Hogg's Epigraphs in *The Three Perils of Man* (1822): Forging Scotland's Cultural Heritage

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The Three Perils of Man, written by James Hogg in 1822, opens with the following lines:

> There was a king, and a courteous king,
> And he had a daughter sae bonnie;
> And he lo'ed that maiden aboon a' thing
> I' the bonnie, bonnie halls o' Binnorie.
>
> But wae be to thee, thou warlock wight,
> My malison come o'er thee,
> For thou hast undone the bravest knight,
> That ever brak bread i' Binnorie!
> *Old Song* (Hogg 1)

When readers discover these stanzas for the first time, they might think they are about to hear an old legend rather than begin reading a three-volume historical romance. Readers are given a glimpse of the types of characters involved in the story that is about to begin—men of power, princesses and knights living in a land inhabited by wizards—but the epigraph also points to one of the central questions raised by the novel, the question of its genre. *The Three Perils of Man* indeed shares similarities with folk-inspired narratives, chivalric romances and historical novels.

There are thirty-two chapters in the novel and thirty-seven epigraphs, as some chapters have double epigraphs. These quotations place the novel under the sign of popular culture and Border folklore[1], and celebrate them as a valuable source of inspiration. This first epigraph, identified as an "Old Song" in the novel, is taken from a ballad called "The Twa Sisters," anthologised as ballad 10 in the Child ballads.[2] It is quite representative of the rest of the novel, which is replete with epigraphs taken from folk tradition.

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[1] The term "Border" is here capitalised as it refers the boundary between England and Scotland or the English and Scottish borderland (OED 3a and 3B). The OED indicates that the term "appears to have been first established in Scotland, where the English border, being the only one it has, was emphatically *the border.*"

[2] The *English and Scottish Popular Ballads* were collected and catalogued by Francis James Child, who then published them between 1882 and 1898. They were published more than half a century after *The Three Perils of Man*. As Child's anthology is still commonly used among scholars and easily accessible, several ballads will be identified using this anthology in this article.

Epigraphs, these "thresholds of interpretation," according to the expression used by Gerard Genette, are a particular type of paratext. Genette defines an epigraph as "a quotation placed *en exergue* [in the exergue], generally at the head of a work or a section of a work [...] Here, the exergue is, rather, at the edge of the work" (144). They give free play to the readers' imagination, and enable them to project themselves into the vision of an imaginary world that is only hinted at. The epigraph gives a first glimpse of what the world of the novel will look like.

Epigraphs function as interpretative clues for the reader. They have a guiding function: they create distance between the reader and the main narrative, offering information about the diegesis or on the contrary misleading the reader, or making an ironic commentary on the main narrative. They add layers to the story that is about to unravel before the reader's eyes, since the main narrative will most certainly resonate with the older narratives of the epigraphs. Finally, they inject touches of generic variety into the novel. Their guiding function concerns more than the diegesis. They provide an indirect paratextual representation of the author and their literary project by placing the work in a personal literary tradition. They allow different genres and a wide variety of voices to interact. This article focuses on the fourth function of epigraphs identified by Genette, the "epigraph-effect," which marks the period, genre and tenor of a piece of writing.

With *The Three Perils of Man*, Hogg breaks into historical romance, as the novel is the first extensive piece of prose fiction in which he engages with his deep knowledge of Border legend and tradition. *The Three Perils of Man* opens on the confrontation of an English and a Scottish family over Roxburgh castle, the object of a long-standing dispute between England and Scotland about the border. The English Lord Sir Philip Musgrave has taken Roxburgh Castle and has vowed to hold it until the end of the Christmas holidays to satisfy Lady Jane Howard. James, Earl of Douglas, takes up a challenge by Princess Margaret to retake the castle by the same date. While Douglas tries to regain control over the castle, his ally Sir Ringhan Redhough, sends a delegation to Aikwood Tower, the tower of the wizard Michael Scott. He wants the wizard to foretell the outcome of the siege. As this first epigraph illustrates, the quotations evoke and give depth to the medieval world depicted in the novel. Many of them are taken from sources that appear to be authentic. These epigraphs raise questions of sources, canonisation, cultural legitimacy and literary filiation. Hogg thus explores the cultural importance of folk material while engaging with the question of its authenticity.

