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The romantic vindication of Cain: A study of sympathetic presentations of Cain by seven major romantic poets in England and France. (Volumes I and II)

Finkelman, Louis, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1992

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THE ROMANTIC VINDICATION OF CAIN:

A STUDY OF SYMPATHETIC PRESENTATIONS OF CAIN BY SEVEN MAJOR ROMANTIC POETS IN ENGLAND AND FRANCE

by

Louis Finkelman

Volume One

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, the City University of New York.

1992

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Chair of Examining Committee

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Executive Officer

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Abstract

THE ROMANTIC VINDICATION OF CAIN:

A STUDY OF SYMPATHETIC PRESENTATIONS OF CAIN BY SEVEN ROMANTIC POETS IN ENGLAND AND FRANCE

by

Louis Finkelman

Advisor: Professor Lillian Feder

This is a study of seven works by major romantic poets in England and France each of whom retell the story of Cain, each presenting him as a sympathetic figure. The works are:

Cain: A Mystery by Lord Byron

"The Wanderings of Cain" by Samuel Taylor Coleridge

The Ghost of Abel by William Blake

Histoire de la reine du matin et de Soliman prince des génies by Gérard de Nerval

"La conscience" by Victor Hugo

"Abel et Caïn" by Charles Baudelaire

Qaïn by Charles-René Marie Leconte de Lisle

I trace these portraits of Cain back to their sources in the text of the Hebrew Bible, and through their evolution in esoteric traditions of biblical exegesis. I also connect each version to the author's religious and political concerns, especially the author's view of the French Revolution. This study casts light role of the Bible in the growth of romanticism, and the different meaning of romanticism in England and France.

Acknowledgements

This work bears the imprint of two wonderful teachers, my parents. My Mother loved French literature. She also did not believe in giving up in the middle of a project, which had much to do with my finishing this dissertation after close to twenty years. I am sorry that she did not live to see it. My Father, who delights in discovering how seemingly unrelated phenomena in history are related, will certainly recognize his influence in many of these pages.

I first heard the suggestion that Cain would make a good dissertation topic from Prof. Ricardo Quinones, at a graduate seminar at City University which he taught during a visit to City University in the early 1970s. Brenda Oded took up the suggestion and wrote a master thesis for him on just this topic; she was kind enough to help me begin my work, which extends hers. My dissertation was essentially complete before the appearance Professor Quinones' own book on this topic, The Changes of Cain: Violence and the Lost Brother in Cain and Abel Literature. A comparison between our two works would be most instructive.

All through my school years, I was fortunate to have enthusiastic scholars as my teachers, among them Dr. Isobel Gordon, and Profs. David Fleisher, Allen Mandelbaum, and Frederick Goldin, who demonstrated how to read literature with love and intelligence. Another remarkable group of scholars, including Profs. Ya'akov Elman and Pesach Oratz, taught me how to read the Hebrew Bible, from the basic mechanics of the language to the subtleties of linguistic echoes. I have never met the great teacher of Bible commentary, Nehama Leibowitz, but she is also among my teachers. My gratitude to them is unlimited.

When I went back to City University, after a hiatus of about fifteen years, Burton Pike greeted me with encouragement, and reinstated by dissertation proposal. At about that time, Prof. Fernande Bassan of the French department at Wayne State University provided me with encouragement and references. Since then, many colleagues have provided helpful references; I especially want to thank Rabbi Hananya Goodman and Dr. Duane Arnold. I have frequently consulted a valuable compendium of rabbinic sources on Cain, David Max Eichorn's Son of the Serpent.

I began work on the dissertation, during a one-semester sabbatical from my duties as director of the B'nai B'rith Hillel Foundations of Metropolitan Detroit. This precious

time was made available to me through that organization, the B'nai B'rith Hillel Foundations National Center, and the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit.

This project would never have been completed without the demanding attention lavished on my work by the dissertation advisor, Prof. Lillian Feder, and the other members of the committee, Profs. Joan Dayan and Joseph Wittreich.

It is customary to conclude by acknowledging one's spouse; far more than customary acknowledgement is called for in recognizing the contribution to this project of my wife, Marilyn. When I married her, I knew many of her talents, and did not yet suspect that I had found an editor.

Louis Finkelman

Oak Park, Michigan

Table of Contents

Volume I

Chapter One: Defining the Phenomenon 1

Chapter Two: Cain in the Hebrew Bible 29

Chapter Three: The Common Understanding of Cain as Evil 79

Chapter Four: The Counter-Tradition 111

Chapter Five: The Forerunner: Gessner's Der Tod Abels 134

Chapter Six: Coleridge's "The Wanderings of Cain" 153

Chapter Seven: Byron's Cain: A Mystery 195

Volume II

Chapter Eight: Blake's The Ghost of Abel 278

Chapter Nine: Gérard de Nerval's Histoire de la reine du matin et de Soliman prince des génies 317

Chapter Ten: Charles Baudelaire's "Abel et Caïn" 370

Chapter Eleven: "La conscience" by Victor Hugo 399

Chapter Twelve: Leconte de Lisle's Qaïn 425

Chapter Thirteen: The Political Significance of Cain: Cain as the Defeated French Revolutionary 478

Chapter Fourteen: Conclusions..... 539

Appendix 558

Works Cited 560

THE ROMANTIC VINDICATION OF CAIN: A STUDY OF SYMPATHETIC PRESENTATIONS OF CAIN BY SEVEN ROMANTIC POETS IN ENGLAND AND FRANCE

by Louis Finkelman

Chapter One: Defining the Phenomenon

Chapter One: Defining the Phenomenon

After a long history of versions of the story of Cain in which he is condemned, the first versions sympathetic to Cain appeared in a flurry. Three such works by major English poets were published in the seven years following 1821. Another four by major French poets were published between 1850 and 1869. This study addresses the sudden appearance of sympathetic, and even heroic, versions of Cain.

Byron wrote and published Cain: A Mystery in 1821 (3-5, 151-258). Of the many responses to Byron's play, two were literary works by major figures: the playlet The Ghost of Abel that Blake dedicated to Byron in 1822 (584-86),[1] and the prose fragment "The Wanderings of Cain," that Coleridge rescued from oblivion and published in 1828 (285-292).[2]

Gérard de Nerval's novelette Histoire de la reine du matin et de Soliman prince des génies first appeared in 1850 (Oeuvres 2: 503-

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[1] The dedication reads: "Etched 1822 / To LORD BYRON in the Wilderness:" At the conclusion of the work is the confusing note, "1822. Blakes Original Stereotype was 1788." While it is possible that Blake modified a thirty-four year old work by dedicating it to Byron, it is more likely that the entire work dates from 1822, and some other significance must be assigned to note about 1788. See my discussion at the beginning of chapter 8.

[2] According to Coleridge's own notes (285), "The Wanderings of Cain" was written in the summer of 1797.

2: 503-606);[3] Charles Baudelaire's Les fleurs du mal, including "Abel et Cain," was published in 1857 (577, 240-42). The first edition of Victor Hugo's cycle of poems, La légende des siècles, in 1859, included a short poem about Cain, "La conscience" (25-25). In 1869, Charles-René Marie Leconte de Lisle published the poem Qaïn (Pich LdeL 459, Leconte de Lisle Poésies complètes 1: 1-21).

These poets use a sympathetic treatment of Cain as a spectacular literary device for expressing, in a direct and challenging way, anti-religious feelings, or religious subjectivism, or an admiration for political revolution. This dissertation explores the correlation between sympathetic literary versions of Cain and political and religious developments in the romantic period.

I shall present, as background to the romantic versions, a brief history of the theme of Cain: first, the austere Biblical narrative, which leaves room for the literary imagination of later writers; next, some literary and exegetical works which express the archetypical reading of the story, in which Cain is a type of evil; after that, some texts

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[3] The piece first appeared in serial form in Le national in March and April of 1850, according to Béguin and Richer, notes to Nerval, Oeuvres 2:1388 note 3. During the next year, Nerval incorporated it into a larger work, the Voyage en orient. Nerval, however, had been working on the theme since 1835 at the latest (Glass, Nerval Journey 18).

from the esoteric Jewish and Christian mystical tradition, which express a positive view of Cain; finally, the one sympathetic literary portrayal which precedes Byron and Coleridge, an influential work by the Swiss poet Salomon Gessner.[4] I shall then present a detailed discussion of each of the seven works, with a special concern for its place in the author's oeuvre, and for the literary, economic and religious significance of the use of Cain. Then, I shall examine the figure of Cain in each of these works as a representation of the failed French revolution.

The focus on understanding the theme of Cain in these seven romantic versions is perhaps a narrow one, but it has wide implications. In the concluding section of this dissertation, I shall delineate some of those implications for the study of the Bible in literature, of the romantic period, and of the relationship between English and French romanticism. I shall also point out some areas for further research.

The ultimate source of the story of Cain is the biblical text, which presents Cain with rich ambiguity. The narrative style of the Hebrew Bible, in the story of Cain as in many other places, is compressed and suggestive. The biblical text gives

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[4] Gessner's Der Tod Abels (The Death of Abel) was published around 1758 (B. Reed 16). Mary Collyer's English translation, a phenomenally popular book, was first published in 1761, and Michel Huber's French translation appeared in the very next year.

few background details and is characteristically silent or ambiguous even on matters of central importance to the story of Cain. That narrative style created opportunities for later writers.

Some early exegetical material expands on the sympathetic aspects in the biblical portrayal of Cain, but by the time of the Church fathers, the dominant exegetical tradition is entirely negative. They see Cain as a pure villain, in league with the devil, possibly a son of the devil, and the typological father of all who perpetrate evil. Abel is a figure of Jesus, so Cain is a figure of those who killed Jesus. All those who are compared with Cain deserve to wander without hope, as Cain did, or to die in a violent manifestation of righteous judgement, as Cain's descendants died in the Flood.

The positive view of Cain is preserved and developed in esoteric mystical sources: in Gnostic and Masonic texts, in some kabbalistic texts and in the writings of some Christian mystics. Some Church Fathers refer to a mysterious sect called the Cainites, who glorified Cain and other biblical villains (Cainites are mentioned by Iraneus, Against Heresies, I, 31, 1. and Epiphanius, Against Heresies 39, Layton 188-89. They also appear in Hippolytus and Eusebius.). Later, among certain kabbalistic writers, most notably Hayyim Vital

[b.1542-d.1620], Cain is seen as a spiritual giant, forerunner of the Messiah (chapters 14, 20, 23). The Christian mystic Jacob Boehme [b.1575-d.1624] holds that Cain was intended to be the new man who would vanquish the serpent (Beer 326);[5] by implication, Cain would be the Messiah. When, in the nineteenth century, seven major poets present Cain sympathetically, they flout the dominant exegetical tradition, and learn from, or reinvent, the esoteric exegesis.

This is a study of how seven poets made radical innovations in telling the story of Cain. Therefore, this study necessarily depends on a narrow definition of the theme. The seven works I discuss in this study mention Cain by name, and retell part of his story. Works which parallel the story of Cain, including stories about relations between brothers, or about acts of family disloyalty, or guilt feelings, or exile as punishment, are outside the scope of this study.[6]

Other writers have used a more inclusive definition in

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[5] According to Beer (326) the passage about the messianic Cain occurs in Jacob Boehme, The Three Principles of the Divine Essence, in Works, . . . with figures, illustrating his Principles, left by the Rev. W. Law. 4 Volumes (1764-81) Vol.I, ii, 204. Since I have not been able to locate a copy of this once influential book which has since become rare, I have had to rely on Beer's presentation. I believe that the ideas which Beer attributes to Boehme are entirely plausible as biblical commentary and as mystical speculation (see my discussion in chapter 4).

[6] The connections between the works on the theme of Cain and those which parallel part of the story of Cain would be an interesting topic for further study.

studying the history of the theme of Cain. Honor Matthews, for example, in The Primal Curse; The Myth of Cain and Abel in the Theatre, includes a much wider scope of material. Matthews apparently defines the theme as "the concepts of a primordial sin followed by guilt, and, until recently, its punishment" (206). This definition enables him to deal with such works as Macbeth and Waiting for Godot, and a wide variety of other plays that have no place in my study. While Matthews may indeed have advanced our knowledge of the history of sin, guilt and punishment, his work is much less valuable on the significance of the specific story of Cain and Abel.

In the title of my dissertation, I characterize the seven poets as "romantic." I have chosen to use the term in spite of the two related challenges raised by Arthur O. Lovejoy in his essay, "On the Discrimination of Romanticisms." First, "romantic" is notoriously difficult to define. Many writers who do defend it have sought to find a single defining characteristic. Unfortunately, the multiplicity of their results suggests that the defining characteristic does not exist. Their various idiosyncratic definitions are useless and confusing. Jacques Barzun has collected dozens of assorted and contradictory uses of the word ("'Romanticism'--A Sampling of Modern Usage" 154-168), which only point out the difficulty in making sense of the word. All this difficulty might be an indication that the term is meaningless, and that

literature which is called romantic is not significantly different from other literature. Measured by the presentation of Cain, however, this literature is radically different from earlier literature. Writers in the romantic period identify with him, as earlier writers do not; this is a distinguishing sign of the period, so that the period itself, having at least one defining characteristic, cannot be an arbitrary construct.

The second problem is that there may not be common features to romanticism in different European literatures. "English romanticism" would then be a useful expression, as would "French romanticism," but "romanticism in England and France" would be entirely misleading. Lovejoy ("On the Discrimination of Romanticisms" 229-253) does not stop at distinguishing among romantic movements in different national literatures. He distinguishes among romantic movements in the same national literature, and suggests that many more such discriminations are possible, thereby implying that the single term "romanticism" is a chimera.[7] Though the figure of Cain serves a slightly different purpose in each of the works in this

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[7] Similarly, Peyre:

> Academic debates have for half a century or so been fought around the question whether there were any common features at all to the European romanticisms or if it would not be more sensible to discriminate once and for all among them, and concede the heterogeneousness of the several literary movements in Western Europe from around 1760 to 1850. ("The Originality of French Romanticism" 338).

study, I will show that the overall rhetorical effect of the figure of Cain is quite similar.

Some of the differences in the presentation of Cain may reflect national characteristics: I will demonstrate that the English romantics use the figure of Cain in nuanced ways to express partially conciliatory religious and political positions, while Nerval, Baudelaire and Leconte de Lisle use the figure of Cain in stark ways to express radical religious and political positions. Nonetheless, in view of the similarities which I shall demonstrate in all seven versions of Cain, I feel justified in using one term to describe the literature of the period in England and in France. The contrasts between English and French romanticism (as developed, for instance, in Lillian Furst's studies Romanticism and Romanticism in Perspective) must be examined in the light of the differences between the figure of Cain in English and French versions.

Lovejoy, in "The Meaning of Romanticism for the Historian of Ideas" (and elsewhere) is much exercised by the fact that there is no Platonic definition of "romanticism." Plato maintains that all items called by the same word partake of the same essence; and Lovejoy has demonstrated that many items called "romantic" have no one essence in common. He therefore claims that ". . . 'Romanticism' has no generally

understood meaning and has therefore become useless as a verbal signal (258)." It seems to me that many of the words used in literary study, and in other contexts, cannot be defined by a Platonic definition. Consider, for example, the task of looking for a single characteristic which is an adequate definition of "poetry" or "art" or "prose." Ludwig Wittgenstein (Philosophical Investigations I, especially #69-70; see also articles by Khatchadourian and Bambrough) suggests a different relationship among items called by the same word: a family resemblance. Each of these items resembles, to a greater or lesser extent, some of the other items, by some type of similarity. In the middle are items which resemble nearly all other items called by that word. At the extremes are items which resemble the intermediate items in different ways; though these extreme items may have almost nothing in common with each other, yet all are called by the same word. The word remains useful, though anyone can demonstrate that it is used for disparate items.

In the same essay, Lovejoy asserts

> a massive historical fact which no one is likely to deny--namely, that in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, especially in the 1780s and 1790s, there were discovered, invented or revived, chiefly in Germany, a large number of ideas which had been relatively, though not always absolutely,

> unfamiliar or uninfluential through the most of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. . ." (260).

The results of these ideas were persistent changes in intellectual attitude in everything from government to metaphysics and poetry "which had no parallel in the preceding period" (260). Similarly, in The Great Chain of Being, he is only a little more tolerant of the word, while still insisting that the phenomenon was real:

> It is, however, of no great consequence whether or not we apply to this transformation of current assumptions about value the name of 'Romanticism'; what it is essential to remember is that the transformation has taken place . . . ." (Great Chain 294).

Lovejoy believes that calling these changes "Romanticism" would breed confusion ("The Meaning" 261); he thinks it appropriate to call the different strains of thought "Romanticisms", and he is willing, "in a spirit of compromise" to call the period "the Romantic period" ("The Meaning" 261).

What Lovejoy was willing to concede about the phenomenon is, by Wittgenstein's standards, and possibly even by Plato's, the whole ball game. If there was an intellectual transformation at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries, one with political, metaphysical and artistic

consequences, though one composed of diverse and contradictory parts, we ought to have a word to enable us to talk about it. "When all is said and done, Romanticism is as good a term as any to describe this very loosely structured point of view" (Radley 27). If we, in a fit of terminological precision, discard the word "romantic," then we will only have to invent another term for the phenomenon (see M. Praz, The Romantic Agony 1).

Lovejoy identifies several of the transforming ideas of the romantic period. In The Great Chain of Being, he singles out the valuation of diversity, rather than of uniform perfection, as typical of the period (294). In "The Meaning of Romanticism for the Historian of Ideas," he discusses the political consequences of this idea, and two others, "organicism and dynamism" (272). Lovejoy understands these as three of the many ideas characteristic of much of the literature of the period, which should by no means be considered a single romanticism. Morse Peckham, on the contrary, is willing to accept these three ideas as the very criteria for the definition of romanticism (Peckham 4).[8] Let us look at Peckham's definitions of the three ideas. Organicism: The central metaphor for the universe is no longer a machine, but a living organism. The universe is not

[8] At least at one point in his career. For a discussion of Peckham's changing ideas about romanticism, see Wellek, "Romanticism Re-examined" 220-202.

"something made, a perfect machine; it is something growing" (Peckham 7). Dynamism: As an organism, the universe "does not develop additively; it grows organically. Therefore change becomes a positive value, not a negative value" (Peckham 7). Diversitarianism: If the universe is changing, then it is never perfect (Peckham 8). There can be no perfect model, so an creative person cannot simply copy a pre-existent pattern; consequently artists and critics now value novelty, imperfection, originality, exoticism, mixing genres.

Like Lovejoy, René Wellek finds a few central "norms" which are "dominant" in romantic literature ("The Concept of Romanticism," 129), and which define a "system of ideas and poetic practices" (160): "imagination for the view of poetry, nature for the view of the world, and symbol and myth for poetic style" (161). The world is nature, that is, as opposed to machine; the poet is imaginative, as opposed to skilled; the poem uses myth, as opposed to convention. For Wellek, therefore, the terms "romantic" and "romanticism" "were everywhere understood in approximately the same sense and are still useful. . ." (160).

Two of the three transforming ideas that Lovejoy found in romanticism (and which, for Peckham, defined romanticism) match Wellek's dominant norms. Wellek's "imagination for the view of poetry" is a corollary of Lovejoy's

"diversitarianism." If readers value new and different artistic creations, then the poet is one who is original, who creates as it were, ex nihilo. The mere craftsman, who can follow convention to make beautiful expressions, is not really a poet. Wellek's "nature for the view of the world" is exactly Lovejoy's "organicism and dynamism."

Wellek and Peckham agree that "romanticism" is a useful term, and largely agree about its defining characteristics. Henry Remak, in "Trends of Recent Research in West European Romanticism," studies the works about romanticism by more than a hundred modern literary critics; his answer to the question: "[H]ave we achieved any kind of consensus on what we mean by (European) romanticism?" is: "Miraculously enough, we have" (490). Remak (490-91) finds that an impressive list of scholars agree with Wellek about the defining significance of imagination, nature and myth. Remak himself suggests that further research might add another feature, "the shift from outer-directedness to inner-directedness" (491).

Other scholars have discovered additional themes in romanticism. The most convincing of these are usually closely related to the dominant norms. Thomas MacFarland, for example, identifies the fascination with fragments, ruins and incomplete forms as typical of romantic literature. This characteristic follows from dynamicism, and from the image of

the poet as imaginative prophet, rather than skilled craftsman. Dynamicism means that there is no fixed, unchanging goal to a work of art, or to the world. The poet will not finish a perfect, given form. He will rather discover something new, which, like the world, is incomplete, changing. Fascination with brokenness also.follows from the high demand that originality places on a poet: If the poet aims to create an original myth in each work of art, then he will often discover that some projects simply cannot be completed.

Remak refers to yet another feature, as analyzed by Geoffrey Hartman:

> Hartman suggests that certain myths and motifs converge in what we might want to call as super-myth. Thus Cain, Ahasuerus, the Ancient Mariner, and Faust move within the scope of the Solitary, or Wandering Jew theme, highly developed by and since the romantic period. (Remak 489).

Hartman explicitly connects the theme of the solitary with "the perilous nature of consciousness," (Hartman 558) which, I believe, is a corollary of subjectivism. Furthermore, the theme relates to the romantic image of the poet. When the poet was seen as a kind of craftsman, who inherited a tradition, by implication the poet participated in a community. The romantic image of the poet as innovative myth-

maker implies that the poet must be solitary. Thus romantic poets not only describe solitary figures like Cain, but also identify with them. In Hartman's words: "The figure of the Wanderer approaches that of the Poet" (559).

Cain is not only a solitary, for he has other features which are important for the romantic poets. He is one of many traditional villains to be reevaluated and championed in romantic literature. As early as 1886, Alois Brandl wryly observed of the English romantic period that "noble villains were common in those days" (Coleridge und die englishe Romantik qtd in B. Reed 111). But Cain is not merely a generic villain;[9] the biblical text fleshes out his story with enigmatic details. Within the theme of Cain are several smaller themes, which develop from those details, and which are crucial in the role that Cain plays in the romantic period. I shall explore several of these smaller themes: The economic aspect of the story, suggested by the different careers of the two brothers, by Cain's role as urban developer, and by the careers of Cain's descendants, is important in the versions of the story by Nerval and Baudelaire. The religious aspects of the story are important

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[9] Raymond Trousson observes that "tous les frères ennemis ne sont pas Caïn et Abel, qui representent, si l'on ose dire, une certaine façon d'être frères ennemis" [emphasis is in text] (15). "All brother enemies are not Cain and Abel, who represent, if one dare to say it, a certain way of being brother enemies" (my translation).

in every one of these seven versions. Cain's audacious rebellion against God is championed by Nerval, Baudelaire and Leconte de Lisle, and, to some extent, by Byron. The political aspect of the story, suggested by Cain's rebellion against God's chosen favorite, is important in every one of these seven versions, each of which contains an evaluation of the French Revolution. The specific form of Cain's punishment, to wander away from the presence of God, resonates with the gloomy religious sensitivity of Byron and Coleridge, and with the deep political dissatisfaction of all seven poets.

I characterize the rhetorical stance towards Cain in these seven versions of the story as "sympathy." This study, therefore, calls for a clear definition of sympathy. By etymology, sympathy, like compassion, means "feeling with." This definition, focused on sympathy as a kind of emotion, is inadequate for the purposes of this study: If "sympathy" merely describes my emotions as I read these works, it is an entirely subjective term, conveying information, not about the works, but about my emotions. However, there are literary techniques, subject to rational analysis, which authors employ to lead the readers' emotions. These techniques have been studied and perfected by those who seek to persuade, from ancient rhetoricians to modern advertisers. The term "sympathy" in this study means that the authors employed more

or less objective techniques which are known to arouse the sensation of "feeling with."

There is an interesting ambiguity in the definition of sympathy as "feeling with." "With" could modify our feeling, or our selves. On the one hand, if "with" modifies our feelings, it means that we identify with the other's own emotions: That is, we feel the same emotions that he feels, or we share his feelings, or at least we understand his feelings. On the other, if "with" modifies our selves, it means that we identify ourselves with the other: In fantasy we occupy his place, and we want to see him succeed. These two meanings, although grammatically distinct, are closely related psychologically. When we identify ourselves with someone, we will come to share that person's perspective, and, therefore, that person's feelings; conversely, when we share someone's feelings, we tend to want that person to succeed.

Edward T. Wright, in a work designed for attorneys, develops a methodology from the interrelationship between the two meanings of "feeling with."[10] He advises an attorney to create opportunities for the jurors to share the client's emotions, so that they will come to identify themselves with the client, and will therefore want to see him succeed (256).

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[10] Wright uses the word "empathy" for "feeling with," rather than "sympathy."

Wright's advice seems particularly relevant to the theme of this study, for Cain is a criminal. An author who wishes to present the story of Cain in such a way that Cain is excused, or exonerated, or justified, essentially faces the same problem as a criminal defense attorney faces in orchestrating the defense of his client. The seven romantic poets use the specific techniques recommended by Wright to create sympathetic portrayals of Cain. In the next few paragraphs, I shall draw illustrations of sympathy from the seven works, although it involves telling my story a little out of order, since I have reserved a later chapter for a detailed discussion of each work.

Wright observes: "Jurors reach conclusions on the basis of people and issues with which they can identify" (192). He specifies that people identify with others when they can understand their motives. If a client's motive is one that jurors share, and are proud of sharing, then the jurors will feel strong identification with the client. A lawyer who can stress the client's motivating loyalty, patriotism, or kindness, is likely to win the case (192). Even if the client's motive is a relatively unattractive one, but one widely shared, the jurors will be able to identify with it: "People can identify with fear, hunger, embarrassment, and pain" (193). Unattractive motivations that are shared by few people, such as the desire to have sex with children, or

extreme greed, will not arouse sympathy; it is best to keep attention away from these motives.

Thus Nerval, in one of the few sympathetic versions to deal with the motive for the killing of Abel, provides Cain with admirable, or at least widely shared, motives for the crime. Nerval has Cain describe his motive: God, "the judge, condemning me to sterility, gave Abel a wife, Aclinia; she was our sister, and it was not Abel whom she loved, but me"[11] (Journey 168). Cain's motives, jealousy, desire to be with his love, desire for children, are widely shared. In seeking appropriate motives for the murder of Abel, poets are not entirely bound to the "facts" of the case, as reported in earlier versions. Within the generous limit of the defining characteristics of the story, poets can freely vary details; whereas, in theory, attorneys have to honor the facts. Nerval's story of the jealously over the twin sisters is not, however, an invention. The poet himself cites a source for this subplot in Islamic and Kabbalistic legend (Nerval, Oeuvres 2:1395).[12]

The other poet who deals with Cain's motives is Byron, who

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[11] The original is: ". . . me condamnant à la stérilité, donnait pour épouse au jeune Habel notre soeur Aclinia dont j'étais aimé" (Oeuvres 2: 558).

[12] Ancient Jewish legend, known as midrash, earlier proposed jealousy over the twin sister or sisters as a motive for the murder (see, for example, Bereshit Rabbah 22:7).

does provide us with a complex portrait of the circumstances which motivate Cain. As Byron presents him, Cain is motivated at the moment of the murder by his good qualities: his independence, his courage, his honesty, his refusal to bow before arbitrary authority. He is also motivated by faults, but these are not base or venal faults: irritation, impatience, inflexibility and pride. At no point is he motivated by evil: he does not hate his brother, he does not wish to harm his brother. He has absolutely no plan to commit the crime. Byron presents these motivations as if he were a talented defense attorney, trying to get Cain's sentence reduced to manslaughter.

The other sympathetic versions do not deal with the motive, because they do not deal with the murder at all! Wright advises attorneys to "[d]etract from unfavorable evidence or argument by not keeping it stage center, by getting it offstage as soon as possible" (255). In these seven versions of the story of Cain, only Byron presents the murder directly. Coleridge, Blake, Nerval, Baudelaire, Hugo and Leconte de Lisle begin the story of Cain at some point after the murder. Any description of the murder is potentially damaging to a reader's inclination to sympathize with Cain. Nerval, however, allows Cain himself to present a version of the murder (Journey 169; Oeuvres 2:557). Normally, when an incident is presented from the point-of-view of one character,

we tend to share that character's assessment of the incident.[13]

Wright suggests that an attorney "[R]eview the occurrences that form your lawsuit, and see how jurors of common experience can identify" (195). Analogues to common experience can occur in the most exotic circumstances. In the dialogue with the harsh angel called the Khéroub in Leconte de Lisle's poem (p.14ff, l.330ff), Cain is reasonable in his requests to go to Eden, while the Khéroub can appeal only to authority for keeping him out. This contrast develops our resentment against the angel, and against the God who sent the angel with such cruel and inexplicable orders; it strengthens our sympathy for Cain, for who has not been frustrated by arbitrary bureaucrats?

Wright emphasizes that people develop sympathy as a result of a good first impression and consistent follow-up. "Get the jury on your side, and keep them there. From the very first moment you face these twelve people, you want to move them to your client's corner" (x). In several of the works, the author uses the first encounter with Cain to establish him as

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[13] There are many works of literary art in which the reader understands the action better than does the naive or self-deceiving narrator. The reader then judges the narrator. In such works, the author generates ironic force by giving his readers evidence that leads them to overcome their natural sympathy for the narrator.

an object of sympathy. Victor Hugo begins "La conscience," for instance, with Cain leading his exhausted family at nightfall through a violent storm across a great plain to the foot of a mountain range. They must stop to rest, but he will get no rest. He is fleeing from God. Thus we see Cain's suffering, vividly imagined, but nothing about the crime which occasioned such punishment.

Wright observes: "Emphasize or detract with time. Call attention to what is good by pausing, by repeating, by using timing to shout Listen!" (255). Leconte de Lisle, in his poem "Qaïn," long delays the entrance of Cain. We learn of Cain's anguish before we learn anything else about him. When we finally meet him, after this introduction, we are prepared to give great weight to his first words. On arising from his tomb, he expresses tender, compassionate thoughts of Abel (10, lines 231-233). This long preparation for Cain's appearance puts tremendous emphasis on Cain's remorse.

Even in areas unrelated to the crime, Wright advises attorneys to present their clients as likable, sympathetic persons (262). When the authors provide Cain with positive characteristics, they contribute to our sympathy for him. Thus Byron, Coleridge, and Gessner before them, emphasize Cain's love for his family. In Hugo's version, the emphasis is on the family's love for Cain, at the moment when Cain's

granddaughter innocently asks after her grandfather's well-being. In Byron's version, Cain also has admirable qualities, a sense of justice and intellectual curiosity. He loves animals, admires beauty and hates violence.

Sometimes, it is possible to shift the blame to another. Leconte de Lisle's Cain (line 440) explains to Abel: "L'inquité divine est ton seul assassin."[14] God, who created the circumstances of Abel's death, is surely the true murderer. This is a technique of sympathy only to the extent that it creates a believable alternative accusation.

A criminal who shows remorse for the crime (not merely for the punishment) can gain sympathy. If it is impossible to claim that a client did not commit the crime, it is important to show that the client feels remorse. One cannot expect people to feel sympathy for a remorseless killer. Nerval, for instance, has Cain respond, when Adam reminds him of the murder, with dramatic remorse: "Hurling himself down, Cain beat his fists upon the ground until it echoed, while the convulsions of his sorrow rent his breast. Such is the torment of Cain for having shed blood."[15] (Nerval, Journey

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[14] "Divine iniquity is your only assassin."

[15] The original text reads:
Kaïn roula sur le sol, qui retentit, et les convulsions du désespoir lui déchiraient la poitrine...
Tel est le supplice de Kaïn, parce qu'il a versé le sang. (Nerval, Oeuvres 2: 558).

170) Leconte de Lisle, as we have seen, has Cain, on arising from his tomb, sob about the death of his brother "the irreparable deed is done"[16] (line 434). Cain would give his life to resuscitate Abel in Leconte de Lisle's poem (Piche 468) and in Byron: "But could I / With my own death redeem him from the dust--" (III, 510-11).

Blake uses the most straightforward technique to generate sympathy for Cain. He says that God demands that we show sympathy for Cain. The impulse, on the part of Adam and Eve, to avenge the death of Abel is supported by the spirit of Satan; their impulse to forgive Cain is supported by God. If forgiveness is not identical with sympathy, the difference is small. At the conclusion of the play, the angels sing that God is identified by divine forgiveness, idols by the quest for vengeance. Adam and Eve, who feel the loss of Abel more acutely than we, are praised for forgiving Cain; certainly we must forgive Cain.

This study forms part of the history of the theme of Cain. Wellek and Warren hold that the entire enterprise of thematic studies is of doubtful literary significance. They argue that there is not any necessary connection (beyond coincidence) between different works of literature that deal with the same

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[16] "la chose irréparable est faite."

theme.[17] I believe that this challenge has little relevance to the theme of Cain as it appears in this study, for several reasons:

First: Since the source of the story of Cain is a single, canonical text, every version of the story is also a commentary on that original text. No matter how the works relate to each other, they all connect with the original text. Victor Hugo's reading of the biblical text is, for example, one of the fascinating aspects of his poem "La conscience." The history of literary treatments of the theme of Cain is thus, in part, the history of the literary analysis of the biblical text.

Second: The affinities among treatments of Cain in each period are extremely strong. The figure of Cain is used to mean something very similar by any two Church fathers. The figure Cain means something very radically different from that in the works of the romantic poets, and yet any two romantic poets

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[17] Various versions of a story have no such necessary connexions or continuity as have metre or diction. To trace all the differing versions of the tragedy of Mary Queen of Scots throughout literature might well be a problem of interest for the history of political sentiment, and would, of course, incidentally illustrate changes in the history of taste--even changing conceptions of tragedy. But it has itself no real coherence or dialectic. It presents no single problem and certainly no critical problem. Stoffgeschichte is the least literary of histories. (Wellek and Warren 260).

mean something very similar by the figure of Cain. The similarities among different versions of Cain in each period are much more than coincidental. Therefore, the theme of Cain will be useful in the study of literary periods, in the study of the history of ideas, and in the study of the history of religion.

Third: Different writers choose to deal with Cain in the romantic period because the story lends itself to the literary technique of confounding the readers' expectations. The Bible is a literary text, but it is also a sacred text. Readers bring a strong tradition of the meaning of the story of Cain to any new version of the story. In this study, I shall show that the romantic poets make various use of their own ability to shock their readers' expectations about the possible uses of the story of Cain. The literary technique of reversing extratextual expectations is a proper subject for literary analysis, not less than the history of the picaresque novel, or the history of a particular meter. For the romantic poets, sympathy for Cain is a powerful way to express radical religious and political convictions.

Indeed, this dissertation suggests a line of defense for thematic studies against the entire challenge made by Warren and Wellek. It is possible that each plot-line marks out, to some extent, the uses to which it will be put. Perhaps a

story is not entirely passive, ready to have any possible meaning poured into it, in any possible style, by any possible author. Perhaps, indeed, the story will be used by only those authors who are sensitive to one of its finite possible meanings, and even they may find their work somewhat determined, or shaped, by the demands of the story itself. As Herbert Schneidau says in Sacred Discontent:

> For the study of literature, it appears, the book is not just an unfailing source of material; in spite of all the tomes that have been written on 'So-and-so's' use of the Bible, the point is how the Bible uses authors, and not vice versa. (2).[18]

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[18] Schneidau continues: "It would certainly be a mistake to assume that the only importance of the Bible is in the constructions that have been put on it."

Chapter Two: Cain in the Hebrew Bible

The compressed narrative technique of the Bible allows the story of Cain to be so fruitful as a source of later literature. Erich Auerbach identifies the characteristics of a typical biblical narrative (23): a purposefully spare foreground, fraught with background. The entire story of Cain takes up seventeen verses (Gen. 4:1-17); Cain is mentioned a few verses on (Gen. 4:24,5), and in no other place in the Hebrew Bible. Yet so many elements are introduced in those seventeen verses that few of the literary versions deal with all of them. In order to make sense of the story, the reader has to fill in the missing background. Writers, too, have to fill in the background in order to retell the story. The austere biblical narrative style leaves room for the literary imagination of later writers.

This narrative clearly has a very tight structure. The names Cain and Abel occur in strict chiasmus through the end of the seventh verse: first Cain, then Abel, then Abel, then Cain, and so on (this is pointed out by Cassuto, Commentary 204).

Each verse carries the story forward without digression, and with a minimum of context. And yet the story bristles with ambiguity.

A few recent works analyze the use of ambiguity in the narrative technique of the Bible with considerable success. Robert Alter, in The Art of Biblical Narrative, looks at the orchestration of ambiguity, the subtle use of linguistic echoes, the understated use of juxtaposition. Meir Sternberg, in The Poetics of Biblical Narrative, does a masterful analysis of the literary effects of the numerous artful "gaps" in biblical narrative. Although neither scholar focusses on Cain, the tools they lay out in analyzing other biblical passages can be used to understand that story.

Sternberg and Alter are pioneers of a new perspective on the text; some of the earlier commentators, without entirely sharing this perspective, had keen insight into the literary style of the Hebrew Bible. As Alter himself notes, the medieval rabbinic commentators drew on a tradition of "the most remarkable acuteness in identifying connotations and nuances of difference in Hebrew terms,"[1] a tradition

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[1] An earlier manifestation of this tradition was the ancient midrash (as we shall see in the next section), which also deals with the subtle effects of juxtaposition, echoed language, and gaps in information, but in ways so fanciful and indirect as to be obscure for the modern reader. See Alter, "Interpreting" 55-56.

"reinvigorated by the invention of philology" and by the revival of Hebrew poetry in the medieval period. The best of the these commentators "were all brilliant readers, but also readers with a deep and ramified rootage in a historically continuous Hebrew culture" (Alter, "Interpreting" 56). Yitzhak Abravanel (or Abarbanel), who lived from 1437-1509, was such a reader. He prefaces each section of his commentary on the Bible with a list of questions of exquisite literary sensitivity, pointing out gaps, inconsistencies, ambiguities. To whatever extent scholars develop new ways of "solving" difficulties raised by the text, Abravanel's questions, which identify those difficulties, remain the point of departure.

The romantic poets were also extremely talented readers of the Bible, picking up all sorts of subtle hints from the biblical text, as is amply demonstrated in the way they retell the story of Cain. Coleridge and Blake read the Bible with the help of least some knowledge of Hebrew. The insights of obscure ancient and medieval commentators turn up in the romantic versions as well, whether because the poets read the commentaries, or because they rediscovered those same insights.

In the rest of this chapter, I shall read through the story of Cain in the Hebrew Bible line by line from beginning to end. This reading will identify ambiguities, tensions, and other

unresolved issues inherent in the text; issues which we meet again in literary versions of the story. At several points Abravanel's questions are helpful at identifying the literary nuance of the biblical story of Cain. I shall, at those points, begin my presentation of each verse with a citation from Abravanel. Careful reading of the biblical story turns out to be astonishingly relevant to understanding the romantic versions of the story. Far from being flights of unrestrained fancy, barely tethered to a detail or two of Bible, the romantic versions are, to varying degrees, firmly connected to the suggestive details of the entire Bible story. Indeed, we must read this story with as much care as the romantic poets did, to understand the nuances of meaning which they found in the ambiguities of the Bible itself.

The story begins: "And the man knew Eve his wife; and she became pregnant and bore Cain. . . . ."(Gen. 4:1).[2] Abravanel asks: "Why does the text connect the birth of Cain and Abel and their names to Eve, and not to Adam?"(122)[3] Abravanel points out that this is different from the genealogical form used by the Bible elsewhere. A little while later, repeating the genealogy of Seth, for example, the Bible follows the typical form, "he begot a son. . . and called his name Seth,"

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[2] Translations from the Hebrew Bible are my own.

[3] All translations from Abravanel are my own, with punctuation added for clarity.

connecting the birth with the father (Gen. 5:3). Adam's absence is even more striking later in the first verse, when Eve chooses the name Cain, explaining: "I have gotten (Heb. kaniti) a man with the Lord" (Gen. 4:1).[4] She does not mention Adam's role in the conception of Cain. Perhaps she does not understand conception: This baby is, after all, the very first to be conceived. Perhaps she has another reason for emphasizing the role of the Lord: It might be gratitude at being the first person to play a part in the creation of a new human being. In the next chapter, I shall show that Eve's words can have a sinister interpretation: that Cain was fathered by Satan.

Abravanel asks, "Why does the text explain the reason for the name 'Cain?' . . . but for Abel, Eve did not explain why she called him that" (122). Abel's name, mysteriously introduced without any explanation, apparently means "breath" or "vanity." It is the same word as is repeated in the Ecclesiastes 1:2, "vanity of vanities, all is vanity." The name seems singularly appropriate to the murder victim who lives but a short while (Cassuto, Commentary 202), which may be the function of the name "Abel" for readers who know the end of the story; that cannot be the function of the name for Eve at the beginning of the story. Perhaps for that reason,

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[4] Or "I have created a man equally with the Lord" (Cassuto, Commentary 198).

Eve has no explanation for the name.

The verse ends: ". . . And Abel was a shepherd, and Cain was an agricultural worker [literally worker of earth]" (Gen. 4:2). Abravanel asks: "Why did Abel become a shepherd and Cain an agricultural worker. . . ?" (122). On the face of it, there is no moral dimension to the choice of farming for one brother and herding for the other. Although the earth had been cursed because of Adam, people were not forbidden to work it; on the contrary, the words of the curse imply that Adam himself was to work the earth:

> The earth is cursed for your sake; in pain shall you eat of it all the days of your life. Thorn and thistle shall sprout for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. By the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread until you return to the earth, for out of it were you taken; for dust are you, and to dust will you return. (Gen. 3:17-19).

We can understand the two careers without resorting to a typological opposition of farmer and herdsman: Perhaps the text uses the choice of different work to set up the opposition between the two brothers from the start. They diverge even in their choice of work. Their first act, in the biblical text, is to choose antithetical careers; or, rather, they did not act at all, but simply were, farmer and shepherd. Farmers and herdsman have often failed to get along well since

then, too (Schneidau 120). This divergence may, without making any moral judgment about farming and herding, foreshadow the eventual conflict between the brothers. Such reasoning accords well with the exegetical tradition of Cain as a morally complex character.

The opposing exegetical tradition is that Cain is an unambiguous figure of evil, and that every action of Cain's was evil. This tradition fits well with denigrating agriculture, and indeed, some commentators understand the story as a moral condemnation of agriculture. Abravanel (125), like Josephus (4:25,27; see discussion in Williams 22) and the Church Fathers (cited in Williams 103), finds Cain's choice of career an act of impiety: he chooses to work the earth after God cursed it. Unlike Josephus and the Church Fathers, Abravanel is also dissatisfied with Abel's career: Abel (126) chased the vanities of this world, in wanting sheep to obey him. The Church Fathers consistently find Abel to be a paradigm of virtue (Ambrose, Cain and Abel 362; Augustine, City of God, Book 15, Chapter 5 and many places in Contra Faustum). There is more material about the career of Cain at the end of the story, when Cain builds a city (Gen. 4:17). In medieval versions of the story of Cain, and again in French romantic versions, the economic aspect of the story plays an important role; I shall discuss those elsewhere in this dissertation.

"And it was after some time that Cain brought of the fruits of the earth an offering to the Lord. And Abel--he also brought of the first born of his flock and of their fat. . ." (Gen. 4:3-4). But, as Abravanel asks: "What awakened Cain and Abel to bring a sacrifice?" There is not, as Abravanel points out, another sacrifice in the Bible until Noah (122). Cain is the first one inspired to bring a sacrifice to God (Gen. 4:3); only after he does so does Abel "also" make his offering, and the biblical text emphasizes the word "also" (Gen. 4:4). This text cannot easily be reconciled with the notion that Cain is purely evil. It is the first indication of Cain's religious longing, which is the mainspring of the plot. Because of Cain's extraordinary religious sensitivity, he invents the idea of sacrifice. That same sensitivity embitters him all the more when the Lord, seemingly arbitrarily, "accepted Abel and his sacrifice, and did not accept Cain and his sacrifice" (Gen. 4:5).

But why did the Lord do that? Let me cite Abravanel's question here at length:

> Why did God not accept Cain and his sacrifice, as he did accept Abel and his sacrifice? Is it because the sacrifice of Abel was "of the firstborn of his flock, and of their fat," more valuable than the sacrifice of Cain, which was only "of the fruit of the earth?" Our rabbis have taught that it was

> flax seed, but we have already learned that "It makes no difference whether one gives more or less, as long as one's heart is directed towards heaven.". . . (Abravanel 122).

The Bible gives no direct reason for God to accept Abel's sacrifice and reject Cain's. There are, however, several elements of contrast between the sacrifices. First, as we have seen already, the idea of sacrificing is Cain's. For that reason, Cain's sacrifice should be the more accepted. Second: predictably, given their occupations, Cain offers the fruit of the ground, and Abel offers animals. This distinction seems unpromising as a reason for the difference in God's response to the two sacrifices, for it would require that the text honor animal sacrifices above vegetable. There is a more significant contrast in quality: Cain's offering is "of the fruit of the earth." Abel's offering is "of the first born of his flock, and of their fat" (Gen. 4:4-5). The word for "fat," helev, also means "the best part." Abel, in contrast with Cain, sacrifices his own, and his best. Perhaps the difference in quality explains why God accepts Abel's sacrifice and rejects Cain's (So said the patristic writer Ambrose, De Cain et Abel 2:10 and, among early Rabbinic texts, Bereshit Rabbah 22:5; see discussion in Braude 565; and later rabbinic commentators, including Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Issurei Mizbeiah 7:11).

But the text also specifies that God accepts Abel and rejects Cain (Gen. 4:4-5). Abravanel suggests that the difference in quality between the two sacrifices itself should not matter: A sacrifice should be judged by intent. But perhaps quality does matter, only because it indicates intent. In the New Testament (G. Heb. 11:4), however, the significant contrast is between the faith of Abel and of Cain. This passage can be taken to suggest that the sacrifices of the two brothers are identically acceptable; that Cain's sacrifice is not accepted because of a flaw in himself, in the failure of his faith (Chrysostom, Discourse 1, 7, 2-3 The Fathers of the Church 68:26-27). This passage, thus interpreted, supports the typological reading of Cain as representative of the Jews, heretics and Moslems, all of whom, according to medieval Christianity, offer worship and sacrifice which can never be accepted by God; this interpretation prepares the way for the curious role of the figure of Cain in the Crusades, as I shall show in the next chapter.

Two of the romantic versions of Cain offer explanations for God's choice of Abel and his sacrifice over Cain and his sacrifice (the others pick up the story later on). In Byron's play, Cain has no enthusiasm for sacrifice, and merely goes through the motions to please his brother (III, 170-278). God, presumably, rejects the offering because both the offering and the motive are flawed. In Nerval's novelette,

God has a preexisting hatred for Cain because Cain was fathered by Satan (Oeuvres 2:557). Nothing that Cain does leads God to reject his offering; though Cain wishes to please, no deed of his can ever be good enough. Neither Baudelaire nor Leconte de Lisle directly present the rejected offering in their poems; but in both, God has an unmotivated enmity for Cain.

The biblical text, by the way, gives no information about how God makes manifest his rejection of one sacrifice and the acceptance of the other. This is, I believe, what Sternberg calls a "blank" rather than a "gap" (236). We may be interested in this question, but the text seems uninterested. The text is similarly blank about how the sacrifices were offered, and how the crime was committed.

Cain reacts emotionally to the fate of the two sacrifices: ". . . and Cain was very angry and his face fell. And the Lord said to Cain, 'Why are you angry and why is your face fallen?" Gen. 4:5-6). The repetition in these two verses at first seems clumsy, as Sternberg notes (92). First comes the statement, on the "highest authority" of the omniscient narrator directly reporting on in the story, describing Cain's inner state and appearance: He was angry and his face was fallen. Then the Lord addresses Cain with exactly the same description, with "extreme redundancy in meaning . . . and

parallelism in form" (92). Sternberg points out a subtle subtext of this repetition: It "demonstrates God's knowledge--of internals (anger) as well as externals (fallen face)--by maximum reference to the narrator's authority" (92). By demonstrating God's omniscience, the text "sharpens the irony leveled at Cain" (92) a few verses on, when he takes one of God's probing questions to be a request for information, which he then disingenuously withholds.

My only quibble with Sternberg is in his characterization of "fallen face" as an "external."[5] I believe that this expression means "embarrassment," "depression," or "frustration," and so is also what Sternberg calls an "internal." It is one of a number of characteristic biblical expressions which describe the psychological states in physiological terms, or, more generally, describe abstract concepts in concrete terms.[6] The other word in this phrase, "vayihar" "and he became angry," is actually another example of this phenomenon. It is related to the word for

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[5] "Fallen face" does not occur elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, to my knowledge. Almost a direct opposite, "lifting of face," does, in contexts where it cannot be interpreted to mean the facial expression (Gen. 32:21, Num. 6:26, Prov. 6:35).

[6] The phenomenon occurs in languages other than Hebrew. My son Chaim pointed out to me that "fallen face" is equivalent to one of the meanings of the English word "downcast": "downward cast (of the eyes or look)." ("Downcast" in Oxford English Dictionary).

"overheated" or "scorched," so that it seems to mean "and he became hot." It is an elliptical reference to the expression for anger, "haron af," found frequently in the Bible, (Exod. 4:14, Exod. 11:8 and many other places) which literally means "heat of nose." If Sternberg were right about "fallen face" being an "external," then the entire phrase would be an unfortunate anti-climax: God, who knows the secrets of the heart, even knows the expressions of the face.

Abravanel remarks on another difficulty with God's question:

> Concerning that which the text says, "why are you angry and why is your face fallen?": How could he reprove him for that, as it is known that the more important and honored a man, the more fitting that he be hard on himself when his service is not received by his King and God, all the more so when his younger brother's offering is accepted, which is an embarrassment to him. . . . (122).

The answer to the question seems obvious: Because you, God, chose my brother and his sacrifice over me and mine. Nonetheless, it would be hard to find an answer that is both honest and respectful. Perhaps the question is rhetorical. God does not receive an answer from Cain, but continues speaking, advising: "Is it not that if you will do well, ascendancy; and if you will not do well, sin crouches at the

opening, and its desire is towards you, and you may rule over it" (Gen. 4:6-7).

All in all, God's advice to Cain is a difficult passage. The word which I have translated as ascendancy, "s'et," is not grammatically connected to the rest of the sentence.[7] It is also a difficult word to define: it may mean ascendancy as opposed to failure, or perhaps specifically ascendancy over your brother; it may mean "forgiveness," but what has Cain done to require forgiveness? The words which describe the action of the sin (personified as a kind of beast) are in masculine gender, although the subject "hatat" (sin), with which they must agree, is elsewhere consistently feminine.[8] Those words also match the words in God's curse of Eve in the previous chapter: ". . . your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you" (3:16), suggesting a mysterious parallel between the cursed relationship between wife and husband, and the ideal relationship between person and sin. Perhaps husbands can unfortunately control their wives by using their knowledge of their wives' sexual desire; and all of us can fortunately control our tendency to sin by

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[7] Incidentally, s'et (ascendancy) is from the same root as minnso (than can be borne) in verse 13, which I shall discuss later in this section. This makes an ironic contrast: In place of the "ascendancy" which God promised Cain if he "will do well," Cain, because he did not do well, achieved "that which cannot be borne."

[8] The word is also masculine in Lev. 4:24 and 5:9.

using our knowledge of the nature of the desires of that part of our personality.[9]

For all its difficulty, the passage has a clear overall meaning. Cain has missed the mark (for that is the literal meaning of the word "hatat," which in this passage is always translated as "sin").[10] He need not respond to missing the mark by becoming depressed and angry, being "hard on himself" or on others, though that is entirely natural (Abravanel 127). He should rather try again, confident that he has the power to succeed. This advice must be addressed to the reader as well as to Cain. It is prudent advice, but difficult to follow. The romantic poets, by and large, did not believe it possible to follow, as we shall see.

"And Cain said to Abel his brother. And it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him." (Gen. 4:8). What did Cain say to his brother? The verb "amar" in Hebrew, as the verb "say" in

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[9] Augustine explains the parallel between Gen. 3:16 and Gen. 4:7 thus:

> What is said to Cain about his sin, or about the vicious concupiscence of his flesh, is here said of the woman who had sinned, and we are to understand that the husband is to rule his wife as the soul rules the flesh. (City of God 15.7. Dodds translation 2:60).

[10] Lillian Feder points out the parallel between the Hebrew hatat and the Greek hamartia. The Greek word means "error, fault, and is also often translated as sin, again I think wrongly" (personal correspondence).

English, is nearly always followed by a direct or indirect quotation.[11] Why is this an exception?[12] Perhaps Cain found some excuse to begin his quarrel with Abel, an excuse which the text finds irrelevant. As we shall see, Cain's anger is not, at its source, directed against Abel:

> Why did Cain kill Abel? He [Abel] had not done him any evil! Was it because he [Abel] brought a sacrifice? Cain preceded him in bringing a sacrifice: "Abel--he also brought" (Gen. 4:4) [so, presumably, Cain would have no objection to Abel doing likewise]; and if it was because God did not accept his [Cain's] sacrifice, Abel was not guilty of that, for he, perhaps, would have wanted and preferred God to have also accepted the sacrifice of Cain. And [therefore] Cain should have complained against God, who did not accept his sacrifice--not killed Abel, who did not do anything wrong!" (Abravanel 122)[13]

Robert Alter identifies the "Bible's artful procedure of variously stipulating or suppressing motive in order to elicit moral inferences and suggest certain ambiguities" (Art of

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[11] Gen. 4:8 is not the only exception; see Jonah 2:11.

[12] Cassuto thinks that the text is an unusual way of saying that Cain set an appointment with Abel (Commentary 215).

[13] Material in brackets added.

Biblical Narrative 44). Where the Bible suppresses motive, according to Alter, it invites its readers to draw the appropriate inferences from a few "tersely expressive details" (Art 20). Alter's observation applies precisely to the story of Cain. In suppressing Cain's motive for the killing of Abel, the Bible makes us search for the motive in the only direct description of emotion in the story, Cain's anger and depression at the moment when God accepts Abel's sacrifice but not his own (Gen. 4:5,6).

Looking into that anger and depression, we can see an amalgam of motives for the crime. Cain is angry at God for preferring Abel's sacrifice, and disappointed in himself for proving unworthy of sacrifice. He is jealous of Abel, and fearful that Abel has permanently achieved preeminence in relations with God. Cain's anger at God is displaced against Abel. Cain's disappointment in himself changes into rage. The story of Cain is the first of many stories in Genesis which revolve around the struggle between brothers for preeminence in relations with God; this struggle is the recurrent theme of Genesis. The story of Cain can be seen as a warning that this struggle can lead to bloodshed.

Abravanel accurately indicates that Cain's anger would be more

properly directed against God than against Abel.[14] Cain's suppressed current of anger against God makes this story an effective vehicle for expressing religious rebellion in the romantic period.

It is astonishing to note that, in an austere story with so few words, the word "brother" occurs six times in verses 8-11, each time with a possessive suffix relating Abel to Cain. The first three of these times, the text also mentions Abel by name, so that the word is not even necessary for identification. Discussing a different story, Sternberg notes that when a familial referring term is repeated in a biblical narrative, the effect is very often to heighten the contrast between the action and the relationship. This technique is part of what he calls "the Bible's poetics of indirection" (450). Merely by repeating that Abel is Cain's brother, the text heightens its condemnation of Cain, "shaping objective judgment" (450) without ever a word of direct moralizing.

After the crime, God asks Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" (Gen. 4:9). Sternberg calls this question "God's pretending ignorance to Cain" (182). It is clear to the reader, if not to Cain, that this cannot be an informational question: God has just demonstrated supernal knowledge of Cain's emotions

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[14] Similarly Basil of Caesarea (c.330-79) says of Cain that "he wreaked vengeance upon man, since he was unable to avenge himself upon God" ("Concerning Envy," 465).

(Sternberg 92). The question, reminiscent of his question to Adam after the sin in the Garden of Eden, "Where are you?" (Gen. 3:9), is probably aimed at opening a dialogue to elicit a confession.[15] Many elements of the story, in fact, echo the story of the Garden of Eden. Each contains a sin, followed by a conversation with God; in each, the sinners feel the need to hide (Adam and Eve before they talk with God, Cain afterwards); in each the sinner's first, and perhaps last, response is to evade responsibility. God, in each story, curses the earth because of the sin, promising that from now on farming will be hard work, and in each story the sinner incurs the penalty of exile. In each, the exile is served east of Eden. These parallels suggest that the two stories develop a similar theme: That perhaps the fate of Cain can be seen as a sort of second, more violent, fall.

Cain's crime, however, is the ultimate act of violence, the murder of another human being, committed, as we have seen, in rebellion against God. The sin in the Garden of Eden story seems to be a simple matter of disobedience to an apparently arbitrary ritual command, far less heinous than the murder of Abel. Perhaps that is why the word "sin" does not occur in the Garden of Eden story. As Terry Otten observes, the word "sin" first occurs in the Bible in God's advice to Cain (19).

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[15] So said Basil of Caesarea in a letter to Bishop Optimus of Antioch, probably written in 377 (Letter 260 Letters 2:224).

The violent rebellion of Cain, rather than the ritual disobedience of Adam and Eve, is suited to be the theme of the romantic poets' confrontation with religious and political revolution.

God's question offers Cain the opportunity to confess, which Cain audaciously spurns: "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen. 4:9). The strength of that answer reverberates down through the romantic period. It identifies Cain as a glorious rebel. By contrast, "[a]s sinners, Adam and Eve seem vapid figures indeed, and not only in committing the act of disobedience, but also in responding to the consequences" (Otten 19). When God gives Adam the opportunity to confess, he makes a weak attempt to pass off responsibility: "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate" (Gen.3:12). Eve's response is much like his: "The snake beguiled me, and I ate" (Gen. 3:13). In attempting to pass off responsibility, Adam and Eve implicitly accept God's right to judge. Accused of breaking the law, they identify themselves as friends of the law, offering to help the working of justice by pointing out the true criminal. They identify with the judge, if only out of cowardice. Cain's first response shows no cowardice: He does not offer to help find the criminal, he does not acknowledge God's right to judge him, he does not even admit that a crime has been committed. Cain, in his defiance, shows "the energy, courage and

conviction" that would appeal to the romantic poets (Otten 19).

God decrees Cain's punishment:

> What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying out to me from the earth! And now, cursed are you from the earth[16] which has opened its mouth to take your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the earth, it will not continue to give its strength to you; a wanderer and a fugitive will you be in the land. (Gen. 4:10-12).

The punishment is not death, which is perhaps surprising. Rather it is exile, like the punishment of Adam and Eve, and like the punishment of the negligent homicide (Num. 35:9-34, Deut. 19:1-12).[17] Some of the earliest rabbinical commentary notes extenuating circumstances which mitigate Cain's sentence (Bereshit Rabbah 22:12). Perhaps it is because God had not yet specifically forbade murder that Cain received the punishment appropriate to one guilty of negligent homicide; or perhaps Cain, never having seen a human death, did not know

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[16] Or "more than the earth." Apparently, according to this reading, the earth was cursed. This either refers back to the cursing of the earth in Gen. 3:17, or indicates a new curse.

[17] Actually, the punishment of the negligent homicide is not exactly exile, but exile to a city of refuge. There are no cities at all at this point in the story. Is it relevant that Cain later built a city?

that his blow would kill. Perhaps the sentence is mitigated only because of the mercy of God.

Cain's punishment differs from that of Adam. Adam was exiled from Eden, forced to work hard for his food, suddenly aware of good and evil. Human history, in a sense, begins with Adam's fall; so, too, does the work of human redemption. Adam's fall, in that sense, is a fortunate fall. Cain's punishment is exile, not from paradise, but from everywhere. He is forever an exile. For this reason too, the story of Cain is more suited to romantic retelling than the story of Adam. Exile has its own mystique: It is social death. Exile is the objective correlative of the emotional state of the romantic hero: loneliness, alienation, feeling cut off from human society. Cain, as he endures his punishment of exile, resembles the Ancient Mariner and the tortured heroes of Byron.

Any attempt to imagine Cain's crime and punishment also brings us to what he learns from the terrible experience of sin and exile. Afterwards, he understands the omniscience of God better, and his mercy and justice. He understands the importance of family, and perhaps the depth of his own crime. This is a bitter kind of wisdom. Jonathan Omer-Man describes Cain's incomplete acquisition of wisdom through sin and suffering in his essay, "The Evolution of the Blemished

Priest" (93-104). Hyam Maccoby (241) attempts a radical reading of the story in which Cain's experience is more clearly a fortunate fall (see below).

In the opening chapters of Genesis, the Hebrew word for the common noun "man" is adam, or, rather, ha'adam, "the man." A little later on, when God punishes the man for disobedience, the article is dropped, and the word changed into the proper name of the first man, Adam (Gen. 3:17). This man is fashioned out of earth, which is called adamah (Gen. 2:7). The life of a man is in his blood, which is called dam (Gen. 9:6). The Bible, early in Genesis, rings changes on these three related words at several points. In the sentence pronounced on Adam, God twice mentions earth, once as the source of food, and once as the source and destiny of man: "The earth is cursed because of you, in sorrow shall you eat of it all the days of your life" (Gen. 3:17). "By the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread, until you return the earth, for from it were you taken, for dust are you, and to dust you will return" (Gen. 3:19). In the sentence pronounced on Cain, God mentions earth three times, twice as the receiver of Abel's blood, and once as the object to be worked to produce food:

> What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying out to me from the earth! And now, cursed are you from the earth which has opened its

> mouth to take your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the earth, it will not continue to give its strength to you; a wanderer and a fugitive will you be in the land. (Gen. 4:10-13).

Cain is punished as the first murderer, at a moment when murder has not yet been explicitly forbidden. When God does forbid murder, to Noah after the flood, the prohibition echoes with the words blood and man, dam and adam: "Whosoever spills the blood of man, by man shall his blood be spilt" (Gen. 9:6): "shofeikh dam ha-adam ba-adam damo yishafeikh." It seems from these verses that there is a natural cycle of human lifeblood, earth, and food. The human, formed of earth, brings forth from the earth the food that sustains his lifeblood. When his life is done, the earth receives his blood, and he returns to the earth. The earth, in turn, receives the worn blood of the aged dead, and gives forth food to sustain the living. This cycle is disrupted by murder: The murderer spills fresh, innocent blood on the earth; when the earth receives this blood, it is cursed, and no longer gives its bounty.

Returning to Cain's punishment, as decreed by God: "When you work the earth, it will not continue to give its strength to you; a wanderer and a fugitive will you be in the land" (Gen. 4:12). When Cain describes the punishment back to God, however, he says: "Behold, you have driven me off this day

from the face of the earth, and from your face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer in the land, and whosoever finds me will kill me" (Gen. 4:14). As is often the case in the Bible when one character quotes another, the two descriptions do not match exactly. Sternberg calls our attention to an encyclopedia of effects that the Bible generates from deviance and variation in repetition of quotations (390-440). Much of Cain's statement can be read as a paraphrase of God's decree, but Cain's lament, "from Your face shall I be hid," is not in the sentence which God pronounced over him. In this story as in the story of Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:8), the need to hide from God is not a punishment for sin, but a natural psychological consequence of sin. Victor Hugo uses this psychological understanding of the sinner's need to hide as the central theme of his version of Cain.

In the Septuagint, the words which are usually translated as "wanderer and fugitive," are interpreted as "groaning and trembling" (Williams 19; Mellinkoff, The Mark of Cain 116 note 63). Medieval Christian sources usually depict Cain as suffering from palsy (Williams 26; Mellinkoff, The Mark of Cain 40-57). Coleridge recalls of this interpretation, and Hugo makes brilliant use of it, describing trembling, like hiding, not as a distinct punishment, but as a psychological consequence of guilt.

The beginning of Cain's lament (Gen. 4:13) is, in some ways, the most remarkable verse in the entire story. Sternberg and Alter call attention to the careful orchestration of ambiguity in biblical narrative. Though neither scholar gives this example, the beginning of Cain's last statement is a wonderful illustration of the perplexities of biblical literary style: The translation in the Revised Standard Version is "My punishment is greater than I can bear" (Gen. 4:13). The three Hebrew words, "gadol avoni minnso," seem to be a statement, but they can be read as a question. The second word of the hemistich, "avoni," almost always means "my sin," but possibly here it means "my punishment." The last word is an infinitive verbal noun,[18] which leaves the subject ambiguous: it translates literally as "beyond bearing." Does it mean "than I can bear," or "than you can bear"?[19] There are, in short, eight possible permutations of this three word statement; each permutation yields a plausible reading. Which reading we accept will have a great impact on whether we see Cain as an

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[18] Mandelkern lists "minnso" as a construct of the absolute infinitive (769). Gene Schramm describes its grammatical role in the sentence as a "verbal noun" (conversation with the author, 3-22-90).

[19] The two words are, for example, used with God as the subject in Numbers 14:18, and with the human sinner as the subject in Lev. 19:8. When God is the subject, then God "bears sin," which seems to mean "forgives sin" or "forebears from punishing;" with a human subject, the person "bears the sin," which seems to mean "bears his own guilt" or "is responsible for his own punishment."

The word "minnso""beyond bearing" is from the same root as the word "s'et," "ascendancy," a few verses earlier (Gen. 4:7).

impenitent, arrogant sinner, or a broken-hearted penitent.

The eight permutations, with a simple sketch of a possible tone for Cain in each:

"My punishment is greater than I can bear" (Revised Standard Edition and other English Bible translations). Cain, somewhat humbled by God's power, still not penitent, regrets his punishment, not his sin.

"My sin is greater than I can bear" (Gessner 1.725,[20] Abravanel 128). Cain, penitent, pleads for a reduced sentence or perhaps for death (Abravanel 129).

"Is my punishment greater than you can bear (or forgo)?" (Bereshit Rabbah 22:11) Cain arrogantly pleads for a reduced sentence, though he is not penitent, on the grounds that God is infinitely merciful.

"Is my sin greater than you can bear (or forgive)?" (Bereshit

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[20] See Gessner's translator, Oulton, who refused to translate this sentence in Gessner accurately. Oulton explains in a footnote:

> Throughout this speech our poet has entirely deviated from Scripture. He made Cain acknowledge the greatness of his crime, (1.725); but we find in Genesis IV.13, that he only complains of the greatness of his punishment--"And Cain said to the Lord, my punishment is greater than I can bear." These words are, therefore, introduced here, though omitted by Gessner.

Rabbah 22:11) Cain, penitent, pleads for a reduced sentence.

"Is my punishment greater than I can bear?" Cain, humbled, frightened, but impenitent, pleads for reassurance from God.

"Is my sin greater than I can bear?" Cain, humbled, frightened, self-doubting, penitent, pleads for reassurance from God.

"My punishment is greater than you can bear (or forgo)" (Bereshit Rabbah 22:11; Chrysostom Discourses Against the Judaising Christians 8.2.9, The Fathers of the Church 68:212). Similarly, the Wycliffite Middle English versions, and William Tyndale, put it: "My sin is greater than that it may be forgiven" (Spelling modernized). A French Bible of the Thirteenth Century has essentially the same translation, and the Douai Bible is only slightly different: "More is my wickidnes (sic) than that I deserve forgiveness." Cain, in black despair, feeling the enormity of his punishment, suddenly understands that God should never reduce his punishment.

"My sin is greater than you can bear (or forgive)" (Bereshit Rabbah 22:11). Cain, in black despair, feeling the enormity of his sin, suddenly understands that God should never forgive him.

The readings that have Cain lamenting his punishment are strengthened by the rest of the quotation, in which Cain laments his fate (Gen. 4:14). Writers, in retelling the story of Cain, choose one or another of these readings. Robert Alter would probably say that the ambiguity of this passage is part of the art of biblical narrative; that, in Alter's words, the Bible "indulge(s) in all this fancy footwork of multiple ironies that we moderns so love."(Art 18).[21] When a text is careful to preserve different possible meanings, the goal "solving the problem" by "finding the right meaning" calls for clumsy underreading (Sternberg 222-229), and in Alter's words, "reduces the biblical tale to a simple linearity that impoverishes it" ("Interpreting" 56). Of such texts, Sternberg observes, "[t]he endless critical warfare about their interpretation misses (as well as, unwittingly, establishes) the poetic point. And so do attempts to resolve the quarrel by blaming the work itself. . ."(227). Alter agrees that this writing "might have been devised precisely not to yield a solution, or to yield multiple and

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[21] I have taken Alter's words slightly out of context. Alter, in context, defends Menakhem Perry and Meir Sternberg's study of literary ambiguity in biblical narrative texts, which appeared in several articles in the Hebrew literary journal Ha-Sifrut from Summer 1968 through October 1977. Alter characterizes the opposition to Perry and Sternberg's position as maintaining that "the biblical story was, after all, religious, moral, and didactic in intention, so it would hardly indulge in all this fancy footwork of multiple ironies that we moderns so love" (18). But Alter, like Perry and Sternberg, does believe that the Bible indulges in complex multiple ironies.

contradictory solutions, and that this might be the very hallmark of its greatness" ("Interpreting" 56).

Cain, in his lament, introduces another new item which was not in God's decree: "Whosoever will find me will kill me" (Gen. 4:14). Byron has his Cain ask the logical question about this fear: "But who are they / Shall slay me? Where are these on the lone earth / As yet unpeopled?" (Byron, Cain III, 482-84). This is the same difficulty which we shall encounter later on, in the discussion of Cain's wife. The Bible does not guarantee that the family of Adam was the only, or even the first, family on Earth (See Stanton 142 for the opinion of Samuel George Morton, who in 1851 argued that the Bible gives the account of the creation of one of the races of man). If there were other families than the family of Adam, then there is no difficulty finding that other person, but that person would seem to have no reason to avenge the death of Abel. Most commentators avoid that solution. It is possible that Cain fears his own parents, or, more likely, their future descendants. This suggests that Cain recognizes that he has begun a murderous pattern, which, once begun, can continue indefinitely:[22] "Thou hast slain thy brother / And who shall warrant thee against thy son?" (Byron, Cain III, 484-85). Cain's fear of his family could be well-grounded in reality

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[22] So says MacBeth in similar circumstances: . . . that we but teach / Bloody instructions, which being taught, return / To plague th'inventor" (Act I, Scene 7, lines 8-10).

(that is, it could be likely that his parents or their descendants will want to kill him) or it could be a kind of psychological projection, founded on his guilty conscience (If I could kill my brother, then my relatives could do the same to me). Rabbinic legend has it that Cain was, many years later, killed by his own descendant (Bereshit Rabbah 23:4; Josephus Antiquities Book 1, Chapter 2, Paragraph 2 Complete Works 1:9). It is also possible that Cain fears the animals (this is the opinion of Abravanel 129, and Josephus, Antiquities 1, 2, 1, Complete Works 1:8). The domination which protects humans from animals might be related to the moral order; having upset the moral order, Cain now suspects that he is vulnerable to the animals.

In response to Cain's lament, God promises vengeance against anyone who would kill Cain, and sets a sign for him (Gen. 4:15). Turning first to the promise of vengeance: There is a rich tradition of interpretation of these words; many interpretations stray from the plain meaning of the text. The words are relatively simple: "Whosoever kills Cain. . . twice seven will he be avenged." I do not know why the word "shivtayim" has been interpreted to mean "seven," as it has by commentators all the way back to the New Testament (Matt. 8:21), when it is quite simply the double form of the word seven (see the biblical commentary of Obadiah Sforno ad loc). The number, whether "seven" or "twice seven," is related to

the word "plenty;" the threat is that Cain's killer will be punished many times over. The verb yukam is in a passive construction, without a stated subject; that would be justification for differing opinions about who the subject is, but for the fact that, a few verses later, Cain's descendant Lemekh uses the same sentence in a fuller form: "If Cain 'twice seven will be avenged,' then Lemekh seventy-seven" (Gen. 4:24). Thus Lemekh understands the subject of yukam "he will be avenged" (Gen. 4:15) to be Cain; it is not easy to see why commentators since then have disagreed.

According to this interpretation, the sentence features an abrupt change, anacoluthon, caused by a grammatical gap, ellipsis. The full form of the sentence, by implication, is "Whosoever kills Cain is subject to a terrible, unstated punishment, for twice seven times will he, Cain, be avenged" or "I warn whosoever would kill Cain that he, Cain, will be avenged twice seven times" (added words are underlined). Byron preserves the broken syntax of this sentence: "Who slayeth Cain, a sev'nfold vengeance shall / Be taken on his head" (Cain III, 496-7). There are several examples in the Bible of incomplete threats, in which the text breaks off abruptly, changing the subject without specifying the terms of the threat. Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki, 1040-1105) lists this verse among the examples of the pattern, in his commentary on Exodus 22:22.

Many commentators understand yukam to have the opposite meaning: not that "he will be avenged," but that "vengeance will be taken against him" (Rashi and Sforno ad loc, and Basil, Letter 260 to Bishop Optimus Letters 2:223). The whole clause must then mean: "Whosoever would kill Cain should not do so, for he rather than being allowed to die, will live to have vengeance taken against him twice seven times." In the seventh generation, so the legend goes, Cain was finally permitted to die, at the hands of his descendant Le2mekh (Midrash Tanhuma, Bereshit paragraph 11). This interpretation neatly reverses the meaning of the words, changing a promise to protect Cain into a threat to prolong his punishment.

Now, for the sign: The direct meaning of the biblical text is that the sign is for Cain's benefit and protection, an understanding response to the lament (Gen. 4:13, 14). The sign of Cain is a sign of God's loving protection, extended even to the murderer in his hour of despair and penitence. That is exactly the way Blake interprets the sign in his illustration "God the Father Marking Cain's Forehead" (Essick 109), in his Illustrated Manuscript of Genesis; and not at all like the popular expression "the mark of Cain," which identifies the guilty.

It is possible, although with some difficulty, to read the story in such a way as to make sense of the common expression.

The reasoning of Abravanel leads him to that understanding of the sign. He asks: "Why did God give him assurance and a sign that no one who finds him should strike him?" (122). After all, Cain is a murderer, and therefore deserves death. Abravanel assumes that, although God has pronounced a different sentence on him (in Gen. 4:11-12), Cain still has no right to demand protection from death (122). Abravanel therefore understands Cain's lament as a request for death: "As I have explained, Cain was waiting and longing to die, and he would say, 'Would that someone would find me and kill me'" (129). If so, then the sign is no kindness for Cain; rather it is a "decree that he should not die now, but he should live to accept his punishment" (Abravanel 129). This is an approach which makes sense of the typological interpretation of the mark of Cain, which has become an ordinary expression. Interpretations like this gave rise to the relationship between Cain and the Christian legend of the Wandering Jew (Isaac-Edersheim 200-202) and possibly to the despairing Cain in Coleridge.

In fact, the two readings of the function of the sign--to defend Cain, or to prolong his agony--are both explicit in an early midrashic text: "Rav said, 'He made him a sign for murderers.' Rabbi Hanin said, 'He made him a sign for penitents.'" (Bereshit Rabbah 22:12). The opinion of Rav Hanin represents the positive view of Cain, which became less

and less common as time went on. The opinion of Rav (who flourished around the year 200) is one of the earliest sources of the negative medieval tradition, which is the subject of the next section of this dissertation.

It is possible that both Rav Hanin and Rav mean, not that a sign was put on Cain, but that Cain himself became a sign for other people. A perfectly plausible way of reading the phrase in Gen. 4:15 is: "the Lord made a sign of Cain," instead of "the Lord made a sign for Cain." So the notion of Cain as a role-model, so important in the romantic period, may be right there in the biblical story.

Before the romantic period, literary versions of the story usually followed the negative understanding of the sign of Cain. In most mystery plays, for example, the sign is intended to prolong Cain's suffering (Mellinkoff, The Mark of Cain 33, cites the most popular of English mystery plays, the York series). Neither of those two interpretations of the mark of Cain figures strongly in the romantic versions of the story.[23] A third way to understand the mark of Cain does. In Gnostic and Masonic texts, Cain and his descendants are superior beings, and the signs of that superiority mark them (Heindel 84). Nerval tells the story of how Adoniram and

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[23] Although both are present in Byron's version of Cain (see Chapter 7).

Balkis at long last come to recognize each other as descendants of Cain, therefore destined to mate with each other and continue the elect race.

The Bible, while giving an ambiguous explanation for the purpose of the sign, gives absolutely no information about its nature. Abravanel asks simply: "What was that sign?" (122). Popular legend, midrash and exegesis rush in to fill that vacuum, as we shall see.

The dialogue with God at an end, "Cain went out from before the Lord" (Gen. 4:16). He went into exile, not merely from human society, but from God, an ironic fate for the man who was driven by the desire to achieve a preeminent relationship with God. At that moment, when he has lost assurance that he can communicate with God, or that God will ever communicate with him, he becomes the first modern man. As the religious genius cut off from God, Cain is a very personal model for Byron and Coleridge; as the religious rebel set against God, Cain is a very personal model for Nerval, Baudelaire and Leconte de Lisle.

At first glance, one might think that Cain's punishment is never carried out. Only a few verses after Cain is condemned to be a wanderer (Gen. 4:12), we are told that he "dwelt in the land of Nod" (Gen. 4:16) and "built a city" named Hanokh

(Gen. 4:17). Apparently, some time before he settled down and built a permanent city, he must have ceased wandering. The tension between these verses gives rise to two opposite elaborations, each flawed by dealing with only one pole: In the "urban" version, as, for example, in St. Augustine's work, Cain is identified with the city and the evils of civilization (City of God, Book 15, Chapter 5). In the "rural" version, as, for example, Beowulf, the descendants of Cain are identified with bogs and fens, and the evils of the uncivilized.

An ancient Jewish legend suggests a technical resolution, that Cain is able to build a city because his sentence has been reduced after he repented for his crime (Bereshit Rabbah 22:13). Another resolution can be drawn from the unusual tense of the verb "built" in verse 17, which should be translated precisely as "was building" (Nachmanides, Commentary to Gen. 4:17, 92-3). Perhaps the city of Hanokh could never be a place for Cain to settle because, like New York, it was never finished. A third resolution: Although Cain builds a city, it seems possible that he cannot ever dwell in it. He names the city for his son; perhaps he builds it as a dwelling place for his son, but not himself.

The Bible hints at a resolution much more profound and sophisticated than these merely technical ones: for Cain built

his city in the land of Nod (Gen. 4:16), that is, the land of wandering. Even as he settles in the city, he is still a wanderer; the Bible apparently sees wandering as a condition of the mind (Ellul 3). Hugo develops this sophisticated understanding of the biblical text in "La conscience."

Cain's wife suddenly appears in verse 17, "And Cain knew his wife, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Hanokh. . . ." From where does she come? This is the same difficulty which we had in understanding who it was that Cain feared would kill him. The same answers more or less apply, with appropriate adjustments.

Perhaps she is his sister. Cain's innocent incest with his sister and bride is a reasonable conjecture (Uffenheimer 42). This explanation occurs in the apocryphal book of Jubilees (2:40. Charlesworth 61, 64). The ancient rabbis use this explanation, and go further, providing a sister and bride for Abel (Bereshit Rabbah 22:2); so does Josephus (Antiquities Book 1, Chapter 2, Paragraph 1, Complete Works 1:7), Nerval, Gessner and Byron. If there were only one sister, perhaps Abel also wanted to marry her. There might have been sexual jealousy between the brothers even if there were two or more sisters. Old sources attest that this jealousy existed, and might even be the motive for the murder of Abel (see Bereshit Rabbah 22:7). Nerval relies on these sources in his version

of the story.

Uffenheimer notes that when the early Rabbis, (and others) identify Cain's wife as a sister, they have logical reasons for providing this supplement "to what is written in the Torah. Their assumption is that the Torah tells, in the early chapters, about all the families of the Earth who were in the time of Adam and Eve" (42). There are other possible solutions to the problem of the origin of Cain's wife. One might look for a wife for Cain among other families. It is also possible that Eve, Cain's mother, is also the mother of his children (Williams 28, citing Ambrose, De Cain et Abel CSEL 32:408.).

"Cain built a city and named it after his son, Hanokh" (Gen. 4:17).[24] As with so many other details in the story, this appears without seemingly important contextual information, a narrative technique which Sternberg calls "gapping." We are not told why there is a need for a city, who inhabits it, why Cain names it after his son, what he hopes to accomplish. This is an example of "permanent gapping" (230),[25] in which

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[24] Cassuto argues, against the plain meaning of the text, that Hanokh, rather than Cain, is the city-builder (Commentary 218-220).

[25] Uffenheimer (30) has a different explanation for this phenomenon. The Bible sometimes depends on an extratextual oral tradition; it refers to information that its readers know from other sources.

the Bible never does fill in the missing information, leaving it to the reader to make sense of the story from indirect cues. Clearly, naming the city for his son indicates Cain's hopes that his descendants will maintain a lasting culture. In fact, the name Hanokh itself seems to mean "Educating" or "Training." If so, perhaps the name indicates Cain's affection for his son, although in many modern families a father's ambition for his children is not marked by affection for them.

The reader of the Bible may identify Cain's ambition, and possible affection, for his son, as a redeeming characteristic of the first murderer. Gessner, Coleridge, Byron, Nerval, Hugo and Leconte de Lisle all use the closeness between Cain and his family to develop sympathy for Cain.

