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ARTICLE

Echoes, Connections, Continuities: Bill Winnyford, James Robertson, and James Hogg in *The Testament of Gideon Mack*

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This article looks to an engagement with canonical Scottish texts, exploring the intertextual resonances between James Robertson's *The Testament of Gideon Mack* (2006) and James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824). Murchison explores the playful and multiple connections between the two texts, offering both elucidation of the twenty-first century text and new ways of approaching Hogg's novel and the tradition to which it belongs.

Keywords: James Hogg; James Robertson; intertextuality; Scottish literature

James Robertson's *The Testament of Gideon Mack* (2006) offers a new perspective on James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824). Critics acknowledge that *Gideon Mack* is a re-working of Hogg's most famous novel, yet few critics have engaged fully with the relationship between the two novels. It is therefore worth exploring, in greater detail, the ways in which Robertson uses his novel to interpret *Confessions* and how this leads the reader to a renewed understanding of an important and canonical Scottish novel. Through the various other intertextualities in *Gideon Mack*, it is possible to connect both novels to literary and folkloric tradition in Scotland.

It will first be necessary to examine how Robertson self-consciously acknowledges the concept of intertextuality, with an overview of the real and fictional intertexts found in *The Testament of Gideon Mack*. Once this broader view of the maze of texts that make up the novel has been established, it will be possible to look more closely at the dialogue Robertson enters into with Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified*

Sinner in particular. Robertson's novel updates *Confessions* for a secular age. An argument often made about *Confessions* is that it is a novel about certainty, conviction and unquestioned religious fervour.¹ *The Testament of Gideon Mack*, on the other hand, is about a 'reverse crisis of faith' (Murray 2008, 172). While the religious contexts of Robertson's and Hogg's novels differ somewhat, they both deal with the ambiguous space that exists between doubt and faith, certainty and scepticism. A key allusion to *Confessions* in *Gideon Mack* is the devil figure, which dimly echoes Hogg's Gil-Martin. This devil figure, it will be argued, embodies the inter-text and the way it's changed context alters the reader's understanding or interpretation of its meaning. This raises the question of identity: Gideon Mack's identity is a pastiche of various fictional characters he has read, just as *Gideon Mack* is a pastiche of various fictions and non-fictions. Similarly, Gil-Martin's chameleon-like identity in *Confessions* is based on his interpretations of the characters and figures that surround him. The instability of identities based in fiction create uncertainty and ambiguity: in the same way that Gideon bases his identity on his own interpretation of other texts, *Gideon Mack's* reader must base his or her understanding of the novel on his or her interpretation of other texts. This article will explore the implications of this for interpretations of *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, which has now been given the additional context of a predecessor to *The Testament of Gideon Mack*.

Gideon Mack is a novel about a man who becomes a Church of Scotland minister despite having no belief in God. The novel opens with his disappearance and the subsequent discovery of a manuscript he has written, which fictional editor Patrick Walker reproduces for the reader. Following years of ministerial work in the community of the fictional Northeast town of Monimaskit despite his lack of faith, Gideon's atheist beliefs are challenged when he finds a standing stone in the woods that, despite looking like it had stood for centuries, did not, to his mind, previously exist.

For such a recent novel, *The Testament of Gideon Mack* has received a relatively large amount of critical attention. In her recent comprehensive overview of the

¹ See, for example, Rankin 2008, vii–xiv and Craig 1999, 37–39.

influence of *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* since its initial publication in 1824, Gillian Hughes points out that the formal and some thematic aspects of *Gideon Mack* mirror those of *Confessions* (Hughes 2012, 143–4). While critics never fail to mention the connection between Robertson's novel and Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, it is dismissed by Robert Morace in a 2011 article for *Gothic Studies* as 'obvious' (Morace 2011, 30) and tends to be discussed only in terms of their formal similarities. While the connection may be obvious, it remains worthwhile to examine Robertson's reasons for adapting Hogg's novel for a secular age beyond its place in a body of work that can be considered 'rural Scottish Gothicism' or that deals with 'ministers and the Devil' (Morace 2011, 30). Morace's argument focuses mainly on the comic aspects of Robertson's novel, reaching the conclusion that he is writing 'for a more sceptical age for which intertextuality may be the new supernatural (or poor cousin): a Gothic incapable of signifying anything but itself' (Morace 2011, 32). The implication is that *Gideon Mack* is merely a collection of other texts, creating a deliberately superficial and unrelentingly self-reflexive work of comedic fiction. However, as will be seen below, *The Testament of Gideon Mack* has meaning and significance beyond itself, and its intertextual allusions signify much more than the Gothic supernatural – they connect a twenty-first century novel to the past and help acknowledge and continue Scotland's literary traditions.