This article focuses on this notion of authenticity as opposed to the idea of forgery. This corresponds to the third definition of the term in the *OED*: "With reference to a document, artefact, artwork, etc.: the fact or quality of being authentic; genuineness" (*OED* 3, first recorded use 1720), authentic meaning "having the stated or reputed origin, provenance, or creator; not a fake or forgery" in this context (*OED* 7a, first recorded use 1645). In this context, authenticity

is synonymous with direct contact with the material or with the ability to locate the quotations in multiple sources. The authenticity of the material guarantees that the representation of the stories, beliefs and customs of the Scottish Border is authentic, in this case in the first meaning of the term: "The fact or quality of being true or in accordance with fact; veracity; correctness" (*OED* 1, first recorded use 1716). This article can thus be reinscribed within a larger critical interest in the Romantic conception of authenticity.[3] Hogg provides a complex example of Romantic authors' ambiguous relation to the notion of authenticity and several scholars have explored the ways in which Hogg performs authenticity in his works.[4]

Epigraphs enable Hogg to unravel a reflection on the making and the transmission of a cultural heritage and to inscribe his novel in the tradition of Scottish folk storytelling. However, authenticated folk songs are juxtaposed with other types of epigraphs, such as literary quotations, compositions of Hogg's own making that are presented as authentic folk material, and unidentified quotations. Many of Hogg's epigraphs are thus forgeries. They conjure up the memory of Macpherson's Ossianic poems, which had sparked the eighteenth-century interest in the cultural roots of Britain.

This article argues that Hogg's use of epigraphs in *The Three Perils of Man* complexifies his treatment of questions of cultural and literary inheritance. It enables him to comment on the antiquarian taste of his own time. The aim of this paper is to recontextualise Hogg by comparing his use of epigraphs with that of one of the leading figures of early nineteenth-century Scottish fiction, Walter Scott. Hogg strongly positions himself against the antiquarian authority of Scott to present himself as the authentic guardian of this folk heritage. This article will then address the question of inauthentic epigraphs and their function in creating a portrait of Hogg as an elusive storyteller.

"Old Ballads," "Old Songs," "Old Plays"… but different traditions

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, pre-chapter epigraphs were commonly used by authors. Corrina Readioff demonstrates that between 23% and 26% of first-published novels featured epigraphs, and these numbers kept increasing in the 1820s, the decade during which

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[3] See Ian Duncan, "Authenticity Effects: The Work of Fiction in Romantic Scotland," as well as Tim Milnes and Kerry Sinanan, *Romanticism, Sincerity, and Authenticity*. Margaret Russett's book, F*ictions and Fakes: Forging Romantic Authenticity, 1760-1845,* convincingly argues that the acknowledgment of subjectivity and poetic identity as fictions is "an ethical condition of authenticity" in the Romantic period (5).

[4] See for instance Hotchkiss, Duncan. "Performing Authenticity in the 19th-Century Short Story: Walter Benjamin, James Hogg, and The Spy ." *Studies in Scottish Literature*, vol.46, no. 1, 2020, pp.100-116 and Mack, Douglas. "James Hogg's Second Thoughts on *The Three Perils of Man* ." *Studies in Scottish Literature*, vol. 21, no. 1, 1986, pp. 167-175.

The Three Perils of Man was published: "The actual percentage of new novels with epigraphs does climb steeply from about 1819/20. This peaks at 52% in 1820 and 53% in 1827, with the total yearly percentage only once dipping below 40% in this decade" (Readioff 12). Readioff identifies the publication of Scott's Waverley novels as one of the main causes explaining this phenomenon.

Scott often referred to epigraphs as trivial elements, writing in his journal: "[i]t is foolish to encourage people to expect mottoes and such like Decoraments [sic]. You have no credit for success in finding them and there is a disgrace in wanting them" (*The Journal of Sir Walter Scott* 119 in Readioff 16). He nevertheless started using chapter epigraphs at the beginning of every chapter in *Guy Mannering* (1815) and continued experimenting with them in the Waverley novels. Hogg might have been imitating this example by opening every chapter of *The Three Perils of Man* with a quotation.