Another way to interpret Cain's ambition for his son is to tie it in to the larger theme of the economic aspect of the story of Cain. Cain is a farmer, Abel a shepherd (Gen. 4:2). Cain builds a city (Gen. 4:17). His descendants are pioneers in herding, mining and the use of musical instruments (Gen. 4:20-21). Characteristically, the text gives no direct evidence of the significance of these details. Naturally, biblical interpreters over the millennia provide a rich literature of attempts to deal with the isolated details of the economic side of the story of Cain.

If Cain is seen as morally complex, neither purely good nor purely evil, the economic aspect of the story makes a statement about the relationships among economic progress, sheep herding, agriculture, city building, and alienation, without clear value judgments. Thus, for instance, one can understand the biblical description of the farmer who later becomes the first city-builder as a mythological statement of historical necessity: Cities can rise only on the foundation of a productive farming economy.

If Cain is seen as a penitent, then perhaps his ability to build a city is a reward for his penitence. Cities are good. This is consistent with the ideal role of David's city in the Bible. If cities are good, so too are the inventions of Cain's descendants. No longer dwelling in paradise, these wise people develop the ways which we still use today to ease dwelling outside of paradise.

If Cain is seen as pure evil, however, this aspect of the story logically must be a condemnation of the economic activities of Cain and his descendants. Mining, city-building, musicianship and especially farming are evil when compared with herding sheep. In the words of Herbert Schneidau: ". . . Cain the agrarian murderer is associated with various arts and crafts bespeaking culture" (128). There must be some special characteristics of farming and herding

sheep which justify this moral distinction. There are, in biblical commentaries, three features to the contrast between the shepherd and the farmer: First, the shepherd cares for his flock, protecting and nurturing living animals, and so the shepherd can be an figure for the just political leader. Second, the shepherd works at an easy and natural career, unlike the hard-working farmer "who all day must plow and sow, and ravage his land" (Abravanel 175). Third, the shepherd produces little compared with the farmer.

Consider, first, the metaphor of the political leader as a good shepherd. Schneidau claims, somewhat anachronistically, that "[i]n the Bible as we have it, this symbolism is nearly unequivocal. The first shepherd is Abel, type of the Just Man in later theologizations. . . . "(128). The shepherd is a symbol of the trustworthy leader in the Hebrew Bible (Psalms 23 and Ezekiel 34), and consequently as a symbol for Jesus in the New Testament (John 10:11). Despite that, the case for systematic discrimination against farmers in favor of shepherds in the Hebrew Bible is not entirely convincing. Moses and David were elected to leadership after having been shepherds; Elisha was called to prophecy after having been a farmer (I Kings 19:19), and Amos, after having been a cowherd, shepherd and tree surgeon (Amos 7:14).[26]

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[26] Early Rabbinic sources, however, condemn shepherds in very harsh terms, going so far in the Mishnah as to prohibit the raising of small cattle in Israel. See, for instance, the

Incidentally, the shepherd is also a symbol of the political leader in Classical texts. For example, when the chorus in the Oresteia provide uneasy greetings to Agamemnon at his triumphant but doomed return home to Argos, they say "Yet the good shepherd, who knows his flock / The eyes of men cannot lie to him" (Aeschylus Agamemnon, 1.795).[27]

The second contrast is between the easy and natural work of the shepherd and the difficult, artificial work of the farmer. This contrast, developed by some Church Fathers (Williams 104 notes 45 and 46[28]) and Jewish commentators (Josephus,

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Mishnah Bava Kama 7:7. The Tosefta Bava Metsiah at the end of chapter 2 takes an even more condemnatory position on shepherds. It is typically difficult to fix the date or circumstances of the relevant mishnaic texts, but the significance for our discussion is clear: The positive image of the "good shepherd" will not be a key in understanding rabbinic analysis of the story of Cain and Abel. Uffenheimer reviews the scholarly discussion of these issues (38-39).

[27] I am indebted to Prof. Lillian Feder for very much, including this reference. Prof. Feder sent me a further observation:

> In the Ilaid, the epithet 'shepherd of the people' also refers to Agamemnon. It is interesting to note that Agamemnon is not always "the good shepherd." As the chorus in Agamemnon suggests, he often overlooks the people's needs, [showing himself] more concerned with his own. Thus there seems to be some ambiguity in the concept in Ancient Greek literature as well as the Bible.

Remarkably, this image in Ancient Greek literature has its own biblical parallel, for Jeremiah uses the term "shepherds" for unworthy rulers (Jeremiah 2:8).

[28] Williams 105 note 45 cites Clement Homily 8 in Clementine Homilies, Ante-Nicene Christian Library. Edinburgh. 1967. 17:142-3, and 106 note 47 cites Theophilus To Autolycus in Writings of Tatian and Theophilus in the same collection, 3:95. I found the relevant texts in Clementine Homilies 3,

Antiquities Book 1, Chapter 2, Paragraph 1, Complete Works 1:7; Abravanel), emphasizes the contemplative opportunities offered by herding sheep with the all-consuming obsessional work demanded of the farmer. In the words of Abravanel:

> Cain, however, also chose to occupy himself with crafts, and thus became a worker of the ground, who all day must plow and sow, and ravage his land, so that his mind becomes reduced to its animal part, and serves that, whereas Abel became a shepherd, who is drawn after natural things, and satisfied with them, for there is no work in grazing sheep, nor any craft, but just to lead them naturally (175).[29]

The third contrast between the shepherd and the farmer focusses on the greater productivity of the farmer. The logical end point of seeing Cain, the farmer, as entirely evil, is to condemn the whole enterprise of economic progress. Again, Abravanel provides the most extreme statement of this position, almost a reductio ad absurdum:

> Cain called the city Hanokh (education), for he

25-26 and in Theophilus To Autoycus Chapter 29, 20, in Writings of the Ante-Nicene Fathers 2:105-6.

[29] Abravanel had personal reasons for his disillusion with economic progress and coercive government. A powerful financier with close ties to Ferdinand and Isabella, he was driven from Spain when the royal couple outlawed the practice of Judaism. His biblical commentary, written later, reflects what he learned from that experience.

> trained and educated his children to do productive crafts . . . and so the descendants of Cain all kept to the ways of their fathers, to be drawn after productive crafts . . . . The descendants of Cain pursued profit. Violence and predation increased among their people until, because of this, they were punished in the Flood and erased from the land (176).

The generation of the tower of Babel, said Abravanel, was similarly punished, for their sin was similar to that of Cain and his descendants,

> for they had enough necessities from nature to support them, given by God from Heaven, they could have been free from all their crafts and from all labor, and they were able to be occupied in the perfection of their souls (176).

Abravanel attributes all violence, theft, bloodshed, and government (which he considers a kind of oppression), to the accumulation of wealth made possible by crafts. The sin is not accepting "the will of God that man be satisfied with natural things which do not require the assistance of craft, as it was in the beginning" (177). Crafts "are strange to nature, for they make things which nature does not bring: as, for example, most practical crafts, making clothes, building houses, and shipmaking, and so forth" (177). Ultimately,

this line of thinking condemns culture itself.[30]

In contradistinction, Masonic writers see themselves as descendants of energetic and skilled Cain, and apply a nearly opposite set of value judgments to the two careers. Thus, for the Masons, hard work and productivity are the signs of the noble descendants of Cain; leisure and lack of creativity are the signs of the weak descendants of Abel (Heindel 17-21). The Masons, perhaps grudgingly, admit that the descendants of Abel have some value as "the avenue for divine and spiritual wisdom" (Heindel 20). Nerval takes the Masonic distinction to its radical conclusion, without reservation condemning Abel and lauding Cain (Lokke 106-111). The French romantic versions of Cain make use of the economic aspects of the story. Each of these emphasize the useful crafts practiced by Cain and his family. We understand these versions best in the light of the history of biblical interpretation.

The Bible leaves the story of Cain without explicitly describing Cain's death. Some time later, one of Cain's descendants, Lamekh, recounts to his wives the tale of how he killed a man (Gen. 4:23) Rabbinic legend explains that Cain

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[30] So too Josephus on Cain's later career:

> He also introduced a change in that way of simplicity wherein men lived before, and was the author of measures and weights: and whereas they lived innocently and generously while they knew nothing of such arts, he changed the world into cunning craftiness. (Antiquities Book 1, Chapter 2, Paragraph 2 Complete Works 1:8).

is Lamekh's victim, killed inadvertently in a hunting accident (Midrash Tanhuma, Bereshit paragraph 11). Alternatively, if Cain lived long enough, he would have died in the Flood. Some Christian legends, though, are intrigued by the thought that Cain's wish for death was denied, and so his punishment is to endure. Cain thus becomes, like the Wandering Jew, punished with immortality. These legends cannot be reconciled with the literal text of the Bible, in which all the human race but the family of Noah perish in the Flood. The immortal (or resurrected) Cain appears in the story as told by Nerval and Leconte de Lisle.

What is the fate of Cain's descendants? According to a direct reading of the biblical text, they are victims of the Flood. The family of Noah alone survives, and Noah descended from Cain's brother, Seth, the third son of Adam and Eve. Although the genealogy of Noah and his sons is recorded, the genealogy of their wives and mothers is not, so perhaps it possible that some or all of Noah's family are to be seen as Cain's descendants.

Nonetheless, the legendary material is rich in accounts of the survival of the descendants of Cain (Mellinkoff, "Cain's Monstrous Progeny in Beowulf: Part II, Post-Diluvian Survival). Some legends account for the survival by tracing the descent through Ham, son of Noah. Other legends simply

postulate the survival, without giving any account. As these legends are distant from the biblical text, they properly belong in the next chapter.

One of them, though, draws on the Bible, and deserves mention here: The Zohar (I 12a; Mellinkoff, The Mark of Cain 103 note 2 cites Sperling translation I:108) makes the astonishing suggestion that Cain is the progenitor of the Biblical Kenites, the tribe of Moses' father-in-law (Judg. 1:16) and of Jael (Judg. 4:17). In Hebrew the name of their nation is spelled exactly the same as Cain's. Somehow this text must be related to the Gnostic understanding of the tale, and to Nerval's version. Oddly enough, this suggestion reappears as the outcome of modern speculative research in the very late nineteenth century (Mellinkoff, The Mark of Cain 103 n. 1 cites Bernhard Stade's 1894 article on this theme; Cassuto argues against any connection between Cain and the Kenites, rejecting each of Stade's points, Commentary 178-181).

Before leaving the account of Cain in the Hebrew Bible, we should take a brief look at a modern understanding of that text in the work of Hyam Maccoby. Maccoby sees the murder of Abel as a veiled account of human sacrifice. Although human sacrifice was demanded in the ancient world, the executioner was condemned and feared. Cain is the sacred executioner. The Bible attempts to conceal this history, for the Bible is

The Bible attempts to conceal this history, for the Bible is opposed to human sacrifice. Therefore, the Bible cuts off the genealogy in which the human race descended from Cain, and invents a counter-genealogy for Seth. Cain is shifted from being the heroic executioner to being a mere murderer. His ambiguous fate is made over to be purely punishment, whereas originally "Cain's crime and punishment are terrible; but in the outcome, he is shielded from death, acquires special gifts and talents, contributes in a distinguished way to civilization and becomes a holy person" (Maccoby 241). Whatever this speculation is worth as Bible criticism, it is interesting historically for its parallels to the Masonic versions of the tale, and therefore, to some of the romantic versions as well.[31]

The story of Cain in the Hebrew Bible is told in a spare style, unembellished, deceptively simple. Live with the story, as we have in these past few pages, and it reveals unexpected complexity: Was Cain evil before the crime? Was he penitent after the crime? Was he rewarded with God's protection, or punished by not being allowed to die?

In the next chapter, we shall see how the dominant tradition

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[31] See Harold Fisch "Byron's Cain as Sacred Executioner" in Byron, the Bible, and Religion, and Ricardo J. Quinones, "Cain as Sacred Executioner," Chapter 3 of The Changes of Cain.

embellish its figural significance. This typological tradition fills the story with fantastic action and detail, yet, curiously, at the same time makes it static, a mere emblem, without suspense; it has great significance, but no life of its own. The typological readers trained a bright light on the story, making it all light or dark, and destroyed its many gradations of shadow. This was the dominant, established tradition of the story of Cain for sixteen hundred years; during this time, underground, a mystical counter-tradition preserved the story in its complex chiaroscuro. And then, the romantic poets breathed life back into it; but we will get to that later. In the next two chapters, I will explore the dominant typological tradition, and the underground mystical counter-tradition.

Chapter Three: The Common Understanding of Cain as Evil

The common understanding of the meaning of the story of Cain, from before the Middle Ages until the present day, has been that Cain is purely evil. This understanding is manifest in countless works of popular and scholarly literature, which completely overwhelm, in number and popularity, the few esoteric dissenting versions. At any point in the sixteen hundred years before the romantic period, I suspect that few people had ever heard of a positive word about Cain, or noticed the ambiguities of the biblical text. Even today, the negative view of Cain seems self-evident. Though the romantic poets who portrayed Cain sympathetically were widely misunderstood as doing violence to the biblical text, what they rebelled against, to be precise, is this common understanding.

The condemnatory version of the story of Cain has its roots in the Pseudepigrapha, Rabbinic legends, the New Testament and

especially the Church Fathers.[1] The pseudepigraphic literature typically "reworks the basic biblical stories adding many elaborations . . ." (Heinemann 47), including some of the earliest recorded elaborations of the story of Cain. The homiletic legends of the Rabbis, collectively known as the Midrash or Aggadah, also form an exegetical tradition: However fanciful the legends and tales may seem at first glance, they are nearly always rooted in close reading of the biblical text. A careful study of Midrash will therefore usually produce insights into the meaning of the original text (Alter, "Interpreting" 55-56). Although the Midrash is sometimes interested in "reinterpreting Scripture, deriving new meanings from the ancient texts, and finding new morals to biblical stories" (Heinemann 47), more often it searches the text for implicit moral points. The midrashic material also typically fills in the background which the austere Biblical text leaves blank. This "filling in" is identical with, or at least parallel to, the literary work of writers who tell the story of Cain again and again throughout history.

I trace these extra-biblical legends back to the earliest available written sources, but it is by no means certain that those are where legends first appeared in history. Many of

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[1] For my research into the works of the Church Fathers, I am indebted to Dr. Duane Arnold, who gave me a free hand in his extensive library. Without his help, this chapter would have been much poorer.

the legends must have existed in oral traditions long before they were written anywhere; some legends may indeed be as old as the biblical text. Therefore, knowing whether a detail first appears in a Jewish or Christian text is no guarantee that it is originally part of a Jewish or Christian version of the story. (See the discussion in Jacob Lassner's forthcoming study of the Islamic and Jewish legends of the Queen of Sheba, to be published by University of Chicago Press.)

I have found not a single example in the Patristic literature of a sympathetic presentation of Cain. In fact, I have found no mention of any of the features of the biblical story which would bring Cain credit: his apparent invention of sacrifice, his religious fervor, his penitence. I have found one mention of Cain's confession: Chrysostom examines Cain's confession, and explains why it is inadequate (Discourses Against Judaising Christians 8,3,1-3, The Fathers of the Church 68: 213-14). Even God's merciful protection of Cain is almost entirely absent from Patristic writings (almost, but not entirely: for rare exceptions, see Tertullian On Prayer 8, ANF 3: 684, and John Chrysostom Discourses Against Judaising Christians, 8, 2, 9-10, The Fathers of the Church 68: 212).

In the Rabbinic material, we find forerunners of the common understanding, but also a more positive reading. The discussion of the sign of Cain, Bereshit Rabbah 22:12, seems

to turn on the nature of God's evaluation of Cain. The sign, according to one Rabbi, is a horn growing on Cain's forehead, indicating, perhaps, that Cain, by committing murder, has made himself less than human. Another Rabbi says the sign is a patch of skin marked with the "leprosy,"[2] which, in Leviticus, signifies that one must leave the camp (Lev. 13). These interpretations of the sign suggest that it condemns Cain by pointing out his evil. But there is latitude in the ancient Rabbinic material to propose positive interpretations of the sign: Other rabbis say that Cain's sign is a dog that protects him, or that the sun always shines for him. We have already seen the paired interpretations that Cain himself became a sign either for murderers or for penitents (all of these are from Bereshit Rabbah 22:12). Each of these proposals, in the style of the Midrash, seems to invite a naive reading, but one should not be deceived. The rabbis of the Midrash use these elaborations of the plot to express different conceptions of the underlying theme.

The rabbis similarly argue about whether Cain is more to blame than Abel for the fight between the brothers (see, for opposite opinions, Bereshit Rabbah 22:3 and 22:7), and whether Cain's repentance is sincere (Bereshit Rabbah 22:13). Thus

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[2] The symptoms of leprosy do not at all match the symptoms described in Leviticus 13. Obviously the disease in question is not leprosy; and yet that is the word used in English translations of Leviticus.

the midrashic texts tease out the implications of each side of the ambiguous biblical portrait of Cain. Uffenheimer's conclusion is fully warranted:

> . . . two sharply different trends take form in the midrash: The first trend. . . comprehends the murder as an unpremeditated act caused by his inner turmoil, after which Cain was a shaken, broken man, and repented. According to the second trend, the murder was an act of guilty premeditation; Cain is transformed here to a denier of the first principle, a rebel against his Creator. After the deed, he acted towards his God with deceit and counterfeited penitence in order to lessen his punishment. (Uffenheimer 47).

Uffenheimer demonstrates that the midrashic statements of sympathy for Cain become less and less frequent as time goes on, so that "most of the midrashim which come to denigrate Cain as an evil person, are attributed to sages who flourished in the end of the third century or the beginning of the fourth century" (Uffenheimer 46). Let us take as an example this unsympathetic interpretation of Cain by a rabbi of the late third century:

> Said Rabbi Yohanan, "Abel was stronger than Cain. For 'he rose up' (Gen. 4:8) can only mean that he (Cain) had been

> placed below him. He (Cain) said to him: 'We two are alone in the world. What are you going to say to Father?' He (Abel) then was filled with mercy for him. At once, he (Cain) stood up on him and killed him. From this we say, 'Do not do good to the evil, and the evil will not reach you.'" (Bereshit Rabbah 22:8).

Rabbi Yohanan scrutinizes the wording of the biblical text minutely: How can "Cain rose up on Abel" (Gen. 4:8) be true, unless Cain has previously been placed below him? Rabbi Yohanan then provides an explanation for why Cain is down: Abel was the stronger fighter, and had been holding him down. Then, the Rabbi provides an explanation for how the Cain gets out of Abel's wrestling hold: He disingenuously appeals to Abel's filial concern. Apparently, as Abel is about to slay his attacker in self-defense, Cain appeals for mercy on the grounds that his death would be a blow to Adam. Abel is innocent and gullible to let Cain up; Cain is cunning and evil to misuse his brother's best emotions to gain the opportunity to murder him. In Rabbi Yohanan's version, the story of Cain makes a fine illustration of the prudent, if uncharitable, popular saying that warns against trusting evil people with favors. In Rabbi Yohanan's version, Cain is guilty of lying, cheating, debasing the value of filial concern, and of fully

premeditated murder.

Uffenheimer theorizes that the later rabbis argued against various Gnostic sects which glorified Cain, and, as part of that polemic, refused to concede any virtue to him (46). Polemical reasons may well account for some of the Patristic animosity towards Cain as well. Some of the Church Fathers were certainly in contact with Gnostics (Irenaeus, Against the Heresies Book 4 ANF 1:524; Tertullian, Against All Heresies 2 ANF 3:650-51; Hippolytus, The Refutation of all Heresies Book 5, Chapter 11 ANF 5:62-3; Epiphanius, Panarion 38.2.4); in fact, they are our best sources of information about the Gnostic Cainites.

This condemnatory understanding of Cain is elaborated in various ways, both in the early exegetical writings and in later literature or art. Writers associate Cain with specific evil traits. They identify his punishment and mark as some extraordinary sign of God's relentless punishment. They trace the source of Cain's evil all the way to Satan. They recognize him as the progenitor of monsters, demons and cannibals. They identify him as the progenitor, either physically or typologically, of all later evil-doers, while they, by way of contrast, trace good persons to some better source. These themes appear in early exegetical writings, and in later literature, politics, and art; in short, in every

kind of cultural expression throughout the Middle Ages.

This common understanding of Cain appears in its simplest form as the Church Fathers retell the story of Cain, staying close to the biblical text or to the Septuagint, adding only the epithet "evil" to Cain so that the story be as clear as possible (Origen, Against Celsus ANF 4:516). When Church Fathers mention Cain in passing, he is usually invoked as an illustration of some specific form of evil (Ambrose, Joseph 3.9, The Fathers of the Church 60: 193). Methodius, for example, warns his readers to avoid "imitating the jealousy of Cain" (Concerning Free Will, ANF 6:356). Dionysius argues that excommunicating a Christian without good evidence is imitating Cain's deed of killing Abel (Constitutions of the Holy Apostles 2, 3, 21, ANF 7: 406). Augustine describes Cain as heir to "that diabolical, envious hatred with which the evil regard the good, for no other reason than because they are good" (City of God Book 15, Chapter 5 Dodds trans. 2:55).

The most popular traditions about the sign of Cain express his absolute evil. Although the early Jewish legend elaborate a wild profusion of descriptions for the sign which protects Cain, in later legend, the sign is seen as a mark put on Cain's forehead (Mellinkoff, The Mark of Cain 32-33 cites the most popular French mystery play, the fifteenth century

Mystère de la passion d'Arnoul Gréban)[3] to identify the murderer, (see the commentary to Gen. 4:15 of the eleventh century Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki, known as Rashi, the most popular of the medieval Jewish commentators). Some think that the mark of Cain is "identical to his curse, namely, the trembling of his limbs and his exile" (Williams 25). In any case, according to later legend, "[i]ts purpose was universally viewed not as a protection of his life, that he might enjoy existence, but as an extraordinarily long penance, that his suffering might be prolonged" (Williams 25 attributes this observation to various Church Fathers, including St. Jerome in letter 26, 2. See also Abravanel 129.). Basil of Caesarea (who lived roughly 330-379) writes that the mark itself becomes the worst of the chastisements of Cain: "that the punishment is not hidden, but proclamation is made to all by a mark in plain evidence that this man is the author of unholy deeds" (Letter 260 to Bishop Optimus Letters 2:228).

God accompanies the sign with a promise to Cain: "I warn whosoever would kill Cain that he, Cain, will be avenged twice seven times" (Gen. 4:15; see Chapter 2). Like the sign, this promise seems to be designed to protect Cain. The Church Fathers, in general, do not interpret it that way. Basil writes that the simple meaning of this verse is "that it is

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[3] But oddly enough, in this play the mark serves to protect Cain.

necessary for Cain to pay the sevenfold penalty for his sins" (Letter 260 to Bishop Optimus Letters 2:223). Furthermore, to the extent that God promises to protect Cain's life, that is not kindness according to Basil, for:

> Death is a gain for those who are being punished, since it brings deliverance from their pains. But your life will be prolonged in order that the chastisements may be measured to you according to the desert of your sins. (Letter 260 to Bishop Optimus Letters 2:225,6).

Chrysostom thinks that the prolonged punishment serves as a warning to others not to repeat Cain's crime. The punishment is almost never seen as beneficial to Cain himself: Chrysostom, however, thinks that the punishment will also benefit Cain, for, since the punishment includes paralysis, it prevents him from sinning again, and teaches him self-control (Discourses Against the Judaising Christians 8,2,10, The Fathers of the Church 68:212-13.).

Some Church Fathers suggest that Cain's evil is inherent in his person. This clears up a difficulty in the biblical text: Why does God not accept Cain and his sacrifice? According to Dionysius, Cain's sacrifice is rejected because Cain is a murderer, although the murder has not yet occurred: "And while

Thou didst accept the sacrifice of Abel as of a holy person, Thou didst reject the gift of Cain, the murderer of his brother, as that of an abhorred wretch" (Constitutions of the Holy Apostles Book 8, Section 2, Chapter 12, ANF 7: 408; similarly Ambrose, The Prayer of Job and David 9, 32, The Fathers of the Church 60: 416: "He disapproved of the offerings of that murderer Cain."). But according to Irenaeus, the flaw is that Cain's "heart was divided with envy and malice" (Against Heresies Chapter 18, Paragraph 3, ANF 1: 485).

Greed and envy are Cain's primary motivation for the murder in several of the earliest exegetical sources (Bereshit Rabbah 22:3 "Three people lusted after land, and it brought them no benefit. And these are they: Cain. . . "; Basil, "Concerning Envy," Fathers of the Church 22:465). In some of the medieval mysteries, Cain's refusal to tithe is his primary sin, leading to his inadequate sacrifice and then to the murder. The mystery plays treat biblical characters with "vivid contemporaniety" (Thomas 38):

> Cain is presented to the audience as a typical English farmer who makes the usual exasperated grumbles about bad weather, poor crops, poverty, and in particular, the exorbitant demand of the Church for tithes. The payment of tithes was a constant source of friction in the Middle Ages. . .

. (Thomas 26).

In the twelfth century Mystère d'Adam, Cain is an avaricious peasant (Grace 76): of course, the biblical Cain is a peasant. In the later York play The Gaunters (#7), Cain argues against the logic of tithing: Does it make sense to return the gifts of God? "That he us gave, give him again" (The York Cycle of Mystery Plays 41). An angel responds, commanding Cain, Abel, and the audience, to tithe (41). In the Wakefield play The Killing of Abel, Cain offers his sacrifice grudgingly, meanwhile denouncing God for taking it from him (78). These motives can be related to the paltry sacrifice offered by Cain in the Bible, suggesting that avarice is the evil quality that begins the fall of Cain. A close reading of the text in Genesis supports the notion that Cain's sacrifice is not accepted because it was paltry; this reading is found in Ambrose among the Patristic writers (De Cain et Abel 2:10; see discussion in Roston, Biblical Drama 44-45), and in several of the early Rabbinic writers (Bereshit Rabbah 22:5; see discussion in Braude 565). Avarice is the primary evil quality of Cain according to Josephus (Antiquities Book 1, Chapter 2, Paragraph 1 Complete Works 1:7) and Pirkei DeRabbi Natan (Chapter 41 The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan 173). Similarly, the troubadour Pierre Cardinal [c. 1180-c. 1270], charges that wealthy people have for the rest of the world the charity which Cain shows to Abel (The sirvantes "Tos temps");

the troubadour brings into his own day the connection that the exegetes draw in the life of Cain between the character trait of stinginess and the act of murder.

Other horrible traits are ascribed to Cain. Cannibalism, or perhaps more precisely vampirism, absent from the biblical story, makes its appearance in the Pseudepigrapha. In the first century Latin version of Life of Adam and Eve, Eve dreams a premonition of the murder of Abel, in which she sees Cain drinking the blood of Abel (Life of Adam and Eve paragraph 23 The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha 2:266; see also The Revelation of Moses ANF 8:565). The same horrible traits are attributed to Cain's descendants (see below).

Cain's lament: "You have driven me this day from the face of the land" and "I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer in the earth" (Gen. 4:14) might support the belief that Cain must live underground. Such a reading is overly literal, distorting the Hebrew idiom, and yet there is a legend that Cain (Zohar 3: paragraph 341-43, pages 195-6) and his descendants (Ginzberg 1:115, 4:132; Williams 53, citing the obscure Midrash Konen) do live underground. In the romantic period we shall meet the subterranean Cain again, in works by Nerval, Hugo and Leconte de Lisle.

The common tradition sees Cain as the progenitor of monsters.

A twelfth-century Middle High German Genesis, quoted by Emerson (883-4) and Friedman (93), describes Cain's descendants in this way:

> Some had heads like those of a dog; some had their mouths on their breasts, their eyes on their shoulders; they had to make do without a head. Some had such large ears that they covered themselves with them. One had a single foot, very large; with it he ran quickly as the animals in the forest. Some bore children which went on all fours like cattle. Some completely lost their beautiful coloring: they became black and disgusting, unlike any people. Their eyes shone, their teeth glittered. Whenever they revealed them, they made even the devil terrified. The descendants displayed on their bodies what the forebears had earned by their misdeeds. As the fathers had been inwardly, so the children were outwardly. (Die Frümittelhochdeutsche Wiener Genesis. Kathryn Smits, ed. Berlin: 1972. 26.8 135-137. cited in Friedman 233).

There is a puzzling biblical passage, immediately before the Flood, in which the "sons of God" mate with the "daughters of men" and produce evil giants (Gen. 6:2-4). An ancient and

scandalous[4] interpretation asserts that the "sons of God" are angels, and that these angels fall by seducing or raping the human "daughters of men" (I Enoch 7:1-2), who, in one version are specifically descendants of Cain (Pirkei Rabbi Eliezer, Bereshit chapter 22, p.49; see discussion in Mellinkoff, "Cain's Monstrous Progeny in Beowulf: Part I, Noachic Tradition" 148-9). Here again, monstrous giant vampire cannibals descend from Cain (I Enoch 7:2-6). Years later, in Beowulf, Cain's descendants are cannibals. I Enoch becomes the inspiration for several literary and artistic works when it first appears in a modern European language, an English version in 1821 (Bentley, "A Jewel in an Ethiop's Ear" 216, 221-235); among these are Leconte de Lisle's Qaïn (discussed in Chapter 12), and Byron's Heaven and Earth.

Mellinkoff and Braude locate illustrations from English psalters in which Cain himself is shown as a Black. Mellinkoff (The Mark of Cain 76 and figs. 19 & 20) shows an

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[4] This interpretation is later suppressed by sober Jewish and Christian commentators (Mellinkoff "Cain's Monstrous Progeny" 1:148-9), in favor of two more acceptable versions. One is that the phrase "sons of God" should mean, according to Hebrew idiom, "sons of judges" or "nobles" (Bentley, "A Jewel in an Ethiop's Ear" 222), so that the story tells of the sons of Cain abusing their political power to claim wives of the common people "from whomever they chose" (Gen. 6:4). The other, which becomes popular in medieval England (Emerson 896ff), and is later used by Milton (Paradise Lost I, 664ff), is that the sons of Seth were "That sober race of men, whose lives / Religious titled them the sons of God." The "daughters of men" must therefore have been the daughters of Cain (Augustine, City of God Book 15, Chapter 23).

English psalter of the thirteenth century in which Cain is negroid (Cambridge, St. John's College Library MS. K. 26, folio 6 verso). Braude, (580 and the figure on p.583) shows the dark Cain and the blond Abel in another English psalter (Brit. Mus. Add. Ms. 38116, fol. 9r). Mellinkoff also finds textual sources for the Black Cain.[5] As in Die Frümittelhochdeutsche Wiener Genesis above, so in the English illustrations, the Black in medieval Germany and England is considered a kind of monster. In a pamphlet published in England as late as 1769, the Wandering Jew (of all characters!) explains that the mark of Cain is black, and from Cain springs the race of Blacks (Anderson 85).

The condemnatory approach to Cain includes some information about the origin of his evil. In the previous chapter, I remarked on the curious fact that Eve, in naming Cain, does not connect Adam with the birth of Cain. "And the man knew Eve his wife; and she became pregnant and bore Cain, and she said 'I have gotten (Heb. kaniti) a man with the Lord'" (Gen. 4:1). She recognizes the role of the Lord, but not the role of Adam. I promised to show an early legend which supplies a sinister interpretation: That a supernatural being was the

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[5] See the discussion in Mellinkoff, The Mark of Cain 75-77, 97, showing the blackness of Cain in Ginzburg's translation (1:108) of an ancient Midrashic text (Bereshit Rabbah 22:6), in an Armenian psuedepigraphic text, in a Middle High German poetical Genesis, in the illustrations to an English psalter of the thirteenth century, and in the writings of Brigham Young.

child's father instead of, or along with, Adam. Thus the legend, widespread in the ancient world, that Cain is a son of Satan.[6] Knowing what to look for, one might find the legend in I John 3:12: ". . . not as Cain, who was of the evil one."

Even if not a son of the Devil, Cain is, in the writings of the Church Fathers, a type of the Devil. Ignatius refers to Cain as the successor of the Devil (Epistle of Ignatius to Hero V, ANF 1:114 and To the Smyranaeans 7, ANF 1:119); Basil calls Cain "that first disciple of the Devil" ("Concerning Envy," Fathers of the Church 22:465). As a son or successor of Satan, Cain seems absolutely beyond redemption.

The rather straightforward Jewish and Christian forms of this legend can be understood as an attempt to explain the origin and depth of Cain's evil. In Gnostic and Masonic sources, this legend serves a radical understanding of Cain's power as an opponent of the God of creation. This form of the legend (which I shall explore in Chapter 4) was influential in the romantic period.

Other typological readings connect Cain with later biblical

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[6] For example, see the Targum Yonatan ben Uzziel, an early Aramaic translation of the Pentateuch, on this verse. See Williams 15-16, 25, for a discussion of this legend in the Church Fathers, especially in Polycarp, Tertullian, John Chrysostom, and Rupertus. See Kasher 2:404 for a compendium of Jewish sources. See Robinson 19 for Gnostic sources. See Heindel 17 for a Masonic version.

and historical figures, or with evil-doers in general. The notion that Cain is the source and pedigree of all future evil-doers, in sharp contrast with some other source for good people, is found in Christian and Jewish sources. In the Midrash:

> All of the ideological motives are realized in the Pirkei Rabbi Eliezer [Chapters According to Rabbi Eliezer] (Bereshit 21), put in the name of Rabbi Ishmael: 'From Seth[7] arose all generations of men and all righteous generations are traced back to him, and from Cain arose all generations of evil men, and all criminals and rebels who rebelled against the Omnipresent and said we do not need the drop of your rain nor to know your ways, as it says, (Job 21:14) "They said to God, turn away from us. . ."' (Uffenheimer 49).

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[7] Uffenheimer proposes a not very convincing emendation, changing "Seth" (Heb. Sheit) to "there" (sham) so that Abel could be the source of the righteous. Uffenheimer's emendation is indeed the text at one place in the Warsaw edition (Chapter 21; at Chapter 22, page 48); but Rabbi David Luria, in his commentary on the Pirkei Rabbi Eliezer (Chapter 21, page 48, n.9), demonstrates that "Seth" is the correct text (as in Chapter 22, page 50). If this were a Christian text, there would be some reason for Uffenheimer's emendation, but the rabbis do not particularly make a theme of the righteousness of Abel.

Compare Josephus, who, without making a typological theme of it, writes of the righteousness of the descendants of Seth (Chapter 3, Paragraph 1; 1:11).

Oddly enough, the earliest source for the saintliness of Abel is indeed a Jewish thinker, Philo (Quinones, The Changes of Cain 23-33). Philo wrote in Greek and had, in general, more influence on the Church Fathers than on the Rabbis.

Thus Pirkei Rabbi Eliezer (Bereshit Chapters 21, 22) traces the wicked to Cain, and the righteous to Seth; in Christian texts, the opposition is between the evil Cain and the righteous Abel. For the Church Fathers, the righteous are Abel's typological, rather than biological, children, since in the Bible Seth, not Abel, has descendants. The Bible does recount that Seth is born as sort of replacement for Abel, "for Cain had killed him" (Gen. 4:25); the Zohar explains that "the name Seth is the same as the secret of the lost soul, that is, the soul of Abel" (the commentary Sulam on Zohar 3 para. 348 on page 198). Irenaeus (Against the Heresies Book 4, ANF 1:524) gives evidence that there was a Gnostic sect of Cainites who preached the Gospel of Judas, and followed the example of Korah, Judas, Cain and the Sodomites. From a typological point-of-view, that such people should exist is excellent, for evil-doers cannot help becoming "Cainites."

In Heb 12:24, the sprinkled blood of Jesus is described as speaking more graciously than the blood of Abel. By implication, Abel is, like Jesus, a sacrifice, only a less effective one. Abel's purity is not particularly a theme in rabbinic exegesis[8]; but it is a central theme in Patristic

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[8] In fact, in the Zohar, Abel is no less than Cain considered a child of the diabolical snake (Genesis Vol 3 paragraphs 332-333 on pages 3:190-191 in the Sulam edition). Philo is the exception to this rule. Though a Jewish commentator, in his allegorical interpretation of the Bible, he does emphasize the righteousness of Abel (cited in Quinones, The Changes of Cain 29, 33).

analyses of the story, because, influenced in part by this verse, the Church Fathers see Abel as a type of Jesus (Augustine City of God Book 15, Chapters 7 and 18; Mellinkoff, The Mark of Cain 92-3 cites Augustine Contra Faustem Section 6, part 1; Cyril of Alexandria, letter 86:9, in The Fathers of the Church 77:120). Thus, the New Testament verses are read to preclude a sympathetic portrayal of Cain, or an unsympathetic portrayal of Abel. However, I will demonstrate that Blake's portrayal of The Ghost of Abel as a figure of Satan, is, in fact, a commentary and elaboration of Heb. 12:24.

The blameless Abel is, in some contexts, a type of the good Christian, in which case Cain becomes a type of the Jew. Tertullian, for example, explains that the sacrifices "in the person of Cain, to be those of the 'elder son,' that is, of Israel; and the opposite sacrifices demonstrated to be those of the 'younger son,' Abel, that is, of our people" (On the Resurrection of the Flesh 56:4, ANF 3:156. Emphasis in text).

Abel is also, in other contexts, a type of Jesus. Methodius of Olympus writes: "Abel clearly prefigures Thy death, O blessed One" (The Banquet of the Ten Virgins, 1:6:11 ANF 6:352). Irenaeus makes the next step explicit: the parallel between Cain, who killed Abel, and those who killed Jesus

(Against Heresies Chapter 18, Paragraph 3 ANF 1:485). Similarly, Cain in medieval religious dramas was, according to historians, represented with a red or yellow beard, exactly as was Judas.[9] This yellow beard is a visual representation of the typology: Cain, who killed Abel, prefigures and is morally equivalent to Judas, who betrayed Jesus. "No medieval spectator bred on this typological tradition could miss the Crucifixion parallel in Cain's murder of Abel. . ." (Roston, Biblical Drama 28).[10]

When Abel is a figure of Jesus, then, as killer of the typological Jesus, Cain must again be a type of the Jews (Augustine, City of God Book 15, Chapters 7 and 18; Iraneus Against Heresies 18:3 ANF 1: 485). This typology is certainly relevant to the suggestion that the mark of Cain was circumcision! (Cited in Williams 26, without reference to a primary source. Mellinkoff, The Mark of Cain 92-95 attributes it to Isidore of Seville, Commentarius in Genesim, PSEL Vol. 107, column 507, and Bruno of Asti, Expositio in Genesim, PSEL

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[9] See The Merry Wives of Windsor, I, iv, 23, in which Shakespeare has a character refer to "a little yellow beard, a Caine-coloured beard." The Oxford English Dictionary gives, as part of its second definition of Cain, "reputed colour of the hair of Cain, to whom, as to Judas Iscariot, a 'red' or reddish yellow beard is attributed." Also see Stokes: "Cain and Judas were usually represented in the mystery plays with red or yellow beards."

[10] Shylock also was portrayed with a red wig (Fiedler 98). The equation Cain=Judas=Jew was thus complete.

Vol. 164, column 174.)[11] Similarly, in medieval artistic representations, Cain often stands for the Jews (Braude 561). Cain is depicted as wearing a Jew's hat in the ornaments of the Salisbury Cathedral (Braude 582 fig. 9, discussion 580), and in a medieval illustration of the murder of Abel (Pierpont Morgan MS 739, fol. 9v., Friedman 234).

This comparison had lasting power. Pope Innocent III, in a letter dated January 17, 1208, urges Christian princes to enforce economic sanctions against the Jews. The Pope has the model of Cain in mind, both in his description of the Jews and in his proposed sanctions against them: The Jews are like Cain, Jesus's blood cries out against the Jews; the sanctions are designed to allow the Jews to continue to exist as impoverished wanderers (Grayzel 126-127).[12] Innocent wants

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[11] While the Church fathers used the epithet Cain for the Jews, the Jews had their own negative biblical epithet for Christendom. Christendom was "Edom," or "Esau" (see Gen. 36:1), Jacob's brother. While Edom is the more powerful now, ultimately--this is the point of the epithet--"For the violence done to thy brother Jacob, shame shall cover thee, and thou shalt be cut off for ever" (Obadiah 1:10). For a fuller discussion, see Salomon Zeitlin, "The Origin of the Term Edom for Rome and the Roman Church."

Medieval Christian interpreters, of course, understood the story of Jacob and Esau in exactly the opposite way: Jacob is the Church, and Esau is the Jews (Roston, Biblical Drama 28).

[12] Compare Remegius of Lyon: "This is shown concerning them [the Jews--Williams' note] who throughout the whole Roman world are wanderers and exiles and have no permanent seat" (Commentarius in Genesim 2, Patrologiae cursus completus: Series latina, Vol. 131, column 70, cited in Williams 105).

Christian princes to require distinctive clothing for the Jews; most often, the distinctive item was a badge, which recalls the mark of Cain (Mellinkoff, The Mark of Cain 96-97). And that too is not the end of the comparison. In 1963, when Pope John XXIII, in 1963 at the close of his life, confesses the sin of centuries of Christian anti-Semitism, he again uses the image of Cain and Abel, only reversing the identifications. In his prayer, he compares the Christians to Cain and the Jews to Abel![13]

Pearl Braude, in her study of the iconography of Cain's sacrifice in the Medieval artistic representations, discovers that Cain can also "represent the heretic" (561). Braude notices that paintings of Cain's sacrifice show weeds among the grain. These weeds may merely exemplify the ancient Rabbinic exegetical tradition that Cain's offering is indeed plants of little value (Bereshit Rabbah 22:5); but Braude points out that the weeds also fit in with Matthew's Parable of the cockle, in which weeds signify heresy (Matt 13:24-32).

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[13] The text of the prayer is:

> We are conscious today that many centuries of blindness have clouded our eyes so that we can no longer either see the beauty of Thy Chosen People or recognize on their faces the features of our privileged brethren. We realize that the mark of Cain stands upon our foreheads. Across the centuries our brother Abel has lain in the blood which we drew by forgetting Thy love. Forgive us for the curse we falsely attached to their name as Jews. Forgive us for crucifying Thee a second time in their flesh. For we know not what we did. (Telushkin 197).

In offering corn mixed with weeds, Cain prefigures all those who commit or tolerate heresy. These deserve the fate of Cain.

Ignatius makes all the connections among Cain, heresy and the descent from Satan in one striking sentence: "Let us stand aloof from such heretics . . . they are the offspring of that spirit who is the author of all evil . . . who slew Abel by the hand of Cain" (Epistle of Ignatius to the Smyranaeans 7, ANF 1:89).

The Moslems also appear as descendants of Cain. "In the French epic poems, Cain is the favorite as progenitor of the Saracens, and it is his unsavory character and reputation to which his descendants have fallen heir" (Comfort 629).[14] These Moslem descendants of Cain recapitulate the characteristics of the their ancestor. In Les Narbonnais (7218-19) they are "horned pagans, who had horns as hard as an antlered stag" (Comfort 629). They are typically black. They are giants (Comfort 651), like "the giant enemies of God in Genesis 6:4" (Comfort 652). They are "magicians" (653) and "marvelous craftsmen" (654), both appropriate for descendants of Cain.

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[14] Comfort cites E. Langlois, Table des noms propres de toute nature contenus dans les chansons de geste (Paris: 1904) 127 for many examples.

"Pax in Nomine Domini!" is Marcabru's poetic attempt to recruit for the Crusade.[15] The main theme of this lyric, by one of the earliest (c. 1129-1150) and most talented of the Troubadours, is that a man can be absolved of his sins only by taking part in the Crusade against the Moslems in Damascus or in Spain. The others, those who fail to take part in the Crusade, are as damned as the Moslems. The fifth stanza of "Pax in Nomine Domini!," begins (in Frederick Goldin's translation):

> In the lineage of Cain,
> the first criminal man,
> are many like him,
> not one brings honor to God. (lines 37-40).[16]

The lineage of Cain means, on first reading, the Moslems, mentioned in the previous stanzas as those who are doing God wrong here and in Damascus.[17] The rest of the stanza of Marcabru's poem, though, refers to the "brute," the "eager

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[15] Frederick Goldin has alerted me to a critical edition and commentary on this poem by Peter T. Ricketts and John Hathaway, "Le vers del lavador de Marcabrun: édition critique, traduction et commentaire," Revue des langues romanes 77 (1966) 1-11.

[16] Probet del lignatge Caï,
del primeiran home felho,
a tans aissi
c'us a Dieu non porta honor

[17] ". . . del tort / que·ill fas sai, e lai vas Domas" (lines 35-6).

eater," the "squatter with his rump in the road,"[18] in short, to the Christians who would not join the Crusade. Thus, Marcabru uses the image of the descendants of Cain to chastise both the Moslems and the cowardly Christians. Elsewhere, Marcabru identifies as the lineage of Cain ("Falsa del lignatges Caïn") anyone who lacks the virtues of shame and honor, and is therefore incapable of love (line 42 in "Bel m'es cam. . ." Poem 13 in Poèsies complètes du troubadour Marcabru).

For the church writers, every sinner, or monster, is ultimately a descendant of Cain, if not biologically, then at least typologically. But the distinction between "really" true and typologically true is less sharp than it seems for modern readers. Northrop Frye observes in a parallel context, "The religious and poetic identification differ in intention only, the former being existential and the latter metaphorical. In medieval criticism the difference was of little importance. . . ." (Frye Anatomy 142).

Consider, for example, that Marcabru calls Moslems "the lineage of Cain." In what sense can Moslems be descendants of Cain? The descendants of Cain are killed in the Flood, but they prefigure the Moslems. The Moslems are, on another

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[18] "coita disnar, bufa-tizo, / crup-en-cami" (lines 47-8).

level, not literal but even more important, a reenactment of the descendants of Cain. The Crusade is not literally, but figuratively, a reenactment of the Flood. Christians who do not take part in the reenactment cast their lots with the evildoers. In a way that is perhaps hard for moderns to understand, figurative relationships are real.

According to biblical interpreters the descendants of Cain were doomed to be destroyed in the Flood. Nonetheless, there were legends about descendants of Cain physically surviving the Flood. Grendel and his mother, the monsters in Beowulf, are members of the clan of descendants of Cain. Emerson (880ff), Tolkien (18), Williams (1-70) and Mellinkoff ("Cain's Monstrous Progeny in Beowulf") have each shown that the monsters in Beowulf have exactly the characteristics that the ancient sources attribute to Cain himself, or to his descendants. In fact, the descriptions of the monsters in Beowulf pull together many of the disparate elaborations of the negative tradition of Cain and his descendants. Grendel is excluded from, and hates, human happiness (line 100). He is called "a fiend of hell" (line 101),[19] and a "wicked demon"

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[19] But Huppé (193-4, note on lines 90-101) argues that the words in line 101 "feond on helle" (fiend in Hell), refer to the Devil, rather than to Grendel. The dispute may show that the line is an example of "syncheis, liquid syntax," so that either referent is possible (a suggestion put forth by Marijane Osborn, according to Huppé). However the line is construed, it must strengthen the connection between Grendel and the forces of Hell.

(line 712); he is also an adversary of God, and punished by God (line 711), so that he is a "miserable wretch" (line 104). He is a giant (line 426) who dwells in darkness (line 87), or in swamps (line 104). Williams finds at least one source for each detail in the descriptions of Cain and his descendants written by the Church Fathers (Williams 1-70). In a similar way, Mellinkoff convincingly locates the roots of Grendel's descent from Cain in the traditions surrounding part of the Pseudepigraphic work I Enoch ("Cain's Monstrous Progeny in Beowulf: Part I, Noachic tradition").

The poet explicitly makes the connection with Cain in describing Grendel's mother, who, after the death of her son,

> brooded on the woe
> of her dwelling in the dread waters
> of frozen streams enforced by fratricide
> when Cain murdered his closest kin
> his father's son; sin-encrusted he fled
> from the joys of men, marked by his murder
> to inhabit the wasteland; from him awoke
> the demonic race of the ravaging Grendel
> the accursed foe. (lines 1259-1267, Huppé trans.).

Emerson notes that the "terms describing Grendel and his mother are similar to those chosen when devils and demons must

be meant" in other Old English works (Emerson 881). Grendel is associated with darkness in more than a dozen lines of Beowulf (Emerson 882), the darkness which is characteristic of the descendants of Cain. Emerson concludes that "I have no question that the author of the first two adventures conceived of the monsters as belonging to the devil descendants of the first murderer" (883).[20]

In Beowulf, the family of Cain has degenerated into moral subhumans, physically superhuman, ideologically anti-human. If Cain is a descendant of the Devil, then perhaps there is no degeneration; perhaps the family merely continues its demonic nature. The first born of Satan is naturally the father of demons. Yet if the monsters are descendants of Adam, and therefore also human, still they are described as demons:

> From him arose all monstrous races
> elves and ogres and evil spirits
> the giants too who contend with God
> for enduring time --their toil He repaid, (lines 101-104, Huppé translation 108).[21]

They 'feuded with God" (line 811), though they are merely outcast humans. They are human enough to make their man-eating cannibal, but the motivation for their attacks on human

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[20] Compare John 7:44, "Their father, the devil, is a murderer."

[21] According to Zohar, many demons and evil spirits also descend from Cain (Zohar 3: paragraph 354 on page 200).

society is envy (lines 86-89) or hatred of God (lines 809-811), not mere hunger. Huppé calls this phenomenon the "thematic interweaving of human and monstrous" (194, note on line 136).

In the early manuscripts of Beowulf, the monsters are sometimes described as descendants from Ham, rather than Cain (Emerson 925, Friedman 89, 99-107). While many explanations are possible,[22] Emerson maintains that "[T]he real explanation of the confusion is that Cham (Ham) was regarded as the natural successor of Cain after the Flood" (925). Emerson equivocally remarks that, for the medieval writers, Ham is "at least a spiritual descendant of Cain" (929; see also Tertullian, Against All Heresies 2, ANF 3:651). Nerval, in his version of the story, makes use of that medieval connection between Cain and Ham in its stronger version, that Ham is a biological descendant of Cain.

The same question should be asked about Beowulf's Grendel family as about Marcabru's Moslems: How did they survive the Flood? Connecting Noah's son Ham with the family of Cain (Friedman 99) solves the problem, as Ham legitimately survives

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[22] Ham's name (spelled Cham in the Middle Ages), was easy to confuse with Cain in medieval orthography, since the three minims of the m could be read as an i and an n. This confusion occurred widely in English, French and Latin spellings. (Friedman 100).

the Flood. According to the Zohar, many demons and evil spirits also descend from Cain (Zohar 3: paragraph 354 on page 200); perhaps demons and spirits were safe from the waters of the Flood. Many medieval sources are sure that, however they managed to do so, the evil descendants of Cain survived.

In the medieval references to Cain, Cain has typological significance. In league with the devil, and possibly a descendant of the devil, Cain is entirely evil, without any redeeming characteristics. He is the typological father of all who perpetuate evil (Williams 24). Among Christians, he prefigures the stingy, the envious, and the cowardly. Among non-believers, he prefigures the Jews, the Moslems, the heretics. His followers deserve the fate of Cain, to wander without hope, cut off from God and from human society, or the fate of the descendants of Cain, to be exterminated in a righteous action of justice like the Flood.

There is something uniform about all these sources. From the most sober biblical commentary to the most fanciful legend, across the whole of Europe and across many centuries, all agree that Cain is to be identified with pure evil. These sources form "a continuous legendary tradition and . . . any writer on this biblical episode might be expected to draw upon it" (Steffan 299). The traditional portrait of Cain is totally negative. The romantic poets intend their sympathetic

portraits of Cain to stand in sharp contrast with this traditional portrait.

Chapter Four: The Counter-Tradition

The tradition that understood Cain as wholly evil dominated biblical exegesis, popular expression and all forms of literature. There were, however, other traditions. In this chapter, I shall explore the counter-traditions, the systems, primarily Gnostic and kabbalistic, in which Cain is sympathetic, or even glorious.

I have already shown midrashic exegesis of the parts of the biblical text which support a sympathetic approach to Cain. These mitigate his evil, or establish him as a penitent rather than a hero. In this category are the statements in Bereshit Rabbah which suggest that Cain is no more at fault than Abel for their original argument, that Cain's penitence is sincere, and that God's sign shows acceptance of the penitence (22:3, 7). These texts were available, and were studied, primarily by Jewish scholars, alongside the texts which are not sympathetic to Cain. This is a moderate, non-mystical tradition for a sympathetic understanding of Cain. The survival of this tradition in Hebrew literature is seen in the

penitential prayer, "Horeita derekh t'shuvah," (text and English translation in Rosenfeld 202) by the medieval Hebrew poet Benjamin ben Zerah (c. 1050), which holds up Cain as an example of the prototypical penitent. In doing so, the poet follows the opinion of Rav Hanin in Bereshit Rabbah (22:12). Cain, by repenting, does the best he can, given his crime. God, because of Cain's remorse at the murder, mitigates Cain's punishment. In reciting this prayer, the reader calls on God to accept his own repentance as God accepts Cain's repentance. Thus a moderate sympathetic understanding of Cain survived, without having much influence in Western literature or biblical studies.

Another, far more radical, tradition for understanding the role of Cain was extremely influential in the romantic period. Almost nothing remains of the writings of the Gnostics, sects of mystical dualists who flourished in late antiquity; but those few paltry fragments include the earliest manifestations of groups which taught a positive version of Cain.[1] According

[1] We do not know how the Cainites came into existence. It must have been easy for Church Fathers to describe their opponents as Cainites, supposing that perpetrators of evil identify with Cain. But apparently the Gnostic literature which glorifies Cain really exists, and its writers must have had their own ideological explanation for identifying with Cain. If we knew that explanation, we could perhaps solve the riddle of the origin of the Cainites.

Perhaps the Cainites were originally a Jewish or Christian heretical sect. If so, they probably understand the father of Cain to be a good angel or demiurge (Segal 82); the notion that the father is specifically Satan should then be understood as a polemical expression developed by Jewish or

to these ancient thinkers, it seems that Cain is no mere human being; he is a supernatural being of the same order as the Creator. He is not evil, but a tremendous beneficial force.

The most informative sources about the ancient Gnostics are the writings of the Church Fathers, for, "[b]ecause of the

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Christian opponents of the Cainites (Segal 81), and perhaps later accepted as a self-description.

An opposite theory for the origin of the Cainites is that they were not, at first, Jewish or Christian at all. Rather, they might have taken their beliefs about Cain from some source other than the Bible. Uffenheimer (30-36), Maccoby (247) and others, have suggested that Cain might have appeared in traditions before the Bible, very likely the traditions of peoples other than the Hebrews. Perhaps, then, Cain was a good and superhuman hero in some lost extra-biblical legend, reduced to human size and ambiguous morality in the Bible. When the Bible takes its stand about Cain, it is in opposition to this old tradition; if so, then the Cainites might well be heirs of that old tradition.

It is also possible that no one explanation will suffice for the origin of a syncretistic group such as the Cainites. Their beliefs may have come from contradictory sources, as their members may have come from adherents of different faiths.

> Thus Gnosticism seems not to have been in its essence just an alternate form of Christianity. Rather it was a radical trend of release from the dominion of evil or of inner transcendence that swept through late antiquity and emerged within Christianity, Judaism, Neoplatonism, the mystery religions and the like. As a new religion it was syncretistic. . . (Robinson 10).

As for the date of the origins of Gnosticism, "Late antiquity" will have to do, in the absence of more precision. It is too much to ask for exact dates of Gnostic material. The books found at Nag Hamadi in 1945-46 physically date back to the fourth century, but were probably copied from earlier texts. The early Gnostic teacher Valentius was born about 100, but it is likely that even he was influenced by earlier Gnostic schools.

For a thorough discussion of the origins of Gnosticism, see Hans Jonas, The Gnostic Religion.

paucity of the Gnostic texts, perforce if we wish to learn anything about gnosticism, we must turn to the texts of their opponents" (Uffenheimer 48; see also Layton xxvii). These provide some context for understanding the surviving texts written by the Gnostics. According to Irenaeus of Lyon [c. 130-200] and other Church fathers, a particular Gnostic sect called the Cainites glorified Cain (Irenaeus, Against Heresies 1:31:1. Hippolytus of Rome [ca.170-236], Eusebius and Epiphanius of Salamis [ca. 315-403] also refer to the Cainites). Tertullian asserts that the Cainites:

> Magnify Cain as if he had been conceived of some potent Virtue, which operated in him,--for Abel had been procreated after being conceived by an inferior Virtue, and accordingly had been found inferior. (Against All Heresies 2 ANF 3: 650-51).

That is to say, the Cainites believed that neither Abel and Cain are purely human. Both have supernatural fathers, literally not human beings but Virtues. Since the father of Cain is a superior Virtue, and since that Virtue continues to operate in Cain, Cain is superior to Abel. According to Tertullian, the Cainites also revere other biblical villains such as Esau and the men of Sodom (Against All Heresies 2 ANF 3: 650).

Hippolytus of Rome, a student of Irenaeus, calls the Gnostics snake worshippers. He says that the snake is one of the three

powers in gnostic philosophy, along with the god of creation and the good redeemer god who is yet to be revealed. Hippolytus describes a gnostic philosopher in these difficult words:

> He says: This universal snake is the wise logos [that met] with Eve. This is the secret of Eden. This is the river that left Eden. This is [also] the sign that was placed on Cain that no one who finds him should kill him. He says that this one [the snake, according to Uffenheimer's note] is no one but Cain, whose sacrifice was not accepted by the God of this world. The gory sacrifice of Abel he approved of, for the ruler of this world rejoices in [offerings of] blood. They say: "He is exactly the one who appears in the end of days, in the time of Herod, in the shape of a man. . ." (Uffenheimer 47 attributes this passage to Hippolytus, Elenchos V. 19, 9ff.; the passage is also found in Hippolytus, The Refutation of All Heresies Book 5, Chapter 11 ANF 5:63).

In this passage, the Gnostics according to Hippolytus make of Cain "one who stands in complete opposition to the Creator in Judaism. The arch-murderer is elevated here to the level of a redeemer. . ." (Uffenheimer 49); that is to say, the Gnostic philosopher believes that Cain was Jesus the Messiah: "He is exactly the one who appears in the end of days, in the time of

Herod, in the shape of a man. . . ." In Gnosticism, as understood by Hippolytus, all values in the Bible are transformed. The God of the Bible becomes a lowly deity, merely the god of justice, inferior to the redeeming god who is yet to appear, the God of love and mercy (Uffenheimer 49).

The Church Fathers preserve the names and some of the doctrines of other groups in late antiquity which venerate Cain. "The Perateans suggested that it was only the demiurge, the god of this world, who did not accept the offering of Cain" (Segal 82, based on Hippolytus V, Ref. 16:9). "Marcion taught that the high god accepted Cain, leaving Abel and Abraham and their descendants behind unsaved" (Segal 82); those who rebelled against, and were rejected by the creator (Cain and his descendants), would be lead out of this world by Christ, "while Abraham and those justified by the creator must remain unredeemed" (Segal 235). Marcion, like the Cainites, believes that "Cain became the ancestor of those elected of Christ, in turn, the messenger of a good, saving God yet unknown and unprophesied in the Old Testament" (Segal 235, based on Irenaeus Against Heresies I, 25, 1).

This contrast between the God of this world and the God of the next reappears, almost verbatim from Hippolytus, in the works on Cain by Coleridge and Blake. The speech which, according

to Hippolytus, a Gnostic philosopher would make, according to Coleridge and Blake, belongs to an evil spirit, disguised as the ghost of Abel.

While the Church fathers denounced Gnosticism by including it in their catalogues of damnable heresies, contemporary Rabbis apparently waged a different kind of polemic against it. Uffenheimer notices that the very same sentiments which the Church fathers describe as Gnosticism appeared in late midrashic texts as the words of Cain. In many late Midrashim, Cain expresses bitterness against God for creating the evil impulse, and for accepting Abel's sacrifice, and for creating a world without mercy or love. When Cain is seen as precipitating his dispute with Abel by claiming "There is no justice and there is no Judge" (Targum Yonatan ben Uzziel to Gen.4:8; see discussion in Uffenheimer 46), or when Cain indicts God for the murder of Abel, on the grounds that God created the evil impulse (Midrash Tanhuma, Bereshit Paragraph 9; see discussion in Uffenheimer 47), the Rabbis are putting Gnostic doctrines into the mouth of Cain. Byron and Leconte de Lisle would have Cain make those same arguments again when they tell his story in the nineteenth century.

In summary, the opponents of the Gnostics describe Gnostic doctrine as denigrating the creator as a limited god, committed to justice, partial to blood sacrifice, merciless.

The Gnostics associate Cain with the mysterious snake, or with a higher God, committed to mercy; they suggest that Cain is a descendant of this God, and that the Messiah is directly related to Cain.

With the discovery in 1945 of the Nag Hamadi library, a collection of Gnostic volumes in Coptic, it became possible to get an extensive first-hand look at the movement, instead of relying almost entirely on the writings of its opponents (Layton xxvii). The difficulty is that these cryptic texts defy easy analysis. The references to Cain in the Apocryphon of John, one of the Nag Hamadi texts, can serve as an example. This work, while not explicitly Cainite, glorifies Cain: It identifies Cain as a descendant of the monstrous creator-god, the archon Yaldabaoth (The Nag Hamadi Library 104, 112) "And the chief archon seduced her (Eve) and he begot in her sons....And these he called with the name Cain and Abel, in order to deceive" (The Nag Hamadi Library 112). The text explains why the names "Cain" and "Abel" are deceptive: One of the beings is "really" named with the biblical Hebrew word for God, Elohim, and the other with the tetragrammaton, the biblical Hebrew name of God! Of these two gods, the cat-faced power over fire and the wind is good; the bear-faced power over water and the earth is evil (The Nag Hamadi Library 112). This passage leaves it perfectly ambiguous which is which, but we can rely on other Gnostic passages in surmising that Cain

is associated with the good, feline power over fire and wind, and Abel with the evil power over water and earth. Elsewhere in The Apocryphon of John, and in another Gnostic codex, The Gospel of the Egyptians, one of the twelve angels who rule over the world is Cain, "whom men call the sun" (The Nag Hamadi Library 104 and 201).

Though it is difficult to understand the full import of the Nag Hamadi passages, we can extract certain themes from them. In The Apocraphon of John, the monotheistic belief that all biblical words for God refer to the same being is split apart: Two beings are entitled each to different biblical names of God, and neither of these is the creator. Good and evil are divided between these two deities; the one who rules this Earth is evil and inferior, though called God in much of the Bible. Cain is no mere human, but rather equal and opposite to this biblical God; Cain is identified with the superior, good god of fire and the Sun.

All of these themes extracted from the baffling Gnostic sources also appear, in much more intelligible form, in modern Masonic legend (with one minor difference: The Masonic texts identify the creator God with the Moon, rather than the Earth). This may be evidence for the continuity between ancient Gnostic sources and modern Freemasonry. More important for the purposes of this study, we may be able to

use the relatively lucid Masonic sources to make sense of the recondite Gnostic material.

According to the Masons, Cain and Abel are half-brothers, the sons of different fathers. Cain's father is the Lucifer Spirit Samael; Abel's is the human Adam (Heindel 17).[2] Ever after, the people of the world come in two sorts. The descendant of Cain,

> partaking of a semi-divine nature imbued with the dynamic martial energy inherited from this divine ancestry, is aggressive, progressive and possessed of great initiative, but impatient of restraint or authority whether human or divine. (Heindel 18).

Abel dies without issue, but his role is taken on by his replacement, Seth. The descendant of Seth, who was himself no more than a son of humans on both sides, "was perfectly contented to tend the flocks also created by God and to accept a livelihood from their divinely begotten increase without labor or exercising initiative" (Heindel 19-20). The descendants of Seth have their own virtue, that of spiritual obedience (Heindel 11).

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[2] For the description of Masonic thought, I have used Max Heindel's Freemasonry and Catholicism. Lokke describes this work as "a concise, accurate and accessible summary of Freemasonic arcana" (Lokke 108).

In the Masonic legend, as in the Gnostic, the creator is neither all powerful, nor morally perfect. He has personality flaws: Because he is "extremely jealous of His prerogative as Creator," (20) he accepts the docile Abel's sacrifice, "but scorned the offering of Cain because derived though his [Cain's] own divine creative instinct. . ." (20). The power of the creator is limited: He is a lunar god, associated with water, more or less equal and opposite to Lucifer, the spirit of Fire (96). The tetragrammaton, in Heindel's exposition of Masonic thought, refers exclusively to this limited creator, and never to the highest supernatural powers. For these powers, Heindel, uses the expression "Divine Hierarchs" (47), an expression parallel to "archon" found in many ancient Gnostic texts. These "Divine Hierarchs" seem to be, in Masonic thought, more powerful yet than the Creator or Lucifer. It is the Hierarchs who planned, long ago, that the children of Seth and the children of Cain would someday outgrow their respective rulers, the creator and Lucifer. At that time, the ultimate reconciliation will take place, ending the ancient feud between the children of Seth and the children of Cain (Heindel 49).

The ultimate reconciliation almost occurred three thousand years ago, with the construction of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. The master craftsman, Hiram Abiff, descendant of Cain, cooperated on this work with the spiritual master,

Solomon, descendant of Seth (83). At the crucial moment, Hiram Abiff would not contain his creativity, and, rather than follow the Sethite plans for the Temple, he tried for an original effect in casting his sea of bronze. Excessive creativity, at the cost of following wise rules, is ever the weakness of the children of Cain. At the same moment, Solomon could not contain his jealousy, and allowed political intriguers to assassinate Hiram Abiff. Love of political intrigue is always the weakness of the children of Seth. Although his efforts failed, Hiram Abiff nonetheless endured a baptism of fire, and transcended his role as a child of Cain. In the romantic period, Nerval's version of the story of Cain appears as part of his version of the Temple Legend of the Masons.

The next great attempt at reconciliation came at the time of Jesus. "As the superlative skill of Cain was focussed in Hiram Abiff at the time of his baptism of fire, so the sublime spirituality of the Sons of Seth was centered in Jesus . . ." (Heindel 49). He, too, transcended the limitations of his obedience to the creator god; he, too, did not succeed in redeeming mankind, and had to undergo his own crucifixion, which plays a role in redeeming Sethites.

The mark of Cain has a distinct function in Masonic thought. It identifies the superior members of the family of Cain to

each other:

> It will be remembered that according to the Bible story the Lucifer spirit appeared to Eve as a serpent, son of Wisdom. Cain according to the Masonic legend, was born from this union with Eve. It is also stated that the Lucifer spirit then left Eve, who thus became a widow, and Cain was thus the son of the Lucifer spirit the serpent of Wisdom, and Eve, the widow. Every Initiate to this day has the serpent symbol on his brow and is known to his fellow by that token as a <u>son of the widow and the Lucifer spirit</u> (Heindel 84).

Like the Kabbalists and the Christian mystics, the Freemasons preserve a tradition in which the messianic redeemer is to be a descendant of Cain. In the traditions of the Freemasons, the descendants of Cain continue to be the creative geniuses who benefit mankind. These traditions have a biblical base: In Genesis (4:20-22), the origins of the various arts are traced to the descendants of Cain.

The next version of Cain as a redeemer occurs in the Kabbalah.[3] The central work of Kabbalah is the <u>Zohar</u>, the

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[3] "Kabbalah" is the traditional and most commonly used term for the esoteric teachings of Judaism and Jewish mysticism, especially in the forms which it assumed in the Middle Ages from the 12th Century onward. (Scholem 3).

"Book of Splendor," which made its appearance in the thirteenth century (Scholem 233), but did not particularly mark off a new area in the study of the theme of Cain.[4] Perhaps in the conversations of the great student of the Zohar, Rabbi Yitzhak Luria [1534-1572], there are hints of a deep role for Cain; "[M]any of the great figures of Jewish history are represented as stemming from the root of Cain, and as the messianic time approaches, according to Isaac Luria, the number of such souls will increase" (Scholem 163).

The radical redemptive Cain is disclosed by Luria's foremost disciple, Rabbi Hayyim Vital [1542-1620]. For Vital, Cain is a spiritual giant, the forerunner of the Messiah. Vital puts forward an elaborate theory for the central role of reincarnations of the soul of Cain in the future of mankind (Sefer HaGilgulim, especially chapters 14, 20, 23). According to Vital, Adam, Cain and Abel, are source souls for later reincarnations. Their sins and good deeds have great import for the future, far more than the sins of private souls. The reincarnations of the different source souls have different characteristics. The reincarnations of Cain are, in some

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[4] Cain appears in the Zohar as a penitent (Genesis Vol. 3 paragraph 344 on page 3:196 in the Sulam edition), as the firstborn of the diabolical snake (Genesis Vol 3 paragraphs 332-333 on pages 3:190-191 in the Sulam edition), and progenitor of demons (Genesis paragraph 354 on page 200 in the Sulam edition). Nerval cites the Zohar as the source of the idea that Cain is a son of Eblis, whom we call Satan (Oeuvres 2:687), although the reading goes back further.

ways, the most powerful, whether for good or evil. Vital's system thus provides explanations for variations in human personality. It also explains the divided self, for Vital writes that many people are composite souls, reincarnations of different combinations of preexisting souls. Vital, however, saw himself as purely a reincarnation of Cain (Chapter 28).

Underlying Vital's elaborate system of reincarnations is an extremely subtle exposition of the thematic parallels in the Bible. Where a literary writer would use the terminology "variations on the treatment" of a parallel theme, the mystic Vital used "reincarnation." We should not let this exotic terminology obscure the point. Consider this example of Vital's writing on the reincarnations of Cain:

> And behold, Nadav and Avihu [Lev. 10:1-4] were a spark of Cain, for the best of the souls of Cain were in Aaron, and the others in Jethro. . . They wished to enjoy the splendor of the Presence, in the same jealous zeal which awakened in his jealousy of Abel (In the section of Sha'ar HaGilgulim called Gilgulim Likutim 128).

In this cryptic paragraph, Jethro, Nadav and Avihu, are all described as reincarnations of part of the soul of Cain. Now, according to the Bible, Nadav and Avihu, sons of Aaron, "in their zeal to enjoy the splendor of the Presence," offer an

unauthorized sacrifice at the dedication of the Tabernacle, for which they suffer death (Lev 10). They parallel the zealous Cain who, in his religious fervor, of his own free will, makes an offering, and who is bitterly disappointed when that offering is not accepted. What Vital calls "a reincarnation of the good side of Cain," is apparently manifest in zealous fervor to serve God.[5]

Vital also believes that Jethro, father-in-law of Moses, is a reincarnation of Cain. In a densely-allusive passage, Vital asserts:

> 'He [God] made a letter[6] for Cain.' [Gen.4:15] Which letter was that? The vav of Jethro, as He said "yeter s'et" [extra ascendancy]. For the repair [tikkun] of Cain is in Jethro (Sha'ar HaGilgulim Chapter 33).

The reader needs some background information to begin to understand this passage: Reuben is, like Cain, a firstborn son who loses his ascendancy to a younger brother. Jacob says the words yeter s'et [extra ascendancy] about his son Reuben

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[5] Rabbi Uri of Strelsk (died 1826, Buber 2:21) is perhaps influenced by Vital when he says: "My teacher, Rabbi Shelomo of Karlin, had the soul of Abel. Now, there are people within whom the good traits of Cain's soul have their habitation, and these are very great" (Buber 2:279).

[6] The word "ot" in the quoted verse is usually understood as a "sign" for Cain; Vital, in this passage, understands it as "letter."

(Gen.49:3), as he explains why Reuben had not proved worthy of that extra ascendancy. Earlier in Genesis, God uses the word s'et [ascendancy] to Cain, as he explains that Cain would have to do well to have ascendancy over his brother (Gen. 4:7). The word yeter [extra] is the short form of the name Jethro, thus connecting Jethro to Reuben. The Hebrew word for sign in Gen. 4:15, "ot," means letter of the alphabet as well as sign, and Vital assumes that the sign of Cain was a letter. But which one? The last letter of the name Jethro, when the name is spelled in its full form. The short form of the name, yeter, does without that letter.

With that background, we can begin to disentangle the complex of parallels in the passage: Cain desires s'et, ascendancy over his brother in the service of God.[7] He should accept the fact that his brother has the higher role, or he should earn the higher role for himself. Instead, he goes into a rage and kills his brother. Jethro is parallel to Cain. According to one biblical source, Moses's father-in-law is of the Kenite people, called by the same name as Cain (Judges 4:11). Jethro is a "priest of Midian" (Exodus 18:1), but when he hears how God has rescued Israel from Egypt, he recognizes the God of

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[7] In this interpretation, Vital follows Nahmanides' reading of Gen 4:7: "If you do well, will you not have ascendancy [s'et] over your brother?" Nahmanides defines the obscure word by its use in Gen 49:3 "Reuben...firstborn son...with greater [s'et] ascendancy" (Nahmanides 1:88). I believe that Nahmanides, who lived from 1195-1270, ultimately bases this reading on even earlier kabbalistic sources.

Israel (Exodus 18:11), and sacrifices to the God of Israel (Exodus 18:11-12), thus acknowledging the primary role of his own son-in-law Moses (Exodus 18:19). Facing with the same challenge as Cain, Jethro finds a peaceful resolution. So Jethro is the tikkun, the restoration, of Cain, rectifying Cain's flaw. Vital writes "Jethro was Cain, after his restoration [tikkun]" (Sha'ar HaGilgulim Chapter 33). When God marks Cain with a sign, the sign shows Cain's connection with Jethro.

Vital gives a further example of a zealous servant of God. Esau is also a reincarnation of Cain: "He who came out red, the one who shed blood, [Esau] was from the evil part of Cain" (Sha'ar HaGilgulim Chapter 34). Esau yearns for have the blessing of his father, Isaac, the blessing which apparently means pre-eminence in the service of God. When his brother, Jacob, craftily receives the blessing intended for Esau, Esau is disappointed to the point of planning to murder Jacob (Gen. 27). Vital notes the extended parallel between Esau and Cain, who also is so disappointed by his younger brother's pre-eminence in the service of God that he kills him. What Vital calls "the evil part of Cain" is apparently manifest in jealous, murderous rage at the thwarted desire to serve God.

We can see certain themes in Vital's kabbalistic reevaluation of Cain. First, Cain's zeal in the service of God is very

great, so great that it leads him to violence. Zeal is a mixed blessing: The bad side of Cain is his zealous propensity for violence; the good side of Cain is his powerful desire to serve God. When a powerful desire to do good spills over, it becomes violent. In Vital's world of countervailing forces, the violence is a measure of the strength of the original desire to do good. Cain, who kills his brother out of misplaced zeal, must have a very powerful desire to do good:

> And behold, the evil of Cain is very great, as is known, for the fence which protects heroism [gevurot] is made of very harsh justice, and therefore the good of Cain is something good and very elevated. (Sha'ar HaGilgulim Chapter 31).

Second, according to Hayyim Vital, one purpose of reincarnating the soul of Cain is to rectify his faults in later incarnations. Souls stemming from Cain (such as the soul of Jethro) operate to redress flaws in its original attitude. The term tikkun, "rectification of faults," or "redressing flaws," is central to the kabbalistic concept of redemption.

Third, the redemption of Cain has cosmic significance. Vital conceives of the whole universe as a confused interplay of opposing forces. The ultimate redemption of the universe will come as these forces become distinct. The confused soul of

Cain mirrors the confused state of the unredeemed universe. Later incarnations of Cain rectify the flaws in his soul and liberate the greatness in his soul, mirroring the process of the redemption of the universe, and, indeed, playing a key part in that process:

> Messiah will come when evil and good will be completely separated. And there will not be any evil left clinging to good in all souls. Then the Messiah will come, as is known. Then "wickedness shall vanish like smoke."[8] (Sha'ar HaGilgulim Chapter 31).

The biblical Cain has these forces deeply mixed, and as long as these forces remain mingled, there can be no redemption. Redemption comes from clarity, from separating these forces out. When evil is separated from good, it will either disappear, for evil has no independent existence, or it will be reconciled with seeming good to the ultimate unity of true good. Now, we occasionally neutralize some isolated evil, but in the last days before the ultimate redemption the most powerful forces of evil must come into agreement with good; therefore, at some point in the future, even Cain must be reconciled (Idel 231).[9] Indeed, because there is such

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[8] The internal quotation is from the liturgy for the Jewish Festivals of Rosh HaShannah and Yom Kippur, in Birnbaum's translation (Birnbaum 443,4).

[9] Victor Hugo makes use of the logical extreme of this line of thinking, that Satan must also, finally, be reconciled with God, in his "Fin de Satan."

powerful good in Cain, his redemption will be an important part of the ultimate redemption.

Vital thus develops an understanding of the role of Cain as the heroic, but misguided, forerunner of the Messiah. Although Vital's work was often published, and was as widely circulated in manuscript (Scholem 444-6), it remained in a difficult Hebrew, and was directly available to a relatively small group. It is likely that Vital had a wide, but indirect, influence on Western literature.

A contemporary of Vital, the Christian mystic Jacob Boehme (1575-1624), develops a system of theological ideas which strongly resembles those of Vital. It is still debated whether Boehme had teachers who knew kabbalistic sources (as Tannenbaum asserts in Biblical Traditions in Blake's Early Prophecies 15, 295 n.39), or whether he arrived at his conclusions independent of kabbalistic influence (as Scholem asserts, 200). Like Vital, Boehme sees the world as an interplay of conflicting forces; like Vital, Boehme holds that Cain is intended to have a major role in ending the conflict. Boehme holds that Eve originally expected Cain to be the new man who would vanquish the serpent, and that the nations of the world expect the Messiah to be the Serpent-treader (Beer 326). The biblical basis for this messianic Cain is clear: God curses the snake which had tempted Eve, decreeing that her

son will trample his head (Gen. 3:15). Later, Eve's son Cain is born; his parents have every reason to expect him to be the promised hero (Gen. 4:1). Perhaps some other son of Eve is meant, and Cain is not a messianic figure at all. Perhaps he is a failed Messiah, capable of trampling the tempter's head. Perhaps he yet will, for, like the Freemasons and some Gnostics, some Kabbalists and Christian mystics preserve a tradition in which the messianic redeemer is to be a descendant of Cain. William Blake teaches that doctrine (See Chapter 8 below).

Thus positive versions of Cain existed, but only in relatively esoteric texts. The ideas of the ancient Gnostics were, until recently, available only in Patristic works which refute them. Masonic legends, which apparently continue ancient Gnostic themes, were available only to initiates. The Freemasons were a secret society; no Freemason was allowed to reveal the traditions of the society.[10] The majority of the works of the

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[10] So successful were the Freemasons at keeping their secrets that Ruth Mellinkoff, in her otherwise excellent study, The Mark of Cain, could find no source for the role of the mark of Cain in a work obviously based on Masonic sources, Hermann Hesse's Demian (Mellinkoff, The Mark of Cain 25, 107,114-115, 122). In Demian, the descendants of Cain are stronger, more aware and more creative than other humans. While other people strive to conform, the descendants of Cain strive to become fully aware, and so to transcend the herd. While others perpetuate the status quo, the descendants of Cain struggle to bring about the individualism of the future. The sign of Cain is a certain boldness, which frightens conventional people. Those marked with the sign of Cain are outcasts from a society that lacks freedom and love, outcasts because they are capable of freedom and love (Mellinkoff, The

Kabbalah were available only in the original languages, archaic Aramaic and difficult Hebrew. Some of the material had been translated into European languages by Christian scholars (Scholem 196-201); much of the literature could be found by those with a strong enough interest. The works of Jacob Boehme were studied by those with an interest in Christian mysticism.

Most of the romantic poets had interest in, and access to, esoteric religious sources. Blake, Coleridge, Nerval, Hugo, and Leconte de Lisle each amassed extensive knowledge of Gnosticism, Kabbalah, and Freemasonry. It is not surprising that we see aspects of the radically sympathetic versions of Cain echoed in most of the English and French romantic versions. The romantic poets used information from these sources to defend Cain for other reasons than their love of antiquarian esoterica.

Mark of Cain 87-91). Mellinkoff considers this interpretation of Cain as "bizarre," the "most intentionally distorted interpretation," which "through a twisting of the story ... projects an image that could only have been produced in the modern world" (87). In fact, Hesse's portrait of the descendants of Cain corresponds exactly with Nerval's; both portraits are firmly rooted in Masonic, and, very likely, in ancient Gnostic, sources.

Similarly, Richardo J. Quniones, in his comprehensive study of the history of the theme, overlooks the Masonic influence on the French romantic versions of the story of Cain (The Changes of Cain). The Masonic writers were indeed successful at keeping their traditions secret.

Chapter Five: The Forerunner: Gessner's Der Tod Abels

The Swiss Salomon Gessner was a minor, but influential, poet. Even Bertha Reed, an admirer of his work, admits that "Everything that Gessner did has been done since by greater poets, and done better than he could do it" (118). His Der Tod Abels (The Death of Abel), a prose poem[1] of novella length, published around 1758 (B. Reed 16),[2] was the first literary work which deals with Cain as a sympathetic character.[3] The modern history of sympathy with Cain in literature begins with Der Tod Abels.

