

Novel Technologies:
The Holyrood Chapel
Diorama in James Hogg's
*Confessions of a Justified
Sinner*

KIRSTYN LEUNER

WHILE it appears that James Hogg's novel *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) begins where it ends, with the story of an exhumed corpse, it also begins at the Paris Diorama. Hogg's novel depicts a ruin of Scotland's past and present to its early-nineteenth-century audience with the help of Louis Daguerre's diorama "Ruins of Holyrood Chapel, a Moonlight Scene," which Hogg incorporates into his text. Invented in 1822, the diorama was a popular multimedia theater experience comprised of a massive trompe l'oeil picturesque painting and a printed booklet describing that scene. In Hogg's novel, the Holyrood diorama calls attention to the complex relationship between fictional, historical, visual, and textual representations of the Scottish nation and identity in the late-Romantic era. Like many frame narratives that grow out of found books, *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* encourages its readers to contemplate

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the media that convey its stories. Similarly, the character of the Editor, who finds and retells the buried story, documents his own storytelling project to publish Robert Wringhim's recovered memoir while integrating evidence from a mixture of media and sources including parish registers, local Scottish "tradition," and the Editor's own experiences. Scholars have addressed as well the question of how media convey story in Hogg's novel. Concerning newer media in the Romantic era, Valentina Bold and Meiko O'Halloran have analyzed Hogg's obsession with optical technologies and the significant influence of the magic lantern as well as the kaleidoscope on his writing. For older media, many critics have written on print culture and *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, including Daniel Stout, who argues compellingly that the novel frames text as the archive of tradition that changes as it is conveyed from one recipient to the next.¹ I add that one medium that sews together the Editor's conflicting pieces of evidence is Daguerre's Holyrood diorama, an innovative and immersive hybrid visual and textual narrative of Scotland's national ruins that unites the old and the new.

In *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, the Holyrood diorama is transformed into text to amplify the terror and bodily power of an aggressor, as when a demonic Robert Wringhim Jr. perpetually stalks his half-brother, George Colwan. The diorama in the text not only puffs up a villain, but also emphasizes the harm to Robert's physical and mental health caused by Gil-Martin, as when just before his suicide Robert writes that he is reduced to "a vision."² I argue that reading the interactions between the powerful and the powerless in *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* through the lens of the diorama, and specifically with

¹ See Daniel Stout, "Castes of Exception: Tradition and the Public Sphere in *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*," *ELH*, 77 (2010), 538. See also Peter Garside, "Printing Confessions," *Studies in Hogg and His World*, 9 (1998), 16–31; Karen Fang, "A Printing Devil, a Scottish Mummy, and an Edinburgh Book of the Dead: James Hogg's Napoleonic Complex," *Studies in Romanticism*, 43 (2004), 161–85; and Kirsten Stirling, "The Devil in the Printing Press," in *After Satan: Essays in Honour of Neil Forsyth*, ed. Kirsten Stirling and Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), pp. 114–24.

² James Hogg, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, ed. Peter Garside (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2001), p. 165. Further references are to this edition and appear in the text as *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*.

the Holyrood diorama in mind, makes the dynamics between half-brothers George and Robert and between Robert and his doppelgänger Gil-Martin more nuanced than the binary good-versus-evil scenarios that appear to drive the plot. Through the diorama, we see Hogg's novel as an image of the Scottish ruin that can be read as enchanting, picturesque, and a romantic Scottish icon, but simultaneously steeped in a long history of national trauma that is not only historic but also contemporary.

Both Daguerre's Holyrood diorama and Hogg's novel create what Rosemary Mitchell calls a "picturesque history": a detailed historical scene that empathically involves the audience in national representations of "rebels and rejects, [and] historical failures."³ On 20 October 1823, an audience of approximately 250 people entered the Paris Diorama's rotating auditorium for the opening of the Holyrood show.⁴ It transported them imaginatively to Holyrood Abbey in Edinburgh and interred them in the chapel graveyard (see Figure 1). In the theater, the audience sat in a darkened viewing area and peered through a large aperture in a wall. On the other side of the opening, a hallway led to an enormous mural-sized painting. Viewers looked into the roofless three-dimensional chapel toward fractured columns and a picturesque east-facing window façade that is also broken and stunning. On the picture's right side, a woman robed in white kneels beside a tombstone with a candle resting on top. More grave markers cobble the foreground (the west end of the chapel just inside the doorway), and the dead connect the foreground to the recesses of the chapel painting. Viewers could barely see the entrance to the royal vaults in the shadowy back-right corner, behind the kneeling woman and through the colonnade. Some aspects of the image moved: the stars twinkled, the candle on the tombstone flickered, and the moon traveled across the night sky so that it illuminated different parts of the architecture and courtyard and threw other areas into deepening shade. A flute playing an old Scottish air broke the tension that accompanied the

³ Rosemary Mitchell, *Picturing the Past: English History in Text and Image 1830–1870* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), p. 15.

⁴ I capitalize "Diorama" to indicate the theater called "Diorama" in Paris and London in which the first "diorama" (lowercase) paintings were shown.



FIGURE 1. Illustration for “Diorama—The Ruins of Holyrood Chapel,” in *The Mirror of Literature, Amusement, and Instruction*, 5 (1825), 193.

changes in illumination.⁵ After fifteen minutes, a bell rang, the auditorium rotated spectators toward a different view, and the Holyrood scene faded away.⁶

The Holyrood diorama ran for almost a full year, until 23 September 1824, at which point the owners shipped it to London’s Regent’s Park, where it showed for another year beginning on 15 March 1825.⁷ One of Daguerre’s earliest and most acclaimed dioramas, “The Ruins of Holyrood Chapel” generates a historical fiction comprised of many parts: a picturesque and Gothic painting, in three dimensions, that also shows movement and the passage of time, with an accompanying printed booklet that describes the scene for viewers as travel guidebooks do.

⁵ See Helmut and Alison Gernsheim, *L. J. M. Daguerre: The History of the Diorama and the Daguerreotype*, 2d ed. (New York: Dover, 1968), p. 26.