Timothy C. Baker has recently written extensively on *The Testament of Gideon Mack*, placing it, like Morace, in the context of contemporary Scottish Gothic fiction. Unlike Morace, Baker chooses to move away from the Gothic parallels with Hogg and Stevenson, and instead examines the ways in which the works of Walter Scott haunt the text, making a strong argument for Scott's place alongside Hogg and Stevenson as part of the Scottish Gothic canon in addition to his well-established place in the Scottish literary canon more generally. As Baker astutely indicates, 'Mack moves from being a reader of Scott to, unconsciously, a re-enactor' (Baker 2014, 45). He argues that Scott's texts are often forgotten 'because they appear permanent' (Baker 2014, 46). Though Baker argues that Scott's texts – like Gideon's mysterious stone in the novel – are less permanent than they initially appear, Hogg's novel does not have the same illusion of permanence due to its publication history fraught with instability

and relatively recent, belated inclusion in the Scottish canon.² It is therefore useful to examine the instabilities of both *Gideon Mack* as a text, and the unstable, changeable literary tradition to which it belongs, in relation to a text whose canonicity is less stable.

Echoes: Fictional and Functional Intertextuality

Intertextuality is a major aspect both of *Gideon Mack* and of the criticism surrounding it. In the novel, an artist, Bill Winnyford, is commissioned to create a museum installation to celebrate the six hundredth anniversary of Monimaskit, the fictional town where Gideon spends his adult life and much of the novel is set. The project is itself reminiscent of *Life Beneath the Shadow*, an art installation by Cai Guo Qiang at Edinburgh Fruitmarket on which James Robertson collaborated in 2005. Winnyford's reflections on his exhibition, entitled 'Echoes: 600 Years of Monimaskit Memories', also describe the novel itself. "I'm building this multi-layered experience," he explains:

"creating, or *re-creating* is more accurate, the world in which people live [. . .]. I'm building items into the whole that are self-reflecting, recyclable. Echoes that are sometimes natural sometimes manufactured sometimes a mixture of both [*sic*]. Echoes, connections, continuities." (Robertson 2006, 184–5)

Winnyford's emphasis on the word 'recreating' follows Derrida's argument that 'everything begins with reproduction' (Derrida 1978, 224). Winnyford, like Robertson, is consciously creating a work that is, like all texts, 'shaped by the repetition and transformation of other textual structures' (Frow 1990, 45). Through the doubling Robertson has created by the inclusion of an art installation whose purpose, self-

² *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* sold very poorly on its initial publication in 1824 and was republished as a distinctly different version in 1836–37. It was in this bowdlerised form it was largely known for most of the nineteenth century. The novel was not fully recognised as one of Hogg's best works until its republication, with an introduction by André Gide, in 1947. For more information, see Garside 2002, xi; Alker and Nelson 2009.

reflexivity and conspicuous intertextuality mirrors that of the novel it is contained by, he draws attention to how the novel, too, is constructed, created, and recreated.

Intertextuality, however, can and does occur unconsciously. Winnyford's claim that his 'echoes' are 'sometimes natural sometimes manufactured sometimes a mixture of both' draws attention to the idea that, while Robertson's text consists of a web of other texts deliberately and consciously included in order to make up his text, it is also the case that 'the unconscious text is already a weave of pure traces [. . .] consisting of archives which are *always already* [emphasis in the original] transcriptions' (Derrida 1978, 224). In other words, any text is created through the repetitions of other texts previously read by the author, whether consciously, unconsciously or both. The writer is first a reader and the act of writing is an act first of interpretation and then of (re)creation: as Linda Hutcheon wrote in *Theories of Adaptation*, 'adapters are first interpreters and then creators' (Hutcheon 2012, 18). Through its unceasing emphasis upon its influences, Robertson's novel, and Winnyford's installation within it, draws attention to the notion that any text is made up of a network of influences.