Three aspects of Hogg's use of epigraphs can be compared with Scott's: the celebration of native traditions – English or Scottish – through the selection of epigraphs taken by predominantly British authors and works, the creation of an authorial persona through the epigraphs, and the use of invented epigraphs. Scott and Hogg both use verse epigraphs taken from poetry or drama predominantly in their novels. Both authors had published poetry collections, and had come to be known as poets, before turning to prose fiction. Verse epigraphs can be seen as indicative of "a desire to integrate the novel, particularly the historical or philosophical novel of the 19th century into a cultural tradition" (Genette 160). Writing about the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Berger evokes "a decisive change in both the matter and manner of epigraphic employment" (376). He identifies a desire to move away from classical quotations to highlight British quotations: "[Old ballads' epigraphs] represent not only a change from learned classical to English quotations but also from the "classic" authors well established in the tradition of literature to unknown poets giving voice to folklore, legend, and myth" (Berger 381). The way in which the two authors use epigraphs in their novels is evidently fully in tune with the literary practices of the time, since both Hogg and Scott place a greater emphasis on native tradition.

If there are similarities in Scott's and Hogg's use of epigraphs, the differences in the sources from which the epigraphs are taken are rather telling. Berger identifies four main categories of epigraphs in Scott's Waverley novels: quotations taken from anonymous old plays, songs, or ballads, sometimes adapted from older works and sometimes invented; quotations from Shakespeare's works—which constitute Scott's favourite sources; quotations from neoclassical

authors, such as Dryden, Crabbe, Pope or Jonson; and epigraphs from contemporary authors like Burns, Byron or Coleridge.[5]

The vast majority of Hogg's epigraphs—twenty-six out of thirty-seven—appear to be taken from folk tradition.[6] Ten out of twenty-six are identified as coming from old songs, ballads or plays. Sixteen out of twenty-six are given a title. Five out of twenty-six are authenticated,[7] sixteen out of twenty-six are probably of Hogg's own composition, and five come from unidentified sources.[8] Eleven quotations out of thirty-seven are taken from exclusively textual sources, and include literary quotations, historical accounts, or quotations from the Bible.

Both authors make references to "Old Ballads" and "Old Plays," unidentified sources belonging to Scottish or English traditions. But they do not do so in the same proportion and, I would argue, not for the same purposes. Most of Scott's sources are English sources, and many of them are literary ones. Three categories out of four concern exclusively textual sources. Scott's main source is Shakespeare, and a lot of epigraphs are taken from Shakespeare's historical plays. Berger argues that the analogy between Shakespeare's historical plays and Scott's own literary enterprise is thus "brought unobtrusively but continuously to our attention" (391). Hogg presents a different type of canon in his epigraphs. His references are resolutely Scottish: epigraphs include quotations from Scottish authors such as David Lindsay, Jacobite songs, and folk songs from the Border.

Given the number of epigraphs that appear to be taken from folk tradition, Hogg shows a real desire to give pride of place to Scottish folk storytelling and song tradition. The only contemporary literary quotation identified as such by Hogg is significantly taken from Robert Burns' "Tam o' Shanter," which opens chapter 16, and constitutes a perfect introduction to a frightful tale:

> The wind blewn as 'twould blawn its last,
> The thickening showers rose on the blast;
> The speedy gleam the darkness swallowed,
> Loud, deep, and lang the thunder bellowed;
> That night a child might understand
> The deil had business on his hand!
>
> *Tam o' Shanter* (Hogg 219)

[5] For a more detailed analysis of these different categories, see Berger, pp. 380-83.
[6] This classification is based on the editorial work of Douglas Gifford in the Canongate edition of the novel.
[7] These songs can be found in other collections or anthologies like Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* or the Child ballads.
[8] No connection has been established between these epigraphs and Hogg's own writings.

This chapter constitutes a turning point in the novel. In chapter 15, caught up in an argument with the wizard Michael Scott, the Friar, one of the members of the delegation sent to the wizard's tower, challenges the wizard to a contest.