⁶ See [Anon.], “Diorama—The Ruins of Holyrood Chapel,” *The Mirror of Literature, Amusement, and Instruction*, 5 (1825), 193–95.

⁷ See Gernsheim, *L. J. M. Daguerre*, pp. 182–84.

I begin this essay from within the Holyrood diorama show and move outward to consider this diorama's work as part of Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, an experimental nineteenth-century novel. The first part of the essay describes the elements that comprise the earliest diorama shows and that differentiate them from other visual entertainments of the day. These elements include the way that Diorama theatergoers interacted with scenes in "reality-tests" to discover the limits of an illusion as well as the results of such testing that are unique to the Diorama. Diorama elements also include its accompanying booklet, which tells the story of the ruin since the twelfth century. In the second part of the essay, I describe the Holyrood diorama within the "theater" of Hogg's novel. *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* performs the diorama with its fractured form, abundance of characters with doppelgangers, staging of diorama scenes on site in Holyrood Palace Park, and characters reality-testing diorama illusions within the novel. The final part of this essay reflects on the media consciousness of Hogg's novel that is a product of reality-testing at the Diorama. In this, *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* asks readers to participate like viewers and discover how different media frame and project one's present moment.



John Arrowsmith's 1824 patent describes the Diorama as "An Improved Mode of Publicly Exhibiting Pictures or Painted Scenery of every Description, and of Distributing or Directing the Daylight upon or through them, so as to Produce many Beautiful Effects of Light and Shade."⁸ The description reminds readers that the inventors of the Diorama advertised it as of the present moment by calling it an improvement upon other kinds of optical entertainments, namely the magic lantern and the panorama, which it shares some similarities with. However, the special effects of a diorama show were categorically different than magic lantern or panorama special

⁸ John Arrowsmith, "Diorama, or Method of Exhibiting Pictures. Arrowsmith's Specification," British patent no. 4899 (1824), p. 1; available online at <www.midley.co.uk/diorama/Diorama_Patent_2.htm>.

effects, which were well established by 1822. According to Laurent Mannoni, Christiaan Huygens invented the first “true” magic lantern in 1659.⁹ Magic lantern shows use a projector to illuminate a painted image, or later a photograph, on a glass slide and display it on a wall or screen at a fairly short distance. Crude animation made images grow, shrink, or move around in two dimensions on the wall. A more recent medium, panoramas were invented about thirty years prior to the diorama, in 1791, when Robert Barker painted mural-sized representations of Edinburgh on a cylindrical surface that surrounded viewers. Neither the magic lantern nor the panorama produced 3-D illusions or movement as the early diorama did, and its optical techniques captivated 1820s audiences.

The dioramists toyed with their audience’s visual experience of place and space from the moment they entered the theater. Lighting was crucial for creating the dramatic theatrical atmosphere and specific kinds of motion and illusions of depth that separate dioramas from magic lantern shows and panoramas. The roof of the Diorama theater featured generous skylights and suspended a large lantern to light canvases from above. Windows behind each painting provided direct rear lighting controlled by curtains and pulleys. By gradually blocking the light, or letting it creep behind the painting, Daguerre and Bouton made shadows and light rays play across thin cotton canvases painted in oil mixed with turpentine.¹⁰ These effects were sophisticated innovations in the early 1820s, appearing just before Peter Mark Roget presented his landmark paper on the persistence of motion on the retina to the Royal Society in 1824, a discovery that theorized early animation. While lifelike movement onscreen dazzled the audience, optical illusions, such as painted details located at the scene’s outer edges, made it difficult for attendees to discern the precise distance from their seats to the screen, though the painting was down a corridor and far from the viewers. Of the view of Canterbury Cathedral, a reporter from *The Times* remarked that

⁹ See Laurent Mannoni, *The Great Art of Light and Shadow: Archaeology of the Cinema*, ed. and trans. Richard Crangle (Exeter: Univ. of Exeter Press, 2000), pp. 33–34.

¹⁰ See Stephen C. Pinson, *Speculating Daguerre: Art and Enterprise in the Work of L. J. M. Daguerre* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2012), p. 69.

even “after a man has gazed to his heart’s content, his eyes still half refuse to believe but that the picture begins at the top of these steps, and that the steps themselves, and the planks, and other *debris* . . . are part of the house in which he stands, and not of the show which he has paid to see.”¹¹

When 1820s audiences confronted such large and optically confusing three-dimensional images in diorama shows, they searched visually and linguistically for how to process these unfamiliar immersive experiences. Many observers resorted to using the rhetoric of magic and wonder to explain a diorama’s shockingly lifelike illusions. This writer for *The Mirror of Literature* attempted a nuanced explication:

on viewing the Diorama [audience members] might think themselves transported by some magic spell to the scene itself—so perfect is the illusion; indeed we know an artist though eminent not in one branch, but in a general knowledge of the arts, who declared that had he not clearly ascertained that the view of Roslyn Chapel was a painting on a flat surface, he would not have believed but the effect was produced by more than one position of the scene, or rather by many scenes placed in different positions, yet such is not the case.¹²

The reviewer fails to summarize clearly the artist’s explanation of the illusion. He uses negative constructions three times in order to convey the artist’s point: he knew that the Roslyn diorama is a painting on a flat surface, but if he had not known that already, he would have believed that the realism and depth were produced by a single scene depicted from more than one position or by several paintings of the scene in different positions combined. Unable to provide a comprehensible account, the reviewer uses tortured syntax that discloses the persuasion of diorama illusions as well as the viewing public’s basic struggle to reckon with them during this nascent period of 3-D imaging.

One method of trying to understand three-dimensional diorama images during a show was to reality-test them. That is, viewers interacted with the picture physically and mentally to

¹¹ [Anon.], “Diorama,” *The Times*, 4 October 1823, p. 3.