Cain, in the beginning of Gessner's lyrical prose rhapsody, is shown as a dark, uncouth farmer of limited intelligence. Abel

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[1] Mary Collyer describes the style in the introduction to her translation of Der Tod Abels:

> All our author's work, or which this is the first that has been translated into English, are wrote in a kind of loose poetry, unshackled by the tagging of rhymes, or counting of syllables. This method. . . is of a middle species between verse and prose; it has the beauties of the first, with the ease of the last. (xxii).

[2] Apparently not 1760, as Roston asserts in Biblical Drama (200).

[3] Thorslev, going further, calls Der Tod Abels Cain's "first incarnation in formal and serious literature" (94).

is pious, blond and happy. The main contrast between the two is that Abel expresses his emotions easily, while Cain is stolid. At the end of the Second Canto, for instance, all members of the family smile or cry at Adam's recitation of the history of the family; only Cain is unmoved, or at least, unable to express his emotion (Oulton translation, 100). Later on, when Adam recovers from an illness, Cain cries for joy, but much less than Abel does. Cain explains to himself that he cannot stand abundant tears (Oulton 131, line 586ff), but at that moment, Cain fears that the family will decide that he loves Adam less than Abel does.

This is not the only place in Der Tod Abels where Cain is plagued with envy: Later, he begrudges Abel the relatively easy profession of shepherding (Oulton Canto 4 line 121). Cain envies Abel the love of their family. Cain's envy grows when an angel calls upon Abel, but not Cain, to provide the cure for their father's illness (134ff, line 664ff). Adam blesses Abel in gratitude (137, lines 727-730), while poor Cain has to ask for his father's blessing (139, lines 775). The women of the family are thrilled with Abel (138, line 733ff), which only fuels Cain's envy. The fateful sacrifice, in this version, is Abel's idea (rather than Cain's, as in the Bible), and it is offered in thanksgiving for Adam's recovery. All these factors intensify Cain's envy.

Then a demon named Anamelech shows Cain a vision of his descendants subjugated to Abel's descendants (Oulton 160ff, Canto 4 lines 67-222). In the dream, Cain overhears the sons of Abel conspiring to enslave his own:

> We will recline on beds of violets under the myrtles, while the hardy sons of the earth, the brawny inhabitants of yonder plain, shall for us endure the toil of labor. Their men shall till our ground, their wives and daughters shall be the servants of ours. (Collyer translation, 1762 edition, 151).

Ultimately, "he saw his sons and grandsons bound, and with their wives and infants, tamely marching before the children of Abel like a flock of sheep" (Collyer of 1762 153).

The dream drives Cain to such despairing envy that, before he is fully awake, he murders his brother (168, lines 261-348): "like a wounded lion attacks the first person he sees, even an innocent child" (168, Canto 4 line 261ff). The dying Abel gives his murderer a "look of pity and forgiveness" (Canto 4 line 346). Immediately, Cain comes to his senses, crying out with remorse "infernal horrors--oh--infernal horrors seize me!" (176 line 360). As the ghost of Abel ascends among the praising angels, a tear of compassion drops from his eyes (line 573). Meanwhile, Cain goes though a catalogue of manifestations of despair (line 650): His trembling limbs will

not support him (line 370), he strikes his throbbing breast (lines 569-70), he rolls his eyes, he trembles in the dust (line 572). The only break in Cain's overwhelming, complete, sincere remorse, comes as he thinks: "I have destroyed by bother, and with him / Destroyed his unborn children--Ha! What then?-- / They were the destin'd murderers of mine!" (lines 672-4).

The sign of Cain, in Gessner's work, is a psychological one, both in its manifestation on Cain and in its effect on others:

> Growing remorse and gloomy discontent
> Shall strongly be imprinted on thy brow,
> That everyone who meets thee shall be struck
> With horror, and, on seeing thee, shall quit
> Whatever path thy wand'ring feet pursue,
> Exclaiming--There goes Cain the murderer! (Oulton Canto 4, lines 736-741).

Cain prays for death, and laments that he has been given the harsh sentence of wandering, rather than the more lenient sentence of death (Oulton, Canto 4, line 775). He curses the demon (Oulton, Canto 4, lines 776-790).

Adam and Eve, not yet aware of the murder, are still aware that Cain resents their love of Abel, feeling it is greater than their love for him. To show that they love him, too, they determine to bring Cain a present of some figs (Oulton,

Canto 4, lines 800-860). On the way, Eve stumbles onto the body of Abel (Canto 4, line 872). Cain, his steps guided unconsciously, returns to the scene of the crime, where he confesses to Adam (Canto 4, lines 897-902), concluding the confession by cursing the hour of his birth (echoing the words of Job, Job 3:1-10).

Eve refuses to join in Cain's self-condemnation, for she sees the connection between her sin and his. Has she not brought death to the world, he could not have invented murder. " . . . on me alone / Let all thy dreadful imprecations fall! / 'Twas I, wretch that I am, who first transgress'd! (Oulton, Canto 4, lines 957-8). Adam comforts her with the thought that he also sinned, and that the afterlife gives meaning even in the face of death (line 987ff). An angel joins in comforting the mourners: "Immod'rate grief ill-suits immortal spirits! (Oulton, Canto 4, line 1156). Canto Four ends with the plans for the burial of Abel.

In Canto Five, Thirza, wife of Abel, and Mehala, wife of Cain, come on the scene. Thirza has had a premonitory dream, and describes it to Mehala. Cain, overhearing the prayers of Thirza and the entreaties of his own wife, resolves to depart in solitude. Mehala, still talking with Thirza, confesses that she is unhappy in her marriage, because Cain is always discontented (Canto 5, line 74), and she is uncomfortable with

Cain's "rooted enmity to Abel" (line 82). Thirza and Mehala both break into tears at this comment; but, resolving to hope for a better future, begin praying "to soften the obdurate heart of Cain" (line 105).

When they discover the body of Abel, Thirza and Mehala both faint (line 169). Thirza, when she comes to, laments that she ever awoke to see Abel dead (line 185-7). Adam tries to comfort them, with the same promises which the angel had made to Eve and to him. Meanwhile, the two women still do not know how Abel died; Mehala, innocently remarks that if Cain had been around when Abel was in trouble, he would have protected him, and Abel would have blessed Cain (line 220). Hearing this remark, Eve faints again.

The infant sons of Cain, Josiah and the "golden haired" Eliel (line 448), appear for the burial (line 445). In Gessner's version, Abel also has an infant son. The children comment that Abel lies "like a lamb for sacrifice" (line 462). Adam preaches a long funeral sermon about how "the woman's seed shall crush / the serpent's head" (line 622), and the Messiah will redeem sinners from Hell. At the end of the story, Cain and his family set out for parts unknown.

In this plot summary, I have distorted the atmosphere of the story by leaving out all of Gessner's description of pleasant

scenery, "an immense amount of pastoral detail" (Thorslev 95) which takes up much of the work. To correct that distortion, I shall now present parts of two long sentences which accurately represent many other passages: "When Abel and his beloved Thirza left their leafy couch and repaired to a neighboring bower of interwoven jessamin and roses . . . (Collyer, 1802 edition 2).

> See where the newborn day first wakes the eagle; when on the glittering summits of the rocks and the shining sides of the mountains, the exhalations ascend and mix with the pure air of morning . . . .(Collyer, 1802 edition 4).

In Gessner's description, the wild parts of nature are tame; everything is uniformly pretty, as if all creation were a well-ordered garden.

Gessner is a precursor of the romantics in his treatment of the figure of Cain. By developing sympathy for Cain in his version of the story, Gessner begins "the tremendous transformation, even a reversal of sympathies," (Oded 4) which changes Cain from being an unmitigated villain in the common understanding, to a sympathetic figure, even a hero, in the romantic versions. Gessner does not complete the process: Compared with the romantic portraits of Cain, Gessner's is measurably tamer.

In the next paragraphs, I will trace the sources for parts of The Death of Abel; then I will show where Gessner diverges from earlier sources to create a new portrait of Cain; last, I will demonstrate ways in which Gessner, in his understanding of Cain, did not go as far as the romantic poets.

At some moments Gessner follows the earlier sources[4] in his portrayal of Cain. The contrast in Der Tod Abels between the blond Abel and his dark brother Cain, for example, is in perfect keeping with medieval tradition. Cain's darkness can be traced back to ancient sources (see Chapter 3 above). In Der Tod Abels, Cain envies his brother's easy and prosperous profession. Greed and envy for Abel's material success are also present in old sources: These are Cain's primary motivation for the murder in several of the medieval mystery plays (Roston, Biblical Drama 44-45), and in some of the earliest exegetical sources (Pirkei Rabbi Eliezer 21; Basil, "Concerning Envy" Fathers of the Church 22:465). Augustine ascribes the motive for Cain's crime to a diabolical envy which moves evil men to hate those who are good for no other

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[4] Oulton explains his use of blank verse for his translation of Der Tod Abels: "As this poem of Gessner's is an evident imitation of Milton's celebrated 'Paradise Lost,' certainly blank verse is the only English dress in which it can appear in the best advantage" (vi). It is very likely that any retelling of Genesis would be influenced by Milton, and Thorslev points out several specific examples of that influence, including the moralizing speeches and the concluding banishment (94-95). However, Milton's portrait of Cain in Paradise Lost is not a significant influence on the development of that theme.

reason than that they are good (City of God Book 15, Chapter 5). Gessner's Cain feels a form of envy that is not so much diabolical as "adolescent" (the word is Thorslev's, 98): He feels insecure. He worries about how the family thinks of him. He turns his eye to his brother's fortune, and wonders whether that means that their parents, or God, really loves Abel more. This envy is a corrosive emotion, but not as evil as the frank greed showed by Cain in Pirkei Rabbi Eliezer, or the diabolical hatred of the good showed by Cain in Augustine. Cain's insecurity and envy seem destined to hurt only himself, had they not been exploited by an evil demon.

God rejects Cain's sacrifice because of the unworthy thoughts in Cain's mind: his jealousy of Abel, and his fear that he would be rejected (147, line 947ff). This is consistent with the New Testament reading of the Genesis story, that Cain is rejected because he is wanting in faith (Heb. 11:4). The sign that God accepts Abel's offering is the stilling of the wind (149 Canto 3 line 978); the sign that he rejects Cain's is the whirlwind that scatters the offering and blows smoke in Cain's face (149 Canto 3 lines 985-86). Similarly, on the doors that Jacopo della Quercia designed for the Church of San Petronio in Bologna in the fifteenth century (Braude 592), the fire of Abel's sacrifice ascends straight in the calm air, but the whirlwind drives the fire of Cain's sacrifice in his face.

But Cain, in Gessner's work, also has some positive traits, which cannot be not found in any earlier literary treatments of Cain. Some of the positive traits can be traced back to the Bible; others are original with Gessner. Gessner's Cain is devoted to his wife and children, a new theme in the history of retelling the story of Cain. This theme is foreshadowed by the biblical passage in which Cain builds a city and names it in honor of his son (Genesis 4:17), indicating a strong father-son bond.

In Der Tod Abels, Cain's guilt for the murder itself is extenuated: The demon Anamelech controls Cain by giving him the evil dream (Oulton 160-67, lines 67-229) which drives him to commit the crime. The extenuating role of the demon may be original with Gessner, although there is a parallel for it in the role of the serpent in the murder of Abel according to Irenaeus (cited by Uffenheimer, 49-50):

> When the detestable serpent met him [Adam?] together with his son, he confused him, filled him with earthly forgetting, put foolishness and arrogance in him, until he killed his brother Abel, and became the first to bring jealousy and death into the world.

In Gessner's version, Cain is immediately remorseful over the murder, and his pathetic tearful remorse becomes the major

theme of the end of the work (Thorslev 95). In the Bible, of course, Cain's first response after the murder is the insolent: "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen. 4:9); only later does Cain make the statement that is the basis of the exegetical tradition of the repentant Cain, "My crime is greater than I can bear" (Gen. 4:13).[3]

Gessner's dark Cain has a blond child. As darkness befits the benighted Cain, so blondness befits his angelic child. The blond child is as different as possible from the monstrous black progeny of Cain in the medieval traditions. This detail, presumably, helps Gessner make the new point that Cain's love for his children is a redeeming feature, one which should inspire a reader's sympathy. Reading this work, I tried to resist noticing the offensive convention that blonds are necessarily beautiful and good, while dark people are disturbed and evil, but it is present. This is not

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[3] See chapter 2 above, for a discussion of the multiple possible meanings of Gen. 4:13. "My crime is greater than I can bear" is the translation which Gessner needs: It is entirely consistent with his theme of the repentant Cain. Oulton, who was apparently no biblical scholar, objects strenuously, inserts the "correct" version of the biblical verse:

> Throughout this speech our poet has entirely deviated from scripture. He made Cain acknowledge the greatness of his crime [1.725], but we find in Genesis IV.13, that he only complains of the greatness of his punishment--"And Cain said to God, my punishment is greater than I can bear." These words are, therefore, introduced here though omitted by Gessner. (Oulton, Canto 4 line 728, note).

overreading: Cain's loveable blond descendants reappear in some of the romantic versions.

Gessner, in the second half of Der Tod Abels, orchestrates sympathy for Cain, by displaying his tearful concern for his family (Blumenthal 8) and tearful remorse for his murdered brother. Gessner invites the reader to share Cain's sentiment. This may indeed be the first literary version of the story of Cain in which Cain has respectable emotions with which the reader is evidently expected to sympathize.

Gessner makes a more extreme appeal for sympathy for Cain, going so far as to exonerate Cain to a great extent. It is appropriate to cite B. Reed's extended observations on this point:

> . . . Gessner frees Cain from the last vestige of blame. Differing wholly from the Biblical Cain, he is a perfectly innocent murderer. He intended to do no wrong, but a calamity has come, and for that he is sorry. He would undo the wrong if he could. (B. Reed 74).
>
> Gessner represents Cain, not as a wicked man, but the very reverse. He loves his wife and children, and when, in his

> dream, he sees his children and grandchildren taken as slaves by the descendants of Abel, he is aroused to perform the deed which will prevent that calamity. His terrible remorse immediately following the blow, shows the tenderness of his heart. He is surprised to find that he has brought death into the world. The spirit of Anamelech had held him in its power, and we are made to feel it is not Cain that has dealt the blow, but the evil spirit in whose power he is. (B. Reed 70-71).[4]

The reading public was ready for a sympathetic treatment of Cain. Their prevailing mood was a sort of pre-romantic sentimentalism, which Gessner matched perfectly in this rhapsody. He, "in conformity with the new sentimental tendencies of the age, depicted the characters as successively bursting into floods of tears" (Roston, Biblical Drama 201). The work champions emotional expressivity. Self-pity, remorse, family affection, sympathy for animals,[5] all find

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[4] The fiend exults, after the murder, "I provoked the wretch-- / His arm I guided, when he gave the blow" (Oulton Canto 4 lines 402-3).

[5] This is Adam's description of an animal sacrifice:
> I took the best of my flock; but my children, it is impossible to give you a description of

their way into effusive speeches and fountains of tears in the Death of Abel, to the evident approval of writer and reader. The Eclectic Review 6, part 2 (1810) 628, attributes the popularity of The Death of Abel to "the piety of the sentiments, and the heart-rendering interest of the story" (quoted in B. Reed 35). Blumenthal accurately describes Cain's mien as "gushing sentimentality" (Blumenthal 8) in his remorse after the murder. The characters all rush to express their innermost emotions; however, the content of that inner self is without subtlety or variation, and the methods of expression are generic. Gessner puts his characters in situations which call for predictable emotions, and uses a limited repertoire of behaviors to express those emotions. Great literature would not come out of that sentimental mood of conventional emotion. However, it paves the way for the more daring and individuated inner explorations of the romantic poets.

> what I felt, when I went to deprive the innocent animal of life. A trembling seized my hand; I was scarce able to hold the struggling victim; and I never could have brought myself to give it death, had not my resolution been animated by the express command of the Author of Life. The very remembrance of its endeavours to escape gives me pain. When I beheld its quivering limbs in its last moments of existence, an universal tremor shook my own; and when it lay before me without sense or motion, dreadful forebodings invaded my troubled soul. (Emphasis in text. Collyer, 1802 edition 49).

Gessner's work is religiously conventional. An anonymous critic in 1766 thought that work fit for reading after communion (B. Reed 16).

> Many of its readers . . . had the satisfaction of thinking that they were . . . piously employed in reading a "good book." We remember to have seen it put into the hands of children, under this persuasion, on Sundays by persons who would have regarded a profane book as an abomination against the Sabbath. (The Quarterly Review [2] 1814, quoted by B. Reed 5).

Each character has the opportunity to express noble religious feelings. Even Cain feels remorse and true penitence after the crime, in one of the most original themes in the work.[6] By dwelling on Cain's remorse, that is to say, on Cain's emotions after the crime, Gessner continues his systematic practice of exploiting all the emotion he can find in the story; he also fits the story in a wholesome religious framework. But the focus on Cain's emotions could easily go beyond the bounds of acceptable morality, a tendency which served the purposes of the romantic poets well. Every one of the romantic versions uses the story of Cain to challenge

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[6] In chapter 4, above, I show examples of Cain as the first penitent, but these are in Hebrew, not in Western, sources.

accepted religious thought.

Presenting Cain as a sympathetic character is Gessner's breakthrough. In the common understanding of Cain, expressed in every earlier literary version of the story, and indeed in all the romantic versions, a key aspect of the personality of Cain is his defiance. Gessner sacrifices this part of the theme to achieve his breakthrough: The element of defiance is absent from Gessner's Cain. This is probably a necessary move, to allow Gessner to exploit Cain's emotions and still to keep the story wholesome.

Mary Collyer's English translation of Der Tod Abels appeared almost immediately, and was extremely popular. B. Reed cites this sentence from the Quarterly Review X, 1814. 78: "No book of foreign growth has ever become so popular in England as the Death of Abel" (B. Reed 5). Her translation went through eighteen editions in the next forty years, and there were five other English translations before 1811 (Thorslev 96). Obscure English writers produced numerous imitations.[7] The work had

[7] Imitations of The Death of Abel, according to Reed: The Death of Cain: a Vision was published in 1788 (Reed 117). "In 1814 at Oxford the Death of Abel was first published with the Death of Cain: a Vision. This volume went through several editions in England (Reed 115) and in America" (Reed 117). The purpose of this work, according to the author's preface: "In imitation of my friend Gessner, who conducts Abel thro' the rough journey of life, and at last gives him a passport to Heaven!--I do the same for the wicked, forlorn and repentant Cain" (cited in Reed 115). In 1810, there appeared an anonymous Cain's Lamentations over Abel in six books, Portsea

a similar career in France. The first French translation, by Michel Huber, appeared in 1762 (Hibberd 30). The French were quick to appreciate the work (Van Tieghem 2:234, 250), making it the most widely read of German books (Hibberd 128). The University Library system lists a total of eight French translations, all published before 1806. Gessner's Der Tod Abels was also translated into Dutch, Latin (unpublished), Italian, Danish (B. Reed 41, citing Literary Magazine and British Review 2 (1798) 241), Portuguese, Spanish, Swedish, Bohemian (B. Reed 42 citing Encyclopaedia Britannica, 9th edition), Hungarian and Russian (William Taylor, J. W. Robberds Memoir of Wm. Taylor of Norwich 1843 Vol 2, 573. Cited in B. Reed 45-6).

The last new English translation of The Death of Abel by Julius De Benham Jacoby appeared in 1853 (B. Reed 114). By then, however, The Death of Abel was well on its way to being completely forgotten. It was then nearly a century since the work had first been printed and greeted with obsessive interest; now its time was past.

Deep in the rare books room of the academic library at Oakland University are two crumbling copies of The Death of Abel, one translated by Collyer, the other by Oulton. I untied the

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1810 (Reed 116), and finally, another anonymous one, Cain the Wanderer, London 1829.

string around their covers, and read these books. Over the years, very few readers have asked to see them. The other local university libraries do quite well without even one copy of the book.[8] The various imitations and responses to The Death of Abel written at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth are forgotten now, even more thoroughly than their model. Der Tod Abels has disappeared; but while the book still mattered, it had an impact on seven great romantic poets in England and France.

John Hibberd's study of Salomon Gessner: His Creative Achievement and Influence, published in 1976, begins the discussion of Gessner in English. Except for that short work, Gessner's extraordinary influence on English and European literature has been ignored, although some scholars (notably Blumenthal, B. Reed, and Steffan) have written about the influence of Gessner on Byron and Coleridge. They point out numerous echoes of Gessner in the characters and events in the works by the later poets. Thorslev, however, denies that Gessner was a talented enough poet to have influenced the major English romantics in "more than the theme and the subject matter. . ." (95). Ricardo J. Quinones, in his just-published study, The Changes of Cain, devotes a few judicious pages to Gessner's influential work (89-92, 185-88).

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[8] Since I wrote this sentence, the Wayne State University Library has catalogued a microcard of an 1802 printing of the Collyer translation.

Van Tieghem's extensive study of the influence of the Gessner in France is largely focussed on the author's Idylls, with only passing references to Der Tod Abels. Certain details of Gessner's version of Cain, the dream-stuff prepared by Anamelech of two contrasting races with different economic roles, hardworking descendants of Cain and comfortable descendants of Abel, will recur as reality in the versions of the story by Nerval and Baudelaire.

William Taylor locates the popularity of the Death of Abel in the "religious world" (B. Reed 46). Collyer, in the introduction to her vastly successful translation of Der Tod Abels, explains her motive for devoting the effort to this work: Poetry, she says, "has always been in the retinue of religion, and is of no small service to it, being the most energetic method of conveying sentiments of virtue and devotion" (xv). This work is among the scriptural histories that "have a zeal for the honor of their religion" (xiii). In the next pages, I shall discuss versions of the story of Cain by authors who were less zealous in cultivating the sentiments of devotion in the service of their religion.

Chapter Six: Coleridge's "The Wanderings of Cain"

The first segment of Coleridge's "The Wanderings of Cain" to appear was a single stanza, published as footnote in a theological work, Aids to Reflection, in 1825 (Aids to Reflection 338 n.; see also Coleridge: Poetical Works 287). A larger unit of the story appeared as a prose poem, "The Wanderings of Cain. A Fragment" (Coleridge: Poetical Works 285-292) in 1828 (Holmes 170). These works were published after Byron's play. But Coleridge, in a comment published with the verse stanza[1] and in the "Prefatory Note" to the prose fragment, asserts he had written them many years earlier, in 1798 (Coleridge: Poetical Works 285-7), long before Byron's play appeared. An undated rough draft of a relatively complete version of the story was found among Coleridge's papers and published years after the poet's death (Coleridge: Poetical Works 285-6 n.1).

If we accept Coleridge's early date for "The Wanderings of

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[1] Coleridge refers to the verse fragment as a "poem composed in the same year which I wrote the Ancient Mariner and the first book of Christabel" (Aids to Reflection 338 n.).

Cain,"[2] the work deserves to be named the first romantic retelling of the story. Gessner's literary version of the story is sympathetic to Cain, but his Cain is a relatively innocuous figure, without insolence or rebellion. Coleridge, with characteristic boldness, attempts a version of the story built on sympathy with a whole, complex, morally equivocal Cain. It is also characteristic of Coleridge that he was unable to finish the work. As he worked on "The Wanderings of Cain," he was also continually reworking the theme in slightly disguised form in other poems, with spectacular results. Sympathy for Cain was a vital theme for Coleridge.

The story is most complete in the rough draft of "The Wanderings of Cain." The other versions appear to be no more than beginning attempts to develop parts of that draft into a finished work.

In the rough draft, an evil spirit appears to Cain, first as "an orb of fire," then, "retaining its luminous appearance," in the "lineaments of a man." It attempts to seduce Cain into burning out his eyes in expiation of his guilt before the true deity, "who is a severe God." Cain protests that his current

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[2] Steffan accepts the date with the most muted note of skepticism: ". . . Coleridge stated that the piece had been written in 1798, and scholars have accepted this as a fact" (Steffan 316). Even Norman Fruman, who discovers extensive examples of the unreliability of Coleridge's claims about the dates of his poems (Fruman 10-12), does not challenge the 1798 dating of "The Wanderings of Cain" (Fruman 362).

punishment is from "God himself," so, by implication, there is no need to add to the punishment. The spirit then admits that God is merciful, but still argues for the sacrifice, because Cain needs to be a horrible example for mankind, and because there will be a great reward of inner sight for Cain. Cain, about to consent, climbs to "the top of the rocks to take a farewell of the earth," when he thinks of "the promised redeemer," and abruptly changes his mind. The spirit has already left, dancing down the rocks of "those interminable precipices."

Meanwhile, Cain's son, "affeared by his father's ravings," goes out to gather fruit by moonlight, and finds a pitcher and a cake which he brings to his father. Apparently wondering who could have left the pitcher and cake, Cain speculates about the other inhabitants of the world, whether they were created since man, or whether they were pre-Adamites "rescued from the Chaos, wandering like shipwrecked beings from another world."

Then Cain, with suicidal intent, rescues some people from a tiger; they turn out to be his wife and their two children. She wonders how her son Enoch suddenly appeared beside her. In order to be able to answer her, Cain must beg the elements to stop persecuting him. When the elements give him a moment of peace, he tells her of his earlier encounter with the evil

spirit disguised as Abel.

The rest of the rough outline is Cain's speech to his wife: The spirit told Cain about the dual forces that rule the universe. According to the spirit, the being who rules the dead is more powerful than God. Cain followed the fleeing ghost to learn how to serve the power of the dead, descending though an immense gulf of water. As they descended, alligators followed them. Below the water, they came to a hidden meadow, where the spirit sacrificed some blood from his arm: "A gleam of light illumines the meadow--the countenance of Abel becomes beautiful, his arms glistering. . ." The ghost then asked Cain to draw some blood from his son's arm as a sacrifice to the power over the dead. But this was all an evil temptation; the true Abel, in his angelic appearance, along with the Angel Michael, returned in time to warn Cain of the mistake he was about to make. This version ends with the evil spirit, returned to its own shape, pursuing a flying battle with Michael, while the true, angelic Abel carries off the child, presumably to return him to his mother (Coleridge: Poetical Works 285-287 n.1).

The prose poem, labelled Canto II, begins with the part of the story in which Enos[3] guides his father, Cain, through a forest

[3] Note the name change. In the rough draft, Coleridge uses the correct name, Enoch (Hanokh), for Cain's son. In the prose poem, he uses Enos. Coleridge certainly knew that, in

in the moonlight to the mysterious place where the son has found a pitcher and cake. As they travel, their conversation reveals Cain's torments, and Cain's love for his son. Enos, in his innocence, asks his father why the squirrels would not play with him. Cain grieves about the punishments which he continuously receives, and wishes that he were dead. When they emerge from the deep forest, they come to an uncanny terrifying desert, the place where Enos has found the pitcher and cake. Cain and Enos encounter a spirit in the shape of Abel, who laments that he has been faithful to the God of the living, and now is tormented by the God of the dead. The shape claims that the divinity which rules the dead is very different from the one which rules the living. Whoever, like Abel, is beloved of the God of the living will suffer torments after death; but whoever serves the more powerful God of the dead will endure torments only in this life, and experience joy after death. At these words, the innocent Enos prays, but Cain "rejoiced secretly in his heart." Suddenly, the shape of Abel flees, shrieking; Cain eagerly pursues, hoping to learn of the God of the dead. The running feet of the shape leave no mark on the sands. The shape doubles back to the mysterious place, where Enos catches its garment, stopping the shape. There, it promises to reveal the secret of the God of

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English translations of the Bible, Enos (better transliterated Enosh) is the son of Seth (Gen. 5:6), the brother whose progeny will populate the Earth, rather than Cain, whose progeny are doomed in the Flood.

the dead. At this point, the prose poem breaks off (Coleridge: Poetical Works 288-292).

Of the verse version, we have only an eighteen-line fragment, the introductory stanza; if Coleridge ever composed more of the poem, he did not commit it to writing. The stanza is a description of a nearly naked boy picking fruit by moonlight in the tropics. Even though night, in such a climate, is "more beloved" than day, the poet still wonders why the boy should be alone, in such a wild place, without friend or mother (Coleridge: Poetical Works 287). Coleridge makes the connection between the verse fragment and the story of Cain in his "Prefatory Note" to the prose poem. Nothing about the verse fragment, taken alone, indicates that connection; in the context of the rough draft, however, the verse fragment appears to be an expansion of the moment when the "Child, affeared by his father's ravings, goes out to pluck the fruits in the moonlight wildness" (286 n. 1 continued from 285).

Coleridge does not address the relationship between the rough draft and the prose poem. Ernest Hartley Coleridge refers to the rough draft as "a continuation or alternative version of the Wanderings of Cain (sic)" (Coleridge: Poetical Works 285 n. 1), which seems overcautious to me. The prose poem matches the tone and subject of the rough draft, and fits into a gap in the narrative of the rough draft. In the second paragraph

of the rough draft, the child finds a pitcher and cake and brings them to Cain. That paragraph ends abruptly, and the next paragraph picks up the story at a point some time later. In the middle of that paragraph, Cain recounts to his wife that he and the child were in the desert, where they met a young man who appeared to be Abel. The narrative apparently omits the journey of Cain and the child to the desert where they meet the spirit of Abel. The prose poem recounts that journey. Coleridge undoubtedly intended to complete the prose poem according to the entire rough draft.

But let us consider the consequences of assuming that the prose poem was intended to stand apart from the rough draft (following Ernest Hartley Coleridge's hint). In the prose poem, the shape of Abel tells Cain that there is a more powerful God of the dead, opposed to the God of the living. Roston, looking at only the prose poem and ignoring the rough draft, suggests that Coleridge did not intend any answer to the shape's assertion (Biblical Drama 203). Roston considers that Coleridge means the work to express a dualist heresy, which would "cut from Cain's neck the albatross of guilt." The existence of two opposing powers would mean "a dual scale of morality, and hence absolve him from the responsibility for his crime" (Biblical Drama 203).[4] Roston is consistent when

[4] Similarly, Thorslev thinks that "there was more than a hint of Manichaeism in the story" (Thorslev 97).

he writes that Cain's eagerness to "set out upon a quest for the new God of whom he has just learned," that is, the God of the dead, makes Cain a "symbol of intellectual curiosity" (203). Roston speculates that "a Faustian theme is suggested, perhaps free from moral strictures" (203). I think that I can puzzle out what Roston means by that enigmatic phrase: There are some who belong to God, and some, like Faust, who belong to the Devil. But this is a Faustian theme "free from moral strictures," so belonging to the Devil does not mean, as it does for Faust, being damned; it simply means belonging to the other forces in a dualistic world. That interpretation would make this a purely Gnostic version of the story of Cain, quite as radical as the Cain of any of the French poets, and far more radical than Byron's.

Roston explains that Coleridge is driven to this dualistic version of the tale because "a whitewashing of Cain could only be achieved by transferring the guilt in some way to the world at large, and hence to the powers which direct it" (202). Thus Roston finds in "The Wanderings of Cain" a "condemnation of divine dispensation" (202). Roston's argument is not convincing; Gessner certainly produces a version of the story in which Cain is thoroughly "whitewashed," much more so than in Coleridge's; yet Gessner's version is religiously innocuous, and so, largely, is Coleridge's. Byron does take the argument to its conclusion, making sympathy for Cain into

a challenge of the justice of God, and the French poets openly prefer Cain to God.

Probably Roston is not correct; Coleridge very likely did intend to develop his prose poem along the lines of his rough draft. As in the rough draft, so in the prose poem, the apparent ghost of Abel is in fact an evil spirit, disguised as the ghost of Abel, which deceives Cain when it lures him into serving an independent and powerful God of the dead. It lies about Abel, for it describes the torments experienced by Abel after his death, while, at the end of the rough draft, Abel appears as an angel, not at all wretched. The evil spirit is not an accurate reporter of the spirit world, but a deceitful liar, from whom Cain barely escapes with his soul. The angels, at the conclusion of the rough draft, do rescue Enos from the evil spirits, over whom they apparently have power.

The role of Cain in "The Wanderings of Cain" is therefore much less radical than Roston suggests. Coleridge's Cain is a sympathetic figure, almost heroic in his suicidal depression. He loves his son, towards whom he is sensitive and caring. He is filled with anguish, perhaps in remorse over the murder of Abel. When he is tempted to rebel against God, the forces of good protect him from that evil temptation. Coleridge demonstrates, in his portrait of Cain, deep sympathy with the

errant human, and respect for Cain's ability to go on despite guilt, isolation, anguish and depression.[5] Coleridge uses Cain to express pain and dissatisfaction with, but not rebellion against, religious order.

In Coleridge's "Prefatory Note" to "The Wanderings of Cain," he recounts that the work was originally envisioned as a collaboration between himself and Wordsworth, with each poet writing alternate cantos; Wordsworth was to do the first, Coleridge the second, and so forth. When Coleridge finished the second canto, according to his note, he started the third.[6] Since Wordsworth was unable to make any progress on a work so totally alien to his own talents, "the project broke up in a laugh: and the Ancient Mariner was written instead" (Poetical Works 287).[7] The prose poem, marked Canto II, is

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[5] B. Reed describes Cain, in Coleridge's version, as a "spirit of discontent" (Reed 74), which seems too mild a word for a suicidal character.

[6] There is no evidence of a third canto. Perhaps Coleridge finished so little of it that he saw no need to preserve what he had. Or perhaps he never started the third canto, and merely stretched his account of what he had written, as he did with Christabel and several other unfinished works (Fruman 546 note 10).

[7] It is interesting that Ernest Hartley Coleridge lists The Rime of the Ancient Mariner among the works of 1797 (Coleridge: Poetical Works xvi), before Coleridge's attempted collaboration with Wordsworth on "The Wanderings of Cain," which Coleridge remembered as 1798 (Coleridge: Poetical Works 285). So it seems that The Rime of the Ancient Mariner was written before "The Wanderings of Cain" was begun. Fruman collects many examples of the poet's extreme unreliability in assigning dates to his works (Fruman 10-12, 54-6), and perhaps this is another example.

apparently the result of that attempted collaboration.

The only part of the biblical story of Cain which interested Coleridge is exactly described in his title: "The Wanderings of Cain." All three versions begin the story after the crime has been committed. Coleridge does not present any motivation for the crime, nor the crime itself. For that matter, none of Coleridge's versions extend as far as the building of the city of Hanokh. Cain, in the Bible, eventually makes a constructive attempt to deal with his predicament, but Coleridge is not interested in telling that part of the story. The part of the story that fascinates Coleridge, to which he returns in all versions, is Cain wandering in despair.

Norman Fruman asserts that Coleridge was interested in crime and punishment, not in motivation (Fruman 353); "The Wanderings of Cain" is evidence that Fruman is partially right. Actually, Coleridge was most interested in the psychological consequences of the state of sin. In fact, while Coleridge's version of the story of Cain seems to have only weak connections with the details of the biblical text, it would be wrong to overlook the one profound connection which is implicit in the whole work. "The Wanderings of Cain," in all its forms, is an extended meditation on the state of being "away from the presence of God" (Gen. 4:16). Isolation from other people and from God are components of the

state of sin in the biblical story of Cain, and they are nearly the only features of the original story that even appear in Coleridge's versions.

Isolation from God and man, and a pervasive sense of deserved punishment, are also the central features of The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.[8] According to his "Prefatory Note" to "The Wanderings of Cain," Coleridge wrote The Rime of the Ancient Mariner instead of finishing any version of his study of Cain (Coleridge: Poetical Works 287). In the Rime, the poet does not retell the story of Cain, but rather tells a parallel story which casts light on his attitude towards Cain (Lowes, The Road to Xanadu: A Study in the Ways of the Imagination 257-59). The Rime appears to be a reworking of the themes of his versions of Cain, and the extent to which the Rime resonates with the story of Cain is remarkable.[9] The hero kills and is punished severely. He confronts overwhelming supernatural beings. While he achieves partial remission of

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[8] Thorslev lists the common themes of The Rime of the Ancient Mariner and "The Wanderings of Cain": "the crime against innocence, the curse, the eternal and compulsive wandering" (97). Roston provides a more extensive list of parallels: Each poem exhibits a "haunting sense of guilt," a "profound sense of divine justice and mercy;" in each poem, "nature serves as the emissary of God's will;" each protagonist must learn a "lesson of human love" (Prophet and Poet 178).

[9] Forgive my perfunctory treatment of The Rime of the Ancient Mariner. Because it is not a version of the story of Cain, a detailed analysis of that poem would be outside the scope of my project.

his guilt, he must remain a wanderer. In his wandering, his appearance is distinctive: He has a "glittering eye" (line 3). The glittering eye is characteristic of the obsessed, the possessed; in some traditional versions the glittering eye is the mark of Cain (Williams 26); it was also characteristic of Coleridge himself (Bate 36, for the description by Dorothy Wordsworth; 92, for the description by an anonymous travelling companion; 229, for the description by John Lockhart). In all his reworkings of the story of Cain, Coleridge appears to feel close to the role of Cain, and invites his reader to share that closeness.

The Mariner experiences the psychological state of sin as "desperation, guilt and loneliness" (Watson 167); the same is profoundly true of Cain in "The Wanderings of Cain," in which Coleridge presents neither sin nor sentence. In fact, Wordsworth claimed that he suggested to Coleridge the idea that there should be some crime for which the Mariner suffers the special persecution and wanderings (The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth 1:360-361, cited in B. Reed 75; Fruman 271, 512). Apparently, Wordsworth believed that Coleridge originally intended to portray his Mariner as suffering remorse and undergoing penance, without being guilty of any specific crime![10]

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[10] Or at least without letting the reader know what crime he has committed.

Coleridge's fine poems of high imagination are all ascribed to the same period, 1797-8.[11] He assigned Christabel to 1797 (Coleridge: Poetical Works 213); The Rime of the Ancient Mariner was written in 1797 (Fruman 512, n. 20). According to Coleridge's famous Preface, "Kubla Khan" was composed in 1798 (Coleridge: Poetical Works 295-7). Ernest Hartley Coleridge corrects that to 1797, which Fruman accepts as the date of the origin of the poem, while maintaining that it was completed much later (Fruman 544).

The parallels between Christabel and "The Wanderings of Cain" are hard to see, and yet Coleridge, by the very title of Christabel, promises that they must exist. "The name Christ-Abel can thus be seen as embracing the two archetypal victims of man's murderous impulses" (Fruman 362). Actually, the thematic connections between Abel and Christ are far more extensive (see Chapter 3 above).

The last lines of "Kubla Khan," with their portrait of the hypothetical wise man, whom others would approach with "holy dread," create a reverse image to "The Wanderings of Cain." Cain, by virtue of his painful experience, is set apart from others. He has gained some incomplete knowledge of the

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[11] Lowes locates a few places where Coleridge claims that the verse fragment of "The Wanderings of Cain" was composed in the same year as The Rime of the Ancient Mariner and Christabel (Lowes 492).

struggle between the evil spirits and the angels, he has suffered from his insight into his own punishment and guilt, and he succeeds in conveying some of this wisdom to his wife. The conclusion of his message is hopeful: In this gloomy world, angels may rescue us from sinning further. The poet in "Kubla Khan," by virtue of his vision of a damsel with a dulcimer, has something precious to give to others. If only he could do so, he would, by recreating the music of the dulcimer, magically recall the pleasure dome of Kubla Khan, and inspire the same wonderful vision in others. They would treat him with grateful reverence. The Mariner stands mid-way between the poet and Cain. By destroying God's creature, and undergoing the consequences of that sinful act, the Mariner has learned an important message for those people who are ready to hear it. This message is painful, but not cause for despair. It makes one "[a] sadder and a wiser man" (209 line 624); but who, having achieved wisdom, would return to be happier and more superficial? In all three poems, the hero, by virtue of his experience, comes to have a vision; the vision sets him apart from other people, but gives him a role teaching them.

The theme of the isolated, lonely visionary as teacher was so central to Coleridge at that point in his life that it formed the conclusion of all three of his best poems. It seems inescapable to me that Coleridge saw himself, or wanted to see

himself, in exactly that role. Coleridge had no doubt that he had suffered, and that he was different from others; he deeply wanted to believe that, perhaps because of his suffering, what he had to impart was of value. In a way, that makes "Kubla Khan," though it is the sunniest of the three poems, the most painful of them: For while the vision in "Kubla Khan" is pure pleasure, the wistful poet only wishes he could revive that vision. Cain and the Mariner, though their visions are bitter, know what to say. It seems that Coleridge trusted that he could teach that, in this gloomy world, sometimes the angels swoop down to rescue the innocent and keep the guilty from sinning more; he believed he could teach that once a sinner begins to love God's creatures, he begins to recover; but Coleridge doubted that he could teach joy.

There is indeed evidence that Coleridge personally identified with Cain. At the same period in which he wrote "The Wanderings of Cain" and his poems of high imagination, Coleridge wrote a series of autobiographical letters to his friend Thomas Poole (Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge 174, 179, 208, 210, 234). In one of these letters, Coleridge recounted a violent childhood incident, implicitly casting himself in the role of Cain. Coleridge recalled that he was eight years old when, in a dispute over some cheese, he went after his older brother Francis with a knife. His mother returned just at that moment, so Coleridge ran away. He hid

all night, sleeping on the damp, cold hill over the river. Though the men of the village searched for him all night, no one could find him until he sought help in the morning. His parents were overjoyed to see him alive. Coleridge suffered from an illness for years after this incident, and his father died at the same time of the next year (Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge 1:352-53; see discussion in Fruman, 362-3). Bate repeats this story without noticing the parallel to Cain, merely noting that it "seems to have lain more heavily on his [Coleridge's] conscience than anything else in his childhood" (3). The parallels are quite strong: Like Cain, Coleridge feels guilty for attacking his brother. Like Cain, he hides. Like Cain, he is accepted when he returns, but this acceptance does not restore him to his previous innocence: He carries the mark of the incident the rest of his life. The story is somehow connected with the loss of Coleridge's benevolent protective father, which parallels Cain's loss of his relationship with God.

What followed was Coleridge's own encounter with exile. After the death of his father, Coleridge was sent away to a charity boarding school, which he experienced as a terrible banishment (Fruman 21).

> Thus it should not be at all surprising that a sensitive and fearful boy almost completely isolated from his family at the age of nine would

> henceforth in his life find a potent attraction in the theme of loneliness and human isolation (Fruman 361).

In all three poems of high imagination, and in "The Wanderings of Cain," the hero is isolated by his experience. It is not reductionist to point out a connection between Coleridge's masterful presentation of loneliness and his own biography.

Like The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, "The Wandering of Cain" comes from Coleridge's nightmare world. It is a "portrayal of desperation, guilt and loneliness" (Watson 167). The hero is isolated, alienated from others by his own guilt. His striving to repent never reaches direct contact with God, but only with intermediate spirits of uncertain orientation. He suffers greatly, and this suffering is imposed upon him because of his guilt, yet the details and magnitude of the suffering do not seem to be in any calibrated proportion to the details of the original crime. The crime of murder, implicit in "The Wanderings of Cain," seems more worthy of severe punishment than the killing of an albatross in the Rime; but even as a punishment for murder, the unending torment of Cain seems out of balance.

There has been considerable debate about the moral or religious significance of the works from Coleridge's nightmare world. While the debate has largely focussed on the Rime, it

applies with equal force to "The Wanderings of Cain." Bostetter, in "The Nightmare World of The Ancient Mariner" persuasively argues that the "most disturbing characteristic of this universe is the caprice which lies at the heart of it" (68). The punishment which the Mariner endures seems to be determined by chance, literally at one point by a roll of the dice; and there seems to be no logic to the details, such as the death imposed on the other mariners, who seem "guilty of no more than the usual human frailty" (69). This is the logic of nightmare, the product of an artist who was himself haunted by nightmares (Fruman 365-412). These observations militate against attempts to find a "rigidly logical religious interpretation" (Bostetter 69) of that poem.

Thus far, Bostetter adds to our understanding of The Ancient Mariner, and, consequently, of the closely related works about Cain; but Bostetter goes further, concluding that The Rime of the Ancient Mariner "is not morally meaningful beyond our fears and desires" (77). He finds the poem to be "the expression of values which may not be rationally defensible" (77). Bostetter's viewpoint is shared by Lowes, who claims that the poem has no didactic or moral value (The Road to Xanadu 274), and Fruman, who finds the poem "morally bizarre" (354). "Consequence and cause, in terms of the world of reality, are ridiculously incommensurable" (Lowes 275). "The punishment, measured by the standards of a world of balanced

penalties, palpably does not fit the crime. But the sphere of balanced penalties is not the given world in which the poem moves" (Lowes 275).

The poem specifically offends against Bostetter's notion of what can be morally meaningful in two ways. First, in the universe of the poem, sin brings punishment. Bostetter thinks that no modern person can seriously maintain such a frightening magical belief, but that the belief still has the power to scare us:

> No matter how emancipated from the magical view of the universe modern man may be intellectually, he can never free himself from it emotionally or from the values associated with it . . . The inexorable punishment, penance, and redemption for sin is not the law of life, but most of us are afraid it might be (76).

Bostetter cannot accept the moral seriousness of the scary anthropocentric belief in sin and punishment, which is akin to "medieval Catholicism, seventeenth century Puritanism, or the lurid Calvinism of the extreme Evangelicals of Coleridge's own day" (67-68).

Second, Bostetter objects to the moment in the poem at which the Mariner, having blessed the water snakes, is still subject to penance. "The God who loved man should have been merciful

and forgiving" (71). The "dear God" of the soothing conclusion of the poem ". . . who loveth us, / He made and loveth all" is inconsistent with the punishing God of the middle of the poem. Bostetter cannot accept the moral seriousness of a God whose forgiveness is not instant and total.[12]

It seems to me that the two positions which Bostetter would find morally serious are what William James called "the religion of healthy-mindedness"[13] in which the optimistic believer is confident of his relationship with God, or, if I may term it that, "the atheism of healthy mindedness," in which the optimistic unbeliever is confident and relieved that there is no One to deal out punishment.

Neither of these positions was open to Coleridge. As far as I understand him, Coleridge was the sort of person whom William James describes, not at all pejoratively, as "the sick soul" (James 125-162). Coleridge's religious bent was predicated not only on the knowledge, but on the deep inner

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[12] Incidentally, Bostetter's two objections to the morality of The Rime of the Ancient Mariner contradict each other. If pain is not caused by sin, why must pain be relieved by penitence?

[13] The terminology, and title, of Lecture IV and V of The Varieties of Religious Experience 77-124. James says of these that "they have no vivid conception of any of the qualities in which the severer majesty of God consists" (80).

experience, of sin and suffering.[14] Solace comes to the sick soul in the faith that his suffering and sinfulness mean something, that is to say, that there is a God for whom this all has, in some mysterious way, meaning. It is not a problem for him, primarily, that the justice of God is inscrutable, so long as he can believe it exists. Bostetter writes that "The inexorable punishment, penance, and redemption for sin is not the law of life, but most of us are afraid it might be"(76), which suggests to me that Bostetter completely misunderstands Coleridge. Coleridge's deepest fear was that he would not be judged by an inscrutable God. His deepest fear was that all his suffering was without meaning. Coleridge voices these ideas with painful eloquence, giving thanks for those moments of insight in his life which:

> . . . prove to the afflicted Soul, that it has not yet been deprived of the sight of God, that it can still recognize the effective presence of a Father, though through a darkened glass and a turbid atmosphere, though of a Father that is chastening it. (Biographia Literaria 2:207,8; See discussion in Jasper, "The Two Worlds of Coleridge's 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.'" 104).

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[14] A typical observation, from a letter to Josiah Wade dated February 1796: "For shame! I ought not to mistrust God! but indeed, to hope is far more difficult than to fear" (Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge 1: 184,5).

The objections against Coleridge's morality in the Rime apply to "The Wanderings of Cain." No mention is made in any of the versions of this work of the murder of Abel, but certainly Cain's suffering is the dire result of that crime. Yet his suffering seems excessive: Cain would dearly love to die, he is so agonized that he can barely communicate with his wife and children. The evil spirits tempt him: Is that part of his punishment? Why should he be tempted to do more evil? Cain is deeply confused. There seems to be no way for him to tell the difference between the evil spirit, masquerading as the resurrected Abel, and Abel in his angelic appearance. When the evil spirit promises Cain that the God of the dead is more powerful than the God of the living, Cain seems to have no way of knowing that this is cunning deceit; how can he protect himself from the tempting notion? Even that may be too optimistic a description of the action: There are evil spirits in this work, evil spirits who can battle against the angels. From where does their power come? What is the nature of a world in which such beings can exist?

Lowe, Bostetter and Fruman find the world of Coleridge's nightmare works to be "morally bizarre" (Fruman 354). In the end, they either dismiss the moral system of the Rime as a flaw, or condescendingly accept it as true only within the work. It is possible that the objection which these critics raise is not so much moral as literary. After all, we do not

demand poetic justice from realistic fiction, or from newspaper articles. The Rime of the Ancient Mariner and "The Wanderings of Cain" are more like fables or parables, in which we do expect intelligible morality. The problem in "The Wanderings of Cain," as in the other nightmare works, might not be primarily incoherence or inner contradiction, but offense against our expectation that a work of fantasy should take place in a morally simple world.

Actually, poetic justice is not entirely absent from The Rime of the Ancient Mariner. The poem does end with a clear and simple moral, which seems inconsistent with the tale. This would be a powerful objection if Coleridge maintains that the whole universe is part of the nightmare; but he maintains that the nightmare is part of the universe, the part of the universe that one inhabits when one is "away from the presence of God." The moral is a statement of faith, not a logical conclusion.

> O Wedding-Guest! this soul hath been
> Alone on a wide wide sea;
> So lonely 'twas, that God himself
> Scarce seemèd there to be. (lines 597-600).

"Scarce seemèd there to be." Even in his nightmare works, Coleridge maintains, not that God can be absent, but that we can lose our awareness of the presence of God.

The sense of having lost one's moral bearings, which so

afflicts Coleridge's Cain; the sense that one's fate is determined by chance;[15] the sense that one is alone, frightened, isolated; that sense is a psychological consequence of sin: being "away from the presence of God." The deepest of the torments which Coleridge's Cain suffers are these purely psychological torments. This is consistent with Coleridge's personal experience of terrifying nightmares, and also with his most deeply held subjectivist religious philosophy.

Coleridge, at one point in his education, was a devotee of Spinoza, whose attack on the reliability of the Biblical text was developed by the German forerunners of higher Biblical Criticism. Coleridge studied those German Bible scholars, and defended the Bible in his own way.[16] The Bible is not inerrant for Coleridge, rather, it is potent. "Whatever finds

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[15] This may seem antithetical to any biblical perspective. It is not. Compare: "If you walk with me by chance. . . then I will walk with you by violent chance" (Lev. 26:27-28).

[16] Abrams points out the influence on Coleridge of the Inner Light Protestants. One of these, Winstanley, attaches

> a spiritual sense to the key personages, places, events, actions, and doctrines represented in the Bible, but he systematically invalidates the literal sense. As a result, Biblical history is completely internalized and the entire text becomes no more than sustained metaphoric vehicle for the powers, states, conflicts and processes of individual's mind. (Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism 52).

Coleridge's subjectivism is closely related to the religious philosophy of these Inner Light Protestants.

me, bears witness that it has proceeded from a Holy Spirit" (Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit 10; See discussion in Jasper, Coleridge as a Poet and Religious Thinker 133). The truth of the Bible is to be measured not in objective, but subjective, terms (Prickett 44).

> Further, he distinguished so strongly between the internal faith with lies at the base of, and supports, the whole moral and religious being of man, and the belief, as historically true, of several incidents and relations found or supposed to be found in the text of the Scriptures . . . (H. N. Coleridge, xi. See discussion in Prickett 40).

Most defenders of the Bible in Coleridge's day focussed on the biblical miracles as proof of the Bible's value; Coleridge focusses on the effect of the Bible on its readers (Prickett 57). "[T]he purpose of Sacred History, or of Miracles, is to reveal the Subjectivity, the personal subsistence and life, of the supreme mind. . . ." (From Coleridge's notebooks, No. 39 in the British Museum Manuscript 47, 534, p. 48, quoted by Prickett 61). There seems to be a straight line from the psychological torments in "The Wanderings of Cain," to the subjectivist bent of Coleridge's mature religious faith.

If the Bible, for Coleridge, claims no more direct truth than the subjective experience it creates for readers, how much

less appropriate is it for other imaginative works to claim direct transmission of religious truth.[17] The religious significance of "The Wanderings of Cain" and The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, therefore, will not be in the content or doctrine which can be found in their words, but in the change which they work on a reader. "Is 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'(sic) a religious poem, or not? Coleridge's answer is . . . try it, and see!" (Jasper, Coleridge as a Poet and Religious Thinker 150). So, disappointing anyone who seeks religious truth in the specific doctrines of a poem, Coleridge tries to give his readers a religious experience in reading the poem.

For Coleridge, the religious stimulus is unformed, incomplete, at best, "a mystery of religion which escapes any theoretical formulation or control by doctrine" (Jasper, Coleridge as a Poet and Religious Thinker 62-3). The religious personality reacts to this incomplete stimulus with an impulse of faith, trust or hope, just as the Mariner does to his experience. The impulse is never fully justified by the experience. Even the Bible does not try to be the record of neat, didactic principles, fully borne out in the lives of the biblical

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[17] Coleridge writes that "in the Bible there is more that finds me than I have experienced in all other books together" (Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit 13). As Jasper observes, however, the difference for Coleridge between the Bible and other works of religious literature is one of degree (Jasper, Coleridge as Poet and Religious Thinker 150).

figures. That is why "The Wanderings of Cain" and The Rime of the Ancient Mariner can never be seamless, whole, without contradiction. The literary and religious paradigms to which Coleridge aspired, judging by his practice, were certain enigmatic biblical narratives such as the binding of Isaac, or Jacob's dream of the ladder, or Jacob wrestling with the angel. These narratives, poor, contradictory sources of explicit dogma, are rich sources of religious experience.

The sacrifices demanded by the evil spirits in "The Wanderings of Cain" are suggestive: Cain's eyes, and blood from Cain's son. When Oedipus loses his eyes, when Samson loses his eyes, the symbolic meaning is that the present loss of eyes is a consequence of past failure to "see" or understand. Cain is ready to put out his eyes because he cannot "see" that it is an evil spirit tempting him to do so. Unlike Oedipus, unlike Samson, whose eyes are put out when they finally "see" clearly, and understand the significance of what has happened without eyes, Cain nearly loses his eyes in ignorance. It is not clear whether he would then ever understand that he was in bondage to evil. With his eyes put out, he might be powerless ever to understand. The blood of a child sacrificed to the God of the dead is an equally suggestive idea. Blood is the food of the dead in classical mythology, and the Bible warns its readers away from the idolatrous practice of sacrificing children (Lev. 18:21, 20:2-4; Jer. 32:35).

Coleridge structures "The Wanderings of Cain" so that the reader will identify with Cain. The other characters essentially appear only to illuminate Cain's situation. In the work, Cain faces a morally unclear universe; he is himself morally unclear. He is remorseful, but not wholly repentant: He is tempted by the evil spirit's talk of a stronger God of the dead, so tempted that he nearly sins again. Benevolent forces, in the rough draft, rescue Cain from sacrificing to the forces of evil. Even so, Cain's rescue is only partial; nothing relieves Cain's suicidal despondency. This is a "complex" version of the tale. The reader sympathizes with Cain, though Cain remains flawed, with no assurance that he can achieve goodness. This is truly a new way to look at Cain.

Coleridge collected elements of this new portrait of Cain from a wide variety of sources. The breadth of Coleridge's reading, in several languages, is almost unbelievable. "It is never safe to assume that Coleridge had not read anything published before the year of his death" (Herbert Reed 96). Coleridge was, for all his extensive plagiarism (Fruman 43-49), also an incredibly inventive thinker. He introduced original ideas, in his writing on philosophy, psychology, theology, literary criticism, economics, biblical scholarship, and political science. There is no reason to assume that Coleridge received his image of Cain exactly from any early

source. Coleridge's portrait of Cain, like much else in Coleridge, shows both scholarship and creativity.

The words of the evil spirit, disguised as the ghost of Abel, precisely echo the words of the Gnostic philosopher, recorded long ago by the Church Father, Hippolytus of Rome. The Gnostic philosopher develops a contrast between Abel and "Cain, whose sacrifice was not accepted by the God of this world. The gory sacrifice of Abel he approved of, for the ruler of this world rejoices in (offerings of) blood" (Uffenheimer 47; Hippolytus, The Refutation of All Heresies Book 5, Chapter 11, ANF 5:63).

The single source with the greatest impact on Coleridge's version of Cain is certainly Gessner's Der Tod Abels. Coleridge himself explicitly notes that his fragment "The Wanderings of Cain," was originally to be part of a prose poem in three cantos intended to "imitate the Death of Abel."[18] Lowes demonstrates that Coleridge owned a copy of The Death of Abel (234) before he wrote "The Wanderings of Cain." B. Reed

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[18] Thorslev cites Coleridge's words as "to imitate the Death of Abel" (97). Ernest Hartley Coleridge has it "to imitate the Death of Abel" (287) without italics or underlining, perhaps not explicitly referring to Gessner's work. I would be interested in finding out if Coleridge marked book titles in his writings.

If, indeed, Coleridge does not mean to refer to a specific work, then he must mean the verb "imitate," as a technical term based on Aristotle's description, in the Poetics, of the imitative function of tragedy and art in general.

points out that Coleridge's work can be read as a continuation of Gessner's (The Influence of Solomon (sic) Gessner upon English Literature 73-4). In Biblical Drama in England, Roston writes that, "[s]ince Coleridge's own attempt was written in a rhythmical prose, there can be little doubt that he was alluding to Gessner's version as the model" (202). Elsewhere, Roston distinguishes between the prose styles of the two works.[19] Certainly the gothic tone of Coleridge's piece, with its shrieking ghost, shows the influence of Gessner. The large portion of the two works devoted to landscape description is another common feature. However, in contrast with the charming landscapes of "The Death of Abel," those in "The Wanderings of Cain" are gothic horrors:

> The pointed and shattered summits of the ridges of the rocks made a rude mimicry of human concerns, and seemed to prophecy mutely of things that then were not; steeples, and battlements, and ships with naked masts. (290 lines 81-84).

Cain's relationships with the members of his family in Coleridge's work resemble those in the Swiss poet's. B. Reed notes that, in both works, Cain marries his sister, and has a

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[19] "Gessner's work . . . was a somewhat turgid prose piece in no way indebted to the Bible linguistically: but in Coleridge's version, entitled The Wanderings of Cain, the parallelistic prose is unmistakably Jobian" (Roston, Prophet and Poet 177). In diction, Coleridge's versions reveal a debt to certain heightened prophetic biblical passages, rather than to the understated narrative of the Cain story.

close relationship with her and with their children (B. Reed 74). Furthermore, Coleridge probably derives the idea for a special role for Cain's son from Gessner, and even some details of what that role would be:

> [W]e see a child made a leading spirit in a poem, as in The Wanderings of Cain, acting as a guide to the father, animating him with his childish prattle, and encouraging him when the way seems too dark and wearisome. . . . the same thing had been a quarter of a century before by our Swiss poet, Gessner. (B. Reed 72).

B. Reed asserts that "Coleridge's Cain is the same loving father as Gessner's Cain" (73). The result of all this familial affection is that Cain is made sympathetic, but also "distinctly sentimentalized" (Thorslev 97).

Both Gessner and Coleridge generate sympathy for Cain by emphasizing the depth of Cain's melancholy. In each work, Cain, as he endures his punishments, is deeply despondent. In Coleridge's prose poem, Cain's son Enos is puzzled that the playful squirrels will not include him: "Why, O my father, would they not play with me? I would be good to them as thou art good to me . . ."(lines 24-26). Cain is overcome when he hears this innocent question, and cannot not continue to walk; he prays for his own death. Apparently the question reminds him of the potential for violence in the human heart, a

potential which his young son has not suspected, but which Cain knows intimately. Coleridge combines in this one incident several of the elements of Gessner's sympathy for Cain: Cain's love for his innocent son, Cain's suffering, and his melancholy.

There are significant differences between the portrait of Cain in the two works, however. Gessner's account of the murder mitigates the guilt of Cain. B. Reed somewhat overzealously claims the same for Coleridge. "Cain, as Coleridge depicts him, had never hated Abel. And in Gessner,--we have Cain's own word for it--he bore no malice toward his brother" (B. Reed 79). In fact, "The Wanderings of Cain" takes place after the death of Abel, and there is no mention at all of the motive for the crime, nor of Cain's attitude towards the living Abel.

B. Reed sees another parallel which I do not see: "In the suffering and remorse of [Coleridge's] Cain is again seen Gessner's influence" (B. Reed 74). But there is no mention of remorse in Coleridge's version. Gessner's work is a conventional religious tale, for his Cain deeply regrets having killed Abel, from the very moment after the murder wishing that he, rather than Abel, were dead. Coleridge's Cain shows no unambiguous remorse about the death of Abel. In Coleridge's work, Cain also wishes he were dead, but not

necessarily because he regrets the murder. Perhaps Cain feels guilt, or perhaps only self-pity. Coleridge's Cain reacts to the sight of the ghost of his brother ambiguously, "like one who struggles in his sleep because of the exceeding terribleness of a dream" (290 lines 112-14). He asks the ghost a tender question: "The Creator of our father, who had respect unto thee, and unto thy offering, wherefore hath he forsaken you?" (291 lines 125-27). Though he shows some solicitude towards his brother's ghost, he cries for his own agonies. He says, revealingly, "Abel, my brother, I would lament for thee, but that the spirit within me is withered, and burnt up with extreme agony" (292 lines 164-65). The difference between Gessner and Coleridge on this point mirrors an ambiguity in the Bible. In Gen. 4:13, Cain laments over his great "avon," which can mean either "sin" or "punishment." Gessner's Cain laments over his sin; Coleridge's over his punishment.

In fact, Gessner's Cain would clearly deserve the name penitent, except that he scarcely deserves the name sinner:

> . . . Gessner frees Cain from the last vestige of blame. Differing wholly from the Biblical Cain, he is a perfectly innocent murderer. He intended to do no wrong, but a calamity has come, and for that he is sorry. He would undo the wrong if he could. (B. Reed 74).

The moral picture of Coleridge's Cain is not so one-dimensional. There is simply no evidence about the murder, nor about Cain's subsequent evaluation of the murder. Cain lives in torment (288-9 lines 32-47; 292 lines 171) and is overcome by an emotion (288 lines 29-30) which might be guilt. On the other hand, he is tempted to serve the God of the dead, according to the prose poem; according to the rough draft, he almost sacrifices blood of his son's arm to that deity: "He then persuades Cain to offer sacrifice, for himself and his son Enoch by cutting his child's arm and letting the blood fall from it. Cain is about to do it. . ." (Rough draft 286 n. 1). In the prose poem, when he hears that there is a God of the dead, Cain "rejoiced secretly in his heart" (291 lines 142).

B. Reed herself identifies one difference between Cain as portrayed by Gessner and as portrayed by Coleridge. Coleridge's Cain is, unlike Gessner's, as a "spirit of . . . inquiry" (74). He does ask his son to corroborate the evidence of his senses, when he first sees the spirit disguised as his dead brother (291 line 124); he similarly questions the spirit about its fate (292 lines 126-8), about Abel's relationship with God (292 lines 138-9) and about the nature of the God of the dead (292 lines 150-51). Following B. Reed, Roston asserts that Cain's motive, in seeking out the God of the dead, is "intellectual curiosity" (Biblical Drama

203). As I look at Cain's questions, though, it seems to me that they are all connected to his immediate situation. He is more pushed by his misery than pulled by his intellect.

> Who is the God of the dead? where doth he make his dwelling? what sacrifices are acceptable unto him? for I have offered, but have not been received; I have prayed, and have not been heard; and how can I be afflicted more than I already am? (292 lines 168-172).

The real pioneer of the vision of Cain as a champion of intellectual inquiry would be Byron.

Coleridge knew of the story of Cain as presented in an old German miracle play by Hans Sachs, and probably attended a performance of the play (Lowes 496-7), although that was after he wrote at least the first draft of "The Wanderings of Cain." What impressed him most about the mystery play was the completely domesticated interactions between God and the Adam family, in which Cain fails to pull off his little hat in respect for God, and for which Cain is boxed about the ears. Coleridge apparently found the work ingenuous, and did not use it as a model for "The Wanderings of Cain."

Coleridge apparently consulted Josephus' comments on Cain as part of his research for the "Wanderings of Cain" (Lowes 216, 233). His Notebooks contain two excerpts, in Greek, from

Josephus (Antiquities 1:2:2), with information about Cain (Lowes 216, 492). Lowes thinks that Josephus is a source for Coleridge's Cain. Josephus' particular ideas about Cain, however, that Cain is motivated by avarice, for instance, and that farming is morally inferior to shepherding, do not appear in "The Wanderings of Cain."

Coleridge develops sympathy for Cain by emphasizing the terrible punishments which Cain endures. In the prose poem, Cain is so disfigured that he frightens his own loving son (289 line 62). Coleridge does not make clear whether Cain's horrible appearance is the sign of Cain, or the result of his punishment:

> For the mighty limbs of Cain were wasted as by fire; his hair was as the matted curls on the bison's forehead, and so glared his fierce and sullen eye beneath; and the black and abundant locks on either side, a rank and tangled mass, were stained and scorched, as though the grasp of a burning iron hand had striven to rend them; and his countenance told in a strange and terrible language of agonies that had been, and were, and were to continue to be. (289 lines 62-69).

In the rough draft, his punishment includes persecution by the elements. He has to ask the elements "to cease for a while to

persecute him" so that he can tell his story "at last" to his wife (286 n. 1). Coleridge might have found each of these disfiguring features in earlier sources. Coleridge's Cain is hairy, like the Cain in the Cornish mystery Gwreans an Bys [Creation of the World] lines 1507,8 cited in Mellinkoff, The Mark of Cain 70). The hair is dark: In this, Coleridge follows Gessner and some ancient sources, although the obvious contrast with the blond Abel is missing in Coleridge. The hair is curly like that "on a bison's forehead"; this description recalls, without exactly stating, the belief that Cain's mark is some bestial feature located on his forehead. It may even be related to the ancient legend that Cain's mark is a horn growing out of his forehead (Bereshit Rabbah 22:12; the horn appears in the Cornish Creation of the World mystery, cited above, and in an extensive list of medieval sources collected in Mellinkoff, The Mark of Cain 59-72).

Coleridge's Cain wears a mark of burning. Cain also appears scorched in ancient legend (Bereshit Rabbah 22:6. Also see Ginzburg, 1:108; Mellinkoff, The Mark of Cain 127 n. 182). The last mark, the anguished look of Cain's face, should not be traced to any specific ancient source. It is rather to be expected in any version which, like Coleridge's, has a psychological focus.

Cain, in the Bible, exhibits religious fervor, which most

exegetes subsequently ignore. Some of the kabbalistic commentators do emphasize this characteristic (see Chapter 4). In the prose poem, Coleridge has Cain explain his search for the God of the dead partly in terms of unrequited fervor: "for I have offered, but have not been received; I have prayed, and have not been heard" (292 lines 169-171). The passage is equivocal, however; perhaps Cain prays only for release from his torments. Coleridge's positive view of Cain might be influenced by his reading of students of the kabbalah; or perhaps when he only later found these kabbalistic sources, he recorded them because they reinforce his own predisposition towards Cain. However, Coleridge's portrait of Cain in "The Wanderings of Cain" is not identical with those in kabbalistic sources. Coleridge focuses on Cain's spiritual torment, without giving any of the kabbalistic assurance that Cain will ultimately be redeemed. If Coleridge's Cain has great spiritual powers, they are not evident. Nonetheless, Coleridge was aware of mystical versions of the story of Cain, primarily those of Jacob Boehme, and these may have had some influence on his decision to write a sympathetic treatment of the biblical figure. Beer speculates that Coleridge was familiar with other Christian students of Kabbalah, including Henry More and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (Beer 58-9). Swedenborg is another possible conduit of kabbalistic thought to Coleridge (Beer 56-8). The messianic Cain is not the only kabbalistic idea in Coleridge: Beer cites, for example,

references in Coleridge's notebooks (Beer 59, 287) to the Shechinah.[20]

Later, Coleridge would make an entry in his notebooks about at least one exegetical source for a positive view of Cain, the idea, put forth by Jacob Boehme, the Christian mystic: "that Eve had expected Cain to be the new man who would vanquish the serpent" (Beer 71).[21] Coleridge "also mentioned more than once the expectation among the nations that the Messiah would be the Serpent-treader" (Beer 71).[22] This shows the influence of the most extravagantly sympathetic view of Cain, that he could have been the Messiah but failed to realize his potential, or perhaps, that he yet will be the Messiah, for the Messiah will partake of the soul of Cain.

In "The Wanderings of Cain," Cain must travel to an underwater grotto to meet the evil spirit of Abel. This recalls Beowulf, in which the hero has to travel to an underwater grotto to meet the evil descendant of Cain, the monstrous mother of

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[20] Coleridge's use of the term is not conclusive proof of his knowledge of kabbalah. The term is also used by non-mystical Hebrew writers.

[21] Beer (326) traces the observations back to Boehme, The Three Principles of the Divine Essence, in Works, . . . with figures, illustrating his Principles, left by the Rev. W. Law. 4 Volumes (1764-81) Vol.I, ii, p.204.

[22] Coleridge makes oblique reference to this idea in his later notebooks, now in the British Museum collection 36.35. (Beer 71, 156, 326).

Grendel. Note, though, that Cain has switched sides: Instead of identifying him with the denizen of the underwater cave, as in Beowulf, Coleridge identifies him with the heroic invader.

It is possible that the legend of the Wandering Jew also influences Coleridge's portrait of Cain, for the poet was deeply moved by Matthew Gregory Lewis' Monk (published in 1795), which centers on the story of the Jew (Lowes 223). Coleridge probably knew the story from several other sources as well, and, at one point, he planned to write a romance on the theme (Lowes 226).[23]

Coleridge, by expanding on the biblical portrait of Cain wandering, suffering, cut off from God and from his fellow humans, deals with the part of the story that gains Cain the greatest sympathy. It is also the part of the story which touched the poet the most deeply, and which he recast in his greatest poems. In portraying Cain, he expresses "the new sympathy which the romantic felt for the suffering sinner." Cain has "been transformed from a callous villain into a member of the romantic brotherhood" (Roston, Biblical Drama 202); but an unfortunate brother, not yet a hero to emulate. Because Coleridge does not champion Cain's cause, his Cain is,

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[23] His work was possibly to be in imitation of Monk, or of the Percy Ballad, "The Wandering Jew" (Lowes 222), or of a comic play, The Wandering Jew, or Love's Masquerade, by Andrew Franklin (Lowes 225).

at least on the surface, not very threatening to religious pieties. Cain is an afflicted and guilty man who tries to find his way in a murky universe, "spiritually isolated, conscious of his own moral failings, and yearning eternally and vainly for relief from his pain" (Roston 202). Whenever Coleridge recounts the story, Cain seems unfortunately like the storyteller.

Chapter Seven: Byron's Cain, A Mystery

Byron wrote Cain, A Mystery, between July 16 and September 9 of 1821, and had his friend Murray publish it late that year (Steffan 3-6).[1] The work shocked its first readers, who launched a firestorm of criticism, accusing Byron of Satanic blasphemy (Steffan 331-426; Goode 10). The Chancery Court found the work unworthy of copywrite protection, since its intent was arguably to "traduce and discredit . . . part of sacred history" (Lord Eldon's judgment in Murray v. Benbow, Steffan 15-6). Other readers, accepting the assessment of the play as a daring attack on conventional religion, applauded the author. Historically, the figure of Cain in Byron's play was read as a simple image of rebellion. It has taken many years for even a minority of the critics to recognize the enigmatic nature of the play, and the divided loyalties which Byron reveals in his presentation of Cain.

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[1] Truman Guy Steffan accompanies his critical edition of Byron's Cain with exhaustive, and perceptive, supporting essays. There is no need for me to duplicate Steffan's efforts by attempting a complete critical study of Byron's play, even if I had space and ability. My responsibility is to relate the play to the continuing development of the theme of Cain.

In the first act, Byron presents the pious but dull family of Adam, in contrast with the intelligent rebel Cain. Lucifer, attracted, so he says, by Cain's defiant thoughts, finds him a worthy companion. He generously enlightens Cain about theological matters, and magnanimously offers to take him on a journey which will satiate Cain's thirst for knowledge. If Byron had written only the first act, we would be correct in identifying the author with Cain and Lucifer, and the theme would be nothing less than their justified rebellion against the tyrant God.[2] But he wrote more.

In the second act, Lucifer serves as the guide on an educational tour of outer space and then of Hades, all the while continuing his philosophical discussion with Cain. The tone of the discussion becomes progressively more strained, as Lucifer becomes less interested in showing respect for Cain, and more in depressing him with tales of the eternal misery of creation. Cain, for his part, becomes dissatisfied when Lucifer refuses to teach him more, though disheartened by what

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[2] This is how the play is read by a host of critics, among them Thompson (406) and Marchand, who consider Lucifer the "a champion of humanity against an authoritarian and arbitrary deity" (Byron's Poetry 86).

Byron himself objected to this reading of the play:

> I am taxed with having made my drama a peg to hang on it a long, and some say tiresome, dissertation on the principle of Evil; and, what is worse, having given Lucifer the best of the argument. (Medwin 129).

he has already learned. Lucifer ends the act by asserting the eternity of his battle with God, and his moral superiority over God. If Byron had written only the second act, we would rightly consider this either a Gnostic work or a nihilist one, depending on whether we see Lucifer[3] or Cain as the hero. But Byron wrote more.

In the third act, Cain, recently returned to Earth but still depressed and agitated, placates his brother and sister by offering a sacrifice, though doing so offends against his own beliefs. His discomfort converts to rage when Abel explains that God has accepted Abel's sacrifice while rejecting Cain's. Cain tries to overthrow his brother's altar, Abel defends, and, in the ensuing struggle, Cain kills Abel. Stricken with remorse and utterly defeated, Cain accepts without protest the traditional punishments from an Angel, and bitter curses from Eve. He is prepared to wander off alone, but Adah, his sister and wife, refuses to part from him. If Byron had written only the third act, we would judge his theme to be either the futility of rebellion against God,[4] if Cain is the hero, or

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[3] Byron was afraid that critics would accuse him of Manacheism (Medwin 129), and many have. Steffan provides a list of those who see Lucifer as the hero and Byron as a Manachee (456).

[4] So, for example, Wolf Z. Hirst reads the play in his "Byron's Lapse into Orthodoxy: An Unorthodox Reading of Cain." Hirst concludes his excellent essay by characterizing the action of the play as "a Job-like rebellion and silence in the face of Divine mystery" (172).

the overriding value of faithful love, if Adah is the heroine.[5]

And there the play ends, leaving each of the three main characters with virtues and faults. "The moral norm in Cain is not," as McGann notes, "embodied in any single character" (Fiery Dust 255). Perhaps it is "implied in the dramatic relationships that develop between various people" (McGann, Fiery Dust 255), or in "the play's structure and tone" (Hirst 152); perhaps it is a puzzle without solution. While Cain reads as a complete play in three acts, Byron's other plays have five acts, and in his original planning he apparently expected to write two more acts for Cain as well (LJ V, 189). It may be that he intended to resolve the enigmas in those acts; possibly he was unable to write more precisely because he could not reach a resolution.

Byron's usual concern for historical accuracy appears, in this work, as faithfulness to the biblical text:[6] "I had always though Cain a fine subject, and when I took it up I determined to treat it strictly after the Mosaic account" (Medwin 126).

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[5] So Cook, who writes that "latent criticism of the self-centered attitude" is a major theme of Cain (Cook 110).

[6] Steffan summarizes several of Byron's letters in which Byron writes of the importance of historical accuracy; oddly enough, Steffan asserts that this tenet has little bearing on Cain (23); Marchand, however, does note the relevance (Byron's Poetry 99).

He does not pay such respect to the traditional understanding of Cain. In his Preface to Cain, Byron defends his practice by noting:

> Whatever interpretation the Rabbins and the Fathers may have put upon this, I take the words as I find them and reply with Bishop Watson upon similar occasions, when the Fathers were quoted to him as Moderator in the schools of Cambridge, 'behold the Book!' holding up the Scripture. (Preface 155).

And the finished play does accord with Byron's appeal to "the Book," for "despite the startling divergence of his Cain from conventional characterizations, only in the smallest details is there any discrepancy between the scriptural account and the Byronic" (Roston, Biblical Drama 204). Even so, many critics "scolded him for daring to distort the holy scripture"[7] (Steffan 67). In fact there are few distortions, and the changes which Byron does make are not what aroused the ire of his critics.

The major discrepancies from the biblical account are these:

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[7] Some of the most modern critics, though no longer scolding, hold this opinion yet: "Byron took even more liberties than Milton with the story in Genesis. Cain the intellectual rebel is wholly Byron's invention" (Marchand, Byron's Poetry 87).

Hirst, however, maintains that "Cain the epitome of the glorified Romantic rebel does not preclude Cain the protagonist of a drama truly Biblical in spirit" ("Byron's Lapse into Orthodoxy" 162). Hirst apparently disagrees with Marchand about the nature of both the Bible and Byron's play.

In the play, Abel takes the lead in bringing the offerings, rather than Cain as in the Bible (III, 214-79);[8] there is, in the play, no delay between the offerings and the murder; Adam, rather than God, proclaims Cain's exile, (III, 444-446, 451-52); an Angel, rather than God, announces Cain's punishment (III, 469-476) and sets the mark on Cain's brow (III, 494). Adah, rather than Cain, responds by begging for mercy (III, 477-482). No systematic philosophical position accounts for these changes; Steffan believes that Byron makes them for dramatic, rather than theological, reasons (69 note 3, 74-5).

Indeed, the one change for which Byron does offer a theological motive (or partially theological and partially literary) is intended to make the work more respectful of religion, rather than less:

> I have even avoided introducing the Deity--as in the Scriptures--(though Milton does and not very wisely either) but have adopted his Angel as sent to Cain instead--on purpose to avoid shocking any feelings on the subject by falling short--of what all uninspired men must fall short in--viz--giving an adequate representation of the effect of the presence. . . . (Letter to Murray, Feb. 8, 1822. LJ

[8] Note Byron's stage direction: They dress their altars and kindle a flame upon them (following III, 219). The two sacrifices are simultaneous, but at every step in preparing them, and in offering prayers afterwards, Abel precedes Cain.

VI, 16 BL&J 9:103).[9]

Within the constraint of faithfulness to the Bible, there is still much room for elaboration, since "the brief biblical account, by restricting itself as usual to the actions and words of the participants, gave almost no indication of their motives or religious inclinations" (Roston, Biblical Drama 204). In those areas, Byron displays complete disdain for the conventional understanding of Cain. Cain appears as a sympathetic hero, and, throughout most of the play, defiant of both God and human order. Byron's return to the biblical text for his source evidently gives him the freedom to create a complex Cain, like the ambiguous Cain of the Bible. This is a protagonist sophisticated enough to convey Byron's complex relationship with traditional religious faith. To most readers, however, his cavalier disregard for the traditional understanding of Cain, accompanied as it is by the impious arguments of Cain and of Lucifer, identified the play as a simple attack against religion. In Byron's day, and for a long time thereafter, most critics "discussed the work more as

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[9] Byron's letter combines a literary and theological point. Steffan offers an analysis of the purely literary difficulties introducing the Deity would have brought Byron (74-75). Byron hints at these difficulties in this letter to Murray, but he also addresses the religious issues. Note the delicacy of Byron's expression, "all uninspired men," allowing that inspired writers, such as those of the Bible, can attempt and even achieve the sublime effect of the presence of God. This pious thought is completely consistent with Byron's high estimation of the literary value of the Hebrew Bible.

an antitheological tract than as a drama" (Thorslev 176). Whether they approved of the play or not seems to depend more on their theological beliefs than on any artistic analysis of the work.[10]

I will study how Byron modified the traditional story of Cain in this play, and the play, in turn, influenced further developments in the theme of Cain. I am interested, primarily, in the specific characteristics which Byron assigned to Cain before the crime, the motive for the crime, and the changes in Cain after the crime. Because Byron portrayed Cain in contrast with two other characters, Lucifer and Adah, I especially examine Cain's interactions with them.

From the beginning of the play, Cain is a complex character; many passages in the play show changing configuration of positive and negative characteristics which make up Byron's hero. Cain's very first lines display his heroic defiance. At the close of the morning prayers of the pious family of

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[10] Almost no critic in 1822 or thereafter was willing to allow Byron's claim to dramatic objectivity. The only contemporaries who did so were the liberals, and some of them tipped their hand by approving of the attack on despotic and outworn notions. Both conservatives and liberals, from the Tory reviewers and Leigh Hunt to Brandes and twentieth century scholars, have identified Cain's and Lucifer's unorthodox views and rebellious personalities with Byron's own Promethean temperament and sympathies. (Steffan 10-11).