The phrase 'echoes, connections, continuities' places the text within a larger network, or maze, of texts. The text does not, and cannot, stand alone: it 'does not function as a closed system' (Still and Worton 1990, 1). In this case, *The Testament of Gideon Mack* connects, through its numerous allusions, to Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (and many other works) and, crucially, continues and contributes to the larger narrative of Scottish literary tradition. Through Winnyford's reflections on his installation, moreover, the novel comments on the reader's role in extrapolating meaning and creating intertexts. As Still and Worton indicate, 'Readers recognise in (or impose on) these texts segments from other writings which may have been forgotten by the writer or even written many centuries later' (Still and Worton 1990, 9). Not only, then, does Robertson bring traces of other texts to his novel, but so, too, does the reader. As 'the identification of an intertext is an act of interpretation' (Frow 1990, 46), once Robertson has made an allusion, it is then left to the reader to ascribe meaning through his or her own recognition of the reference, or lack thereof, and

understanding of the reference that itself will have been influenced by the reader's previous reading.

Although *Gideon Mack* is a reworking of *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, it is also necessary briefly to examine how Robertson deals with intertextuality more generally. Robertson's novel, like Hogg's, poses a series of questions that are either left unanswered or given multiple potential answers, creating ambiguity. Robertson has said of *Gideon Mack* in an interview with Isobel Murray that it is a novel full of questions for which he does not provide the answers (Murray 2008, 175). The answers – the novel's various allusions suggest – may well be found beyond the boundaries of the text as an object. Like Bill Winnyford's installation described here by Gideon himself, the experience of reading *Gideon Mack* is

not unlike being in a maze: you could only get to some parts of the outer circles by first going deeper in towards the centre, and you came across dead ends too, which obliged you to retrace your steps to the next gap. (Robertson 2006, 236–7)

The reader can only reach some potential answers to the questions raised by the novel by 'going deeper in', that is, by identifying and interpreting the intertexts.

However, in addition to finding more questions, the reader will also reach some 'dead ends'. This could refer to the texts Robertson alludes to that exist only within the fiction he has created: local historian Catherine Craigie's book *The Ancient Stones of Monimaskit and Surrounding District* and one of Gideon's predecessors in the manse, Augustus Menteith's book *Relicts and Reminiscences* both appear authentic for they are given detailed publication dates and authentic-sounding publisher information (Robertson 2006, 175, 196). Fictional editor Patrick Walker mentions in the prologue 'the latest edition of our Scotch whisky guide, *A Dram in Your Pocket*' and journalist Harry Caithness's book *Crimes and Mysteries of the Scottish Highlands*, neither of which exist despite their entirely plausible-sounding titles and subject matter (Robertson 2006, 4). Yet these fictional references nestle alongside allusions

to real works both of fiction and non-fiction. For example, Robert Kirk's *The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns and Fairies* is key to the plot as it is gifted to Gideon's father by the devil. Yet it is frequently described as 'curious' and the clearly fictional means by which it enters the novel's text strongly suggest to the uninformed reader that this book is as fictional as Gideon's bizarre encounters with the devil. Also explicitly referenced – aside from *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* – are, to pick a selection, Walter Scott's *Waverley* novels, Hugh Miller's *Scenes and Legends of the North of Scotland* (1835; republished 1994), Lewis Grassie Gibbon's *A Scots' Quair* (1934), and Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* (1854). Through these allusions and references, the reader is encouraged to bring their own knowledge of such prior texts to their understanding and interpretation of Robertson's novel, alongside other, more implicit textual allusions.