The Friar wants to prove that his master—God—is more powerful than Michael Scott's—The Devil. Each character tries to use his powers to divide Eildon Hill into three. Eildon Hill is an emblematic place of Scottish folklore, and the division of the hill in three by Michael Scott is told by Scott in *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805). While the Friar only creates the illusion that the hill has been cleaved, Michael Scott sends three spirits to the hill. It is only in chapter 16 that the characters realise that Eildon Hill has been divided into three. The limits between the epigraph and the narrative are blurred as chapter 15 ends with a loud explosion, "a tremendous flash of fire" (Hogg 217), which is taken up in the image of thunder in the epigraph. The images of wind and thunder in the lines from "Tam o' Shanter" also echo the song sung by the three spirits as they fly towards the hill:

> Winds arise, and tempests brattle,
> And if you will the thunder rattle.
> Come away
> Elfin grey,
> Much to do ere break of day! (Hogg 214)

Burns' lines become an oblique representation of the division of the hill into three while representing a symbolical shift: they signal the fact that the narrative is taken over by folk elements. The narrative, which seemed to have started as a historical account of a dispute between the English and Scottish armies over Roxburgh castle, is moving away from history.

Characters and readers now seem to be immersed in the realm of folk tales and legends, which can be seen through the transformation of the land by the wizard and emblematised by the quotation from Burns. The introduction of magic in the narrative has been foreshadowed by the words pronounced by the other characters at the end of chapter 15: "He's gaun to be about some awesome enchantment now" (Hogg 217). Burns' epigraph also opens the storytelling competition of the novel. The narrative poem is thus placed at the beginning of a series of embedded tales told by different characters. All the stories to be told in the storytelling competition are therefore told under the patronage of Robert Burns. Hogg is thus grounding his narrative in a distinctively Scottish background. By focusing on epigraphs taken from or inspired by folk tradition, Hogg positions himself as a more authentic representative of this popular heritage and reclaims a place that Scott had appropriated on the literary scene of the time..

The Antiquarian and the Ettrick Shepherd

This difference in the authors' choices of epigraphs reflects two images that are usually associated with Scott and Hogg: the images of the Antiquarian and the Ettrick Shepherd. Scott and Hogg's uses of epigraphs thus reveal a different relation to authenticity and cultural heritage. According to Readioff, Scott's epigraphs become "an extension of narrative voice, intended to develop and enhance the authorial persona he had striven so hard to create" (115). The use of epigraphs from old songs and ballads reflects Scott's fondness for the literary antiquarianism of the eighteenth century.

The epigraphs in *The Antiquary* (1816) are particularly interesting in that regard. The epigraph from chapter 3 are lines taken from a poem by Robert Burns, and it is interesting to compare Scott's epigraph with Hogg's use of "Tam o' Shanter," which has just been discussed:

> He had a rough o' auld nick-nackets
> Rusty airn caps, and jinglin-jackets,
> Would held the Loudons three in tickets
> A towmond gude;
> And parritch-pats, and auld sauts-backets,
> Afore the flude.
> *Burns* (Scott, *The Antiquary* 29)

The epigraph sketches the portrait of an antiquarian, making a playful reference to his collecting habits, through the mentions of the "auld nick-nackets," "[r]usty airn caps," "parritch-pats" and "auld sauts-backets." Contrary to Hogg, Scott does not provide the name of the poem quoted here. These lines are taken from Burns' poem "On the late Captain Grose's Peregrinations thro' Scotland collecting the Antiquities of that Kingdom" (1789), a poem that pays tribute to Burns' friend, Francis Grose. Grose was an antiquarian known for his works *The Antiquities of Scotland*, in two volumes (1797), a work meant "to illustrate and describe the ancient castles and monasteries of Scotland" (Grose 1), and *The Antiquities of England and Wales*, in seven volumes (1784-1785). While Hogg chooses to quote from a narrative poem inspired by folk tradition, Scott's reference to Burns is itself a reference to an antiquarian enterprise, a celebration of a historical antiquarian and one of the major works on the antiquities of Scotland.

Other epigraphs in *The Antiquary* evoke antiquarianism or popular antiquarianism, such as the epigraph taken from "The Gaberlunzie Man" in chapter 4, taken from Herd's *Ancient and Modern Scots Songs* (1769), or the lines taken from William Cartwright's *The Ordinary* (1651) in chapter 6, which are spoken by an antiquarian. Epigraphs also include quotations from several plays by Shakespeare, including *The Merchant of Venice*, *King Lear*, *As You Like it,* and *Romeo and Juliet*, and numerous quotations from "old ballads" or "old plays," particularly in

the second part of the novel. The use of quotations that depict, satirise or evoke in many ways the figures of antiquarians and their works is evidently related to the subject-matter of *The Antiquary*. However, Scott's use of epigraphs taken from traditional sources also refers to his role as an antiquarian: the author had tried to collect and fix definitive versions of traditional Scottish songs in the *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802). These epigraphs stand as a collection of ancient fragments displayed in front of the eyes of the reader throughout the course of the novel.