Adam which start the play, Cain refuses to pray.[11] A few lines later, he reproaches his father for failing to pick the fruit of the tree of life, after which Adam could have defied God (I, 33-34). The first information about Cain is that he values defying God.

His refusal to pray is grounded in his proud, dignified independence: He will bow neither to God nor to Lucifer (I, 31; I, 318). It is also, partly, ingratitude, or perhaps a depressive inability to feel pleasure. He will not pray, since he asks for nothing and recognizes nothing for which to be thankful (I, 28).

He cannot be thankful even for life itself, since it is blighted by inevitable death (I, 29). This is the first hint of the obsession with death which Cain articulates throughout the play. Typically, his suicidal thoughts occur in a welter of ideas which are logically contradictory, but psychologically sound. The ominous certainty of death deprives life of significance, but once life is insignificant, death is not an evil. Yet Cain remains afraid of death, disturbed even by the death of animals. Echoing the thoughts, and, to some extent, the language, of Ecclesiastes 2:17-18,

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[11] In this, Byron's "very first scene reminds one of the Death of Abel." Similarly, when Cain refuses to join his family, in both works they try to get him to pray (B. Reed 98).

Cain says:

> I live,
> But live to die. And living, see no thing
> To make death hateful, save an innate clinging
> A loathsome and yet all invincible
> Instinct of life, which I abhor, as I
> Despise myself, yet cannot overcome,
> So I live. Would that I had never lived." (I, 109-115).

Though he is self-pitying and self-righteous, Cain is not entirely self-centered; he is able to feel the suffering of others, especially of his descendants, and even of animals, which he perceives as a challenge to the justice of Original Sin: "Alas, the hopeless wretches, / They too must share my sire's fate like his sons / Like them too without having shared the apple. . ." (II, 2, 157-59).

He resents his parents for depriving him of Eden, "Our native and forbidden Paradise," (I, 277), bringing death and hard work into the world. He often makes his complaint against his parents in violent words: "They sinned, let them die" (III, 76; see also I, 434-35; II, ii, 24-25). He also resents God, who unjustly punishes all the descendants of Adam and Eve for the sin of their parents. This resentment is based on an "overwhelming sense of injustice that he, the innocent child,

should bear his parents' guilt" (Roston, Biblical Drama 207).

When Cain's family proffers a simple pious answer to his doubts about God, "'Twas his will / And he is good," Cain, his discontent driven by sharp intelligence, asks:

> How know I that? Because
> He is all pow'rful, must all-good, too, follow?
> I judge by the fruits--and they are bitter--
> Which I must feed on for a fault not mine. (I, 75-79).

Cain appreciates beauty, gaining our admiration as for his esthetic sensitivity. When Lucifer tells Cain of the process of death and destruction, for example, Cain is gladdened by the thought that at least the beautiful stars will endure (I, 280-84). Cain is overwhelmed by the beauty of space (II, i, 98-117). Characteristically, Cain expresses his awe at the beauty of space in suicidal terms: "Let me die" (II, i, 113) and "Let me expire or see them nearer" (II, i, 117). Most of all, Cain finds Adah beautiful (II, ii, 255-269, 300), recognizing that his appreciation of her beauty is based in part on his love for her (II, ii, 273). This love seems to him to be beyond choice, inborn and unalterable (I, 432). It is so great that he is willing to compromise his beliefs to assuage her tears (I, 330-334). Like Gessner's Cain, he

deeply loves his children as well (I, 438).

Cain thirsts for every kind of knowledge (I, 246-8). Proud of himself for his curiosity, he looks down on the rest of his family for being satisfied with what they think they know (I, 167ff). He feels that even Adah does not measure up to him in this respect (I, 187). He confides his feelings of superiority to Lucifer: "Never till / Now met I aught to sympathize with me. / 'Tis well. I would rather consort with spirits" (I, 189-191). Cain is thus both an attractively inquisitive thinker and something of an intellectual snob.

In the opening scene of the play, Cain asserts: "The snake spoke truth. It <u>was</u> the tree of knowledge" (I, 36) and "Knowledge is good" (I, 37). He displays his reasoning ability by challenging, with precise logic, God's prohibition on eating the fruit which had the good consequences of bringing about knowledge. Later he comes to doubt the unmitigated goodness of knowledge (II, ii, 232-33; II, ii, 417-18).

Eve admonishes Cain to be more like his father, "cheerful and resigned" (I, 51), for she accurately sees Cain as the opposite, melancholy and ambitious. Hers may be prudent advice, but he is not equipped to heed it, or even to want to heed it.

Cain displays all these characteristics before he encounters Lucifer; Lucifer does not create, but rather inflames, his discontent. Cain's proud soliloquy about his own search for knowledge is the cue for Lucifer to appear. Lucifer immediately feeds Cain's pride (I, 191-3), assuring him that he has sought him out only because of Cain is a great soul, fit for companionship with immortal spirits. A little while later, Lucifer goads Cain's pride, "but I speak to thee of what thou know'st not" (I, 245), belittling him and daring him to risk more. As the play develops, Lucifer gratifies Cain's pride less often and humiliates him more often, until, by the end of Act II when Lucifer makes his final exit, he acts entirely as a depressing influence.

Cain's intellectual curiosity motivates his decision to travel with Lucifer, but though he sees wonders, they do not satisfy him. At the outset of his journey, talking with Lucifer about what he wishes to learn, Cain admits that his desires and his conceptions far outstrip the power of his faculties (II, i, 80-83). Thus Cain foreshadows the disappointing conclusion of the journey: By the very nature of human curiosity, no amount of knowledge which can be acquired will ever suffice. Furthermore, knowledge, which Cain places as the highest value at the beginning of the journey, now, at the end of the journey, seems to be only a relative value. Cain asks: "And to what end have I beheld these things / Which thou hast shown

me?" (II, ii, 417-18).

Cain's shows admirable courage in challenging Lucifer. When, as they travel towards Hades, the powerful spirit asks whether Cain wants to see more, Cain replies with logic and bravery: "Till I know / That which it is, I cannot answer" (II, ii, 14-15). And that is how he answers whenever Lucifer dares him to ask to see more (II, i, 133-5).

Lucifer and Cain argue about love: The spirit, who does not love, believes it is merely an appetite, doomed to fade (II, ii, 323-26). Cain rejects that, for he knows love as a commitment beyond himself (II, ii, 320-23), so that even if Adah's beauty should fade, he cannot "conceive my love for her the less" (II, ii, 333). Confronting Lucifer's triumphant claim that mortal beauty must fade, Cain is moved to an unusual and beautiful emotion, pity for the Creator: "methinks / He who creates all beauty will lose more / Than me in seeing perish such a work" (II, ii, 334-36).

Having heard Cain's defense of love, Lucifer insidiously uses it against Cain's feelings for his brother, insinuating elaborations on any existing jealousy. Lucifer voices the evaluation that Cain's declaration of love for Abel is "meekly done" (II, ii, 341), since Abel is more beloved than Cain, both by their mother (II, ii, 343) and by their God (II, ii,

347-49). Meekness is a virtue that Cain never wants; in hearing himself addressed as meek, Cain feels challenged. All these thoughts were already Cain's, as Lucifer claims (II, ii, 354), but Lucifer presents them in a way to exacerbate Cain's discontent. When Cain becomes agitated (II, ii, 356), Lucifer defeats him. Lucifer's most successful method for undermining Cain throughout the play is to detect his existing weaknesses and exploit them.

Given the hurtful knowledge that his children will suffer, Cain asks Lucifer: "And wherefore didst thou / Lead me only to inform me of this?" (II, ii, 228-29). The answer is logical: "Was not thy quest for knowledge?" (II, ii, 230), and Cain is forced to admit that he had assumed that knowledge was "the road to happiness" (II, ii, 231). Earlier, Cain explicitly chooses pride (I, 465-6) over happiness; and implicitly, when he decides to travel with Lucifer, he opts for knowledge, innocently assuming that it will be compatible with happiness. Near the conclusion of his bitter experience with Lucifer, Cain concedes: "my father's God did well / When he prohibited the fatal tree" (II, ii, 232-33). Knowledge, which at the beginning of the play had seemed to Cain an unmitigated blessing, now seems a curse. Cain feels that he would be better off ignorant of the extent of human suffering.

When Cain returns to Earth, at the opening of Act III, Byron

again shows "us three related attractive qualities: Cain's sensitivity, his gentleness, and his family affection" (Steffan 285). In the same scene, though, Cain also displays his continuing agitation from the journey with Lucifer, and his obsessive discontent with the loss of Eden (III, 31-34, 68-69). Cain seems at the edge of losing control. Adah recognizes the baneful influence of Lucifer in Cain's mood (III, 51) and thoughts (III, 77-78). Meditating on Lucifer's most depressing teaching, the future suffering of the human race, drives Cain to his most violent expression about his own son: "Better 'twere / I snatched him in his sleep and dashed him 'gainst / The rocks than let him live to--" (III, 123-25). Adah is momentarily afraid Cain will kill the child (III, 125-26). Steffan rightly praises the craftsmanship of Byron, who has Cain recapitulate all of his characteristic themes before the catastrophe (287-88).

Cain, fulfilling a promise which he made to Adah (I, 323-334), hesitantly prepares to make an offering to accompany his brother's (Stage direction after III, 219). As Adah gently convinces Cain to bring his offering, she teaches that his offering of fruit will be acceptable, provided that it is "[g]iv'n with a gentle and a contrite heart" (III, 109, echoing Ps. 51:19). This may foreshadow God's response to the two sacrifices, as Cain's heart is agitated and restless (III, 203-205). In a few lines, Cain will interpret the response to

mean that God prefers blood sacrifice (III, 284-85, 290-94, 310), but perhaps it means only that God prefers the gentle and contrite heart. An exactly parallel explanation occurs in a passage in the New Testament (Heb. 11:4), which explains that Abel's sacrifice was more excellent than Cain's because Abel offered "by faith."[12] I will shortly propose an entirely different way to understand the response to the sacrifices in Byron's play.

In the Bible, Cain makes his sacrifice first.[13] As Byron understands the narrative, Cain must be a reluctant and secondary participant in the ritual: In Byron's play, Cain does not build his own altar (III, 95-96), does not want to choose which of Abel's altars he will use (III, 211), declines to say his introductory prayer until Abel has prayed (III,

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[12] So, too Milton: Cain's offering is rejected as "not sincere" (Paradise Lost XI, 443).

Writing about Byron's play, McGann, perhaps swayed by Cain's next few speeches, claims that "Abel's God does demand blood sacrifice" (Fiery Dust 259); neither Abel nor Adah would agree.

[13] Byron noticed this change which he made in the action. In conversation with Medwin, he commented: "One mistake crept in,--Abel's should have been made the first sacrifice: And it is singular that the first form of religious worship should have induced the first murder" (Medwin 126).

Steffan adds a phrase to clarify Byron's comment, possibly reversing its meaning: "one mistake crept in [to the biblical narrative]--Abel's should have been made the first sacrifice" (Steffan 74).

Medwin himself understands that Byron felt he was the one who made the mistake in his play, but Medwin did not know what that mistake was: "The nature of the mistake in Cain is not clear" (Medwin 127, n. 298).

222), says his prayer while standing (III, 244, 270), and altogether demonstrates reluctance to take part in this, his first sacrifice. Cain's prayer, when he finally makes it, expresses his proud and dignified creed. Kerry Ellen McKeever points out that the entire prayer is in the conditional voice (164). He develops the contrast between the shepherd's bloody offering and his own peaceful one (III, 255-267), implicitly judging God by which sacrifice will be accepted.[14]

In preparing for the sacrifices, Abel also acts with dignity and purpose, but without sensitivity. Though he notices that Cain is agitated (III, 185-89), and hears Cain's pleas to be left alone (III, 188-190, 195, 207), Abel cannot relent even to allow Cain to delay in making his offering. Five times Abel presses him for immediate action (III, 183-207), while Cain becomes more resentful and less able to control himself.

Note the contrast with Adam's behavior in the beginning of the

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[14] Byron, in showing Cain disgusted specifically by animal sacrifice (III, 214-19, 255-58, 266-67, 284-85, 291-93,m 298-304), follows Gessner, who presents a particularly horrifying description of Adam's sacrifice of a lamb in Der Tod Abels. In Gessner, this is a more or less counterproductive description, as Gessner apparently still wants us to approve of God and of Adam. Gessner, it seems, elaborates every emotion that he can, even if doing so runs counter to the theme of his work. Byron, more logically, uses the horror of animal sacrifice to portray Cain sympathetically, and to continue to question the justice of God. In any case, Byron was a lifelong advocate of humane treatment for animals, and needs no inspiration from Gessner on that score.

play. When Cain refuses to join his family in prayer in the opening scene, Adam engages him in an attempt to get him to pray (I, 25ff), but does not insist, and cuts off the debate without recrimination (I, 47). Adam wants to convince Cain to pray, but accepts Cain's refusal peacefully. Abel insists that Cain must make an offering, thereby precipitating catastrophe. The contrast seems extremely significant. Am I reading too much into this? In his own life, Byron enjoyed debating with individuals who sought to change his religious opinions, but detested all religious compulsion.

Byron follows the lead of Gessner and older sources in making the sign of God's approval a column of fire from Abel's offering to heaven, while the sign of God's disapproval is a whirlwind scattering Cain's offering. In the older sources, however, these signs are inherently meaningful. As McKeever (164-166) points out, in Byron's play, Abel, confident that he understands God's symbolism, interprets the equivocal signs to Cain (III, 280-88). There is no evidence in the play that Abel is right, and the search for such evidence outside the play leads right into the whirlwind of the end of the book of Job (38:1).[15] Drawing a parallel to that passage would

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[15] I think McKeever's suggestive explication of the whirlwind is unconvincing, however. She observes that Cain's prayer was conditional, and so,

> the whirlwind that casts down Cain's offering is not a sign of displeasure, but merely a confirmation of what Cain has always suspected: the narrative of ritual and sacrifice is man's ritual

indicate that Cain and his sacrifice are more acceptable to God than are Abel and his sacrifice. In that passage, Job, like Cain, has complained against the justice of God; Eliphaz and Job's other pious friends, like Abel, have warned him against complaining; God reveals an enigmatic answer to Job from the whirlwind, but then tells Eliphaz that he accepts Job's complaint and rejects the piety of the friends (Job 42:7-8).[16]

Cain, at first unconvinced by Abel's evaluation that God has rejected his sacrifice (III, 281), is content with seeing the offering scattered; the seeds, unlike the lamb of Abel's offering, will live to bear fruit (III, 283). This contentment may be diffidence about the response to his reluctant sacrifice, or it may be his confidence that God has accepted his peaceful offering in an appropriate way. Then,

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> alone, a ritual to which God is basically indifferent. (McKeever 165).

This interpretation seems problematical to me, for it assumes that an act of God demonstrates his indifference.

[16] The full passage conveys the strength of God's condemnation of the pious friends and contrasting validation of Job:

> God said to Eliphaz the Yemenite: My anger is hot against you, and against your two friends, for you have not spoken of me correctly, as has my servant Job. Now take yourselves seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and offer them as a burnt offering for yourselves, and Job my servant will pray for you, for only his face will I accept not to do something repulsive with you, since you have not spoken of me correctly, as has my servant Job. (Job 42:7-8).

implicitly accepting Abel's interpretation with bitterness, Cain becomes ashamed and angered (III, 284-5, 290-293). He rejects the whole institution of prayer and sacrifice. He will not sacrifice to such a God, who seeks the dull prayers of the grovelling Abel, which offend against Cain's intellect (III, 291), and, even worse, who wants blood sacrifices, which offend against his ethical sensitivity (III, 297-304).

Cain's decision, "I will build no more altars / Nor suffer any" (III, 288-89), is a major turning point in the play. At that moment, Cain changes from his tolerant attitude towards his family's practice of religion to active opposition.[17] The murder of Abel is a consequence of that decision. Cain decides to kick over the bloody altar. Abel, who does "love God far more / Than life" (III, 315-16), insists that Cain "not touch my altar / With violence" (III, 305-06), and fights to prevent that impiety. The struggle escalates, as the two brothers fight over the sacrificial knife (III, 303, 305). Cain, characteristically indulging in ferocious words, threatens to make Abel into a sacrifice to his God, who, according to Abel's own explanation, seems to love blood (III, 308-311). Struggling to overcome Abel's defense of the altar,

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[17] But then, the family has changed as well, from Adam's toleration of Cain's refusal to pray (in Act I) to Abel's insisting that he sacrifice (in Act III).

Cain strikes Abel with a brand from the altar, killing him.[18]

Lest his reader see the killing of Abel as somehow warranted, Byron presents the dying Abel, after the fatal blow, as a figure of Jesus, exactly following the typological tradition. Abel echoes the language of Jesus on the cross, saying: "Forgive his slayer, for he knew not what / He did" (III, 319-320, after Luke 23:34).

At several points, Byron's characters meditate about how it happened that Cain was tempted to evil, and ultimately committed a heinous crime. The angel locates the source of evil in Cain's nature: "Stern hast thou been and stubborn from the womb" (III, 503). Presumably speaking with the highest authority, the angel puts the blame for Cain's evil acts on his inborn personality. This suggests that Cain, burdened with evil within, cannot possibly escape expressing that evil eventually. Similarly, Cain, speaking of himself in third person, says to God: "If he's evil / Strike him. Thou art omnipotent and may'st" (III, 270-71). Cain, before the murder, sees evil as a possible component of his personality, which he cannot change. If he is guilty, it is not of his own

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[18] Thus, apparently for dramatic reasons, Byron follows the lead of Milton (Paradise Lost 11, 429-447) and does away with the Bible's interval between the two sacrifices and the murder (Steffan 291).

choosing; ultimately, Cain suggests, any evil in his personality must be traced back to the God who created him. After the murder, Adam blames the serpent of Eden and Eve (III, 382). For him, Cain's killing of Abel is a manifestation of the original sin. Shortly thereafter, Cain himself attributes his evil to his upbringing. The proximity of his birth to the Fall had damaging psychological effects on his parents. As they set about raising Cain, Eve was still turbulent-minded from her encounter with the serpent, and Adam was still mourning for Eden (III, 506-8). Unsurprisingly, given that care, Cain developed a disturbed and melancholy personality.

Another explanation for the genesis of Cain's evil deed, suggested at many points in the play, is that Lucifer has successfully manipulated Cain. Thorslev, for example, believes that, from the moment when Cain decides to travel with Lucifer, Cain's destruction cannot be avoided (181). Playing on his thoughts and desires to irritate him, to exacerbate his despair and his anger, Lucifer calculates how to lead Cain to commit the crime. In the grip of that superior malevolent being, Cain is unable to resist.

What these explanations have in common is that they comprehend Cain's disturbed personality and evil deed in terms of factors beyond his control. All support the conclusion which Cain

himself articulates: "I did not . . . make myself" (III, 509-510). Whether the moral state of the world, or the psychological environment of his upbringing, or his innate characteristics, or the influence of Lucifer, or all together, determine Cain's adult personality and make the crime inevitable, the crime is inevitable. Byron doubts that moral choice is possible; where there is no moral choice, logically there can be no moral judgment, so Byron has sympathy for Cain. Byron does not believe it possible to follow God's moderate, optimistic, prudent advice to Cain about how to deal with the tendency to sin: "You may rule over it" (Gen. 4:7). In fact, the line does not appear in Byron's version of the story; it is the only part of the biblical dialogue which Byron did not use.[19]

In general, it is appropriate to think of Cain and the other Byronic heroes as "guilty victims." Cain, at the opening of the play, has a sense of outrage about the indignities to which he is subject through no crime of his own. At the end of the play, when his crime is abundantly clear, still he has not willed his own evil deed, and he accepts his punishment with dignity. He is, like other Byronic heroes, "guilty with extenuating circumstances," and still admirable: "The Byronic hero . . . drew on his creator's sense of guilt as if it were

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[19] Hirst argues that Byron omits the warning in order to "make the murder unpremeditated" ("Byron's Lapse into Orthodoxy" 166).

an abundant capital, and made of infamy a darkly lustrous thing. But the poet was 'more sinned against than sinning.'" (Berry 385; see also Eliot 263).

As the Bible, so in Byron's play, no explicit motive is given for the murder of Abel. It is more clear in Byron's version than in the Bible why Cain's anger is directed against Abel, rather than against God: For Abel annoys Cain by insisting that he make an offering, offends him by interpreting God's response to the offerings, and frustrates him by trying to protect the bloody altar. Even so, the killing is totally unplanned. Cain's motive for killing Abel in Byron's play has been the subject of an ongoing critical battle from Byron's time until the present day. Byron himself contributes some suggestive hints about the motive in some letters to his friends written shortly after the play:

> . . . Cain comes back and kills Abel in a fit of dissatisfaction, partly with the politics of Paradise, which have driven them all out of it, and partly because (as it is written in Genesis) Abel's sacrifice was the more acceptable to the Deity. (letter to Thomas Moore, Sept. 19, 1821 LJ V, 368 BL&J 8:216).

And again:

> . . . till he falls into the frame of mind--that leads to the Catastrophe--from mere internal

> irritation--not premeditation or envy--of Abel--(which would have made him contemptible) but from the rage and fury against the inadequacy of his state to his Conceptions--& which discharges itself rather against Life--and the author of Life--than the mere living. (Letter of Nov. 3, 1821 to Murray, LJ V, 470 BL&J 9:53-54).

Byron thus suggests a complex of motives for the crime, none of them obviously supported by the text of the play. Roston dismisses these as "contradictory justifications of the murder," all "either retroactive justification or . . . a plan which he failed to realize in the drama itself" (Biblical Drama 211). In this judgment, Roston is rather too harsh, for each of the motives which Byron listed is present in the play, if not directly connected with the killing. Cain often expresses frustration at the inadequacy of life lived in the shadow of death, outside of paradise, he often expresses anger at God, who arranges life so unfairly, and he judges God for accepting Abel's bloody sacrifice. Radcliff-Umstead accepts Bryon's explanation totally:

> Cain finally kills his brother out of a desperate rage--not one born of jealous motives, as in all the Cain poetry before Byron in works like Gessner's Abels Tod [sic], but from melancholy after realizing man's inadequacies (Radcliff-

Umstead 399).

In this, Radcliff-Umstead is too credulous. Rage and melancholy are not exactly Cain's motives for the crime; they are rather the incendiary psychological conditions under which Cain's conflict with Abel explodes into violence.

Though Byron specifically denies that envy is a factor in the murder (Letter of Nov. 3, 1821 to Murray, LJ V, 470. BL&J 9:54), there are hints of it in the play. Lucifer, insinuating that Abel is better belovéd than Cain, succeeds in upsetting him to the point where Cain cannot speak (II, ii, 338-356). When, shortly before the murder, Adah refers to Abel as "Our brother" (III, 161), Cain responds testily, "Thy brother Abel" (III, 162), revealing Cain's estrangement from his brother, and providing evidence of envy among the conditions the led to the murder. In dialogue with Abel, Cain echoes Lucifer's claim that God loves Abel better than he does Cain (III, 191-92).[20]

After all the motivating factors are identified, the question remains whether they add up to an adequate explanation for the

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[20] After the murder, Eve refers to Abel as "My best belovèd" (III, 384), confirming Cain's suspicions, and Lucifer's insinuations. But though Cain and Lucifer are proven correct, and Eve's greater love for Abel is unjust, the murder of Abel now dwarfs that injustice. Byron demonstrates considerable artistry in finishing the theme of jealousy for a mother's love.

murder. Among the critics, at the one extreme, Roston finds the motivation for Cain's act to be entirely inadequate, for Cain's "sudden rush of anger" is "totally out of keeping" with his "thoughtful, idealistic" character until then (Biblical Drama 210). At the other, McGann claims that Cain kills Abel because Abel has said that he loves God more than life itself (III, 315-16). Abel's love of God appears to Cain as "a violation of the corporeal aspect of existence," and "an admission of his paradisial ignorance (II, ii, 306)[21] of the true nature of God" (McGann 259). While McGann's analysis remains murky, he clearly claims that the murder is a kind of logical necessity, the conclusion of a syllogism in Cain's disputation with Abel about religious truth. Russell explains that the God-principle and the Lucifer-principle are at war within each human being; reconciling these principles would bring health, but Cain, mislead by Lucifer, joins the war against God by killing Abel (Russell, Mephistopheles 186). Thus Russell agrees with McGann that Cain's crime can be fully explained, although differing on the explanation. Frye apparently falls into the same camp, with yet another account of Cain's motivation. In a difficult passage, he seems to say that Cain, feeling that his imaginative vision puts him above the law, and acting on Lucifer's hint that death leads to the

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[21] One of the perplexing items in this passage is McGann's reference to this line, in which Lucifer refers to Cain's self-proclaimed love of Adah: "Of all belovèd things, thou lovest her."

highest knowledge, kills Abel as part of his own intellectual awakening (Fearful Symmetry 199). Lockridge offers a laconic explication: "Cain has slain his brother because he thinks human conscience should take precedence over brutal divine will" (The Ethics of Romanticism 433). Cain will not accept murder as evil simply because God has declared it so; Cain, by an act of will, assigns it a positive moral value, and "exhibits the impulse to freedom in a fallen world" (429).

It seems to me that the killing is made plausible, but not fully determined, by the earlier action of the play. There is ample evidence in the text of Cain's violent imagination. He has philosophical reasons for his dissatisfaction with God and with Abel. But the sudden act of unpremeditated violence has more to do with emotion than with reason. Byron does provide enough background for Cain's murderous emotional state at the fatal moment. He feels annoyed at his brother's persistence, embarrassed at having let himself be nagged into offering a sacrifice, humiliated at having this sacrifice rejected, irritated at not being allowed to experience his anger in solitude. He hopes that the act of destroying the altar will provide physical and symbolic release of some of these pressures, but even that is opposed by the relentless Abel. More complex theological speculations about the meaning of the murder (such as those of Russell, Frye and Lockridge) exist without basis in the text.

After the crime, Cain's situation abounds with irony. He has been a gentle and affectionate person, but now he has murdered his own brother. He has fervently desired human betterment, but has now made the future worse. He has complained, when everyone in the world loves him, that no one understands him in his loneliness; but now, by his own deed, he is "himself cast out from society as a polluted thing" (Roston, Biblical Drama 205). He has protested his innocence, for he is unjustly included in his parents' error, but now he is guilty by his own hand (Steffan 49). He has expressed only scorn for his parents and their sin, and now he has committed a far worse crime. "Byron's Cain begins by lamenting on his low state resulting from his parents' sin. By the play's end Cain has fallen lower by committing a still greater sin" (Radcliff-Umstead 399). He who always abhorred death, has brought it into the world (III, 371). His life, until then "empoisoned" by the irrational hatred of death (III, 373), is now embittered by his own act. God, according to Cain, has been unjust for depriving him of Eden; now, God will be justified in giving him a much harsher punishment.

The realization of his guilt transforms Cain. No longer resentful for what others have done to him, he is now remorseful for what he has done to another. He can no longer tolerate even talk of violence (III, 524-25). He says: "I am become / The native of another and worse world" (III, 342-43).

His previous philosophical denigration of this world seems to him, at that moment, trivial. The evils of which he previously complained are all characteristic of a better world in which he was innocent and sinned against. In the worse world which he now inhabits, he is himself guilty.

Cain is aware of his transformation. His self-pity, throughout the play presented as an unhealthy emotion, now seems completely warranted. Looking back, Cain describes his previous state of mind: "a dreary dream / Had maddened me" (III, 378-79); now, after the crime, he has awakened (III, 378). This is a difficult passage: Clearly, Cain felt that some of his earlier attitudes were unenlightened, and that now he was more aware; but which of his earlier attitudes are still valid, and which has he abandoned? And what, exactly, is the "dreary dream"? Is it the depressing journey with Lucifer (Steffan 296), or perhaps his innocent self-righteousness at the opening of the play?

Cain's request, in his dialogue with the angel, "No, let me die" (III, 497), is superficially similar to his earlier suicidal wishes. But this is no longer a general philosophical disdain for finite life; now Cain would prefer death to living with the knowledge of what he has done. If Cain's suicidal wishes before the crime seem petulant and unhealthy, driven as they are by his minor discomforts and his

philosophical speculations, those after it (see also III, 513-15) have a certain dignity, for they are driven by his genuine realization of his guilt.

Except for those suicidal comments, Cain after the crime abjures the verbal violence which had characterized his earlier speech. He even interrupts Adah as she is about to use a harsh expression: "No / No more of threats, we have had too many of them" (III, 524-25). The famous line: "Am I then / My brother's keeper?" (III, 468-69) seems slightly out of character for Cain where it occurs in Byron's play, for Cain gives no other hint of continuing defiance after the crime. Thorslev, with some justice, calls the line "a blot on the drama. . . and certainly inconsistent with Cain's new-found realization of the primacy of love" (Thorslev 182).

Cain is reconciled to the earth after the crime. Before the crime, he complained as he spoke of the fruits of the earth (I, 109ff), for these were meager and earned by toil. After the crime, he remarks on the burial of Abel with irony: "Oh earth! Oh earth! / For all the fruits thou hast rendered to me, I / Give thee back this" (III, 542-44). The irony is turned against himself. The fruits of the earth, previously disparaged, he now recognizes as good, while the fruits of his own activities have become evil.

Finally, Cain, after the crime, becomes reconciled to God. Cain, who before the crime always scrupulously avoids identifying any positive connection between himself and God (I, 311), after the crime accepts that God is "his God" (III, 532). Cain does not object to Adah's reference to "our God," nor to her wish, though it calls for him to follow God: "Lead! Thou shalt be my guide, and may our God / Be thine" (III, 554-55).

Early in the play, Cain challenges the justice of a God who would forbid first the tree of knowledge and then the tree of life. "Knowledge is good, / And life is good, and how can both be evil?" (I, 37-38). At the end of the second act, Cain understands that the knowledge which Lucifer has shown him has injured him (II, ii, 416-17, 420-21). At the end of the play, Cain, no longer merely toying with suicidal thoughts, understands that life can itself be an evil to be borne (III, 500). Indeed, though he has become much more reconciled to reality, he has also reached a more profound despair.

"Cain subsides into a remorse that is deeper and more agonizing than any punishment that could be inflicted upon him" (Marchand Byron's Poetry 89). The punishment of Cain is almost entirely psychological, self-inflicted by a penitent who knows that he deserves worse. The angel's mark burns Cain's brow, "but naught to that which is within it" (III,

501).[22] For Byron, in an important development in the sympathetic portrayal of Cain, awareness of guilt is the most painful of Cain's punishments.

Adah, rather than Cain, protests when Eve curses Cain (III, 404-07)[23] and when the angel sentences him (III, 476-482). Cain, acquiescing, wishes to die.[24] Byron thus partially follows the traditional understanding in his presentation of the mark of Cain. As in the tradition, the mark is placed on Cain's brow, and preserves his life over his objections that he would rather die (III, 493-500); however, Byron does not specify that the purpose of the mark is to prolong Cain's suffering, and to make him an example for others to shun. Furthermore, in Byron's play, the angel's final words to Cain offer him a sort of grim hope that the remainder of his life

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[22] Byron writes a parallel passage in The Giaour: Alas! The breast that inly bleeds / Hath nought to dread from outward blow:" (lines 1155-6).

[23] Roston suggests that Byron introduces the change to "preserve Cain's manly dignity" (Biblical Drama 204); Steffan, going a little further, believes that Byron is concerned with saving Cain's heroic stature (75).
Praying for mercy for Cain is, of course, entirely in character for Adah.

[24] When Adah, in objecting to the harshness of Cain's punishment, pleads for mercy: "'Twill come to pass that whoso findeth him / Shall slay him" (III, 481-82), Cain, wishing for his own death, responds: "Would they could" (III, 482). Adah's line is, of course, spoken by Cain in the Bible (Gen 4:14), where it is subject to two classical interpretations, either as a request for lighter punishment or for death (Chapter 2 above). Byron thus distributes the two classical interpretations of this verse, one to Adah and one to Cain.

will not be merely suffering, but may have some positive significance: "Go forth. Fulfill thy days and be thy deeds / Unlike the last" (III, 516-17).

Cain is deeply changed by the murder, but he remains a complex character. He does not simply reverse every one of his earlier opinions. Although he regrets the murder, there is no sign that he regrets the intellectual and moral yearnings that brought about the murder.[25] Though he loves Adah, who is guiltless and comforted by her faith, there is no indication that he wants to, or can, accept that same faith.

Thus, at the conclusion of the play, Cain has changed greatly. He now has repented from his tendency towards violence, accepted the leadership of God, repudiated Lucifer, understood his commitment to Adah, rejected self-righteousness, and ceased theological speculation. These would seem, in the context of the play, to be positive developments.[26] At the

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[25] Marchand overstates this: "None of the rebellious feeling but all of the fight had left him" (Marchand, Byron's Poetry 90). Actually, from the murder on nothing in the text refers to his rebellious feelings or intellectual yearnings.

[26] So, it seems to me, Byron intends them; but perhaps my understanding of this play reflects my own political and religious biases. To many readers of the political or religious left, these are negative developments in Cain. From their perspective, Cain has abandoned reason, intellectual challenge, revolt, the better to submit meekly to the victor. See Steffan (294-96) for a summary of the attempts of various critics to find a continued call for political or religious rebellion in Byron's enigmatic words.

same time, he has no sense that he could have behaved differently, he has no hope of forgiveness from humans or from God, he has no enthusiasm for the rest of his life, and he has learned that the human future will be filled with pain.

The meaning of Cain's ironic self-transformation remains unclear; what effect does Byron wish to achieve by allowing his proud hero to experience inner defeat? "The paradox of a play which both idealizes and crushes the heretic can be traced to that deliberate cultivation of inconsistency typical of Byron's personality" (Roston, Biblical Drama 206). Steffan claims that Cain's new values are "less a betrayal of his former rebellion than the unavoidable experience of a sensitive individual trapped and goaded by intolerable circumstance" (Steffan 49). For Steffan, then, at the end of the play Byron continues to praise intellectual curiosity, daring and adventure, although he recognizes that they may lead an individual to destruction. Byron, according to this reading, agrees with the rebellious Cain, and commiserates with the defeated Cain.

Thorslev, sees Cain's defeat differently:

> Cain's sincere remorse (for the drama is a tragedy), not for his pride, but for his rebellious murder, is certainly a sign that he has learned to see what Campus calls "the proper limits of

rebellion" (Thorslev 199).

For Thorslev, the defeated Cain recommends "realization of the limits of the human mind, and a cultivation of one's own values in an assertion of a community of selves in an ultimately unknown and unknowable universe" (89). Byron, according to Thorslev, partially withdraws from his approval of Cain's rebellion.

Not only the qualities of Cain, but also the dramatic structure of the play, lead the reader to identify with the hero. Cain is on stage for nearly the entire play, and the every incident is focussed "on the inner and outer pressures that drive Cain to his crime" (Steffan 21) or on his psychological reaction after the crime. Cain so regrets his deed that he wishes the murder undone, even if it cost his own life: "So shall be restored / By God the life to him he loved; and taken / From me a being I ne'er loved to bear" (III, 513-15). Byron, like the writers of the ancient Midrash, generates sympathy for Cain as a remorseful penitent.

Thus two of the factors which I have found in sympathetic retellings of the story of Cain are present in Byron's play: Cain seems not to blame for his crime, since he was driven to commit the murder by forces beyond his control, and he reacts to the crime with sincere penitence. Given those two

sympathetic factors, one might expect to find the third, related factor of forgiveness in this version of the story. It is almost entirely absent.

The angel explains that God's mark is intended to express the promise that Cain not be murdered, "so that he may go forth in safety" (III, 495), thus hinting at divine mercy of a partial sort, although Cain himself would prefer to be killed (III, 500). But none of the characters, human or supernatural, express any clear statement of forgiveness of Cain. Eve condemns Cain in unrestrained terms (III, 409ff), Adam in equivocal ones (III, 446, 449), and even Adah, whose every action speaks of her continuing commitment to Cain, does not exactly offer forgiveness for the crime:

> I fear
> Nothing except to leave thee, much as I
> Shrink from the deed which leaves thee brotherless.
> I must not speak of this; it is between thee
> And the great God. (III, 462-466).

Only Cain speaks directly of forgiveness, asking it from the ghost of Abel, but in the same breath expressing certainty that he will never receive it from himself nor from God.

> What thou art now,
> I know not, but if thou see'st what I am,

> I think thou wilt forgive him, whom his God
> Can ne'er forgive, nor his own soul. (III, 530-33).

Since none of the characters entertains the possibility of forgiveness, it seems likely that Byron himself agrees that neither man, angel, nor God is able to forgive. Blake's version of the story of Cain responds directly to Byron's apparent denial of the possibility of forgiveness.

Though Cain is a sympathetic character, it would be a mistake to describe him as an entirely admirable one. Byron develops a complex portrait of the failings of his central character, and Cain is still a murderer, whom "Byron did not absolve . . . completely" (Steffan 35). It is not obvious how Byron intends to divide the reader's sympathy among his other main characters, Lucifer and Adah. This is not a minor question, for the conflict between Adah and Lucifer is central to the structure of the play: "Lucifer and Adah function less as fully characterized, discrete individuals, than as expressions of contrasting aspects of Cain's inner world" (Bidney, "Cain and The Ghost of Abel" 149).

For Thorslev, "Cain himself is the drama's one sympathetic character, since he and not Lucifer has the capacity to love" (183). Thus Thorslev considers, and rejects, Lucifer as a sympathetic character, but does not consider Adah at all. (I

shall return to Adah later in this chapter). Bostetter does view Lucifer as sympathetic, claiming that "Lucifer is undoubtedly speaking for Byron" ("Byron and the Politics of Paradise" 572) in all his speeches attacking God's supposed goodness. Marchand essentially agrees with this assessment (Byron's Poetry 86), as does Thompson (Thompson 406). Bostetter, in fact, sees Lucifer as the most sympathetic character in the play, so that "[t]he play viewed as a whole is clearly an ironic prophecy that the future belongs to Lucifer and the sons of Cain" (Bostetter, "Byron and the Politics of Paradise" 575).

Support for this reading can be marshalled from the brilliance of Lucifer's arguments against religious orthodoxy. Lucifer, reasoning sharply, accuses God of being an evil tyrant (I, 138) who fitfully creates and destroys (I, 163, 266-67), who is responsible for his creatures' pain, ignorance and mortality (I, 207-09). If Lucifer had been man's creator, he would have been more generous: "Did I plant things prohibited within / The reach of beings innocent, and curious / By their own innocence? I would have made ye Gods." (I, 200-203). Lucifer seems sincerely to value reason (II, ii, 459-466), and to use his reason to educate Cain.[27] Except for a few

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[27] Note, however, that though Lucifer expounds the Platonic doctrine that intellect is eternal and invincible (I, 103; III, 460-66), he himself remains unhappy, ambitious and dissatisfied.

moments, in the first act Lucifer is extremely attractive (I, 507-517).

But as the play continues, Lucifer's less attractive qualities become apparent. For all his glorification of reason, and for all his respectful words about Cain's mind, Lucifer's first offer to reveal the wonders of the universe comes with the condition that Cain "fall down and worship" him (I, 303). Cain preserves his dignity; as he refused to worship his father's Lord, so he refuses to worship Lucifer (I, 310-12). Lucifer, disappointed, has to content himself with a sophistical victory, claiming: "He who bows not to him has bowed to me" (I, 317). Nonetheless, when Lucifer calls upon Cain to begin their journey, he again states his goal as domination, "I ask / Thee to be mine" (I, 345-64).

In the second act, Lucifer's early pose as Cain's benefactor is revealed to be a ruse (Steffan 53). The spirit also repudiates his claim to share in human suffering (I, 100-01, 157-61) for in his later speeches to Cain (II, ii, 219-227) he demonstrates "ironic distance from human suffering" (Russell, Mephistopheles 184), since he cannot love (II, ii, 337). Similarly, though he begins by showing respect for the thoughts of Cain, a mere mortal (I, 103; I, 191-3), later Lucifer mocks him for being mortal, claiming to believe that

only spirits can have value (II, ii, 401-07).[28] Lucifer boasts, at the outset of the journey, "If thou dost long for knowledge, I can satiate / That thirst" (I, 558-9). By the end of the journey, with Cain still unsatisfied, in particular by the haziness of his understanding of death, Lucifer attempts to convince Cain that he ought to be satisfied by what he has learned: "'tis something / To know that there are such realms" (II, ii, 171). Cain bravely continues to object: "We knew already / That there was death" (II, ii, 171-72), and Lucifer struggles to find some way to claim that he has fulfilled his promise: "Thou knowest that there is / A state and many states beyond thine own, / And this thou knewest not this morn." Pushed to the wall, Lucifer asks Cain to "be content; it will / Seem clearer to thine immortality" (II, ii, 176-77), thus appealing to, of all things, Cain's faith! Then he scales back his promises radically: "Thy human mind hath scarcely grasp to gather / The little I have shown thee" (II, ii, 401-02). Finally, he refuses Cain's demand to for more knowledge: "Dust! limit thy ambition" (II, ii, 406); thus Lucifer exhibits exactly the characteristics which he attributes to God. Though Lucifer glorifies the intellect, and promises to enlighten Cain, he winds up concealing knowledge from Cain, and asking for Cain's blind faith.

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[28] Lucifer, or perhaps Byron, is not conscious of a contradiction here, for Lucifer has already informed Cain of the immortality of his soul (I, 115; II, i, 71-2).

Lucifer seems to promise that he will not lead Cain to injury in the course of the journey, saying that he will not "ask thee to partake of fruits / Which shall deprive thee of a single good / The conqueror has left thee" (I, 559-561). He apparently knows that the outcome of the journey will be such that Cain will slay his brother. Technically, Lucifer does not break his carefully-worded promise, though he shows Cain overwhelming sights which depress him. The vast emptiness of space, the destroyed worlds of the past, and the future worlds of suffering, are not, after all, fruits. All this material undercuts Marchand's assertion that "Byron conceived of Lucifer not as the 'Arch-Fiend' and enemy of mankind, but as their defender" and "a champion of humanity" (Byron's Poetry 86).

Lucifer pretends to be Cain's benefactor (Steffan 53), but the "promises of the good he might have done really did Cain harm" (Steffan 54). The "educational tour, taken under the guise of beneficence, was Lucifer's most theatrical stratagem to humiliate his proud novice and intensify his discouragement" (Steffan 65-7).

"He tells Cain that he knows all things (I, 300) but he himself elsewhere confesses that this is not so. . . (I, 289)" (McGann, Byron's Poetry 255). He tells Cain that angels do not stoop to tempt mere humans (I, 240-44), but then expends

his considerable persuasive abilities on tempting Cain (McGann 256). When Cain laments that the snake lied, that the tree "promised knowledge at the price / Of death, but knowledge still; But what knows man?" (II, ii, 162-63), Lucifer, who until now has heatedly maintained that the snake spoke truth (I, 197; I, 393), retreats with an equivocation: "It may be death leads to the highest knowledge" (II, ii, 164). Similarly, Lucifer suggests that Cain will be able to see secrets of the "two principles"[29] (II, ii, 404) after death, but, when directly challenged by Cain, equivocates (II, ii, 410-12). Perhaps Lucifer does not know, since, as an immortal, he cannot experience death (I, 289-90); Byron, himself not knowing what wisdom comes after death, might have his own reasons for leaving the passages with such uncertain conclusions. The overall impression, however, is that Lucifer acts consistently, since he wishes to hurt Cain, and to goad him into outright rebellion. He can take opposing points-of-view about knowledge, or about the nature of death, if that furthers his ends. He is "a devil of contradictions (Oded 10). Truth and constancy are not characteristic of Lucifer.

Lucifer's tendency to lie provides the best explanation for a curious contradiction about the relationship between Lucifer and God. In his first speeches, Lucifer freely and bitterly acknowledges that he has been defeated by the power of God (I,

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[29] God and Lucifer.

128-163) "He conquered; let him reign!" (I, 130);[30] in his final speech, he proudly denies that he has ever been defeated, or is in any way inferior to God (II, ii, 426-442). There are, I think, four ways for a reader to make sense of Lucifer's contradictory theological statements:

1. One can understand these statements as part of Byron's psychological portrait of Lucifer. Byron means to paint Lucifer as a deceitful and boastful spirit, who dislikes acknowledging the greatness of God. As Lucifer gains confidence and Cain loses strength, Lucifer, contemptuous of his human listener, simply lies. He knows the truth about God, but cannot not, or will not, admit that truth to Cain. This seems to me the explanation best supported by the text.

2. One can understand these statements as exemplifying Lucifer's technique for educating Cain. Lucifer, at first wary of shocking Cain, pretends to be a mere rebellious angel. Later, when Cain is firmly in his grasp, Lucifer can afford to reveal his true nature to Cain.

3. One can understand these statements as symptoms of Byron's

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[30] Even at that moment, Lucifer rebels against the idea that God created the angels, "[a]s he saith--which I know not nor believe" (I, 141). Later, Lucifer suggests that God, far from being eternal, has a beginning "as mean / As thou" (II, i, 153-59).

artless theological incoherence. Speaking through Lucifer, Byron begins to betray enthusiasm for heretical notions about the limitations of God, without noticing the inconsistencies with Lucifer's earlier statements.

4. One can understand Lucifer's speeches as precise and accurate statements of Byron's theogony, to be reconciled with each other by fine distinctions. Jerome McGann manages such a reconciliation, as a result of which he assigns to Byron a complex and precise Gnostic theology (260-61), including a schedule of stages according to which antagonistic principles split off from the original God and develop in tandem (Fiery Dust 267). According to McGann, the God worshipped by Abel and disparaged by Lucifer is a mere "temporary power" (261), equal and opposite to Lucifer, both of whom are to be distinguished from Byron's "revered and immutable Almighty Lord who is the source of all Life" (260) but who is "totally amoral" (261). McGann derives this complex mythology from a rather too close reading of Lucifer's contradictory statements about God, assuming both that Lucifer is truthful about his own perceptions, and that Byron fully identifies with these.[31] Since both of these assumptions are suspect, it might seem wiser to accept Thorslev's description of Byron's theology in this work: "skeptical" (Thorslev 89).

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[31] McKeever, following a slightly different path, also concludes that McGann confuses the theology of a character in this play with that of Byron himself (177 n.5).

At the end of the journey to Hades, Lucifer, betraying his trust as Cain's mentor, inflicts his most painful wounds. Beginning by casting doubts on the depth of Cain's feelings of rebellion and melancholy, he asks: "Thou thinkest / Thyself most wicked and unhappy. Is it / Not so?" (II, ii, 216-18). Now that he no longer needs Cain's trust, Lucifer can afford to deflate him with a hateful, but accurate, prediction:

> Thy present state of sin--and thou art evil--
> Of sorrow--and thou sufferest--are both Eden
> In all its innocence compared to what
> Thou shortly may'st be. (II, ii, 219-223).

Lucifer predicts growing sin and sorrow for Cain's descendants as well (II, ii, 223-27), intending that information to hurt Cain. Knowing, or at least suspecting, that Cain will soon be tempted to commit a heinous crime, Lucifer teaches him hopelessness, and makes the crime more likely. Cain, in all innocence, can still say "For crime, I know not" (II, ii, 218); shortly he will know.

Cain and Lucifer have different purposes for their journey: Cain's goal is to satisfy his curiosity; Lucifer's, repeated in all his speeches in Act II, is to depress Cain, to hurt his pride, to deprive him of hope.[32] When, Lucifer achieves his

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[32] The play fully supports Byron's explanation:
> Cain is a proud man: if Lucifer promised him kingdoms, etc., it would elate him: the object of the Demon is to depress him still further in his own estimation than he was before, by

intended result, Cain, overwhelmed by the immensity of what he has seen, cries out "Alas! I seem / As nothing" (II, ii, 420-21). That feeling of worthlessness remains with Cain after his return to Earth, and (III, 68), and contributes to his crime.

If Byron intended Lucifer as simply the mouthpiece for the author's most deeply held convictions, it is hard to see why Byron made him guileful, arrogant, loveless, and unhappy. Most of all, it is hard to see why his influence on Cain multiplies Cain's problems. So Thorslev is right: Lucifer cannot be an entirely sympathetic character, since he cannot love (Thorslev 183; similarly Russell, Mephistopheles 184). Russell's summary of the presentation of Lucifer goes beyond Thorslev's: "Although he promotes intellectual freedom and progress, Lucifer is deliberately blind, self-absorbed, and selfish" (Russell Mephistopheles 185). Even this assessment may be too generous, as it implies that Lucifer is indifferent to the pain which he causes Adah and Cain, whereas in fact Lucifer is malevolent. Roston correctly sees that Lucifer is "the exponent of reason and intrepid speculation," but also the tempter who causes Cain's downfall (Biblical Drama 211).

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showing him infinite things and his own abasement, till he falls into the frame of mind that leads to the Catastrophe (Letter of Nov. 3, 1821 to Murray, LJ V, 470 BL&J 9: 53. See discussion in Steffan 9).

> We must keep in mind Lucifer's dual role: on the specific and literal level, he was Cain's teacher and irritant, tormenting the unhappy boy. . . On the broadly social and abstract level, Lucifer was vigorous intellectual critic of religious dogma that Byron detested and of the abuses of tyrannical authority. (Steffan 58).

That dual role is a wonderful demonstration of Byron's artistry: Lucifer's political arguments seem excellent, his religious arguments have some force, and yet the results of those arguments are, for Cain, unmitigated disaster. We cannot take Lucifer at his word as a benefactor of mankind, but neither can we easily dismiss his reasoning. Lucifer's logical arguments are not compromised by his lies. When he attacks traditional apologies for the goodness of God, for the ultimate value of suffering, for the effects of original sin, for vicarious atonement, and so forth, he may indeed speak for Byron.

If Lucifer is a study of evil, there is a contrasting study of goodness in this play, in Byron's positive portrait of Adah. She is representative of "the attractions of comfortable acquiescence to traditional theology," but also "the representative of goodness, loyalty and love" (Roston, Biblical Drama 211). This path is beautiful, but not accessible to someone like Cain, much as he loves and respects

Adah. Thus Cain is a tragedy. The hero can admire, but can never achieve, religious serenity.

At the morning prayers which open the play, Adah prays to be able to love God and his creatures (I, 14-18). What she prays for, she has. Throughout the play, Adah exemplifies love. After the family prayers are done, Cain wants to be alone. Adah, gently asks him to return to her (I, 55-62). In fact, Adah always seeks to be together with him (I, 336-37; I, 533-34; III, 527-8; III, 551), even when he leaves to travel with Lucifer against her advice (I, 348), even when he tells her to leave him after the murder (III, 460). Being together is part of her definition of happiness: "Alone I could not / Nor would be happy; but with those around us, / I think I could be so, despite of death" (I, 465-67).[33]

The next item on the schedule is work, which Cain refuses to do: "Toil! And wherefore should I toil? Because / My father could not keep his place in Eden" (I, 65-6). Adah casually remarks, a short while later, that she has finished Cain's work (I, 338) along with her own, in time for their usual "hour of rest and joy" (I, 336). This suggests that Cain's bitter laments about his need to work are disproportionate to his few light assignments; that Cain's cry, far from being an

[33] The one exception occurs when, at Abel's request, Adah leaves Abel and Cain so that they may sacrifice in privacy (III, 171-175). See discussion below.

heroic call for justice for the world's exhausted workers, is more like the petulant and cranky complaints of a bored teenager who does not want to do his chores.[34] But Adah's remark is overdetermined. To the extent that we believe her about the ease of the tasks, her remark supports our suspicions that Cain's complaints are unfounded. To the extent that we suspect her description minimizes the work in order not to offend Cain, it suggests that Adah is so loving that she would do even arduous tasks cheerfully, if that would bring peace to the family.

When Lucifer appears on the scene, Adah at first does not recognize him as anything sinister, thinking him rather to be one of the usual, run-of-the-mill angels who stops in on their family from time to time (I, 340-45). This indicates her ingenuous loving nature, welcoming all.[35] However, Adah quickly becomes more perceptive than Cain about Lucifer, recognizing him as a kindred of the serpent of Eden (I, 351; I, 567-7), and she remains so through the rest of the play (III, 45ff). When he demands that Cain leave her to travel with him, she asks a question that echoes with ever greater significance throughout the play: "Who / Art thou that

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[34] Adam apparently sees it this way, when he describes the toil, which Cain cannot tolerate, as "not heavy" (I, 48), merely a "little labor" (I, 50).

[35] Steffan suggests that, at their first encounter, she simply is not creative enough to recognize Lucifer for what he is (61).

steppeth between heart and heart?" (I, 349).[36] Though she is attracted by his beauty (I, 410-412), very early on, she recognizes his destructive method exactly: He is one of those demons who, like the serpent of Eden, "tempt us with our own / Dissatisfied and curious thoughts" (I, 402-3).

Nonetheless, Adah's compassion extends even to Lucifer: "Thou seem'st unhappy; do not make us so, / And I will weep for thee" (I, 518-19). Lucifer has no compassion. He is not grateful for Adah's tears; rather, they indicate to him that he will not win her over. Not being able to win, he cruelly seeks to hurt, tormenting her by revealing that her descendants will undergo pain (I, 521-24).

The loss of Eden, which Cain understands as a philosophic challenge to the justice of God, and a personal source of pain, and which so obsesses him, does not disrupt Adah's thoughts. She is less philosophic than he, and more willing to live in this world. So Adah refuses to join Cain in whining over the loss of Eden, finally telling him that love of family has replaced the need for Paradise (III, 40).

When, after Cain returns from his trip with Lucifer, Adah

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[36] Lucifer accepts that definition, asserting: "All things are / Divided with me" (I, 547-8). Note the echo of passages in the New Testament: All things are divided for Lucifer (Acts 2:27, 30-32; Eph. 4:9-10).

objects to his impious talk, he, in an agitated state, tells Adah to leave him (III, 94). She refuses, in language which foreshadows the end of the play: "Never, / Though thy God left thee" (III, 95). Adah, upon hearing the sentence of banishment proclaimed by Adam, immediately begins making plans for her exile with Cain, saying "we must go forth. I am ready, / So shall our children be. I will bear Enoch, / And you his sister" (III, 455-58). She, ever loyal, assumes that she will travel with Cain; once again, she refuses to accept Cain's advice: "Leave me" (III, 460). Throughout the play, Adah follows her emotions in striving to be together with Cain. Now, she sacrifices even her own feelings in order to support him: "I alone must not weep. My office is / Henceforth to dry up tears and not to shed them" (III, 547-48). She asks to take part of Cain's burden, as she follows his path into the wilderness. This conclusion, more than anything else in the play, justifies Michael Cook's comment that "latent criticism of the self-centered attitude--private or political--is perceptible even within the 'heroic' works, especially . . . Cain" (Cook 110).

The worst moments for Cain always happen in the absence of Adah. Lucifer asks Cain to worship him only when Adah is away (I, 303). Lucifer makes his most powerful impression on him during the long trip to outer space and Hades, a trip on which Lucifer emphatically did not invite Adah (I, 348). Abel asks

Adah to leave so that he and Cain can sacrifice, perhaps because they needed privacy, but certainly because the playwright needs Adah offstage for the rejection of Cain's sacrifice and the murder of Abel (III, 172-3).

The playwright treats Adah as consistently sympathetic. She has no faults, except perhaps her orthodoxy. Marchand calls that a "bland acceptance of the world as it is" (Byron's Poetry 90), which overstates her passivity; ever willing to act to improve circumstances, she is unwilling to raise philosophic objections to reality. Her love for Cain, and for their children, survives the tragedy. Byron gives Adah an entirely loving personality throughout the play, to the extent that she sometimes seems less of a fully developed character than an embodiment of principles of love for God and fellow. If she adheres to the religious beliefs of her family, which Cain and Lucifer so ably demolish, that does not hurt her or Cain.

Byron's play is a drama of ideas. Most of the dialogue is philosophic dispute. At several points the characters are acutely aware of the interplay between abstract ideas in determining their actions. Asked to choose between happiness and pride, Cain chooses pride. "I will have nought to do with happiness / Which humbles me and mine" (I, 465-6). That choice determines his decision to accept the honor of joining

Lucifer in exploring universes. Similarly, Lucifer prefers knowledge to love: "Choose betwixt love and knowledge, since there is / No other choice. Your sire has chosen already. / His love is but fear" (I, 429-31). Cain's decision to travel with Lucifer is presented as the equivalent of choosing knowledge over other values (I, 557-8). Given the same choices, Adah picks love and happiness (I, 430-31), which for her means sharing (I, 472): "What else can joy be, but the spreading joy?" (I, 481).

The constellation of abstract values, pride and knowledge on the one hand, sharing, love and happiness on the other, has powerful concrete significance for Byron. The solitary hero who is born proud and curious, who would not change that part of his personality if he could, is thus doomed to unhappiness. Lucifer fits that pattern, although he seems not to be curious: He has great knowledge, and overwhelming pride, and he is completely, unrelievedly, unhappy. Cain is slightly more complex than the pattern, for his love for Adah and their children intrudes on his solitude. At a crucial moment, though, when he follows Lucifer, Cain acts according to his curiosity and pride, and against his love for Adah; that choice leads from unhappiness to enduring unhappiness. Adah stands as a foil to the Byronic hero. She consistently chooses to act with love, and to share with her beloved, even to the point of going into exile with Cain. So she maintains

some happiness whatever evil occurs; unlike Lucifer and Cain, she is "not wretched" (I, 463). The opposition of abstract qualities is a little too neat, but when Byron fleshes it out in the three main characters of the play, it delineates his portrait of Cain as a Byronic hero.

In one area, however, the oppositions among the three characters is not balanced. Lancelot Shadwell, an attorney hired by the play's publisher to defend the play (and thus protect the publisher's copyright), summarizes the relationship between Cain and Adah inaccurately:

> Although the poet puts passages in his [Cain's] mouth, which of themselves are blasphemous and impious. . . those passages are powerfully combated by the beautiful arguments of his wife, Adah. (Shadwell in Steffan 14).

Actually, Adah rarely disputes with Lucifer;[37] her example, rather than specific logical arguments, form the counterweight in the plot. It seems appropriate to speculate why Byron does not give her much in the way in intellectual ammunition, since he is not wholly of Lucifer's opinions. Part of the answer is purely literary: Byron develops a formal equilibrium, in which the intellectual Lucifer is counterbalanced by the intuitional

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[37] "Lucifer's views stand unchallenged by anything except Cain's quite human questioning, and the thorny problems of theodicy and of original sin remain in the play as mysteries" (Thorslev 178).

Adah. The rest of the answer must be moral-religious. Let me present three alternatives:

1. Byron has great respect for the power of love, and he values the practices of kindly, loving people. Their virtues are, for him, the best argument for faith; just as the most telling argument against faith, more than any intellectual one, is the evil practice of people who slaughter each other in its name. Adah's defence of religious submission and family closeness rests on the basis of kindness, love, and compassion; Byron does not think that it can be improved by any of the intellectual arguments in favor of religious orthodoxy or political submissiveness.

2. Byron believes that "the Tree of Knowledge is not the that of Life" (Manfred 1. 12. Complete Poetical Works 4:55) Knowledge, as Cain learns, poisons happiness. Religious belief, though it is intellectually indefensible, can lead to happiness. Religious doubt and denial, though they are grounded in accurate reasoning, lead to misery. Therefore Adah, who represents religion in its most attractive form, does not get involved in reasoning. Cain, who represents the intellectual quest, reasons well, but has nothing to show for it.

3. "The focal problem in Cain is the limits of human

knowledge" (McGann, Fiery Dust 245); Byron's answer is that nothing can be known of ultimate truth. The "search for absolute knowledge" is "inevitably tragic" (Thorslev 198-199); it conflicts with "the satisfaction of limited and human love" (Thorslev 199). At the end of the play, Cain abandons his quest for the great answers; Adah has never taken up the quest, being satisfied with her beliefs. Thus, Byron demonstrates that "human love" is "the one sure value in a world of irrational conflict" (Thorslev 199).

I wonder to what extent it is significant for Byron that the intellectual Lucifer is male, and the emotional Adah female. The trend towards an "idealization of women" (Roston, Biblical Drama 200) may explain part of the innocence of Cain's wife: "The tender, righteous pleas of a loving and virtuous wife prove powerless against his masculine vigor and fearless curiosity" (Roston, Biblical Drama 200). An idealized romantic woman may show moral, but not necessarily intellectual, strength. Furthermore, Byron may selectively admire religious intensity in women rather more than in men: "I like [religious] devotion in women" (Medwin 82).

Roston writes that in Byron's day, the trend was towards an "idealization of woman" that "made a virtue of her weakness and her need for male comfort and protection" (Roston, Biblical Drama 200), which does not seem entirely on point

about Adah. While she does need Cain, she is certainly not the weaker of the two.

Cain is torn between the ethical Adah, who embodies love, and the intellectual Lucifer, who cannot love. Cain cannot be understood without understanding his attachment to each of these characters. He is tragically unable either to resolve the conflict or to escape from it. He cannot achieve peace. At the very close of the play, as he takes his family into the wilderness, Cain laments for Abel and also for Abel's unborn children (III, 557); Adah piously responds to his mention of Abel: "Peace be with him" (III, 561), to which Cain replies "But with me!" (III, 561), implicitly abandoning all hope of peace. The play ends with those sad words.

Cain's condition, at end of the play, is, appropriately enough for a tragic hero, dismal. It comes as a surprise to find critics who see Cain as victorious: "[T]here is a good deal of power in the moving victory, however grim, of . . . Cain in exile" (Thompson 408). On the contrary, by the conclusion of the play, Cain, and Byron with him, seems to have lost all his enthusiasm for scorning God. Where is Cain's pride, his skepticism, his rebellion, his ironic comments about conventional morality? Lucifer, the favorite character of the radical readers, has completely disappeared. The only character who remains faithful to Cain is the pious Adah. If

the first two acts of Byron's play are distressing to his pious readers, the third is equally distressing to his radical readers.

One of those radical readers is the British Liberal political figure Michael Foot, whose work is a vindication of the Byron's reputation as a champion of religious and political revolution. The beginning of Cain is one of the supports for Foot's thesis, so much so that he draws his title for the book from a letter of Byron's explaining Cain's rebellion: The Politics of Paradise (Letter to Murray of September 19, 1821, LJ V, 368, BL&J 8:216). Foot characterizes Byron's motives in writing Cain:

> He wanted to settle his scores with his old Calvinistic God, although the censure could be applied equally to all other Christian faiths where the expulsion from Eden, the fall of man, the branding of Cain, were accepted as worthy traditions for the human race to accept and honor. (Foot 293).

Naturally, Foot would have trouble dealing with end of the play: In fact, Foot does not mention it at all. For Foot, it remains as if the play ends with Lucifer's speeches.

Bostetter faces the same problem in "Byron and the Politics of Paradise." He asserts that Byron's play is intended as "an

attack on the social and political as well as the religious implications of . . . dogma" (574); how, then, to explain Byron's "retreat into orthodoxy at the end of the play" (575 n.10)? Bostetter recognizes that the play "fades out on a note which seems to concede completely Cain's guilt and the justice of his punishment" (575). Bostetter offers three explanations: that Byron "refused to face directly the full implications of his thought" (575-6 n.10), that he was driven to this conservative conclusion by his choice of a somber, humorless writing style (Bostetter 575), and that he wanted to avoid a head-on clash with authorities (576 n.10). Therefore, Byron's explanations of his play, in his letters to Murray and Moore, "are to be taken neither at face value nor as deliberately disingenuous" (Bostetter 576 n.10). In short, Bostetter resolves the conflict by claiming that Byron did not really mean the conclusion of his play. Bostetter's position is no more satisfying than Foot's.[38]

At the other extreme, Lancelot Shadwell, the lawyer who defended the book in Chancery Court, found it more sensible to read the play as leading up to its conclusion, simply

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[38] By asserting his right to determine what the author really meant, Bostetter begs a host of questions: 1. Definitional: What does a playwright, or other fiction writer, mean when he writes something? 2. Epistomological: Can anyone know whether the fiction writer meant what he said or not? 3. Methodological: If someone can know this, how can he come by this knowledge?

repudiating its blasphemous opening.[39] To read the play that way is to ignore the impact of Lucifer's unanswered theological challenges, and of Byron's revolutionary sympathy for the defiant Cain. "It is all but impossible for the modern reader to appreciate the audacity of Cain, or to realize the alarm and indignation which it aroused by its appearance" (E. H. Coleridge, notes to Byron's Poetry V, 202 quoted in Marchand 85). Foot is completely correct that Byron must mean his use of Cain as a shocking tactic, and "the idea of choosing Cain, the first murderer, to confound the Christians can still stun the imagination" (293).

Some writers attempt to account for conflicting sympathies in the play. Thompson writes that Byron had no positive creed at all, only the belief in rebellion against the old system. That is why "no traditional restoration follows the catastrophe and there is no real way to build a larger structure out of the several heroic acts" (Thompson 408). Roston feels that Byron dramatizes a religious crisis, but does not resolve it; rather "Bryon retired from the spiritual fray only vaguely aware of the direction in which the solution lay" (Roston, Biblical Drama 207). For Roston, the conclusion of the play is unexpected and unsatisfying. Cain's

> meek submission at the conclusion is, unlike Job's,

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[39] Shadwell's speech is reproduced in Steffan 13-15; among modern critics, Hirst comes closest to agreeing with Shadwell ("Byron's Lapse into Orthodoxy").

> an unexpected volte face which leaves the reader merely perplexed. Byron's lack of a consistent religious (or even anti-religious) philosophy is patent at the end of the play (Roston, Biblical Drama 211).

Marchand, with acute sensitivity towards Byron's divided soul, feels that Byron changes his mind. He began to write a simple play of rebellion, in which "Lucifer is a champion of the 'good principle,' whereas God by his deeds is shown as 'evil'" (Byron's Poetry 86). What prevents him from carrying out the plan is "Byron's haunting sense of sin" which "disturbed the picture, and left him without full convictions in his own skepticism" (Byron's Poetry 86). For this reason, he fails to carry out his plan. "Cain in the end is remorseful and repentant and does not cry out against a tyrant god but accepts his judgment of exile" (Byron's Poetry 86). Thus Marchand finds the moral and religious complexity of Byron's Cain to be a sign of failure.

Steffan interprets the conclusion of the poem as a profoundly pessimistic call for doomed revolt:

> Byron, who had, for two and a half acts, given a sympathetic presentation of the causes and complexities of revolt. . . did not invalidate nor compromise that revolt in the last two hundred lines. For men like Byron, Lucifer, and Cain,

> rebellion against the social, political and theological system was imperative. The outcomes of the struggle--calamity and then anguish over the fratricide and a crushing rejection by the system and a confession of immoderation--these too were inevitable. (Steffan 49).

Steffan's interpretation has the virtue of explaining the emotional effect of both halves of the work, and even of their order: Rebellion is worthwhile and invigorating, but ultimately it must fail. Unfortunately, Steffan's interpretation of the conclusion does not make sense of the role of Adah.

Hirst argues that "Once Byron had selected the Cain story for his version of man's Fall the plot left him little choice but to censure disobedience" ("Byron's Lapse into Orthodoxy" 171). The power of the biblical version is so great that Byron, against his will, told its story rather than his own.

It seems to me that Byron's Cain is the ultimate paradoxical retelling. Byron has us identify, in varying degrees, with Lucifer, Cain and Adah; Byron himself seems unsure about how to achieve goodness. While Byron's Cain rebels in anger against the world as it is, and against complacent theology, he also has a deep thirst for religious comfort, and the value of love. A great deal of the play consists of complaint

against God's justice. On the other hand, the complaint is made by Lucifer, who is not honest or impartial, and by Cain, who is in part driven by flaws in personality. Cain's fall comes from following the words of Lucifer. While none of the characters makes a particularly convincing defense of God, Abel has a certain dignity in his sincere faith in God, and Adah's faith is part of what makes her the most attractive character in the play. Byron's Cain is on the knife-edge between the religious and the anti-religious versions of the story; or, perhaps, on both sides of the edge. In short, Byron presents the religious quests of his characters with purposeful ambiguity (a technique which Byron might have learned from the biblical text itself), so that Alter's comment about the Bible could apply as well to Byron's play: It seems to "have been devised precisely not to yield a solution, or to yield multiple and contradictory solutions, and . . . this might be the very hallmark of its greatness" ("Interpreting" 56).

Byron loved the Bible, "that is to say the Old Testament," which, as he writes to John Murray, "I had read through & through before I was eight years old." He continued to be "a great reader and admirer of those books." In fact, in this letter to Murray, written a few days after the completion of Cain, he orders a new copy of the Bible even though he already owns one, explaining that he does not want to wear out the

copy which was his last gift from his sister (letter to John Murray, Oct. 9, 1821, LJ V, 391 BL&J 8:238). Byron's deep familiarity with the Bible, and his daring to read it in unusual ways, is apparent at many places in the play,[40] and, possibly in the tone of the play as a whole. Hirst finds Byron's Cain to be "truly Biblical in spirit" ("Byron's Lapse into Orthodoxy" 163).

Byron's education prepared him for reading the biblical text without the mediation of tradition. He recalls bitterly that, as a child, he was "cudgelled to Church" (Letter to W. Gifford, June 18, 1813, LJ II, 222; see discussion in Marjoram 1). Thus Byron's earliest experience with Bible reading was extensive and pleasant, and his earliest experience with formal religion was extensive and unpleasant.

Byron's religious feeling was marked by independence and distaste for authoritarianism. A wealth of information about Byron's religious opinions, much of them apparently

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[40] I cannot resist an example. Cain, in response to Lucifer's wonderful tour of the cosmos, exclaims:

> Oh God! Oh Gods! or whatso'er ye are!
> How beautiful ye are! How beautiful your
> Your works, or accidents, or whatso'er
> They may be. (II, ii, 110-13)

This wonderful mix of faithfulness and agnosticism, one of the very few flashes of humor in this somber play, is a parody of Psalms 92:6.

contradictory, can be gleaned from Byron's numerous letters,[41] and from the writings of his various interlocutors (Medwin 77-79). He followed his own lead in matters of doctrine, and was repelled by systematic theology (Marjarum 36). A pair of typical examples: "I abhor books of religion, though I reverence and love my God without the blasphemous notions of sectaries, or belief in their absurd and damnable heresies, mysteries, and Thirty-nine Articles."[42] He maintained, "I am a better christian than those parsons of yours though not paid for being so" (Letter to John Murray, Oct. 9, 1821, LJ V, 391, BL&J 8:237).

Byron knew some esoteric sources on the story of Cain. In one of his earliest poems, he refers to the legend that Cain descended from the union between Lucifer and Eve ("The Edinburgh Ladies Petition to Doctor Moyes and his Reply," "The Reply" lines 133-142, [1807], TCPW 1:199). McGann believes

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[41] On the one hand, see Marjarum (80-82) for the letters that Byron wrote explaining why he arranged to have his daughter, Allegra, educated in a convent. These express some of Byron's positive feelings about secure religious belief.

But also see Byron's journal entry: ". . . I envy no one the certainty of his self-approved wisdom" (LJ II, 351-2, 'Journal' [Nov.] 27, 1813; see discussion in Marjarum 30). And see Byron's reference to the "seventy-two villainous sects who are tearing each other to pieces for the love of the Lord and hatred of each other" (Letter to Francis Hodgson, Sept. 3, 1811, LJ II, 22 BL&J 2:89; see discussion in Marjoram 28).

[42] Byron's memorandum of 'works I have perused,' cited by Marjarum (2), from Chapter V of Paul Elmer More's edition of the Complete Poetical Works of Lord Byron (New York: Cambridge, 1905).

that Byron learned this version from Bayle's Dictionary (notes to TCPW 1:387).[43] From Armenian translations of the Bible (which Byron read in Armenian!), he learned the story that Cain and Abel were rivals for the love of their sister.[44] But Byron did not necessarily depend on esoteric sources for his unusual readings: "He knew his Bible as well as any other great English poet, not excluding Milton, but the effect of the instruction became the opposite of that which all the priests and preachers had intended" (Foot 93-4).

As a careful and creative reader of the Bible, Byron noted the extensive parallels between its stories of Cain and of the Fall (see Chapter 2), and worked similar parallels into his play. The suggestion that the romantic versions of Cain are "disguised versions of the Fall" (Roston Biblical Drama 200) has its strongest support in Byron's Cain. When Byron's characters debate about the justice of the Fall, they also confront vicarious atonement, for the two doctrinal themes are

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[43] In a letter written days after he finished writing Cain, Byron refers to his desire to obtain a copy of Bayle's Dictionary (letter to John Murray, 9 Oct. 1821, in LJ V, 391 BL&J 8:238).

[44] In Byron's words: "I had once an idea of following the Armenian Scriptures, and making Cain's crime proceed from jealousy, and love of his uterine sister; but, though a more probable cause of the dispute, I abandoned it as unorthodox" (Medwin 126).

Nerval, finding this same theme in other esoteric sources, makes use of it at a crucial moment in his version of the story.

related: Original Sin means that each human being stands in need of salvation by virtue of being born a descendant of Adam and Eve, who, yielding to the demonic serpent, first disobeyed God. Vicarious atonement means that the death of Jesus makes that salvation available. In Christian doctrine, vicarious atonement is the answer to Original Sin.

Much of the play prepares for the idea that the murder of Abel is in some sense a second Fall, a reenactment of Eve's sin in Eden. Eve's opening prayer introduces this theme: "Let me not see my offspring fall into / The snares beyond the walls of Paradise, / Which ev'n in Paradise destroyed his parents" (I, 40-41). Cain repeatedly complains about the Fall, of which he is innocent and for which he deserves no part of the punishment. His implication is that he would have withstood the temptation which destroyed Adam and Eve. After the murder, it becomes clear "that Cain's temptation, his murder of Abel, and his banishment repeat the pattern of the Fall, whose effects Cain had been trying to escape throughout the play" (Tannenbaum, Blake and the Iconography of Cain 29).

> The irony of this prolonged parallelism is that Cain was not conscious that his role was similar to his mother's, that his willing association with Lucifer incorporated his mother's succumbing to the blandishments of the serpent, and that his yearning for wisdom and his eagerness to travel were

> variants of her curiosity about the new life and knowledge the serpent had offered her. (Steffan 70-71).

The story of the Fall furnishes Byron with nearly all the imagery in his Cain. He uses a carefully restricted set of frequently recurrent images: trees, fruit and serpents (Steffan 78-80).[45] These images, operating on an almost subliminal level, echo the Eden story throughout the play. So, too, the recurring image of dust, earth and clay for mortality (Steffan 81-82) echoes Adam's sentence: "For dust thou art, and to dust shalt thou return" (Gen. 3: 19).

The most astonishing connection in this play between Adam's punishment and Cain's occurs early in Cain's journey through space, long before the murder. Cain refers to the punishment endured by his father after the Fall: "He shut him forth from Paradise with death / Written on his forehead" (II, i, 74-75). This is the mark of Adam! There is no hint in the biblical text, nor do I know any traditional source, for the idea that Adam was given a mark of any sort. The biblical sign, of course, is that of Cain (Gen. 4:15), and the dominant tradition has long been that this was some kind of mark written on Cain's forehead. In fact, later in Byron's

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[45] Steffan notes that these images are appropriate for Cain's limited experience (90).

play, an angel does mark Cain's brow (III, 500). So, when Byron has Cain mention the mark of Adam, the poet sets up the murder of Abel as a postfiguration of the Fall. Further, he develops a powerful dramatic irony, for Cain, at that point in the story, cannot know, as the audience certainly does, who is destined to have the most famous marked brow in literature.

At several points in the play, Byron's characters debate about the doctrine of vicarious atonement. During a discussion with Lucifer about the paradox of the existence of evil in a world created by a good God,[46] Cain launches an oblique attack to this doctrine: A lamb is bitten by a poisonous snake (II, ii, 288-305). Though Adam cures the lamb by placing herbs on its wound (II, ii, 293-94), Cain thinks it would have been better had God created a world in which the lamb would not have to "purchase renewal of its little life / With agonies unutterable, though / Dispelled by antidotes" (II, ii, 303-05).[47] Each of the figures in the story, the poisonous serpent, the innocent lamb, the loving mother, and the powerful father, has obvious referents in the central mythos of Christianity. The plot similarly resonates with the life

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[46] Curiously, Steffan misidentifies the theological paradox in this passage as "God's goodness and man's evil" (282).

[47] Steffan again explains that Byron chose this example, since "he had to stay within the compass of Cain's local experience" (282), and this pastoral story is consistent with Cain's experience.

story of Jesus. Because of the evil serpent, the innocent lamb must die, but through the intervention of the father the lamb lives again. Looking at the story from a Christian perspective, as Cain challenges the goodness of a God who created evil in the world, by implication Byron simultaneously challenges the classical Christian answer to that problem. The lamb cures evil, but God would still have done better to have prevented evil.

While Byron merely hints at a challenge to the doctrine of vicarious atonement here, later in the play, he has Cain attack the doctrine explicitly, and with considerable logical acuity (III 79-92).[48] When Cain wishes that his parents would die for their own sins, and leave him alone, Adah says "Would I could die for them, so they might live" (III, 79). Roston points out that that is "the Christian doctrine of vicarious atonement" (Roston, Biblical Drama in England 209), presented with sympathy. Cain acknowledges Adah's correctness, that vicarious atonement would be worthwhile, but only if that one death would serve for all time, for everyone, especially their own little child (III, 80-84), thus agreeing with vicarious atonement in principle. Adah, predicting Christian doctrine, says: "How know we that some such atonement one day / May not redeem our

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[48] Steffan appropriately notes that Byron, in his own voice, attacks the doctrine in a letter to Hodgson on Sept. 13, 1811 (LJ II, 35 BL&J 2:97).

race?" (III, 85-86), to which Cain responds by reverting to his criticism of the doctrine on logical and moral grounds (III, 86-92). At the end of the play, Cain himself articulates something very like the doctrine, requesting of the angel:

> But could I
> With my own death redeem him from the dust--
> And why not so? Let him return today,
> And I lie ghastly! So shall be restored
> By God to him the life he loved; and taken
> From me a being I ne'er loved to be. (III, 510-515).

Byron alludes to the influence of the mystery plays in the title of his Cain: a Mystery. Like the medieval playwrights, Byron invents material to fill in the biblical story of Cain and to emphasize its contemporary parallels. Byron follows the mysteries in some physical details of the story, most notably the flame which consumes Abel's offering (Steffan 299). Byron's Cain and the Cain of the medieval mysteries share their complaints about the need for labor, their "pride, non-conformity and defiance, their antagonism towards the deity and their scorn of piety, their surliness and hot temper" (Steffan 299). The purposes of Byron's play and the medieval mysteries are very different. The mysteries retell the story to reinforce religious belief and practice. To that

end, they emphasize Cain's evil, portraying Cain as coarse, crude, arrogant, even the butt of jokes, in order to make him a completely unsympathetic character. The members of the audience are expected to identify with Abel, and the angels. Byron makes Cain a sympathetic character, and uses his story to dramatize religious or political conflicts which remain unresolved.

Critics still argue the extent of Gnostic influence on Byron's play. Lucifer's speeches, especially in Act II, have a Gnostic tone (the best example is II, ii, 426-442). Byron was aware of the dualist implications of that part of his play, did not want the entire work to be mistaken for a Gnostic tract. He writes, in the Preface, "I am prepared to be accused of Manicheism,[49] or some other hard name ending in ism . . . Against such I can defend myself" (Preface 156).

A great influence on Byron's play is exerted by Gessner's Der Tod Abels. Byron knew the work, which was one of the first works that his German master read him, and Byron joked about its oversentimentality,[50] largely dismissing the work in the

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[49] The Manichees, whom Byron knew from Bayle's dictionary, were a Gnostic sect who believed in a good God of light, creator of the soul, and an evil God of darkness, creator of the body (Steffan 262-3).

[50] Byron told his friends that while the German master "was crying his eyes out over its pages, I thought that any other than Cain had hardly committed a crime in ridding the world of so dull a fellow as Gessner made his brother Abel"

Preface to his own play on the theme:

> Gesner's [sic] Death of Abel I have never read since I was eight years of age, at Aberdeen. The general impression on my recollection is delight; but of the contents I remember only that Cain's wife was called Mehala, and Abel's Tirza. . . . Whether, then, a coincidence of subject may have caused the same in expression, I know nothing, and care as little. (Preface 156).

Several critics have pointed out that there is evidence in Byron's Cain that Byron remembered The Death of Abel better than he thought (Steffan 261).[51] In Byron's play, as in Gessner's rhapsody, Cain marries a sister, and fathers children, before the murder (B. Reed 102);[52] an angel, rather than God, speaks to Cain; a whirlwind demolishes Cain's altar; and Cain, in both versions is overcome with remorse after the murder. In both works Adam and Abel are "sentimentally moral characters" (Thorslev 98), exemplars of "evangelical piety" (E. H. Coleridge, Poetry V, 201, cited by Reed 97). In both, the family of Adam nag Cain to try to get him to pray (B. Reed

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(Medwin 126).

[51] Steffan lists this as the opinion of E. H. Coleridge, Chew and Thorslev (261). Reed, in particular, makes an extensive list of the parallels between the two works.

[52] In the Bible, Cain's wife and children are mentioned only after he has reached the land of Nod (Gen. 4:17; Steffan 73).

