Roman Catholicism. The only allusion made to justification is made when Gil Martin tells Robert about "what is written." Presbyterian grace or predestination is replaced by a vague and common notion of doom.



from Wojciech Has's *Memoirs of a Sinner*



from Wojciech Has's *Memoirs of a Sinner*

When a film adaptation displays a totally different cultural context (e.g. time or space) from the original story, we can talk about a “transcultural adaptation” (Hutcheon 145). Among the numerous adaptations of *Macbeth*, we can find the film *Maqbool* (Vishal Bhardwaj, 2003) a cross-cultural transposition of Shakespeare’s play in the context of Mumbai’s criminal gangs in the early 2000s. But what if the film simply cuts off a time-space reference? The film can be said to perform a “des-indigenization,”² an expression proposed by Linda Hutcheon in her work about media and film adaptations, by taking different opera and film versions of *Carmen* and classifying them as performing different types of *indigenization*³.

It may appear quite clearly that Wojciech Has is not interested in the presentation of a religious doctrine that never quite existed in Poland, and has little to say about Scottish controversies from the 18th century. What is the purpose of adapting James Hogg’s novel, then? As Paul Coates puts it about *Saragossa Manuscript*, “does this make the novel more pretext than pre-text?” (197). We can suggest that the main interest of the film is the possibility of adapting a challenging formal structure: filming an unusual narrative shape, the possibility of a double bind, a proliferation of points of view. What strategies, then, does the movie employ to screen a novel whose premises are duality, contradictory versions of a same story given by the binary structure of the text and the theme of mental illness? The first strategy I will discuss engages with the idea of equivalencies and corollaries. The film, far from reframing the novel by evacuating the textual and enunciative ambiguity – which would offer only a mere *fabula*, without any *syuzhet* in the terminology of Russian formalism – seeks narrative and visual solutions corresponding to the textual complexity, as a reappropriation is supposed to do.

Finding equivalences: the “zombification” of the narrator

The two versions of the story offer a lot of contradictions. But they work in a complementary way to establish the presence of the *Doppelgänger*. But they form a coherent piece of evidence in order to certify the narrative presence of the *Doppelgänger*. The editor constantly plays with the suspense

² The expression is forged after reading Linda Hutcheon’s term “indigenization,” a term she herself is borrowing from the anthropologist Susan Stanford Friedman who calls by this word the process of the intercultural encounters and accommodation of ideas occurring when travelling. It broadly refers to “processes of representation and institutionalization” (Edward Said, quoted by Hutcheon 145) that affect political and religious ideas.

³ These are of three types: (1) historicising/dehistoricising, (2) racialising/deracialising, (3) embodying/disembodying (Hutcheon 158).

that prepares the physical appearance of Gil Martin described by Robert. Even if the second narrative is a re-telling, we can say that the two tones alternating increase suspense by engaging the reader in an enigma interpretation. The first narrative plays with our abilities to guess what happened, as a detective story would: the more the editor pretends to be objective, the more he leaves clues for an upcoming supernatural event, and sets the frame for this event.

At first glance, Has's film abandons this duplicity. The whole story is given by a relatively classical temporal line, through a flashback. Has makes the narrator or the supposed infra-textual narrator a corpse, who tells the story of his life after he has been exhumed by some mysterious men. But what could be seen as a reduction through the simple elimination of the double structure is in fact compensated by a time extension in the field of events: because the flashback makes Robert a zombie, and because he begins the story at a point before he was born. This is illustrated in these two particular shots, the first in which Robert the living corpse begins to speak; the second showing his mother getting married, long before he is conceived.

James Hogg's novel is not structured by this time shape, but even if we consider Robert's *Confession* as an *analepsis*, we notice that the film considerably extends Gérard Genette's categories of "amplitude," "portée" and "duration" of the flashback, to the point where it is no longer realistic. This leads us to immediately question the reliability of the subject who is supposed to narrate the facts he has experienced before. The



from Wojciech Has' *Memoirs of a Sinner*

point of entry to the flashback is also not definite, relying only on the succession of these two shots, but without any other visual or audible indicators. The same technique has already occurred in Has' *Saragossa Manuscript*, when different characters contribute to the dynamics of embedded narratives. At the end of *Saragossa Manuscript*, we learn that the whole plot was due to a conspiracy, and in consequence all those embedded stories were false. With the same type of dubious flashbacks and the

zombification of Robert, Hogg's adaptation immediately complicates the integrity of the story-teller, his identity and reliability.