Hogg's epigraphs refer to a different authorial persona. They conjure up the image of the Ettrick Shepherd, the name given to his literary persona in Blackwood's *Noctes Ambrosianae*.[9] The figure of the Ettrick Shepherd is a stereotypical image of the labouring-class author "submerged in the primitive world of tradition" (O'Donnell 9). Like many other of Hogg's paratexts, the epigraphs in *The Three Perils of Man* enable him to present himself as an authority on folk tradition. However, his relation to tradition is not the same as Scott's, and he seeks to position himself differently than his friend and patron. Hogg is not presented as a witness, a distant observer and collector of folk tradition, but as one who knows the material from the inside, and therefore in a more authentic way.

An example of this contrast can be seen in his use of the Ballad "Old Maitland," which appears as an epigraph to chapter 11. This ballad had been published by Walter Scott in the *Minstrelsy*, and collected directly from Hogg's mother. Scott had identified his sources in his introduction to the song:

> [This ballad] is only known to a few old people, upon the sequestered banks of the Ettrick; and is published, as written down from the recitation of the mother of Mr James Hogg, in Ettrick House, who sings, or rather chaunts it, with great animation. She learned the ballad from a blind man, who died at the advanced age of ninety, and is said to have possessed of much traditionary knowledge. (The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border 18)

Margaret Laidlaw had criticised Scott's project. She deemed it killed the living dimension of the songs: "They were made for singing an' no for reading; but ye hae broken the charm now, an' they'll never be sung mair. An' the worst thing of a', they're nouther right spell'd nor right setten down" (Bold and Gilbert 13). The song here appears in chapter 11, under the title "Ballad of Auld Maitland" and again in chapter 28, with the title spelt differently, "Ballad of Old Mettlin." One of these versions is probably Hogg's own rendering of the song, but the fact that several versions of the same narrative are included in the novel is a way for Hogg to reassert the ever-changing nature of this type of material. The epigraph opening chapter 5 is taken from

[9] A series of dialogues which appeared in Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine from 1822 to 1835.

the ballad of *Rob Roy*, a character that had been also used by Scott in the eponymous novel, first published in 1817.

These epigraphs invite readers to understand this tradition as a living heritage and a source of inspiration. If Hogg considers the ballads as being part of his cultural heritage, he shows no intention of presenting a definitive version of the songs. Hogg instead brings forward the existence of various versions and the narrative potential of such diversity. Only extracts of the songs are given, so the literary text only hints at something that exists outside its boundaries.

The way in which these songs resonate with the diegesis revive their sensational content, which is often toned down when the material is presented along a heavy editorial apparatus. The first epigraph has been carefully chosen by Hogg, since "The Twa Sisters" is described by James Child as one of the most enduring folk songs: "one of the very few old ballads which are not extinct as tradition in the British Isles" (Child 118). In chapter 11, the epigraphs also announce the different songs that are sung by the characters. The narrator insists on the fact that only a part of the song sung by the character survives, as the manuscript from which the novel is edited does not include the whole song: "Isaac the curate has only given a fragment of it" (Hogg 122). The novel stages the living dimension of these traditional songs and their circulation.

However, many of these supposedly authentic old songs, plays and fragments, are forgeries. The inclusion of forged epigraphs might undermine this canonising enterprise, but the question of inauthenticity in Hogg's epigraphs is central to his conception of cultural tradition and to the image of the storyteller that he develops in his novel.

The deceptively naive Ettrick Shepherd

Inauthentic epigraphs can be found in Scott's and Hogg's works. It is interesting to note that Scott first consistently used invented epigraphs in *The Antiquary* (1816). The origin of this habit is recounted by Lockhart in the *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott*:

> On one occasion he happened to ask John Ballantyne, who was sitting by him, to hunt for a particular passage in Beaumont and Fletcher. John did as he was bid, but did not succeed in discovering the lines. "Hang it, Johnnie," cried Scott, "I believe I can make a motto sooner than you will find one." He did so accordingly; and from that hour, whenever memory failed to suggest an appropriate epigraph, he had recourse to the inexhaustible mines of "old play" or "old ballad," to which we owe some of the most exquisite verses that ever flowed from his pen. (Lockhart 13-14)

