The Pragmatics of Literary Interaction in James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs* and *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*

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Abstract

Hogg's *Confessions* was fiercely criticised by the Edinburgh post-Enlightenment literati who considered his writing unsophisticated. A literary-pragmatic investigation, however, reveals Hogg's strategic use of conversational principles through which he conveys additional, subversive meanings. Politeness theories, in fact, demonstrate that Hogg's *Confessions* may have been perceived as a Face Threatening Act against the positive face of bourgeois women. A cognitive approach based on relevance theory, on the other hand, admits the simultaneous validity of both the psychological and supernatural interpretations of the character Gil-Martin. Indeed, Hogg consistently flouts the maxim of Manner as described in Grice's Cooperative Principle, thus creating areas of ambiguity which readers interpret in accordance with their personal cognitive environment.

1 Introduction

During James Hogg's lifetime (1770-1835), Edinburgh was a centre of sophisticated literature and empirical philosophy, dominated by the upper classes, among them Sir Walter Scott. In *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) Hogg, self-educated and working-class, opposes this elitism and insists upon the greater value of marginal voices. This opposition contributed greatly to the novel's unenthusiastic reception within the post-Enlightenment Edinburgh literary scene at the time of its publication while, by contrast, it is judged by recent postmodern and postcolonial scholars to be one of the most significant Scottish novels of any period.

Preoccupied with the negative reception of his previous two novels, *The Three Perils of Man* (1822) and *The Three Perils of Woman* (1823), and possibly also influenced by the success of The Great Unknown's (that is, Walter Scott's) series of *Waverley* novels, Hogg published the *Confessions* anonymously in 1824. Notwithstanding these precautions, the novel was negatively reviewed. As argued by Hughes (1982), the negative reception of the *Confessions* "could not have been for the want of Hogg's name" (Hughes, 1982, p. 11), as six out of the ten anonymous reviewers attributed the novel to him, using as evidence his style, "an incongruous mixture of the strongest powers with the strongest absurdities" (Hughes, 1982, p. 12). With the only exception of the *Monthly Critical Gazette* (1824), which praised highly Hogg's satire of extremist Calvinism, the main objections "were made to what are now taken to be the deliberate ambiguities of the novel" (Hughes, 1982, p. 12). Some reviewers criticised Hogg's inconsistent representation of the devil as either real or a product of the Justified Sinner's imagination, arguing that this uncertainty caused great confusion in the reader as to who was responsible for the crimes committed in the novel. One reviewer admitted his "ignorance of Mr. Hogg's precise drift ... as regards his incoherent machinery" (*The London Literary Gazette*, 1824, p. 451); while another claimed that "if an author will introduce supernatural beings, he is at least bound to invent plausible motives for their interference in human concerns" (*Westminster Review*, 1824, p. 561). The double narrative also raised some concerns as "the author has managed the tale very clumsily, having made two distinct narratives of the same events" (*Westminster Review*, 1824, pp. 560-561); while a further reviewer argued that "it is altogether unfair to treat the reader with two versions of such extraordinary trash" (*New Monthly Magazine*, 1824, p. 506). In general, Hogg's "tremendous power over the human imagination" (Hughes, 1982, p. 13) was acknowledged, although not always in positive terms, and the *Confessions* was viewed as exhibiting "the characteristic ingenuity and extravagance of the highly-gifted, but eccentric writer" (*The Ladies' Monthly Museum*, 1824, p. 106).

The *Confessions*' negative reception continued up to 1947, when André Gide wrote an enthusiastic introduction to the Cresset edition, claiming that "the personification of the Demon in Hogg's book is among the most ingenious ever invented, for the power that sets him in action is always of a psychological nature; in other words—always admissible, even by unbelievers" (Gide, 1947, p. xv). Garside (2002) claims that the eminent French novelist stimulated the interest of a modernist audience by highlighting the psychological intensity of Hogg's novel; while later, the conflicting narratives of the *Confessions*, which Hogg's contemporary critics saw as inconsistencies, have also attracted the attention of poststructuralist critics (Garside, 2002).