Another strategy of transposition into the filmic medium of the literary technique of the ambiguity of "ascriptions" is the common use of tracking shots, doorstep framings and devices of *mise-en-scène* that reveal a game of masks and appearances. As I briefly mentioned, "ascription" is one of the means of attributing actions to agents. It is a way of questioning the agent, the identity of the subject regarding actions and things. And yet, stories of doubles and *Doppelgänger* often present a malfunction of the ascription, because unusually, a single action can be attributed to several agents. The relation is reversed, and the perfect resemblance between two subjects implies that the ascriptions and predications can be borne by one or the other. With Bessière's commentary of Dostoyevsky's *The Double*, the ascription duplicates and at the same time maintains differences:

Goliadkine le vieux n'est pas Goliadkine le jeune, et cependant l'un et l'autre sont dans un rapport mutuel d'ascription. [...] Cette alliance de l'identique et du différent fait du jeu de prédications des agents un jeu dédoublé et conduit à la possibilité d'une ascription équivoque. (Bessière 15)⁴

The same happens to Robert, who is accused of actions he does not remember, for example seducing a young woman, Miss Keller. Then a lawyer presents him with a contract involving Robert and signed by his hand. This leads Robert to a great confusion and to the *exegesis of the Self*: "I was a being incomprehensible to myself" (Hogg 125). Has's film transforms this trial into a dream sequence: the costumes of the accusing ladies, the mysterious presence of his parents, the scenography of the room, especially with painted landscapes on the walls affirm the causal ambiguity. Before this sequence, a long tracking shot has caught the outdoor landscape with the camera passing deliberately behind walls and trees, and then films Gil Martin at the doorstep seconds later, setting a kind of filmic sentence which we cannot but interpret as "that is his point of view: it is him." In a symmetrical way, after this the trial sequence, Robert goes to the window, and when he turns back everything he saw a minute ago has vanished. All these effects of passage, apparition and disappearance lead to the ultimate illusion, the scene of metamorphosis that certifies the double nature of Gil Martin. The crowd plays blind man's bluff, and Robert sees Gil Martin, for the first time, changing face and taking on his features. The metamorphosis is viewed through a shot reverse shot, a simple editing device that requires little to no

⁴ "Golyadkin Senior is not Golyadkin Junior, and yet they are in a mutual relationship of ascription [...]. This union of the identical and the different transform the game of predications of the agents a split game and leads to the possibility of an equivocal ascription." (I translated).

special effects, but sets a frame for the metamorphoses. The film breaks with the ascription, tending towards the hypothesis of an internal double, a materialization of Robert's twisted mind:

Heterogeneous aspects of the shattered elements, changes in points of view – everything has to disorient spectators [...]. We have the feeling that this drama is played facing a mirror, that the character we see on the screen is not a murderer but only a very troubled dreamer, whose negative thought will, by a diabolical trick, materialize in reality [...]. In Has's film, everything is subjective vision. (Sobolewski 13)⁵

In the typology of doubles and *Doppelgänger* in literature and cinema, one can be objective or subjective, internal or external⁶. At the very early level of its presence, the double calls for an interpretation: the possibility, for a subjective, external double, of a dynamic that psychoanalysis calls “projection” and “introjection” (Brugière 16). Those notions refer to concepts by which we explain how the subject integrates in his mental space the environment and objects from the outside world. In a fantastic mode, those objects can be projected back, giving birth to the *Doppelgänger*.

Right after this scene, all the characters start to move in a round dance: most of them are deprived from any possibility of communication, looking mentally absent. We can even notice some figures covered with bandages like mummies. This dreary ballet, encircling Robert and Gil Martin, echoes the procession of zombies of the prologue. A lead is given by this climax of the ‘Uncanny’: the affirmed presence of the double is here out of focus, causing the spectator to note that this has only prepared room for a spectacular and generalized diffraction. The same way as Golyadkin, at one point in Dostoyevsky's *The Double*, starts to see many little Golyadkins, Has's film suggests that adapting James Hogg's *Private Memoirs* can open the way to a gigantic staging of mixed and blurred identities. The *Doppelgänger* is only the first step towards infinite divisions of the Self. Indeed, the *Doppelgänger* as a first sign of multiplicity is already latent in many aspects of James Hogg's novel.

⁵ My translation from Polish.

⁶ Objective/ subjective : the protagonist is confronted with his double, like Golyadkin in Dostoyevsky's *The Double* (subjective) vs. the protagonist is confronted with the presence of two identical personalities, like Scotty in *Vertigo* (objective).