¹² [Anon.], “View of Roslyn Chapel, at the Diorama,” *The Mirror of Literature, Amusement, and Instruction*, 7 (1826), 132.

discover where the theater ended and the painted image began as well as whether the 3-D objects displayed in the picture were props with mass or airy optical illusions. Spectators had been reality-testing the boundaries of illusions at other types of shows for some time, with similar methods and shared questions about the limits of art's realism. For example, those attending the panorama sometimes threw coins and other objects at the painting to see how far away the canvas really was.¹³ Diorama-goers did this as well. *The European Magazine* reports that one viewer believed that two workmen depicted in the foreground of the Canterbury Cathedral diorama were actual people and "threw some half-pence at the lazy fellows to rouse them, and was surprised to find no other result produced than that of his own very proper exclusion from the room."¹⁴ While their reality-testing methods were similar to those at panoramas, diorama viewers reality-tested the images from a medium-specific spatial, psychological, and temporal position. Those at the Panorama were free to walk between different parts of the well-lit painting and explore its full footprint, which could occupy an entire building, but those in the Diorama were forced to be comparatively stationary, and were usually seated in what Lady Morgan called a "vestibule" of "Cimmerian darkness."¹⁵ The strange and uncomfortable circumstance of being contained within the small space of one's seat in a pitch-dark theater, while watching a scene with moving and changing images, placed a diorama viewer in a diminutive position in relation to such a large, entrancing image. Being seated in the dark with a crowd also brought with it the discomforts of physical intimacy with strangers reacting to the show. After attending his first show at the Diorama, John Constable described the experience as one of being trapped "in a cage of magpies,"¹⁶ and Lady Morgan describes one spectator growling at another,

¹³ See Denise Blake Oleksijczuk, *The First Panoramas: Visions of British Imperialism* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minneapolis Press, 2011), p. 6.

¹⁴ [Anon.], "The Fine Arts. The Diorama," *European Magazine, and London Review*, 84 (1823), 342.

¹⁵ Lady Morgan, "The Diorama, July 1836," *The Athanæum*, 13 August 1836, p. 571.

¹⁶ John Constable, quoted in Richard D. Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1978), p. 166.

“I’ll trouble you, Miss, to remove your humbrella off my toe, please!” (“The Diorama, July 1836,” p. 571).

Reality-testing a diorama reveals more than the location of the audience in relation to the theater frame or the painting on display: it discloses the audience’s temporal location or present moment in time and their relationship to time’s passage. In the Holyrood diorama, the present moment signals the living, the dead, and the future of those buried in the Scottish graveyard. Sophie Thomas writes that diorama shows have “an uncanny relation to time, insofar as past, present, and future are not only controlled and replicated, but also repeated.”¹⁷ For example, in the Holyrood diorama, the moon advances across the night sky and illuminates different aspects of the ruin as it moves, far faster than it does in nature, creating an early approximation of what we recognize now as a time-lapse video. After one set of viewers watches the Holyrood scene, the moon cycles back through to replay the show, like its diurnal path above the actual ruin in fast-forward on a loop. Thomas elaborates: “In the Diorama, illusion is created and removed, and creation and removal are explicit features of the exhibition—are dramatised by the exhibition” (*Romanticism and Visuality*, p. 128). The Romantic-era Gothic is associated with artificially manufactured ruins that serve as symbols of eroding places, identities, the past, and the dead, but the events in time’s passage that create the ruin are hidden from the Gothic representation. Thomas argues that a diorama’s visualization of time, as in the moon moving across the chapel ruin, expresses what is usually an invisible yet underlying trait of the Gothic. Therefore, throwing a coin or a pebble at the Holyrood diorama makes visible the temporality that an audience member shares with the illusion. When you hit the set or “break” the illusion, that contact-event marks the viewer’s present in the theater and makes the depicted ruin, a real place, part of that present. That is, reality-testing the Holyrood diorama reveals an audience member’s present, living moment in the centuries-long history of the Scottish national graveyard. It calls attention to those who are

¹⁷ Sophie Thomas, *Romanticism and Visuality: Fragments, History, Spectacle* (New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 128.

buried in the courtyard, the present audience of the living who receive and tell their tales, and the questions of how and by whom those stories will be told in the future.

The Holyrood diorama's booklet provides a version of the abbey's tale for the audience to retell. It narrates the story of the chapel's cycles of ruin and repair over time and, like the diorama, makes time's passage in the ruin visible in the audience's present moment. While at first it seems to report facts about the chapel with an unbiased tone, the booklet's scrupulous enumeration of the damage inflicted on the structural architecture, interior ornaments and furnishings, and the dead commemorated in the chapel communicates stories of the Scottish nation's suffering under the British Empire. The booklet begins with the diorama's title, "Ruins of Holyrood Chapel, a Moonlight Scene," and the title page lists neither the author(s) nor the dioramists Daguerre and Bouton, but only G. Schulze, the printer. The beginning frames the booklet as a docent's lecture or a travel guidebook that spatially orients the reader so that from a seat in Paris she can imagine herself within the chapel ruin in Edinburgh.

The latter parts of the booklet emphasize the damage the chapel endured at English hands during the Reformation and the Revolution of 1688. At times, the booklet is flagrantly anti-English and reflects the nationalities of the French dioramists Daguerre and Bouton as well as strong French alliances with Scotland in the 1820s and 1830s.¹⁸ The text lists the abbey's abundant revenues during the sixteenth century followed by injuries the English inflicted on the chapel:

This stately Abbey, with the choir and cross of its church, were destroyed by the English about the middle of the fifteenth century, and nothing left standing but the body of the church. A large brazen font was carried away at this time by Sir Richard Lea, Captain of the English Pioneers, who presented it to the Church of St. Alban's, in Hertfordshire. Along with the other religious houses, the buildings of the Abbey suffered much at the

¹⁸ See Andrew Hook, "The French Taste for Scottish Literary Romanticism," in *Scotland and France in the Enlightenment*, ed. Dieder Dawson and Pierre Morère (Lewisburg, Pa.: Bucknell Univ. Press, 2004), p. 98.