The notion of the reader's role in creating meaning for *Gideon Mack* is underscored by Winnyford's exhibition and reflections upon his exhibition. For the installation, Gideon reads a passage from a previous minister's writings, a local myth called 'The Legend of the Black Jaws'. The audio is placed in a reproduction of the study in the manse that both the transcriber of the legend, Augustus Menteith, and Gideon lived in a century apart as ministers of Monimaskit. Winnyford tells Gideon:

This passage is setting the scene, and that's exactly what my installation is – scene-setting. There'll be a direction to visitors to read the legend in Menteith's book, if they wish. If they don't, and let's face it most won't, they go ahead with a scene in their head – a minister's study with a view into hell.
(Robertson 2006, 213)

Arguably, *Gideon Mack* is also 'scene-setting', with numerous implied directives to readers to seek out its influences. The reader who does will be rewarded with another way of interpreting the novel, while the reader who chooses not to goes 'ahead with a scene in their head'.

In a footnote to the revelation that the devil Gideon claims to have met goes by the name 'Gil Martin', fictional editor Patrick Walker writes:

My informant Dr Hugh Haliburton tells me that this is the very name given by James Hogg to the mysterious, devil-like figure that haunts the anti-hero of his novel *The Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. I have never read this book. (Robertson 2006, 355)

The notion that Walker, as a literary editor in Scotland, is not aware of the name 'Gil Martin' and its implications is faintly ridiculous and, as Morace argues, 'underscores the novel's jokey side' (Morace 2011, 30). Indeed, the comedic effect of Walker's apparent ignorance is itself indicative that *Confessions* is now, in the twenty-first century, an important part of the Scottish canon, to the extent that for a literary editor not to have read it is laughable. Given, however, that Walker later reproduces passages from Hogg's text, an ambiguity is created regarding whether Robertson is creating a laughable editor, or Walker is playing games of his own by denying familiarity with *Confessions*. Regardless, Walker's brief footnote draws the reference to the attention of the casual reader, who may not have any knowledge of Scottish literary tradition, and acts as an implicit direction for him or her to read the earlier novel in a similar way to Winnyford's more explicit directive to the viewer of his installation to read Menteith's 'Legend of the Black Jaws'. Yet the fact that Walker, despite his role as editor of Gideon's testament, claims not to have read Hogg's novel acts as an acknowledgement that, like viewers of Bill Winnyford's scene in the study, many readers may ignore the suggestion. Robertson has said that 'there are some phrases of Hogg's that are in the book, although I haven't been explicit about that, and that's there for people to find if they want' (Murray 2008, 174). The connection to *Confessions* is there for the reader who wishes to engage with it, but is not necessary to an understanding of the novel as a whole.

Conversely, Robertson expects that some readers will pursue many of the novel's references. A description of the town of Monimaskit is reproduced by Gideon and presented as a print-off from an online *Gazetteer of Scotland* (Robertson, 137–8).

The town itself is fictional – the National Grid co-ordinates provided place it in the North Sea – but the website, www.scotgeog.com, is functional. However, the landing page claims the website has been ‘redesigned to concentrate entirely on the affair of Gideon Mack’ (scotgeog 2006a,b). Beside hyperlinks to author interviews that highlight both the novel’s and website’s fictionality is a page consisting of fictional readers’ comments complete with authenticating misspellings and grammatical quirks. One comment in particular highlights the effect that the numerous references and allusions in *Gideon Mack* has on the reader:

I did begin the book thinking this was a factual book and was intrigued but by the end was left unsure if this was fictional or not – I decided to ‘google’ it and found this website – I am now even more intrigued and would love to one day visit Monimaskit (if it really does exist). (Points of View 2006)

It is clear that it is expected that some readers will investigate further, and there are plenty of options for the curious reader to do so. The fact that one of these options is a website and on that website a fictional reader claims to have searched online for Gideon Mack indicates that the intertextualities in *Gideon Mack* have been updated for a twenty-first century audience.

The website also mirrors the authenticating effect of Hogg’s letter to *Blackwood’s* – ‘A Scots Mummy’ – that is reprinted in part in *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. Both the website and Hogg’s letter add to the reader’s confusion and uncertainty regarding the fictionality of the novels to which they relate. The existence of apparently corroborative information in a different media format induces uncertainty in the reader. Furthermore, just as readers of *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* would have been cognisant of its reputation for tricks and games, modern-day readers of *The Testament of Gideon Mack* are aware of the ubiquity of internet hoaxes and the ease with which anyone can create and publish a website containing false information. However, it is crucial to note that Hogg’s letter to *Blackwood’s* appeared before the novel and was a self-sufficient story in its own right, while the website appeared after the publication of *Gideon Mack* and is dedicated wholly to the novel. Unlike Hogg’s

letter, the website would be rendered meaningless without the novel. The website is therefore simultaneously part of the narrative and extraneous to it. Not only does Robertson's novel – like Hogg's – draw attention to its intertextuality, but Robertson also plays with the notion by referring both to non-existent texts, and to texts that have been created specifically as a supplement to the novel.