Internal/external: the character experiences a division of his personality in two parts that can temporarily coexist in his body, like Jekyll and Hyde (internal) vs. the character experiences the vision of another person who has the same body, like Golyadkin (external). For more details, see Pierre Jourde and Paolo Tortonese, *Visages du double : un thème littéraire*, Paris, Nathan, 1996.

Re-organizing the double(s): the evil trio and the proliferation of voices

If Robert is persecuted by his double – Gil Martin – he, himself, is persecuting someone else, his brother George. More than the story of a double, James Hogg's novel is a portrayal of an evil trio. The themes of the *Doppelgänger* and the one of warring brothers are merging, sometimes causing confusion. The first version of the story, controlled by the editor, primarily offers the story of a deadly sibling rivalry between George and Robert, constantly underlined by some symmetrical presentations. Education is constantly put in parallel, but the two boys present inverse qualities – social for George, scholastics for Robert. The second version, the *Confessions* of Robert, recounts the diabolical character of Gil Martin, but is also the story of the hate developed by Robert for his brother. Depending of the version, the story focuses on Robert's being persecuted by Gil Martin, or Robert's persecuting George, but also suggests the substitution of Robert with Gil Martin: it is never explicit, but we know that Gil Martin, because of his capacity to take the features of Robert, is actually the one who is persecuting George. The perpetual *re-organization* of doubles is thus amplified by the duplicity of narrators. Within Robert's *Confession*, we find several expressions of the different faces of doubles:

Either I had a second self, who transacted business in my likeness, or else my body was at times possessed by a spirit over which it had no control, and of whose actions my own soul was wholly unconscious. (125)

We can start to think of a proliferation of identities when the “double duplicity” between Gil Martin, Robert and George, begins to create some confusion among other characters, for example the witnesses of George's murder. Gil Martin is potentially the double of everyone, a chameleon imitating whomever he wants. At the beginning of his *Confession*, he appears as Robert's physical double, but nothing subsequently qualifies his appearance, setting a void for readers' imagination. More than a story about the double, James Hogg's novel is a story of the process of doubling, an extreme equivalent of imitating. Moreover, the *Confession* is, from the onset, filled with the notion of harmful imitation. The chronicle of his sins starts with an episode of his childhood, supposed to offer to the reader the first example of his tormented and vicious nature:

This boy, whose name was M'Gill, was, at all his leisure hours, engaged in drawing profane pictures of beasts, men, women, houses, and trees [...]. These profane things the Master often smiled at, and admired; therefore I began privately to try my hand likewise [...]. I then took M'Gill's account book of algebra home with me, and at my leisure put down a number of gross caricatures of Mr Wilson here and there (...). I brought it before our dominie's eye. But never shall I forget the rage that gleamed in the tyrant's phiz! (75-77)

From childhood, imitation and duplication are processes of dispossessing others, as the French word *singerie* suggests – a childish, exaggerating way of imitating someone's personality features with offending intentions.

At the end of the novel, we come back to the construct of a trio – but it is marked by a supernatural dimension. After Robert commits suicide, the Editor takes up his pen for an Epilogue, where he recounts the discovery – told by the medium of a quoted letter – of Robert's corpse:

And the more to horrify the good people of the neighborhood, the driver said, when he first came in view, he could almost give his oath that he saw two people busily engaged at the hayrick, going round it and round it, and he thought they were dressing it. (167)

The self-reflexive figure of James Hogg appears at the very end: his letter is transcribed by the Editor: "In the first place, take the following extract from an authentic letter, published in Blackwood's Magazine for August, 1823" (165). The pseudo-authenticity reappears at the end, so it is at this point that this supposedly scientific tone is irreparably shaken, since the letter is signed by the author himself: "The letter from which the above is an extract, is signed JAMES HOGG, and dated from Altrive Lake, August 1st, 1823." (169)

With this Borgesian staging of himself in his own fiction, James Hogg certainly puts an end to the remains of the game of double and duplicity. Either the author manifests himself as the absolute creator of this fictional universe, and by these means deprives all the other narrators from their reliability, or he stages himself in the fiction as a witness among many other witnesses of the facts that were told in the story. Throughout the novel, it is not only two points of view but a multitude of them that forge and deconstruct the possibility of knowing the truth: witnesses of the murder, the old Samuel Scrape, George's friends, Bell Calvert and Ms. Logan, the two ladies leading a private investigation on George's murder. As Michael Kearnes has underlined, James Hogg's novel multiplies the presence of folkloric voices: those "minor characters" as "narrative voices" are all Scots (Bessy, Scrape, Barnett) and thus represent an oral memory of the fatherland and the potential witnesses of Robert's story for future generations (82).