Reformation, the ornaments were despoiled by the populace, and nothing was left but the bare walls.¹⁹

This passage makes plain that the booklet has left behind the neutral tone of its first pages. We hear of the many instances of damage that the “stately” abbey—a pun on its regal profile as well as its association with the Scottish state—has suffered. The passage collapses the century between two iconoclastic events and explains how the abbey’s parts were “destroyed,” “carried away,” and “despoiled”; twice the author exclaims, “nothing was left.” It personifies the ransacked chapel as a ravaged “body.” Additionally, the booklet details the harm done to actual bodies buried in the chapel. The royal vaults contain the tombs of Scottish kings, including David II, James II, and James V, as well as other royalty from the sixteenth century and earlier—the remains were moved to the vault to protect them from iconoclasts. After noting repairs and additions made during the Restoration, the booklet ends with a tale of the English ripping the abbey apart and stealing its marble and its dead in protest against King James. During the 1688 Revolution, opponents of James VII and his lavish improvements to the church burned down Holyrood Chapel, carried off its ornaments and marble pavement stones, set fire to the decorous parts of the chapel, and ransacked the lead coffins containing monarchs’ bodies.²⁰ The booklet tells us that, almost a century later, citizens inspired by the French Revolution once more targeted the coffins holding Scottish royalty. This time, vandals stole the remaining coffins and further mutilated the bodies: they removed Queen Magdalene’s head and absconded with all but James V’s thighbones (Mackie, *History of the Abbey, Palace, and Chapel-Royal of Holyroodhouse*, p. 31). With no segue to a discussion of the painting or the diorama’s special effects, the booklet cuts to the next diorama picture, Charles Bouton’s “Cathedral of Chartres.”

¹⁹ *Two Views: Ruins of Holyrood Chapel, a Moonlight Scene, Painted by M. Daguerre, Knight of the Legion of Honor, and the Cathedral of Chartres, Painted by M. Bouton, Knight of the Legion of Honor* (London: G. Schulze, 1825), p. 5.

²⁰ See Charles Mackie, *The History of the Abbey, Palace, and Chapel-Royal of Holyroodhouse*, 2d ed. (Edinburgh: Printed by Hay, Gall, and Co., for Mrs John Petrie, 1821), p. 30.

Though the booklet relays centuries of the chapel's history, it also defies the easy associations of the ruin with the past. Instead, it does the work of reality-testing by marking the present and revealing the invisible passage of time. The booklet situates the ruined chapel in recent eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century memory to convey the urgent contemporary relevance of attacks on the Scottish monument and the difficulties the Scottish endure under British rule. Clues in the booklet date Daguerre's diorama painting of Holyrood Chapel to between 1812, Thomas Lowes's death year on a headstone in the courtyard, and 1816, when the east window mullions were repaired after the 1795 windstorm knocked them down ("Two Views"). This means that the diorama show depicts how the chapel looked as recent as six years before the Diorama theater opened, despite the archaic age that the ruin suggests. It reminds an audience in the 1820s that the Highland Clearances of 1814 and the Radical War of 1820 are current events that left enduring scars on Scottish landscapes and working classes.



Like the diorama booklet, *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* draws the reader into the plot from an early-nineteenth-century perspective, the contemporary moment for 1820s Diorama-goers, but it relays a fractured interior tale that takes place much earlier. The nested action in the novel begins during the Scottish Enlightenment, between 1687 and 1712—a volatile time for Scotland at the end of the 1680–1688 “Killing Times,” the aftermath of the 1688 Revolution, and leading up to the 1715 Jacobite Rebellion. Political and religious conflicts take center stage as characters with an array of affiliations clash, including Whigs, Tories, Cavaliers, Jacobins, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Calvinists, Cameronians, a “man of science,” the angelic, and the diabolical. Those in the external narrative frame—the Editor as well as the reader—must make sense of the melee within, including supernatural elements. Reality-testing becomes a handy strategy not only for those at a show but also for those reading the novel, and even for those within it.

Confessions of a Justified Sinner has three parts—the Editor’s narrative, Robert’s memoirs, and the exhumation of Robert’s grave—that together create steady speculation about what is real. Numerous instances of character-doubling further complicate the fragmented structure of the novel. According to Sophie Thomas, this is a telltale sign of its link to the diorama since “doubling and doubleness appear, so to speak, to be at the very heart of the dioramic enterprise.”²¹ Peter Garside describes the Editor in the opening frame as “a modern, rational, North British gentleman of the 1820s” and an antiquarian “who moves in the same circles as J. G. Lockhart,” making him a British intellectual contemporary of Hogg’s.²² The Editor’s narrative, pieced together from local lore and parish registers, begins over a century earlier in 1703. The protagonists are half-brothers. George Colwan Jr. is the son of George Colwan Sr., the laird of Dalcastle and a member of Parliament who becomes an active Episcopal Jacobite and Tory. The chief conflict in the Editor’s narrative begins when George Sr. travels to Edinburgh with his son, also an Episcopal Jacobite. While his father is in Parliament for the session that passed the Act of Security of the Kingdom in 1704, in which Scotland reserved the right to choose its monarch, George Jr. meets his half-brother, Robert Wringhim Jr., for the first time. Robert, like his father, is an antinomian Calvinist who believes that he is one of God’s elect and can, therefore, sin penalty-free. Young George believes that his half-brother maniacally stalks him, and George is mysteriously murdered at the close of the first part of the novel.

The Editor transitions abruptly to the second part, which includes Robert’s private memoirs and makes his culpability more dubious than it was in the Editor’s narrative. In the memoirs, the fanatical Calvinist villain claims to be the victim of his double, Gil-Martin, who is either a real devil or a symptom of Robert’s psychosis. After a series of heinous crimes and murders, Robert desperately insists that his doppelganger forced his hand or, since Gil-Martin has the powers of shapeshifting,

²¹ Sophie Thomas, “Making Visible: The Diorama, the Double and the (Gothic) Subject,” in *Gothic Technologies: Visuality in the Romantic Era, Romantic Circles*, 2005, para 13; available online at <www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/gothic/thomas/thomas>.