Postmodern scholars have found appealing the fact that in Hogg's *Confessions* no voice is given prime status of reliability, and much responsibility for the construction of textual meaning is left to the reader. According to Garside (2001), post-colonial critics have been fascinated by the novel's challenge, mounted by marginal voices in Scots language against the dominant English culture. Indeed, as suggested by Mack (2006), Hogg's message in the novel is that "well-educated people might sometimes be in error" while people from the margins might have "a valuable story to tell" (Mack, 2006, p. 57). Through a debate that admits multiple voices, Hogg anticipated a postmodern approach to discourse, raising doubts regarding the validity of contemporary official knowledge. This subversive quality resulted in censorship of Hogg's texts and therefore his artistic value was little recognised until recently, as his works are being re-published in their unbowdlerised version. Garside (2001) points out that until the end of the nineteenth century, the *Confessions* was known in the 1837 expurgated version of *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Fanatic*, which has delayed enormously the appreciation of Hogg's novel. A subsequent unbowdlerised edition entitled *The Suicide's Grave* and published in 1895 further complicated the reception of the *Confessions*; it carried a publisher's note stating that the novel had not totally been written by Hogg, but that J. G. Lockhart, Walter Scott's son-in-law, had greatly contributed to it (Garside, 2001).

Keeping in mind the contentious reception of Hogg's novel, this essay will argue that a literary-pragmatic analysis can reveal Hogg's masterly management of voices in the *Confessions* through which he communicates additional, subversive meanings that, in early-nineteenth-century Britain, were perceived as challenging the stability of the dominant discourse. By drawing on Mey's (2000) and Sell's (2000) theories, the present paper will view literary activity as a triangular interaction, where the writer and the reader are 'social individuals' who communicate about a third entity, the literary text, and who, as Sell (2000) argues, are affected by their different historical positions, but not totally determined by them.

The analysis will also draw on pragmatic theories of politeness, in order to demonstrate theoretically that Hogg's lack of inhibition in giving prominence to a prostitute may have been one of the reasons for the *Confessions'* negative reception. Concerning Hogg's treatment of prostitution in *Perils of Woman* (1823), Groves (1987) argues that, at a time when in literary texts even the theme of pregnancy was considered indelicate, Hogg pushed the limits of literary decorum by introducing a social issue concerned with women's contemporary urban life, thus provoking great aversion among the bourgeoisie of the period.

The issue of prostitution was not the only cause for the *Confessions*' cold reception. One of Hogg's main idiosyncrasies in the novel is his consistent flouting of Grice's (1989) maxim of Manner, which determines the ambiguity peculiar to Gil-Martin's nature. The investigation will hence draw on Grice's Cooperative Principle, arguing that Hogg's inconsistencies were perceived as being uncooperative by his contemporary readers.[30]

Finally, negotiating Sperber and Wilson's (1995 [1986]) theory of relevance, according to which new information provided by speakers is interpreted by hearers only when relevant to their cognitive environment, namely their personal representation of the world, the paper will examine why the psychological intensity of Hogg's *Confessions* has raised so much interest among postmodern and postcolonial readers. It will claim that the extra-literary context to which a reader of the *Confessions* belongs greatly conditions the process of textual reception by viewing both acts of "writing and reading as at once historically positioned, voluntaristic and interpersonal" (Sell, 2000, p. 22).

2 Literary Pragmatics

The linguistic field of pragmatics is concerned with the spoken aspect of language and with the study of how words are interpreted in a real conversation. Its basic assumption is that to understand people's words, we must infer their intentions (Mey, 2001a). In order to clarify how utterance meaning is generated, pragmatics takes into account the language system, the particular situational context where a string of words occurs, and the personal knowledge that language users bring with them (Christie, 2000).