The multiplication of untrustworthy narrators is in accordance with the motive of witnessing and seeing that is increasingly developed in the novel. The themes of the reliance on senses and sensibility to establish the truth is constant, in accordance with the debates of the 18th Century on empiricism and sensualism indulged by Locke, Condillac or Helvétius, and a wide lexical apparatus supports this in the *Private Memoirs*: with an abundance of words such as "senses," "enquiry," or

“appearance,” and, of course with George’s murder and the investigation following, a profusion of terms evoking vision. Hogg’s mastery of selecting scenes for description and allowing the reader to develop suspicions can only be explained in terms of light and dark:

Hogg delights in allowing crucial scenes to pass unobserved or observed by unreliable witnesses in poor lightning conditions. In this way the plot moves from the explicable to the inexplicable, to a use of imprecision whose results can be argued to be of a high order of artistic excellence. (Campbell 188)

The central murder episode can be thus read with multiple interpretations: a crime followed by an investigation, a philosophical questioning of the notions of truth and illusions of senses, and the staging of a gothic Sublime event – after all, the murder is constantly presented by Gil Martin as a magnificent quest for justice and an aesthetical accomplishment. These three viewpoints on the same event share the notion of *enquiry* (for a guilty, for philosophical truth, for divine justice), which could be related to the fact that Robert Kiely approaches Hogg’s novel with the Nouveau Roman, because it is “not an answer but a question, not a theory but an investigation; one does not read it in order to discover the solution offered on the last page” (149).

The possibility of the trio – the one evoked by the letter reproduced in the epilogue – thus appears in line with the self-reflexivity given by the presence of “James Hogg’s” signature. Beyond the dichotomy of narrative, a third view point is expressed, the one of the shepherd who discovered Robert’s corpse. We can easily connect this character to James Hogg himself, whose nickname was “the Etrick shepherd.” Moreover, sentences like “to horrify the good people” is possibly an echo to Hogg’s own creative work at the *Blackwood Magazine*. Being both the final witness and the author of the story, James Hogg manifests himself as an additional “I” related to the fictional events. Whether he does so as a *deus ex machina*, like in *Saragossa Manuscript* – a supreme voice orchestrating everything – or filled with a mischievous intention to be seen as a witness among others, the ambiguity is probably at the heart of this ultimate way of staging the double, the author himself.

Reframing James Hogg’s novel: the mill, the mirror and metaphorical networks of vision

The blind man’s bluff and the round dance in Wojciech Has’ film adapted from the *Private Memoirs*, as discussed before, could be then seen as a shifting of all the elements in James Hogg’s prose that reveal an idea of potential proliferation of identities, an *ad infinitum* diffraction of the Self that

Pirandello's *One, No One and One Hundred Thousands* echoes. But we have seen that this question is supported in the novel by the idea of an enquiry, a literary project that seeks to explore the notions of truth and vision, empiricism and illusions. The central affirmation of Bell Calvert in the Editor's narrative, "We have nothing on earth but our senses to depend upon [...]" (Hogg 109) is constantly negated by the unreliable narrators and the blurred identities of the criminals and the victims.

If the divorce between truth and vision is expressed by these two film sequences, the dimension of enquiry is perhaps less present than in the novel: simply, because there is no single character in the film that could be expected to tell the truth. The prologue has set a parade of zombies and the "narrator" is a living corpse: no claim for authenticity and realism has occurred before the confrontation of Robert with Gil Martin takes place. However, a few adaptation strategies and aesthetical choices participate in a dynamic of multiplication of viewpoints and a suggestion of a symbolic "third space" – as the meta-textual James Hogg can appear in the novel – within the boundaries of the dualistic frame set by the relationship between Robert and Gil Martin.

The first category of those strategies can be linked to a reductive dynamic. Space is contracted in Has's film; all the actions take place in the cemetery, in Robert's farmhouse and especially the painted room, in a tavern and in a few outdoor locations, all close to the farm. It is essentially by the scales of color and shades that every location becomes a micro- universe, where Manichaeism and illusion can happen:

We are absorbed by the density of colours given by Technovision and the cemetery sequence, then we plunge into an intimate drama played in the deepest feelings and soul of the narcissistic young man, raised in a puritanical house full of religious pride. (Sobolewski 13)⁷

The static dimension of the movie is over-determined by the inert windmill, which has become an allegory of the story played on the screen. The mill is present in the background, witnessing all the events.



from Wojciech Has' *Memoirs of a Sinner*

⁷ My translation from Polish.