The concealment of inauthentic epigraphs under the label of antique sources in both Scott's and Hogg's works necessarily conjures up the memory of Macpherson's forgeries. These epigraphs might constitute a commentary on, if not a warning against, the difficulty of identifying

authentic material. They reinscribe Scott's and Hogg's works within the larger debate about the authenticity of supposedly discovered material published like Macpherson's *Fragments of Ancient Poetry* (1760) or Percy's *Reliques of Ancient Poetry* (1765). Several critics have highlighted a connection between literary forgery and the rise of the historical novel. Anne H. Stevens and Ian Haywood underline their common interest for "the literary making of the past" (Haywood 161 in Stevens 221). Both convincingly demonstrate that the proliferation of literary forgeries fuelled the rise of the historical novel, notably through one of the modes of forgery: "the use of gestures of forgery for rhetorical effect in order to mimic or recreate the style of another era" (Stevens 221). Forged epigraphs are another interesting connection between literary forgery and historical fiction, and it could be argued that they constitute one of the generic markers of historical novels. Nevertheless, other factors may explain such authorial choices, factors which once again distinguish Hogg from Scott.

As the anecdote suggests, Scott seems to have privileged the invention of epigraphs over the use of authentic ones because he found it tiresome and time-consuming to look for exact quotations and references. Readioff argues that Scott invented a great number of his epigraphs because he "prioritise[d] the narrative appropriateness of the epigraph over its status as a quotation from another's work" (98). The cultural heritage conjured up by the epigraphs is not what is foregrounded in Scott's works, but rather the ways in which pre-chapter quotations can serve the main narrative.

Hogg's use of epigraphs in this novel, steeped in Border folklore, must be understood in relation to his authorial persona, the Ettrick Shepherd. Barrell underlines the ambiguity of such figure, insisting on the fact that it could easily be turned into a laughable character:

> Comic, bilious, full of naïve folk-wisdom, easy to patronise, the Ettrick Shepherd was invented as a souvenir of the pastoral lowlands, a survival whose presence among one of the Edinburgh literary elites could represent both the continuity of modern Scots culture and the impolite past it had left behind. (Barrell 130)

Authenticity often proves to be an illusion in Hogg's works, and in his epigraphs, Hogg is only deceivingly authentic. He is often performing authenticity and playing with the persona of the deceptively naive Ettrick Shepherd.

Penny Fielding argues that, in *The Three Perils of Man*, Hogg constantly sets up binary oppositions in order to evade them. Hiding his own name behind the alleged productions of others might be a way for Hogg to blur the distinctions between these overly-defined categories, as he does in the rest of the novel: "Hogg attacks the cultural division into primitive and sophisticated, of which he was himself a victim, by setting up such bifurcations, only to reveal how untenable they are" (Fielding 81). Hogg's hand plays a role in the fashioning of two types of

epigraphs: his own inventions and epigraphs that are reworkings of traditional material. Hogg never makes an illegitimate use of another's words, but he often erases his own name, which is also a way to present his epigraphs as emanating from a collective tradition.

The adjective "Old" in Old plays and Old songs, evokes a form of cultural transmission in which the original version of the story is lost, as well as its original composer. The audience is left with a type of material the prime characteristics of which are its polymorphy and the absence of any identifiable origin. It is interesting to note that his practice might be emblematic of "an important transitional moment in the history of traditional transmission," according to O'Donnell:

> Hogg's paratexts seem to tacitly enact the perceived shift away from the age of the anonymous oral mediator, who does not take credit for his narratives, to the era of the individual creative artist ("the author"), who most certainly does. Through his autobiographical act Hogg appears to be asserting that his individual life is worthy of record. (O'Donnell 9)

Although his name does not appear on the page, Hogg is omnipresent in his epigraphs. Many epigraphs warn the reader to read the novel cautiously. A warning can already be found in chapter 16, as the narrator introduces "some broken fragments" of a song sung by Michael Scott and collected by the poet with these words: "Poets are never to trust when they give quotations from memory out of the works of others" (Hogg 226). Hidden identities, and more precisely the elusive identities of storytellers are indeed a central theme in the novel, and this is often reflected in the epigraphs.