By analogy, literary pragmatics considers the processes of writing and reading as ruled by communicative strategies, and literary texts as characterised by a mutual agreement between authors and readers. The characters, the author, and the readers have voices that blend in a dialogue, contributing to the communicative process of the text. The analogy between oral

[30] See later "The Double Interpretation of Gil-Martin's Nature."

and literary communication enables the activities of writing and reading to be viewed as pragmatic acts. Three aspects contribute to a pragmatic view of text production and consumption. The first is the cooperative aspect, according to which the cultural conditions that an author exploits to capture the readership determine specific linguistic choices; however, the author's effects can only be achieved if the reader actively collaborates in the re-creation of textual meaning. The second pragmatic aspect is context, as a literary text needs to be "anchored" to a historico-cultural context in order to be properly produced and consumed. The third is multivocality, namely the various textual voices competing for dominance and sometimes even clashing (Mey, 2000, 2001b).

Sell (2000) regards literary activity as a pragmatic phenomenon which further entails an act of human agency on the part of both the author and the reader, thus arguing that "a historical yet non-historicist pragmatics ... will view human beings as profoundly affected by their different situationalities, yet as having the psychological endowments necessary to negotiate such differences through communication" (Sell, 2000, p. 7). The author's co-adaptation between his or her individuality and historical position might be communicated to the readers either by a strategic use of voice, deixis, and free indirect discourse; or by looking outward, at the cultural influence on text production and consumption (Sell, 1991a). Literary pragmatics can thus provide a detailed textual analysis of the *Confessions* as it can encompass considerations about its linguistic features, the users of the text, and the socio-historical position of Hogg and its readers. This "text-author-reader" interface will be important for the discussion of how Hogg co-adapted imaginatively his cultural position in early-nineteenth-century Edinburgh within the novel, even though such co-adaptation did not raise much empathetic response at its time of publication. A "historical-yet-non-historicist" literary pragmatics may help to reveal why the *Confessions'* readers' "positionality" may influence their reaction both to the ambiguity of Gil-Martin's origin and to the relevance that Hogg assigns to prostitution.

3 The Cooperative Principle

The philosopher of language Grice (1989) argues that in order to understand meaning in communication, we need to ask what speakers intend by their linguistic choices rather than what a chain of words literally means. Communication, in fact, is a complex process. A speaker's meaning involves an attribution of intention on the part of the hearer, since speakers usually imply more than what they actually say by relying on shared knowledge in a given context. According to Grice's theory, the distinction between what is said and what is actually meant is due to the implications of conversational principles. Distinguishing between

"conventional implicature", an additional level of meaning conveyed by the speaker's linguistic choices, and "conversational implicature", elicited by expectations of rational linguistic behaviour in interaction, Grice theorises the Cooperative Principle of communication, which he bases upon four maxims. According to him, conversational behaviour is constrained by expectations of quantity (make your contribution as informative as is required, neither more nor less); of quality (make your contribution true); of relation (be relevant to the topic); and of manner (avoid ambiguity), thus allowing hearers to get from what is said to what is actually meant. Grice's maxims are not prescriptive, but rather represent expectations about rational communicative behaviour, which a speaker might flout in order to generate indirect meaning (Grice, 1989).

Sell (2000) argues that Grice's Cooperative Principle might be very productive for "a historical yet non-historicist literary pragmatics" (Sell, 2000, p. 52). As speakers might flout a maxim "in order to make a conversational implicature, perhaps for some special and striking effect" (Sell, 2000, p. 52), so also an author might exploit the same strategy when interacting with "real readers" (Sell, 2000, p. 58). Drawing on Pratt (1977), Sell views the literary text as performing a speech act under certain felicitous conditions, where the cooperative principle is always "in operation". Although an author may flout a maxim, readers go on assuming that there might be "some element of implicature ... and tolerantly interpret the difficulties away" (Sell, 2000, p. 59). Sell, however, adds that although readers may be patient with a writer flouting the maxim of quality, "when it comes to flouting the maxims of quantity, relevance and manner, readers [...] may well dislike being steamrollered by authors they experience as impolite" (Sell, 2000, p. 59).

The present essay will show that Hogg strategically flouts Grice's maxim of manner in order to create areas of ambiguity in relation to Gil-Martin's nature, and that such flouting may have been perceived as impolite by Hogg's contemporary readers, thus determining the negative criticism of the novel.