And as Tadeusz Sobolewski puts it, in the past iconography, the mill was a symbol of human's incapacity when confronted with tragic fate: "as man who needs misericord, the mill cannot work alone, it needs wind" (13). At the end of the film, when Robert dies, the mill starts to work; its wings are rotating for the first time. It is eventually part of the action.

But the most powerful strategy for adapting Hogg's game of blurred identities and narrative duplicity is a metaphorical network of vision and observation, starting with the first shot on Robert as a living corpse, just when the coffin is opened. Then he appears on the screen with a close-up on his gloomy dead eyes. This network involves multiple over-framings of windows and mirrors, doorsteps and voyeuristic positions of Robert. There is one scene in which Robert's father is looking through a long lens and sees his wife pregnant: the reverse shot is surrounded by a black fog, imitating the vision made through the lens. Later in the movie, Robert does exactly the same thing, at the same place, but he sees Gil Martin with the same kind of courtly love scene, surrounded by the same music, however, there is no black fog. The greatest proximity generates the most visible differences. The visual framing suggests that there is no unique capacity of seeing the truth, but that it is possible to have multiple visions coexisting without specifying which is right and wrong. Moreover, the alternative visions also relate to the trio formed by George, Robert and Gil Martin, many shots playing on the physical confusion between the three characters (for example, when George is killed and lies dead, his face only illuminated in a blue hue that makes him very similar to Robert).

The filmic idea of the trio operates as soon as the "scene of the mirror" (the very first confrontation between Robert and his *Doppelgänger*) occurs. In this vision, the complex set of mirrors actually shows



from Wojciech Has' *Memoirs of a Sinner*

two *Doppelgängers*, not only one. The next shot reveals that what Robert first saw was not a reflection in a mirror, but a reflection of a reflection (the window and the divided mirror). Wojciech Has chooses to materialize the construct of the third element, latent in James Hogg's novel. Establishing the apparatus of a divided mirror is a powerful insight of what we could call a modern version of the *Doppelgänger*.

In this variation, the *Doppelgänger* is an object of artistic interest because it raises the question of the Third, the Outsider: the peculiar presence of the living corpses and the *zombification* of Robert – creatures who lost their singularity, became undifferentiated – can be explained if put in front of this divided mirror that our preliminary quote of Louis Aragon's *La mise à mort* evokes. The main character of this novel, Christian, accuses Stevenson of having neglected the Third in the opposition between Jekyll and Hyde, whose encounter gives birth to the "Indifférent." *La mise à mort* lies on a fascinating object, a tryptic mirror (*un miroir brot*). The divided mirror in Wojciech Has's film perfectly resembles this fascinating device, which could place the entire film under the sign of the Third.

"Re-indigenizing" James Hogg

The reception of James Hogg's *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* has traditionally followed exclusive paths: the supernatural dimension of Gil Martin and the Gothic motives, the post modern interest in narrative duplicity, the psychological interpretation as the devil (that André Gide's foreword embraces), and the reading of the novel as a religious parable and a Scottish cultural piece. Even without mentioning the Calvinist antinomian debates, Wojciech Has's film could easily be seen as a dissemination of all those elements. With its soft and water colors, the scenography and the photography tally with an absence of resolved destiny for the chief protagonist, whom Has refuses to abandon:

Literary Robert was a fanatic, a disciple of the "against", craving for power. Filmic Robert is an entirely different character: he is an unhappy boy [...]. He is Narcissus lamenting his fate. [...]. Feelings triumph over metaphysics. The author does not judge, he stays until the end, for better or for worse, side by side with his characters. (Sobolewski 14-15)

If the film is deemed as an existential allegory and an intimate drama about guilt, some elements have been noted as participating in a certain *folklorisation* of the tale. Further in his review, Sobolewski concludes that "Memoirs of a Sinner is a daring attempt to place a hero of a Polish film on the theatrical stage of the world" (15).

The film is not located in Daircastle, Scotland. And yet, this de-territorialisation is what allows the story to enlarge its perspective on folk memory. This process sets Hogg's novel in a plurality of possible time-space environments. It universalizes the tale, but in doing so, it could paradoxically show by distortion the "very Scotch" (Gide IX) dimension of the story, even if it has become an imaginary Scotland, a referent for which the signified has been slightly shifted.