98). "Byron and Gessner both picture Cain as a loving husband" (B. Reed 99) and "a loving father," but gloomy, discontented and proud, in both (B. Reed 100, 101, 105). "In both works Cain's wife is the same loving, devoted wife" (B. Reed 99). She defends him against their sister's curse (Gessner, Canto 5) or their mother's (Byron, Cain III, 404-07). "Abel is, in both works, the same good, but uninteresting, character" (B. Reed 101). The other characters, except for Eve, are also more or less similar.

B. Reed makes the somewhat exaggerated claim that in both works the murder is "the result of a dream." Byron's Cain does say, "a dreary dream / Had maddened me" (III, 378-79), but there is no other discussion of this dream in the play, and it seems likely that he refers to his travels with Lucifer, rather than a literal dream. In both works, a malevolent supernatural being influences Cain, but there is more difference than similarity in the supernatural tempters. Gessner's Anamelech is a minor demon, who directly plants the idea of murder into Cain's head by inducing a literal dream; Byron's Lucifer is a powerful spirit, exerting awesome philosophic and psychological influence, who aggravates the worst tendencies in Cain's personality, until Cain is ready to commit the crime.

Byron copies the scope of the plot from Gessner as well. Both

works begin with the morning prayers of Adam's family, in which Cain is not inclined to join, and both works end with Cain and his wife heading out into the wilderness east of Eden.

The most important difference between the two works lies in the portraits of Cain himself, despite all the similarities which B. Reed lists. Gessner's Cain is a simpering adolescent, and "Byron's Cain, one of the poet's most striking characters, is not only a Cain type--as cursed, and as a wanderer--but he has been given the characteristics of a Titan, a Faust, and even of a Prometheus" (Thorslev 98).[53]

Byron, in the preface to Cain: a Mystery delivers a backhand acknowledgement of his debt to Milton: "Since I was twenty I have never read Milton; but I had read him so frequently before that this may make little difference" (Preface 156). Milton has the angel Michael present a vision of the future to Adam, in which Adam foresees the acts of Cain and his descendants (Paradise Lost XI, 425ff). Milton does not make a measurable change in the traditional presentation of Cain;

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[53] "In Cain's character Byron adds the unquenchable thirst for knowledge which he did not have in the German work" (Reed 101). These grand characteristics are not so foreign to the Cain theme as Thorslev suggests. As I have shown in earlier chapters, Cain's promethean, tragic strength, hinted at in the biblical text, appears clearly in Gnostic and kabbalistic works. It becomes an indispensable part of the theme of Cain in the French romantic period, as I shall show in the latter part of this work.

so, while the marks of Milton's influence can be found throughout Byron's play, he is not a forerunner of Byron's innovations in the theme of Cain.

The deepest source for Byron's version of Cain must certainly lie in his own psychology. Roston asserts that Cain is "patently a projection of Byron's inner struggles" (Biblical Drama 208). His sympathy for Cain as Cain endures the punishment of exile was, perhaps, made more acute by Byron's own situation, for Byron was literally in exile, in Ravenna, as he wrote. He had been forced to leave England by the scandal which followed the breakdown of his marriage, an uproar largely centered about his relations with his half-sister, Augusta (Maurois 302-327). Byron's sympathy for the biblical figure, who also indulged in innocent incest, and also suffered exile, was perhaps natural under the circumstances.[54] The innocent incest of Cain and his sister is present in Gessner, and ultimately may be traced to

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[54] Byron's defense of incest in this play is artfully done. Adah, in many ways the most sympathetic character in the play, certainly the most sympathetic defender of God and morality, praises the beauty of begetting children from the love between brother and sister. For her, Lucifer proves himself to be an evil spirit when he maliciously reports that incest will be, in the next generation, considered a sin. Since her love for her brother is definitely not sin, the notion that such love could be sinful at some other locale suggests the unorthodox doctrine that sin and virtue are determined by circumstance. She knows that this is certainly an evil belief (I, 362-382).

Byron's glee, as he develops the delicious multiple ironies of this passage, can only be imagined.

Midrashic sources; Byron also knew it from the Armenian Scriptures (Medwin 126). While B. Reed traces this toleration for incest to the radicalism of Godwin and Shelley (B. Reed 102-3), it probably also should be traced to incidents in Byron's own life. It must have had an extra measure of personal significance for him.

The characteristics of the story of Cain make it superbly suitable for Byron. Cain may have extenuating motivations for his crime, he may feel remorse immediately after the crime, but he cannot escape having committed the crime. His penitence may be partially accepted, but he is still doomed to a bleak fate. Byron expresses that kind of pessimism in much of his poetry. At the end of the story, death is inevitable, the human condition will not improve, the hero has failed to control his own impulses, the search for knowledge has not brought happiness, the search for God's justice has brought only paradoxical confusion. Human love remains as a value, but it is not enough to satisfy Cain's yearnings. The story of Cain, with its built-in pessimism, is a natural vehicle for Byron.

Cain is, after the crime, a lonely individual, isolated from society by his own guilt. Byron often writes about heroic lonesome, guilt-ridden heroes: Manfred, for example, and Childe Harold. Through Cain, Byron conveys his sense of the

loneliness of the extraordinary one, who constitutionally cannot accept the rules of society, of the pain felt by the one who is sensitive to his own evil.

The biblical Cain, after the crime, in his isolation from God, can also serve as a figure of the modern skeptic, bereft of religious certainty. In this play, in his letters and conversations, Byron voices the thought that some people are filled with religious conviction, for better or for worse; others--Byron usually includes himself among these--are aware of the intellectual and moral challenges to religious certainty (Medwin 80-1). This awareness gives them no comfort; having it could be a kind of bleak heroism, except that, unlike heroes, these people have no choice.[55] They may even yearn for contact with God.[56] Cain is a perfect figure for Byron to use to express his sympathetic attitude towards the natural doubters.

Readers who perceive Byron's self-identification with Cain sometimes use it to support the traditional view of Byron's limitations as a dramatist. This view is put most strongly by

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[55] Byron says: "It is not a matter of volition to unbelieve" (Medwin 80).

[56] Marjarum, summarizing Byron's explanations for educating his daughter Allegra in a convent: "It was impossible for Byron to lay aside his own doubts and his own heritage. But the fault should be remedied in Allegra's life. She should live as he might wish to have lived" (Marjarum 81).

Stendhal: "Lord Byron knew how to paint only one man: himself" (466). More recently, Marchand reiterates it:

> . . . even when he set out to write objectively, as in his historical dramas, in which prided himself on fidelity to the written records of characters and events, he could not but make the major figures over into personalities like himself with problems that were his own. (Marchand, Byron's Poetry 13).

Byron well knew that criticism: "Nor can I conceive why people will always mix up my own character and opinions with those of the imaginary beings which, as a poet, I have the right and liberty to draw" (Kennedy 91-92).

In fact, though, Byron creates a varied group of characters in his Cain. The ability to create widely diverse characters, with different convictions, praiseworthy in other playwrights, is often seen as a sign of Byron's erratic mind. The criticism would make sense, if it were a sign of merit in a play that the characters agree with each other. Of course, each of the characters does express a part of the poet's sensibility. Byron's defensive statement about the relationship between an author and his characters must therefore be a little two simple: "My ideas of a character may run away with me: like all imaginative men, I, of course, embody myself with the character while I draw it, but not a moment after the pen is off the paper" (Letter to Thomas

Moore, March 4, 1822. LJ VI, 31-32 BL&J 9:118-19). And yet, all these criticisms seem to have some application for Byron. Whether he creates a Lucifer or an Adah, he does seems to be dramatizing his inner beliefs, contradictory though they are; the contradictions seem to be located deep in Byron's soul.

Marchand faults Byron for being unable to come to an adequate resolution of conflicting doctrines, following this line to its illogical conclusion: ". . . whatever merit these poetic dramas have lies in the depth and sincerity of the personal revelation rather than in any resolution of a philosophical problem" (Marchand, Byron's Poetry 12). This criticism would make sense if it is appropriate to demand that plays solve their philosophical problems. Hirst, with a deeper understanding of the play, refuses to stigmatize "the poet's failure to solve the intractable dilemma of theodicy" ("Byron's Lapse into Orthodoxy" 167) as a religious, philosophical or literary flaw.[57] Some philosophic problems may have no solutions. For Byron himself, there never would be a resolution to the religious dilemmas which fueled his Cain. He would remain skeptical, independent, and tormented; he would revere God, and despise those who presumed to speak for God. He would maintain his respect for (and perhaps his

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[57] Similarly, McKeever observes that, though Byron "believed that God had a purpose, what that purpose was and what God was were questions that the poet never resolved, to his credit and the credit of his play" (180 n.14).

envy of) those whose religious faith is gentle and sure, while himself being among those who challenge and question. He would honor those who build simple, loving families, while valuing complete freedom.

Byron's attitude towards religion in this play was almost universally misunderstood in his own day. On the whole, I believe that this misunderstanding was generated by the differences between the confident religious sensibility of the critics and Byron's paradoxical religious sensibility. To a lesser extent, critics misunderstood Byron because, given the depth of their attachment to the traditional reading of Cain, they found Byron's heroic Cain to be an intolerable sign of the poet's religious enmity. In any event, the international uproar over Byron's Cain helped make reputation of the work throughout Europe, and inspired further exploration of the biblical theme. Some of the greatest writers of the time, in England and later in France, responded with their own sympathetic versions of Cain.

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THE ROMANTIC VINDICATION OF CAIN:

A STUDY OF SYMPATHETIC PRESENTATIONS OF CAIN BY SEVEN MAJOR ROMANTIC POETS IN ENGLAND AND FRANCE

by

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Chapter Eight: Blake's The Ghost of Abel

Blake's The Ghost of Abel is a small illuminated book, just two pages long. Its subtitle describes it as a "Revelation . . . seen by William Blake." Below the subtitle are four lines of gnomic poetry, dedicating the work "to Lord Byron in the Wilderness." After brief stage directions, the main body of the work is a very short play. Blake intersperses small engraved illustrations throughout the text. At the end of the text, he presents a large engraved illustration, labelled "The Voice of Abels Blood." A small postscript date is appended to the second page (The Illuminated Blake 381-384).

While The Ghost of Abel is dedicated to Lord Byron, and certainly reads as an answer to Byron's Cain, there is one problem with considering it so: the date. The Ghost of Abel is headed "etched 1822," but at the foot these words appear: "1822. Blake's original stereotype was 1788." Byron's Cain was written in 1821. Blake could not have written his response to Byron's Cain thirty-three years before Byron wrote it.

Nor can "1788" be some sort of copyist's error. Blake etched

the text and accompanying artwork for The Ghost of Abel; he printed and produced the book himself. Both the dedication to Byron, obviously in response to Byron's Cain, and the date 1788, are part of the plate which Blake himself produced. Both lines can be clearly seen in the full-color copy of The Ghost of Abel (The Illuminated Blake 381-384).

In the face of this problem, G. E. Bentley equivocates: "Blake evidently wrote The Ghost of Abel at least in part in response to the iconoclasm of Byron. . ." (Bentley, Blake Books 207-9, item A 50). With these careful words, Bentley leaves open the possibility that Blake originally stereotyped most of the work in 1788, and added the dedication to Byron, possibly with a little more material, in 1822. John Sampson offers a very different explanation for the curious dates: 1822 was when Blake produced The Ghost of Abel; 1788 was when Blake first used the technique of illuminated printing (Sampson xvii).[1]

By dedicating this piece to Byron, Blake expresses his own mixed, but respectful, attitude towards Byron's Cain. In extraordinary contrast with contemporary readers, who charge Byron with blasphemy, Blake apostrophizes him as "Elijah."

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[1] Robert N. Essick uses the same explanation, but thinks that Blake's technical innovation of 1788 was relief etching (William Blake, Printmaker 112).

The significance of comparing Byron to a true prophet cannot be overestimated: For Blake, prophecy is the same as poetic genius; all morality and religion are derived from poetic genius ("All Religions are One," Principles 5 and 6.[2] See also "There is no Natural Religion." (Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake 1-2. Both essays are from about 1788.). Blake makes the same claim to true prophecy for his own The Death of Abel, in his subtitle. By comparing Byron to a true prophet, Blake attests to the worth of Byron's poetry, and to the validity of his religious insight.

Stevenson believes that Blake uses the comparison to Elijah to chastise Byron (Stevenson 861n.); for Stevenson thinks Elijah represents the law of retribution, which Blake rejects. Bidney convincingly demonstrates that, for Blake, Elijah is a positive model;[3] Blake calls the regenerative shaping force, named Los in his private mythology, ". . . the Spirit of Prophecy the ever apparent Elias" (Milton 24:71 Complete

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[2] Principle 5. The Religions of all Nations are derived from each Nations different reception of the Poetic Genius which is every where call'd the Spirit of Prophecy.
Principle 6. The Jewish and Christian Testaments are An original derivation from the Poetic Genius. . . ("All Religions are One," The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake 1.).

[3] I do not know of a single instance in Blake's work where Elijah is a negative figure. For Blake, ". . . Elijah . . . comprehends all the Prophetic Characters. . ." (Vision of the Last Judgment 82, The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake 560).

Poetry and Prose of William Blake 121). Note that for Blake, Elijah is not merely a prophet, but the very spirit of prophecy (Frye, Fearful Symmetry 334). Having made this powerful argument, Bidney then settles for a painfully understated conclusion: "So if Byron is Elijah, he should by no means be seen in a wholly negative light" (164). In fact, the comparison to a true prophet is the deepest complement Blake could pay to a fellow artist.

I believe that Blake finds qualities in Byron that match the prophetic role of Elijah. Byron, in his Cain, challenges religious and political authority; like Elijah, he dares to speak the unwelcome truth to the political and religious authorities. The British authorities respond to Byron, as Jezebel does to Elijah, with persecution and threats.

Nor does Blake merely evoke the image of Elijah in some general way, but rather at a specific moment in the prophet's career. Blake addresses Byron as "Elijah in the wilderness," using the words that God addresses to Elijah in the wilderness at that moment when, after all his successes, Elijah feels that his mission has failed: "What doest thou here, Elijah?" (quoted from I Kings 19:9 and I Kings 19:13). The context is this: Elijah has staged a terrible competition with the prophets of Baal (I Kings 18:20-40) on Mount Carmel in the presence of the people; 450 prophets of Baal sacrificed a bull

to their god, and Elijah sacrificed another bull to his. When a fire came down from God to consume Elijah's offering, the people called out "The Lord, he is God! The Lord, he is God!" (I Kings 18:39). Then Elijah called on the people to capture every one of the prophets of Baal, and he personally slaughtered them all.[4] Shortly after his climactic encounter with the priests of Baal, Elijah reaches the wilderness (I Kings 19); he is sick with despair. The competition is over, he has confronted the sinful King Ahab and the murderous Queen Jezebel, he has defeated the priests of Baal, but the people have not remained faithful. Elijah feels that they, no less than Jezebel, wish to kill him. For his part, he is ready to die (I Kings 19:4). Then God speaks to him, asking him, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" (I Kings 19:3). God follows the question by calling upon Elijah not to expect to experience God in any noisy revelation, but rather in a still small voice. Then asks Elijah a second time, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" (I Kings 19:13). This time, God follows the question by calling upon Elijah to continue his mission.[5]

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[4] Kerry Ellen McKeever insists that "it was God, not Elijah, who destroyed Baal's prophets" (195). The Bible says otherwise: "And Elijah said to them, 'seize the prophets of Baal so not one will escape' and they seized them; and Elijah took them down to Kishon Brook and slaughtered them there" (I Kings 18:40).

[5] Elijah's mission involves continuing violence against the prophets of Baal, which does not seem to bother Blake, or lower Blake's assessment of the prophet. Blake's equivocal position on violence requires further study.

Byron, like Elijah, has reached a point of deep despair (I think Blake accurately reads the mood of the close of Byron's Cain). And Blake, performing for Byron the role that God performs for Elijah, intends to lift Byron out of his despair by showing him how to continue. By implication, Blake tells Byron, do not despair, continue your work; some find your work scandalous, but God knows that it is holy.[6]

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[6] Tannenbaum makes an intriguing suggestion that Blake means the comparison between Byron and Elijah to go even further:

> The allusion to I Kings 19 links the identity of Byron and Cain with that of Elijah, thus making Cain's destruction of his orthodox brother's altar and murder of his brother, Byron's baiting of the bigots with his drama, and Elijah's exposing and murdering of the false prophets synonymous acts ("Biblical Tradition in Byron and Blake" 353).

According to Tannenbaum, Blake sees Abel as a Satanic figure, since Abel practices a form of atonement by slaughtering animals. "Blake's play applauds Byron's condemnation of the ritual sacrifice of beasts . . . as it interprets Cain's murder of Abel as the equivalent of Elijah's murder of the false prophets" ("Biblical Tradition in Byron and Blake" 361).

Though this interpretation is intriguing, it runs into serious problems. Tannenbaum links Abel's offering, which is received by God, with the offering of the prophets of Baal, which is not; and similarly Cain's offering, which is not received, with the offering of Elijah, which is. Furthermore, according to Tannenbaum, the reason that Blake finds Abel's offering repugnant, so repugnant that it justifies killing Abel as an act of cleansing, is that Abel's offering consists of slaughtering sheep. Elijah's offering is a bull. Is there any evidence for Tannenbaum's belief that Blake considered death the appropriate penalty for killing an animal?

If Tannenbaum is correct, it is easy to see why Blake does not make this point more explicit. The fulcrum of his play, as I shall demonstrate, is Adam and Eve's offer of forgiveness for Cain. If Cain's murder of Abel were even partially justifiable, then they would have an alternative motive for forgiving Cain, which would leave the issue one of justice, not total mercy.

In the rest of the dedication, Blake chides Byron. Byron has achieved true poetic genius, he has rejected false visions, but he has been too distrustful to accept the positive meaning of his own unerring vision. Blake's purpose, in The Ghost of Abel, is to help Byron learn to trust his accurate perception of the content of his own poetic genius. Perhaps in keeping with his purpose of communicating with a living poet, in this work Blake studiously avoids mentioning the obscure entities of his own personal mythology.

Blake's stage directions immediately follow the dedication. The Ghost of Abel takes place in "A rocky Country." Eve is unconscious, lying over the body of Abel. Nearby is a grave. Adam kneels by Eve; God, identified by the tetragrammaton, stands above. These directions are somewhat enigmatic: Eve has fainted, suggesting that she has just discovered the body. The grave is already dug, indicating that Adam has known about the murder long enough to dig a grave. The mystery can be solved by two additional pieces of information. Later in The Ghost of Abel, Adam exclaims that Eve has fainted seven times. In the title of a painting illustrating the opening moment of The Ghost of Abel, Blake explains that the grave has been dug by Cain.[7]

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[7] "The Body of Abel found by Adam and Eve; Cain who was about to bury it, fleeing from the face of his Parents" (The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake 548). It is likely that Blake intends to use the same chronology in the playlet as in the painting (Bentley, William Blake's Writings 673).

After the dedication, the play proper begins. At the outset, God, identified as the tetragrammaton, visits Adam and Eve, to help them out of their despair at discovering the corpse of Abel. The ghost of Abel then calls out for vengeance against Cain. Adam and Eve, with God's encouragement, reject the call for vengeance. In doing so, they restore their own faith. When Satan predicts that God will be sacrificed to him some day, God agrees, explaining that forgiveness and atonement are the gift of the sacrifice of the Lamb. The ghost, which refuses to forgive, is replaced by, and perhaps revealed as, the spirit of Satan. At the end of The Ghost of Abel, a chorus of angels sing that the gods of the heathen call for vengeance, but that the true God establishes a "Covenant of the Forgiveness of Sins." (The Illuminated Blake 381-383; The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake 270-82).

This is a difficult, knotty text, calling for a line-by-line analysis. After calling to "Lord Byron in the Wilderness," Blake continues the Dedication with these aphoristic lines:

> Nature has no Outline: but Imagination has.
> Nature has no Tune: but Imagination has! Nature has no Supernatural & dissolves: Imagination is Eternity.

Lucifer, in Byron's Cain, drives Cain to despair by showing him visions of the wide expanse of the natural world, and of future multitudes of humans caught in natural mortality, thus

demonstrating the insignificance of a single human. Blake, in this introduction, suggests that Byron is caught up in natural despair as much as his character, and that the only way out is imagination. Blake prescribes this anti-depressive medicine to Byron: Trust your vision of a reality higher than the natural.

At the opening of the play, God calls to Adam and Eve, but they are not yet ready to respond to him. Eve lies unconscious over the body of Abel; Adam refuses to hear the spiritual voice, for God's promise had not been kept: The children of Eve were promised that they would bruise the serpent's head; instead, one child has killed, not the serpent, but the other child. Adam asks bitterly: "Is this the serpent?" Eve revives, and, in deep despair, rejects everything: God's promise, death, life and God himself, all are vain delusions. At that moment, when God seems to be losing in his effort to communicate with Adam and Eve, the voice of the Ghost of Abel calls for vengeance: "O Earth, cover not thou my blood!" Eve immediately recognizes "thou art not the real Abel." The Ghost explains its nature cryptically:

> Among the Elohim, a Human Victim I wander: I
> am their House,
> Prince of the Air, & our dimensions compass
> Zenith & Nadir.

The Ghost then supports Adam's claim that God's promise is vain. He then takes up the cry for vengeance, claiming his own rightful role as "Accuser & Avenger / Of Blood." The vengeance that he requires is: "Life for Life! Life for Life!"

God refutes the Ghost's argument:

> He who shall take Cains life must also Die O
>
> Abel

And who is he? Adam wilt thou, or Eve thou do this Adam at first responds by rejecting both Ghost and God, taking a wary position very like that of Byron. Then, trusting his creative imagination a little more, Adam recognizes God as "Father of Mercies." He calls to Eve to share the vision, and she does, going further, seeing Abel "living: / Tho terribly afflicted as We also are." Once she sees Abel, she realizes that Abel is not dead in the eyes of God; and this makes her want to trust her own vision. So Adam and Eve decide to "believe Vision," and, despite their feeling "fallen & lost," they kneel to God. Note that, in the Dedication of <u>The Ghost of Abel</u>, Blake has advised Byron to trust his own vision. Once Adam and Eve learn to trust their vision, they have no more active role in the play. They attain the prerequisite for mental and spiritual health, which is what Blake wants for Byron. Vision, which is the same as creative imagination, can help them, and Byron, out of despair.

When the Ghost sees that Adam and Eve have rejected his call for vengeance, the he responds with an attack on forgiveness, constructed out of a pastiche of biblical verses. The Ghost rejects the notion that God should accept the sacrifices of a contrite heart (see Ps. 51:19); he repeats back to God the divine promise to Cain: "His (Abel's) desire will be towards you, and you shall rule over him" (Gen. 4:7, as interpreted by Nachmanides ad loc), pointing out that this has come true in a bitter way. The Ghost concludes by calling for "Sacrifice on Sacrifice Blood on Blood." God responds that, if the Ghost wants a sacrifice, or vengeance against the transgressor, it should accept the Lamb (Jesus). At that, with one more cry for vengeance, the Ghost sinks into the grave. Immediately Satan arises from the grave, apparently revealing that all along the Ghost was Satan, and the cry for vengeance Satanic.[8]

In a kind of parody of Hebrews 9:13-14 (Tannenbaum, "Biblical Tradition in Byron and Blake" 361), Satan calls for blood sacrifice as the only form of atonement, and human sacrifice as the best kind. Dismissing God as "Thou Human," Satan swears by all the forces associated with human sacrifice, including "Cains City built with Human Blood" that "Thou shalt thyself be sacrificed to Me thy God on Calvary."

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[8] This casts light on the Ghost's enigmatic expression "I am their House" (1:10), that is to say, the house of the Elohim. The implication seems to be that the Ghost was somehow animated by a foreign spirit.

God responds in a syntactically ambiguous[9] statement: "Such is My Will," apparently accepting Satan's menace of crucifixion, but then finishing the sentence with the thunderous denunciation of Satan:

> that Thou Thyself go to Eternal Death
> In Self Annihilation even till Satan Self-subdud
> Put off Satan
> Into the Bottomless Abyss whose torment
> arises for ever & ever.

Satan is destined both to self-annihilation and to the pit of eternal torment. The theme of the self-annihilation of Satan, based on sources in Kabbalah, would be used later by Victor Hugo. In The Ghost of Abel, however, it is not clear exactly what the end of Satan will be. Look at these lines again:

> Thou Thyself go to Eternal Death
> In Self Annihilation even till Satan
> Self-subdud Put off Satan
> Into the Bottomless Abyss whose torment
> arises for ever & ever.

Bidney maintains that Blake is so determined to transcend despair that he has to allow Satan himself to be rescued through self-annihilation (163) through "putting off Satan" (Ghost of Abel 2:20). Bidney understands this to mean that

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[9] In order to preserve the ambiguity, Blake puts a period after "Will", but begins the next phrase with a lower case letter.

Satan, once he puts off Satan, will be rescued. But where will this discarded Satan go? Into the Bottomless Abyss! Not out of existence, but into a state of eternal torment. According to Tannenbaum, Blake in The Ghost of Abel interprets forgiveness as identical with the crucifixion, which is the sacrifice of Selfhood (Tannenbaum, "Blake and the Iconography of Cain" 30). The world of moralism, of retributive justice, according to Blake, makes us all either criminals or executioners; one escapes when one "willingly dies for another by putting off his own Selfhood though the forgiveness of sins" (Tannenbaum, "Blake and the Iconography of Cain" 32). So too, we would expect that the consequences of self-annihilation would be, for Satan, forgiveness and release. But here, Eternal Death is the state in which Satan must stay, until he discards Satan into the bottomless abyss. The passage remains confusing even with Tannenbaum's explanation.

Perhaps Blake means something like this: Satan is a state of mind. If one is locked into self-protection and retributive justice, one is Satan; Satan is always in torment, always causing pain to himself, always destroying himself. God assures the ghost of Abel, who is at that moment a Satan, that he is doomed to "Eternal Death / In Self Annihilation" as long as he continues in that state of mind. Whenever he "Self-subdud Put off Satan," the ghost will recover; he will no longer be a Satan. But Satan, the state of mind, would still

exist, ready to be put on by anyone who thinks himself "Into the Bottomless Abyss, whose torment arises for ever & ever."

With the ghost of Abel unmasked, Adam and Eve enlightened, Satan refuted, the action of the play is over. The Chorus of Angels then enter to sing the finale, which summarizes the meaning of the play: "The Elohim of the Heathen Swore Vengeance for Sin!"

One of the textual problems in The Ghost of Abel is the principle for determining which appellation is used for God, the tetragrammaton or the word Elohim. This is a textual problem in the Hebrew Bible as well.[10] "Elohim" has a complex of possible meanings in the Hebrew Bible: It is most frequently used for "the true God" (Gen. 1:1), sometimes for angels (possibly Gen. 6:2), sometimes for human judges (Exod. 22:8) or nobles (possibly Gen. 6:2; Ps. 82:6), often for the gods of the heathens (Num. 23:13), sometimes for idols (Gen. 34:2, Deut. 4:23). When it occurs with the modifying phrase "of the heathens" (Gen. 34:2,4) it simply means idols, so "The Elohim of the Heathen" is Blake's rendition of a biblical phrase for idols. Elsewhere in this work, Blake

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[10] "Elohim" is related to the word for power, and serves as a word, applied to God. The tetragrammaton, on the other hand, is related to the verb "to be," and is always a name. It cannot, for example, take an article, or a possessive suffix.

magnificently exploits the ambiguity of the Hebrew word "Elohim."

Before I examine how Blake makes use of the ambiguity of the word, let us look at the consequences of treating the word as if it had only one meaning. Tannenbaum, in "Biblical Tradition in Byron and Blake," consistently translates the word to mean God. So Tannenbaum is forced to interpret The Ghost of Abel as an example of "the traditional concept of a divided godhead that exalts the Son (Mercy) at the expense of the Father (Justice)" (358).[11] There is nothing traditional about an interpretation that makes part of the godhead identical with Satan, which is exactly where Tannenbaum's interpretation takes him in the next two sentences: "Blake asserts that the justice of the Father is a mask of jealousy, vindictiveness, and lust for blood. Such a god, Blake affirms, is really Satan, the Accuser who denies atonement" ("Biblical Tradition in Byron and Blake" 358). The principle of mercy and that of justice are thus completely inimical for Blake, according to Tannenbaum. The solution to the conflict is "having the Father explicitly demand blood payment from the Son and by having the Son outwit and actually defeat the Father by acceding to the bloodthirsty demands in his own

[11] According to Tannenbaum, in Blake the Father is always associated with Justice, and therefore Satanic; how does Tannenbaum then explain Eve's use of the expression "Father of Mercies"?

terms" ("Biblical Tradition in Byron and Blake" 358). Thus Blake, according to Tannenbaum, must be more or less a Gnostic, or perhaps a follower of Marcion.[12] Maybe he is, but one cannot prove it from The Ghost of Abel, if one reads the different uses of the word "Elohim" with proper sensitivity.

The Ghost and Satan use the word "Elohim" throughout The Ghost of Abel as a plural noun; in the Hebrew of the Bible, even though the word is plural, when it means "God," it agrees with singular verbs in nearly every instance (Gen. 1:1 is a fine example of this). The biblical use implies a history for the word "Elohim": In the ancient world, it would seem, the word referred to a pantheon, the collective gods of some Near Eastern peoples. The Hebrew Bible, by appropriating the word as is and using it as a name for the one God, challenges the very existence of the old deities, a polemical point very like the English capital "G" for God, small "g" for gods. "When the ancestors of the Jewish people realized that there is but one God. . . then the common substantive 'Elohim' also acquired for them the signification of a proper noun" (Cassuto, The Documentary Hypothesis 18). Thus, when the

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[12] There is better evidence of Blake's Marcionism in A Vision of the Last Judgment 94:

> Thinking as I do that the Creator of this World is a very Cruel Being & being a worshipper of Christ, I cannot help saying the Son O how unlike the Father <First God Almighty comes with a Thump on the Head Then Jesus Christ comes with a balm to heal it> (Complete Poetry and Prose 565).

Ghost and Satan use the word in plural, they undermine the polemical point of the use of the word in the Hebrew Bible, challenging the exclusivity of God, and continuously asserting the right of the heathen idols to be thought of as Gods.[13] The true God, all through The Ghost of Abel until the very end, is always identified with the tetragrammaton alone.

At the very end, when Satan and the Ghost have been unmasked, they become only "The Elohim of the Heathen," that is to say, mere idols. Blake, demonstrating his intimate knowledge of the Bible, uses the word "Elohim" unmodified in the speech of the Ghost, as long as there is suspense about which concept of God would be victorious. Now that the Father of Mercies has triumphed, the spirit of vengeance is revealed as nothing but an idol, without any life of its own. At that same moment, the word "Elohim" can be applied to God, the spirit of forgiveness, now revealed as the only power. Combining the tetragrammaton with the word "Elohim" creates a compound form, indicating that the true God is the only power. The first mention of the tetragrammaton in the Bible is also in this compound form (Gen. 2:4); in Blake, as in the Bible, the compound form seems intended to establish the identity of God in the different aspects of his activity implied by each name (Cassuto, The Documentary Hypothesis 33). At the climactic moment of Elijah's confrontation with the prophets of Baal,

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[13] As if they had used a capital "G" for the gods.

the cry of the people is: "the Tetragrammaton is the Elohim, the Tetragrammaton is the Elohim" which is translated as "The Lord, he is God! The Lord, he is God!" (I Kings 18:39).

That thought that Blake, in choosing the words for God, is aware of "different aspects of his activity implied by each name," (Cassuto, The Documentary Hypothesis 33) leads to my final observation about the appellations of God in The Ghost of Abel. Satan and the Ghost, by claiming the name Elohim for themselves while using the tetragrammaton for God, challenge God for a share of the attributes traditionally ascribed to him. There is a reason why they contest the one name, and not the other. Satan and the ghost are interested only in justice, not in mercy. According to an old and widely-known midrashic text, the names of God in the Bible correspond to his deeds: "When I judge humanity, I am called Elohim. . . and when I have compassion on my world, I am called by the tetragrammaton" (Shemot Rabbah 3:6). Through what intermediaries Blake learned this teaching, I will not guess; but he did know it. Tannenbaum notices that Blake identifies the voice of tetragrammaton with mercy and the voice of the Elohim--Abel's Ghost and Satan--with justice ("Biblical Tradition in Byron and Blake" 358), but Tannenbaum does not here discuss the history of that pairing.[14]

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[14] In Biblical Tradition in Blake's Early Prophecies, where he does discuss that history, Tannenbaum asserts that Blake "reverses the conventional interpretation of the nature"

The chorus of angels sing: "The Elohim of the Heathen Swore Vengeance for Sin!" As I have explained, this means that the gods, like the Ghost of Abel and Satan, proclaim the law of vengeance. The angels celebrate the true God, who is clothed in a "Covenant of the Forgiveness of Sins." According to these angels, God's majestic forgiveness is revealed "In the midst of the darkness of the Oath." Which oath? The nearest possibility is the oath of the Elohim of the Heathen, "Vengeance for Sin!" Another possibility is Satan's oath to sacrifice God. That second interpretation makes sense of the rest of the line: God, forgives Satan, in advance, for forcing him to undergo ". . . Death O Holy!".

Having finished their address to God, the angels turn back to the idols, finishing their song, and the entire play, with these obscure lines:

> The Elohim saw their Oath Eternal Fire;
> they rolled apart trembling over
> The
> Mercy Seat: Each in his station fixt in the
> Firmament
> by Peace Brotherhood and Love.

So The Ghost of Abel comes to a disappointingly murky conclusion. Tannenbaum asserts that this passage shows "the

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of these two appellations for God (204). Tannenbaum apparently does not know Shemot Rabbah 3:6, and does know a "conventional interpretation" which is exactly opposite.

image of the sacrificial altar transformed into human form" ("Biblical Tradition in Byron and Blake" 361). There is, however, not the slightest hint of that in Blake's words. Bidney also claims to understand these lines. According to him, the angels predict that God will forgive and "not punish the earlier heathen gods; instead they become planetary spirits" (Bidney 164). That may be what Blake means by "fixt in the Firmament;" but it seems most likely to me that the heathen gods are reduced to their true significance when they are stuck immobile in the heavens. "They have hands, but they do not feel; they have feet, and they do not walk; they do not sing with their throats. Those that make them shall be like them, all who trust in them" (Ps. 115:7,8). The consequences of true vision are "Peace Brotherhood and Love;" one who has true vision cannot credit the gods of vengeance with motion.

Blake enhances the text of The Ghost of Abel with numerous illustrations. Many of the small figures intertwined with the text represent stories related to the action of the play: They illustrate the Fall, or the murder of Abel, or the life of Jesus. Other small figures show dancing lovers, birds of all descriptions, and a lion chasing a stag. While these appear to be purely decorative, it is far more likely that they are related to the story by some obscure iconography. Erdman's struggle to discover an iconographic significance of each of

these figures is probably warranted (The Illuminated Blake 381-383).[15]

The large illustration at the bottom of the second page, however, is definitely aimed at intensifying the emotional impact of the story. The most eye-catching figure of the whole work, labelled "The Voice of Abels Blood," is a "horrid, finger pointing" demon (Tannenbaum, "Blake and the Iconography of Cain" 29). His long, sharp left forefinger extends over a fur-clad figure, lying face-down on the ground. From the context, we cannot tell if the prostrate figure is the corpse of Abel, with the spirit arising from his bloody hair, or Adam, prone with grief, whom the spirit counsels in the text, or even Cain, prone with despair, whom the spirit accuses. Perhaps we can reason who the prone figure must be from the fact that he wears fur: It makes sense for Abel, the shepherd, to wear fur;[16] Adam, as he leaves Eden, is clothed by God in

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[15] I am here following Donald Pearce's "working critical principle, that Blake's poetry and painting cannot without violence be separated from each other" (Pearce xviii). Joseph Wittreich makes that point even more emphatically: Blake "creates pictures that are an extension and a culmination of the profoundly pictorial character of his poetry" (Wittreich, "Painted Prophecies" 108). See Wittreich's full article for an understanding of how important that unity between picture and poetry is for Blake.

[16] Braude discusses a mystery play, The Murder of Abel [1327], and an illustration from an English Bible of around 1330, in which Cain wears a woven garment, Abel a sheepskin (Braude 588-90). She explains the contrast by reference to the then current problems of English weavers. The English artists skillfully use the contrast in the brothers' professions, combined with the traditional (as far back as

animal skin (Gen. 3:21); so Cain would seem the least likely identification for the prone figure.

Tannenbaum and Erdman agree that the prone figure covers and conceals the body of Abel. Erdman identifies the prone figure as Eve (The Illuminated Blake 383), finding convincing support from the stage direction at the beginning of The Ghost of Abel: "Eve fainted over the dead body of Abel." According to Tannenbaum, the prone figure must be either Adam or Cain. This ambiguity "may be intentional, as the willingness to believe the figure is Cain will reveal the reader's willingness to accept Cain's repentance" (Tannenbaum, "Blake and the Iconography of Cain" 29). I just do not see any concealed body below the prone figure,[17] and in any case, do not see Cain's repentance as an issue in The Death of Abel. Blake invokes "Cain's city built with Human Blood" in this play, implying that Cain, far from being penitent, is destined for further crime.[18]

Josephus) evaluation of the relative moral worth of natural and manufactured products. A simple explanation for the contrast is that Cain, the farmer, wears a garment made from plants, while Abel, the shepherd, wears one made from animals.

[17] Bentley also sees only one figure, "a horizontal figure in a fur skirt leaning on the ground" (William Blake's Writings 673).

[18] Blake similarly envisions Cain at the Last Judgment, still clutching the murder weapon, and "falling with the head downward" (A Vision of the Last Judgment 80 Complete Poetry and Prose 556).

One of Blake's later paintings seems relevant to The Ghost of Abel (Klonsky 108): "The Body of Abel Found by Adam and Eve; Cain who was about to bury it, fleeing from the face of his parents" (C. 1826).[19] In fact, the work depicts the moment immediately proceeding the beginning of the play (Bentley, William Blake's Writings 673). Scholars have attempted, unsuccessfully, to connect the painting with other literary sources. The scene is not at all "described in the account of the murder in Genesis," as Vaughn asserts (32), nor precisely in Salomon Gessner's work, nor in Byron's Cain. Nonetheless, Vaughn thinks Der Tod Abels, which is "much illustrated by artists," is the source for this painting (Vaughn 32). Tannenbaum believes that the painting was "derived from pictorial sources" ("Blake and the Iconography of Cain" 26). All the speculation seems in vain to me: The painting clearly illustrates The Ghost of Abel; in fact, it glosses a difficulty in the text of The Ghost of Abel. The stage directions for the play leave unclear how Adam has had time to dig a grave for Abel before Eve comes out of her swoon. According to the painting, Cain has already dug the grave, and then run away to avoid facing his parents.

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[19] Tempera on Panel. London, Tate Gallery (Vaughn 32; The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake 548). The work dates from about 1826, but Vaughn claims that Blake displayed a similar painting in much earlier, in 1809 (32). If Vaughn is correct, that would complicate the relationship between the painting and The Death of Abel.

In all of Blake's artistic renditions of Cain, "Blake creates meaning by placing himself within a tradition at the same time that he subverts and reshapes that tradition" (Tannenbaum, "Blake and the Iconography of Cain" 29). This observation applies with equal force to The Ghost of Abel and to "The Body of Abel found by Adam and Eve." In Blake's day, the iconographic tradition for the story of Cain exactly follows the common understanding that Cain must be unambiguously evil. Tannenbaum locates numerous art works which emphasize the righteousness of Abel as a type of Jesus, or "the first criminal's encounter with divine justice" (Tannenbaum, "Blake and the Iconography of Cain" 24). In these works "one usually finds a moral and emotional sympathy with Abel rather than Cain" (Tannenbaum, "Blake and the Iconography of Cain" 26). In "The Body of Cain and Abel Found by Adam and Eve," Blake "is clearly more interested in Cain's torment than the pathos of Abel's death" (Tannenbaum, "Blake and the Iconography of Cain" 26). In the painting, Adam stares at Cain as Cain, his body on fire, his face in anguish, leaps from the grave of Abel.[20] Once again, Blake focusses on sympathy for Cain.

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[20] Tannenbaum, as usual providing a Marcionite gloss on Blake's interpretation of Cain, writes that the desired effect of this painting was that, "Like Adam we become shocked to see that Cain is a human sacrifice to a vindictive God" (Tannenbaum, "Blake and the Iconography of Cain" 27).

Tannenbaum's gloss cannot be extended to another painting of Blake's, which I discuss later in this chapter, "God the Father Marking Cain's Forehead."

The Ghost of Abel is, paradoxically, a sympathetic version of the story of Cain in which Cain himself does not appear. The ghost alludes to him, in calling for vengeance, "Life for Life!" But Adam and Eve, with divine sanction, refuse the call. This refusal is the fulcrum of the work. Adam and Eve recover from despair because they refuse to condemn Cain; by implication, they begin to forgive Cain. In the chorus of angels' song in praise of divine forgiveness that concludes The Ghost of Abel, Blake clearly states that forgiveness applies to Cain. While all this is happening, Cain is offstage.

The theme of Blake's The Ghost of Abel is that divine forgiveness extends to all, even to the bloody murderer. Humans must emulate that mercy, or we become enmeshed in the lust for vengeance, which hurts our souls. In order to make his theological point, Blake has to present the murder without exonerating Cain in any way. If Cain has some attractive motive for the killing, or he is not fully aware of what he is doing, or if some larger force drives him to the deed, then the theological point would be diluted: Perhaps divine forgiveness is available to Cain only because of these extenuating circumstances. Because Blake's theological point is so extreme, that divine forgiveness extends to all, even to the bloody murderer, Blake cannot use any of the rhetorical techniques to gain sympathy for Cain before the crime.

Blake has an equally absolute point to make about the operations of divine forgiveness after the crime: Forgiveness is available to all sinners, it does not depend on repentance. Blake, therefore, cannot use any of the rhetorical techniques to gain sympathy for Cain after the crime. If Cain shows some sign of remorse, or pleads for mercy, or in any way becomes someone with whom we can identify ourselves, then the theological[21] point would be diluted: Perhaps divine forgiveness is available to Cain only because he is penitent. Therefore, Blake cannot let Cain show any signs of penitence.

These constraints gave Blake a literary problem of considerable proportions: If he shows Cain malevolent before the crime, and unrepentant after the crime, then the readers will not sympathize with Cain, but condemn him. Then, when Blake introduces his theme that people should emulate the divine mercy which extends to Cain, the readers will reject it. This, then, is the dilemma: In order to show how great mercy is, Blake cannot not portray Cain with sympathy. In order to have the reader identify with mercy, Blake would have to portray Cain with sympathy. Blake's solution to this dilemma is ingenious: He does not portray Cain at all.[22]

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[21] I use the word advisedly. Blake introduces this drama as nothing less than a vision from God; clearly, he intends The Ghost of Abel as a work with a theological point.

[22] I think this answers Bidney's question: "One wonders why Cain himself is absent from The Ghost of Abel. . ." (161).

The Ghost of Abel begins after the crime. Blake draws our attention away from the crime. This in itself is a methodical attempt to maintain sympathy for Cain: "Detract from unfavorable evidence or argument by not keeping it stage center, by getting it offstage as soon as possible" (Wright 255).

Sympathy for Cain is thus the central motif of The Ghost of Abel, but this sympathy is presented indirectly. Blake presents his attitude towards Cain directly in another work, a set of illustrations for his Illustrated Manuscript of Genesis (for the text of the Genesis MS, see The Illuminated Blake 667), dated about five years after the dedication of The Ghost of Abel (Essick, The Works of William Blake in the Huntington Collection 88, 109-115). Two of these illustrate the story of Cain: "Cain Fleeing From the Body of Abel," depicts Adam and Eve discovering the body of Abel as Cain flees. This work could, it seems to me, serve as well to portray the opening of The Ghost of Abel. The other illustration is entitled: "God the Father Marking Cain's Forehead" (Essick, The Works of William Blake in the Huntington Collection 109).[23] Robert Essick describes it this way: "God the Father, on the left, kneels to embrace the much smaller figure of Cain and to kiss his forehead in an act of

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[23] Martin Bidney notes the relevance of this illustration to The Ghost of Abel in "Cain and The Ghost of Abel" 162.

tender forgiving and blessing more than marking" (The Works of William Blake in the Huntington Collection 109). Blake's chapter heading, on page ten of the Illustrated Manuscript of Genesis, is consistent with his illustration of God lovingly marking Cain: "& the forgiveness of Sins written on the Murdereres Forhead." (Essick, The Works of William Blake in the Huntington Collection 109). For Blake in the Genesis Manuscript as in The Ghost of Abel, the divine forgiveness of Cain remains the central point of the theme of Cain.

Essick believes that Blake's reading of the mark of Cain is unprecedented in biblical interpretation: "At this point, Blake swerves most dramatically even from the traditions of Gnostic exegesis by interpreting the 'mark upon Cain' (Gen. 4:15) as a 'written sign of the forgiveness of Sin'" (Essick, The Works of William Blake in the Huntington Collection 90).[24]

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[24] The rest of the passage: "This act of divine inscription prefigures its spiritual opposite, the writing of the Mosaic tablets and prophesies its fulfillment in the self-sacrifice of Christ" (Essick, The Works of William Blake in the Huntington Collection 90). I know of no direct evidence to demonstrate that Blake intended those prefigurative connections, but it is certainly true that he was antinomian. Blake saw the ten commandments as a perversion of the true, joyous revelation which precedes them, as he writes in America: "The fiery joy, that Urizen perverted to ten commands" (The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake 54; see Bloom's discussion on 902, and Frye's, Fearful Symmetry 213). Urizen, in Blake's mythology, is the "thundergod of moral law and tyrannical power" and "a projection of the death impulse" (Frye, Fearful Symmetry 129).

The connection between forgiveness for Cain (if not exactly the mark of Cain) and the crucifixion of Jesus is explicit in The Ghost of Abel:

Lo I have given you a Lamb for an Atonement

According to Blake's interpretation, as seen in this illustration, the mark of Cain shows radical sympathy for Cain. There is almost no precedent in literary sources for a protective[25] mark of Cain; and its appearance here is an important part of the romantic rehabilitation of Cain. However, as we have seen (in Chapter 2 above), according to the plain sense of the Biblical text the mark of Cain is indeed bestowed upon him in an act of forgiveness, for his own protection. On the contrary, the common tradition which saw the mark of Cain as a brand of evil is difficult to reconcile with the biblical text.

Blake's portrayal of Abel, or, more precisely, of Abel's

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instead
Of the Transgres[s]or, or no Flesh or Spirit
could ever Live.

[25] Voltaire, however, interprets the mark of Cain exactly in this way. According to Voltaire, it is one of the absurdities of Genesis that God should

> absolutely pardon a fratricide! nay, that He should more than pardon, that He should take the offender under His peculiar protection! He declares that whoever shall avenge the murder of Abel shall experience sevenfold the punishment that Cain might have suffered. He puts a mark upon him as a safeguard (Voltaire's Philosophical Dictionary. Vol. 3, 177).

The citation is from Voltaire's additions to his article on Genesis in the 1771 edition of the Dictionnaire philosophique (Dictionnaire philosophique 546, n.162). Blake knew the Dictionnaire philosophique (Tannenbaum, Biblical Traditions in Blake's Early Prophecies: The Great Code of Art 13-14).

ghost, is quite as radical as his portrayal of Cain.[26] In chapters 3 above, I cite examples of the long history of the connection between Cain and Satan, from the oldest pieces of extra-biblical legend, to The New Testament, to Beowulf. Blake draws a very different parallel, connecting the ghost of Abel with Satan.

Blake actually develops the connection between the ghost of Abel and Satan from a text in the New Testament. The Ghost of Abel is a meditation on these words: "and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel" (Heb. 12:24).[27] Blake's underlying reasoning in the Ghost of Abel is that the message of the blood of Jesus is forgiveness, and is more gracious than the message of the blood of Abel. The less gracious message must be less than forgiveness; it must be vengeance, since anything less than forgiveness is, by

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[26] Bostetter apparently makes the error of confusing the Ghost with Abel: "In other words, Blake perceives that in the obsequious Abel is the spirit of revenge, and that it is from such as he that the 'God of men' arises or gains power" ("Byron and the Politics of Paradise" 575 n.8).
Nothing in this play casts aspersions on the living Abel.

[27] Tannenbaum, in the following passage, hints at this interpretation:

> We can locate precise examples of Blake's strict use of typology in . . . as late a work as The Ghost of Abel, which invokes the Epistle to the Hebrews--a book that is in itself a work of typological exegesis--to draw parallels and emphasize differences between the death of Abel and Christ's atonement (Biblical Tradition 99).

definition, vengeance. The blood that calls for forgiveness is that of Jesus, so the blood of Abel that calls for vengeance must be of the opposite of Jesus, therefore the message of the blood (or ghost) of Abel is the message of Satan.[28]

Furthermore, the blood of Abel calls out to God (Gen. 4:10). Perhaps that is a call for vengeance. In the book of Enoch (which first appeared in a European language in Richard Laurence's English translation of 1821), the ghost of Abel laments about Cain, and will continue to do so until the seed of Cain is "destroyed from the face of the earth" (Steffan 303).

Blake was a serious student of the Bible, and had access to a wide range of popular and scholarly works on the Bible.[29] He knew some Hebrew.[30] Where Blake's translation of the

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[28] Tannenbaum assumes the steps of this logic, when he writes of "the suggestion in the Epistle to the Hebrews that the voice of Abel's blood is the antitype of Christ's" ("Lord Byron in the Wilderness: Biblical Tradition in Byron and Blake" 362).

[29] "Blake and the Biblical Tradition," an essay which forms the first chapter of Leslie Tannenbaum's Biblical Tradition in Blake's Early Prophecies: The Great Code of Art 8-24, is a brief outline "of the major sources of biblical tradition that would have been available to Blake and his contemporaries" (8). Tannenbaum demonstrates that Blake "had a rich and multifarious tradition at his disposal" (8).

[30] Several of his illustrations have Hebrew captions in Hebrew letters. Overarching Blake's watercolor of about 1805, "Job's evil dream," (Figure 85 in Pearce) are the tablets of

beginning of Genesis departs from the King James version, "it is possible that even the most trivial changes may be Blake's reaction to the Hebrew text" (Robert Wark, unpublished, cited by Essick, The Works of William Blake in the Huntington Collection 115). He makes some use of esoteric and kabbalistic texts.[31]

Blake, like Coleridge, read Law's translation of the works of Boehme, with its positive view of Cain as a potential Messiah (Tannenbaum, Biblical Tradition in Blake's Early Prophecies 15, 295 n.38; Frye, Fearful Symmetry 158). In The Ghost of Abel, Blake probably alludes to Boehme's idea that Cain is the expected serpent-treader, when Adam asks: "Is this thy Promise

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the ten commandments, with several of the commandments written out in accurate Hebrew. The top line, however, is in unclear Hebrew characters. His Laocoön (Figure 112) includes the words "Angel of God" and the tetragrammaton in accurate Hebrew lettering, as well as this observation which depends on a pun in Hebrew: "He repented that he had made Adam (of the Female, the Adamah)." Adamah, the Hebrew word for Earth, is also the grammatically feminine gender of the word adam, human. Similarly, in his Illustrated Manuscript of Genesis, Blake transliterates the Hebrew word "Adamah," alongside his translation of this word as "Earth," suggesting that he feels the translation inadequate to convey the full meaning of the Hebrew word.

[31] Blake's most explicit reference to the cabbala is in his Preface to Chapter II of Jerusalem, "To the Jews," which mentions the cabbalistic tradition of Adam Kadmon, the universal man who "contained in his mighty limbs all things in Heaven and Earth." (Tannenbaum, Biblical Tradition 283 note 5).

While there are hints of Kabbalistic sources elsewhere in Blake's work, in this instance Blake uses the obscure Hebrew technical term, and provides a knowledgeable definition for it.

that the Womans Seed / Should bruise the Serpents head: Is this the Serpent?" Blake also makes use of the idea elsewhere in his own writings.[32] Attracted to radical and imaginative Bible commentators (Tannenbaum, Biblical Tradition in Blake's Early Prophecies 23), Blake had many models for revisionary readings of the Bible in general, even if he did not have a direct source for his revisionary reading of Cain.

The closest literary parallel to The Ghost of Abel is Coleridge's "The Wanderings of Cain." The two works use similar diction, echoing the language of the biblical prophets (see below, for a discussion of the influence of the Bible on The Ghost of Abel). Both present a battle between supernatural beings, in the presence of humans, in a desolate, rocky setting. Blake's portrait of Satan disguised as the vengeful ghost of Abel is much like Coleridge's deceiving spirit disguised as the suffering ghost of Abel. B. Reed, however, contrasts the two works on this point:

> As Coleridge in the Wanderings of Cain lets Abel appear in the form of a spirit, so Blake brings

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[32] The outcast and rebel Cain, branded by the Creator, became an exalted figure in gnostic theosophy. Blake accepted the doctrine that Christ, by the maternal line, was descended from Cain's wife, whom he called "Cainah" (Klonsky 108).

Cain is the ancestor of Jesus in Blake's mythology (Jerusalem, pl.62 The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake 213). Tannenbaum connects that with Cain's role as the ancestor of the arts ("Blake and the Iconography of Cain" 32), and also with Cain's role as the first to be forgiven.

> back the murdered one; but while Coleridge represents him as a suffering spirit, here he appears as an avenging spirit (110).

But she is wrong: In Coleridge's "The Wanderings of Cain," an evil spirit appears to be the suffering spirit of Abel, thus disguised to deceive Cain into sacrificing to the forces of evil. This is exactly parallel to the role of the Ghost of Abel in Blake's work; the evil spirit takes on the appearance of Abel, in Blake's work, to mislead the grieving Adam and Eve into calling for unholy vengeance.

According to the conventional dating of the works, Coleridge's work could not have influenced Blake. Coleridge's remembered writing his work in 1798, many years before Blake's (which came out in 1822); but Coleridge's work was not circulated or published until years later. It is possible that Blake's work should be, in part, dated earlier (according to his postscript date 1788); or that Coleridge's work should be dated later (we have no evidence for the early date but the author's recollections, which in other instances have been found to be inaccurate). In either instance, it would then become possible for Blake to have influenced Coleridge.

The greatest difference between the two works is the final emotional tone. Coleridge's Cain, in the rough draft, lives to report that angels have rescued him from sinning further;

still, the mood of this report is unrelieved gloom. Cain must live out his days tormented, away from God. At the end of Blake's play, a chorus of Angels sing the praises of God before Adam and Eve. That difference goes very deep into the personalities of the two poets. Coleridge writes obsessively of the feeling of alienation, of wandering alone, out of the presence of God, alienated from men; while Blake writes: "I am in Gods presence night & day, / And he never turns his face away" ("I rose up at the dawn of day" The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake 481).

Gessner's Der Tod Abels is an influence on The Ghost of Abel; Blake's playlet has the same gothic mood as Der Tod Abels, featuring a spooky setting, the appearance of a ghost, and the fainting mother. It is probably this mood which B. Reed has in mind when she observes that The Ghost of Abel "bears much closer resemblance to Gessner's work than to the Bible narrative" (110). In fact, however, Blake's play would be unimaginable without the model of certain biblical passages. The diction, the vivid directness of the images, and even the author's claim to prophetic status, all show that Blake finds the Hebrew Bible "the very source of his inspiration" (Roston, Prophet and Poet 160). The part of the Bible which influences The Ghost of Abel, however, is not so much the understated narrative of the story of Cain, as the intense prophetic tone of Job and the later prophets.

It is worth enquiring why Blake chooses Cain as his hero. Those thinkers who value religious submission and political order do not see Cain as a hero. Blake values autonomy and honesty above submission. Though a deeply religious poet, Blake rejects the establishment of religion (by implication, in the dedication of The Ghost of Abel, Blake calls the political and religious establishment Ahab and Jezebel). And so, for Blake, Cain is a natural choice of hero, expressing not only the poet's radical trust in divine forgiveness, but also his rejection of religious and political authority. Baudelaire and Leconte de Lisle later use Cain as a hero in expressing their own rejection of both political and religious authority.

Byron uses the story of Cain to tell of religious faith and doubt, of intellectual submission and curiosity, of untroubled docility and troubled rebellion, of humility and pride, and finally of the inevitable sense of guilt and exile that is the lot of the rebel. Blake answers Byron in The Ghost of Abel; with admirable literary economy, Blake answers by telling the same story to emphasize divine forgiveness. "The Ghost of Abel with its stress on mercy was an optimistic counterpart to Byron's drama of guilt and punishment" (Steffan 324). The story of Cain is the perfect vehicle for Blake use to urge the despairing Byron to trust forgiveness. Forgiveness, as I understand it, is what Blake finds lacking in Byron's play,

and what he feels Byron needs to learn.[33]

Blake's version of Cain is congruent with other developments in the history of sympathetic treatments of Cain. Cain appears as a hero for writers who focus on the related themes of repentance and forgiveness, including, before Blake, some of the ancient rabbinic commentators and the medieval Hebrew

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[33] Bidney also understands the disagreement between Blake and Byron as centering around the consequences of sin. For Byron, finding the motif of the curse in the Bible, "expands it, exacerbating the curses" (Bidney 162). Cain, having sinned, has to be cursed. For Blake, "unalloyed forgiveness must be stressed at the end of the Byron's play, even if this means that the ending of the that play will have to be rewritten" (Bidney 162).

Northrop Frye puts a different issue at the core of the dispute between Blake and Byron. According to Frye, Blake finds in Byron's play the notion that intellectual awakening must lead to crime, and Blake reassures him that "murder cannot be a part of genius but is always part of morality, and that genius must break with virtue and vice alike (Frye, Fearful Symmetry 199). By transcending Satan's call for vengeance, by rejecting "both Cain's murderousness and Abel's desire for revenge," the true God "prevents the meaningless counteraction of 'bad' crime and 'good' punishment from going any further" (199). In extrapolating from this position, Frye reaches the conclusion that Blake rejects morality: "That is why 'reason' in the bad sense is the same thing as morality" (200).

Byron indeed considers the proposition, in his Cain, that intellectual awakening may be diabolical, or even must be diabolical, as Frye suggests. Even so, Frye's suggestion that Byron thinks his genius "above the law" cannot be defended. Cain, in Byron's play, reacts to the murder with contrition and despair: he feels that he deserves the penalty of the law, and there is no sign that Byron disagrees. "Above the law" is a much better description of Blake's attitude; Blake argues for universal forgiveness, a doctrine which obviously is not compatible with any legal system.

Frye argues that Blake is also "above the law" because genius "must break with vice and virtue alike" (199). Frye thinks that Byron would agree; I think Byron would be horrified by the suggestion.

poet Benjamin ben Zerah (discussed above, Chapter 4). The writers in the Hebrew tradition, however, invoke Cain to illustrate the theme of repentance. For them, the hints of Cain's remorse in the Biblical text are of central importance. Because Blake invokes him to illustrate the theme of Christian forgiveness, Cain's remorse is irrelevant, and any hint of Cain's moral development undercuts Blake's point. The actors in this drama are not Cain, but God, Adam and Eve. Forgiveness of sins is written on <u>even</u> the murderer's forehead, for the murderer needs forgiveness most. Blake chooses to focus on forgiveness for Cain not in spite of the medieval tradition of Cain as the type of unrepentant evil, but because of the tradition. If Cain is ultimate evil, and even he is forgiven, then he is the sharpest possible illustration of universal forgiveness.

Although Blake's presentation of Cain is a radical contradiction to the image of Cain in medieval tradition, quite as radical as Byron's presentation of Cain, <u>The Ghost of Abel</u> did not arouse critical uproar. Blake's work expresses a central Christian doctrine; Byron's expresses deep religious conflict. Also, commercial publishers brought out huge printings of Byron's work, while Blake published in limited editions which he himself printed; even by his standards, Blake printed very few copies of <u>The Ghost of Abel</u> (Bentley, notes to <u>William Blake's Writings</u> 1:745). He was an obscure

figure, on his way to becoming "a forgotten painter and poet" (Pearce xvii); Byron was one of the most popular poets in England, and an enormous celebrity.

Chapter Nine: Gérard de Nerval's Histoire de la reine du matin et de Soliman prince des génies.[1]

Gérard de Nerval's novelette, Histoire de la reine du matin et de Soliman prince des génies (Oeuvres 2:505-606 Journey 121-213), first appeared in serial form in Le national in March and April of 1850 (Béguin and Richer 2:1388 n.3). During the next year, Nerval incorporated the novelette into a larger work, the Voyage en orient. Nerval, however, had been working on the theme of Solomon and Sheba for at least fifteen years (Glass 18; Knapp 59, 139).[2]

Making extensive use of obscure and ancient legendary material, Nerval transforms the image of Cain in literature,

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[1] The Tale of the Queen of the Morning and Soliman The Prince of the Genii (Journey 121).

[2] "In 1835 Nerval had written a rough draft for an opera in which Jenny Colon would star as Balkis" (Glass 18). Nerval showed this libretto to Meyerbeer, and made some changes at his suggestion. When Meyerbeer failed to make a definite commitment to the work, Nerval neglected it (Knapp 59).

"dont il se reclamé avant Baudelaire et Leconte de Lisle"[3] (Constans 31).

In Histoire de la reine du matin et de Soliman prince des génies, Cain appears as the progenitor of the world's artists and craftsmen (as in the Bible), as a superhuman figure (as in the most ancient legends), as a victim of humans and of the limited God of this world (as in the Gnostic and Masonic literature), and as a sensitive soul racked by remorse (as in the Midrash). Nerval writes the first literary version of the story in which Cain has an explanation excusing the murder, and in which other characters seem totally unbothered by it. Nerval goes beyond even the Masonic writers in ascribing unlimited superiority to Cain and his descendants over the merely human descendants of Seth. As an writer and artist, Nerval himself aspires to be identified with the descendants of Cain. Nerval combines and transforms existing themes to create his noble Cain.

In many ways the Histoire is a curious mélange. It does not exactly belong to any known genre (Glass 17): A mythological fantasy, presented as a spoken performance in a travelogue

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[3] "Which he claimed for himself before Baudelaire and Leconte de Lisle." I have incorporated French citations into the text of these next few chapters, and provided translations in footnotes. Occasionally, to maintain the flow of my text, I put the originals in the footnotes, and the translations in the text. The translations are mine, unless otherwise noted.

(with Gérard[4] himself in a bit part in the audience of the storyteller), it includes disquisitions on occult science, political theory and architectural criticism. The tone is also mixed. Constans wonderfully characterizes the "the ferocious accents and blasphemous vehemence" of "the most somber pages" of the novelette (122);[5] but other pages display erotic revery, and still others humorous banter.

Nerval's Histoire de la reine du matin et de Soliman prince des génies is the story of the visit of the Queen of Sheba to the court of King Soliman,[6] as recited by a professional storyteller in a café in Istanbul. In this version, Soliman is stiff, formal, pompous, vainglorious, and deceitful; he always appears overdressed. Balkis, the Queen, is natural, witty, passionate and honest; she always appears semi-nude. Balkis, whose mission is to consider Soliman as a marriage partner, instead prefers Adoniram, the brilliant chief

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[4] Nerval appears by name in much of his own fiction. In discussing his works, writers follow the elegant convention of referring to the author as Nerval and the character as Gérard.

[5] "les pages les plus sombres" and "les accents farouches et la véhémence blasphématoire" (Constans 122).

[6] Nerval uses a rare spelling of the king's name (which is usually spelled Salomon in French), emphasizing the oriental setting of his story.

The changes which Nerval introduces into the major theme of the work should be read against the background of Jacob Lassner's study of the theme of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba in legend and literature, soon to be published by University of Chicago Press.

architect of Soliman's temple. Ultimately, she foils Soliman's intrigues and escapes his marriage offer by fleeing back home, while he foils her elopement by conspiring to have Adoniram assassinated. She returns to Sheba pregnant with Adoniram's child, so continuing the family of the world's artists, scientists and liberators, "Géants de l'intelligence, flambeaux de savoir, organes du progrès, lumières des arts, instruments de la liberté"[7] (Oeuvres 2:563). Soliman, after this encounter, becomes interested only in power and pleasure, and is cut off from his God. In a display of hubris, he attempts a kind of immortality, to be achieved by sleeping for 225 years protected by genii from all dangers. One small mite, not included in the protection, slowly eats through the pillars of the throne, toppling it after 224 years and killing Soliman under the weight of his own throne.

Cain himself appears in only one short, but crucial, section, which recounts Adoniram's descent to "Le monde souterrain" (Oeuvres 2: 536-565; "The Subterranean Kingdom" Journey 168-176). To put the descent in context: The mold for Adoniram's masterpiece, a huge "sea of bronze," has been damaged in a hidden act of sabotage. Molten metal spills from its mold, killing many of his workers, among them Adoniram's faithful

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[7] "Giants of intelligence, torches of knowledge, organs of progress, lights of the arts and instruments of liberty" (Journey 174)

apprentice Benoni.[8] The work itself seems irreparably damaged. Shamed and exhausted, Adoniram collapses beside the ruined metal; there he encounters, perhaps in a dream, his ancestor Tubal-Cain. Tubal-Cain leads him into the fire, and brings him down to the underground world where Cain and his descendants still survive. Cain recounts his version of the biblical story to Adoniram. The significance which Tubal-Cain gives the story is this: Balkis, the beautiful queen, and Adoniram, the inspired artist, trace their pure pedigree back to the world's original artisans, the descendants of the superhuman Cain. From the union of Balkis and Adoniram will come world's future artists, inventors, scientists and liberators. The merely human descendants of Adam include the world's priests, tyrants, sycophants and drones. When Tubal-Cain returns Adoniram to the surface, it is with the knowledge and confidence to repair the sea of bronze.

In his short speech, Cain addresses most of the elements of the theme of Cain: his own origins, his relationship with God, his conflict with Abel, the sacrifices, the murder and its aftermath. Nothing in previous literary renditions, not even in the English romantic versions, prepares us for this radical

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[8] The name Benoni occurs only once in the Bible. Rachel, dying in childbirth, calls her newborn son Benoni, "but his father called him Benjamin" (Gen. 35:18). Benoni means "child of my strength" or "child of my sorrow." Benjamin means "child of my right hand=strength" or "child of my old age." Thus the two names are nearly synonyms.

inversion of the traditional meaning of the story of Cain.

Cain presents a radical account of his own origins: "Héva fut ma mère; Éblis, l'ange de lumière, a glissé dans son sein l'étincelle qui m'anime et qui a régénéré ma race"[9] (Oeuvres 2:557). Nerval follows the most ancient sources, and the Masonic tradition, in presenting Cain as the child of Eve and Satan, whom Nerval calls Eblis (an Islamic name fit for the setting of this story--Constans 70). For the Gnostic Masons, descent from Satan is a mark of honor. Nerval, going further than his sources, hints that Cain was conceived without sexual intercourse, so identifying Cain with Jesus and other avatars. The spark of Eblis, from which Cain springs, is the spark of creativity which descendants of Adam lack.

Cain, speaking from his tomb, describes his ancient unequal relationship with Abel. Abel sat idle while Cain did all the work for his step-family. Especially galling to Cain, Abel had the easy responsibilities of the shepherd, while Cain faced the exhausting work of the farmer, "arrachant notre nourriture au sol avare"[10] (Oeuvres 2:557). Abel "se sentait roi, lui-même, oisif et caressé, il paissait ses troupeaux en

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[9] "Eve was my mother. Eblis, the angel of light, placed within her breast the spark which animates me and which has regenerated my race" (Journey 169).

[10] "uprooting our food from the miserly earth" (Journey 169).

sommeillant sous les sycomores"[11] (Oeuvres 2:557). Furthermore, Cain was not respected for his efforts. Adam and Eve, for their own separate reasons, did not love him (Oeuvres 2:557, Journey 169), and Abel, "dédaigneux et choyé, me considérait comme le serviteur de chacun"[12] (Oeuvres 2:557). The relationship between Cain and Abel thus prefigures the relationship between the working class and the wealthy.

Cain explains the history of the two brothers' sacrifices in an unexpected way: Finding the division of labor between himself and Abel to be unfair, and resenting Abel's disrespect, Cain complained to Adam and Eve. They proposed a sacrifice as a way of appealing to God for a decision. The two brothers brought their sacrifices; Cain's was the first wheat of summer, which had blossomed through his efforts. God scornfully rejected Cain's sacrifice, as he has subsequently "toujours repoussé le génie inventif et fécond, et donné la puissance avec le droit d'oppression aux esprits vulgaires"[13] (Oeuvres 2:558). Abel's sacrifice was preferred because God, being jealous, always prefers untalented and lazy humans.

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[11] Abel "considered himself a king, idle and fondled as he was, he slept beneath the sycamores, leaving his flocks to stray and graze" (Journey 169).

[12] "disdainful and pampered, looked upon me as a mere household servant" (Journey 169).

[13] "persisted in thrusting aside any inventive and fruitful genius, and he has handed power, with its right to oppress, to mediocre minds" (Journey 169).

Cain's sacrifice, obtained by industry and creativity, was a threat to divine pride. Abel's, presumably obtained without effort, initiative or labor, was not threatening (as in the Masonic version: Heindel 20, Lokke 109). Nerval provides an answer to the question which has so puzzled commentators over the centuries: Why does God choose Abel and his sacrifice, and turn from Cain and his sacrifice. According to Nerval, God does so because he is jealous and biased against talent. Told this way, the story of Cain becomes an assault on the biblical God.

For the first time in a literary version, Cain explains his motives for the murder. Cain concludes his description of the sacrifices with an elliptical expression, "Tu sais le reste,"[14] (Oeuvres 2:558) indicating that, as in the biblical account, the murder is partly Cain's reaction to the results of the two sacrifices. In Nerval's account, however, the sacrifice is effectively a test of the justice of stratified society; God ratified privilege. By murdering Abel, Cain rejects the outcome of that test. He performs an act of "symbolic regicide, a revolt against the double inequities of privilege and servitude"[15] (Lokke 110). Before the test, Cain had willingly made his own life a sacrifice, constantly

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[14] "You know what followed" (Journey 169).

[15] But perhaps "symbolic deicide" would be a more precise term.

working to provide for his human relatives, to invent new ways of providing for them, to recreate the lost Eden on Earth. They never appreciated him. They lived off the sweat of his brow. After the sacrifice, Lokke implies, Cain was unwilling to continue that mode of life, and killed the privileged Abel. The murder is thus the first revolution against political and economic privilege.

Radcliff-Umstead finds that Cain's explanation for the murder of Abel focusses specifically on Eve's partiality towards Abel (Radcliff-Umstead 404).[16] In Nerval's Histoire, Cain laments that Eve "se souvenait d'avoir été bannie du paradis pour m'avoir mis au monde, et son coeur fermé par l'intérêt, était tout à son Abel"[17] (2:557). Right before and right after this complaint, however, Cain lists his equally great grievances against Adam and against Abel. It seems, therefore, that Lokke is closer to the truth: Cain rebels against the entire family, not just against Eve.

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[16] Radcliff-Umstead thinks that "[t]he discontent which caused the Biblical Cain to kill his brother came partly because Eve preferred Abel" (404). Actually, there is not a shred of evidence in the biblical text that Eve prefers Abel. Perhaps Radcliff-Umstead meant to write "Byronic" instead of "biblical;" that would make the statement true, but undercut another statement of Radcliff-Umstead's, that Nerval's portrait of Cain "probably owes nothing to Byron's" (400).

[17] "remembered that she had been banished from Paradise for having given birth to me; she closed her selfish heart to me and opened it to none but Abel" (Journal 169).

Cain offers an additional motive in this speech: "[M]ais ce que tu ignores, c'est que la réprobation d'Adonaï, me condamnant à la stérilité, donnait pour épouse au jeune Habel notre soeur Aclinia dont j'étais aimé"[18] (Oeuvres 2:559). The theme that Cain and Abel are rivals for the love of a sister can be traced back to the ancient Midrash (chapter 3 above) and to Armenian versions of the Bible (chapter 7 above). Béguin and Richer cite Islamic versions of the story in which Nerval found the name for Cain's wife, Aclinia (notes to Nerval, Oeuvres 558 note 1; Nerval, Oeuvres 2:1395). The rivalry of Cain and Abel for Aclinia exactly parallels the rivalry between Adoniram and Soliman for Balkis. God, in both stories, intervenes to separate the creative genius from the ideal woman. Thus Nerval adds romantic longing and fear of extinction to his portrait of the artist.

Cain expresses his profound regret about the murder. The murder was, according to Cain, the first manifestation of the war between the mud-born humans, creatures of Adonai, and the fire-born jinn, creatures of the Éloims (Oeuvres 2:558 Journey 169-70). The war was probably inevitable. Nonetheless, Cain feels deep remorse for having shed blood:

> Kaïn roula sur le sol, qui retentit, et les

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[18] "but what you do not know is that Adonai the judge, condemning me to sterility, gave Abel a wife, Aclinia; she was our sister and it was not Abel whom she loved, but me" (Journey 169).

> convulsions du désespoir lui déchiraient la poitrine. . .
>
> Tel est le supplice de Kaïn, parce qu'il a versé le sang.[19] (Oeuvres 2:558).

One of the aspects of the story which can be emphasized to create a sympathetic portrayal of Cain is his regret at the murder. In unsympathetic portrayals, he might regret the punishment, rather than the crime. In this version, he experiences torment at having shed blood; note that the explanation for his torment appears in a comment by the story-teller, presumably, an unimpeachable source. If the explanation had come from a character, Cain, or Adoniram, readers might suspect other origins for Cain's torment: It might be, for example, his reaction to Adam's continuing condemnation. In this version, we cannot doubt Cain's sincerity.

To atone for the crime, he and his descendants become even more complete benefactors of the children of Adam: "C'est a notre race, supérieure à la leur, qu'ils doivent tous les arts, l'industrie et les éléments des sciences"[20] (Oeuvres

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[19] "Hurling himself down, Cain beat his fists upon the ground until it echoed, while the convulsions of his sorrow rent his breast. Such is the torment of Cain for having shed blood" (Journey 170).

[20] "It is to our race which is superior to theirs that they owe all the arts, trades and principles of the sciences"

2:558). This atonement fails to reconcile Cain to God, who does not want to have his creatures liberated (Oeuvres 2:558 Journey 170). Thus, even though God himself later kills multitudes in the great Flood, he cannot forgive Cain for killing one mere human, breaking "une vase d'argile"[21] (Oeuvres 2:558).

Cain explicates his relationship with God in this speech, describing himself as a child of the Éloïms (2:557). Nerval provides a helpful gloss to that remarkably equivocal term: "Les Éloïms sont des génies primitifs que les Égyptiens appelaient les dieux ammonéens. Dans le système des traditions persanes . . . le dieu des Hébreux n'etait que l'un des Éloïms"[22] (Oeuvres 2:557 note). Nerval's portrait of God in this story is consistent with that note: God is one of many supernatural beings, not necessarily superior to the others. Nerval's children of Cain nearly always use the Hebrew title for God, Adonaï, or the tetragrammaton, emphasizing the exotic, and consequently limited, nature of this being.[23]

(Journey 170).

[21] "one vessel of clay" (Journey 170).

[22] "The Eloims are the primitive genii whom the Egyptians call the gods related to Amon. In the Persian system of traditions . . . the god of the Hebrews is only one of the Eloims."

[23] In arguing with Soliman, Balkis uses the generic "Dieu" (Oeuvres 2:537 Journey 152), but that is exactly when she wants to demonstrate that Soliman's religious conceptions

This deity has limited power: He cannot, according to Tubal-Cain's description, control events in the subterranean world (Oeuvres 2:553 Journey 166). He has a flawed personality: He is "plus jaloux que généreux"[24] (2:555). He makes his creatures mortal only because of his jealous fears; his rivals, the beneficent genii of fire, continue to struggle to keep these mortal creatures alive (2:555 Journey 167). In this work, God is morally inferior to the genii.

According to Tubal-Cain, the ancient war between the children of Cain and God continues. "Elle a combattu deux mille ans; on n'a pu nous détruire, parce que nous sommes d'une essence immortelle, on a rèussi à nous vaincre, parce que le sang d'Héva se mêlait à notre sang"[25] (2:560). The children of Cain are doomed to wander, unappreciated, laboring to create all that human beings need, until the day when the children of Cain will overthrow those despotic religious and political

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imply a limited God: "En le croyant jaloux, ce Dieu, vous limitez sa toute-puissance, vous déifiez vos facultés, et vous matérializes les siennes" (Oeuvres 2:537). "Believing that God is jealous, you question his omnipotence, you deify your faculties and disparage His" (Journey 152).

She hints, at this point, that the people of her land can believe in an unlimited God, which liberates them; they know that the God worshipped by the Jews is limited.

[24] "subtle rather than strong, more jealous than generous" (Journey 167).

[25] "For two thousand years . . . Adonai has not been able to destroy us, for we are of immortal essence, but he has been able to conquer us, because the blood of Eve was mingled with our blood" (Journey 171).

powers which owe their strength to God (Oeuvres 2:563; Journey 174). Cain's own description of his relationship with God is consistent with Tubal-Cain's, although, as Constans points out, less vehement (66).[26] The ancient war pits as opposing forces the scientists, artists, workers and thinkers, on one side, and the priests, kings, nobles and followers on the other. In mythological language, this passage calls for the workers of the world to unite, under the leadership of the progressive intellectual vanguard, in an anti-monarchic, anticlerical revolution.

Cain's noble speech leaves Adoniram, as Nerval intends it to leave the reader, "[s]aisi de respect, d'amour, de compassion et d'horreur"[27] (Oeuvres 2:558). The speech has numerous elements calculated to induce our sympathy for Cain: Cain presents himself as a creative benefactor of the human race, a sensitive soul "more sinned against than sinning," a sincere penitent, and the forerunner of the world's political liberators.

Nerval tempers Cain's sympathetic presentation account of the

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[26] While the descendants of Cain openly rebel against God, Cain himself is remorseful for the crime, and hurt that God has eternally withheld forgiveness (Oeuvres 2:558 Journey 170); even so, Cain does describe God as jealous of his creativity and initiative.

[27] "Overcome by respect, love, compassion and horror" (Journey 170).

story of the murder of Abel by including an account from another point-of-view. Adam, also present in the subterranean world, reproaches Cain. Cain invented murder, as a consequence of which "Dieu poursuit, dans mes enfants, le sang d'Héva dont tu sors et que tu a versé"[28] (Oeuvres 2:558). God, punishing humans for that first murder, sets up

> des prêtres qui ont immolé les hommes, et des rois qui ont sacrifié des prêtres et des soldats. Un jour, il fera naître des empereurs pour broyer les peuples, les prêtres et les rois eux-mêmes, et la postérité des nations dira: Ce sont les fils de Kaïn![29] (Oeuvres 2:558).

Adam says that Cain and his race deserve their fate as punishment for the first murder. Cain does not protest: He doubles over in pain to hear Adam's accusations. Cain has already said that he has benefitted Adam ever since the murder, and that the children of Cain have done likewise, while priests and tyrants, who are mass-murderers, and who

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[28] "God seeks in my children the blood of Eve from which you spring, the very blood which you have shed" (Journey 170). This difficult line in Nerval apparently should be referred to a difficult verse in Genesis. In Gen. 9:5-6, God is depicted as demanding, or seeking out, the soul of anyone who has spilled lifeblood. Nerval apparently glossed that verse to mean that God's vengeance extends, not only to the killer, but to the descendants of the victim as well.

[29] . . . priests who have immolated men, and kings who have slaughtered priests and soldiers. The day will dawn when he will create emperors who will crush the people, the priests, and the kings themselves. Then posterity will declare: "These are the sons of Cain!" (Journey 170).

have nothing to do with Cain, are really the instruments of God. Yet Adam predicts that Cain will be blamed for these tyrants, when people will say "Ce sont les fils de Kaïn!"[30] (Oeuvres 2:558; see discussion in Constans 67). According to Adam, God has brought about all the torments of human history, but these torments should be blamed on Cain. If not for Cain's crime, God would have been merciful to his creatures. Adam's defense of God, and his accusation of Cain, are not logical: He blames Cain for the unjust actions of God (Constans 67). Even so, the accusations are sufficient to wound the sensitive Cain.

At the close of Adam's speech, he describes the emperors who would overthrow all; people would call them "the sons of Cain." There is something equivocal about these emperors: They may be just one more punishment brought by God onto mankind, whom people will misidentify as the sons of Cain. On the other hand, the emperors may be the victorious children of Cain, overthrowing God and all human institutions, whom people accurately call sons of Cain. According to this second interpretation, the ultimate victory of the children of Cain, which they await as the triumph of justice, will be, as far as the children of Adam are concerned, just another, more powerful, tyranny. Adam's speech thus provides a contrasting perspective on the messianic hope for the triumph of the

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[30] "These are the sons of Cain!" Journey 170.

children of Cain, which is a dominant theme of the story.