The most sustained connection between *Gideon Mack* and *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* is the devil figure in each. Significantly, this is also where Robertson, or Gideon, most explicitly commits an act of interpretation by referencing Hogg's novel. The figure Gideon claims to meet is unquestionably and openly the devil, and he is also Gil Martin. He admits to being the devil, and fixes Gideon's broken leg as 'proof' of his unlikely role (Robertson 2006, 283). Conversely, the devil figure Robert Wringhim meets in *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* is evasive about his identity, letting Robert believe he is Czar Peter of Russia and giving his name only as Gil-Martin. While readers and critics largely accept that Gil-Martin is the devil, the novel ends with a literal question mark over Gil-Martin's true identity. It is only other characters, such as Robert's servant Samuel Scrape, that recognise him as the devil: "they say the deil's often seen gaun sidie for sidie w'ye, whiles in aw shape, an' whiles in another. An' they say that he whiles takes your ain shape, or else enters into you, and then you turn a deil yourself" (Hogg 2002, 135). Robert refuses to believe that his 'devoted, princely, but sanguine friend' (Hogg 2002, 164) is the devil. The fact that Gideon's devil openly admits to his identity and later claims to have signed his name as 'Gil Martin' in a copy of Robert Kirk's *The Secret Commonwealth* he gifts to Gideon's father, means that Robertson – or Gideon – is choosing to interpret the mysterious figure in Hogg's novel as the devil. Baker writes at length about the fact that 'Mack's perspective on the world is both textually constituted and based on the relations between these texts' (Baker 2014, 42). It is interesting to note that Hogg's Gil-Martin is hyphenated, while Robertson's is not: unhyphenated, Gil Martin can be feasibly abbreviated as 'GM', mirroring Gideon Mack's own initials. It is possible that this devil figure has the initials GM because Gideon's identity and perceptions correspond to the texts he has read and it is Gideon who interprets Robert Wringhim's Gil-Martin as

the devil – just as the reader's perception of the novel is based on the texts he or she has read. There is no overt reference to Gideon having read *Confessions*, but it seems possible given his appreciation of Hogg's contemporary, Scott. Morace has pointed out that the shabby trainers worn by the devil in *Gideon Mack* is an intertextual reference to James Kelman's *How Late It Was, How Late* (1994). This adds credence to the idea that Gideon bases his perception of the devil on his interpretations of the texts he has read. The devil figure haunts Robertson's novel as an embodiment of textual interpretation, whereas intertextuality in Robertson's novel creates connections to a larger literary culture in Scotland.

Connections: Elves, Fauns and Fairies

It is therefore necessary to examine briefly some of the other intertextual connections to Scotland's literary past that occur in *The Testament of Gideon Mack*. Robert Kirk's *The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns and Fairies* is relevant due to the significance of a copy of the book as an object in the plot of *Gideon Mack*, but also due to Kirk's juxtaposition of the pagan supernatural with post-Reformation Calvinist belief. This juxtaposition is mirrored in *Gideon Mack* by the paradoxical contiguity of Gideon's claims of Gradgrindian belief in facts (Robertson 2006, 53) and his supernatural experience with the devil. Similarly, Hugh Miller's *Scenes and Legends From the North of Scotland* mixes the supernatural with science and religion. Robert Kirk's *Secret Commonwealth* was written around 1691, and published by Sir Walter Scott in 1815. Hugh Miller's *Scenes and Legends* was first published in 1835 and, significantly, an edition was edited and introduced by James Robertson in 1994. These texts are therefore particularly pertinent due to the fact they are contemporaneous with James Hogg's *Confessions* and because, like Robertson's and Hogg's novels, both feature ambiguities regarding the boundaries between fact and fiction, reality and myth.