Painting 1. Vernet, *Les Baigneuses*, 1759



Painting 2. Bruegel the Elder, *The Parable of the Blind*, 1568

This “re-indigenization” first emerges with the countryside representations set without temporal connotations. With sequences of outdoor feasts and tracking shots showing peasants working in the fields, with Robert marching with a stick like as shepherd or a pilgrim at the end of the film, the background multiplies references to an imaginary that represents a happy, innocent and domesticated relationship between men and their environment.

Sometimes, a series of sheer *tableaux vivants* absorbs our eyes. Has’s film develops a pictorial iconography directly evoking pastoral paintings of the 17th and 18th Century. Robert watching his brother George having a bath in the river with a young girl not only referring to all the colors and shades of a nude scene, but is also staging it from the exact same perspective – given by Robert’s gaze – than that of a spectator of those paintings, for example Vernet’s *Les Baigneuses* (1759).

Even the rare “urban” scenes – located in the tavern and in one dark street – are composed like a series of Dutch or Flemish genre paintings– or even *Bamboccianti* – typical subjects of countryside life and lower classes: men drinking and playing, prostitutes, beggars, fights. Always filmed in the dark, these scenes are meant to be opposed to the representations of the countryside as a Virgilian bucolic universe. Robert’s dark



from Wojciech Has's *Memoirs of a Sinner*

house is also a location at dichotomy with the outer light. Supposed to suggest the bigotry and darkness of his soul, this weak lightning is not, however, an equivalent of the novel’s Calvinist austerity: here as well, profusion and artifice transfer the dynamics of duplicity from the novel to visual levels. Baroque elements such as *trompe-l’œil* – a gloomy forest is painted on the walls of the room – and mirrors, candles and books sometimes striking by their gigantic dimensions constantly refer to the fictional nature of Robert’s experience, and signify the universal dimension of folk tales.

Round dances and *trompe-l’œil*, *tableaux vivants*, anonymous witnesses always present in the background – peasants, servants, the innkeeper and the miller – add layers to James Hogg’s narrative, which already plays on the proliferation of voices. Not only do they transfer the polarities of truth and illusion, misjudgment and reason, believing and critically thinking, they also wrap the story up with an elegiac dimension. The film’s baroque staging reaches a climax with the presence of zombie processions and the digging-up of Robert, evoking the universe of Brueghel the Elder (see *The Parable of the Blind*, 1568).

Those aesthetical choices *carnivalize* the story, give a spectacular turn to a novel of counter-initiation and “reversed values” (Pope 219). The series of proliferating figures refer to the dynamism of the *Doppelgänger*, Gil Martin, malleable in his appearance. But it could also be the mask that man wears all the time. The masks that we wear – *larvatus prodeo* – are exhibited by the film, working constantly on deconstructing the stability of Self, which the carnival does also.



from Wojciech Has's *Memoirs of a Sinner*

a collective alienation, folkloric superstition, and popular representations reversing the pastor and the devil. This reading is in line with recent interpretations of the Gothic as a reaction of fear provoked by the French Revolution and the terror. The political dimension of Wojciech Has' *Memoirs of a Sinner*, if unclear to most of the spectators, still leaves open some space for discussion, especially if linked to other Polish filmmakers who have filmed stories of possession (Jerzy Kawalerowicz's *Mother Joan of Angels*, 1961), the devil (Andrzej Zulawski's *The Devil*, 1972), and *Doppelgänger* (Krzysztof Kieslowski's *The Double Life of Véronique*, 1991).



from Wojciech Has's *Memoirs of a Sinner*

World inversion is allegorically represented in Hogg's novel, when Robert is suspended upside down in the tailor's house, a "symbol of reverted beliefs and entanglement in the web of evil" (Smith 161). The ironical "uncanny" that we already found in Has's *Saragossa Manuscript* finds an echo in numerous stories of devil and ghosts in the *Private Memoirs*: tending towards the grotesque, the story of the devil of Auchtermuchty that Samuel Scrape tells Robert comes from

Wojciech Has's corpses and candles might simply represent popular dead beliefs and cultures, stories of the past that some undetermined sobbing we hear during the film may echo. This sobbing can be found in almost all his films: it sometimes indicates madness, sometimes terror, but is always preceded or followed by exuberance and laughter, reminiscent of the joyful and nostalgic feelings of the carnival, trying to make past and dead narratives come alive.

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