The English romantic poets identify with Cain in their versions of the story, focussing on him as an intellectual rebel, as a sinner, and as an outcast; Nerval has another point of identification with Cain: Cain as an artist. From that persective, the story functions as a meditation on the nature of true art. The children of Cain are geniuses, but doomed to be "[m]éconnus durant leur séjour sur la terre"[31] (Oeuvres 2: 562). In each case, they will be recognized after death, and "leurs tombes seules seront honorées"[32] (Oeuvres 2:562). They will be "[s]ensibles aux malheurs de l'humanité"[33] (Oeuvres 2:562), but they will be unable to prevent these disasters, for people will not pay heed (Oeuvres 2:562-3 Journey 173-74). The artistic works of the children of Cain, the sphinx, the pyramids, the ancient lost city of Henochia, these are built on a gigantic scale, made of perdurable stone, copied from weird fantasies, frightening to man and God, and eternal (Oeuvres 508-9 Journey 127-29).[34]

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[31] "Unrecognized during their days on earth" (Journey 173).

[32] "their tombs alone will be honoured" (Journey 173).

[33] "sensitive to the misfortunes of humanity" (Journey 173).

[34] The children of Adam are incapable of building anything of true artistic merit. Their works are gaudy, too symmetrical, copied from nature, and doomed to be destroyed.

True artists, according to Nerval, will never be appreciated; their works will always be too radical for their doltish audiences. The audiences will only begin to value true art after they have had a long time to get used to it, when they will not feel as threatened by it, by which time the artist will be dead. Artists have miserable lives, because they are at the mercy of dolts, and because they are sensitive to the pain of others. In their profound originality, artists rediscover ancient archetypes;[35] their work, evoking these permanent archetypes, can never be destroyed. This is a romantic conception of art: Art is a primarily an attribute, not of the artist's skillful hand, but of his tormented soul.

Nerval makes his sharpest presentation of the romantic aesthetic of the "children of Cain," in its contrast with the state-approved neoclassical aesthetic, in Soliman's argument with Balkis about experimentation in art (Oeuvres 2:522-25 Journey 139-142; Knapp 142-43). Balkis, as a child of Cain, immediately loves Soliman's palace, which Adoniram built with

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[35] If there is a contradiction in Adoniram's insistence on using his own dreams to invent new forms, which he has already found in the ancient city of Hénochia (Oeuvres 2:529 Journey 145), that does not bother Nerval. As Balkis remarks to Adoniram, "Si votre oeuvre est belle et sublime . . . elle sera orthodoxe, et, pour être orthodoxe à son tour, la postérité vous copiera" (Oeuvres 2:528-29). "'If your work is beautiful and sublime . . . it will be orthodox, and to be orthodox in its turn, posterity will copy your example'" (Journey 144).

a free hand, and criticizes the both the city and the Temple, which Soliman designed (Oeuvres 2:522-523 Journey 139-140). Soliman, speaking of the symmetrically laid-out city, praises clean lines, wide streets, clear development. Balkis considers the plan sterile, rule-bound, and impractical (Oeuvres 2:522 Journey 139). On the other hand, Balkis criticizes Soliman's Temple as heavy, cluttered, out-of-balance, over-ornamented, with too much gold (Oeuvres 2:523-4 Journey 140-41). She herself displays an artistic bower of living birds, offering them to Soliman on condition that he not oblige her to change them into gold (Oeuvres 2:525 Journey 142). Thus, in one scene, Nerval disparages both the neo-classical preference for orderly art, and the Baroque for ornamented art, from the perspective of romantic expressionist surrealism.

Adoniram, the descendant of Cain, represents the ideal romantic artist: "Clearly, Nerval's descendants of Cain are kindred spirits of the prototypical Romantic artist, isolated from and unappreciated by the masses whom he wishes to serve, a martyr to a revolutionary . . . esthetic vision" (Lokke 110-11; similarly Knapp 142, Schaeffer 211-46). Adoniram is creative by virtue of his innate ability, his racial purity, his knowledge of the tradition and his insight into his own dreams. Furthermore, Adoniram's descent into the Subterranean Kingdom can be seen as a metaphor for Nerval's peculiar type

or creativity. The artist descends into the subterranean world of his own subconscious for inspiration. There, in the subconscious world, he learns the eternal archetypes, so that the artist is both an original inventor and a profound re-discoverer of art. This is, I think, implicit in the metaphor of descent to the Subterranean Kingdom; but Nerval reinforces the connection by having Adoniram wonder whether the entire descent has been nothing more than a dream (Oeuvres 2:551 Journey 164). Nerval, both as poet and as artist, finds his strength in dreams and hallucinations, and so identifies with Adoniram. The virtues of the heroes of the tale, Adoniram and Balkis, the eternal virtues of Cain and his children, are also the virtues to which Nerval himself aspires. As a creative artist, he felt that his dreams connect him with eternal truths. The torments of the children of Cain were shared by Nerval. He too felt unappreciated, persecuted.

Most critics believe that Adoniram represents Nerval himself: "In Adoniram, Nerval is describing himself, perhaps as he would like to be, perhaps as he thinks he is" (Jones 87-88; likewise Constans 68, 272; Glass 18; Knapp 252). I cannot escape the persistent and chilling thought, though, that Nerval especially identifies with Benoni, Adoniram's faithful apprentice. Adoniram criticizes him without mercy. The master faults his apprentice for copying nature slavishly, and for failing to be as audacious as the ancient idol-makers, and

for having a defeated spirit (Oeuvres 2:509 Journey 128), accompanying each criticism with intemperate invective. Benoni responds to all the criticism silently, wondering: "D'où vient, se disait Benoni, cet Adoniram dont l'esprit échappe à l'humanité?"[36] (Oeuvres 2:509). Benoni faithfully mingles with the workers, to see if they are working enthusiastically (Oeuvres 2:548 Journey 160); when he discovers the plot to damage the sea of bronze, he tells the king, who listens impassively. Benoni then runs towards Adoniram, and, seeing him on the other side of the path for the molten metal, leaps into the path. Perhaps he intends to get across to the other side of the channel in time to warn Adoniram, or perhaps he wishes, by his own suicide, to stop the doomed operation (Oeuvres 2:548-49 Journey 161-62). Unlike the true master, Benoni cannot survive his leap into the fiery molten metal. Adoniram, dispassionately protecting his project, sticks an iron hook into the man's breast, and flings him on the opposite bank, without stopping to recognize "son compagnon, le fidèle Benoni"[37] (Oeuvres 2:548). Benoni's suicide is an heroic, but ultimately futile, attempt to protect the true master of arts.

To the extent that Nerval identifies with Benoni, it is not as

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[36] "Where does this Adoniram come from? Benoni asked himself. His spirit takes no account of humanity" (Journey 128).

[37] "his eternally faithful friend Benoni" (Journey 162).

Nerval wishes to be, but as he fears he is. The biblical Benoni is named by his mother as she died in childbirth; he is, like Nerval, the child of a widower. Nerval's Benoni wants to be an artist, but does not have the talent. He loves and appreciates the artist, but the artist loves only art. Benoni is the only confidant of the artist, but when he is gone, the artist rarely thinks of him. Benoni's leap into the channel of molten metal is a suicide in the defense of art, but it turns out to be irrelevant to the success of the venture. Perhaps Nerval fears that he is one of those who loves art, but really can never succeed at it.

In any case, Nerval's myth must be the warmest possible consolation for an unrecognized artist (Gilbert 93). The only reason why genius is unrecognized in this world is that a mediocre God has temporary control, and he jealously prefers only mediocre artists.

The story of Cain, as told by Nerval, has powerful economic and political significance. Lokke maintains that Nerval's story "highlights the socialist tendencies of his own mysticism" (Lokke 109). For Nerval, the conflict between Adoniram and Soliman is "also clearly a conflict of economic classes" (Lokke 109). The voice of Tubal-Cain is also, as Lokke points out (109), "[l]a voix du peuple"[38] (Oeuvres

[38] "the voice of the people" (Journey 161).

2:551). Celier similarly identifies the socialist inspiration behind Nerval's assertion that Adoniram's army of workers will conquer the blind power of despots (Celier 118-19). According to Lokke, Nerval stresses the class conflict in this legend: "The race of Cain, 'Race industrieuse et opprimée'[39] (2:557), as Cain himself described it, becomes an embodiment of the working class" (Lokke 109). God "becomes the archetypal tyrant and oppressor, jealous and fearful of the power latent in these 'ouvriers issus des génies de feu'"[40] (Lokke 109). Soliman, typical of hierarchical political leaders, is a crass materialist, a user of persons, who depends on sycophants and priests for his temporal power. Cain's arduous labor and inventive engineering on behalf of Adam and Abel is never acknowledged. The relationship between Cain and Adam is the prototype for relations between the children of Cain and the children of Adam ever after. But the children of Adam must be punished for their mistreatment of the children of Cain. In Nerval's version, the prophet Ahijah of Shilo calls God's vengeance down upon Soliman: God promises sevenfold vengeance against anyone who would slay Cain (Gen. 4:15), and his descendant Lamekh anticipates seventy-times sevenfold vengeance against his own slayer (Gen. 4:24); according to Ahijah, Soliman is doomed to receive seventy times sevenfold vengeance from God for having arranged the death of the

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[39] "O oppressed and industrious race!" (Journey 169).

[40] "workers descended from the genii of fire."

Cainite Adoniram (Oeuvres 2:600-601).[41] Constans' chapter title accurately summarizes the polemical significance of Nerval's mythological tale: "Adoniram et le messianisme révolutionnaire"[42] (Constans 62). Belief in an ultimate revolution, which destroy tyranny and bring about an age of unbridled creativity and happiness, is built into Nerval's story of the line of Cain.

Lokke finds Nerval's use of myth "progressive" (17). She thinks that Nerval is "a true visionary in the most positive, progressive sense possible" (19; See, for a similar opinion, Celier 118-19). "Nerval's world view is akin to . . . revolutionary mysticism and . . . utopian socialism (Lokke 63). While there are indeed progressive elements in L'histoire, Lokke seems not to notice other elements in the story. Nerval's ultimate plan is certainly nothing like egalitarian. The current ruling classes are not to be reduced to equality, but to be destroyed. Adoniram is "roi des ouvriers,"[43] destined to rule, who masters thousands of his

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[41] In Nerval's account, the vengeance for Cain is "sept fois," (sevenfold), rather than the biblical "twice seven;" likewise, the vengeance for Lamekh is "septante fois sept fois" (seventy times seven), rather than the biblical "seventy-seven." Glass, in his translation of Nerval, "corrects" the numbers to "seven" and "seventy-seven," respectively (Journey 207).

The other major romantic versions of Cain in this study do not refer to those verses.

[42] "Adoniram and the Messianic Revolutionary"

[43] "king of workers"

troops with a single gesture (Oeuvres 2:532 Journey 147). That is not exactly a description of a classless society. Lokke also ignores the theme of racial purity, which runs through the entire story: Adoniram and Balkis owe their superiority, in part, to racial purity; Soliman and the Jews owe their inferiority to mongrelization (Oeuvres 2:511-12 Journey 130). When Nerval writes of the domination of the workers by the ideal, superhuman artist, the destined father of the pure redeeming master race, which must eventually conquer the Jews and other mongrel races, he is much less the forerunner of Utopian Socialists than of National Socialists.

For Nerval, as for the earlier romantics, sympathy for Cain has tremendous religious significance. In the medieval theater, Cain is an entirely unsympathetic character, and the playwrights use their condemnation of Cain to express confidence in an objective religious order. The English romantics, by expressing sympathy for Cain, undermine that confidence, expressing either religious subjectivism (for Blake and Coleridge) or religious uncertainty (for Byron). Nerval rejects traditional religion frankly and totally, and expresses that rejection in his sympathy for Cain. The descendants of Cain, according to Nerval, will simultaneously "abaissera un jour la puissance aveugle des rois, ces

ministres despotiques d'Adonaï"[44] (Oeuvres 2:563; see discussion in Lokke 84). For Nerval, as for Baudelaire and Leconte de Lisle, the foretold destiny of the tribe of Cain is to destroy kings and priests: The overthrow of earthly tyranny is inseparable from the overthrow of the worship of a patriarchal God.

Lokke suggests that Nerval's thought in this work was "founded on a firm Voltairian commitment to religious tolerance" (Lokke 63). That is hard to reconcile with her own observation that, "[f]or Nerval, Judeo-Christian monotheism is by definition repressive" (18). Nerval seems inclined to tolerate religions other than monotheism. In the Histoire de la reine du matin et de Soliman prince des génies, Tubal-Cain predicts that, when the revolution comes, Adoniram's descendants will reestablish the neglected cult of fire in the very face of God (Oeuvres 2:563 Journey 174).

"[A] recognition of the historicity of religion underlies all of these [Nerval's mystical] works; the 'eternal' truth of religion cannot be captured by a reified set of dogma" (Lokke 124). Nerval, then, sometimes seems to take a scientific, anthropological view of religion; at other times, his view would be accurately called "neo-pagan" (Radcliff-Umstead 400-

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[44] "bring down, one day, the blind power of kings, those despotic ministers of God." My translation; a slightly different translation is in Journey 174.

401): He often writes as if he wishes to "inaugurate a renaissance of dead gods" (Radcliff-Umstead 400). He was not loyal to any one system of dead gods; rather he was attracted to the whole syncretistic pantheon.[45]

Nerval admired nearly all religions; in his literary works, Gérard imagined himself a pagan in Greece, a moslem in Egypt, a pantheist among the Druse, a worshipper of astral deities among the Chaldees, and, in Constantinople, attracted to the attitude of the Turks, with a grand tolerance for all. Celier notes "Ce n'est pas un disciple de Voltaire qui parle, ni un champion du relativisme"[46] (Celier 102). According to this way of thinking, each religion, however much it varies in form, develops from the original source. This is the syncretism of the 18th century Masons (Celier 102). What Celier overlooks is that there is one religious style which Nerval could not appreciate, the patriarchal monotheism of Soliman. Later, Leconte de Lisle would feel the same syncretistic appreciation for the development of all religions, and even make the same exception (Constans 177). The difference is that Leconte de Lisle appreciated all these religions from the outside, as an observer; Nerval, to some

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[45] Gérard, for instance, does not worship in the church of St. George; since he is in Greece, he does not wish to face the anger of Apollo (Oeuvres 2:85).

[46] "This was not a disciple of Voltaire who spoke, nor a champion of relativism" (My translation).

extent, from the inside, as a devotee.

Constans maintains that Nerval's attitude towards the God of the biblical tradition was uncertain (Constans 67). Three moments in the story support this reading: Tubal-Cain acknowledges the dignity and majesty of God, Adoniram's father speaks of God with deference and respect (Constans 67, referring to Oeuvres 2:562 Journey 173), and Cain longs for God's forgiveness (Oeuvres 2:558 Journey 170). Constans feels that Cain in Nerval's work affirms a spirit of revolt less open and complete than that expressed by Cain in Byron's work (Constans 66).[47] This statement is very carefully qualified: Tubal-Cain and Adoniram do express a spirit of open and complete revolt in Nerval's story. Even so, the statement is true only if we look at Byron's Cain before the crime. Constans overstates Byron's religious revolt, and understates Nerval's.

Constans finds the few equivocal or respectful statements about God in this story. Far more often, though, the references to God are unequivocally negative.[48] Lokke

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[47] Constans, who consistently underestimates Nerval's opposition to traditional religion, feels that Cain in Byron expresses a more wholehearted spirit of revolt against God. In fact, as I have shown, Byron's Cain ends by withdrawing from his revolt, while Nerval's Cainites will never end theirs.

[48] Nerval's opinion, in this story, matches the opinion of the neo-pagan Quintus Aucler, one of the esoteric

forcefully argues that Nerval, in the tale of Adoniram, Solomon and Sheba, lovingly depicts the role of an underground, revolutionary race of Cain in overthrowing the patriarchal God and thus bringing about a new Golden age (Lokke 19). "In Nerval's text the curse placed upon the descendants of Cain ...exposes this vengeful, unforgiving God as morally inferior to the geniuses he condemns" (Lokke 110). Indeed, the children of Cain in Nerval's work describe God in the same way that Lucifer, in Byron's work, describes him. "Consistently, Nerval depicts God the Father as a destructive and repressive force that must be replaced" (Lokke 17). Lokke maintains that the ideal replacement for God the Father, in Nerval's work, is "a Mother Goddess" (Lokke 17); in this story, at least, the goddess is not in evidence.[49] The higher beings in this story are the beneficent genii of fire (Oeuvres

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philosophers in his Les illuminés (Oeuvres 2:1215).

[49] Constans notes the inconsistency of Nerval, who, for all his praise of opposition against God, still has a tender place in his heart for Jesus and for the Virgin, and a certain nostalgia for belief (Constans 68). There are, however, very few signs of that nostalgia in this story.

Lokke resolves the contradiction: "Nerval's entire oeuvre consists of an attack on patriarchal society and its values, an attack on the brutality, intolerance and tyranny of God the Father" (Lokke 20). For Lokke, Nerval is consistent: He appreciates goddesses, and attacks the patriarchal God.

Lokke repeatedly cites Nerval's positive references to Christ as the god of equality, in contradistinction to his negative evaluation of God the Father, the god of authority (Lokke 74, 83); this combination suggests Nerval's Marcion and Gnostic tendencies. In this story, Balkis speaks reverentially of the ancient vine of Noah, which is to be the holy cross (Oeuvres 526 Journey 142).

563 Journey 174).

Robert Emmet Jones finds the most significant defect of Soliman's religion in Nerval's portrayal is that it is "an intolerant religion" (90), which offends against Nerval's syncretistic appreciation of "the beauties of the pagan world" (90). In fact, children of Cain attack several other aspects of Soliman's religion: Its treatment of women, especially of wives (Oeuvres 593 Journey 200, discussed in Lokke 87), its opposition to the most audacious artistic forms (Oeuvres 2:530 Journey 146), and its timidity towards improving the world (Oeuvres 2:537 Journey 152).

Nerval, in this story, accuses monotheism of having, by nature, a negative attitude towards progress. Patriarchal monotheism, according to Nerval, in theory ought to be fatalist; it should oppose experimentation, which brings freedom and progress. Balkis admits that Soliman's traditional ways had once brought order out of chaos, but now they have become reactionary, holding back progress. Balkis' kingdom is an artificial paradise, supplied by an artificial reservoir. Soliman piously disapproves of the reservoir, on practical grounds because it may fail eventually, and on theological grounds, because such feats of engineering interfere with God's works. Balkis destroys the theological argument: Your religion is enfeebled; the God of enlightenment

would be pleased to see you experiment (Oeuvres 2:535-37 Journey 151-52).

The presentation of Cain's story in Nerval's Histoire de la reine du matin et de Soliman prince des génies is designed to attract the reader's sympathy for Cain. Nerval crafts his physical description of Cain to garner the reader's sympathy: "Kaïn était accroupi dans une posture pénible; il se souleva. Sa beauté est surhumaine, son oeil triste, et sa lèvre pâle. Il est nu. . . l'homme errant semble encore harassé"[50] (Oeuvres 2:557). In the same description, Cain's forehead is "soucieux," "care-worn." Cain is physically beautiful; his beauty is literally "surhumaine," as he is the child of the spirit Eblis, and only half human. His deep suffering is apparent in his face.

Other aspects of the scene also make Cain a sympathetic figure: Cain himself, unlike his descendants, desires reconciliation with Adam and with God. He regrets the crime, although he is "more sinned against than sinning;" his step-family, and even God, discriminate against him intolerably before the crime. His tireless efforts to care for his step-family are never appreciated. In all these ways, Cain is

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[50] "Rising from a painful crouching position, Cain stood up nude to reveal a superhuman beauty, despite the sadness of his eyes and the pallor of his lips. . . How harassed the wanderer still appeared!" (Journey 169).

portrayed as a sympathetic figure, a Byronic hero.

An even more powerful source of sympathy for Cain in the story is that the virtues of the heroes of the tale, Adoniram and Balkis, are the eternal virtues of Cain, to which Nerval himself aspired. The torments of the children of Cain are similarly shared by the unappreciated and persecuted artist, Nerval.

Only one moment in Cain's speech undercuts sympathy for him: When he dismisses the murder of Abel as "J'éteignis le flambeau d'Habel,"[51] merely "brisé un vase d'argile"[52] (Oeuvres 2:558), Cain shows cold disdain for the inferior humans, revealing an unattractive part of his personality. That is the first example of a curious phenomenon. The attitude of Cain and his children towards their merely human relatives is contradictory. Hints of the contradiction are present in Cain's speech, for he speaks of his unstinting devotion to the family of Adam, and yet he dismisses the murder of Abel. This contradiction is made stronger by Cain's descendants. Cain takes pride in the benefits which his descendants confer on the descendants of Seth, but a later descendant, Jubal, glorifies his brother, Tubal-Cain, for taking vengeance against God by introducing iron and gold to

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[51] "I extinguished Abel's light" (Journey 170).

[52] "broken a vessel of clay" (Journey 170).

humans. This is an act of vengeance, since iron and gold are fatal to humans (Oeuvres 2:259-60 Journey 171; see discussion in Constans 67).

The same contradiction comes up again in the portrait of Adoniram. The descendants of Cain are supposed to be sensitive to the pain of others. At the beginning of the work, Adoniram cares only for his projects. He has no interest in men or women, and in particular, he treats his faithful apprentice Benoni with casual scorn and unintended cruelty (Oeuvres 2:507 Journey 126). Near the end of the work, he finally speaks of the dead Benoni with some tenderness (Oeuvres 2:586 Journey 191). By the end of the work, he has formed one deep attachment, in his love for Balkis. She is, however, another child of Cain.

Commentators have missed the implications of this contradiction. Nerval has the descendants of Cain behave selfishly, even as they congratulate themselves on their beneficence towards the descendants of Adam. Perhaps this indicates some ironic distance between Nerval and his superhuman heroes, as if the author himself takes their pretensions with a grain of salt; or perhaps it indicates that Nerval identifies fully with the descendants of Cain, and feels that the children of Adam are irrelevant, so that there is no blame in treating them ill. Such a statement may

indicate Nerval's feelings of extreme superiority, or it may indicate self-loathing, for Nerval may doubt his own credentials as a child of Cain. He himself might be, like Benoni, capable of admiring the children of Cain, but incapable of joining them. He might then accept, and internalize, their cruel scorn for people like him.

Knapp observes of Nerval: "An overidentification with Prometheus, Cain, and Lucifer as 'fallen angels' made him feel that he too had fallen from divine grace" (Knapp 307). Knapp seems confident about which is the cause and which the effect; perhaps, however, Nerval, feeling himself fallen from grace, identifies with Prometheus, Cain and Lucifer. In some sources, identifying with Cain indicates, besides being out of favor with God, being in the favor of some higher being than God. Radcliff-Umstead, in opposition to Knapp, observes that Nerval's "Cainite figures regard their sign as one of great distinction and not of disgrace" (Radcliff-Umstead 399).

In nearly all of his fictions, Nerval's narrative alter ego Gérard is a wanderer, with no fixed abode; so too, in his own life, was Nerval. It is not surprising that he has sympathy for Cain the wanderer. His personal identification with Cain appears in one final note: Five days before his suicide, Nerval described to Maxime du Camp the "tétragramme de Salomon dont les mâles de sa famille portaient tous le signe sur la

poitrine"[53] (Constans 72). Nerval undoubtedly knew the legend that the mark of Cain was exactly the name of God, or a letter from that name, placed on his body (see Mellinkoff, The Mark of Cain 28).

Constans believes that to understand Cain in Histoire, one must first understand Cain in Nerval's sonnet, "Antéros" (Constans 65). Unfortunately, the role of Cain in that poem is, if anything, more enigmatic than in the Histoire. In the poem, Antéros, who is the spirit opposed to love, or "the god of unrequited love" (Knapp 262), proclaims his pride in continuing an angry rebellion on behalf of the pagan gods and biblical villains against God. Antéros exults: "Je retourne les dards contre le dieu vainqueur"[54] (Oeuvres 1:4).

The reference to Cain occurs in the second stanza, in which Anteros exclaims:

> Oui, je suis de ceux-là qu'inspire la Vengeur,
> Il m'a marqué la front de sa lèvre irritée,
> Sous la pâleur d'Abel, hélas! ensanglantée,
> J'ai parfois de Cain l'implacable rougeur![55]

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[53] "The tetragram of Solomon, the sign which all the males of his family have on their chests."

[54] "I hurl back the darts against the conquering god" (Translation Jones, Jones 72).

[55] Yes, I am one of those whom the Avenger drives,
He has scarred my forehead with his angry lip,
Under Abel's pallor, alas! covered with blood,

(Oeuvres 1:4).

At each point, Nerval's use of the Cain story in this stanza is unclear. The identity of the "Vengeur" who drives Antéros is ambiguous. Perhaps Antéros, with an attitude like that of Byron's Lucifer, describes God as the Avenger (Constans 32): Goaded by the example of the conquering God, Antéros is inspired to oppose him. It is also possible that the Avenger is the driving force behind all who oppose God, whether known as Lucifer (Schaeffer 138 n. 58) or Satan (Lokke 114). Lokke even suggests that the Avenger is Antéros himself (Lokke 114).

God has marked Antéros on the forehead, the traditional spot for the sign of Cain. The mark of Antéros seems significantly different from the mark of Cain. The mark of Antéros is made in anger, and seems to signify, not God's protection for Antéros, but Antéros' own continuing anger.

Antéros claims that he has the characteristics of Abel, and, intermittently, those of Cain. But what meaning does he see

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I sometimes bear Cain's implacable redness!
(Translation Knapp, Knapp 263).

Yes, I am one of those whom the Avenger
inspires,
He has marked my brow with his angry lip,
Beneath the pallor of Abel, alas, covered in
blood,
I sometimes have the implacable redness of Cain.
(Translation Jones, Jones 73).

in the pallor of Abel? And what meaning does he see in the redness of Cain? In what way does he resemble Cain and Abel? And what does Antéros regret with the cry "hélas"? There are a few approaches towards answering these intertwined questions:

According to Knapp, the pallor of Abel indicates his weakness. "Abel is 'pale,' a shade, a sterile force, he does not possess the energy, the ebullience of the 'red race'" (Knapp 263). The red color signifies fire; as Cain is a spirit of fire, Antéros "searches for the primal fire, though it implies pain and anguish" (Knapp 264; similarly Knapp 66). Obviously, for Knapp, the "hélas" must be Antéros' cry of anguish at having the pallor of Abel, and achieving the fire of Cain only intermittently.

Of course, it is also possible that Abel is pale and sterile because Cain has already killed him. Lokke argues that Cain and Abel, in this sonnet, have together enacted a murder in "the unending cycle of reciprocal (sic) violence and vengeance" (Lokke 114). Lokke argues that the "hélas!" refers to both the redness of Cain and the pallor of Abel. Both Cain and Abel are "cursed in different ways by Vengeance" (Lokke 113); though one is aggressor, the other victim, ultimately both are victims. Antéros regrets taking part in this cycle, resembling both victim and aggressor.

Radcliff-Umstead also understands Abel's pallor as a sign of death. According to Radcliff-Umstead's reading of the sonnet, Antéros "boasts of his fratricide and rejoices in his red Cain-mark" (Radcliff-Umstead 404). An obvious weakness in this reading is that it has no explanation for the word "hélas" "alas," which is not in keeping with a boast. The strength of this reading is that in the rest of the sonnet, Antéros expresses enthusiasm for continued angry revolt.

Constans agrees that Abel's pallor is the mark of death. Following the implications of that explanation, Constans interprets the sigh of anguish as expressing Cain's regret at having killed Abel. The redness of Cain parallels the defiance shown by Cain in the novelette, who, surrounded by fire, is implacable in his hatred of God (Constans 66). The "hélas" parallels the regret of Cain in the novelette, for Cain in both works regrets having shed blood (Constans 66). He expresses regret at having left Abel "ensanglantée." As I have shown, Constans understates Cain's spirit of revolt in the Histoire. In a consistent manner, Constans softens the implications of Antéros' revolt, asserting that Nerval "introduit dans le sonnet une note de satanisme qu'il faut interpréter comme un cri de désespoir plus encore que comme une mouvement de revolté"[56] (32). But it seems that Constans

[56] "introduces into the sonnet a note of Satanism that must be interpreted as a cry of despair more than as a move of revolt."

is closer to the mark elsewhere:

> Dans le sonnet des Chimères toutes les valeurs sont inversées; les feux de l'enfer deviennent un attribut du Paradis et, par un apparent illogisme qui ne fait que mieux ressortir la violence du sentiment, Ne- -al défie un ciel dont il vient de proclaimer le vide[57] (Constans 249).

The dragon's teeth, at the end of the poem, represent "the seeds of a new race which will overthrow the existing order" (Jones 63).[58] In "Antéros," as in the Histoire, Nerval identifies with the unending Cainite revolt against God (Schaeffer 138 n.58). Nerval, in the sonnet and in the novelette, expresses hope for the ultimate success of the revolution against God. "Le sonnet tout entier constitue une déclaration de révolte at d'activité kaïnites, reprise d'âge en âge par Adoniram et ses frères"[59] (Schaeffer 138 n. 58).

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[57] In the sonnet of the Chimères all values are inverted; the fires of Hell become an attribute of Paradise, and, in an apparent logical error which only emphasizes the violence of the sentiment, Nerval defies a heaven which he has just proclaimed empty.

[58] Jones apparently understands that armed men will rise up from the planted dragon's teeth as an organized army. The poem thus ends with Antéros celebrating revolt.

Knapp, on the other hand, understands that the armed men would kill each other, making no coherent statement at all, merely perpetrating violence (264). The poem, understood this way, ends with Antéros celebrating random violence.

[59] "The whole sonnet constitutes a declaration of revolt and cainite activity, taken up in each age by Adoniram and his

As in the novelette, Nerval tempers that revolt with only the slightest and most ambiguous regret.

The unusual childhood of Gérard Labrunie (1808-1855) seems to have great significance in the literary works which he wrote under the pseudonym Gérard de Nerval. In 1809, Nerval's parents left their new baby. Nerval's father, Étienne Labrunie, was in charge of military hospitals in Austria and Poland; Nerval's mother travelled with her husband. Nerval's mother never returned to France, for she died of a fever in 1810; Nerval's father did not return to France until 1814. Thereafter, "Dr. Labrunie displayed the coldest indifference and rejection to his son throughout his life, even refusing to attend Gérard's funeral" (Gilbert 99). Thus Nerval was raised by his maternal uncle, Antoine Boucher (Glass 11). The effort to relate the details of Nerval's childhood to the themes of his works yields surprisingly fruitful results. In many of Nerval's works, a father-figure, at once distant and punishing, must be overthrown to liberate his sons. In Histoire de la reine du matin et de Soliman prince des génies, both God and Soliman fit that description. An ideal woman, young and beautiful, but unattainable, inspires the hero in almost all of Nerval's works. That is the role of Balkis in Histoire de la reine du matin et de Soliman prince des génies.

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brothers."

Nerval's uncle, Antoine Boucher, possessed a vast library, filled with works of all sorts of esoteric knowledge. The nephew grew to be a voracious reader, and the uncle gave him free use of the library. Years later, Nerval lovingly describes this library in "La bibliotèque de mon oncle," the preface to his Les illuminés (Oeuvres 2:911-12). Thus, from his very earliest experiences with books, Nerval was a "student of alchemy, the Kabbala, Orphism, ancient mystery religions, Sabbean astral worship, illuminism, and theosophy" (Knapp 4). Nerval associated these esoteric studies with those early years in his uncle's care. That period in the young poet's life ended in 1820, in his twelfth year, when his father returned to France, and his beloved uncle Antoine Boucher died (Glass 4).

In his adolescence, Nerval translated works from several languages, including works of Byron and Gessner (Celier 21); by the time he was ready to tell the story of Cain, Nerval knew of Byron's play (Radcliff-Umstead 400 n. 7). It is entirely plausible that these authors had a direct influence on Nerval's treatment of the Cain story. The Histoire continually reminds one of Byron. Constans claims simply that the model for Nerval's Adoniram is Byron's Cain (63). The elegant Queen's teasing humor, as she deflates the wisdom of Soliman's biblical writings, has something of the flavor of

Voltaire, but more of Byron.[60] "Both Byron's Cain and Nerval's pay great penalties for their fratricide" (Radcliff-Umstead 399). Though the connection between Byron's Cain and Nerval's seems unarguable, Radcliff-Umstead preposterously disagrees: "His [Nerval's] early Cain portrait, which probably owes nothing to Byron's even though Nerval was acquainted with the play, . . "(400).

The greatest difference between the two Cains is, as Radcliff-Umstead correctly notes, that "Byron shows himself more nihilistic than Nerval" (399). While Byron's Cain ends "spiritually crushed," and Nerval's Cain not much better, in Nerval's version, Cain has descendants who proudly continue to defy God. Nerval's heroic descendants of Cain are new to literature, and evidently have great influence on the versions of the story by Baudelaire and Leconte de Lisle.

Although the details of this novelette show Nerval's acquaintance with a wide variety of ancient sources, the main source for Nerval's version of Cain and his descendants is clearly the cosmology and temple myth of the Freemasons. Ultimately, Nerval's myths should be traced back to the spirit of those Gnostics who made a cult of the biblical enemies of

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[60] Incidentally, these passages contradict Avni's assertion that in "there is no significant trace of inspiration by the O[ld] T[estament]" in Gérard de Nerval's work (Avni 283).

God, beginning with Cain (Constans 65).

In the next few pages, I shall present some examples to show how closely Nerval follows the Masonic legends.[61] There are also a few instances in which Nerval's story departs from the Masonic legends. These are particularly interesting to a student of the theme of Cain, for in each instance Nerval's changes glorify the descendants of Cain beyond the already positive Masonic version.

Two sorts of higher beings were involved in creation, according to the Masonic account. Lucifer and the angels of Death are "Hierarchs of Fire," who attempt to bring us light, "that we may know," and the Creator is among the "Hierarchs of Water" who attempt to "to quench the spirits seeking light and knowledge and to inculcate faith. . ." (Heindel 11, emphasis in original). The children of Cain teach that same theology in Nerval's novelette (Oeuvres 2:563 Journey 174).

In the Masonic account of the creation of the human species, Eve is created first, after which the Lucifer spirit Samael unites with her. He is then driven out by the Creator, so that their son Cain is ever after the "son of a widow" (Heindel 17). Then Adam is created as a mate for Eve, "and

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[61] Following the lead of Lokke, I have used Max Heindel's Freemasonry and Catholicism as my guide to Masonic thinking.

from their union Abel was born" (Heindel 17). In Nerval's story, Cain gives a Masonic account of the origins of the human race: "Héva fut ma mère; Éblis, l'ange de lumière, a glissé dans son sein l'étincelle qui m'anime et qui a régénéré ma race" (Oeuvres 2:557).[62] Adam, "pétri de limon," (Oeuvres 2:557),[63] the merely human, is the father of Abel.

> Thus from the beginning there have been two kinds of people in the world. One, begotten by the Lucifer Spirit Samael and partaking of a semi-divine nature imbued with the dynamic martial energy inherited from their divine ancestry, is aggressive, progressive, and possessed of great initiative, but impatient of restraint or authority whether human or divine. These people believe in works rather than faith, and by their dauntless courage and inexhaustible energy they have transformed the trackless wilderness of the world into a garden full of life and beauty. (Heindel 18).

The conflict between work of the shepherd, easy, natural, but not very productive, and the fruitful, exhausting work of the farmer, can be traced back at least as far as Josephus (See chapter 3 above). In the Masonic understanding, that contrast

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[62] "Eve was my mother. Eblis, the angel of light, placed within her breast the spark which animates me and which has regenerated my race" (Journey 169).

[63] "kneaded out of mud" (Journey 169).

is prototypical of the two types of humans: The shepherd is the type of the unproductive children of Seth, and the farmer of the inventive children of Cain. At many points in Nerval's story, the children of Cain similarly take credit for material and artistic progress: One example is the long discussion by Balkis of the water-supply system built by her people in Yemen (Oeuvres 2:535-37 Journey 151-52).

In discussing the role of religion, Nerval departs from the Masonic legend. Nerval goes even further than the Masons, for they find the role of descendants of Seth to be of value, at times nearly equal to the value of the role of the descendants of Cain. For the Masons, the children of Seth preserve spiritual knowledge (Heindel 20) but lack practical knowledge; the children of Cain have practical knowledge, but tend to become materialistic (Heindel 18). Redemption thus depends on cooperation between the two. The sons of Cain, in Nerval's Histoire de la reine du matin et de Soliman prince des génies, ascribe both spiritual and practical wisdom to the children of Cain; to the children of Abel they ascribe only sly craftiness and bureaucratic skills.

> Nerval depicts Adoniram as the incarnation of the spirit and Soliman as an embodiment of oppressive materialism. Thus Nerval's version of the history of Cain's ancestry (sic) is even more unequivocally positive than the already sympathetic Freemasonic

rendering of the Biblical myth. (Lokke 110).

According to Heindel, the Masons teach that the children of Cain, masters of "worldly wisdom and temporal power" throughout history, "have been captains of industry and masters of statecraft" (Heindel 20). This is another instance in which Nerval departs from the Masonic legend. In Histoire de la reine du matin et de Soliman prince des génies, statecraft and temporal power are the province of the children of Seth. According to Nerval, the children of Cain, wise though they are, cannot gain power in a word ruled by the patriarchal God. Only when God is overthrown can the children of Cain achieve their rightful power (Oeuvres 2:563 Journey 174).

Nerval's account of the sacrifices of Cain and Abel (Oeuvres 2:557-58) follows the Masons. According to the Masons, the Creator God is "extremely jealous of His prerogative as Creator" (Heindel 20), so he accepts the docile Abel's sacrifice, "but scorned the offering of Cain because derived though his own divine creative instinct. . ." (Heindel 20). The source for the main theme of Nerval's novelette is the Masonic Temple legend, in which, according to Heindel, Solomon, heir to a "line of sublime spirituality," still is "unable to execute the divine design in concrete form" (21). He is a mere child of Seth. He therefore needs "King Hiram of

Tyre, the descendant of Cain," to select "Hiram Abiff, the son of a widow" to be "the Grand Master of the army of construction" (Heindel 21). It is evident that Hiram Abiff is the same as Nerval's Adoniram.[64]

> The worldly acumen of the Sons of Cain was as necessary to the completion of this temple as the spiritual conception of the Sons of Seth, and, therefore, during the construction the two classes joined forces, the underlying enmity being hidden under a superficial show of amity. (22).

In Nerval's version, the sons of Cain have both worldly and spiritual acumen; the sons of Seth have nothing but undeserved political power, gained through the support of the God of this world.

Conventional religions, in the Masonic version, preserve spiritual wisdom, and serve to redeem the children of Seth. In Nerval's version, they serve no good function; they encourage people to worship a minor deity, and to accept hierarchical governments.

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[64] In the Bible, these are two distinct characters. The overseer of public workers for Kings David, Solomon and Rehabam is named Adoniram (1 Kings 4:6, 5:28 and elsewhere; Mandelkern 1354). The artisan sent to Solomon by King Hiram of Tyre is named, like the King, Hiram. This is the Hiram who fashions the sea of bronze for Solomon's Temple (1 Kings 7:40 and elsewhere; Mandelkern 1404).

The Masonic Temple legend is certainly very old. Hints of a response to it are found in ancient Jewish sources: In the Talmud, Bava Batra 75a, for example, King Hiram is castigated for claiming to be a god.

Most of the elements of the Masonic Temple legend appear, largely unchanged, in Nerval's novelette. In the Masonic legend, according to Heindel, King Solomon shows off the Temple to the Queen of Sheba. She wants to see the workmen, but the workmen of the Temple "yielded obedience only to one who had 'The Word' and 'The Sign'" (Heindel 25-26; compare Oeuvres 2:532 Journey 147). She asks to see the "King of Crafts," and Solomon is chagrinned, as he feels he has "fallen in her estimation" (Heindel 26; compare Oeuvres 2:522 Journey 139). Solomon knows that the Grand Master is his rival for the Queen (Heindel 30).

The Queen, when she sees that Hiram Abiff can command the workmen, is so impressed that "she determined to jilt Solomon and win the heart of Hiram Abiff" (Heindel 31; compare Oeuvres 2:532 Journey 147). From the moment that Solomon sees the "lovelight kindle in the eyes of the Queen of Sheba" he becomes jealous. The molten sea, Hiram Abiff's masterpiece, is sabotaged by the treacherous children of Seth (Heindel 22; compare Oeuvres 2:547 Journey 161), and repaired by the master himself, with a hammer given to him by his ancestor Tubal-Cain (compare Oeuvres 2:565 Journey 175).

The obsession with racial purity in Nerval is also derived from Masonic sources. Heindel, explaining Masonic beliefs, asserts:

> In ancient times it was strictly forbidden anyone belonging to one tribe to marry into another tribe because it was known then by the leaders of humanity that the strange blood would kill something; it always does. (Heindel 53).

Nowadays, people are less careful about their bloodlines, "And so clairvoyance, the touch with the spiritual world, with the memory of Nature, has waned since the practice of marrying in the tribe has broken up" (Heindel 55). Adoniram, in Nerval's work, is aware that the gifts of Cain can be maintained only by racially pure descendants of Cain. These gifts will be lost if the descendants of Cain mix their blood with the blood of slaves (Oeuvres 2:511 Journey 130). Nerval was particularly interested in anything which might help explain the nature of genius, especially in relation to the problem of the origin of the races. He took particular joy in ancient sources about "les préadamites, les rapports des anges avec les filles des hommes, la procréation des surhommes, la filiation satanique de Cain, la race rouge ou les mondes souterrains. . ."[65] (Celier 183).

Ultimately, in Masonic legend, Hiram Abiff is assured that, though he will die without fulfilling his ambitions, he will

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[65] "Preadamites, relations between angels and the daughters of men, procreation with superhumans, the satanic ancestry of Cain, the red race or the subterranean worlds. . . "

be the ancestor of "Christ, the Lion of Judah, who will build a new Temple and a New City, bring the law of love to the world and unite the sons of Cain and the sons of Seth in a reign of peace" (Lokke 109). But in Nerval's version, there is to be no reconciliation: Adoniram and the "Queen of Sheba, will be the parents of a race of revolutionaries who will sweep hierarchy, injustice and tyranny from the face of the earth" (Lokke 111); characteristically, these revolutionaries will also overthrow the service of God (Lokke 111). In Nerval's story, the sons of Seth have no purpose but to be overthrown, traditional religions have no purpose but to be overthrown.

While Nerval uses the Masonic legends as the main structure of his story, he incorporates many elements from other esoteric sources as well. Nerval's storyteller mentions the Koran, Sura 34, as source of the whole legend of Soliman and the Queen of Sheba (Oeuvres 2:605 Journey 211). Actually, the Koran does mention the mite, and the broken staff, but of course the Koran does not display the enmity to God shown in this story (Sura 34).

Cush, who in the Bible is a son of Ham, in Nerval's version is himself directly a descendant of Cain (Oeuvres 561 Journey 173). I have located (Chapter Three above) traditions in which Ham is identified with Cain.

In Nerval's story, the ancient city of Henochia has been concealed in the shifting sands, only to surface and serve as inspiration for Adoniram. The legend of the antediluvian wisdom of the children of Cain, carved in durable rock, is known to the fourth century Christian writer Cassian (Williams 35). The Christian writer, like Nerval's Soliman, considers this concealed wisdom to be of superstitious, profane and sacrilegious arts; Adoniram and Balkis understands that these carvings are the archetypes of true art (Oeuvres 2:529 Journey 145).[66] Ludovic de Cailleux's Le monde antédiluvien, a minor but influential poem of the 1840s, deals with the founding and destruction of the city of Hénokhia (Eggli 122).

The connection between genius, fire and descent from Satan, also occurs in an Islamic source, the Koranic legend that Satan, the fallen angel, fell because he refused to bow to Adam. Satan claimed that Adam was made of earth, while he, Satan, was made of the higher element, fire (Koran 7:10, 25:27, 4:14; see Constans 70 note 47).

In this way, Nerval treats the story of Cain as he does other themes from ancient literature; he mines it for elements which

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[66] In a different story of the Voyage en orient, Chalif Hakim proclaims "Malheur à Énochia, ville des enfants de Cain, ville d'impuretés et de tyrannie!" (Oeuvres 2:385). "Woe unto Enochia, city of the children of Cain, city of defilement and tyranny!"(Journey 108). But that is a different story.

can be reworked into his own peculiar kind of story. "[T]ant il est vrai, en effet, que chaque reflet finit par acquérir son autonomie et par apporter des éléments originaux aux thèmes constants"[67] (Schaeffer 20). Other writers, of course, also rework ancient themes. The difference is one of degree: Compared with other writers, Nerval learns materials from a wider variety of religions and literatures, combines them more promiscuously, uses them more strangely.

To my knowledge, Nerval's is the first sympathetic Cain in French literature.[68] Nerval goes beyond his English predecessors in painting a sympathetic Cain. Nerval's Cain stands against God, and if he has some misgivings about the revolt, his descendants, who continue the revolt, have none. In each of the English versions, Cain's revolt ultimately loses. In Nerval's work, too, the revolt of Cain fails, but it will be taken up by his descendants, who will succeed. This optimistic, revolutionary theme of Nerval's is a decisive model for the versions of Cain of Baudelaire and Leconte de

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[67] So much is it true, in effect, that each reflection [of an earlier source in Nerval's work] ends up acquiring its own autonomy, and bringing original elements to the enduring themes.

[68] Voltaire's paragraph on Cain in his 1771 additions to his article on Genesis in the Dictionnaire philosophique anticipate Nerval's novelette in its general anti-religious attitude, and specifically in blaming God for the animosity between the two brothers. Voltaire does not, however, display sympathy for Cain.

Lisle, which describe the eternal war of the descendants of Cain against the God of the Hebrews.

Constans thinks that Nerval takes only a hesitant step towards the position which Baudelaire later expresses in his poem about Cain (Constans 67). In fact, however, Nerval's story contains sentiments quite as radical as those of Baudelaire.

The economic significance of the theme of Cain, which appears in hints in the works of Gessner and Byron, receives its first full exposition in Nerval's novelette. That aspect is also a central feature of the versions by Baudelaire and Leconte de Lisle. In the next few chapters, I shall follow the influence of Nerval's arcane and idiosyncratic story.

Chapter Ten: Charles Baudelaire's "Abel et Caïn"

None of the versions of Cain which we have seen thus far provides as dramatic a reversal of the common understanding as the short poem by Charles Baudelaire, "Abel et Caïn." In this poem, Baudelaire concentrates the theme of Nerval's novelette into a few powerful lines. The impact of this poem (and a few others in the same collection) was so shocking that, shortly after its publication in the summer of 1857, copies were seized, and Baudelaire was put on trial for obscenity. The Ministry of the Interior of France charged Baudelaire with committing "an act of defiance in contempt of the laws which safeguard religion and morality" (Pichois, Baudelaire 224). In the indictment, the prosecutor, Ernest Pinard, asserted that "Abel et Caïn," in particular, ridicules the Christian foundation of morality" (Starkie 322; Carter 82-83).

The volume which the government confiscated was called Les fleurs du mal. Baudelaire's "Abel et Caïn," appears in that first edition, (577, #119 240-42 Flowers 132-33), and in the two later editions, with only the most minor changes. The works in the first edition of the Fleurs du mal were written

over a long span of time: Except for that terminus, "we have no evidence of date" for the writing of "Abel et Caïn" (Starkie 114). Starkie argues that the poem should be dated very early in the 1840's, in order to assign all Baudelaire's blasphemous works to one period (Starkie 113-14), but that date is extremely unlikely. It would fix the writing of the poem before the publication of Nerval's novelette. In order to assign all Baudelaire's works of socialist fervor to the same period, Pichois argues that the poem should be dated between 1847-51 (Notes to OCB 1:1081-82). I do not believe that the poem was written before Nerval's work was published in 1849.

"Abel et Caïn" is thirty-two lines long. Each line has seven or eight syllables. The rime scheme, ABAB CDCD, is maintained throughout. Each quatrain of the poem is balanced, half describing the race of Abel and half the race of Cain. The poem is divided into two sections: In the first twenty-four lines, the poet contrasts the successes of the race of Abel with the failures of the race of Cain. The race of Abel, all rich, fat and smug, are compared to bugs. A smiling heaven grants their prosperity, but not for any particular virtue. The race of Cain are compared to jackals. They are overworked, hungry and poor. Nothing they do can alter their distress. Nerval's race of Cain are supremely talented in art, engineering and science; Baudelaire's are simply poor.

In the second section, the poet calls on the race of Cain to take up arms and kill the race of Abel, and then to mount to heaven and overthrow God. The poem is placed, in evident accord with its subject matter, in the section of the Fleurs du mal entitled "Révolte."

The first problem posed by the poem is that "Baudelaire is wrong when he speaks of the race of Abel. There is no such thing as the race of Abel . . . Abel died leaving no children" (Ellul 7). For that matter, Cain should also not have a race any longer; they should all have been washed away in the Flood. These same questions come up in Beowulf, in the poem by Marcabru (chapter 3 above) and in the ancient Gnostic and modern Masonic sources (chapter 4). If Baudelaire did not find the legend of the survival of the descendants of Cain and of Abel in esoteric sources, he may have known it from Gessner, and he very likely knew it from Nerval. The point of the story of the race of Cain and of Abel, in all its versions, is not necessarily the literal biological survival of these races, but their typological survival. There are, even today, people who partake of the essence of Abel, and others who partake of the essence of Cain.

There are people, healthy bourgeois people, who never seem to know adversity. Their materialistic hopes succeed, their families prosper. They believe that men are basically good,

and that life is, on the whole, pleasant. Nothing in their experience tells them otherwise, and they do not have the imagination to encounter the experience of others. These people, for Baudelaire, are the race of Abel. They have achieved the secret of happiness; and happiness, for Baudelaire, is a failure of moral imagination. Sartre accurately identifies one reason for Baudelaire's attitude: "The happy man has lost the spiritual tension, and has fallen. Baudelaire would never accept happiness because it was immoral" (Sartre 95). The other problem with happiness is that it is unambitious. Happiness is satisfaction with the world, and Baudelaire wanted to feel "dissatisfaction with the incapacity of the world to answer to man's aspirations" (Vlasopolos 128).

Baudelaire suggests both of these themes in a letter which he wrote, but did not send, to J. Janin:

> Ah! Vous êtes heureux, monsieur. Quoi!--Si vous disiez: je suis vertueux, je comprendrais que cela sous-entend: je souffre moins qu'un autre. Mais non; vous êtes heureux. Facile à contenter, alors? Je vous plains, et j'estime ma mauvais humeur plus distinguée que votre béatitude.--J'irai jusque-là que je vous demanderai si les spectacles de la terre vous suffisent. Quoi! jamais vous n'avez eu envie de vous en aller, rien que pour changer le

> spectacle. J'ai de très sérieuses raisons pour plaindre celui qui n'aime pas la Mort[1] (OCB 2:237).

There are other people, the dispossessed, the diseased, the unskilled workers and the unemployed, who know only pain. Their hopes, whether material or spiritual, will always be dashed. These people have legitimate grievances against the happy bourgeois; they even have legitimate grievances against God, who made them what they are. These are the race of Cain.

In the first quatrain, the poet commands the race of Abel to "dors, bois et mange;"[2] they will. It is what they do best. The poet continues: God, the God worshipped by these happy folks, smiles on them approvingly. Meanwhile, the poet orders the race of Cain to grovel in filth, and die miserably. He uses the familiar form, "tu," in addressing each race, showing each a sort of casual disrespect. The familiar form is singular, so the poet personifies the races each as a single

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[1] Ah! so you're happy. Come! If you were to say I am virtuous, I should know what you meant: I suffer less than other people. But not at all. You're happy. So you're easily satisfied? I'm sorry for you, and I fell that my ill-humor is more distinguished than your bliss. I'll go so far as to ask you whether the sights of the earth are sufficient for you. What! You've never wanted to go away simply for a change of scene? I've got sound reasons for feeling sorry for a man who doesn't like death. (Trans. Turnell in Sartre 94).

[2] "sleep, drink and eat;" My translation.

individual.

As the first sign of the preeminence of the biblical Abel is that God accepts his sacrifice (Gen. 4:4), so the sacrifice of the race of Abel, in the second quatrain, pleases the nose of an angel. Baudelaire, to make this angelic satisfaction more troubling, echoes a disturbing biblical anthropomorphism: "God smelled the pleasant smell" (Gen. 8:21).

In the matching lines, the poet asks a rhetorical question of the race of Cain: "ton supplice / Aura-t-il jamais un fin?"[3] The question is double-edged: It implies that indeed the suffering must be endless, while implying that there should be some way to end the suffering.

In the third quatrain, the poet orders the race of Abel to watch as their crops and animals prosper. The race of Abel do not have to do anything to achieve these material successes. While the race of Abel have plenty to eat, the guts of the race of Cain howl like an old dog with hunger. By comparing these people, or rather their guts, to an old dog, the poet dehumanizes the race of Cain. He also emphasizes their hopelessness: No one loves this poor old dog, no one will feed it; it is too old to fend for itself.

In a serious poem on a biblical theme, Baudelaire dares to use

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[3] "your suffering / Will it never end?"

a coarse expression like "tes entrailles / Hurlent la faim comme un vieux chein."[4] In stark contrast with the poem's classical form, the diction of the poem is consciously offensive. Baudelaire experiments with the language of poetry, mixing colloquialisms and ugly words into stately lines of formal verse. Anca Vlasopolos rightly connects those experiments with the program, articulated by Coleridge and Wordsworth, of making poetry out of the language of real people (Vlasopolos 93). There is a striking difference, however: Coleridge and Wordsworth hoped that their readers would come to accept colloquial speech and ordinary words in poetry (Preface to Lyrical Ballads 240). Until readers accept this diction, they will, unfortunately, be offended. Baudelaire's purpose is to offend the reader.

Baudelaire has also abandoned, in this line, the notion of art as the quest for the beautiful. There is nothing beautiful about a human being's guts howling out for food like an old dog. Baudelaire's quest was to look at reality without flinching; or, perhaps "d'extraire la beauté du Mal"[5] (Préface des Fleurs I OCB 1:181).

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[4] "within your gut / howls hunger like an ancient cur" (Flowers 169).

[5] Another formulation, from the letter that Baudelaire did not send to J. Janin: "Pourquoi la tristesse n'aurait-elle pas sa beauté? Et l'horreur aussi?" (OCB 2:237). "Why has sadness not its own beauty? and horror also?"

The poet commands the race of Abel, in the fourth quatrain, to warm its chest by the patriarchal fire. The race of Cain, a poor jackal, meanwhile, shivers with cold in its den. The race of Cain are unsuccessful scavengers.

In the fifth quatrain, he commands the race of Abel to make love and spawn. The verb "pullule" in line 17 usually refers to animals; Baudelaire dehumanizes the race of Abel by ordering them to breed like animals. Meanwhile, he reassures them, "Ton or fait aussi des petits."[6] Without requiring any attention, their gold will also have little ones. The race of Abel need not fear having more children than it can support; making money is as easy for the race as making babies.

The race of Cain, "coeur qui brûle / Prends garde à ces grands apétits."[7] For the first time, the poet attributes something to the race of Cain beyond poverty. While the race of Abel seem to have no emotions but a kind of smug self-satisfaction, the race of Cain has, or is, "a heart that burns." Strong emotions engender poverty, but the poor may not indulge even their emotions.

In the last quatrain of the first section, the poet

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[6] "Your gold also is having little ones" (my translation).

[7] "Race of Cain, you hearts that burn, / Beware of such great appetite" (Flowers 169).

congratulates the race of Abel in the most degrading terms: "tu croîs et broutes / Comme les punaises des bois!"[8] The comparison is no longer to mammals, but to corrupting insects. Meanwhile, the race of Cain must drag its family along the roads to someplace else, having no resources here. Baudelaire invokes the biblical image of Cain, travelling on without hope (Gen. 4:16), dragging his family behind, which forms the final tableau of Gessner's Der Tod Abels and Byron's Cain.

Thus, at the end of the first part of this poem, the race of Abel have the approval of God. They have food, shelter, warmth, plenty of children and money. The race of Cain have only hunger and strong emotions. The poet leaves his reader with the uncomfortable feeling that all this is an injustice, but without hope that the injustice can be corrected. The reader is left hoping for some redress for the race of Cain, but unprepared for the reversal in the second part of the poem:

"Ah! race d'Abel, ta charogne / Engraissera le sol fumant!"[9] With an "Ah!" of satisfaction, the poet surprisingly predicts that the race of Abel will be slaughtered. Their prosperity, which until now has seemed eternal, will come to a sudden end.

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[8] "you grow and browse / Like maggots in wood" (my translation).

[9] "Ah! race of Abel, your fat carcass / Will enrich the reeking soil!" (Flowers 169).

They will have no more dignity in death than they had in life: They will serve as fertilizer. The race of Cain, whose work has all been in vain, now, suddenly, have some purpose to achieve: They must press on until they can kill the race of Abel.

"Race d'Abel, voici ta honte: / Le fer est vaincu par l'épieu!"[10] A difficult pair of lines: What sort of iron is defeated by what sort of pike, and why does that defeat shame the race of Abel?

A. Adam provides an interpretation:

> Puisqu'il fait de Caïn un nomade et de Abel un sédentaire, c'est-à-dire exactement le contraire du ce qu'enseigne la Genèse, le fer est le symbole d'Abel le labourer, et nous devons expliquer le fer de la charrue. L'épieu est le symbole de Caïn le chasseur. Baudelaire annonce la victoire du prolétaire révolté.[11] (quoted by Pichois, notes to OCB 1:1082 n.1).

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[10] "Race of Abel, here your shame lies: / The sword lost to the hunter's rod" (Flowers 170).

[11] Since he made Cain nomadic, and Abel sedentary, that is to say, exactly the opposite of what Genesis taught, the iron is the symbol of Abel the plowman, and we must explain the iron as that of the plow. The pike is the symbol of Cain the hunter. Baudelaire announces the victory of the proletarian revolutionary (my translation).

To begin by eliminating what is wrong with this interpretation: First, this poem is not about Cain and Abel, but about their descendants. Second, the poet does not contradict the biblical account by envisioning even Cain himself as a wanderer. Although the biblical account begins with Cain as a an agricultural worker, Cain's punishment is exactly to wander. As for the race of Abel, according to this poem they own both the animal crops of their ancestor, and also vegetable crops; but that does not explain why the plow should be the symbol of the race of Abel. Third, supposing that the pike is a hunter's tool, and that the race of Cain are hunters, then the how does that make them proletarian? By that logic, A. Adam should conclude his comments by saying that Baudelaire announces the victory of the hunter-gatherers.

What is left, after eliminating all those errors, is still a plausible interpretation: Perhaps, as A. Adam's suggests, "fer" means the blade of a plow. The race of Abel puts its trust entirely in economic growth. They believe that the underclass will be helpless against their material wealth. The shame of the race of Abel is that they are unprepared for violence. Eventually, the race of Cain, having no assets but violence, will kill the race of Abel and seize their wealth. Comfortable people are proud of their middle-class values: They dislike confrontation, they delay gratification, they

store away wealth; these values serve comfortable people well, until the inevitable confrontation with hungry people, who have the values of the jungle. On that day, the comfortable people will be put to shame, for they will be killed by people with more elemental values.

It seems to me that there is a simpler possibility. The iron is the sword, a weapon which must be forged by a craftsman at some cost, and which therefore typically defends wealth. The pike, a crude implement, not much more than a long stick, is the weapon of the poor. The shame of the wealthy is that they cannot count on sophisticated violence to protect their treasures; ultimately the poor will command enough crude violence to overwhelm the wealthy.

In the "race of Cain" half of this quatrain, the final lines of this poem, the poet calls on the race of Cain to go beyond killing the race of Abel and taking their wealth: "au ciel monte / Et sur la terre jette Dieu!"[12] The poem, which begins with God smiling complaisantly on the race of Abel, ends symmetrically, with the race of Cain flinging God from Heaven onto the earth.

It is worth investigating what Baudelaire means by calling on

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[12] "mount to the skies / And down upon the earth throw God!" (Flowers 170).

the race of Cain to fling God to the earth:

Perhaps the point of the whole poem is concentrated at the last line, in which Baudelaire blasphemously calls for the race of Cain to dethrone God. The hatred which drives this poem is then primarily theological: Because Baudelaire, in this poem, hates God, therefore he hates those whom God has blessed, and sides with those whom God has cursed. In this reading, "Abel et Caïn" really is what many of the critics accused Byron of writing in his Cain, a work of direct blasphemy.

Or possibly Baudelaire, in this poem, has reached such a level of identification with the downtrodden of society that he hates every force which conspires to keep them downtrodden, up to and including God. "The poet allies himself increasingly with those shut out of the contentment of everyday life, those who experience the greatest depths of suffering" (Vlasopolos 128). The theological point of this poem would then be a by-product of its socialist point.[13]

It is also possible that Baudelaire means something a little less radical by his conclusion. The race of Abel, those smug

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[13] This discussion has bearing on the date of "Abel et Caïn," which may have been written during a distinct socialist phase in Baudelaire's development, or maybe a blasphemous one, if there were such distinct phases.

and conventional people, by the very way that they live their lives, demonstrate that they have no charity. They selfishly imagine that God must love them, because he is so good to them. If they ever think of the poor, they must imagine that God hates the poor, because he is so unkind to them; but they do not ever think of the poor. The God whom these people worship is pleased with his bourgeois worshippers; he demands nothing of them, he does not judge them, and he gives them everything that their stunted imaginations could want. That God must be overthrown. As long as people believe in such a God, they will be crass materialists, indifferent to the suffering of others.

It is tempting to take that interpretation a little further: Perhaps Baudelaire means to emphasize the words "sur la terre"[14] in the last line. God who dwells in heaven, approves of the world as it is. He is a distant God, unconcerned with the plight of the poor. God must be thrown to earth, must experience the mud with the poor, before he can be a redeemer. He must descend to become the God who: "raises the needy from the dust, and the destitute from the garbage dump" (Ps. 113:7); in Christian terms, he must experience incarnation. This interpretation, though, does not account adequately for the power of hatred that fuels this poem.

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[14] "onto the earth"

Which of these interpretations, on the evidence of the text, did Baudelaire intend? I do not know any methodologically sound way to answer that question. Nothing in the poem enables us to disentangle the poet's burning resentment of the smug, his animosity towards God, his "identification . . . with the pariah and the damned" (Vlasopolos 92). I suspect that even Baudelaire himself could not have assigned priority to any one of those three strands.

Cain does not appear in this poem. Certain elements of the biblical story appear in hints: God accepting the sacrifice of Abel, Cain exiled from before God, Cain wandering with his family. Nonetheless, "Abel et Caïn" fits into the romantic tradition of sympathy for Cain. The murder of Abel is absent from this story. Baudelaire presents the agonies endured by the race of Cain as completely unwarranted: They suffer, but not for any fault of their own. There is no evidence of God's justice in this poem. The prosperity of the rich, fat and smug race of Abel is also undeserved. This poem stands the common tradition on its head: We sympathize with Cain, not with Abel or God.

I have been repeatedly astonished to discover correlations between the family configurations of the poets and their versions of Cain. "Abel et Caïn" seems to have powerful autobiographical significance. Charles Baudelaire was never

gainfully employed for very long. In spite of a good income from the estate of his father, the poet found his way to poverty, by absolutely "[I]gnoring the limits imposed by a budget, and the relationship between assets and liabilities" (Pichois, Baudelaire 112). He lived in a succession of temporary places, "hounded by debt collectors and bailiffs from one cheap hotel to another" (Pichois, Baudelaire 124). After he had frittered away most of his inheritance, he made no attempt to limit his spending to the income from the remainder (Pichois, Baudelaire 113). Besides constantly begging for money, Baudelaire found other ways to sour his relations with his half-brother, Alphonse Baudelaire, and his step-father, Jacques Aupick. He sent, for instance, a love-letter to Alphonse Baudelaire's wife Felicité (Pichois, Baudelaire 133). His romantic relationships were with dancers, models, prostitutes, but never with women he might marry.

Baudelaire's step-father was a General. His half-brother, sixteen years older than Charles, was a magistrate. These were sober people, family-men, money-savers. In response to the poet's persistent requests for money, they tried for years to devise ways of curbing his habits. Finally, in 1844, they arranged to petition the court to appoint a conseil judiciaire, a kind of financial guardian. This condemned Charles to a lifetime of legal infancy (Pichois, Baudelaire

82-91), although it probably also saved him from complete ruin.

Notice the similarities between grievances of the poet against his family, and of the race of Cain against the race of Abel. The race of Abel are prudent, unimaginative, family-oriented, materialists, very much like the poet's half-brother. The poet gleefully predicts their overthrow; he has sympathy only for imprudent people, for desperate people, for wanderers, for the hopeless, homeless, hungry, for used-up prostitutes and overaged artists' models. If Baudelaire was not born into the race of Cain, he made every effort to join it.

General Aupick, the step-father who manipulated Baudelaire's life from afar, who was so disappointed by the poet's failure to become an upstanding citizen, also figures in this poem. He tried to gain control of the poet's life, god-like, to keep the poet in his social class. In the end, when the revolution comes, the God that he represents must be overthrown.

This is a shocking poem. While part of its power derives from the blatantly blasphemous conclusion, part derives from Baudelaire's assault on the traditional understanding of Cain, and this made the deeper impression on the prosecutor when the book was on trial. In his one mention of the poem, the prosecutor, Ernest Pinard, equated the poet's taking the part

of Cain against Abel with his taking the part of Paul against Jesus and Satan against God ("Réquisitoire de M. Pinard" Fleurs du mal 440-447, 443). The traditional understanding of Cain was so strong that it was considered an indictable offense against religion to sympathize with Cain.

Unlike Baudelaire, Nerval, who published his version just a few years earlier, did not get into any legal trouble at all. The difference was timing. Nerval published before the 1851 coup d'état, in a period of great freedom of the press (Pichois, Baudelaire 181); Baudelaire published in a period when the regime was, for its own reasons, encouraging an increasing number of obscenity trials (Pichois, Baudelaire 223). Some people in high places had recently used discreet intervention to protect the newly-published Madam Bovary; "the next writer accused of immorality would have to face a criminal court which had been cheated of its prey" (Pichois, Baudelaire 223). Baudelaire had the bad luck to be that next author. Also, "Abel et Caïn" might not have been censored had it appeared alone; several of the other poems of Les fleurs du mal were probably more offensive. Finally, Baudelaire's poem has a simple rhetorical structure: The poet calls upon the race of Cain to dethrone God. The complex rhetorical structure of Nerval's story insulated the author, not only from prosecution, but even from blame. Gérard, sitting in a café in Istanbul, heard the story told by an anonymous Moslem

story-teller, who claimed that it was based on the Koran; if Nerval merely recounted what he had heard, who was to blame?

The spirit of rebellion against God animates several other poems of Les fleurs du mal; the very next poem in the collection is a hymn to Satan.[15] Baudelaire identifies with Cain, the first rebel, because he also rebels. He finds the demands which God makes on man to be impossible; therefore, God must be overthrown. "Cain is preferred to his brother because he refused submission to God and to the bondage of civilization. Here again is the anarchic strain in Baudelaire" (Carter 82).

Baudelaire contemplates class differences elsewhere in his poetry. He writes sensitively of the poor in "Le crépuscule du matin" (#103 Fleurs du mal 203-04 Flowers 349-50) and elsewhere in the Fleurs du mal, but hatred for the rich is not particularly important in Baudelaire's other poems. It is more natural for him to express contempt for the bourgeoisie ("Au bourgeois," the beginning of Salon de 1846 OCB 2:415-17). That contempt probably figures in his taking part in the revolution of 1848 (see chapter 13).

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[15] Baudelaire's satanic poetry is entirely consistent with romanticism. Because there are parts of the soul which cannot be understood from a saved perspective, his "exploration of the depths of the soul requir[es] a satanic perspective" (Vlasopolos 129).

The motif of exile, an element of the biblical story of Cain stressed in "Abel et Caïn," is important to Baudelaire. It is the focus of "Le cygne" (#89 Fleurs du mal 167-69 Flowers 109-11; see discussion in Weinberg 8-36). Baudelaire also identifies in a personal way with outcast artists like Poe, a genius unrecognized and vilified by bad critics (OCB 1:335-37; see also Vlasopolos 91). The race of Cain in this poem appeals to Baudelaire as his fellows, like him dishonored and unappreciated. The theme of the loneliness of the poet occurs elsewhere in Les fleurs du mal; e.g. in "L'albatros" (#2 Fleurs du mal 31 Flowers 10) and "La Béatrice" (#125 Fleurs du mal 228-29 Flowers 159-60).

Baudelaire is not alone in taking an adversarial stance towards economic power, political power, religious authority and social norms, nor in sharing sympathy with Cain and with Satan. This stance is to a great extent shared by each of the romantic writers who tell the story of Cain.

Baudelaire, as is well known, was ambivalent about accepting the description "romantic," perhaps as a result of his love-hate relationship with the great romantic, Victor Hugo (for Baudelaire's views of Hugo, see Celier, Baudelaire et Hugo, and Pia 80-144). Baudelaire sometimes uses the word "romantic" pejoratively, sometimes approvingly. He refers to Hugo, in the Salon de 1845, as "Voilà les dernières ruines de

l'ancien romantisme--voilà ce que c'est que de venir dans un temps où il est reçu de croire que l'inspiration suffit et remplace le reste"[16] (OCB 2:366). Here Baudelaire dismisses romanticism as an overemphasis on inspiration, at the cost of slighting craftsmanship. A year later, Baudelaire attacks Hugo from the opposite side, calling him "beaucoup plus adroit qu'inventif"[17] (Salon de 1846, OCB 2:430). Baudelaire despises the "romantic" idolization of nature (Starkie 293-4), and attacks it in language very like that of Blake at the beginning of The Ghost of Abel. On the other hand, sometimes he accepts "romantic" as an accurate self-description, if not as a compliment. In a letter applying for a chair at the Academie Fraçaise, Baudelaire indirectly refers to himself as a "Romantique" (Correspondence 2:198). Vlasospolos' concludes that "In fact, Baudelaire by his own assessment is a Romantic" (Vlasopolos 91). Whether the poet was comfortable with the title or not, "Abel et Caïn" illustrates Baudelaire's use of motifs by which we identify romantic literature.

Literary critics have conducted a lively argument over what Baudelaire might have meant by his blasphemous, anti-authoritarian, anarchic poetry. Baudelaire himself suggested

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[16] "the wreckage of Romanticism. . . what comes of living in an age that accepts on faith the maxim that inspiration is everything" (Trans. Patrick Gregory in Pia 135).

[17] "a great deal more adroit than inventive" (Trans. Patrick Gregory in Pia 136)

(in a letters to his lawyer and to a government official) that his work expresses "l'horreur du Mal"[18] (For the letter to his lawyer, see Fleurs 435-38. For the letter to the French Minister of State, Achille Fould, see Correspondence 1:416). Enid Starkie (325),[19] François Mauriac (30-37), Charles du Bos (38-66), essentially accept, and develop, this assessment of Baudelaire's intention. A. E. Carter dismisses it with the observation that Baudelaire "can hardly be described as horrified by 'sin,' whatever he may pretend under threat of law" (Carter 84). This entire debate, it seems to me, misses the point. Baudelaire's poems have contradictory themes: "Baudelaire est resté vivant non pas malgré mais à cause de ses contradictions"[20] (Boisdeffre 92). Jean Prévost makes the correct observation: "Along with poems in which Baudelaire yearns for the good or for nothingness, there are some in which complacency in plunging into evil is triumphant" (Prévost 173).

Northrop Frye argues that deliberation about the poet's intention, beyond the poet's intention to write a poem, is not in the realm of literary criticism (Anatomy of Criticism 86-87). More important, Baudelaire himself seems to anticipate

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[18] His "horror of evil" or "horror of sin."

[19] "In his poems, Baudelaire expressed hatred of sin, and terror and horror of its power . . ." (Starkie 325).

[20] "Baudelaire has remained alive not in spite of, but because of his contradictions" (my translation).

Frye's position:

> La poésie ne peut pas, sous peine de mort ou de déchéance, s'assimiler à la science ou à la morale; elle n'a pas la Vérité pour objet, elle n'a qu'Elle même. La logique de l'oeuvre suffit à toutes les postulations de la morale.[21] (In a defense of Madame Bovary, cited by Boisdeffre 90; similarly OCB 2:82).

But this "art for art's sake" position is not entirely persuasive, for it explains how a poet can write some poems which directly contradict others he has written; but does not explain why some poets write consistent poems. The "meaning" of a poem is not mere decoration.

Nor does Baudelaire himself always defend "art for art's sake;" at some moments he denounces the principle vigorously. He writes: "La puérile utopie de l'école de l'art pour l'art, en excluant la morale, et souvent même la passion, était nécessairement stérile"[22] (from his defense of Pierre Dupont, OCB 2:26). In one of has last letters, addressed to his financial guardian Narcisse Désiré Ancelle, Feb. 18, 1866, he

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[21] Poetry cannot, on penalty of death or decay, assimilate itself into science or ethics; it does not have Truth as its goal, it has nothing but Itself. The logic of the work satisfies all ethical concerns.

[22] "The puerile utopia of the 'art for art's sake' school, excluding morality, and often even passion, was necessarily sterile."

writes about Les fleurs du mal:

> Faut-il vous dire, à vous qui n'avez pas plus diviné que les autres, que dans ce livre atroce, j'ai mis tout mon coeur, toute ma religion (travestie), toute ma haine? Il est vrai que j'écrirai le contraire, que je jurerai mes grands Dieux que c'est un livre d'art pur, de singerie, de jonglerie; et je mentirai comme un arracheur de dents.[23] (Correspondence 2:610).

The debate about Baudelaire as a Christian asks us to determine which of these contradictory themes is the "real" Baudelaire. They are all the real Baudelaire. Baudelaire himself, referring to his conversations about religion, notes his own liking for contradiction (Letter to Sainte-Beuve, March 30, 1865 Correspondence 2:491; see discussion in

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[23] Must I explain to you, you seem to have guessed no more than the others, that I have put my whole heart into that atrocious book, all my compassion, all my religion (travestied), all my hatred? It is true that I will write the contrary, that I will swear by all the gods that it is a work of pure art, mere monkey-play, a feat of acrobatics. And I will be lying through my teeth. (Crépet 149-50; trans. Patrick Gregory in Pia 131).

Another translation:

> Must I say it to you, who haven't guessed the truth any more than anyone else, that in that terrible book I've put my whole heart, my most tender feelings, all my religion--in a disguised form--and all my hatred? Even were I to write the contrary, and swear by all the gods, that it was only a composition of pure art, of artistic jugglery with words, a work of imitation--I know not what else--I'd only be lying like a trouper (Starkie 545; see also Pichois, Baudelaire 335).

Pichois, Baudelaire 409). The poem "Abel et Caïn" is in the section of Les fleurs du mal called "Révolte" because it expresses one of the moods, or attitudes, of Baudelaire. Blasphemy is not, as Starkie believes, a phase that the poet went through in his youth (Starkie 113-14). It was always part of his personality. In Mon coeur mis à nu, Baudelaire writes:

> Il y a dans tout homme, à toute heure, deux postulations simultanées, l'une vers Dieu, l'autre vers Satan. L'invocation à Dieu, ou spiritualité, est un désir de monter en grade: celle de Satan ou animalité, est joie de descendre.[24] (Mon coeur mis à nu, OCB 1:682-3).

Starkie finds in that passage the architectural principle of Les fleurs du mal: When Baudelaire honestly explores the dark side of the human heart, he writes blasphemous poems (Starkie 570). Understanding sin leads him to blasphemy. While that may be an adequate understanding of other blasphemous poems of Baudelaire, it does not seem to work for "Abel et Caïn." The descendants of Cain are not particularly associated with the sinful side of the human personality; their suffering is not occasioned by sin. There seems to be no reason why the

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[24] There are in every man, at every moment, two simultaneous postulates, one towards God, the other towards Satan. The call upon God, or spirituality, is a desire to rise; the call on Satan, or animalism, is the joy of descending.

children of Cain are estranged from God. Their desire to see God overthrown, which the poet applauds, is profoundly moral. In this poem, Baudelaire identifies with the dispossessed of society; he does not judge them; on the contrary, he judges the rest of society, and God, for their cruelty to the dispossessed.

Baudelaire uses the theme of Cain to explore the state of exile from God and from human society. The poet does not deal with the murder of Abel, so he does not connect that sense of exile to punishment for a specific sin. In this way, "Abel et Caïn" most resembles Coleridge's version of the story of Cain; but Baudelaire draws revolutionary conclusions from the injustice of the state of exile.

It is possible that the motive behind the satanic poems is the poet's desire to understand the dispossessed, and his own anarchic feelings, more clearly; "in the militant 'Abel et Cain,' [he] sees the need to restructure the world so as to save it from the tyranny of limited perspectives" (Vlasopolos 129). The poet, according to this explanation, identifies with the dispossessed in order to experience their feelings (Vlasospolos 134).

Byron's Cain is probably an influence on this poem, at least in a general way. As an adolescent, Baudelaire first read

Byron in secret (Starkie 45). For the rest of his life, whenever Baudelaire mentions Byron in his letters, it is always with great respect. For example, he writes about Les fleurs du mal in a letter to his mother dated July 9, 1857: "Je sais que ce volume, avec ses qualités et ses défauts, fera son chemin dans la mémoire du public lettré, à coté des meilleures poésies de V. Hugo, de Th. Gautier, et même de Byron"[25] (Correspondence 1:411). An early poem of Baudelaire's, "Le rebelle," (OCB 1:139 Flowers 193) tells of a man who refuses to bow to God, even as he is damned. The rebel might be modelled after Byron's Cain, or perhaps even Gessner's. Byron's sympathetic portrayal of Cain clears the way for Baudelaire and other writers.

A more direct source for "Abel et Caïn" is certainly Nerval's Histoire de la reine du matin et de Soliman prince des génies. Baudelaire, in "Abel et Caïn," recasts a theme from Nerval's prose into powerful verse. This was not the first time he does so: In his famous poem, "Un voyage à Cythère" (OCB 1:117 Flowers 161-63), completed before 1852, Baudelaire puts into verse an incident from an article with the same title written by Nerval in 1844 (Starkie 198). Nerval's version of Cain, in Histoire de la reine du matin et de Soliman prince des génies,

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[25] ". . . I know that this volume, with all its merits and faults, will find its place in the memory of enlightened readers alongside the best poems of V. Hugo, Th. Gautier, and even Byron" (Pia 10; slightly different translation in Pichois 222)

was not published until 1849. So we can be relatively certain that Baudelaire's poem was written later.[26]

In Nerval's version, the descendants of Cain are the world's artists, scientists and inventors, while the descendants of Abel are politicians and priests. The biblical text, with its contrast between the shepherd Abel and the farmer Cain, suggests to the Gnostics, to Gessner, and to Nerval, before Baudelaire, that Cain is hard working, and justly resentful of the indolent life of his shepherd brother. The biblical text itself identifies Cain as the builder of the first city, and his descendants as the inventors of tools. While making use of the economic theme of Cain, Baudelaire changes the characteristics associated traditionally associated with the two clans.

Most of the action in Nerval's version, as in Baudelaire's, takes place during the time that the children of Cain must

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[26] Baudelaire probably learned of the Masonic legends of the survival of the races of Cain and Abel from Nerval; Baudelaire himself was not terribly interested in esoteric mystical sources, so it is unlikely that he came across the material independently.

It is true that Nerval had been planning his version of Cain for decades, and that the two poets were acquaintances, if not yet friends, by the early 1840's (Starkie 62; Pichois 62): So there is some possibility that Baudelaire knew of the theme of the proposed novelette before Nerval published it.

Pichois notes that Baudelaire may have had an earlier source in a passage in Balzac's late work, Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes (Classiques Garnier Edition, 473-74, cited in Pichois, notes to Baudelaire OCB 1:1081). The Balzac work was published partly in 1843-4, partly in 1847-8.

wander. Ultimately, in Nerval's version, the racé of Cain are destined to rise up against God, and enthrone in God's place the beneficent genii of fire. Baudelaire's version similarly ends with the call for revolt against God, but Baudelaire's vision of the revolt ends without thought of replacing God. The revolt will succeed if it can throw God to earth.

> Evil in Les Fleurs du Mal opens the door to the sacred, prelapsarian thinking that allows the poet to reconstruct his paradise through his identification with the dispossessed of life. Baudelaire's identification of the poet with the pariah and the damned gives him the power to claim their rights. (Vlasopolos 92).

Indentification with Cain and his downtrodden clan had a very different meaning for Victor Hugo.

Chapter Eleven: "La conscience" by Victor Hugo

"La conscience" is a fairly short poem, sixty-eight lines of alexandrine couplets. In it, Hugo presents Cain as a wanderer, carrying out the sentence proclaimed by God. Cain, as patriarch, takes his clan on an endless trek away from the eye which he alone sees in the skies. After reaching the ends of the earth without finding rest for Cain, the clan builds various barriers to protect him from his vision. Eventually, they build a city in which Cain can hide from the eye, but he still sees it. Finally, they build a tomb to protect Cain from the eye, but even in the tomb he sees it.