²² Peter Garside, “Introduction,” in *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, p. xix.

acted while appearing in Robert's likeness. These events drive Robert to suicide. Thus, despite the Editor's early commitment to establishing a good-versus-evil conflict between the brothers George and Robert, the novel fails to hold Robert responsible as the villain for causing the bloody riots and for George's murder. Like the Holyrood diorama, Hogg's novel requires its audience to evaluate its enigmatic and unsettling narrative.

Confessions of a Justified Sinner presents Scotland as a broken family of politically and spiritually opposed fathers and sons who cannot survive the clash of their own competing political and religious identities, all complicated by a heavy British editorial hand whose self-interest corrupts the Scottish folkloric story. The novel's form and content perform the ruin of Holyrood Chapel that the diorama and its booklet depict. For example, the text is fragmented at every level, from its three-part structure to its characters (many of whom have doubles), and it ends in the early 1820s with the image of a ravaged corpse. Robert's remains, like those bodies in the abbey, were picked through and used for profit. After rummaging through the body's clothing, the Editor finds Robert's journal in his pocket, takes it with him, and disregards Robert's written, dying wish that his diary not be altered by bookending his memoir with narratives that color Robert's story and by planning to send the journal to the printer with modifications (*Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, p. 165). Though Robert and Gil-Martin appear to be the chief instigators that rupture their Scottish community, it is the Editor who is the real villain: he is the storyteller who ignores the wishes of his subject and adulterates the narrative to suit his own agenda.

In his introduction to *The Edinburgh Companion to James Hogg*, Ian Duncan describes Hogg's Romantic achievement as "*experiment*," akin to William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* (1798, 1802), Walter Scott's *Waverley* (1814), and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) in boldness, ingenuity, and impact.²³ One of the paramount experimentations of *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, I argue, is the remediation

²³ See Ian Duncan, "Introduction: Hogg and His Worlds," in *The Edinburgh Companion to James Hogg*, ed. Ian Duncan and Douglas S. Mack (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2012), p. 6.

of Daguerre's Holyrood diorama to convey Scotland's storied national challenges as a present concern. Although there is no evidence that Hogg visited the Diorama, he was certainly exposed to its details through periodicals that circulated reviews of each show throughout Anglophone Western Europe. Starting in 1823, Scottish and British news outlets frequently printed descriptions of early dioramas as well as advertisements for running and upcoming shows. These publications include the *Caledonian Mercury*; *The Times*; *Hampshire Chronicle*; *Cambridge Chronicle and Journal*; *Morning Post*; *Morning Chronicle*; *London Literary Gazette*; *La Belle Assemblée*; *The Mirror of Literature, Amusement, and Instruction*; *The Monthly Magazine, or, British Register*; *The Ladies' Monthly Museum*; *The European Magazine*, and many more. Through weekly and monthly reviews and advertisements, news of the Diorama reached Edinburgh literati, including Hogg's circle. For example, early in 1824, *La Belle Assemblée* describes major aspects of the Holyrood show, tells us that the Holyrood Chapel picture "is now exhibiting with great *éclat* in the Diorama at Paris," and hints that the painting will be sent to London in the near future.²⁴

Most important to my claim that Hogg read about the Holyrood diorama is that *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* printed writing on the diorama, such as a piece published in 1823 called "Letter from a Contributor in Love."²⁵ From the first issue of *Blackwood's* in April 1817 until Hogg's death in 1835, Hogg's literary life revolved around this magazine as a major contributor, self-proclaimed cofounder, and even as a fictional character adopted by other contributors.²⁶ "Letter from a Contributor in Love," one piece I suggest Hogg would certainly have read, appeared in the same issue as an infamously scathing review of Hogg's novel *The Three Perils of Woman* (1823), and in the same volume (vol. 14) as his essay "A Scots Mummy," which he quotes

²⁴ [Anon.], "French Diorama," *La Belle Assemblée*, 30 (1824), 183, 184.

²⁵ See T., "Letter from a Contributor in Love," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 14 (Oct. 1823), 471-73.

²⁶ See Thomas C. Richardson, "James Hogg and *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*: Buying and Selling the Ettrick Shepherd," in *James Hogg and the Literary Marketplace: Scottish Romanticism and the Working-Class Author*, ed. Sharon Alker and Holly Faith Nelson (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2009), p. 186.

extensively in *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. According to his letters, Hogg anxiously awaited this publication of the magazine.²⁷

“Letter from a Contributor in Love” is addressed to Christopher North, just like “A Scots Mummy.” It pronounces how extremely well known the diorama and its special effects were among those who follow the metropolitan art scene: “Did you see [the diorama] in Paris?—No. Well, but you have read in the newspapers (if ever by accident you take them up) about the scaffolding on the Chapel view,—and the workmen at which the French General threw stones . . . A good deal of it is true enough” (“Letter from a Contributor in Love,” p. 473). Like many news pieces that cover these shows, the letter reports some of the show’s details, instances of reality-testing, such as throwing stones at workmen depicted in the scene, and the wonderment of the viewer. It also reports the frequency of newspapers reporting on the Diorama and supports the likelihood that Hogg absorbed details about the Holyrood diorama from periodicals. If this is how he learned of the Holyrood diorama, it is fitting that Hogg reexpresses in print a diorama he first encountered in print.

Recent scholarship on Hogg’s writing about other experimental technologies in the same general family as the diorama provides additional evidence to support his attraction to Daguerre and Bouton’s invention. Meiko O’Halloran notices how *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* playfully manipulates perception as David Brewster’s kaleidoscope did, invented in 1816.²⁸ Katherine Inglis writes about the implications of *The Three Perils of Woman*, published right before *Confessions*, bringing the protagonist, Gatty, back to life as an automaton.²⁹ And Valentina

²⁷ Hogg writes to William Blackwood on 7 August 1823: “I am very anxious to hear your veto of the Perils of Woman” (*The Collected Letters of James Hogg, Volume 2: 1820–1831*, ed. Gillian Hughes [Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2006], p. 193).