4 Politeness

Starting from Grice's cooperative principle, Brown and Levinson (1987, [1978]) have developed politeness theory, which, they argue, further clarifies Grice's model of conversation. They wonder why speakers do not just say what they mean, exploiting instead conversational implicatures (what an utterance may suggest), and sometimes even flouting Grice's maxims. All languages recognise a need for saving face, an important pragmatic concept in human interaction deriving from Far-Eastern notions of deference and politeness (Mey, 2001a). Linguistic interaction, however, threatens interlocutors' face, and this is why

speakers use linguistic strategies that express solidarity and minimise potential threats both for themselves and the hearers. In order to theorise a set of universal principles shared by all languages in communication, Brown and Levinson hypothesise a Model Person endowed with rationality and face. They distinguish between negative face (interlocutors' need of not being impeded in whatever they want to do) and positive face (the need of social approval). Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) against positive face criticise, ridicule, or show irreverence towards the hearer; while requests and orders may threaten the hearer's negative face. There are two further strategies in politeness: going "off record", when the speaker drops a hint rather than making a direct request, leaving the hearer free to choose whether or not to help; and going "bald", when the speaker is not concerned about offending because of being in a more powerful position than the hearer, or when there is such urgency, as in case of fire, that face threats are not considered (Brown & Levinson, 1987, [1978]).

Christie (2000) claims that the problem with Brown and Levinson's theory is its abstraction from a socio-cultural context of a Model Person assumed to be sharing the same rationality and face with all human beings, irrespective of their class, gender, and culture. In addition, Mills (2003), in her subsequent study on the relation between gender and politeness, observes that people have to negotiate continuously not only with the gendered stereotypes that circulate within their particular social groups, but also with other variables such as race, class, and age, which influence both their production and interpretation of politeness. Mills' re-elaboration of politeness theories may be relevant to an evaluation of the failure of empathetic response to Hogg's *Confessions* at its time of publication. The Edinburgh literati had already established a notion of literary decorum, and the issue of prostitution raised by Hogg may have been viewed as a FTA against the positive face of bourgeois women, as it showed irreverence towards their moral values. Regarding Hogg's well-received collection of *Winter Evening Tales* (1820), two anonymous reviewers judged *Basil Lee* the worst story because its grappling with prostitution offended "the best regulated modesty" (*The Monthly Review*, 1820, p. 264) and "would make the faces of young ladies in ballrooms ... blush blue as their stockings" (*Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine,* 1820, p. 154).

Sell (1991b) claims that although Brown and Levinson's theory has been criticised for being too abstract, their notion of FTAs and their distinction between positive and negative face suggest productive lines of investigation into the politeness of literary texts. Concerning written communication, Sell (2000) distinguishes between *selectional* politeness and *presentational* politeness, arguing that while the former deals with the choice of words in order to appear more polite, the latter evaluates whether the author is observing Grice's maxims and thus being cooperative with the reader. Sell argues that discussions of both selectional and presentational politeness must be "culture specific and historical" because

what might be experienced as impolite in one period may not appear so "to readers reading in some other milieu" (Sell, 2000, pp. 225-226). The present paper will show that in the specific case of the *Confessions*, Hogg's flouting of the maxim of manner in relation to Gil-Martin's double nature may have been experienced by his contemporary readers as violating the principle of presentational politeness.