The structure of "La conscience" is almost too perfect. Each section of the poem begins with the description of a method which Cain employs to escape from the terrible eye, and each ends with Cain's report that he can still see the eye. Each method of escape is an improvement over the previous one. First, Cain flees to the mountains, then to the end of the earth. Distance does not help him. Later, he hides behind the flap of a tent, then behind a bronze wall, then inside a great sealed city of granite and steel, marked with words

which forbid God to enter. Ever greater physical barriers do not help him. Finally, Cain orders himself buried in a tomb; complete isolation does not help him.

As the description of each more elaborate method of escape progresses, the poet seduces the reader into hoping that Cain will find some rest; all the while, the reader must know that the quest is impossible, that Cain cannot find rest. Nonetheless, the disappointment is greater for Cain and for the reader each time the eye reappears. As each section of the poem begins with a method of escape and ends with the reappearance of the eye, so the whole poem begins with Cain's flight and ends with him still seeing the eye.

Cain hopes to achieve peace and solitude in the tomb: "'Rien ne me verra plus, je ne verrai plus rien'" (1.64).[1] But when the massive door of his tomb has been shut in his face, Cain can still see the eye looking at him. Massin (442 n.12) appropriately connects this situation with the Psalm: "If I make my bed in the grave, here you are" (Ps. 139:8). In religio-philosophic terms, Cain's last stratagem is to try to gain nirvana, peace achieved by renouncing all. Hugo tells us that even that will not protect from conscience.

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[1] "'Nothing will see me any more, I will see nothing any more'" (translations of "La conscience" are mine).

The last line of the poem again shows Hugo's love of balance: it begins with the terrible word "L'oiel,"[2] and ends with the name of "Caïn." After all of Cain's efforts, apparently, nothing has changed. Throughout his wandering, Cain cannot help looking at the eye, which looks at him: "Il vit un oeil, tout grand ouvert dans les ténèbres, Et qui le regardait dans l'ombre fixement"[3] (lines 10-11). At the last line, deep in Cain's tomb, the eye still looks at Cain: "L'oeil était dans la tombe et regardait Caïn."[4] At the first description of the eye, the eye is focussed on Cain; so too at the last.

The eye, which Cain sees wherever he flees, is the eye of God (lines 3, 56; see Massin 442 n.9), which is the eye of his conscience, as indicated by the title of the poem.[5] Cain cannot get free of the sense that his deeds are watched; the eye is thus a terrifying attribute of Cain's mind. That is why there can be no safe haven, for no barrier offers protection from his own mind. That is why Cain always sees the eye.

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[2] "The eye"

[3] "He saw an eye, huge, open, in the gloom, / Which stared at him in the shadow."

[4] "The eye was in the tomb and it looked at Cain."

[5] It is thus different from the eye in Oedipus, in the biblical story of Samson, and in Coleridge's version of Cain (see chapter 6). More relevant is a Masonic symbol, the "eye of surveillance" (Schama 527).

Meanwhile, the eye also looks at him. I can see two subtly different ways of reading the last words of the poem, "et regardait Caïn."[6] Perhaps the eye, as Cain envisions it, is directed towards him, but it exists only in Cain's mind. If so, "et regardait Caïn"[7] would be a somewhat anti-climactic conclusion to the poem: Cain is still not free of the sense that his conscience watches him. Or perhaps it is the poet who describes the eye: The poet tells us that Cain accurately experiences the eye, which in reality is looking at him.

There is a difference between those two readings. In the first, Hugo maintains an entirely subjectivist explanation for God and for the conscience. These are attributes of the human mind. Hugo thus asserts that God is "nothing but" our conscience. In the second, he maintains that our experience of conscience and of God has some objective correlative. According to the second reading, we experience God as our conscience; or, as Hugo wrote elsewhere: "La conscience, c'est Dieu présent dans l'homme."[8] That epigram might be a condensed version of this poem.

Even according to this second reading, the religious position

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[6] "and it looked at Cain."

[7] "and it looked at Cain."

[8] "Conscience (or consciousness) is God present in man" [1858-1860] (Portfeuille, "Post-scriptum de ma vie," "La tas de pierres" OC: Édition chronologique 10:1207).

expressed by Hugo in "La conscience" is "subjectivist" (LeCoeur 23) in that Cain's punishment operates within his personality, rather than in the outside world. This religious position is close to that of Coleridge, in his theological writings; and in general, Hugo's version of Cain is closer to Coleridge's than to those of Baudelaire or Leconte de Lisle.

Because Hugo presents Cain surrounded by his caring clan, enduring his punishment, and because Hugo does not present Cain's crime, we are drawn to sympathize with Cain, or at least to pity him. Hugo uses several subtle techniques to establish our identification with Cain.

The first sentence, by its grammatical structure, brings us along with Cain on an extended journey. The poem begins with the word "Lorsque,"[9] necessarily introducing a dependant clause; the next word, "avec,"[10] introduces another phrase, postponing the development of that dependant clause. The subject of the dependant clause, "Caïn," does not appear until the beginning of the third line. It is not until the middle of the fourth line that the independent clause appears: "l'homme sombre arriva."[11] This first sentence finally winds to a close at the end of the eighth line. The wandering

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[9] "When"

[10] "with"

[11] "the somber man arrived."

grammar of the sentence is the first of a number of techniques which the poet uses to lead his readers to share Cain's experience and to identify with him.

Cain's exhausted family members do not rest before they have Cain's permission, for he is such a revered leader. Similarly, when he wants his family to move on, they obey without question (line 13). He has power, not only over his family, but also over himself. Though he has been through all that they have, he, with greater physical strength or greater power of will, does not let himself sleep. Cain gains our sympathy as an heroic leader.

Even this powerful man can be terrified, though: When he sees the eye, staring at him, he reacts "avec un tremblement" (1.12).[12] He awakens the family and they move on. True bravery is possible only in the face of fear, and Cain feels fear. "Il allait muet, pâle et frémissant aux bruits, / Furtif, sans regarder derrière lui, sans trêve, / Sans repos, sans sommeil" (1.15-17).[13] Cain earns our sympathy as a man brave but overwhelmed.

Hugo generates sympathy for Cain by the precise word which he

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[12] "with a shudder"

[13] "He went, mute, pale, trembling at noises, / Furtive, without looking back, uncompromising, / Without rest, without sleep:"

chooses for Cain's family, in that first line, "ses enfants."[14] The word is ambiguous, meaning either descendants of any age, or young children. Here, the primary meaning is "descendants," for Cain is the patriarch, and all the family members, old and young, are his "enfants;" but Hugo also wants us to hear the echo of the other meaning. Our hearts readily go out to the young children who suffer along with the rest of the clan.

The poet describes the family of Cain, in the opening line of the poem, as "vêtus de peaux de bêtes."[15] Massin correctly notes the biblical connection: God clothed Adam and Eve, after their sin, in animal skins (Gen. 3:21).[16] The clothing thus symbolizes the family's role in preserving the traditions of their parents, and, more significantly, the continuity of God's concern for sinners. This primitive clothing is also the first detail illustrating the difficult conditions endured by Cain and his family. The poet stresses those difficult conditions again in the second line: "Echevelé, livide au

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[14] "his children."

[15] "dressed in animal skins." Blake's final illustration for The Ghost of Abel similarly shows a prone figure dressed in animal skins (see discussion in chapter 8 above). Animal skin clothing also appears in Baudelaire's "Abel et Caïn" (see discussion in chapter 10 above).

[16] Massin gives the verse number as Gen 4:14, an apparent error (Massin 441 n.2).

milieu des tempêtes"[17] and in the sixth: "Sa femme fatiguée et ses fils hors d'haleine".[18] These people are pushed to the limits of their strength, and collapse as soon as Cain gives permission. Thus, the indirect description of Cain in the opening lines validates him as powerful leader and a master of himself. The first metaphor Hugo uses to characterize Cain, "l'aïeul farouche"[19] (line 25) masterfully supports this portrait, suggesting both Cain's power and his dignity.

Perhaps Hugo felt some personal sympathy for the dignity of Cain as an exile. He wrote "La conscience" very shortly after he himself went into exile in Guernsey as an act of opposition the coronation of Louis-Napoleon.

"La conscience" is a somber poem, shot through with images of gloom. Hugo emphasizes the darkness of Cain's world, using different words for darkness: "funébres" (1.9) "les ténèbres" (1.10) and "l'ombre" (1.11). This nightmare world, inhabited by those of guilty conscience, is dark literally and figuratively. Darkness, as in Coleridge's version of Cain, symbolizes both Cain's ignorance and his depression. The only images of light in the poem are associated with Tsilla, Cain's granddaughter, whose hair is blond and whose disposition is

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[17] "Disheveled, livid, amidst the storms"

[18] "His exhausted wife and his children, out of breath,"

[19] "the ferocious eagle"

compared to the dawn (lines 33-34); the rest of the poem is restricted to night or stormy days. Tsilla is godly. Elsewhere in Hugo's work, he identifies light with God, darkness with Satan,[20] so much so that Hugo could almost agree with Nerval's uncle, that "Dieu, c'est le soleil"[21] (Nerval Oeuvres 1:394). Cain's world is dark because, as long as he flees from his conscience, he must inhabit a funereal world. Hugo gives us no information about whether the guilty can ever regain the brilliant light of innocence. Perhaps by turning towards to light, Cain might regain some of his innocence. Hugo does not assure us that a sinner can ever enter the sunlight, but neither does he deny it.

When Cain is safely behind the tent-wall, Tsilla innocently asks: "Vous ne voyez plus rien?"[22] (1.33). But, alas, Cain replies: "Je vois cet oeil encore!"[23] (1.35). Later, with Cain hidden in a huge stone city, Tsilla again asks after his welfare (lines 58-59), and he again has to reply that he sees

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[20] In the next poem in La légende des siècles, "Puissance égale bonté," Hugo describes Iblis as "de ténèbres vetu" (Hugo 443. 1.4), "dressed in shadows." Iblis is, of course, like Nerval's Éblis, an Islamic name for Satan.

[21] "The sun is God." Compare Hugo's own statement: "Eclairer, c'est assainir.
Le soleil ne donne pas seulement le jour, il donne l'example" [1860] (OC: Édition chronologique 10:1206). "To enlighten is to make healthy. The sun gives not only the day, it gives the example."

[22] "You do not see anything anymore?"

[23] "I still see that eye!"

the eye (line 60). Tsilla's two questions appear at symmetrical points in the poem. She does not ask after Cain's flight, his first method of escape from the eye, but after his second method, hiding behind one of Jabel's walls. She asks again after he is immured in Tubal-Cain's city, which is Cain's penultimate method of escape. After his final effort, when he is sealed in the tomb, there may be no way for anyone to talk with him.

Tsilla is obviously a sympathetic figure. She is a young child, representing innocence. She is blond (line 32), which in Gessner and in medieval versions of Cain has been a symbol of goodness; we jump to the conclusion, although the poet never says so, that she is physically beautiful. More important, she is morally beautiful: She is a caring granddaughter, who kindly asks about the welfare of her grandfather. And since we, the readers, sympathize with her, we are also drawn to share her concern for Cain's welfare. Thus she makes Cain sympathetic.

Hugo allows himself only one digression from presenting Cain's efforts to escape the eye, a digression which casts light on the moral stature of the patriarch's family. While Tubal-Cain works on his infernal city, his brothers, "[c]hassaient les fils d'Enos et les enfants de Seth; / Et l'on crevait les yeux à quiconque passait; / Et, le soir, on

lançait des flèches aux étoiles"[24] (lines 47-9). When the descendants of Cain hunt down and catch anyone, they break his eyes. This is a gesture of solidarity with their patriarch Cain. The eye is both the subject and object of Cain's vision: As he is haunted by a the sight of an eye, so they will break the eyes of others; as he is haunted by what he sees, so they will blind the eyes of others. His conscience is guilty, so he cannot bear to be aware that he is watched by God; symbolically, his descendants wish to prevent others from being aware of God. This is the only moment in the poem when we see anything reprehensible about Cain's descendants, the only moment that gives some hint that they might be evil. Cain himself seems not to be involved. While the reader's sympathy for the descendants of Cain is undercut by this example of their cruelty, Cain himself is not implicated.

The most fundamental question in this poem is why Cain alone can see the eye: Presumably, among all his relations, Cain is most bothered by a bad conscience. That answer conceals an ambiguity, for bad conscience, the awareness of one's blameworthiness, has two components: blameworthiness and awareness. Cain may suffer from the eye because he is most blameworthy, or because he is most aware. It seems unlikely

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[24] "Chased the sons of Enos and the children of Seth; / And broke the eyes of anyone who passed, / And, at night, shot arrows at the stars"

that Hugo means to portray Cain as more evil than his descendants, who casually hunt down and blind their fellow human beings; more likely, then, Cain sees the eye because he is supremely sensitive. Thus, even his bad conscience shows that Cain is heroic.

Tsilla does not see the eye. That is presumably because she is innocent, so she has nothing to fear from awareness of the presence of the eye. Logically, however, the symbolism can be extended, so that a sensitive innocent person might see the eye, without, of course, feeling the need to flee from it. That benign symbolism of the eye, interestingly enough, appears in the Great Seal of the United States of America, which was designed shortly after the American revolution.[25] According to the official description, or blazon, the reverse of the seal is:

> A pyramid unfinished. In the zenith, an eye in a triangle, surrounded with a glory proper. Over the eye these words "Annuit Coeptis"[26] . . . And underneath the following motto, "Novus Ordo

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[25] The Great Seal was prepared by William Barton and Charles Thompson and accepted by Congress on June 20, 1782 (Patterson). A copy of the Great Seal can be found on the reverse of every United States dollar.

[26] "He [i.e. God] has favoured our undertakings" (Patterson). Alternative translations: "'He has smiled on our accomplishments' or 'our activities'" (Campbell 26), or "he smiles on our beginnings" (Gould 6).

Seculorum"[27] (Patterson).

In the Great Seal, the eye in the heavens represents the eye of providence (Patterson), or of the God of reason (Campbell 26); the American revolutionaries, in the Great Seal, proclaim their clear consciences. They announce that God smiles on their activities as they work to establish a new world order.[28]

Writers do not always appreciate "the enormous role the Bible was to play in Hugo's inspiration, especially in his later years" (Houston 16). "La conscience" is obviously based on the biblical story, but it would be a mistake to think that the Bible merely provides the plot as a point of departure. On the contrary, "La conscience" is a wonderful example of literature as textual commentary. At several points in this poem, the force of Hugo's literary effort can be appreciated only against the backdrop of an intimate study of the biblical text.

In the Bible, for example, Cain, condemned to be a wanderer,

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[27] "A new order of the ages" (Patterson). Alternative translation: "A new order of the world" (Campbell 26). Both phrases are from Virgil (Patterson).

[28] Similarly, the celestial eye in a triangle appears in an anonymous Jacobin painting of "The Virtues of the Republic," where it shines its benign light on the industry, liberty and equality of the French Republic (Schama 768-70, 770 fig. 191; see Schama 527 for the Masonic source of this symbol).

(Gen. 4:12), still manages to build a city (Gen. 4:17). Is he, then, an urban settler (as in Augustine, The City of God Book 15, Chapters 5 and 8) or a rural wanderer (as his descendants are in Beowulf)? Hugo does more than choose one alternative or the other: He wonderfully "realizes" that building a city fulfills Cain's destiny as a wanderer, heading, as the biblical text itself describes his direction, away from the presence of God (Gen. 4:16).[29] The city is his protection--unsuccessful protection--from God. Hugo's poem ends with Cain in an underground tomb,[30] and even there feeling the need to flee from before the eye, literally a "wanderer in the earth" ("wanderer in the earth" is an overprecise understanding of Gen. 4:12). Hugo's literary imagination provides a splendid gloss on the biblical text.

Hugo follows the Bible when he has Cain ask Jabel, the tent-dweller, to fix a wall that will block the eye. According to the Bible, Yaval, son of Lamekh and Adah (Gen. 4:20), was the

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[29] ". . . it is hardly necessary to say that Dante is heir to rival traditions, because in his hands these themes may not be rival at all, but fundamentally united, finding in the figure of Cain, whether outlaw or burgher, a 'figure' for the discord in the social life of man." (Quinones, "Ulysses' Brother" 440).
The idea which Quinones finds in Dante, I maintain is present all along in the Bible itself. In the biblical text, the rural and urban themes are united by locating Cain's city in the land of wandering (Hebrew: nod). See chapter 2 above.

[30] Williams (53) cites an obscure rabbinic source, the Midrash Konen, to the effect that Cain's offspring lived underground (see chapters 2 and 3 above).

"father of those who dwell in tents and raise cattle" (Gen. 4:20). Hugo follows the biblical text when he identifies Jabel as "père de ceux qui vont / Sous des tentes de poil dans le désert profond"[31] (lines 27-28; Massin 441 n.4).

When Jabel's tent-wall fails to shield Cain, his brother Jubal builds a metal wall. Here, Hugo does depart slightly from the biblical account. Hugo calls "Jubal, père de ceux qui passent dans les bourgs / Soufflant dans des clairons et frappant des tambours"[32] (lines 35-6). As Massin points out, in the Bible Jubal is the father of those who play different instruments, the harp and the flute (Massin 442 n.6, based on Gen. 4:21). I do not know why Hugo departs from the biblical account in this minor way. Similarly, in the Bible the city of Henokh is built by Cain (Gen. 4:17), rather than by Tubal-Cain, as in this poem (Massin 442 n.7). In Hugo's poem Hénoch commands the building of the city (line 41), and, interestingly enough, acccording to one modern biblical commentator it is Henokh, rather than Cain, who builds the first city (Cassuto, Commentary to Gen. 4:17). The other French poets also make the city the work of the descendants of Cain, rather than Cain himself.

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[31] ". . . father of those who travel / Under tents of skin in the deep desert."

[32] "Jubal, father of those who pass through towns / Blowing horns and beating tambourines."

P. Berret raises some technical problems with the chronology of the young Tsilla (Berret's comments are quoted in Massin 441-2 n.5). In the poem, she is described as "La fille de ses fils"[33] (line 34), but Berret points out that the biblical Tsilla marries Lamekh, a sixth generation descendant of Cain (Gen. 4:19). Furthermore, the biblical Tsilla is the mother of Tubal-Cain (Gen. 4:22); in Hugo's poem, Tubal-Cain is, a few lines later in the story, old enough to build an enormous, superhuman city. Berret also finds it hard to picture the mother of Tubal-Cain, first of those who work metal, as a blonde child, sweet as the dawn. "Il est bien certain que V. H. n'a pensé nullement à la chronologie et qu'il a été séduit par la sonorité grêle et graciuese du nom de Tsilla (Gen. 4:19)" (Massin 441-2 n.5). Massin concludes: "Ce procédé hugolien de l'usage des noms propres reparaître constamment dans tout le recueil"[34] (Massin 442 n.5).

It seems to me that Hugo does not confuse the mother of Tubal-Cain mentioned in Gen. 4:19 with this Tsilla. He simply needs a name for this other, much younger, woman, and uses a name from elsewhere in the same biblical narrative. Note that he

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[33] "The daughter of his son."

[34] "It is quite certain that Victor Hugo did not think at all about the chronology and that he was seduced by the delicate and graceful sonority of the name Tsilla (Gen 4:19)." Massin concludes: "This procedure of Hugo's for dealing with proper names will reappear constantly through the whole poem cycle" (my translation).

specifies that this Tsilla is "fille de son fils;" the biblical Tubal-Cain's mother is not necessarily a direct descendant of Cain. Byron follows a similar process to find names for the characters in his play:

> In the following pages I have called them 'Adah' and 'Zillah,'[35] the earliest names in Genesis. They were those of Lamech's wives; those of Cain and Abel are not called by their names. (Preface to Cain 156).

Hugo simply needs a pretty name for the little girl, and uses one from a convenient nearby source, without meaning to suggest, any more than Byron did, that the two characters are identical.

Even allowing for that, the number of generations still does not work out. The little girl is merely a granddaughter, "fille de son fils," who should therefore be several generations older than Tubal-Cain. The logic of the poem requires her to be much younger than Tubal-Cain. Hugo ignores that discrepancy to solve a literary problem. Hugo structures his poem around the skills of the craftsmen who were sixth generation descendants of Cain. Except in the context of the enormous life-spans which the Bible imputes to these early people, it would be incredible for someone to benefit from the

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[35] "Zillah" and "Tsilla" are, of course, just different transliterations of the same name.

skills of such distant descendants. Hugo also wants to present Cain's relationship with his beautiful little granddaughter, a relationship which his readers can appreciate and share. It would disrupt that ready appreciation for the poet to describe her, not as a granddaughter, but as a seventh or eighth generation descendant. So the poet sacrifices consistency to solve that real literary problem, by allowing himself to use the more emotionally effective relationship for Cain and Tsilla.[36]

Hugo had access to some of the earlier sympathetic versions of Cain. Hugo published a critical study of Byron in 1823 (Edwards 53-54), at the height of the controversy surrounding Byron's Cain. Among Hugo's early poems is "Mazeppa" (published in the 1829 collection Les orientales), an elaboration of one moment in Byron's poem by the same name. Hugo undoubtedly knew of Nerval's widely circulated novelette. Though Hugo was a voracious reader of occult documents, he seems to have found most of the esoterica of "La conscience" in Nerval's novelette. Baudelaire made sure that Hugo knew Les fleurs du mal, sending him a special presentation copy of the first edition (Pichois, Baudelaire 220). While the

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[36] Later in the poem, Tsilla refers to Cain as "mon père" (line 58) "my father." According to Hugo's accounting (line 33), she should have called him "Grandfather." The obvious answer is that children are often not precise, calling their grandfather, for example, "Father" (Rashi makes the same observation on Num. 10:29).

younger poet was on trial for publishing Les fleurs du mal, Hugo responded with a generous and positive letter, praising the quality of the poetry in Les fleurs du mal,[37] and condemning the trial. It seems likely that Hugo also knew, but did not use, Voltaire's innovative challenge to the role of God in the story of Cain.[38]

In "La conscience," Hugo responds to the earlier versions. He answers the claim made by Nerval that Cain's descendants had constructed a sanctuary against God. Tubal-Cain's infernal city, into which he forbids God to enter (line 56), in Hugo's poem, certainly seems to be patterned on the city of Henochia and on the Subterranean Kingdom in Nerval's work. In Nerval's version, the city is an offense to God, and the Subterranean Kingdom is safe from God (see chapter 9 above). For Hugo, it is not possible to build a city that can protect from God.

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[37] Vos Fleurs du Mal rayonnent et éblouissent comme des étoiles. . . Une des rares décorations que le régime actuel peut accorder, vous venez de la recevoir. Ce qu'il appelle sa justice vous a condamné au nom de ce qu'il appelle sa morale. . . Je vous serre la main, poète (Celier 89-90).

Your "flowers of evil" are as radiant and as dazzling as stars. . . You have just received one of the few decorations the present regime can bestow. What it refers to as its justice has condemned you in the name of what it likes to call its morality. (Pichois, Baudelaire 245). I offer you my hand, poet.

[38] Voltaire, however, does not express any particular sympathy for Cain (additions to the article "Genèse," in the 1771 edition of the Dictionaire philosophique of 1769).

The massive walls, the inscription, are all useless. God reaches Cain through his conscience; no physical barrier can protect him.

In Nerval's novelette, in Baudelaire's poem, and ultimately in the Masonic legends on which they draw, the children of Seth rule the children of Cain, and will continue to do so until the children of Cain rebel against them. In Hugo's poem, however, the sons of Seth do nothing to provoke violence, and do not even retaliate. In short, "La conscience" does not contain a description of the relationships between the sons of Seth and the sons of Cain to match the description in Masonic texts. The source for Hugo's description of the powerful Cainites, who raid the hapless children of Seth with impunity, is rather an interpretation of Gen. 6:1-3, in which the powerful sons of Cain, "bnei elohim," whenever they choose to, seize the daughters of ordinary people, "bnot ha'adam" (Bentley 222).

Hugo also answers the claim, made in the versions of the story by Nerval and Baudelaire, that the clan of Cain is ultimately destined to overthrow God. As Hugo tells the story, the clan of Cain is no threat to God. Hugo responds to Byron's despairing story of Cain, for, while Hugo's Cain does not find his way out of despair, the poet implies that there is a way out.

The other action of the descendants of Cain, launching arrows at the stars, is also a gesture of solidarity with Cain. By the logic of the poem, the children of Cain should wish to kill not the stars, but the eye. Hugo echoes that language of Nerval's Antéros, who exults: "Je retourne les dards contre le dieu vainqueur"[39] (Oeuvres 1:4). Shooting at the stars is, in both poems, an effort to kill God; but the emphasis is different. In Nerval's poem, Antéros achieves heroic stature by his proud, though possibly futile, effort to shoot at God; in Hugo's, Cain's descendants display only their evil by their futile attempt to shoot at the stars.

The eye was perhaps suggested to Hugo by a passage in which Nerval uses the trope "the eye of God" to refer to the sun. In the Histoire de la reine du matin et de Soliman prince des génies, Tubal-Cain warns the children of Cain to return to their underground world before the appearance of the sun: "[L]a nuit s'avance; beintôt l'oeil flamboyant d'Adonaï va parcourir la terre. . ."[40] (Oeuvres 2:564). Tubal-Cain refers to the sun as "the blazing eye of Adonai" from which the descendants of Cain must hide. This passage is thus a possible source for Hugo's poem about Cain, in which Cain,

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[39] "I hurl back the darts against the conquering god" (Jones 72).

[40] "The night draws to a close and soon the blazing eye of Adonai will range over the earth . . . " (My translation, departing slightly from that found in Journey 175).

constantly fleeing from before the eye of God, eventually entombs himself. However, the eye of God, or of the conscience, in the Hugo poem is not identical with the sun. Unlike the sun, the eye is visible to only one character, Cain; and the eye cannot be blocked by barriers which do block the sun. Still, Hugo's eye seems to be an answer to Nerval's sun.[41]

Where Hugo introduces new elements of the story, these are usually directly connected to his innovative reading of the biblical text. Hugo discovered in the Bible the motivation for Cain's wandering, for the construction of his city, and for the excavation of his tomb. These insights are not to be found in the available literary models.

Hugo presents the awesome good qualities of Cain, his sensitivity, his ability as a leader, and his personal strength, in order to make Cain's failure more poignant. He presents Cain as a true tragic hero, flawed by his inability to deal with his terrible conscience. It would be a mistake to consider Cain a tragic hero in the other French versions,

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[41] In "La conscience," the association between the eye of heaven and the sun is indirect, but I believe it is inescapable. The trope is simply too familiar. For another example: The English name for a flower with a corolla round and yellow like the image of the sun, and white petals radiating out like the rays of the sun, is "daisy," that is, "day's eye" (Oxford English Dictionary).

in which he is virtually flawless; Hugo's version of Cain is thus more like the English versions. If Hugo tells the story of Cain without neatly reversing sympathy, his Cain still fits into the "new trend to transform Cain from villain to hero" (Roston, Biblical Drama 203). One only needs to compare this Hugo's tragic Cain with the monster presented by the Church Fathers to see how thoroughly Hugo has abandoned the traditional interpretations of Cain. Hugo treats Cain with sympathy; as we read the poem, we share Cain's emotions. Hugo shows the dignity and grandeur of Cain. Hugo does not, however, make Cain a figure to emulate. On the contrary, the reader, in identifying with Cain, feels horror at Cain's fate.[42] The reader also feels some superiority to Cain, who is naive in thinking that he can succeed in outrunning his conscience. So Radcliff-Umstead is terribly wrong when he writes: "Hugo, in Conscience of La Légende des Siècles,

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[42] Another reference to Cain from Victor Hugo's enormous literary output: In "Les malheureux", a somewhat dreary portrait of Cain's parents ends with each parent mourning for one son: "Le pêre sur Abel, la mère sur Cain" (Les Contemplations, V. 26: Les malheureux. See discussion in LeCoeur 48-49.). Is this a sympathetic note, that the parents mourn for their sons equally, or is it continuing an ancient notion that "Cain is associated with his mother, Abel with his father?" (Williams 20).

In La fin de Satan, Hugo describes the three weapons which Cain uses to kill Abel: a stick, a nail, and a stone. The nail becomes the sword of war; the stick, the gibbet of the death penalty; and the stone, the prison of governmental oppression. The first evil deed thus grows into all forms of official violence (La fin de Satan "La première page" Part 2, numbers 4, 5 OC: Poésie 4:14-15. See discussion in Journet 1116). As Massin notes, this vision of Cain seems unrelated to the vision of Cain in "La conscience" (Massin 441 n.1).

presents a rather conventional Cain who is pursued forever by the eye of God for his crime" (Radcliff-Umstead 408 note 13).

Like Blake, Coleridge, Nerval, and Leconte de Lisle, Hugo was interested in the rise of the world's mythologies. The story of Cain must have appealed to them all as an example of ancient mythology. The story also lends itself to Hugo's characteristic treatment, for those aspects of his work that are most easily identified as romantic are present in this story. The setting is primitive and oriental, the presentation is dramatic, the events violent.

The murder of Abel, the first act of violence, in the Bible immediately follows the first sin and expulsion from Eden, as a more intense parallel of the earlier story. It is not surprising for critics to theorize that literary versions of the story are often "disguised versions of the Fall" (Roston, Biblical Drama 200). John Porter Houston makes exactly that claim about this poem: "The notion of man's fall is displaced onto Cain in 'La Conscience'" (Houston 115). This seems inaccurate to me. The individuating characteristics of the Fall, a story which tells of the first sin in order to confront the forces which motivate sin and comprehend the origin of evil are all absent from "La conscience." We have no idea, in this poem, of how Cain came to sin, or of what

motivates Cain's sin, or even of what Cain's sin was. Cain himself only partially realizes why he must flee. Like Coleridge's portrait of Cain, this poem is about estrangement from God and its psychological consequences.

Jeffrey Burton Russell provides an insight into Hugo's attitude towards sinning humanity by explaining that for Hugo, evil is a shadow within us, an absence. Though human beings are basically good (Russell 195), we may still be drawn after evil. Sinners do not "create the shadow within us, so we are to be pitied for our misfortune rather than blamed for our sin" (Russell 195). Hugo, in this poem, leads us to admire Cain for the greatness of his soul, and to pity him for his wrong-headed attempt to deal with his conscience.

Writing about Hugo's literary portrayals of Satan, Russell provides a fitting conclusion to a discussion the role of Cain in "La conscience":

> Hugo felt deeply that alienation, defeat, sadness, and regret are as inherent in evil as cruelty and selfishness, and he painted a dimension of evil that had hitherto been neglected: the poignant sadness and isolation of the sinner (Russell 196).

The influence of Hugo's poem is apparent in a poem which presents a very different religious ideal, Leconte de Lisle's

Qaïn. Leconte de Lisle also uses the eye in heaven to symbolize the adversarial relationship between Cain and God; but as the later poet assesses the guilt in that relationship very differently, he changes the significance of the image (Qaïn lines 41ff). Leconte de Lisle twists Hugo's image to use it as a weapon against Hugo's theology.

Chapter Twelve: Leconte de Lisle's Qaïn

Leconte de Lisle's Qaïn is the quintessential romantic version of the theme of Cain, the most extensive portrait of Cain in the French romantic literature, and the most laudatory. Leconte de Lisle works nearly all the subsidiary themes from Byron's play and from earlier French versions into his poem. His identification with Cain shows none of the ambivalence of the English writers. The tragic sense of the biblical story, so wonderfully evoked by Byron and Hugo, is overwhelmed by the poet's triumphant revolutionary zeal. While the action of the poem is intermittently confusing, the emotion is pure and mighty. This is, in its emotional tone, the loudest of the romantic versions of Cain. As told by Leconte de Lisle, this is a simple, direct, revolutionary and anti-religious story. It is the culmination of the romantic rehabilitation of Cain.

This description might seem odd for a poem of Leconte de Lisle's, as it might seem odd to include him in a list of romantic poets. Leconte de Lisle saw himself as a founder of the Parnassian school of poetry, and was conscious of the differences between his theory and earlier romantic theories

of poetry. The ideal of this new school, a kind of polished, elegant and detached poetry, is suggested in Verlaine's praise of Leconte de Lisle's poetic achievement:

> calme, rassise, les vers d'airain retentissant comme les des tonnerres lointains sans jamais éclater, par cette loi suprême de l'art que tout éclat est une discordance, et que le beau, c'est l'harmonie (L'art Nov. 2, 1865, cited in Flottes 5).[1]

Qaïn is nothing like this ideal. In this poem, Leconte de Lisle breaks his own rules (Pich, LdeL 481), producing a poem with strong romantic elements. The poet makes no attempt to develop a calm mood in this poem: Far from avoiding "éclat," the entire poem reads as one continuous emotional outburst. Far from seeking the beautiful in harmony, the poem is deliberately harsh and jarring.

One tenet of the Leconte de Lisle's theory of poetry is that "a work of art is not the proper place of a person to express his personal opinions" (Brown 69). Leconte de Lisle, in theory, writes poems in which he keeps distant from the action; he never enters as a character; he lets the reader draw his own conclusions. In particular, the poet dismisses

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[1] calm, sedate, the bronze verses reverberating like distant thunder without ever bursting out, by this supreme law of art that any outburst is discord, and that beauty is harmony (my translation).

poetry with a message as "didactisme rimé, cette négation absolue de toute poésie"[2] ("Discours de réception à l'Académie Française prononcé le 31 mars 1887" sur Victor Hugo, Articles-Préfaces Discours 204). In Qaïn, he stretches that tenet to the breaking point. The narrator indeed expresses no opinions for himself, recording instead those of Thogorma or Cain or the Khéroub; technically, then poet does keep some distance from his material. In effect, however, the poet is always immediately present, and boiling with emotion, for he identifies himself fully with Thogorma and Cain. So the poem appears to be, like much of romantic poetry, a personal statement (Peckham 4), emphasizing the "vivid, emotional" aspects of the poet's experience (Roston, Prophet and Poet 18).

The poet creates, in Cain, a character who expresses his own rebellion against God. I have seen throughout this study that identification with Cain as an heroic rebel is a powerful mark of romanticism (see the discussion of the romantic hero in Thorslev 3). The poem exhibits the romantic "love of the exotic--the strange and unfamiliar" (Brown 62): Characters with exotic names interact in exotic and ancient places. The huge themes of Qaïn have cosmic significance, prophesying the rise and fall of civilizations, the defeat of God, and the dawn of a golden age of human salvation; the poet appears as

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[2] "rimed didacticism, that negation of all poetry."

a romantic in his fascination with dynamic change, and his discomfort with received religion. Brown describes Qaïn as a "poem . . . in the form of a prophetic vision, characteristic of the Bible" (Brown 115); like the other romantics, Leconte de Lisle sees the role of the poet as prophetic. Blake explicitly claims that role, in the introduction to his retelling of the story of Cain. Blake "so profoundly identified with the biblical prophetic tradition that he scarcely seems conscious that poetry could have any function other than that of conveying a divine message" (Roston, Prophet and Poet 40). The other poets of this study, Byron, Coleridge, Nerval, Hugo, Baudelaire, each implicitly make the claim to a status very like prophecy. Leconte de Lisle does the same in presenting, as the bulk of his poem, the vision of an ancient prophet.

Thus, Qaïn can serve as an example to support Brown's description of the period of Leconte de Lisle as the time when "Romanticism had reached its culmination" or its "maturity" (Brown 1), and Peyre's assertion that "the generation of writers (Baudelaire, Flaubert, Leconte de Lisle) which reached manhood around 1840 was not less, but more wholeheartedly romantic than that which had followed the fall of Napoleon" (Peyre, "The Originality" 337).

Before studying the poem itself, let me take a moment to

examine the title and hero's name, "Qaïn." Leconte de Lisle never uses the standard French transliteration, "Caïn," in this poem, although that reproduces the Hebrew quite accurately. In the first editions of this poem, the name appears as "Kaïn" (Poèsies complètes 4:294). Later, the poet settles on the equally unusual "Qaïn," without improving the accuracy of the transliteration, or even changing the pronunciation. Vianey attributes the spelling entirely to the biblical translation which Leconte de Lisle used (131 n. 1), but that is a local explanation for a widespread phenomenon: The poet loves unusual orthography. In Qaïn, he avoids "Dieu," preferring to experiment with unusual spellings of the tetragrammaton (Poésies complétes 4:294). Similarly, when he writes about Classical figures, he "reproduced as faithfully as possible the original names of the old Greek gods and heroes" (Brown 78), making these names unfamiliar. Mining ancient and exotic literatures, he writes poems about the exploits of heroes whose names are impossible in French: Hialmar, Valmiki, Kenwar'ch, Snorr, and, in this poem, Thogorma. There must be some systematic purpose for all those odd names.

I believe that the poet follows the same practice with Greek names as with a biblical ones. According to Brown, the poet's primary concern in altering Greek names is to avoid the perfectly French-sounding ones used by neo-classical poets,

which make these entities seem familiar, rather than exotic (78). The changes in spelling, then, are made "less in the interests of truth, than because of the artistic effect (Brown 78). Estève catches the intent in this poem accurately: "l'on sourit volontiers des efforts réitérés faits par le poète pour donner au nom de Caïn, devenu successivement sous sa plume Kaïn, puis Qaïn, un aspect qui fût suffisamment barbare à nos yeux"[3] (Estève 106). Leconte de Lisle makes the familiar story strange and barbarous. The use of an exotic name for God is especially powerful, for by associating God with a specific foreign place and time, one implicitly places limits on God.

Leconte de Lisle's process of estranging biblical names is exactly opposite to process by which the medieval mystery plays tame biblical figures. The poet, wanting his readers to see the Bible as the work of an alien culture, emphasizes the disjunctions between biblical civilization and that of his readers. It is significant that Leconte de Lisle assigns Qaïn to his collection of Poèmes barbares, rather than Poèmes antiques. For the poet, the biblical past was a barbaric age; only the period of the ancient polytheistic Greeks and Indians deserved the name classical antiquity (Vianey 12). But he also to emphasizes the strangeness of those cultures, which he

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[3] "One smiles willingly at the reiterated efforts of the poet to give the name of Cain, which became, under his pen, Kaïn, then Qaïn, an appearance which would be sufficiently barbarous to our eyes."

does respect, by stressing the peculiar-sounding names of the heroes. Doing so, the poet reveals a value which he shares with other romantics, his "diversitarian" outlook (see Chapter 1); he also displays his wide-ranging scholarship.

Several of these factors are at work in the name of Leconte de Lisle's prophet. It takes a careful reader to even find the source of the name. "Thogorma," appears only four times in the entire Hebrew Bible (Gen. 10:3, Ezek. 27:14 & 38:6, and 1 Chron. 1:6), as the name of an ancient people, and possibly of the ancestor of this people.[4] The biblical texts do not provide us with much information about that obscure Thogorma. Leconte de Lisle apparently chooses the name for his prophet because it is the obscure and barbaric-sounding name of a barbarian people.

The French romantic versions of Cain which I have studied all appeared at about the same time. Although Leconte de Lisle did not publish Qaïn until September 10, 1869 (Pich, LdeL 376; Flottes 151), twenty years after Nerval's novelette appeared, his poem does belong to the same period. The earliest estimates date the first draft of Qaïn to 1845 (Vianey 136), which is four years before Nerval published his version of Cain. Pich feels that the Leconte de Lisle began his poem

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[4] Raymond Schendlin describes the use of obscure biblical names in post-biblical Hebrew literature (58) to display the poets' learning.

after 1846-47, when he read two works which influenced Qaïn, Ludovic de Cailleux's Le monde antédiluvien[5] and Byron's Heaven and Earth. In any case, Leconte de Lisle had been working on the poem for years before it was published: In a letter to Catulle Mendès, 16 October 1867, the poet mentioned that he had completed the work "dans les angoisses d'un enfantement douloureux"[6] (Pich, LdeL 379). When the poem was published, two years later, Eugène Vermesch wrote: "Leconte de Lisle vient de publier son poëme, Kaïn, dont les doctes et délicats attendaient depuis longtemps l'apparition"[7] (La parodie, Oct.-Dec. 1869, 197, cited in Pich, LdeL 379).

Nonetheless, in Pich's analysis, the poem could not have been

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[5] Eggli lists the themes of Qaïn which Leconte de Lisle took from Le monde antidéluvien:

> Ce poème contait en style biblique la fondation et l'histoire d'Hénochia, cité des géants descendants de Caïn, les luttes de ces géantes contre les enfants de Noé (sic), l'apparition à Noé du cavalier du Géhenne, l'incendie de la ville maudite, le déluge, la destruction du monde sous les regards de Dieu (Eggli 122).
>
> This poem contains, in biblical style, the founding and history of Henokhia, city of the giant descendants of Cain, the struggle of these giants against the children of Noah [sic], the appearance to Noah of the horseman of Hell, the burning of that cursed city, the Flood, the destruction of the world under the vision of God (my translation).

[6] "in the agonies of a long childbirth."

[7] "Leconte de Lisle has just published his poem, Kaïn, which those in the know have awaited since long ago" (my translation).

completed much before it was published, for, according to Pich, it shows the mark of the specific anti-theistic ideological climate of the late 1860s (Pich, LdeL 379), when revolutionaries called for a final split between revolution and religion (Pich, LdeL 479-81). This is not a convincing argument. Though anticlericism was popular in the 1860s, it was not invented then. Nothing in the poem is determined by conditions in the 1860s. It is characteristic of the unfolding of French history that early writers anticipate later political conflicts, so that the ideologies of the 1860s were present in the 1848 revolution, and even in the revolution of 1789.[8] In "Abel et Caïn," (written somewhat earlier than 1857), Baudelaire expresses a view of religion and revolution indistinguishable from Leconte de Lisle's view in Qaïn; indeed, every detail of Pich's observations about the religious and political stance of Leconte de Lisle's Qaïn applies with equal force to Baudelaire's poem. For that matter, Leconte de Lisle himself had already, in 1858, published "La fin de l'homme," a kind of prelude to Qaïn, in which he used a biblical theme, the Flood, to express revolt (Denommé 71). Qaïn, whether completed in the 1850s or the 1860s, appeared in the same political and religious context as

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[8] In a peculiar way, the French seemed, not so much condemned to repeat their history, as looking for opportunities to do so. Marx, contemplating this pattern, made his celebrated observation that history repeats itself, first as tragedy and then as farce (Marx 13); Schama calls it "history as mimesis" (Schama 5).

the other French romantic versions of the story.

Qaïn is a long poem, 495 lines divided into ninety-nine stanzas. Each stanza consists of five classical Alexandrine lines, in an unvarying rime-scheme of a b b a b. This pattern seems designed to "give a sweeping rhythm that is very musical, without becoming monotonous throughout its twenty-one pages" (Brown 115). If the verse form is regular to the point of monotony, the tone even more unified.[9] From the first lines, the poem displays "raucousness and harshness" (Denommé 74), establishing a mood of gigantic horror mixed with rage. Thereafter, the poem "is kept in a single key, and a unity of feeling is well sustained to the end" (Brown 115). Almost nothing is quiet or understated: Qaïn is "grandiose" (Brown 183) and emotionally overwrought.

The violent tone of the poem is sustained even at pauses in the action. The poet interrupts the flow of the poem with numerous descriptions of fearsome beasts, sometimes at rest (lines 27-29), but usually migrating (lines 81-84) or in violent action. Stallions crush palm trees as if they were reeds (line 218), dogs bite through the legs of camels (line

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[9] There are two exceptions, which I shall explore later in this chapter. In the description of the inhabitants of Hénokhia in the middle of the poem, and in the description of Thogorma's manuscript in last stanza, the poet achieves a quiet tone.

84). The sounds of these ferocious animals are vividly imagined: Jackals cry; wild asses snort (lines 46-47); monsters gnash their teeth (line 49); bears and lions growl (line 53) or roar (lines 143-44); all breathe with raspy noises (lines 64, 100). The animal cries are revealed to be cries of hatred (line 216). None of this description has direct connection with the plot of the poem; I believe that the function is to provide a violent background to the story, to create the image of a world, our own, in which all suffering and brutality are possible.

Leconte de Lisle employs, in many lines in Qaïn, a sort of parallelism very much like that used in the heightened language of the Hebrew Bible (Brown 74), which emphasizes the poem's dignity. It is instructive to compare the stately cadences of the voice of God challenging Job out of the whirlwind in a series of rhetorical questions (Job 38-40), with impassioned voice of Leconte de Lisle's Cain, posing rhetorical questions as a challenge to God (lines 301-315):

> Ai-je dit à l'argile inerte: Souffre et pleure!
> Auprès de la défense ai-je mis le désir,
> L'ardent attrait d'un bein impossible à sesir,
> Et le songe immortel dants le néant de l'heure?
> Ai-je dit de vouloir et punir d'obéir?[10] (lines

[10] Have I said to the inert clay: Suffer and cry!
Beside the prohibition, have I set the desire,
The ardent attraction to some good which can

306-310).

So Qaïn is intermittently biblical in syntactic structure as well as in subject matter. Roston has shown that the rediscovery of the principle of parallelism in Hebrew "verse"[11] is an important link in the rise of romanticism in England (Prophet and Poet 77); Avni argues that the early French Romantics are also deeply influenced by the Hebrew Bible, even to the extent of trying to echo its characteristic parallelism (99). Leconte de Lisle thus continues the pattern, identified by Avni and Roston, of modeling romantic verse on biblical parallelism.

The poetic frame of Qaïn is the vision of Thogorma, doomed prophet of a doomed people. The poem begins with a leisurely description of the ancient, exotic, brutal, oriental world in which Thogorma lives. His people, never named in the poem, have been conquered and exiled by the Assyrians. The ordinary folk are stupefied, and even the prophet sleeps to escape knowledge of his nation's destruction: But in the sleep of prophets come clairvoyant dreams. In this ferocious, gloomy

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never be satisfied,
And the immortal dream in the newborn of an hour?
Have I commanded to want and punished for obeying?
(translations from Qaïn are my own).

[11] I have put the word "verse" in quotation marks, in recognition of James Kugel's brilliant and convincing demonstration that the neat distinction between prose and verse does not apply in biblical Hebrew (The Idea of Biblical Poetry).

setting, Thogorma dreams[12] of the tomb of Cain, and of the its fierce occupant. Cain, as he appears in the dream, returns from the dead to protest against the fate that doomed him to crime, to the loss of Eden, and against the God who holds him responsible for what he could not change. A harsh angel, the Khéroub,[13] denounces Cain, and demands that Cain accept his miserable fate.

Thogorma envisions the mighty Cain in defeat, lying in the tomb and planning his ultimate assault against his eternal enemy. Some day, after God has inflicted horrible punishment on the world for disobedience, Cain will break out of his tomb. On that day, Cain will vanquish God; on that day, Cain will whip the priests, revive the cities destroyed in the Flood, reconstruct Eden, and on that day, God will die. God cannot survive the moment when adults deny him, and happy children do not even learn his name (lines 411-440).

God responds to Cain's challenge by bringing about a great flood (lines 445-486), in a futile attempt to destroy all who

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[12] By placing the action of this poem in a dream, the poet does distance himself from any claims about the historicity of these descriptions: Anything in this poem may be true within the dream, rather than in the world (Vianey 137).

[13] This is another of the poet's idiosyncratic transliterations: Khéroub is the Leconte de Lisle's version of "Cherub" (Hebrew: "Kruv"), which in French is usually rendered "Chérubin."

oppose him. At the close of his vision, Thogorma perceives, walking through the mists towards the Ark, not Noah, but Cain, the eternal enemy of God (lines 488-490).

The portrait of Cain in Thogorma's vision is the longest and most fully developed of the French romantic period. Cain is a giant (line 199), who stands like a cedar tree (line 317), with knotty arms (line 222) and a deep chest (line 205), his great physical stature and strength serving as metaphors for his moral stature. His arms are covered with thick hair (line 205), and his chest is covered with the long hair of his head and beard (line 206-7), signifying, I believe, his virility and vigor. His voice is "lente et grave et semblable au tonnerre"[14] (line 224), in keeping with his serious, thoughtful and masculine[15] character.

The elements of the traditional punishment of Cain are present in this poem, but transformed into virtues. Cain, in Thogorma's vision, accepts death, "car les temps de vivre sont passés"[16] (line 108), and so he "veut dormir, il est las,

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[14] "slow and heavy and similar to thunder."

[15] It is stereotypic and more than a little sexist to attribute greater moral purpose to men with thicker beards, bigger arms, or deeper voices. Blame the poet, then, for using this stereotype, and not the reader for noticing it.

[16] "for the times for living have passed"

c'est assez"[17] (line 200); he therefore orders his family to prepare his tomb. This is not the longing of the soul deprived of death, nor even the suicidal despair that we have seen in other romantic portraits of Cain, but rather an admirable dignity. Cain describes himself as "libre et seul"[18] (109), thus turning the traditional punishment of Cain, loneliness, into a boast. He uses a perfectly traditional epithet in calling himself "Le Rôdeur"[19] (line 200), but apparently he thinks of this title with some pride.

Sacred to the spirit of vengeance (line 192), Cain often describes himself as "vengeur" (lines 245, 382) and the poet concurs (line 441). Although the description parallels the poet's description of God, both for Leconte de Lisle and for his Cain, the vengeance wreaked by the powerful God is cowardly villainy, while Cain's vengeance against God is heroic.

In any rendition of the story, Cain would seem entitled to the epithet, "l'Homme violent" (line 221),[20] although typically in romantic versions the attempt is made to protect Cain from the charge (see above, discussion of Gessner, Byron, Nerval).

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[17] He "wants to sleep, he is tired, it is enough."

[18] "free and alone."

[19] "The Wanderer."

[20] "the violent Man."

Leconte de Lisle embraces the epithet for his hero, and so, apparently celebrates violence, at least under some circumstances.[21] Only Baudelaire, in his version of the descendants of Cain, goes as far towards accepting the legitimacy of violence.

Cain is "Celui qui ne sut ni fléchir ni prier!"[22] (line 185). Leconte de Lisle thus follows Byron and Gessner, for whom Cain's refusal to pray is central. Cain cannot pray, because he wants nothing from God, for he "n'as jamais cru, ni jamais espére"[23] (line 193). Furthermore, Cain explains his refusal to bow to God by stating that "La soif de la justice, ô Khéroub, me dévore"[24] (line 354). For these poets, there is an inherent conflict between justice and prayer. A world which includes unnecessary pain is unjust; asking concern from the ruler of such a world is merely begging for favoritism. On the contrary, rebelling against "Celui qui peut tout"[25] (line 342), though it seems perfectly hopeless, is still an act of justice. Thus, for Leconte de Lisle, Cain's refusal to

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[21] Pich sees this as an example of Leconte de Lisle's lifelong fascination with violence in all its forms, physical, psychological and verbal, as an agent of change in history (213).

[22] "The One who did not know how to bend nor pray!"

[23] "never believed, nor ever hoped"

[24] "The thirst for justice, O Cherub, consumes me."

[25] "One who can do anything"

pray becomes a potent endorsement of religious, and, by implication, political, revolt.

Cain predicts that even in death, lying on his tomb, his heart will be overwhelmed with the world's sleeplessness, thirst, hunger, and bitterness (lines 121-25). This is a compassionate Cain, sensitive to the pain of the world, an eternal witness to human suffering, anguished by the fate of individuals or by the absurd, unjust, gratuitously cruel nature of human history (Pich, LdeL 462). The portrait shows the influence of Byron, whose Cain is primarily motivated by his refusal to accept suffering as a condition of life. Leconte de Lisle's Cain, in protesting against history and the fall of civilizations, incarnates justice and morality (Pich, LdeL 464). By this means, the poet goes beyond merely defending Cain as a helpless victim; for Leconte de Lisle, Cain always seems justified. He is a model to emulate.

Cain also appears as a Byronic hero when he accuses God of having made him as he is, with "L'ardent attrait d'un bien impossible à saisir" (line 307),[26] a formulation very close to Byron's own description of the motivation of his Cain, who is driven by "rage and fury against the inadequacy of his state to his Conceptions" (letter to Murray, Nov. 3, 1821, LJ V, 470

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[26] "The ardent attraction of a good impossible to achieve."

BL&J 9:53-54). A person with high ideals can imagine a better world, and feel that he deserves to live there; disgusted by this imperfect world, the idealist is impelled to rebellion. That logic hinges on how imperfect the world is, or, as Byron's Cain repeatedly inquires, whether life is worth living. In Leconte de Lisle's poem, Cain expresses the same thought in one powerful pair of lines: "La vie assurément est bonne, je veux nâtre! / Que m'importait la vie au prix où tu la vends?"[27] (lines 314-15).

His dignity in response to the Khéroub establishes Cain as a sympathetic hero. The angry angel, in attempting to force Cain to bow to God, dismisses Cain as a "ver de terre"[28] (line 341) and as an "esclave"[29] (line 340), insulting Cain, and with him, all other human beings. Cain's insistence on standing thus becomes an act of defiance on behalf of the dignity of the whole human species. Note that this passage parallels the passages in which Byron's Lucifer insults Cain, and with him all other human beings, as a technique to force him to bow to Lucifer. Each poet achieves a literary effect by having a supernatural character use this cruel debating technique, thereby estranging readers from the supernatural beings.

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[27] "Life certainly is good, I would be born! / What good is life at the price at which you sell it?"

[28] "earthworm"

[29] "slave"

Byron, however, uses the technique to discredit Lucifer; Leconte de Lisle, to discredit the angel of God.

Leconte de Lisle's Cain delivers his speech from his own tomb, where he lies dead. He will not stay forever dead; he is only a "dormeur silencieux"[30] (line 191), who will someday rise again to redeem the human race from God. He is thus directly related to the Cain of Gnostic literature, and a parody of the messianic Cain of some Kabbalistic texts. Near the end of the poem, Thogorma envisions the beginnings of the great Flood, in which he sees Cain, the immortal enemy of God, walk through the mists toward the half-concealed Ark (lines 488-89); Noah, as it were, becomes a prefiguration of the second coming of Cain, who will lead his people past the Flood.

Leconte de Lisle, in some of the most powerful verses in this poem, has Cain explain why he should be seen as a victim of injustice, rather than its perpetrator. First, Cain is embittered because he was, at birth, already disinherited from Eden (line 272). He feels a longing for Eden (line 277), but the curse (line 279) and the glittering sword (line 275) insure that this longing will never be fulfilled. Second, he never knew a mother's love; his mother, bitter, hungry, and lonely, cried in horror as she gave birth to him (lines 281-85). Too melancholy to respond to his cries (line 293), or

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[30] "silent sleeper"

even to smile at him (line 295), unable to care for him, she abandoned him to the elements (line 292). His father also never forgave him for living (line 294). Raised by these psychologically damaged parents, Cain cannot be faulted for inheriting their terror (line 291) and anguish (line 296). Third, God created Cain to murder Abel. It is God, not Cain, who created both desire and prohibition (lines 307-310, see discussion in Pich, LdeL 470). "Il m'a précipité dans le crime tendu"[31] (line 365). Consequently, "L'inquité divine est ton seule assassin"[32] (line 240). Each of these exculpatory elements which support Cain's claim to innocence can be traced to Byron's Cain.

Because of these factors, Cain feels so free of responsibility for the crime that he can challenge the Khéroub: "Je souffre, qu'ai je fait?"[33] (line 358). An author might intend all sorts of irony by having Cain, of all characters, protest his innocence so ingenuously, but there is no evidence of irony here. As presented by Leconte de Lisle, Cain is the eternal victim (Pich, LdeL 464; Flottes 88).

For a victim, though, Cain seems unusually assertive. Flottes

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[31] "He threw me into the waiting crime."

[32] "Divine iniquity is your only assassin." Note that in Gessner's version of Cain the demon is fully responsible for the death of Abel.

[33] "I suffer, what have I done?"

suggests that the poet, having determined to make Cain a victim of circumstance, emphasizes Cain's vigorous virility, to avoid painting him as a weak and passive character (88).[34] Though vigorous, Cain was totally helpless to prevent the crime. Pich interprets Cain's assertiveness differently, for he sees Cain as not completely innocent. Cain is indeed the first criminal, and only partially a victim. According to Pich, Leconte de Lisle feels that no one can escape being both victim and executioner (Pich, LdeL 465).

Cain has all the characteristics of the romantic hero: He is a political and religious rebel, a sensitive dreamer, a visionary who must endure exile without losing his vision for the future, a powerful leader who nevertheless feels the suffering of ordinary mankind, a solitary and immortal soul. "Dans son Surhomme, il poursuit la conciliation de la force et de la tendresse" (Flottes 88).[35] Leconte de Lisle, in his aspiration for ultimate triumph, identifies himself with Cain, who feels himself destined to overcome all authority.

Leconte de Lisle portrays Cain in contrast with, and in conflict with, God. A reader understands Cain by understanding the God against whom Cain rebels, and whose

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[34] This end is also achieved by presenting Cain as a persistent champion of humanity against God.

[35] "In his superman, he pursues the conciliation of force and tenderness."

power is "more than matched by the gigantic strength" (Brown 121) of Cain. "One of the most powerful ways of presenting self-assertion is to show the individual overcoming the Deity. Prometheus . . . was defeated, while here Cain is successful" (Brown 119). Of course, in the biblical version, Cain is also defeated; Leconte de Lisle has to change the end of the story in order to make this his poem.

At the first mention of God in the poem, Leconte de Lisle characterizes him as the one "qui terrasse / Les forts et de leur chair nourrit l'aigle et le chein"[36] (lines 6-7). The cadence of the language is biblical, as, indeed, are the roles assigned to God: He has power over even the most mighty (Ex. 15:6; Ps. 29:5), and he provides food for all his creatures (Ps. 104).[37] In the Bible, however, God's power of destruction is typically celebrated as a profoundly moral power over the proud and the evil. Leconte de Lisle, by praising God's power as a morally indifferent power over the strong, implies that God is primarily a figure of meaningless destruction, who derives pleasure and satisfaction simply from killing. By juxtaposing that praise with the image of God as provider, the poet identifies God with the carnivorous beasts.

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[36] "who breaks down / The mighty and with their flesh supports the eagle and the dog."

[37] The passage also recalls the prophecy that dogs would eat the flesh of the wicked Queen Jezebel (1 Kings 9:36; 21:23; 2 Kings 9:10).

This is consistent with the poet's first epithet for God, "le Chasseur"[38] (line 6). Leconte de Lisle attributes all the horrors of war directly to God; he envisions God as pleased by the progress of armies, by agonized cries of victims, even, in a striking use of a biblical image (see Deut. 28:57 and Lam. 4:10), by the sight of starving mothers driven to eat their own children (lines 401-05).

As God's people suffer under the rule of the cruel Assyrians, he does not intervene; he remains "sombre" and "muet"[39] (line 20). Leconte de Lisle consistently portrays God as devoid of compassion. When he does intervene, it is not to defend, but to destroy: He is an "implacable Maître"[40] (line 311), the "tourmenteur du monde et des vivants"[41] (line 312). Motivated by vengeance, God is properly termed "le Jaloux"[42] (lines 170, 312). The Flood is an act of vengeance (line 170). Thus jealousy and the desire for vengeance, characteristic of Cain in the traditional reading, in Leconte de Lisle's poem are characteristics of God.

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[38] "the Hunter."

[39] "dark" and "silent."

[40] "implacable Master."

[41] "tormentor of the world and of the living"

[42] "the Jealous One"

The poet (or perhaps Thogorma) refers to Cain as "maudit"[43] (lines 171, 187), and "condamné"[44] (line 187) from the very womb of Eve. Thus, following the lead of some ancient sources (among them Targum Yonatan, the book of John, and various Gnostic texts, discussed in chapters 3 and 4 above), Leconte de Lisle asserts that God already hated Cain before he had done either good or evil. That ancient version of the origin of Cain's curse serves the interests of Leconte de Lisle's story, since it makes God arbitrary, and Cain an innocent victim.

Cain accuses God of lying, for God has described creation as good (line 407, corresponding to the repeated refrain of Gen. 1). As in Byron's play, the existence of evil and suffering in this world is taken to be a profound challenge to belief in a good God, demanding explanation. The only explanation for suffering which the Khéroub offers is that God wants it that way (line 368), thus reinforcing the portrait of God as arbitrary and evil. Near the end of Thogorma's vision, Cain calls for a revolt, like that in the Baudelaire poem, against the God of the Hebrews. Leconte de Lisle's call is the more trenchant. Ultimately, the God of the Hebrews will be overthrown, defeated in the one way that an omnipotent God can be defeated: People will stop believing in him. Now, in the

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[43] "cursed."

[44] "condemned"

time of this poem, Cain is unjustly punished for his fierce revolt. Ultimately, the perpetrator of that injustice, the God of the Hebrews, is also doomed to be overthrown.

Cain looks forward to the day when the creatures will mutiny and refuse to adore God (line 410), or even to listen to his voice (line 415). According to Cain, God will have no other way of responding than to bring about mass destruction (416-420), which will be futile. It will not prevent Cain from whipping the priests (line 421-425), restoring the cities drowned in the Flood (line 426) or covered by sand (line 427), breaking open the vault of heaven (line 431), and finally destroying God (lines 439-440). Thereafter, babies will not know anything about God, and will be happy (lines 429-430); apparently, for Leconte de Lisle's Cain, the recipe for human happiness is freedom from concern with this immoral God.

In Cain's portrait of a God who does not deserve to be worshipped, who rules arbitrarily over an evil universe, and who is destined to be destroyed, Leconte de Lisle expresses his own atheism and anti-theism. Byron is accused of using Cain in this way, although, on closer analysis, Byron's Cain, like Byron himself, is complex and conflicted. Leconte de Lisle, aware of his differences with Byron, at one point criticizes the English poet for lacking objective force, so that his Cain is merely an expression of his own personality

("Préface des Poëmes et Poésies" in Articles-prefaces discours 133). At another, he perceptively summarizes the English poet's religious sensibility: Compared with his hypocritical critics, the poet of Cain is "Le grand Byron, mille fois plus reliegieux et plus tourmenté de toutes les inquiètudes sublimes[45] ("Lamartine" in Articles-préfaces discours 168). Leconte de Lisle specifically lists Cain as one of Byron's "poëmes immortels"[46] (Articles-préfaces discours 168). Leconte de Lisle, like Nerval and Baudelaire, indeed uses Cain as a spokesperson for rebellion against God.

Cain, denying free-will, blames God for the murder. Leconte de Lisle may "agree with" his character that there is no free will, but would be illogical for the atheist poet to attribute human violence to "l'illusion suprême."[47] Like the other writers who describe the defeat or "death of God," Leconte de Lisle does not literally believe in a time-bound God; rather, he uses the idea as a metaphor for the thought that people

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[45] "The Great Byron, a thousand times more religious and more tormented by all the sublime disquiets"

[46] "immortal poems"

[47] "the supreme illusion." Leconte de Lisle uses the phrase in the last sentence of his "Discours de réception à l'Académie Française prononcé le 31 mars 1887" to summarize Hugo's belief in a benevolent God and in human progress (Articles-Préfaces Discours 218).

Pich explicates the phrase as the belief in reality or life (218 n.75); if he is correct, Leconte de Lisle's disbelief extends beyond God.

will realize that God never existed. Paradoxically, the metaphor derives much of its force from its logical weakness. The poet feels angry at God, and simultaneously (or consequently) denies God's existence. Yet he can express that anger only by writing as if God exists; without God, there is no focus for the poet's anger. Further, the metaphor enables the poet to express his hatred for the idea of a God, for he believes that the God of this painful world, if it had one, would have to be a cruel one; in the words of Proudhon, "c'est de prouver à l'humanité que Dieu, au cas qu'il y ait un Dieu, est son ennemi"[48] (Système des contradicitions économiques 387, quoted by Pich, LdeL 473). Thus, the poet blames God for the murder of Abel as a kind of rhetorical stratagem, while his character Cain "sincerely" blames God.

While the atheist poet cannot logically blame God for anything, he can invoke determinism to exculpate his Cain. Once again, the character blames God sincerely, while the poet blames God as a rhetorical stratagem, this time for the idea that not God, but some impersonal force, determines the actions of human beings. Since the notion of criminal responsibility rests on the idea of free-will, determinists of all varieties[49] easily explain away guilt, and people who wish

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[48] "it is to prove to man that God, in case there is a God, is his enemy."

[49] Primary examples are Marx, Skinner and Freud.

to defend violence are drawn towards determinist explanations. Oddly enough, determinists, having found an explanation which ought to forgive all crimes, usually still condemn some crimes; thus Leconte de Lisle has Cain defend himself on determinist grounds, but still condemn priests (lines 421ff). Superficially, it seems that determinists also violate their own logic by exhorting their readers to take some action or other, or at least to realize some truth. Though this may seem to contradict its determinist point-of-view, Qaïn is effective advocacy for political and religious revolution.

Leconte de Lisle brings the vision of Thogorma to a conclusion with Cain's triumphant prophecy of the overthrow of God. Denommé interprets that conclusion: "In this epic poem, de Lisle conveys his strongest expression of the inevitability of evil in a world imperfectly created" (74). If Cain is a symbol of evil, then indeed the triumph of his race is the inevitability of evil; But Cain is the symbol of justified rebellion against repressive politics and against confining theology, and therefore Thogorma's vision ends in optimism. Brown accurately conveys the spirit of the poet when he claims that the conclusion:

> lights the road along which modern civilization has strode towards progress by its solicitude for this world, which has meant forgetting of the other

> world. Eden, long placed in the past, is here set in the future. (Brown 118).[50]

The utopian optimism at the end does not redeem the horrors encountered along the way. According to this version of history, in the ancient past, Cain was punished by an implacable God, who then destroyed the great city in a meaningless Flood; more recently, the people of Thogorma were enslaved by the cruel Assyrians; but at some point in the future, the evil emperors and priests will be overthrown, though through horrifying cataclysms. The restoration of Eden will come only after terrors, boiling heavens, massive destruction, and the extermination of God (Pich, LdeL 480). Pich notices that, even though Cain predicts a return to Eden, the poem is filled with a superabundance of negative words and images (480). Leconte de Lisle is not inconsistent; while the poet's vision of the ultimate future is optimistic, his evaluation of history, and of current events, is horrific.

At the very last lines, the poet balances the poetic frame by returning to explain how the vision of Thogorma was written and preserved. Since the dejection of the slaves in ancient Assyria, as described in the opening lines of the poem,

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[50] Flottes gets this exactly backward, attempting to contrast the optimism of Hugo, who dreams of an ultimate paradise, with the pessimism of Leconte de Lisle, who nostalgically locates paradise at the dawn of history (Flottes 90).

parallels the mood of the modern French, and the modern poet, like the ancient prophet, has no confidence that people will understand his message, it is fitting that the tone of this last stanza is elegiac. The word-music echoes that tone wonderfully:

> Et l'homme s'éveilla du sommeil prophétique,
> Le long du grand Khobar où boit un peuple impur.
> Et ceci fut écrit, avec le roseau dur,
> Sur une peau d'onagre, en langue khaldaïque,
> Par le Voyant, captif des cavaliers d'Assur.[51]
> (lines 491-95).

This poem is clearly opposed to optimism about any reconciliation between human progress and God. On the contrary, the optimism in this poem lies in Leconte de Lisle's belief that we can reenter Eden, "non pas sans Dieu mais en lutte contre lui"[52] (Pich, LdeL 479).

It makes sense for sympathetic accounts of a murderer to avoid describing the murder, and so, in general, the romantic

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[51] And the man awakened from his prophetic sleep,
Along the great Khobar where an impure people drink.
And this was written, with pen of hard reed,
On the skin of a wild-ass, in the Chaldean language,
By the Seer, captive of the horsemen of Assyria.

[52] "not without God, but in struggle against him."

versions of the story of Cain do without that event. Leconte de Lisle's poem is one of the few do which provide details of murder. In this version, as in Nerval's, Cain recounts the murder in retrospect. On first awakening from his centuries in the tomb, Cain wonders whether he was awakened by Abel, whom he describes as the young man killed beneath a massive club at the ruins of an overturned altar (lines 226-230). That description suggests that the murder occurred much as Byron's play, where Cain, angry over the different reception accorded the two sacrifices, immediately overturns his brother's altar[53] and, using a convenient piece of wood, kills Abel. This is significantly different from the biblical account, in which the murder occurs some time after the sacrifices, and apparently at a different location; the Bible does not identify the murder weapon. Leconte de Lisle dares to describe the murder because he is willing to confront the possibility that violence in the cause of revolution may be completely warranted. His Cain therefore cannot be silent, or even entirely apologetic, about the murder.

Cain's first words, on awakening from his long stay in the tomb, are concerned with his brother. His remorse must be great, for he laments that "la chose irréparable est faite" (line 234); by implication, he would change the past, if he

[53] Or could the overturned altar in Leconte de Lisle's poem be Cain's, overturned by God as a sign of the rejection of Cain's sacrifice?

could. The poet, having built suspense for many lines before presenting Cain, puts great stress on those first words; Leconte de Lisle uses them to gain sympathy for the murderer by recording his regretful wish that the deed could be undone. Byron and Nerval use Cain's regret for the murder to generate sympathy for him in their versions of the story (Pich, LdeL 443 explicitly notes the parallel to Byron).

But Cain's presentation of his attitude towards Abel is deeply conflicted. A few lines later, in a surprising reversal, Cain claims that his revolt against God is also directed against those who, like Abel, submit to God (lines 374-375). If revolt is intentionally directed against Abel, then Cain should show no remorse for the murder. The simplest way to generate sympathy for Cain, under those circumstances, would be to vilify Abel. But instead, Leconte de Lisle's Cain praises Abel:

> O jeune homme, tes yeux, tels qu'un ciel sans nuage,
> Étaient calmes et doux, ton coeur était léger
> Comme l'agneau qui sort de l'enclos du berger,
> Et Celui qui te fit docile à l'esclavage
> Par ma main violente a voulu t'égorger![54] (lines

[54] O young man, your eyes, like a heaven without clouds
Were calm and sweet, your heart was light
Like a lamb which leaves the shepherd's enclosure,
And the one who made you docile enough for

366-370).

Abel's traits are all, apparently, attractive: He is light-hearted, sweet and innocent (line 366), and yet God arranges to have him murdered. Although Cain seems, in describing Abel's gentleness, to lament the murder, a few lines later Cain shows no remorse. These same docile traits fit Abel for slavery (line 369) to God, which Cain, the eternal spirit of liberty and enemy of God, can never tolerate. It was thus inevitable that Cain would kill Abel. Still in this remorseless mood, Cain predicts, or perhaps wishes, that Abel will never be resurrected (line 374), while Cain himself remains conscious after death (line 119), and expects to return to lead the revolt against God (lines 425ff). I believe that, according to Cain, Abel does not deserve to be resurrected because he is a limited personality, "faible enfant que j'aimais."[55] Only the spirit that breaks limits, the spirit of human revolt, can be eternal. Leconte de Lisle's romantic hero is unquenchable.

Having prepared the reader to accept the violent destruction of the obedient as a necessary part of a liberating revolution, Leconte de Lisle then backs down. In another reversal, he has Cain wish to see Abel reborn after the death

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slavery
By my violent hand has decided to bleed your throat.

[55] "weak child whom I loved."

of God; Abel, who until now has been sheltered in his heart: "Vera renaître Abel sur mon coeur abrité"[56] (line 438; see Flottes 90). In this mood, Cain once again earns sympathy for repudiating the murder, but at the cost of his own logical coherence.

The one hint of an impure motive for the murder of Abel comes when Cain refers to Abel as "O préféré d'Héva" (line 372).[57] Here Leconte de Lisle follows Byron and Nerval, rather than the Bible, in having Cain jealous of Abel for the unequal love of their mother.

Leconte de Lisle varies the biblical account of the blood of Abel in two significant ways. In Qaïn, the sun, rather than the Earth, drinks the blood of Abel; and the blood cries out, not from the Earth, but from the frantic heart of Cain (lines 189-90). I do not know what the change from Earth to Sun signifies. By removing the cry from the external world, Leconte de Lisle, like the other poets in this study, makes the punishment of Cain subjective, an attribute of Cain's psychology.

Leconte de Lisle's contribution to the long history of speculation about the sign of Cain occurs when, in his

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[56] "Abel, sheltered in my heart, will be reborn."

[57] "O favorite of Eve."

deathbed speech, Cain refers to "La signe que la haine a creusé sur mon front!"[58] (line 117). The poet, like the Bible, does not specify the appearance of the sign; he does place it on Cain's brow, in accordance with tradition. Leconte de Lisle provides an ambiguous genesis for the sign; the sign was carved by hatred, but the poet does not explain who did the hating. Perhaps God, in his hatred for Cain, dug some sign into Cain's brow; or perhaps Cain, by characteristically feeling hatred against God, wore his face into a mask of hatred, developing the sign in the way that most of us develop our own characteristic faces. The function of the sign in the Bible is apparently to protect Cain from human avengers, or, perhaps, from animals (see Chapter 2 above). In Leconte de Lisle's poem, this protection persists after Cain's death; the patriarch has no fear that animals would touch his corpse (lines 116-120).

"Ses yeux, hantés d'un songe unique, et grands overts, / Contempaient par delà l'horizon, d'âge en âge, / Les jours

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[58] "The sign which hatred dug into my brow."

Qaïn is not the only work in which Leconte de Lisle deals with the mark of Cain. "La passion" is one of a number of poems in which Leconte de Lisle, like Nerval before him, presents Jesus tenderly. In the first station, Leconte de Lisle refers to the Jews, the "peuple déicide" (deicide people) who condemn Jesus, as "marqué comme Caïn d'un stigmate éternel" (marked like Cain with an eternal stigmata) (cited in Piche LdL 292).

évanouis et le juene univers"[59] (lines 207-210). Cain's powers as a seer encompass all of time: On first arising, he looks to the distant past; at the close of the poem, he looks to the distant future. This great power of insight, which originates in a kind of dream, haunts the prophet. Leconte de Lisle thus portrays Cain as his own predecessor, a prototype of the romantic poet as triumphant, but damaged, visionary.

In a less grand way, Leconte de Lisle also identifies with Thogorma, the frightened prophet who dreams for a defeated and nearly hopeless people, who himself has little hope. At the end of the poem, the poet describes this poem as the very manuscript to which Thogorma committed his vision. Romantic writers, seeing themselves as analogous to prophets, tend to dramatize their own situations by creating fictional representations of themselves as literal prophets. When Thogorma, at the end of Qaïn transcribes his vision, he becomes a writer, and thus completes the circle (Pich, LdeL 460). Thogorma, hopeless in his own time, records his dream for the future, and so is a prototype of the romantic poet when he feels most dejected about his own time. In Thogorma and Cain, Leconte de Lisle presents two models for the poet.

This poem has a remarkably complex rhetorical structure: The

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[59] "His eyes, haunted by a unique dream, and completely open, / Contemplate beyond horizon, from age to age, / The vanished days and the young universe."

observer reports the vision of Thogorma, who reports his own vision of Cain, who reports his own prophetic dream. Having taken the trouble to create all those levels of reportage, the poet lets them all collapse: A reader cannot easily differentiate the defiant sentiments of Cain from the attitude of Thogorma, the observer, or the poet himself. That is especially interesting in this poem, since rhetorical complexity typically allows a poet to maintain emotional distance. Often each narrator has a distinct point-of-view, with the writer somewhat detached from all of them; rhetorical complexity can then be used to show the different reaction of the narrators to one story; here, it shows a recurrent reaction to a repeated history. Each narrator has a similar point-of-view, with which Leconte de Lisle passionately identifies. He uses rhetorical complexity to intensify, rather then to nuance, the theme.

Further, by showing narrators from different periods of history as they experience similar events, the poet expresses a cyclical view of history. Cain is defeated, the people of Thogorma are exiled, and, throughout history, injustice has prevailed; again and again, giants of the spirit have rebelled against injustice. This situation recurs, but not indefinitely: Eventually, the poet promises, humanity will escape from the cycles of injustice.

The rhetorical complexity of this poem is matched by its awesome temporal complexity. Thogorma, at some point in the far distant past, envisions Cain, awakened in his tomb; Cain recalls events from his own birth forward to the destruction of his descendants in the Flood, and further forward to the revolt against God in the end of days; the observer in the present time reads the testament of Thogorma from an ancient parchment. Sometimes, it is just not possible to keep the different times in order: The destructive flood at the end of the poem, for example, might perhaps be the ancient biblical Flood, rather than a recurrence of that event in the distant future. Vianey points out a parallel between this technique and biblical prophecy, which characteristically alternates past, present and future (Vianey 137).

In the context of retelling the story of Cain, the protest against divine justice is always related to the idea of the lost paradise (Pich, LdeL 466): Thus, the Cain's longing praises of Eden in Leconte de Lisle's poem (lines 271ff) echo those in Byron's play (Act I, lines 65ff). Eden recurs at the close of the poem, when Cain envisions the end of history as a kind of paradise (lines 437-38).

In his presentation of the Garden of Eden, Leconte de Lisle seizes both resolutions of a gap in the biblical narrative, even though they are mutually exclusive. The Bible does not

tell us where Cain and Abel are born. Since it concludes the story of the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden (Gen. 3:24) before recounting the birth of Cain and Abel (Gen. 4:1-2), the text implies that the brothers are born out of Eden, after the expulsion. It is possible, however, to understand that the narrative departs from chronological order for narrative reasons, to complete one story before beginning another; if so, the stories overlap chronologically, for the brothers are then born in Eden. Cain and Abel are not mentioned in the account of Eden, according to this understanding, simply because their presence is not relevant to the unfolding of that story. In Qaïn, Leconte de Lisle elaborates on these two different accounts of the birth of Cain. In lines 246-280, Cain recalls his childhood in Eden, and how the expulsion embittered him. In lines 281-295, Cain recalls that his birth came when his parents were still too involved in mourning for their lost Eden, and psychologically unprepared to raise a child. For all that the two explanations are mutually contradictory, they are literarily reinforcing. As in Byron's version of the story, the hero is shaped by his bitter nostalgia for paradise, and by the failures of his traumatized parents, twin disasters which were never his own fault. Ultimately, only God can be blamed. Although these disasters seem peculiar to Cain, they are, in slightly altered form, shared by many: those who experience the loss of childhood innocence as a kind of exile, and those who resent their

parents' limitations.

The race of Cain figures in every one of the French romantic versions of the story of Cain, and in none of the English versions.[60] The city of Henokhia is important in most of the French versions, and absent in the English. Leconte de Lisle devotes an extended section early in his poem to a description of the serene children of Cain, and of their monstrous city.

The city, as it appears in Thogorma's dream, is an awful, forbidding fortress (lines 56-60). The poet magnifies its emotional significance by indirect descriptions: At the first vision of the city, the prophet's hair stands on end (lines 101-05; line 134-35); the very animals curse this city, each in its own language (lines 161-64). The prophet's epithet for the city is "géhenne"[61] (line 59). Later, the city is cursed as a "monceau d'orgueil"[62] (line 168). This is the city of Cain, the "Vagabond révolté"[63] (line 169). Clearly, it is the same monstrous city as described by Nerval and Hugo.[64]

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[60] The French poets have an English source for this theme in Byron's Heaven and Hell.

[61] Leconte de Lisle's epithet for the city, "géhenne" (line 59), matches Hugo's description of the city as a city of Hell (line 52).

[62] "a heap of pride."

[63] "the rebellious Wanderer"

[64] Brown comments that "Leconte de Lisle's vision of the City and the Race . . . reminds one of Hugo at his best"

The poet interweaves an ancient genealogy for the descendants of Cain into his account of the people of the great city. The city was built by superhuman giants, descendants of the angels who took whomever they wanted from among the beautiful daughters of men (lines 136-39, 166; see Gen. 6:2, according to 1 Enoch). If the giants came from angels on one side, they must come from Cain on the other (line 169), so these "daughters of men" must descended from Cain.[65]

In Leconte de Lisle's version, the great city is doomed to drown in Noah's Flood. Thogorma envisions a horseman (the keeper of the gate of Hell) who rides up to the city, strikes its walls, and, cursing the city, announces its downfall (lines 167ff). Contemplating the fate of his descendants and of their city, Cain is anguished. In effect, Leconte de Lisle agonizes over the nature of history, which involves change, and inevitably brings about the fall of great institutions (Pich, LdeL 462-63).

Critics disagree about the significance to Leconte de Lisle of

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(Brown 115-16). That gives the impression that there is merely a general stylistic connection between this passage and various passages in Hugo. Actually, Hugo does describe the city and race in "La conscience," and Leconte de Lisle expands on that description.

