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The Persistence of the Medieval Christian Devil
in English Romantic Literature and its Example
in James Hogg's "Private Memoirs and
Confessions of a Justified Sinner".

**Medieval Theology and the Devil - The Devil
and Calvinism - The Romantic devils - The
second Romantic devil and James Hogg's
novel.**

Medieval Theology and the Devil

In the Old Testament the Devil did not have such an important place as in the New Testament. Demons in rabbinical literature are spiritual beings who have been given permission by the Lord to tempt mankind and do us bodily harm for punishment of our sins, but in the New Testament they are under the generalship of Satan: «The fallen Angel, Satan rules this world, chief of a vast multitude of powers spiritual and physical allied against God», as G.B.Russell explains in "The Devil".

The Devil goes through important transformations during the Middle Ages: first with Saint Augustine who fused the New Testament with neo-Platonism and then Saint Thomas of Aquino who brought Aristotelian ideas into Christian theology. As a result, the medieval tradition was largely based on an amalgam of Platonic and Aristotelian ideas of the cosmos, in which the hierarchy of beings was formed by seraphics, cherubics, archangels and angels... and at the bottom Satan. Man was placed between angels and animals because he is part spiritual and part animal; man has a spirit and a body, animals only have a body in Christian theology.

The Devil and Calvinism

Even if Calvin in his theology perpetuated the idea of the medieval Devil, he mentioned that Satan was regulated by God and he could not conceive of evil that God does not want. This concept seems to have a relation with rabbinical literature, as we have seen before, where demons are sent by the Lord to chastise mankind. But one thing is sure, Calvin gave medieval attributes to the Devil underlining the fact that the latter is an existing being and Protestants must be conscious of this. But the Devil does not only appear in theological and biblical texts, it also often appears in secular literature especially during the Romantic period.

The Romantic devils

Demons and devils were the heroes and anti-heroes of the 19th century Romantic literature but we must right away define two different kinds of Romantic devils. First the devil as a revolutionary or an anarchist. The French Revolution was said to be the work of the Devil and the restoration of the King of France was assimilated to the triumph of Christ over the Devil by the royalists. The revolutionaries, on the contrary, found in the Devil; fighting against repressive authority and the unjust, a sympathetic figure antagonist

of Christianity that was related to royalty through the theory of the divine right of kings.

As Russell says the Devil was a hero of the Romantic concept of the sublime, which magnifies nature and humanity. This cast away devil rebels against society that blocks progress to liberty, beauty and love.

The second Romantic devil and James Hogg's novel

In the second phase of Romanticism from 1815 on, the medieval definition of the Devil reappears, as in James Hogg's novel: "Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner". It is about a young antinomian Calvinist, Robert Wringham, who is under the influence of a man called Gill Martin. Robert identifies him as an eastern potentate or czar Peter the Great; in reality it is the personification of Satan that he is dealing with. The Devil will direct his life and bring him to quasi madness.

Many critics have defined this Devil in terms of Robert's psychological problem; but in fact this Devil seems real for he has the attributes of the medieval Devil: he is afraid of cold fresh water, he has demon companions under his orders, he has the power to possess, to change physically into anyone he wants... The other point is that the Ettrick shepherd (James Hogg) was maybe a Presbyterian but surely a believer. In his "Sermon on Deism", he says: «I think it is best, in supporting the doctrines of the Christian religion always to avoid any attempt to explain mysteries.» He reveals here the mystical side of his character. For Hogg mystery is not a challenge demanding a solution; his respect for mysteries of religion is immense and it is the same way he respects mystery in fiction. Flannery O'Connor has commented on a remark on Saint Gregory: «Every time the sacred text describes a fact, it reveals a mystery. That is what the fiction writer on his lesser level hopes to do.» So it would be irrelevant to state that Gill Martin is more the fruit of Robert's psychological illnesses than the Devil itself.

Even if Hogg was close to Christian theology and was a believer, he was still a fiction maker and he made use of the Devil as he wished. There are no limits in literature like there are in theology; imagination can have free sway to create what the writer wishes. But his culture, his past, his identity, his religion will definitely influence his writing. He can't escape his past education, and we can feel it in his novel. To conclude in more general terms, the Christian Devil seems to be present in human consciousness, and as a result, in the history of literature it appears as the inevitable image of evil.