5 Relevance Theory

One of the most insightful theories in the linguistic field of pragmatics is Sperber and Wilson's (1995 [1986]) relevance theory. Reducing Grice's four maxims to the principle of relation, they argue that hearers interpret speakers' new information only when relevant to improving their cognitive environment, namely their personal system of values, and only when such interpretation requires the minimum processing effort. Most importantly, Sperber and Wilson counter the "mutual knowledge hypothesis", arguing that although two communicants can share a similar system of beliefs, their respective contexts may not be totally shared. Conceiving of context as the hearer's psychological construct activated at the very moment of utterance interpretation (rather than as already given before such construal takes place) may explain why there can be as many reactions to the same utterance as the numbers of hearers who hear it (Sperber & Wilson, (1995 [1986]). This is also why, as Sell (2000) claims, "communication can be seen as a process by which ... contextual disparities are negotiated" (Sell, 2000, p. 120). Previous linguistic theories have been based upon the "unitary context assumption", namely a context which is identical for all the people involved in interaction. Concerning literary communication, such hypothesis is "unhistorical and dehumanizing" as it suggests that "any given text can only be taken in just some single way: either according to the putative intention of its author, or according to the understanding of the current commentator" (Sell, 2000, p. 133). Notwithstanding the "mental distance" between sender and receiver, communication, whether spoken, written, literary or non-literary, is triangular as it also includes the context of "the real, hypothetical or fictional people, events and things under discussion" which, however, are always "reconstructed by the current communicants" (Sell, 2000, pp. 121-122). Sell (2000) views the context of reading as a cognitive environment which goes "beyond the writer's control" as it also depends on both the historical position and individuality of the reader who, during the process of inferencing may experience different cognitive environments "jostl[ing] against each other" (Sell, 2000, p. 132). Undeniably, a historically purist analysis of authorial intention would not capture the depth and the breadth of the "empathetic movement", as Sell would call it, between the context of the writing of Hogg's *Confessions* and its multiple contexts of reading, as will be later discussed.

6 The *Confessions*

Hogg's *Confessions* is divided into two main narratives. The first part is told by the post-Enlightenment Editor, a contemporary of Hogg, who offers a third-person account of Robert Wringhim's life; the Justified Sinner, a religious fanatic who lived between 1687 and 1712. The second part is Robert Wringhim's autobiography, which is interrupted by an embedded supernatural tale; the novel is then concluded by the Editor's account of how he and his friends found Robert's manuscript in a grave in Ettrick Forest more than one hundred years after the narrated events. The plot shows the negative consequences of Robert's religious fanaticism and his adherence to antinomianism, a distorted version of Calvinism. According to Calvinism, God has already predestined the elect, and their strong faith is evidence of such election. Antinomianism, conversely, releases the elect from the obligation of observing moral law, diminishing the importance of integrity. Robert thus thinks that in order to destroy God's enemies, he is justified in committing any crime. Such religious zeal, however, will bring him to damnation; he is either evil or psychotic, depending on how the reader wants to interpret this particular aspect of the novel, which Hogg leaves unanswered. In the *Confessions*, Hogg investigates the negative consequences of relying on authoritative discourses by opposing the value of moderation to both the Editor's biased rationality and the Justified Sinner's antinomian enthusiasm. Hogg criticises their feelings of superiority by using the voices of subaltern classes, which question the authority of British discourse. Hogg's attitude is similar to that of French philosopher Michel Foucault (1990), who claims that any society is characterised by its particular system of values, which is spread by institutions at the expense of other knowledge. In 1820s Edinburgh one of the hidden problems was prostitution, which Hogg sought to expose in the *Confessions*. Although Wringhim's narrative is set more than one hundred years before the 1820s, it mirrors Hogg's social issues since, as argued by Sell's (2000) and Medvedev and Bakhtin's (1978) studies, the fictional events under discussion have been constructed according to Hogg's socio-historical conditions.

7 *The Double Interpretation of Gil-Martin's Nature*

One of the major disputes that has divided Hogg's critics is the origin of Gil-Martin, who first appears in the novel soon after Robert's antinomian election. Is Gil-Martin the devil in disguise who gains Robert Wringhim's soul by exploiting his antinomian extremism? Or is Robert the victim of a split personality and Gil-Martin his alter-ego? Glance (1993) claims that the tension experienced by the reader in relation to this point mirrors an early nineteenth-century Scottish cultural division: although in Hogg's time, Edinburgh was an

important intellectual centre, a popular belief in supernatural phenomena was still common. Mack (1999) suggests that Hogg's *Confessions* confronts merits and faults of both rational philosophy and old Ettrick tradition without allowing an empirical explanation to diminish the mystery of both beliefs. Oost (1999) focuses on the great demand placed upon the readers of Hogg's *Confessions* who, since no authoritative voice is provided to guide them, must be alert and 'work actively to make their own sense of the tale' (Oost, 1999, p. 105). Garside (2001) observes that Hogg exploits the Gothic motif of the *doppelgänger* as it appears in T. A. Hoffmann's *The Devil's Elixir* (1815), where the protagonist Medardus is haunted by a double who is later revealed to be his half-brother. Hogg, however,