Kirk's *The Secret Commonwealth* is an unusual book that explores the subterranean world of fairies and supernatural creatures. It is unclear whether Kirk's belief in these creatures and the second sight was genuine or not, and folklore surrounding

his death suggests he was taken captive in Fairyland and his body never found. Kirk discusses, at length, *doppelgänger*-like creatures he calls 'Co-walkers', which are 'every way like the Man, as a Twin-brother and Companion, haunting him as his shadow, as is oft seen and known among Men (resembling the Originall,) both before and after the Originall is dead' (Kirk 1933, 70). This description can be applied both to Hogg's Gil-Martin, who haunts Robert and appears as his twin, and to the devil figure in *Gideon Mack*. Significantly, the 'Co-walkers' are, Kirk informs the reader, 'Subterranean Inhabitants' (Kirk 1933, 67). Robertson literalises this notion by placing his devil figure deep underground in a river gorge known as the Black Jaws. Furthermore, a man with an 'exact likeness' to Gideon is seen by a hill-walker seven months after Gideon's death. With Robert Kirk's 'subterranean inhabitants' in mind, it is possible to surmise that the hill-walker in fact saw a 'Co-walker' or the devil figure Gideon met in the Black Jaws. It is notable that after his disappearance and before his death, Gideon checks into a bed and breakfast under the alias 'Robert Kirk', perhaps to suggest that, like the legend regarding the real Robert Kirk, he is not dead but being held in Fairyland. Robert Kirk, too, was said to have reappeared after his death (Kirk 1933, 22) and this tale is retold in Robertson's novel (Robertson 2006, 215) but, as with Gideon, the vision in Kirk's legend could also have been a 'Cowalker'. The folklore and supernatural beings explored in Kirk's manuscript are not biblical but pre-Christian Scottish legends. The connection to Kirk's *The Secret Commonwealth* suggests that the supernatural creature Gideon meets in the Black Jaws is not only explainable as the devil but also has its roots in more ancient Scottish folklore.

Robertson undoubtedly took his inspiration for the Black Jaws from Hugh Miller's *Scenes and Legends From the North of Scotland*, again reinforcing the notion that Gideon's identity and experiences are a pastiche of various literary influences. As with Kirk, Miller's book blurs the boundaries of myth with fact. Geographical and geological information is placed alongside historical detail, folklore and legend. As Robertson indicates in his introduction to the 1994 edition of *Scenes and Legends*, it was Miller's 'natural talent to store and retell [traditional folk beliefs] with that shrewd mix of imaginative accuracy and scepticism' (Miller 1994, x). This description

reflects and pre-empts Robertson's own, later novel with its ambiguous fusion of doubt and faith. It is unsurprising, then, that one of the legends in Miller's text, 'The Lady of Balconie', in which a Lady is kept as a servant by the devil 'one hundred and thirty feet below the surface of the earth' under the Black Rock of Kiltarn (Miller 1994, 165–9) is reproduced in *Gideon Mack* as 'The Legend of the Black Jaws' written by a previous minister named Augustus Menteith (Robertson 2006, 188–95). Both Augustus Menteith and Mack reiterate the trope of the devil living deep underground in a gorge, and Menteith's description of the Black Jaws mirrors Miller's description of the Black Rock of Kiltarn. This fact is emphasised strongly in the text by a footnote from fictional editor Patrick Walker in which, as with his footnote regarding *Confessions*, he claims no knowledge of Hugh Miller's book (Robertson 2006, 196). As with references to Kirk's work, Robertson's intertextual engagement with Miller connects the novel not only to Scotland's literary canon and to religion in Scotland, but to ancient Scottish folklore and legend.

Continuities: Faith and Doubt in the Past and Present

The relationship between past and present is a feature of much of James Robertson's work. *The Testament of Gideon Mack* is less of an 'historical novel' than some of Robertson's other work, such as *The Fanatic*, *Joseph Knight*, and *The Land Lay Still*, yet *Confessions* and other sources maintain a link to the past. Just as the kites school children fly at local historian and teacher Catherine Craigie's unorthodox funeral operate as a 'kind of line of communication between the living and the dead' (Robertson 2006, 334), the references to *Confessions* create a dialogue between the two novels. Robertson has stated in an interview that his interest lies in 'if you can locate a story in the eighteenth or seventeenth or whatever century which has some kind of resonance for today. I'm interested in that relationship between past and present.' (Robertson 2013) Robertson's engagement with other texts in *Gideon Mack* places the story he has created within a larger narrative, challenging the notion that humanity has changed greatly and finding connections with the concerns and beliefs of a past that may appear different on the surface.