²⁸ See Meiko O’Halloran, *James Hogg and British Romanticism: A Kaleidoscopic Art* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 17, 187.

²⁹ See Katherine Inglis, “Maternity, Madness and Mechanization: The Ghastly Automaton in James Hogg’s *The Three Perils of Woman*,” in *Minds, Bodies, Machines, 1770–1930*, ed. Deirdre Coleman and Hilary Fraser (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 65. See also James Hogg, *The Three Perils of Woman, or Love, Leasing, and Jealousy*, ed. David Groves, Antony Hasler, and Douglas S. Mack (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 1995).

Bold explores Hogg's use of the magic lantern as a plot vehicle in *The Three Perils of Man* (1822).³⁰ While Hogg's interest in realistic art and technologies covers this array of eighteenth-century media, I argue that Hogg specifically uses the diorama and its unique properties in *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*.

Identifying key incidents in *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* that feature the traits of a diorama show exposes the Holyrood diorama's subversive narrative embedded in the text. In the novel, the diorama is most apparent in interactions between characters and their doppelgangers that haunt them, such as George and his ghostlike half-brother, Robert, and Robert and the diabolical Gil-Martin. As in the Holyrood diorama, reality-testing in the novel defines the audience's present moment among Scottish national ruins. The most salient example of this is a key scene early in the novel in which George reality-tests a diorama-image of his doppelganger half-brother on Arthur's Seat. The setting is important: the scene takes place on a hilltop within Holyrood Palace Park that overlooks the abbey ruin featured in Daguerre's diorama.

The diorama scene begins with George trying to escape his haunting double by hiking into the hills, skirting Holyrood Chapel and ascending Arthur's Seat, the highest peak above Edinburgh. At the summit, feeling free from the ghost of his half-brother, George takes a seat. His position replicates that of a diorama spectator in an arena propped above a dark pit containing scenographic technologies and stage mechanics. What follows is a long scene characterized by slow, subtle changes in lighting like that in a diorama show: a pale "sublunary rainbow" spreads out before him and dazzles him with a range of colors that blend softly (*Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, p. 29). In order for this view to be a diorama, the tranquil sky must now darken, and it does. George turns to the right instinctively, as if rotated by the Diorama auditorium in the way it spins its spectators between views, to where the illusion of his brother usually appears at arm's length:

³⁰ See Valentina Bold, "The Magic Lantern: Hogg and Science," *Studies in Hogg and His World*, 7 (1996), 5-17. See also James Hogg, *The Three Perils of Man, or War, Women, and Witchcraft: A Border Romance*, ed. Judy King and Graham Tulloch (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2012), p. 100.

Gracious Heaven! What an apparition was there presented to his view! He saw, delineated in the cloud, the shoulders, arms, and features of a human being of the most dreadful aspect. The face was the face of his brother, but dilated to twenty times the natural size. Its dark eyes gleamed on him through the mist, while every furrow of its hideous brow frowned deep as the ravines on the brow of the hill. . . .

George conceived it to be a spirit. He could conceive it to be nothing else; and he took it for some horrid demon by which he was haunted, that had assumed the features of his brother in every lineament, but in taking on itself the human form, had miscalculated dreadfully on the size, and *presented itself thus to him in a blown-up, dilated frame of embodied air, exhaled from the caverns of death or the regions of devouring fire*. He was farther confirmed in the belief that it was a malignant spirit, on perceiving that it approached him across the front of a precipice, where there was not footing for thing of mortal frame. . . . he continued rivetted to the spot, till it approached, as he deemed, to within two yards of him; and then, perceiving that it was setting itself to make a violent spring on him, he started to his feet and fled distractedly in the opposite direction, keeping his eye cast behind him lest he had been seized in that dangerous place. But the very first bolt that he made in his flight he came in contact with a *real* body of flesh and blood, and that with such violence that both went down among some scragged rocks. (pp. 30–31; first emphasis added)

While the image of a giant demon face growing in size could allude to magic lantern phantasmagoria, its heft and volume clearly derives from the new special effects attributable to a diorama. The three-dimensionality of the illusion manifests in its “blown-up, dilated frame of embodied air” that gives substance to vapor. Augustin Jal uses similar language in an 1824 article on the Holyrod diorama painting in which he calls it “a vast and imposing frame.”³¹ The embodied air moves toward George, not remaining on a two-dimensional plane at a fixed distance.

George uses reality-testing strategies to grapple with the vision he does not understand. First, he tries to identify it. He calls it an “apparition,” then he “conceived it to be a spirit”

³¹ See Augustin Jal, *L'artiste et le philosophe: entretiens critiques sur le salon de 1824* (Paris: Ponthieu, 1824), p. 238: “le cadre vaste et imposant du Diorama” (my translation).

before stating that he was “farther confirmed” of its being a “malignant spirit.” With the ghost nearly upon him, George flees, and, instead of discovering that the image has no substance beyond the theatrical frame, he smashes into a real body: his brother’s. Nearly on the site of Daguerre’s Holyrood Chapel scene, the “dilated frame of embodied air,” a diorama view within the novel, appears to transform into a physical and forceful body. It is as if the viewer, George, hurls himself at the diorama to see what will happen.

George’s reality-test collision with his brother produces a diorama-specific response. After he perceives that “it was his brother” that he ran into, George is “confounded between the shadow and the substance, he knew not what he was doing or what he had done” (*Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, p. 31). Recall that when a viewer throws stones at a diorama image to reality-test it, he reveals not only the location of the materials producing the illusion, but also his present moment in the continuum of time’s passage through events—social and environmental—that create the depicted ruin. George demonstrates this connection when, on the ground after the collision, he tries to separate “the shadow” (the diorama) from “the substance” (his brother’s body). His attempts to discover “what he was doing” and “what he had done” are evidence of him contemplating his relationship to the present moment, time passing, and the dead as his brother Robert repeatedly screams “murder!”