> *takes the motif of the* doppelgänger *into a new dimension, creating a work where the reader is left in a continual state of uncertainty as to whether Gil-Martin is an external presence or the product of Robert Wringhim's psychosis, yet where ultimately both levels of interpretation might relate to aspects of a single incomprehensible truth. (Garside, 2001, pp. 120-21)*

Campbell (2000) states that Robert's crimes can be explained as cases of either evil possession or mental psychosis, and that although Mrs. Logan's and Mrs. Calvert's seeing of Gil-Martin can be motivated by hysteria, Blanchard's witness of him 'is hard to contradict' (Campbell, 2000, p. 186). However, it must be added that this part of the novel is narrated by the Justified Sinner, while the two women's testimony appears in the Editor's account, and both narrators are presented by Hogg as unreliable. Campbell holds that the *Confessions*' resistance to "single readings and single interpretations" has attracted a great deal of post-modern criticism (Campbell, 2000, p. 186). Most importantly, Duncan (1994) claims that Hogg is one amongst very few authors of his time to have sensed that a written text "can be reanimated by the act of reading" (Duncan, 1994, p. 48).

Taking into account the interaction between Hogg and the reader of the *Confessions*, and considering the pragmatic aspect of extra-literary context, and Grice's maxim of manner, it is likely that Hogg created areas of ambiguity in relation to Gil-Martin's character out of fear of negative criticism. In *Perils of Man* (1822), Hogg had "decided to join a loose historical background with his deep knowledge of Border legend and tradition, and to place both within the perspective of his fantastic imagination" (Gifford, 1996, p. xvi). Walter Scott's response, however, was not particularly positive as he argued that Hogg "had ruined 'one of the best tales in the world' with his 'extravagance in demonology" (Gifford, 1996, p. xvi). This may explain why in the *Confessions* Hogg leaves to the reader the final task of inferring Gil-Martin's origins. Gifford observes that in the *Confessions*,

> *…always there is the possibility that the devil and other supernatural apparitions exist only in the mind of Wringhim. Thus to the critic who would attack the novel for its 'diablerie and nonsense', Hogg could reply that the story was a psychological study of a religious fanatic. Conversely, if the novel were attacked as the distasteful study of a lunatic, Hogg could reply that his work was in fact a supernatural tale [...] Hogg thus hoped to ride with the hares and hounds of contemporary criticism. (Gifford, 1996, p. xix)*

Indeed by flouting Grice's maxim of manner, Hogg appears to have employed himself in a negotiating process between two different cognitive environments: the rational post-Enlightened Edinburgh literary circle and his own cultural background of Borders legendary tradition. The following passage is an extract of Robert's monologue which shows Hogg's ambiguity:

> *I generally conceived myself to be two people. When I lay in bed, I deemed there were two of us in it; when I sat up, I always beheld another person […] over the singular delusion that I was two persons, my reasoning faculties had no power. (*The Confessions*, p. 106)*

A literary-pragmatic analysis of this passage admits both Robert's split personality and Gil-Martin's evil nature. Mey (2000) holds that both author and reader are involved in a dialogical interaction for the duration of the text. However, they are also creatures of the society surrounding them, which govern their co-operative process of text production and consumption. If we add to Mey's (2000) considerations Sell's (2000) adaptation of Sperber and Wilson's relevance theory, it may be possible to elucidate why at Hogg's time, the *Confessions* was not appreciated. As Benedict (1983) and Smith (1993) have argued, Hogg combined supernatural and psychological motifs in a manner totally alien to the readers of his time who viewed the psychological treatment of Robert and the conflicting duality of his personality as inconsistencies. Hogg's flouting of Grice's maxim of manner may have been experienced as violating presentational politeness by his contemporary readers who, perceiving Hogg as uncooperative, determined the negative reception of the novel. The same inconsistencies, however, are viewed as relevant by postmodern critics, whose cognitive environment is more informed concerning the psychological implications of human nature, and who might be more fascinated by the conflicting narratives of the *Confessions*.