The Testament of Gideon Mack contests the historical philosophy of progressivism. In *The Modern Scottish Novel*, Craig interprets Robert Wringhim's memoirs as:

not simply an account of the false assumption of election: it is a realisation that what, at one moment in life, may seem an undeniable truth, justifying a certain course of action, will come in retrospect, to have an entirely different significance, subject to revision both by ourselves and by the processes of history – dramatised in the later and misconstruing narrative of Hogg's "Editor" – that will make our beliefs incomprehensible to the future. (Craig 1999, 39)

Here, Craig indicates the ways in which time can alter perceptions. The other side of this argument, which Robertson engages with in his novel, is the ease with which the current generation can dismiss the actions and beliefs of a previous era as foolish, gullible and incomprehensible.

The editors in both *Testament of Gideon Mack* and *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* operate under the assumption that they come from a more enlightened or sceptical age than the century previous. Patrick Walker, the editor in *Gideon Mack*, begins his concluding narrative by writing:

What can this work be? Can it be anything other than the ramblings of a mind terminally damaged by a cheerless upbringing, an unfulfilled marriage, unrequited love, religious confusion and the stress and injury of a near-fatal accident? Who dare, in this day and age, to suggest that Gideon Mack was, as he maintained to the end, telling the truth? (Robertson 2006, 361)

This is comparable to the way that Hogg's unnamed editor resumes his commentary following Robert's memoirs:

What can this work be? Sure, you will say, it must be an allegory; or (as the writer calls it) a religious PARABLE, showing the dreadful danger of selfrighteousness? I cannot tell. (Hogg 2002, 165)

Not only is the initial question here reproduced verbatim by Walker, the sentence structure and rhythm of the passages share conspicuous similarities. Each features long, list-filled rhetorical questions containing several short clauses. More importantly, Walker's final question quoted above is highly reminiscent of Hogg's editor's later assertion that, 'in this day and age, and with the present generation, it will not go down, that a man should be daily tempted by the devil' (Hogg 2002, 175). Both of the editors refer to an undefined earlier time in which, they believe, people were less sceptical and more readily believed in the supernatural. Yet, significantly, there is a gap of nearly two hundred years between the editors making the same contention. Robertson therefore subtly informs the reader that there have for centuries been people who look condescendingly at a previous generation's beliefs in order to anchor, validate and reinforce the beliefs of their own.

Doubt and scepticism, then, are assumed by the editors of both novels to be a signifier of human progress, yet Robertson's novel conveys that Scotland's relationship to Christianity is historically characterised by doubt rather than certainty. Gideon writes:

What is the history of Christianity in this dark wee country but a history of doubts and fears, grasping at metaphysics from hard stone and wet bog? True, some came up bloody and triumphant with their fists full of certainties, but it is a delusion to look into our past and see only grim ranks of Covenanters and John Knoxes scowling back. Even then there were plenty of holy wobblers and switherers making up the numbers. (Robertson 2006, 37).

This is how Gideon justifies his decision to become a minister despite his atheism, but it also contradicts Patrick Walker and Hogg's editor's assumptions that those of an undefined previous generation failed to question their beliefs. This passage creates a dialogue with the past by contesting the traditional view of Calvinism as a set of beliefs typified by certainty and fanaticism. Despite, however, Gideon acknowledging that viewing Scotland's Calvinist past in such a way is 'a delusion,' he fails to recognise that his own father is one of the 'holy wobblers and switherers making up

the numbers'. Gideon, until the events of the novel, is certain of his own atheism and takes his father's unwavering belief in God for granted. There is a strong sense of superiority and condescension in Gideon's treatment of his father's faith at the beginning of the novel.