Robert’s transformation from vision to physical body during the scuffle on Arthur’s Seat is reversed in the second part of the novel, once more making reason-challenging transfigurations the main attraction of the novel and forcing characters and the reader to perform reality-tests. Late in the plot, Robert tries to reality-test himself when Gil-Martin shapeshifts to commit crimes as Robert’s look-a-like: “I was a being incomprehensible to myself. Either I had a second self, who transacted business in my likeness, or else my body was at times possessed by a spirit over which it had no controul, and of whose actions my own soul was wholly unconscious” (*Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, p. 125). Robert cannot step outside of himself to test if he has a second self or if a spirit possesses him, especially with his memory compromised. He attempts to locate himself temporally, but fails, as

he says: "of dates I could make nothing: one-half, or two-thirds of my time, seemed to me to be totally lost" (pp. 125–26). Shortly thereafter, he describes his body dissolving with his mind into the parts that comprise a diorama picture: its screen and then finally just the illusion.

While escaping from Gil-Martin and the mob, Robert finds shelter at a weaver's house. In the early morning, he becomes entangled and suspended over a pit in a web of linen threads stretched the entire length of the apartment between looms (*Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, pp. 148–49)—a diorama screen in size and material, since dioramas were painted on linen canvases. Robert loses his footing, and the linen screen ensnares him. He dangles upside-down within the linen web as a vulnerable insect might in a spider's web made of the very fiber from which beguiling diorama scenes project. This is the beginning of Robert's devolution from his embodied self to a less-substantial yet visual essence. After the cottager's wife frees him from the looms, Robert continues to flee the mob and the demons he believes are chasing him, sleeps in farm-houses, prays for oblivion, and writes in his journal. His mental state continues to erode, and with it so does his sense of his physical self. In his last journal entry, dated 18 September 1712, he shares the results of his final reality-test on himself: "Still am I living, though liker to a vision than a human being" (p. 165). The final self-assessment aligns him with the diorama image projected toward an audience, a trace of the living and an incorporeal projection of a ruin replete with absent bodies. On this day, Robert hangs himself.

The diorama in *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* represents the relationship between Scottish victims and the tyrants that plague them, internal and external, past and present. When we read the novel as containing elements of Daguerre's diorama, Robert's persecution and death represent an extreme of the Scottish condition between the 1707 Union and the 1712 Toleration Act, a time that the Holyrood diorama and booklet emphasizes as traumatic for the "body" of the chapel as well.³² The novel

³² The years between 1707 and 1712 saw "a more decisive set of changes than those of 1688–90," the revolution and its aftermath (Alasdair Raffe, "Scotland Restored and

contains a plethora of dates that fail to corroborate the Editor's narrative to Robert's memoir, and the date conspicuously missing is 1707, when Scotland loses its independence to union with Great Britain.³³ A lack of unity or union of any kind is the best descriptor for this novel; the characters' psyches, the parts of the novel, and even Robert's corpse are relentlessly scavenged throughout the plot. Parliament passed the Toleration Act of 1712, the year of Robert's suicide, to prevent non-Anglicans from occasionally receiving communion in the Church of England as a method of bypassing the religious requirements of running for British public office. Together, these Acts severely exclude Scots who seek political and religious autonomy and influence in the new British regime, and the abbey at Holyrood Palace is a monument to the persecution of Scots who sought those very same powers.



Early forays into three-dimensional imaging and animation in the nineteenth century were not independent acts of optical showmanship: they were intertwined with literary traditions and inventions. Hogg, one of the great innovators in Romantic literature, perhaps seized on the diorama in order to invent a new multimedia iteration of the late-Romantic novel.³⁴ Robert's final words in his memoir that identify himself as "a vision" not only construct him as a diorama picture but also as writing, a far older visual technology. A self-consciousness about the relationship between one's identity and the media that construct our identities and our narratives appears in *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* in reality-testing

Reshaped: Politics and Religion, c.1660–1712," in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Scottish History*, ed. T. M. Devine and Jenny Wormald [New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2012], p. 252).

³³ See Ian Duncan, "Fanaticism and Enlightenment in *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*," in *James Hogg and the Literary Marketplace*, p. 61.

³⁴ On the diorama during the Romantic era, see Thomas, *Romanticism and Visuality*; William H. Galperin, *The Return of the Visible in British Romanticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1993); and Gillen D'Arcy Wood, *The Shock of the Real: Romanticism and Visual Culture, 1760–1860* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

moments like the one where Robert identifies himself as a vision. That is, reality-testing in the diorama can also be thought of as a mode of media identification: how is one's present moment constructed?

Confessions of a Justified Sinner contains many reality testing episodes in which a viewer tries to separate the diorama image from the real and identify the way the present is made. Therefore, when read with the diorama in mind, the novel continuously reminds the audience that it is also about the power of visual entertainment inventions in Hogg's day. This makes *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* strikingly different than Hogg's earlier works like *Jacobite Relics of Scotland* (1819, 1821) and *The Queen's Wake* (1813), both of which celebrate older Scottish bardic heritage and oral poetic traditions. *The Queen's Wake* even stages its minstrelsy contests at Holyrood Palace in 1561. A decade after publishing *The Queen's Wake*, Hogg set *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* in the early eighteenth century and overlaid it upon historical events and contemporary technologies. These technologies project an unresolved and self-conscious portrait of a fractured Scottish nation attempting to understand how it looks in the "mirror" of present visual media.

According to "A Scots Mummy," Hogg's 1823 article in *Blackwood's* about the discovery of the suicide's grave and from which he quotes directly in *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, Hogg wrote the novel in response to a challenge from Christopher North, the penname of John Wilson. Wilson challenged Hogg to write about "the boundless phenomena of nature." In fact, the phrase "phenomena of nature" appears four times in the article, each time recalling the temporal atmospheric changes and depth of illusion of a diorama:

"Have you not the boundless phenomena of nature constantly before your eyes?" . . .