A specific group of epigraphs illustrates this idea. The quotations are supposedly taken from a fictional play titled "The Tragedy of the Prioress." The first one of these epigraphs is a double epigraph from chapter 9:

> His doublet was sae trim and neat,
> Wi' reid goud to the chin,
> Ye wad hae sworn, had ye been there,
> That a maiden stood within.
> The tears they trickled to his chin,
> And fell down on his knee;
> O had he wist before he kissed,
> That the boy was a fair ladye.
> *Song of May Marley*
>
> Who's she, this dame that comes in such a guise,
> Such face of import, and unwonted speech?
> Tell me, Cornaro. For methinks I see
> Some traits of hell about her.
> *Tragedy of the Prioress* (Hogg 96)

The quotations are an indirect reference to the diegesis: they refer to the fact that several characters in the plot cross dress and hide their identities. The title of the song, "Song of May Marley," obliquely refers to one of Hogg's poems. If epigraphs underline the importance of hidden identities as a narrative motor, they also create a literary-level commentary. The name of the fictitious play might indeed be a reference to "The Prioress's Tale," in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, and thus constitutes an intertextual reference to of one the main frame tales in Western literature.

These epigraphs also offer, just like Hogg's novel, a metaliterary reflection on storytelling. They reveal something of Hogg's conception of what a storyteller is, foregrounding the fact that a storyteller always wears a mask. Epigraphs taken from the *Tragedy of the Prioress* are used in the chapters relating the adventures of a delegation sent to the castle of the wizard Michael Scott. Locked inside the castle, the characters organise a storytelling competition in order to decide which one of them is going to get killed and eaten first if this should prove necessary.

These epigraphs hint at the characters' ignorance of their own identities. The quotations are placed at the beginning of chapters that narrate the adventures of storytellers. Exchanging stories, each storyteller discovers that they ignore something from their past and each character proves to be playing a role in a story told by another character. The characters discover that Delany is the daughter of the Friar's lost love, that Thomas Craik is the thief evoked in Gibby's story and that the poet is the child from Charlie's tale.

The epigraph to chapter 22 thus obliquely refers to the character's ignorance of their own identity through the image of sleep:

> *Lord Duf*. Did you not wake them, Cornaro?
> *Cor*. Alas! My lord I could not.
> Their slumber was so deep, it seemed to me
> A sleep eternal. Not a sleep of death,
> But of extatic silence. Such a beam
> Of joy and happiness I ne'er beheld
> Shed from the human's face.
> *The Prioress, A Tragedy* (Hogg 347)

This quotation might refer to the fact that readers are being fooled by Hogg into believing these quotations are taken from an authentic old play. Even on the threshold of the text, before entering the narrative, readers are deceived by the author. What should guide them in their reading only proves that they are already under the spell of Hogg, just as the characters will fall prey to the illusions of the wizard Michael Scott. The fact that this quotation introduces not any character's tale but the poet's tale further emphasises the relevance of a metaliterary reading.

The origin of both epigraphs and stories proves to be unsure. Even when readers or characters think they know who tells the story, they are mistaken. Moreover, just as the stories told by each character end up referring to other characters and other stories, words from a distant past and other songs or ballads reveal something of the stories told here by Hogg. Fielding underlines the importance of this parallel: "The seemingly random stories prove to be linked in ways unexpected at the time of telling as characters who appear in these stories turn out to be members of the audience" (Fielding 93). In the same way, seemingly unconnected epigraphs create the image of an author who is much more sceptical about the purity of an idealized oral tradition than the literary elites of Edinburgh suggest. All these examples show that one can never truly know who tells the story. Hogg here presents yet another side of the Ettrick Shepherd. He craftily plays with the notion of authenticity with which he has been so closely associated in order to show that he can fool his readers as well as fill them with wonder.

In *The Three Perils of Man*, Hogg gives pride of place to folk material. He celebrates its polymorphic nature and foregrounds the fact that as a storyteller, he is himself always a shapeshifter. Hogg's epigraphs also foreground the fact that readers are never quite sure whose words they are reading, because, when it comes to folk tradition, true authenticity lies in the collective construction of the tradition. Concealing his name in so many epigraphs may also be a way for Hogg to regain control over his own authorial image and his own name by choosing when to reveal it, and when to hide it.

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