Yet the devil Gideon meets first tests his atheism, in direct contrast to the devil's traditional role in testing faith, and secondly forces Gideon to accept the fact that James Mack's relationship to Christianity was not hugely different to his own. The devil describes James Mack as:

A sad, frightened little man. He was so like you, or you're so like him. You may have started off from different places but you've both spent your lives scuttering about in theological mud. Even if you think you haven't. The hours and hours he spent in that study of his, wondering where he'd gone wrong [. . .]. You don't think he was there because he *believed*, do you? Don't you think he would have been out fighting the world if he'd really believed? He didn't. He didn't have a shred of faith left. (Robertson 2006, 285)

Despite being of a generation previous, before the sudden secularisation of Scotland in the 1960s, James Mack shared the same doubts and fears as Gideon. The father and son 'started from different places' since Gideon is of an era for which publicly declared religious belief or church attendance is no longer an obligation. Though Gideon, unlike his father, was free to admit his unbelief to himself and his close friends despite his role as a minister, his personal relationship to religion is no different to that of his father. This reveals a new way of understanding *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. Despite *Confessions* being mired in early nineteenth century Calvinism and *Gideon Mack* engaging with the rise of secularism in the late twentieth century, both novels are dealing with a universally human subject: that of the tension between certainty and uncertainty, doubt and faith. Like Gideon and his father, both novels 'scutter about in theological mud'. *Confessions* is widely purported to be a novel about certainty and fanaticism, yet in the same way that Gideon's father's

religious fervour is revealed to be an attempt to hide his uncertainty, *Gideon Mack* offers the perspective that Robert is led astray by Gil Martin due to uncertainty: he is surprised by his father's claim that he is 'one of the elect' and this suggests he has not himself experienced the 'inward stirrings of the spirit' that Calvinist doctrine views as necessary (Benedict 2002, 323). Cairns Craig points out that 'Robert's sudden translation from certain damnation to unchallengeable justification allows him to transcend the fears by which his early life is claustrophobically imprisoned' (Craig 1999, 38). Robert's fanatical behaviour is a result of doubt, fear and uncertainty, rather than certainty and unquestioned faith in his own infallibility.

Through intertextual engagement with various sources in *The Testament of Gideon Mack*, Robertson offers the twenty-first century reader renewed understanding of James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. Rather than a novel about certainty and unquestioned belief, *Confessions* is shown to be a novel about doubt and uncertainty. In *Gideon Mack*, artist Bill Winnyford's installation and his reflections upon his work act, to some extent, as a self-reflexive interpretation of the novel it is contained by. Like Winnyford's exhibition, the novel encourages the reader to look outwards to the sources referred to for answers to the novel's multitudinous questions, contradictions and ambiguities, while acknowledging the fact that many readers will not. However, Robertson also playfully complicates the reader's ability to find the novel's influences by including a number of 'red herrings' in the form of explicit references to sources that do not exist and a website that is functional but serves only to blur further the boundaries between reality and fiction. While Winnyford's exhibition epitomises the novel's complex maze of sources and its consequent connection to a wider literary and folkloric tradition in Scotland. Moreover, the devil's revelation that Gideon's father, like Gideon, had no faith in God despite his role as a Church of Scotland minister exposes the notion that Scottish Calvinism is characterised by doubt as much as by faith. *Confessions* is frequently viewed as a novel about unquestioned belief and religious fervour, but Gideon's father's lack of faith despite his religious fervour offers an alternative interpretation of Robert Wringhim's fanatical behaviour.

In using James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* as an intertext alongside a number of other references and allusions, James Robertson's *The Testament of Gideon Mack* inevitably offers another interpretation of the novel and, in turn, a new perspective for the reader of both novels. Robertson's engagement with important novels from Scotland's literary past, and with Scottish legends and folklore, places his novel within a larger tradition, continuing and updating the myths and narratives of the past for the present and future. In the twenty-first century, through this reading of *The Testament of Gideon Mack*, Scotland can be viewed historically not as a nation of fanatical Calvinists, but as a nation with both faith and scepticism regarding the supernatural. James Robertson uses his novel to show how Hogg's canonical novel is relevant to a modern Scottish audience and can be connected to Scottish folklore and legend as well as to Calvinism.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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