. . . "A man who has such an eye as you have, for discerning the goings on of the mighty elements, can never want the choice of a thousand subjects whereon to exercise his pen. You have the night, with her unnumbered stars, that seem to rowl through spaces incomprehensible; the day dawn, and the sunshine; the dazzling splendours of noon, and the sombre hues that pervade

the mountains, under the congregated masses of impending vapours.”

... “You should look less at lambs and rams, and he-goats, Hogg, and more at the grand phenomena of nature.”³⁵

For phenomena of nature, North points Hogg to an image of a deep cosmos with mobile celestial bodies and diurnal changes from sunlight to shadow. The description also has the vital components of three-dimensional expanse and depth unique to the diorama: the universe is comprised of “spaces incomprehensible,” hues “pervade” or penetrate the mountain range, “impending vapours” “congregate” *en masse*, and personified they accrue bodily mass. In sum, North challenges Hogg to visualize the signs of time passing in nature with his pen.

The story that Hogg alights on to satisfy North’s challenge is the mystery of the gravesite atop Cowan’s Croft in Scotland, and the Editor calls this story “one of the greatest natural phenomena that [he has] heard of in this country” (*Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, p. 166). At first blush, these appear to be the supernaturally preserved corpse and hay-rope of the suicide victim. One might also associate these “phenomena of nature” with the magic lantern, given Hogg’s 1833 essay “Nature’s Magic Lantern.”³⁶ Yet Laurent Mannoni writes that the terms “nature” and “natural” are used to describe optical wonders more generally, even before the invention of the magic lantern, as in *Magiae Naturalis*, or “Natural Magic,” the title of Giovanni Battista della Porta’s 1558 description of the camera obscura (*The Great Art of Light and Shadow*, p. 8). Therefore, the superlative “greatest natural phenomena” that inspires the novel can also refer to the optical wonder of the diorama in *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. Each additional time the word “phenomenon” appears in the novel, it occurs during the episode where George sits atop Arthur’s Seat and attends a diorama in nature’s theater showing the “little wee ghost of the rainbow” (*Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, p. 29) and the “dilated frame of embodied air,” just above Holyrood Abbey, the setting of the diorama.

³⁵ James Hogg, “A Scots Mummy,” *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, 14 (1823), 188.

³⁶ See [James Hogg], “Nature’s Magic Lantern,” *Chambers’s Edinburgh Journal*, 2 (1833), 273–74.

If his allusions to the diorama are intentional, Hogg would be the first author in history to adopt this medium as a literary device. *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* is remarkable for its references to so many aspects of the Holyrood diorama: the Holyrood scene and booklet, auditorium, screen, scenographics, interplay between light and shade, lifelike illusions, reality-testing, and visualizing of the present moment and time's passage. The focus in Hogg's novel on early-nineteenth-century visual entertainment inventions is by definition self-referential because, in addition to the diorama, it also points to its primary visual medium, the late-Romantic novel. This is most noticeable where the novelist writes himself into the conclusion of the story. When the Editor and his company meet Hogg, in character as a farmer, and invite him to accompany them to dig up the suicide's grave, Hogg refuses:

“Od bless ye, lad! I hae ither matters to mind. I hae a' thae paulies to sell, an' a' yon Highland stotts down on the green every ane; an' then I hae ten scores o' yowes to buy after, an' if I canna first sell my ain stock, I canna buy nae ither body's. I hae mair ado than I can manage the day, foreby ganging to houk up hunder-year-auld banes.” (*Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, p. 170)

Uninterested in the “hunder-year-auld banes” that the Editor's party may or may not find, Hogg reminds the Editor with stinging sarcasm that he has real work to do: he must first sell his own “stock” or livestock before he can purchase others' (p. 170). I agree with Thomas Richardson that in this scene Hogg indulges in the fantasy of snubbing his elitist literary colleagues as he “retreats into the primacy of farming” (“James Hogg and *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*,” p. 199), but I also see more at stake—or rather, in stock—than this. In his dismissal of the Editor, Hogg breaks the novel's spell and throws a coin at the diorama within his own narrative. He comments on his character's work in two markets: the livestock market and the book market in which he strives to create original work that will contribute to Scottish writing and heritage transmission. Here, I read Hogg differentiating his experimental diorama-novel—his stock, his ideas printed and bound—from narratives that romanticize

Scottish history or circulate colonial agendas, like the Editor's.³⁷ Hogg's approach creates a futuristic, hybrid nineteenth-century technology for Scottish storytelling that blends ocular and authorial ingenuity in real-time, since the Holyrood diorama was playing in Paris at the time of the release of *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* in June 1824. Hogg's fascination, then, would be seen not as trained only on the diorama, but as equally invested in the evolving visual technology of the novel.

Santa Clara University

ABSTRACT

Kirstyn Leuner, "Novel Technologies: The Holyrood Chapel Diorama in James Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*" (pp. 437–461)

This essay argues that there is a diorama remediated within James Hogg's experimental Scottish Gothic novel, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824). Invented in 1822, the diorama was a popular multimedia theater experience comprised of a mural-sized immersive and realistic painting as well as a printed booklet describing the scene. Together, the view and booklet imaginatively transport the diorama's audience to the depicted location. The diorama in Hogg's novel is Louis Daguerre's "Ruins of Holyrood Chapel, a Moonlight Scene" (1823), which places the viewer within the crumbling abbey at Holyrood Palace, Edinburgh, at night, among the tombs of Scottish nobles and royalty buried there. With its remediated Holyrood diorama, *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* prompts readers and characters, much like diorama-goers, to test their surroundings and determine where reality ends and the screen of illusion begins. Such reality-testing reveals characters' and readers' present moments to be part of, not detached from, the history of the ruined Holyrood Chapel and graveyard, the fractured identity of Scots, and the reception and retelling of their stories. Further, reality-testing draws attention to the media that construct one's sense of self, the present, and the past, and these include not only the newer technology of the diorama, but also that of the novel in the late-Romantic period.

Keywords: James Hogg; *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*; diorama; Gothic; Scotland

³⁷ On empire and *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, see Douglas S. Mack, *Scottish Fiction and the British Empire* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2006).