On the other hand, Hogg's consistent violation of Grice's maxim of manner provides passages that support the daemonic thesis. The following extract, where Robert's voice muses over the nature of Gil-Martin, well shows this point:

> *I began to have secret terrors that the great enemy of man's salvation was exercising powers over me, that might eventually lead to my ruin [...] the presence of my illustrious and devoted friend was becoming irksome to me. When I was by myself, I breathed freer, and my step was lighter; but when he approached, a pang went to my heart, and, in his company, I moved and acted as if under a load that I could hardly endure. (The* Confessions*, p. 126)*

Shortly afterwards, however, Robert adds a remark that may lead the reader to infer the schizophrenic interpretation: "And yet to shake him was impossible – we were incorporated together – identified with one another […] and the power was not in me to separate myself from him. I still knew nothing who he [Gil-Martin] was" (The *Confessions*, p. 126). Indeed, the last sentence, "I still knew nothing who he was", may be interpreted as a case of split personality by a modern reader, due to the different cognitive environment.

The Justified Sinner is accused of having killed his mother and raped a girl. He, however, does not recall having committed these crimes and experiences a void of memory that Hogg never explains, exploiting the fact that, being Robert the narrative voice, he cannot know what happened. When speaking to the girl's mother, Robert provides the following explanation:

> *This is unaccountable [...] It is impossible that I can have been doing a thing, and not doing it at the same time. But indeed, honest woman, there have several incidents occurred to me in the course of my life which persuade me I have a second self; or* that there is some other being who appears in my likeness. *(The Confessions, pp. 121-122, emphasis mine)*

The above passage gives space to the daemonic interpretation, by suggesting in the last line the chameleon nature of Gil-Martin, which he himself explains a few pages earlier: "By looking at a person attentively, I by degrees assume his likeness, and by assuming his likeness I attain to the possession of his most secret thoughts" (The *Confessions*, p. 86).

As Campbell (2000) argues, Hogg's *Confessions* resists any single interpretation, and the imposition of just one reading would limit its power (Campbell, 2000). Through a deliberate technique of imprecision, Hogg guides the reader towards Robert's fall into damnation, whether of the mind or of the soul, requiring that Gil-Martin's nature be devised through a pragmatic act of reading. Gil-Martin's sinister presence in Robert's life can be seen both as the devil being attracted by Robert's spiritual pride and as an extreme case of schizophrenia. A literary-pragmatic investigation gives space to both interpretations by arguing that the choice depends on how the readers, according to their cognitive environments, prefer to fill in the blanks left by Hogg. Pilkington (1991) observes that from a relevance perspective,

reactions to a poetic work will never be the same because cognitive environments differ according to the reader. The same principle may be applied more broadly to Hogg's *Confessions*, where the double interpretation of Gil-Martin's nature has received both empathetic and negative response, depending on the historical position of its reader.

8 Bell Calvert and the Question of Literary Politeness

Mack (1999) holds that the most amazing subversion of Hogg's *Confessions* is set against the Editor's assumptions, in the voice of a woman with a very different background: Bell Calvert, a poor prostitute. Bell recounts an episode already narrated by the Editor, but provides an eye-witness description of the killing of young George, the Justified Sinner's brother. The Editor assumes that George has been murdered by his friend Drummond, basing his account on the general impression of George's friends who, at the moment of the homicide, were in a brothel. Although unable to work out what she saw on the night of the crime, Bell does know that Drummond cannot be guilty. In addition, her tale makes the reader reconsider the Editor's jovial depiction of George's friends as she describes a group of drunken men who, on the night of the murder, were contracting sexual favours with her, while she was perishing with famine (Mack, 1999).

The industrial revolution had caused a rapid growth of population in early-nineteenth-century Edinburgh, contributing to the degradation of urban life and to an increase in the number of prostitutes, as described in detail by William Tait, a surgeon of the period (Tait, 1842). Hogg saw prostitution as a social plague, and wanted to make the public more aware of it, highlighting its negative consequences "on the prostitutes themselves, their clients, and society at large" (Groves, 1987, p. 131). Levine (2004) and Wilson (2004) remark that nineteenth-century bourgeois women represented the moral authority of the imperial project, acting as Christian guides of British society. The cult of domesticity within marriage shaped the distinction between private and public space, while the stigmatisation of prostitutes as fallen women contributed to the construction of middle-class identity. Giving relevance to prostitutes in his texts, Hogg exposed the ideology behind bourgeois marriage in early-nineteenth-century Britain. Mack (1990) argues that Hogg's lack of inhibition in dealing with these matters, however, provoked great aversion among the Edinburgh literati who, for this reason, censored his texts. Sell claims that nineteenth-century fiction greatly mirrors the "interweaving of politeness with class and power" (Sell, 1991b, p. 210). In the specific case of Hogg's *Confessions*, giving voice to a prostitute may have been perceived as a FTA against the positive face of British bourgeois women. Hogg, a self-educated shepherd who refused to

conform, could not be considered a serious writer, and his lack of inhibition in dealing with such "indelicacies" was viewed as inappropriate for a bourgeois lady.

In his discussion of politeness in Dickens's *Dombey and Son* (1846-48), Sell (2001) points out that the novel's success at its time of publication was due to Dickens's skilfully balanced "endorsement and subversion of a homogenizing bourgeois decorum" (Sell, 2001, p. 165). Dickens's fluctuation between traditional values and their subversion mirrors a "tension between the social and the individual" which Dickens "powerfully" co-adapted (Sell, 2001, pp. 168-169). A total deconstruction, in fact, may have been "too intoxicating for a middle-of-the-road Victorian reader" (Sell, 2001, p. 181). This is probably the balance that Hogg was unable to strike in the *Confessions* as, instead of placing Bell Calvert in the background, he made her one of the most relevant characters of the novel. The dialogic contraposition between the Editor's and Bell's voices, however, represents Hogg's basic message in the *Confessions*, namely as argued by Mack (2006), that people from the margins may also have a worthwhile story to tell. According to relevance theory, hearers generate inferences from information only when they judge it relevant to improving their representation of the world. As claimed by Christie (2000), a speaker's class, gender, and ethnicity, greatly conditions the hearer's assumptions about how relevant that speaker's information will be considered. Giving voice to a prostitute was thus not only against nineteenth-century conventions of literary politeness, but it may also have been perceived as irrelevant to the cognitive environment of the bourgeoisie. Conferring dignity to Bell Calvert seemingly worked to subvert the discursive justification of the dichotomy between bourgeois "Madonna" and prostitute, upon which the middle-class identity was constructed.

9 Conclusion

A literary-pragmatic analysis of the *Confessions* reveals how Hogg questioned the authority of early-nineteenth-century British discourse by giving literary dignity to Bell Calvert, a prostitute from the margins. Hogg's tactic, however, threatened bourgeois conventions of literary politeness as he raised doubts concerning the manipulative strategies adopted by more conventional literature, thereby anticipating a post-modern approach to fiction. Relevance theory, on the other hand, admits the simultaneous possibility of both the evil and the schizophrenic interpretation of Gil-Martin's nature since, perhaps motivated by fears of negative criticism, Hogg flouted Grice's maxim of manner, leaving the question of Gil-Martin's origin unanswered.

One of the major concerns about using literary pragmatics for textual analysis is that applying communicative principles to the study of literary texts is abstract, since writing and

reading are non-simultaneous processes; hence an author cannot enjoy immediate feedback from the reader as in a real conversation (Sell, 2000). Notwithstanding the absence of immediate reaction, however, "most linguists [...] nowadays recognize that an act of writing is inherently dialogic" (Sell, 2000, p. 20). Indeed, a literary-pragmatic framework may open very productive lines for investigating Hogg's handling of gender issues in his work by evaluating how the early-nineteenth-century British context contributed to shaping Hogg's work, and how Hogg himself tried to co-adapt his own individuality to bourgeois literary conventions.

10 References

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