[65] This opinion traces back to Pirkei Rabbi Eliezer, Bereshit chapter 22, p.49; see discussion in Mellinkoff "Cain's Monstrous Progeny" 1:148; see chapter 3 above; earlier poetic versions of the story occur in Lamartine's Les visions, discussed in Avni 126-7, and in Byron's Heaven and Earth.

the civilization of the inhabitants of the city of Henokhia. According to Denommé, the inhabitants of the city are the primitive pagans who "have succeeded in dominating nature and who have learned to live in harmony with one another under the benevolent guidance of the dignified elders" (Denommé 72); by contrast, the people of God are "pictured as living in fear and in dismal submission to a capricious and vengeful God" (Dennomé 72). Pich does not see anything harmonious or benevolent in the inhabitants of the city. He accepts the horseman's description of them as violent people, "[q]ui ne connus jamais la peur ni le remords"[66] (line 133; see Pich, LdeL 462); by contrast, Cain himself remains sensitive to human pain (Pich, LdeL 462). According to Flottes, their main trait is virility[67] and a kind of ancient "rudesse"[68] (Flottes 88, 90); by contrast, civilized man has acquired a certain timidity over the centuries. Leconte de Lisle theorized that these ancestors must have been so virile as to be "inhumain comme un fauve"[69] (Flottes 88). Whichever virtues of these people appeal to the poet, clearly he loves them. He devotes the only quiet moments in the midst of his poem to describing

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[66] "Who never knew fear or remorse" (my translation).

[67] Flottes chooses the word carefully, yet perhaps he needs another which has not yet been invented, for the women of Henokhia also exhibit a kind of sexually-charged vigor and dignity, the feminine equivalent of virility.

[68] "rough vigor."

[69] "Inhuman as a wild beast."

their powerful, self-assured women (lines 66-76) and their confident, proud elders (lines 89-95). He laments their destruction at the hands of God. In any interpretation, the poet has more sympathy for the inhabitants of the city than for the God who destroys them.

As in Hugo's poem, in Leconte de Lisle's Qaïn the descendants of Cain build his tomb during his lifetime and at his command (lines 108ff). Leconte de Lisle offers a double explanation for Cain's entering his resting place in the city. According to one explanation, Cain chose his tomb; he commissioned this city as his own sepulchre (lines 104-5; see discussion in Pich, LdeL 463), where he lies "selon sa volonté (line 130).[70] According to the other, God walled Cain into this city as punishment for his crime (line 195). Thus Cain has the dignity of accepting his fate willingly, even though it is an unjust one, imposed upon him by an unjust God.

The figure of Cain is a perfect vehicle for many of the central themes of Leconte de Lisle. Leconte de Lisle holds a "scientific," that is to say, anthropological, view of the rise and fall of religions. People come to believe in a religious system at a time when that belief fits their circumstances and world view. (Leconte de Lisle told the Académie Française that the religions of all peoples "toutes

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[70] "According to his will"

ont été vraies à leur heure, puisqu'elles étaient les formes idéales de ses rêves de ses espèrances.")[71] Eventually, as circumstances change, as nations rise and fall, the old religious system becomes less and less appropriate. Eventually, the religious system dies out, and is replaced by a new religious system that accords with the new circumstances. This anthropological view would seem to dictate a detachment from religious issues, but Leconte de Lisle had strong religious views. Ancient paganism was a much more creative force than monotheism, which invariably has a horrible impact on the human spirit:

> En général, tout ce qui constitue l'art, la morale et la science, était mort avec le Polythéisme. Tout a revécu à sa renaissance. C'est alors seulement que l'idée de la beauté reparaît dans l'intelligence et l'idée du droit dans l'ordre politique . . . Ce n'est pas que je veuille insister ici sur la valeur morale du Polythéisme dans l'ordre social et religeux. L'étude de cette théogonie, l'examen des faits historiques et des institutions, l'analyse sérieuse des

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[71] Discours de réception à l'Académie Française prononcé le 31 mars 1887" sur Victor Hugo, Articles-Préfaces Discours 209; see Pich's notes ad loc, and discussion in Estève 83.

"are all true in their hour, because all are the ideal forms of the dreams of their hopes."

> moeurs, suffisent à la démonstration d'une vérité admise par tout esprit libre d'idées reçues sans contrôle et de préventions aveugles. L'art antique, lui seul, en est une révélation permanente.[72] (Leconte de Lisle, "Préface des Poèmes et poésies" 227-28; Articles-prefaces discours 128-29).

Cain, rebelling against the unjust God of the Hebrews, thus expresses Leconte de Lisle's own rebellion against the very idea of a single God. Sympathy with Cain is thus a powerful literary technique for expressing Leconte de Lisle's theology in as offensive a way as possible.[73]

Roston observes that all biblical dramas involve "some degree

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[72] In general all that which constitutes art, morality and science came to an end with the death of Polytheism. Everything came back to life in its renascence, for it is only during that era that the idea of beauty reintroduces itself in the intelligence and the idea of right in politics. . . . It is not that I wish to insist at this juncture on the moral value of Polytheism in the social and religious realms. The study of this theogony, the examination of historical facts and institutions, the careful analysis of customs are sufficient evidence of a truth that can be admitted by any mind that is free of settled ideas and of uncontrolled prejudices. The art of Antiquity, alone, constitutes a revelation of such truth (translation Denommé 34).

[73] "La mode d'expression de Leconte de Lisle n'est pas plus inoffensif que les idées exprimées" (Pich, LdeL 477).

of personal identification, an attempt to visualize the scriptural scene from within" (Biblical Drama 14). With some skepticism, I have considered how events or themes in the story of Cain parallel those in each author's own life. The obvious parallel in the life of Leconte de Lisle is exile: The poet was born on Réunion (then called Bourbon), a tropical island in the Indian Ocean (Dornis 99). It was a paradise. In a letter to Jean Dornis (Nov. 3, 1893), Leconte de Lisle refers to his "hasard heureux d'être né dans un pays merveilleusement beau et à moité sauvage, riche de végétations étranges, sous un ciel éblouissant"[74] (Dornis 3). But he did not stay there: His parents sent him to France, to complete his education under the supervision of an uncle (Dornis 100).

As the young man matured, he came to appreciate that his native paradise was based on the terrible injustice of slavery. His guardian uncle wrote back to the family, in shock, "Il affiche, dans ses opinions politiques, une exagération blâmable: Charles est républican!" (Dornis 103). For the young man had denounced slavery. In doing so, Leconte de Lisle made an irreparable break with his family and his native land; "[l]a fortune de presque tous les créoles avex lesquels sa famille était en relation, le revenu même de son

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[74] "good fortune of being born in a land that is marvelously beautiful and half wild, rich in strange vegetation, beneath a dazzling sky" (translation Brown 87).

père, avaient pour base, la culture du sol par des esclaves"[75] (Dornis 106-7). Unlike Adam and Eve, Leconte de Lisle could physically return to his paradise, but, by his own act, he had guaranteed that he would never be at home there again; like Cain, he had become a stranger. Whereas a just power exiles the biblical figures for some sin which they committed, a slave-holding society exiled the poet for noticing that it was unjust.

Flottes points out that the stages of the poet's life parallel those of the life of Cain (Flottes 90). The observation can go further: The moral significance of the characters in the in Qaïn match the moral significance of the actors in the poet's life. Cain, like the poet, has revealed the moral bankruptcy of his native world. Though the price is sudden expulsion to a hard and deceiving world, that price must be paid; reconciliation with the Khéroub, for Cain, or with the poet's father, for Leconte de Lisle, would have meant betraying his own moral perspective.

> Ce destin d'obéisance que le Khéroub assigne aux enfants d'Adam, le père du poète n'avait cessé de proposer à son fils. La révolte de Qaïn devant le

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[75] "The fortune of nearly all the creoles with whom his family was connected, even his own father's income, was at base, cultivation of the soil by slaves."

> Khéroub, c'est la révolte du fils contre le père.[76] (Flottes 90).

So Flottes concludes that "Ainsi, en créant le mythe de Qaïn, Leconte de Lisle nous parle encore de lui-même"[77] (Flottes 90).

Leconte de Lisle's version of Cain incorporates material from many sources. The poet was avidly interested in the world's mythologies, in esoteric doctrines, and in contemporary literature. His Qaïn is replete with material from his wide research. The poet reworks esoteric doctrines, particularly the teachings of ancient Gnosticism, in constructing his version of Cain. He also gathers details from the earlier works of the romantic rehabilitation of Cain, and incorporates them into his poem (Pich, LdeL 403 n.16). He melds these sources with contemporary radical thought, thus gaining a contemporary perspective on ancient cataclysms and using the ancient events to illustrate modern beliefs (Flottes 88).

Leconte de Lisle displays his admiration for the works of Byron, including Byron's Cain, in an essay "Les femmes de

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[76] This destiny of obedience, which the Cherub assigns to the children of Adam, the father of the poet never ceased to propound to his son. The revolt of Cain before the Cherub was the revolt of the son against the father.

[77] "Thus, in creating the myth of Cain, Leconte de Lisle is always speaking to us of himself."

Byron," published in 1846 (Articles-préfaces discours 73-83). He demonstrates that admiration in Qaïn, a work which is deeply indebted to Byron's version of the story. Leconte de Lisle considers Byron's Cain to be, like Milton's Satan, "la magnifique symbole de l'orgueil vaincu mais non humilité"[78] ("Preface des Poëmes et poésies" in Articles-prefaces discours 133). Byron's Cain provides Leconte de Lisle with the idea of using a portrait of the first murderer to express dissatisfaction with divine justice (Flottes 86). Cain's refusal to bow or to pray, his questions and curses (Estève 75), the circumstances of the murder and the role of the angel, all show the influence of Byron. Significantly, Leconte de Lisle follows the account of the murder in Byron's Cain, even where Byron departs from the biblical account. Pich identifies another continuity between the two works: "De telles invectives contre Dieu, ne sont pas rares au xix^{e} siècle . . . et leur modèle est souvent à rechercher chez Byron"[79] (Pich, LdeL 473 n.93). Lucifer's invective against God, repeated through the first two acts of Byron's play, becomes the main theme of the French poem. One of the reasons which Leconte de Lisle gave for his long refusal to publish Qaïn was his fear that the work was too derivative of Byron

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[78] "the magnificent symbol of pride vanquished but not humiliated."

[79] "Such invective against God is not rare in the nineteenth century . . . and the model is often traced back to Byron."

(Estève 75).

Flottes inaccurately sees one significant difference between the two works: "Toutefois, l'ironie et la caricature, si abondantes chez Byron, répugnent à Leconte de Lisle"[80] (Flottes 86). Irony and caricature, are, however, characteristics are typical of Byron's style in Don Juan rather than Cain; Byron's play is, like Leconte de Lisle's poem, humorless and sincere.

The influence of Nerval is everywhere in this poem. In both versions of Cain, he, after centuries in his tomb, tells the story of the first murder. Both works look forward to the restoration of an ancient cities covered with sand (line 427). Both works go beyond their Gnostic sources, for in both (as in Baudelaire's poem) the forces of Cain, now in defeat, will rise at some future point and overthrow God.

Like Victor Hugo, Leconte de Lisle included his poem on the theme of Cain in a collection depicting the sweep of human history from its most ancient beginnings. Leconte de Lisle's concern with depicting primitive society may account for a minor borrowing from Hugo: The descendants of Cain wear clothing of skin (line 90).

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[80] "However, irony and caricature, so abundant in Byron's work, were repugnant to Leconte de Leconte de Lisle."

A far more significant influence of Hugo's poem is apparent at two other points, where Leconte de Lisle appropriates the central image of "La conscience," the eye in heaven which symbolizes the adversarial relationship between Cain and God (Qaïn lines 41ff). Leconte de Lisle transforms Hugo's image, using it against Hugo's theology. Where Hugo maintains that a sinner, because he is estranged from God and conscience, must perceive the neutral eye as threatening, Leconte de Lisle responds that the eye of God is in fact crossed and bloodshot; the discomfort in the relationship between Cain and God must be traced to the deformity and illness of God. The image recurs at the end of Qaïn, when the sun will reemerge, after the defeat of God, "comme un oeil cave et vide / Qui, sans voir, regardait les espaces béants"[81] (lines 481-2); after the death of God, the eye of heaven will be blind.

Flottes' observation about Leconte de Lisle's presentation of Hénokhia could as well apply to the other borrowings in this poem: "mais il lui imprime une grandeur tragique et une intensité d'angoisse qui sont bien l'apport de son génie"[82] (Flottes 88).

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[81] "like an eye hollow and empty / Which, without seeing, looks at the yawning spaces"

[82] "but he imprints it [Henokhia] with a tragic grandeur and an intensity of anguish which are indeed the contribution of his own genius."

When, after long hesitation, Leconte de Lisle finally published his veiled attack on religion in Qaïn, he then made the point explicit. A short time later, he published an attack on Christianity in all its forms, Histoire populaire du Christianisme (Pich, LdeL 521). The poet uses the same violent tone in these works as in Qaïn (Pich, LdeL 490-92):

> Le Christianisme . . . n'a jamais exercé qu'un influence déplorable sur les intelligences et sur les moeurs. Il condamne la pensée, il anéantit la raison, il a perpétuellement nié et combattu toutes les vérités successivement acquises par la science. Il est inintelligible dans ses dogmas, arbitraire, variable, indefférent en morale[83] (Histoire 140, cited in Pich, LdeL 491-92).

It is fitting to conclude this study with Leconte de Lisle's Qaïn, as this is the most sustained literary presentation of the rehabilitated Cain since Byron's play began the trend. Leconte de Lisle uses every aspect of the tale from earlier versions to make it into a powerful revolutionary statement. Qaïn is the culmination of the French versions, the most thorough presentation of a purely heroic Cain, opposed to all

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[83] Christianity has always only exercised a deplorable influence on intelligence and morals. It has condemned thought, it has annihilated reason, it has perpetually denied and fought against all the truths successively acquired by science. It is unintelligible in its dogmas, arbitrary, variable, indifferent in its morality.

political, economic, and religious powers. In Leconte de Lisle's poem, Cain commands more than sympathy: He is a champion to be respected and emulated, the eternal spirit of rebellion against God and king.

Chapter Thirteen: The Political Symbolism of Cain: Cain as the Defeated French Revolutionary

Retelling the myth of Cain is a political act: It has "strong political implications and significance which have too long been underemphasized, perhaps because of the mythic language and imagery in which they are expressed" (Lokke 12-13).[1] Cain, who defies God and kills his own brother, brings to mind other fearless rebels against religious and political authority, especially the rebels of the French revolution. Each of the works in this study uses sympathy with Cain to express dissatisfaction with existing religious, political or economic order. Thus, each work is built on a bedrock of identification with the causes of revolution. Because the story ends with Cain outcast and wandering, the story is most appropriate at a moment when the revolution has been defeated. In this chapter, I shall demonstrate that the view of the French revolution implied in each of these seven versions of Cain correlates with the author's view of the French Revolution as expressed in more explicitly political works of

[1] Lokke makes this observation about Nerval's fantastic writings, but it can be applied to the other versions of Cain as well.

the same period. It is my contention that each of these versions of Cain is an attempt to make sense of a world in which the great revolution in France has been defeated.

Three characteristics of Cain make him a suitable symbol for the French revolution: his audacity, violence and failure. The French revolution was audacious. A true revolution, no mere rebellion, its goal was to change not the rulers, but the very basis of government. The revolution, according to the boasts of its leaders and the alarms of its opponents, would throw out a government based on tradition to replace it with one based entirely on reason. The calendar of the new state would have new names for the months, and new holidays, dedicated to reason; one that would begin with the date of the revolution (Schama 771-78, Hibert 231). The revolution would discard not only this monarch, but the principle of monarchy. To the extent that the ancient regime was mandated by God and supported by the Church, the revolution would dethrone God (Hibert 230-233). Priests, aristocrats and kings claimed to be anointed by God, but they could be killed.[2] It was an audacious plan. Cain could be a symbol of such audacity, for he refused to accede to God's choice of his brother's sacrifice, killed the brother preferred by God, and challenged God with the question: "Am I my brother's keeper?"

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[2] For the organized killing of priests, Schama 633-34; for the killing of the king, Schama 789.

The French revolution was violent. After destroying the aristocrats, the revolutionaries dragged each other to the guillotine.[3] Indeed, the first fratricide is a potent symbol for that revolution which began under the banner of fraternity, and ended devouring its own.[4]

The French revolution failed twice. Its first failure was internal: The revolutionary government, striving for justice and reason, indulged in bloodshed, corruption and oppression. Cain also experiences "[l]a contradiction ... dans la conduite du héros entre sa soif de justice et l'injustice dont il se

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[3] Hibert 194-217, 235-40; Schama 790-820, 839-47.

[4] "Devouring its own," I wrote, wanting a stronger word than "fratricide" or even "murder," unaware that the revolting image had been used long ago to depict the revolution, by both friends and enemies of the revolution. Joan Dayan referred me to Ronald Paulson's discussion of this image (Representations of Revolution 361-373):

Pierre Verniaud in 1793 warned that "la révolution, comme Saturne, dévorant successivement tous sen enfants," ("the revolution would devour all of its children successively") to which Louis de Saint-Just promptly replied that the revolution would devour, not itself, "but only its enemies" (Paulson 24). Saint-Just's version of the image recurs in a Jacobin cartoon, "Le peuple mangeur de rois" (363-367), in which the people, symbolized by Hercules, literally eat the king, and so "become the national incarnation of his sovreignty" (367). Verniaud's version, perhaps, recurs in Francisco Goya's Saturn (painted 1820-23), in which the titan voraciously devours one of his own sons (Paulson 361-373):

> But whether the figure is supposed to be the heroic Spanish spirit, the Herculean sans-culotte, Napoleon's ravaging army, the spirit of the revolution, or the ravaging excesses of the Spanish mob is absolutely unclear. Most likely it is all of these. (Paulson 370-71).

rend coupable à l'égard d'Abel" (Pich, LdeL 476).[5] The second failure was external: The monarchy returned; Napoleon was proclaimed emperor in 1807 (Hibbert 304). Those who believed that the revolution would change history once and for all were bitterly disappointed. France was no longer the home of liberty, fraternity and equality; these great ideals had no home. Cain, the defeated wanderer, cast out from the presence of God, could be a symbol of the failed revolutionary.

Few people in the nineteenth century were prepared to see the great revolution in France as a mere political event. It was rather described as the fulfillment of an apocalyptic prophecy (Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism 63). Secular revolutionaries and religious apocalyptics follow the same pattern of thought today: They expect some cataclysmic effort, such as the French revolution, to usher in an age of universal bliss. And because the attempt fails, when, inevitably, the age of universal bliss does not begin on schedule, apocalyptic thinkers have a recurrent need to find a response to failure.

As long as the champions of the revolution can continue to insist that the age of universal bliss is upon us, there is no need for a stance toward failure. Forced to retreat, some

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[5] "the contradiction. . . between his thirst for justice and the injustice which he commits against his brother Abel."

revolutionists claim that the revolution is still going on, not yet a success: There will be a "second coming." Others admit failure, claiming that the revolution would have succeeded, but for the treachery of the enemy. Some abandon their hope in apocalyptic solutions to the world's problems, becoming liberal former-revolutionists, who now assert that progress can occur only gradually. Some deny that progress can occur at all, now shifting their hope from political to personal salvation. Some abandon hope entirely. In these seven versions of Cain, we shall see each of these strategies for facing the failure of the revolution.

The French revolution occurred during the adult lives of Blake and Coleridge. M. H. Abrams observes

> And at the formative period of their lives, major Romantic poets--including . . . Blake . . . [and] Coleridge--shared this hope in the French revolution as the portent of universal felicity. . . . Though these writers soon lost confidence in a millennium brought about by means of violent revolution, they did not abandon the form of their earlier vision. In many important philosophers and poets, Romantic thinking and imagination remained apocalyptic thinking and imagination, though with varied changes in explicit content (Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism 64-65).

Both Blake and Coleridge initially saw the French revolution as the fulfillment of apocalyptic passages in the Bible, such as those in the books of Zachariah (see, for example, chapter 13) and Revelation.

The 1820s, when the English poets published their versions of Cain, was long enough after the French revolution that each had begun to withdraw from literal hope in the millennium brought about by that cataclysm. By that time, the political climate in England had become extremely hostile to the revolution. Albert Hancock describes the 1820s in England as the time

> . . . after the failure of the Revolution, after the Terror, and the selfish ambitions of Napoleon; when the reactionary policy of Metternich seemed to have established the hated monarchy more securely than ever. The ardent patriots of humanity were driven to the fastnesses of secrecy; the tepid ones had joined the conservatives, and for the sake of peace had acknowledged the king; the old order had not changed nor yielded place to new, nor had God, it seemed, fulfilled himself in many ways (Hancock 108).[6]

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[6] Hancock's description of the options faced, in that climate, by a "patriot of humanity" seems somewhat narrow, perhaps revealing Hancock's own political stance. Coleridge, for example, was one of those who "joined the conservatives," at least in the most obvious ways, and yet the description

Blake was one of the disappointed. It is possible to trace the development of Blake's political thought in his literary works, and so to locate the political context of his version of Cain.

> The poems of revolution which William Blake wrote in the early 1790s expressed the millennial interpretation of the great events in America and France which the author shared with the religious radicals of his day, as well as with his fellow poets, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey. These poems announce the impending dawn when 'The happy earth' will 'sing in its course, / The mild peaceable nations be opened to heav'n, and men walk with their fathers in bliss'[7] (Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism 339).

Contemplating the political future, Blake echoes the messianic imagery of Isaiah 65:25: "For Empire is no more, and now the Lion & Wolf shall cease" (America plate 6, line 15 Complete Poetry and Prose 53).

Blake could not sustain his messianic expectation indefinitely; rather than rejecting the expectation, he transformed it. Abrams describes the poet's development:

"tepid" seems inappropriate for him.

[7] Blake, The French Revolution lines 236-37 (The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake 296).

> Blake wrote A Song of Liberty at the height of his millennial expectation from the French Revolution; but after he had lost this faith, he incorporated the events of the revolution and its aftermath of wars, reaction, and tyranny into the mythical forms and actions of his Prophetic Books. (Natural Supernaturalism 363-64).

By 1810, when he wrote A Vision of the Last Judgment, Blake had rejected the hope for a political solution to the problems of humanity:

> Many Persons such as Paine. . . say we will not Converse concerning Good & Evil we will live in Paradise & Liberty You may do so in Spirit but not in the <Mortal> Body as you pretend till after the Last Judgment . . . while we are in world of Morality we Must Suffer (Complete Poetry and Prose 564).[8]

Blake maintained his respect for the revolutionaries, but the French revolution had failed to achieve universal human political redemption, and Blake's response was to place his hope in spiritual redemption of the individual.

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[8] Compare with Luke 17:21: "for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you." This passage, as Abrams points out (Natural Supernaturalism 47), was "widely interpreted to mean that the coming universal kingdom may achieve an immediate realization in the spirit of each believer."

The Ghost of Abel, dedicated to Byron in 1822, is Blake's last published text. Its political aspect is consistent with the development of Blake's thought about the French revolution. Blake does not identify Cain himself as a revolutionary in The Ghost of Abel; but the work is a sequel and response to Byron's Cain, in which that identification is clearly made. Blake, in an allusion in the dedication, identifies the government of England with Jezebel and Ahab; there is no doubt that he would characterize the French monarchy at least as harshly. He has no quarrel with the revolutionary observation that the present regime is corrupt and worthy of overthrow, but parts company with the revolutionary claim that overthrowing the regime would lead to something better.

Though Blake, in The Ghost of Abel, has withdrawn from specific and literal hopes in the messianic significance of the French revolution, and his political radicalism has been tempered by his disappointment, he does not yield to the reactionary political climate. The Ghost of Abel hinges on God's call to Adam and Eve to forgive Cain; forgiveness heals the mournful soul; vengeance is a temptation from Satan.[9] While the revolutionary is to be forgiven for murder, Blake condemns monarchs and their supporters. By strict logic, universal forgiveness ought to apply to them as well, but

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[9] Satan and the heathen gods in The Ghost of Abel swear "Vengeance for Sin;" in contrast the angels praise the true God for "the Forgiveness of Sins."

Blake shows little enthusiasm for forgiving them. In A Vision of the Last Judgment, he explains his harsh attitude towards political powers, while providing an explanation for why the revolutions must fail:

> . . . there will always be as many Hypocrites born as Honest Men & They will always have superior Power in Mortal Things You cannot have Liberty in this World without <what you call> Moral Virtue & You cannot have Moral Virtue without the Slavery of that half of the Human Race who hate <what you call> Moral Virtue. (A Vision of the Last Judgment, Complete Poetry and Prose 564).

The way to freedom is honest forgiveness beyond good and evil, but those individuals who can be honest will not rule, for hypocrites will seize power. The rulers of this world will be, until the Last Judgment, self righteous, unforgiving people, who punish acts of mercy, "not thro Envy or Hatred or Malice but thro Self Righteousness that thinks it does God service which God is Satan" (A Vision of the Last Judgment, Complete Poetry and Prose 565). With that passage as a key, we see that Blake does refer to the enemies of the revoltion at the end of The Ghost of Abel. They are Satan.

Just as an individual can reject hypocrisy, so can the great mass of humanity, and that is exactly Blake's definition of the Last Judgment: "Error or Creation will be Burned up and

then & not till then Truth or Eternity will appear It is Burnt up the Moment Men cease to Behold it" (A Vision of the Last Judgment, Complete Poetry and Prose 565). Geoffrey Hartman identifies this statement as Blake's eventual political creed: Giving up on the attempt to produce a terrestrial paradise by direct political action, he now attempts to produce it by teaching art and vision to reform first the individual, and then later society (560, note 1).

The trajectory of Coleridge's attitude towards the French revolution parallels that of Blake. Throughout his career, Coleridge returned to the revolution as a theme in his literary works, providing a remarkably detailed portrait of the development of his thought. Coleridge's earliest poem about the revolution is "The Destruction of the Bastille," (Coleridge: Poetical Works 10-11) probably written in 1789 when the Bastille fell.[10] Coleridge was sixteen. In what remains of this ode, the young poet lauds the impending end of tyranny, and calls on all other countries to rise in freedom.

In "Religious Musings," in 1794, Coleridge sees a vision of human history moving towards a paradisial "blest future" (Coleridge: Poetical Works 108-125). In his prose argument, Coleridge specifies the French revolution as part of the

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[10] The poem was first published in 1834, but Ernest Hartley Coleridge assigns the writing to "?1789."

circumstance that must lead to this paradise, as a fulfillment of messianic prophecies of the Bible: "The French Revolution. Millennium. Universal Redemption" (108 n.1). His initial reaction to the French revolution, like Blake's, was to rejoice in the immanent realization of biblical prophecy.

In September 1794, Coleridge wrote "To a Young Lady: With a Poem on the French Revolution" (Poetical Works 64-66). In it, he contrasts his original response to the French revolution "Red from the Tyrant's wound I shook the lance, / And strode in joy the reeking plains of France!" with his attitude on further reflection: "Fallen is the oppressor, friendless, ghastly, low, / And my heart aches, though Mercy struck the blow" (lines 25-28). He discovers that he abhors violence even in just causes. At the end of the poem, he turns his attention away from political cataclysms and towards quiet, personal pleasures.

Four years later, the year to which that Coleridge assigned "The Wanderings of Cain," he wrote two literary works directly evaluating the French revolution. He makes the political allegory of "Recantation: Illustrated in the Story of the Mad Ox," explicit in the subtitle: "The following amusing Tale gives a very humorous description of the French Revolution, which is represented as an Ox" (Poetical Works 299-303). The title "Recantation" is meant ironically: Critics may accuse

former enthusiasts of the revolution of "having recanted,"[11] but they have rather been true to their principles. They are not inconsistent in abandoning the revolution after the revolutionists have begun behaving madly. The theme of the poem, however, is that the revolution never would have gone mad, but for its persecution at the hands of the monarchies. The atrocities of the French revolution are to be blamed on the counter-revolutionaries. From its very inception, the new regime was beset by internal and external enemies. At first, conspirators from England sought to undermine the revolution (Michelet, History 222-23); then a kabal from Austria worked to assist the Queen (Michelet, History 355-386); later, Church leaders inspired a bloody counter-revolution within France (Michelet, History 398-431); finally, the massed armies of the monarchies of Europe marched against the French republic (Hibbert 193).[12]

A stronger advocate of the revolution could deny that the revolutionists had committed any violence at all. An advocate

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[11] In a copy of the Annual Anthology of 1800, Coleridge writes over against the heading of this poem, "Written when fears were entertained of an invasion, and Mr. Sheridan and Mr. Tierney were absurdly represented as having recanted because .... they, [having been favourable, changed their opinion when the Revolutionists became unfaithful to their principles?]" (Ernest Hartley Coleridge's note on Poetical Works 299).

[12] On the other hand, Schama argues that the revolutionaries, from the beginning, raised armies to overthrow the monarchies (Schama 589-97, 686-90, 752-799).

who considers revolution the highest good could admit that all the allegations of violence are true, but claim that all violence is automatically justified by the needs of the revolution. Coleridge considers the revolution a means of achieving other values, and, at this point, sadly acknowledges that it has failed. His admiration of the revolution is so strong that he wishes to remove the blame for that failure from the revolutionaries themselves.

His other meditation on the revolution in 1798 is a more profound poem, "France: An Ode" (Poetical Works 243-247). Significantly, the original title was "Recantation: An Ode." The recantation in this poem is not ironic. The poet recalls, in stanza 2, that he once sang for the revolution, and "sang defeat" for the monarchist armies which marched against revolutionary France, though his beloved England was among them. In stanza 3, he recounts his misgivings about the revolution even then, for its "Blasphemy," its "fierce and drunken passions." He has tried to make his fears flee by telling himself that after the revolution, the victors' passions would quiet. When the victors would become wise, then the revolution would spread without force, for the joyous example of life in revolutionary France would "compel the nations to be free." The poet now acknowledges, in stanza 4, that excusing the excesses of the revolution was an offense against freedom. Even after the revolution, the French can be

as predatory as any monarchy, insulting their own cause of Liberty. The poem concludes with the poet's realization that politics cannot capture liberty: As soon as a revolution succeeds, it installs its own political leaders, its own "Priestcraft," and forges its own chains. As long as people are sensual, as long as the human personality is not free, no political organization can compel liberty.[13] The poet himself feels liberated when, standing on a beautiful sea cliff at the edge of a pine forest, he feels himself "possessing all things with intensest love." Thus, liberty becomes an attribute of the psychology of the poet, not of the political system.

Coleridge wrote "France: An Ode" at the painful moment of change, when he was in the process of rejecting his own earlier convictions about the French revolution. He wrote the poem as his "lingering hope in the French Revolution was shattered by the French invasion of Switzerland" (Abrams, Natural Supernaturalism 339). He characterizes the political situation, in a letter to Wordsworth written the following September, as "the complete failure of the French Revolution;" as a consequence of which many have "thrown up all hopes of the amelioration of mankind, and are sinking into an almost epicurean selfishness, disguising the same under the soft

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[13] Coleridge expresses a similar attitude towards the inability of government to bring about liberty, in "Fears in Solitude: Written in April 1798, During the Alarm of an Invasion," (Poetical Works 256-263, l.160ff).

titles of domestic attachment and contempt for visionary philosophes" (Collected Letters of STC 1:527).

In describing the French revolution as a "complete failure," Coleridge implicitly acknowledges that the revolution originally had hope of achieving a significant goal. Years later, in a poem addressed to Wordsworth, Coleridge still characterizes the heady days of the dawn of the revolution as the time "When from the general heart of human kind / Hope sprang forth like a full-born Deity!" ("To William Wordsworth," Poetical Works 405, 1.36-37).[14]

Hancock rightly points out the connection between Coleridge's changing attitude towards the French revolution and the rise and fall of the utopia in Coleridge's private life ("Coleridge" The French Revolution and the English Poets 157-194). Coleridge, in 1794, convinced some of his friends that it was practical and worthwhile to found an ideal commune in America, "based on freedom and equality." The members of the commune were to be twelve gentlemen, who would farm "for two or three hours every day;" and twelve ladies, who would perform household duties. "The leisure hours were to be spent

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[14] My analysis of Coleridge's changing reaction to the French Revolution is based on the references to France in Coleridge's poetry. Abrams constructs an essentially congruent account from Coleridge's Biographia Literaria, Ch. 10, 1:132-3 (Natural Supernaturalism 521-2).

in study, liberal discussions, and the education of the children" (Hancock 176-77). This commune was to be called Pantisocracy. The prospective members raised money for Pantisocracy, made speeches and wrote articles in favor of the scheme, even married in prospect of it. Incredibly, the idea stayed alive until November of 1795, when it died a natural death amidst bickering about money, recriminations about bad faith, and a general falling-out among friends.

Pantisocracy failed. Human nature could not be easily reformed, and a perfect society could not be built on imperfect persons. The French revolution overthrew an evil monarchy, but also failed to build a more perfect political system. Thus, the private utopian experiment of Pantisocracy in its failure, and the political utopian experiment of the French revolution in its failure, both served to reinforce Coleridge's subjectivism, his belief that real value comes from within the human personality. For Coleridge, the human heart proves too crooked to be made straight by political adjustments:

> The Sensual and Dark Rebel in vain,
> Slaves by their own compulsion! In mad game
> They burst their manacles and wear the name
> Of Freedom, graven on a heavier chain! (the beginning of the last stanza of "France: an Ode" Poetical Works 247).

Thereafter, the most he could affirm was an organic, gradualist, conservative, political aspiration, in every way not revolutionary. Violent revolutions would occur, but they would not bring about the age of bliss. Only some individuals can achieve true joy, which comes from within the soul; in the absence of that joy, a sensitive person feels confused, dejected, abandoned.

Years later, Coleridge would point out that even the attempt at founding a private Utopia was a subjectivist response to the political demands of the revolution.

> What I dared not expect from constitutions of government and whole nations, I hoped from religion and a small company of chosen individuals. I formed a plan, as harmless as it was extravagant, of trying the experiment of perfectibility on the banks of the Susquehanna. . . ." (Hancock 181 attributes this to Coleridge, "writing in the Friend").

Hancock concludes by finding the constant points in Coleridge's changing political beliefs. One of these constants is that "He was the friend of all enlightened reforms, and he believed the people were entitled to a larger share of influence" (Hancock 194). To whatever extent Coleridge believed that, by the time he wrote "The Wanderings of Cain," he had already recognized that giving people a

larger share of influence would not bring about any major improvement in the human condition. It could not, as long as people were not free in spirit.

Coleridge's attitude towards the French revolution in 1798 is expressed indirectly in "The Wanderings of Cain." Each element of Coleridge's response toward the French revolution has a parallel in his portrait of Cain in the longest version of the work. The story begins after Cain's revolution is over. Cain, in his abject state after the murder and punishment, is tempted to take rebellious actions which will ally him with the God of the dead, against the power of the God of the living. This act of rebellion (or, perhaps, further rebellion, as we do not know Cain's motive for killing Abel) is doomed; it is an illusory temptation, concocted by an evil spirit. Cain's rebellion, like the French revolution, cannot succeed. Cain is literally disillusioned when he realizes that his contemplated rebellion, his hope to gain respite from his torments by sacrificing the vision of his eyes or the blood of his son, is merely the evil suggestion of an evil spirit.

There is tremendous power, in this context, in the two forbidden sacrifices: the blood of his son, and the sight of his eyes. These are polyvalent symbols, but I do not think it is reductionist to connect them in a direct way with the

violent ideology of revolution. This ideology demands sacrifices of sight, that is to say, that the revolutionary loses the ability to sympathize with "counter-revolutionaries." As the revolution becomes more bloody, it demands the blood of its own sons. Those who remain faithful to the revolution in its bloodiest phase must allow themselves to be aware of less and less of the suffering that the revolution has caused: They must lose even more of their sight. Cynthia Ozick observes that ideology can progress to idolatry, and idolatry leads to murder: "In the absence of the Second Commandment, the hunt for victims begins" ("Literature as Idol: Harold Bloom" 190-191). Unlike the revolutionaries in France, Cain does not follow the evil spirit from blindness to further bloodshed.

Having failed to improve his condition by a dramatic action, Cain is left as he started. The great battle between good and evil spirits takes place above his head, beyond his influence. Cain's rebellion does not bring him utopia. The world is still filled with terrors; and worst of all those terrors come from the confusion within his heart. He does not know whom to trust, or how to better his situation. In retrospect, we see that Cain has acted with strength, but without clarity of vision. Even after the failure of his revolution, he does not achieve clarity. The world is not simple, and improving it, or man's lot in it, will not be simple. There are forces

beyond our control and understanding, forces as likely to bring about evil as good. Coleridge sympathizes with the revolutionary Cain, but does not believe that we will improve the world by emulating him. Rather, he fears that we cannot help emulating Cain in his confusion and in his distress.

In the years after he wrote "The Wanderings of Cain," Coleridge never found a simple repository for his broken hopes; his political philosophy was never again utopian. The last of Coleridge's books published during his life is called Church and State, a project intended to provide a rationale for the National Church, which has contradictory loyalties: as a national body to the particular organic society in which it lives, and as a Church to the universal God (Prickett, Romanticism and Religion: The tradition of Coleridge and Wordsworth in the Victorian Church 31-32, 255). A less apocalyptic project would be hard to imagine. Coleridge thus retained some vision of political process, but it is an organic, dialectic process. It holds out as its limited goal the gradual flourishing of society, nurtured by limited institutions. Like Blake, he turned his hope for redemption to the individual: Even here, Coleridge retained at best a limited hope. Those who would experience light must generate it from "the soul itself" ("Dejection: an Ode," line 53 Poetical Works 365). There is, however, no program for retaining this light. The fear that Coleridge has himself

lost the light becomes a major theme of his later poetry ("Dejection: an Ode," [1802] Poetical Works 362-368, and "Work without Hope," [1825] Poetical Works 447).

Byron was the first of the poets in this study to reach maturity after the French revolution. It is a commonplace that Byron was filled with "revolutionary spirit," meaning, perhaps, both his "revolutionary ideal of personal unrestraint" and his political "love of liberty" (Moore xix, xx, xiii). He indeed had no patience with efforts by any authorities to curtail personal liberty, and he advocated national self-determination passionately. His love of liberty is so palpable that it is tempting to exaggerate his affinity for political revolution. A careful look at his attitude towards the French revolution is the best antidote to that temptation:

Byron's meditation on revolution and war, in Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto the Fourth (1818[15]--only three years before the publication of Cain), turns, in stanza 97, specifically to the French revolution.

> But France got drunk with blood to vomit
> crime,[16]

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[15] Paul Elmer More assigns the Fourth Canto to the period between June 1817 and January 1818 (1).

[16] The image is from Isaiah 49:26.

> And fatal have her Saturnalia been
> To Freedom's cause, in every age and clime;
> Because the deadly days which we have seen,
> And vile Ambition, that built up between
> Man and his hopes an adamantine wall,
> And the base pageant last upon the scene,
> Are grown the pretext for the eternal thrall
> Which nips life's tree and dooms man's worst--his second fall. (Poetical Works of Byron 69).[17]

Byron presents this disparaging vision of the French revolution in direct contrast to the American revolution. The American revolution replaced tyranny with freedom; but all other wars merely replace one tyranny with another (stanza 96). The French revolution was worst of all, for it was fought in the name of freedom, but when it succeeded it brought forth "bitter fruit" (stanza 98): orgies of blood-spilling, crime and continual battles among ambitious men. Thus the French revolution perverted the ideals for which it was fought, and blackened the very name of freedom. From now on, it will be harder than ever to overthrow a tyrant, for people will fear the outcome of the French revolution: bloody criminal anarchy. Nonetheless, freedom will rise again, as a

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[17] In Canto the Third, stanzas 82-84, Byron judges the revolutionaries slightly more kindly. Michael Foot says that in those stanzas: "This was Byron, be it not forgotten, rejecting the doctrine that the misdeeds of the Revolution should condemn the Revolution itself" (182).

tree that has been cut down sends forth shoots (stanza 98).

Although this analysis of the French revolution occurs as the musings of a character in a literary work, it is fair to take it as representing Byron's own thinking. In a letter to John Hobhouse which is the preface to Canto the Fourth, Byron proclaims that

> With regard to conduct of the last canto, there will be found less of the pilgrim than in any of the preceding, and that little slightly, if at all, separated from the author speaking in his own person. The fact is, that I had become weary of drawing a line which every one seemed determined not to perceive. (Poetical Works of Byron 54).

It is sometimes hard to reconcile Byron's admiration for the American revolution, and his discrimination between the French and American revolutions, with the political views expressed elsewhere in his poetry. In Don Juan Canto the Twelfth, 73, (Poetical Works of Byron 940) and similarly in "Sonnet to the Prince Regent" [1819] (Poetical Works of Byron 199 Complete Poetical Works 4:242), Byron seems to express his admiration for constitutional monarchy as the truest freedom for a people, at least when the monarch has earned the people's respect (The point is made forcefully by Michael G. Cooke, 98-99). That is astonishing, because, in general, Byron's

opinion of monarchs and monarchy is extremely negative.[18] Distributing his irony fairly, in Don Juan Canto the Twelfth, stanza 21, Byron also pokes fun at constitutions (Poetical Works of Byron 932).

Actually, Byron did champion the cause of political rebellion, not only in various poems, but in deed as well. His poems were instrumental in turning popular opinion against monarchist intervention in Greece, and he personally took part in the battle for Greek independence.

Hancock explains Byron's political views in the light of Byron's skepticism. "Byron stands for destruction only. He was not therefore a true revolutionist; he was rather the arch-apostle of revolt, of rebellion against constituted authority. He goes no further" (Hancock 79). It is difficult

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[18] See, for instance, his "Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte" (Poetical Works of Byron 180-182 Complete Poetical Works 3:259-266), which condemns Napoleon for betraying the revolution by becoming king. The poem ends with praise of the one revolutionary who achieved glory without guilt, Washington--who never tried to be king. See also Byron's couplet on François Bonivard, the prisoner who befriended the spiders and mice in his cell: "Nor slew I of my subjects one / What sovereign has so little done?" ("Prisoner of Chillon," lines 389-90, Complete Poetical Works of Byron 4:16). Similarly, Byron's Sardanapalus says: "That there are worse things betwixt earth and heaven / Than him who ruleth many and slays none" (Sardanapulus Act II, lines 314-15 Poetical Works of Byron 566 Complete Poetical Works 6:57). See also his praise of Rousseau, who was inspired to utter "Those oracles which set the world in flame, / Nor ceased to burn til kingdoms were no more" (Childe Harold, Canto the Third, Stanza 81, Poetical Works of Byron 47).

to reconcile this judgement with Byron's own preference for the American over the French revolution. Likewise, Cooke sees Byron's affirmation of the value of constitutional monarchy as an example of an all-pervasive skepticism: Byron's characteristic debilitating skepticism kept him from embracing republicanism wholeheartedly, so that he even had "reservations about" his own "lifelong commitments to republicanism" (Cooke 99).

I propose, however, that there is a consistent theme in Byron's political thought: He preferred to see people free to live their lives in relative prosperity, in peace, and without interference. He was opposed to meddlesome governments that interest themselves in citizen's private affairs, he was opposed to personal slavery and to foreign enslavement, and to war; he was even opposed to revolution, unless it frees an enslaved people, or leads to a moderate and tolerant government. In those extremely rare situations where a monarch is wise enough to rule gently, and enjoys the love of the people, then even monarchy may ensure domestic tranquility.[19] In general, some form of republicanism is better. Republicanism is a means, though, not an end. It is natural for someone with this undramatic viewpoint to prefer

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[19] On second reading, the "Sonnet to the Prince Regent" demands an ironic tone. Byron commends the way an unusually magnanimous ruler might command the people's love, but implies that this rarely happens.

the American over the French revolution, to prefer pragmatic, historically-rooted, political systems over thorough-going logical theories, even to prefer gentle monarchs over bloody revolutions.[20] The goals of domestic tranquility and personal liberty seem disappointingly modest to someone who believes that government is capable of bringing the millennium; so Byron, with his moderate political agenda, must seem pale beside his more logical, radical contemporaries.

In any case, Byron was too pessimistic to be a good revolutionary. A revolutionary must believe that, with the proper actions, human history will be transformed into something glorious; but Byron writes of human history as inevitable suffering and pain. Byron's Cain is motivated, not coincidentally, by "a fit of dissatisfaction . . . with the politics of Paradise, which had them all [Adam's family] out of it" (Letter to Thomas Moore, September 19, 1821 LJ 5:368 BL&J 8:216). That is to say, in Byron's version, one of the mainsprings of Cain's revolt is that he is in human history and out of paradise.

Foot, in his recent study of Byron's politics, demonstrates the consistency of Byron's liberal, moderate, political thinking in his prose and conversation as well as in his

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[20] Byron's own disdain for the glories of warfare, illustrated in many places in Don Juan, is a disability in a true revolutionary.

poetry. Foot cites Byron's own words, written in 1821:

> It is the fashion to attribute everything to the French revolution, and the French revolution to everything but its real cause. That cause is obvious--the government exacted too much, and the people could neither give nor bear more. . . Acts --acts on the part of government, and not writings against them, have caused the past convulsions, and are tending to the future.
>
> I look upon such as inevitable, though no revolutionist. I wish to see the English constitution restored and not destroyed. (Appendix to Sardanapulus, Foot 300-301).

In that same year, Byron wrote Cain. Hancock accurately notes: "Presumably it is a mystery-play, dealing with a religious theme; but its effect, in spirit, was applicable to political as well as to religious conditions" (115-116). Byron's Cain contains a sustained assault on authority: Lucifer has many lines in which he attacks the legitimacy of God's authority, and Cain has many lines in which he questions it.[21] Cain repeatedly challenges the docility of his family

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[21] Beginning with Cain's question in I, 76-77: "How know I that? Because / He is all pow'rful, must all-good, too, follow?" Lucifer appears in response to that question, to identify himself and Cain as (I, 138-140): "Souls who dare look the omnipotent tyrant in / His everlasting face and tell him that / His evil is not good!"

members before God.[22] The family members seem helpless before this onslaught. Even Adah, the strongest family member, acknowledges "I cannot answer this immortal thing / Which stands before me" (I.405-6). Giuseppe Mazzini was one of the first to notice that nearly all of the attacks on God's authority can be applied with equal, or greater, force to human authorities ("Byron and Goethe" Life and Writings 6:61-94).

The political sting of Cain's question, "Because / He is all-pow'rful, must all-good, too, follow?" (I, 77), is, in a way, more devastating than the religious. The religionist, who because of faith in God equates ultimate power with goodness despite evidence to the contrary, at least has some theoretical underpinning for this faith. God, by definition, must be good, powerful and mysterious. The political conservative has faith that political power is equated with goodness, but has no parallel theoretical underpinning for that faith. Why, indeed, should he trust that politically powerful humans are good?

Revolutionist critics, who applaud the political implications

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[22] In Act III, when Cain debates the morality of sacrifice, first with Adah and then, fatally, with Abel:

> And how knew he that I would be so ready
> With the burnt off'rings, which he daily brings
> With a meek brow, whose base humility
> Shows more of fear than worship as a bribe
> To the Creator?" (III, 99-103).

of the arguments of Cain and Lucifer in Byron's Cain, must be disappointed by the pessimistic conclusion of the play. Mazzini himself, for example, would have preferred to see Cain undertake some socially beneficial, altruistic enterprise, overcoming his problems by his active participation in the brotherhood of mankind, as Steffan accurately observes (Steffan 434, commenting on "Byron and Goethe" in Life and Writings 6:61-97).

The notion that Cain is mainly a call for political action is fatally flawed by the conclusion of the play, which gives no indication that political action can achieve anything. The drama ends on a pessimistic note. The only practical outcome of all that debate about authority and morality is the lamentable murder of Abel. Adah speaks of domestic joys at the end of the play: These will not overcome Cain's sadness, nor will they undo the evil which has come out of his action, nor will they answer the deep questions gnawing at Cain's soul. If Cain's observations about his parents and about God are to be seen as Byron's justification for future political rebellion, then Byron has little hope for the success of that rebellion. Furthermore, human history is invoked many times in Cain (in the play, of course, it is the future) but always as the locus of pain and suffering.[23] There is no indication

[23] Admittedly, all these grim views of the human future are presented by Lucifer, whose outlook is not impartial. The first of these is in I, 520 ff, in which Lucifer tells Adah

in the play that revolution, or anything else, will bring about a time of general happiness.

The political implications of the play parallel Byron's views of the French revolution, which began in innocence, justified by the hated absolutist rulers; he had little sympathy for them. But the revolution did not stop with measures to increase personal liberty; the bloodshed continued. Finally, the outcome of the revolution was to shame the very name of freedom. The revolutionaries, if they maintained any moral sense, were aware that they, too, could be guilty of crimes. The new order that they created was not significantly better than the old tyranny they destroyed. In Cain, too, the hero begins in innocence. The murder, the unintended result of Cain's rebellious speculation, sets nothing right. The virtues of domestic joy, which Adah champions, are all that is left for Cain. He begins the play with such glorious aspirations, and such anger at his parents' faults; by the end of the play, he regrets his own actions: "But the four rivers would not cleanse my soul (III, 522)." So Cain is not a call for political action, but a skeptical evaluation of political action.

Each of the English poets in this study uses the figure of

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and Cain of the "oceans" of tears which will be shed by the "million millions" of the human future.

Cain to express a broad political attitude, which implies a specific view of the French revolution. In the French works, the connection between the political attitude of a poet and the poet's view of the French revolution is much more direct. In general, there is a tendency in French politics of the nineteenth century to replay the revolution, trying to make sure that this time it turns out right.[24] Even the terminology, "Second Empire," "Third Republic," bears witness to this tendency. Edgard Pich describes debates about whether Danton, or Robespierre, or Hébert, was the true hero of the revolution--debates which lasted into the 1870s and beyond, and which had much more the character of current than of historical battles (LdeL 489). In that atmosphere, any message about the French revolution in the four French works is close to the surface. The French works are thus, much more so than the English, explicitly about the French revolution.

Nerval, who glorifies the revolution, presents Cain as the progenitor of all human progress. In 1850, when Nerval's novelette Histoire de la reine du matin et de Soliman prince des génies was first published, Louis Napoleon was drawing the aftermath of the revolution of 1848 to a close, patiently

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[24] Linda Orr observes that, for many participants in French history, "the Revolution barely misses its mark each time, but is always eagerly awaited: 1830? 1848? 1870? 1914? 1936? 1968?" (Orr, Headless History 40).

gathering power in the ruined republic.[25] At that time, when revolutionary fervor seemed most misplaced, Nerval continues to praise the French revolution. Many of his references to the revolution are veiled in the language of myth and fantasy; the main goal of Kari Lokke's book, Gérard de Nerval: The Poet as Social Visionary, is to unmask the consistent "progressive" strain in Nerval's writing.

Nerval tells the story of the French revolution at one remove in the Histoire du Calife Hakem [1847][26] (Oeuvres 2: 358-397), in an elaborate description of a revolution which takes place in Egypt. The eponymous protagonist of this story is more than merely the political leader of the Egyptians: He is also a spiritual giant, a man with Messianic pretensions, who wonders whether he might be God.[27]

> As messiah, Hakem leads his followers out of their imprisonment and oppression to a cataclysmic

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[25] For a concise description of the manoueverings of Louis-Napoleon, see William Fortescue, Revolution and Counter-Revolution in France, 1815-1852 71-84.

[26] The Histoire du Calife Hakem was published in 1847 (notes Béguin and Jean Richer to Oeuvres 2:1357), three years before the Histoire de la reine du matin et de Soliman prince des génies; both novelettes appear in the collection Voyage en oriént.

[27] This is a theme which runs through the story, beginning in the first scene: "Je n'adore personne, puisque je suis Dieu moi-meme! Le seul, le vrai, l'unique Dieu, dont les autres ne sont que les ombres" (Oeuvres 2:356). "I adore no one, because I myself am God! The only, the true, the unique God, of whom all others are nothing but shadows."

> revolution clearly modeled after the 1789 French Revolution. The apocalypse of revolution is depicted as a manifestation of divine retribution against the rich and corrupt: '. . . la vengeance du ciel usait des armes de l'enfer.'[28] (Lokke 33-34).

Nerval does not merely evoke the spirit of the 1789 revolution, he presents specific parallels to the events of the revolution. In the story, the Egyptian people form a court which, in a few days, condemns thousands to death by decapitation. The operation of the Egyptian courts, and the mode of execution, clearly parallel events in France. By implication, Nerval even justifies the reign of terror. When, at the close of the fictional Egyptian revolution, the regressive defender of the nobles is decapitated, his departing spirit is revealed as the spirit of Satan; at that moment, "Class conflict takes on the aura of a battle between absolute good and evil. . . "(Lokke 44).[29] Nerval writes of a reign of terror in which only the guilty are condemned.

Nerval represents Cain, in the Histoire de la reine du matin et de Soliman prince des génies, as he represents the Egyptian

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[28] The citation from Nerval is Oeuvres 2:358.

[29] But for a completely different interpretation of the appearance of Eblis (Satan) at the death of Argevan, see Knapp 137.

revolutionaries in Histoire de Calife Hakem (Lokke 49). Nerval in Hakem glorifies the revolutionaries; he similarly presents Cain as the forerunner of the Messiah, the first truly creative being, in fact, more than merely human. Soliman the King, representing the ancient regime, is in every way inferior to the representative of the coming revolt. He is heavy-handed, alienated from his workers (Oeuvres 2:531), self-aggrandizing, unfair to women, unable to deal with others as equals. He is aesthetically untalented in all fields but poetry; his poetry is magnificent but extravagant, boastful, unsubtle, and immoral (Oeuvres 2:516-519 Journey 132-36). His designs in the plastic arts are weighted down with gold, too gaudy, unimaginative.[30] He is surrounded by sycophants (See the description of Banaïas, Oeuvres 2:515 Journey 133). He is somewhat uncomfortable with the independent Balkis, and much more so with the truth-telling bird Hud Hud. Following his materialist conception of progress, he uproots the tree of Noah, which is destined to be the holy cross (Oeuvres 526 Journey 142). Soliman's monotheism merely restricts life, interfering with the flourishing of more pleasing and spiritually significant cults (Oeuvres 537 Journey 152). He

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[30] See, for instance, Balkis' criticism of his architectural style:

"--Ne craignez-vous point, par cette prédilection exclusive pour l'or, de paraître critiquer les autres matières qu'Adonaï a crées?" (Oeuvres 2:525).

"Does it never occur to you that by your exclusive preference for gold you disparage the other materials created by Adonai?" (Journey 141).

is physically immobilized by the gaudy trappings of the monarchy (Oeuvres 2:513 Journey 132).

Adoniram, the descendant of Cain, is destined by his racial heritage to be a master artist, able to command by mystic signs and native talent, far more worthy to lead than is Soliman. With the single mystical sign of the letter "tau," he commands the entire work force to form ranks (Oeuvres 2:531-32 Journey 147-48). All the truly beautiful artifacts in the temple and castle of Soliman are the work of Adoniram; as, indeed, all beauty and utility are the work of the descendants of Cain (see Tubal-Kaïn's speech OC 2:563 Journey 173). Cain himself is the unappreciated benefactor of Adam and Abel (Oeuvres 2:557 Journey 169). Adoniram, rather than Soliman, must win the hand of the Queen of Sheba OC 574-75 Journey 184-85). Adoniram will die, but the descendants of Cain will eventually achieve their deserved rank (Oeuvres 563 Journey 174).

In Nerval's version of the story, Cain is the progenitor of artists, artisans and workers. These are naturally united against the untalented, power-mad, monotheistic, materialistic ruling classes of mere human beings. The revolution predicted in this work is the French revolution, or one of its successors, in which stifling religion and materialist nobles will be defeated by artists, artisans and workers. Constans

supposes the work to be "l'expression des espérances révolutionnaires de l'Europe de 1930 en 1848, la traduction mythique de l'idéal," so that "je supposais que Nerval avait entendu dans sa rêverie demander . . . d'asumer symboliquement le rôle d'animatrice de la Révolution . . ."[31] (Constans 297-8).

Lokke finds the most progressive ideals of the French revolution implicit in Nerval's Histoire de la reine du matin et de Soliman prince des génies: "His mysticism is a profoundly political and active belief infused with the 18th-century French ideals of Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité" (Lokke 63). Although I have argued, in Chapter 9, that he does not necessarily believe in those egalitarian ideals, certainly he believes in the revolution. Nerval envisions the outcome of its vividly: The old ruling powers will be destroyed, and the new order will be established. Adoniram will beget "une souche des rois"[32] (Oeuvres 2:562). The new ruling dynasty will be made up of artistically talented, racially pure, superhumans, whom the workers will eagerly obey.

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[31] "the expression of the revolutionary hopes of 1830-1848, the mythic translation of the ideal," so that "I suppose that Nerval intended to in his revery to ask . . . symbolically to assume the role of the organizer of the Revolution."

[32] "a founder of kings" (Journey 174).

Adoniram, for all his talent, is doomed to die (Oeuvres 562 Journey 173). The world is not ready for him to succeed. Jealous traitors among his workers, abetted by the king, conspire, first to put flaws in his masterpiece, then to murder him (Oeuvres 547, 598-600 Journey 160-61, 205-6). This fate cannot be avoided by the genius who is too far ahead of his time; the day will come, however, when Adoniram's descendants will prevail. Tubal-Kaïn prophesies two reasons for the inevitable death of the descendant of Cain, Adoniram, thus suggesting two parallel explanations for the failure of the French revolution. First, jealous workers will conspire against Adoniram: The failure of the French revolution is a consequence of "betrayal." Second, Adoniram is too far ahead of his time: the day will come when people will be ready to be redeemed, but they are not ready yet. The failure of the revolution is temporary; there will be a "second coming" (Oeuvres 563 Journey 174).

Within the next two years, Nerval's prediction was fulfilled. The revolution died. Louis Napoleon, who had been elected head of the parliamentary republic for a single term, cunningly arranged to be crowned Emperor in 1851. Victor Hugo, who had befriended him as the hope of moderate republicanism, now felt betrayed. The Republic did not exist any longer. Louis Napoleon was not, as some had hoped, a liberal defender of the rights of man. Rather than live in a

French monarchy, Hugo went into exile; he was not to set foot in France again for nineteen years. In that exile, Hugo wrote one leaflet after another denouncing the King as a betrayer of the constitution; and in that exile, Hugo published his magnificent retelling of Cain. The other French poems about Cain are likewise products of the Second Empire, in fact, of the years of Victor Hugo's exile, when the royalist version of the revolution had official approval. These poems form a sort of chorus of opposition to the royalist version. There are significant parallels between the political climate of England in the 1820s, when the three English poems were published, and of France in the years from 1851-1869.

Victor Hugo's remarkable short poem, "La conscience," which tells part of the story of Cain, was written in January, 1853 (Massin 441 n.1.) and first published in his epic cycle of poems, La légende des siècles, in September of 1859. Massin claims that Hugo originally intended to include this poem in an earlier poem cycle, Châtiments. In that context, the "La conscience" could have been part of a poetic attack on the recently coronated Louis Buonaparte. The tragically flawed Cain would then have been a figure for the Emperor.[33] By the time Hugo was ready to publish Châtiments, though, he felt

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[33] Massin claimed: "Il ne faut pas oublier cependant cette origine du poème: Caïn est issu de Louis Bonaparte . . ." (Massin 441 n.1).

"One must not, however, forget the origin of this poem. Cain is a product of Louis Bonaparte. . ."

that Louis deserved to be treated with mockery, rather than mythic grandeur.[34]

The structure of Hugo's epic, La légende des siècles, reveals the poet's political stance. The poems in this cycle focus on moments in history from the creation of Eve to the French revolution, which suggests the extent to which Hugo viewed the French revolution as an epochal event. Hugo makes that point explicit in the preface, in which he describes theme of the cycle as "l'epanouissement du genre humaine de siècle en siècle, l'homme montant des ténebères à l'idéal, la transfiguration paradisiaque de l'enfer terrestre, l'éclosion lente et suprême de la liberté. . . "[35] (Hugo's preface to the first edition of La légende des siècles). Jacques Heugel rightly emphasizes the importance of this passage (51). The achievement of liberty is, for Hugo, part of the inevitable march toward paradise. The French revolution must ultimately succeed, not only in a narrow political agenda, but even in bringing about the final human spiritual redemption; the

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[34] Massin also suggests that Hugo did not include this poem because, in the final poem of Châtiments, Hugo claims that "La conscience humaine est morte." He did not want to have the series begin with a poem in which conscience triumphs (Massin 441 n.1).

[35] "the flowering of humankind from one century to the next, man climbing from ignorance to the ideal, the transformation of earthly hell to paradise, the slow and supreme blooming of liberty. . ." (emphasis in original).

revolution is part of the ultimate eschaton.[36]

Hugo trumpets his longing for the resumption of the French revolution, and his disdain for the monarchy, in Napoléon le petit, and in countless pamphlets and notes. This passage, with its biblical imagery, is typical: "Une révolution, c'est le passage de la mer Rouge. Le peuple élu passe, avec la colonne de feu devant lui: Pharon et l'Egypte sont engloutis."[37] Near the end of Napoléon le petit, in one passage, Hugo explicitly describes the coming destruction of the evil Empire as the work of "Dieu" and "Providence" (Napoléon le petit, book 8, part 7, OC, histoire 129). In another, he draws an extended parallel between the betrayal and resurrection of Jesus, on the one hand, and the betrayal and ultimate victory of the French revolution (Napoléon le petit, conclusion of the second part, "deuil et fois" OC, histoire 143-146).

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[36] His fragment, "La bastille," at the end of La fin de Satan (149-151), on the horrors of the royal prison, sets the stage for an unwritten work on the on the redemptive storming of the Bastille. The last poem tells of the reconciliation of good and evil, which entails the disappearance of separate evil, and so the end of Satan ("Dénouement" 153). See discussion in Houston (94).

[37] From "Le temps présent III, 1848--fragments sans date" in Victor Hugo, OC, histoire. Paris: Lafont, 1987 1152.
"Revolution means crossing the Red Sea. The chosen people pass, with the column of fire before them: Pharaoh and Egypt are swallowed up" (my translation).
Note the foreshadowing of modern "liberation theology."

Throughout the years of his exile, Hugo remained optimistic about the outcome of the revolution: "Un fois les rois dévorés, la révolution fera le bonheur du monde. Geoffroy St-Hilaire me disait un jour: Quand le lion a mangé, il est en paix avec la nature"[38] (Hugo, OC, histoire 1323). He sees the revolution as removing the impediments to natural human happiness. "Humanity, basically good, was moving gradually toward perfect love and liberty, he believed, but its progress was blocked by cruelty and by a selfishness attracted to the glamour of evil" (Russell, Mephistopheles 195).

In his treatment of Cain, Hugo's is the least radical romantic version of the story. It would be a mistake, however, to miss the radical political implications of even this poem. Cain's rebellion is glorious, but he rebels against God, and so must fail; later heroes, with more appropriate targets, will rebel as gloriously and transform history into salvation.[39] Human

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[38] "Once the kings have been devoured, the revolution will bring about worldwide happiness. Geoffroy St-Hilaire once said: "When the lion has eaten, he is at peace with the nature."

[39] In La fin de Satan, Hugo presents a vision of organized oppression which begins with the murder of Abel. As Massin notes, this image of Cain seems unrelated to the Cain in "La conscience" (Massin 441 n.1). Hugo describes the three weapons which Cain used to kill Abel: a stick, a nail, and a stone. The nail becomes the sword of war; the stick, the gibbet of the death penalty; and the stone, the prison of governmental oppression. The first evil deed thus grows into all forms of official violence (La fin de Satan "La première page" Part 2, numbers 4, 5 OC, poésie 4:14-15. See discussion in Journet 1116).

beings have the potential to overcome political tyranny and religious ignorance.

One of the issues at the height of the revolution was whether republican France was to allow freedom of religion, or whether atheism was to be enforced by the state. In general, the more moderate parties favored freedom of religion, and the parties identified with Hébert and Proudhon favored an absolute prohibition on theistic religions. Hugo rejects this political atheism in his political writings,[40] for the impulse to freedom has religious sources; it is God who brings the people to revolution. Hugo's portrayal of Cain as heroic but misguided is a specific critique of the followers of Hébert. For Hugo, the true political revolution must also be a turning towards God.

The parallel between the author's view of the French revolution and his portrayal of Cain is hardest to demonstrate in the work of Baudelaire, simply because it is hard to determine Baudelaire's political opinions. What we know of Baudelaire's politics is, like what we know of his religion,

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[40] See, for example, his comment on the death of Proudhon: "Proudhon est mort. Vrai talent, esprit faux. Il n'avait jamais fait que du tort à la République et du mal à la Révolution. Sa morte est une perte; ce n'est pas un malheur" (OC, histoire 1318-1319).

"Proudhon is dead. A true talent, a false spirit. He did nothing but wrong to the Republic and nothing but evil to the Revolution. His death is a loss; it is not a misfortune."

contradictory. In fact, Baudelaire himself writes about his enjoying self-contradiction (Letter to Sainte-Beuve, March 30, 1865, Correspondence 2:491; see discussion in Pichois, Baudelaire 365). But while there is a vast amount of primary source material about Baudelaire's religion, there are only a few scraps about his politics. "At most moments in his life, Baudelaire hardly seems a person of strong political passions" (Seigel 106). Those who write about the topic find different ways to coordinate these few and contradictory scraps.

The poet reveals his anti-democratic side in his Salons of 1846 and 1859 (Ruff 46). This passage is from the Salon de 1846:

> Avez-vous éprouvé, vous tous que la curiosité du flâneur a souvent fourrés dans une émuete, la même joie que moi à voir un gardien du sommeil public,--sergent de ville ou municipal, la véritable armée,--crosser un répuiblicain? Et comme moi, vous avez dit dans votre coeur: "Crosse, crosse un peu plus fort, corsse encore, municipal de mon coeur; car en ce crossement suprême, je t'adore, et te juge semblable à Jupiter, le grand justicier. L'homme que tu crosses est un ennemi des roses et des parfums, un fanatique des ustensiles; c'est un ennemi de Watteau, un ennemi de Raphaël, un ennemi acharné de luxe, des beaux-arts et des belles-

lettres, iconoclaste juré, bourreau de Vénus et d'Appolon! Il ne veut plus travailler, bumble et anonyme ouvrier, aux roses et aux parfums publics; il veut être libre, l'ignorant, et il est incapable de fonder un atelier de fleurs et de parfumeries nouvelles. Crosse religieusement les omopaltes de l'anarchiste!"

Ainsi, les philosophes et les critiques doivent-ils impitoyablement corsser les singes artistiques, ouvriers émancipés, qui haïssent la force et la souveraineté du genie.[41] (OCB 2:490).

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[41] Have you ever experienced (those of you whose inclination for idle strolling has sometimes led you into the midst of a street-brawl) the same delight as I have felt in watching a Guardian of the Public Sleep--a member of the town or municipal police--beat up a Republican? And like me, have you ever cried out in your heart of hearts: "Bash him down, hit him a little harder! bash him! bash him! sweet policemen of my heart's desire, for when you bring down your magnificent club, I adore you and consider you the equal of great Jupiter, the Lawgiver. That man whom you are bashing is an enemy of Watteau, an enemy of Raphael, a bitter enemy of luxury, of the beaux-arts and belles lettres, a sworn iconoclast, the beheader of Venus and Apollo! He no longer wants to be the humble and anonymous workman cultivating roses and perfuming the public; he wants to be free, the ignorant wretch, and he is utterly incapable of founding a greenhouse or fabricating a new scent. Lay it on with devotion. Belabor the anarchists' shoulders!"

Likewise all true philosophers and critics should bring down their clubs on these apes of art, these emancipated laborers who hate the strength and the sovereignty of leadership. (trans. Patrick Gregory, Pia 74).

Pia takes this statement as definitive of Baudelaire's extreme opposition to democracy (74).[42] Ruff minimizes the statement as not a serious politics at all, but an example of Baudelaire's immoderate refusal to conform (Ruff 55).

Baudelaire's anti-democratic tendency exists side-by-side with his revolutionary and democratic urges. In his 1846 essay in praise of Pierre Dupont, Baudelaire praises the folk poet's love for humanity and his "goût infini de la République"[43] (OCB 2:33). Nor were Baudelaire's revolutionary attitudes limited to words on paper: He actually took part in the fighting on behalf of the revolution of 1848. An acquaintance of Baudelaire, Jules Buisson, describes him in the fighting in February 1848, dressed as a revolutionary, after helping loot a gunsmith's shop, waving a rifle around, calling out, not for the success of the fight, but for the assassination of General Aupick, the poet's hated stepfather (Ruff 55; Pia 79). Pia finds this convincing evidence that Baudelaire played the part of a revolutionary just to settle private scores. Ruff believes that Buisson's malicious description of this incident is unreliable, and that the poet was an honest participant in the revolution (Ruff 55).

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[42] Baudelaire also admired the political thinking of royalist political philosophers (Pia 73).

[43] "boundless predeliction for the Republic" (trans. Patrick Gregory, Pia 76).

Pichois cites various critics who, like Ruff, have "attempted to view the poet as an authentic revolutionary--overt or covert, depending on the circumstances--and to read a revolutionary message into his work" (Baudelaire 177-78). Pichois, for himself, is willing to go along with them only this far: Baudelaire genuinely hated bourgeois society (Baudelaire 178). Although Baudelaire usually "maintained a shield of indifference," on occasion his political passions "broke through" (Seigel 108); Orr believes that Baudelaire was soon embarrassed by his those occasions, and wanted to forget that he had ever been a revolutionary (Headless History 28).

A friend of Baudelaire's made a perceptive remark about Baudelaire's politics: "Baudelaire was fond of Revolutions," Asselineau observed, but not motivated by his "fervor as a citizen" (Ruff 55). Ruff interprets that remark charitably as an indication of Baudelaire's metaphysical opposition to the existing order of things (56). A consistent, although less charitable, explanation of Baudelaire's political views is suggested by his own comments on his motivations for taking a role in the 1848 revolution: "Mon ivresse de 1848, de quelle nature était cette ivresse? Goût de la vengeance; plaisir naturel de la démolition. Ivresse littéraire, souvenirs de lectures"[44] (Mon coeur mis à nu, OCB 2:679. Pia 80 provides a

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[44] My state of intoxication of 1848
What was the nature of that intoxication?
Taste for vengeance. Natural pleasure of

photostat of the passage in Baudelaire's hand. Emphasis is in original.).

Perhaps consistent explanations miss the point. In February of 1848, Baudelaire co-founded a newspaper of the religious left, Le salut public, but by April, he was working for La tribune nationale, "a Republican newspaper with conservative leanings," and by September he was editor-in-chief of a newspaper founded "in defense of conservative interests"[45] (Ruff 56-58). In 1852, he wrote to a friend that he had no more political concerns, that he would not even vote again (Ruff 59). In 1862, he wrote to another friend that he still retained "a touch of his former revolutionary spirit" (Ruff 59). Ruff admits, however, that Baudelaire should not be seen as a partisan of the revolution, because "[h]e was not interested in political systems, but in Revolution" (55). "He was fighting neither for the Republic, not for the revolution, but satisfying an deeper instinct for revolt. His anger transcended politics" (Pichois, Baudelaire 160). Perhaps he

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destruction.
Literary intoxication; memory of readings.
(trans. Gregory in Pia 80; Starkie 183).

Another translation:
My exhilaration in 1848. What sort of exhilaration was it? A taste for vengeance. The natural pleasure of demolition. A literary exhilaration. Remembered readings. (Pichois, Baudelaire 160).

[45] Starkie presents a fuller and more subtle account of Baudelaire's career as a journalist, without making his political development seem more rational (Starkie 188-89).

was interested, not so much in revolution, as in destruction (Siegel 108). Pichois puts the same thought differently:

> Baudelaire's only political characteristic is his resolute anarchic philosophy. Having been a left-wing anarchist, he was about to become a right-wing anarchist. Baudelaire belonged to the race of 'good haters.'. . . (Baudelaire 178).

Baudelaire was aware of his tendency to contradict himself on political matters: "Je comprends qu'on déserte une cause pour savoir ce qu'on éprouvera à servir une autre" [46] (Mon coeur mis à nu, OCB 1:676). He clarifies this statement, to some extent, later in the same work:

> POLITIQUE
>
> Je n'ai pas de convictions, comme l'entendent les gens de mon siècle, parce que je n'ai pas d'ambition.
>
> Il n'y a pas en moi de base pour une conviction.
>
> Il y a une certaine lâcheté ou plutôt une certaine molesse chez les honnêtes gens.
>
> Les brigands seuls sont convaincus,--du quoi?--qu'il leur faut réussir. Aussi, ils réussissent.
>
> Pourquoi réussirais-je, puisque je n'ai même pas envie d'essayer?

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[46] "I understand why one deserts a cause in order to find out what it feels like to serve another" (trans. Patrick Gregory in Pia 82).

> On peut fonder des empires glorieux sur le crime, et des nobles religions sur l'imposture.
> Cependant, j'ai quelques convictions, dans un sens plus élevé, et qui ne peut pas être compris pas les gens de mon temps.[47] (Mon coeur mis a nu, OCB 1:680)

Thus, by 1857, when "Abel et Caïn" was published, Baudelaire had been through all points of the political spectrum. It is not possible to fix his political views at the time of the publication of the poem, because they changed so often, or, perhaps, because he held contradictory political views at the same time. It is also not possible to determine when "Abel et Caïn" was written (see chapter 10).

While Baudelaire's explicitly political statements are contradictory, the political stance of his "Abel et Caïn" is

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[47] POLITICS. - I have no convictions, as men of this country understand the word, because I have no ambitions.
I can find in myself no basis for a conviction.
There is a certain cowardice, or rather, a certain softness of men of good intentions.
Only thieves are convinced - of what? - that they must succeed. And so - they succeed.
Why should I succeed since I haven't any desire to try?
Glorious empires can be founded on crime and noble religions on imposture.
However, I do possess several convictions, in the highest sense of the word, which cannot be understood by the men of my time. (trans. Patrick Gregory in Pia 82).

quite clear. Each couplet contrasts the smug race of Abel and the impoverished race of Cain. At the close of the poem, the poet calls on the race of Cain to take up arms and kill the race of Abel, and then to mount to heaven and throw God to earth. Taken as a political metaphor, the poem declares that the disenfranchised classes (laborers, thieves, beggars and scavengers) can achieve freedom only by destroying the privileged property-owning classes; even so, to achieve full political emancipation, they must become fully emancipated from religion and God. This is the doctrine propounded during the French revolution by Jacques Réne Hébert.

Perhaps the fact that anti-religious republicanism is the political theme of "Abel et Caïn" can give us insight into Baudelaire's contemporary political opinions; or perhaps the doctrine of Art for Art's sake, which Baudelaire sometimes embraces and sometimes denounces, means that readers should have no expectation that artists will be consistent in any practical matter, not in their politics any more than in their religions or in their esthetics.

The one position which Baudelaire apparently never espoused is the optimistic and theological republicanism of Victor Hugo. "Baudelaire regarded Hugo's democratic opinions as mere crack-brained notions" (Pia 138-139). Leconte de Lisle likewise dismissed him as a political and religious thinker (conclusion

of the "Discours de réception à l'Académie Française prononcé le 31 mars 1887" sur Victor Hugo, Articles-Préfaces Discours 217-18). For Leconte de Lisle, it is sentimental to believe that revolution and religion can be reconciled. A true revolutionary must take a clear stand against religion. Leconte de Lisle's political stand in favor of revolution and against monotheism was first implied in his poem, Qaïn, and then made explicit in his political writing.

It is not surprising that Leconte de Lisle came to see the defeat of monotheism as a political goal. With his anthropological stance towards world religions, he accepted that all religions must die as conditions change. For Leconte de Lisle, the Catholic Church, and, in truth, all forms of monotheism, are beliefs which serve oppressive monarchies. If the new society is to be healthy, it will have to have a religion fitted to republican conditions.

Qaïn is set in the thirtieth year of the Babylonian captivity. When the poem was published, the Second Empire had endured less than twenty years. Nonetheless, the long period of captivity in the poem parallels the long period of monarchy in political reality. By allusion, Leconte de Lisle calls the Second Empire a foreign captivity. In the poem, "Quant aux peuple, il a été terrassé moralement, et physiquement, par la défaite; il est "stupide", incapable de réagir, en proie à la

faim et à la soif, ne conservant de la grandeur passée. . ."[48] (Pich, LdeL 460). The portrait of the Thogorma's people, enslaved, captured, unnerved, thirsty and hungry, under the yoke of the infidel Assyrian knights, is, symbolically, a portrait of the French in 1869. Similarly, in the first line of the poem, Leconte de Lisle refers to the time of Thogorma as the century of testing, "siècle de l'épreuve," which is also a fitting title for the first century of the French revolution. According to Pich,

> On serait tenté de trouver la clef de cette description dans les événements de 1848 et des années suivantes, dans la répression sanglante des révoltes populaires et dans l'apathie où semblait tombée la société française si des analogies si précises n'ètaient pas, a priori, fragiles et invérifiables.[49] (LdeL, 460).

The vision of the powerful city of Hénokhia "ne peut se comprendre que comme une revanche de Thogorma sur sa faiblesse

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[48] "The people is broken, morally and physically, by defeat; stupid, unable to react, afflicted by hunger and thirst. It is not able to hold on to its past grandeur. . ."

[49] It would be tempting to find the key to this description in the events of 1848 and the following years, in the bloody repression of the popular revolts and in the apathy into which French society seemed to have fallen, if these too-precise analogies were not, a priori, frail and unverifiable.

présente"[50] (Pich, LdeL 461); the vision of the determined activity of Cain and his clan, as Thogorma's response to the current lassitude or prostration (Pich, LdeL 461). The political point is clear: After the priests and kings have had their bloody day of rule, the champions of the people will inevitably arise. They will throw off the yoke of oppression, and bring about a true revolution. The people, strong, free, and atheist, will rebuild Eden.

Cain's rebellion against God also has a political point. The Khéroub (lines 331 and following) demands that he submit to the rulership of God, even though Cain cannot accept the justice of that rulership. He refuses to submit; in doing so, he expresses Leconte de Lisle's political agenda, for the poet, in his political writing, praises rejection of arbitrary power. The poet's political use of the figure of Cain exactly parallels the use by Baudelaire and Byron.

There is often a strain of pessimism in Leconte de Lisle's revolutionary thought: The revolution may well succeed, but, after that, the revolution must fail. Change is part of the nature of human institutions. In Qaïn, however, Leconte de Lisle looks forward to an ultimate victory of the forces of freedom. Qaïn reveals Leconte de Lisle's return to

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[50] "can only be understood as Thogorma's revenge against the current weakness."

revolutionary sentiment, which he had more or less abandoned since the failure of the 1848 revolution. Leconte de Lisle now analyzes the causes for the failure of that revolution: In retrospect, the alliance, in 1848, between some parts of the Church and the revolution was against nature; the revolution must be pure of any taint of religious sentiment. The poem is thus part of the anticlerical republican opposition to the Second Empire.

The political message may have contributed to Leconte de Lisle's reluctance to publish the poem as much as any literary doubts. Pich says that, "according to Houssaye, it required the pleas of Madame Leconte de Lisle and of Heredia to keep the poet from burning his work"[51] (Pich, LdeL 481). Once Leconte de Lisle decided to present his radical politics to the public in the thinly-veiled allegory of Qaïn, he made his radical views explicit in two books of history, published immediately after the poem. In these, he presents the history of the 1789 French revolution as a form of political advocacy. Pich characterizes the first part of the poet's Catéchisme poulaire républicain, (published in 1870), as "a kind of prose translation of Qaïn"[52] (Pich, LdeL 486). In the next

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[51] "Selon H. Houssaye, il fallut les prières de Mme Leconte de Lisle et de Heredia pour empêcher le poète de brûler son oeuvre" (H. Houssaye, "Discours de réception à l'Académie" in the supplement of Temps, December 13, 1895, quoted in Pich, LdeL 481).

[52] "une sorte de traduction en prose de Qaïn."

year, Leconte de Lisle returned to the key themes of Qaïn in Histoire populaire de la révolution française: Liberty, Rights, Justice. He glorifies the revolution: "The French revolution was the vindication of the outraged rights of humanity; it was the terrible and legitimate combat of justice against iniquity"[53] (Histoire populaire 11, cited by Pich, LdeL 488. Emphasis in original). He tries to justify all its violent excesses: "One cannot deny that the actions of this party, bloody and despotic as they were inside the country, contributed energetically to the defence of the territory and the morale of the armies of the Republic"[54] (Histoire populaire 53, cited by Pich, LdeL 489). Leconte de Lisle, in this work, continues the meditation on problem of violence which he began in Qaïn. He finds a similar solution to the problem: in Qaïn, all violence is God's fault; in the Histoire populaire, it is the fault of the old, clerical regime. The view of the French revolution implicit in Leconte de Lisle's allegorical poem is explicit in histories.

The political significance of Leconte de Lisle's Qaïn was no

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[53] "La Révolution française a été le combat terrible et légitime de la justice contre l'iniquité."

[54] My translation. The original reads: "On ne peut nier, que l'action de ce parti, despotique et sanglante à l'intérieur, n'ait énergiquement contribué à la défense du territoire et à l'élan victorieux des armées de la République." In fact, Leconte de Lisle had a lifelong fascination with violence as an agent of change in history (Pich, LdeL 213).

mystery to his readers; the publication of Qaïn marked Leconte de Lisle's entry into politics as a revolutionary figure (Pich, LdeL 510). "Leconte de Lisle dénonce, par la voix de Qaïn, les évêques de l'Empire, assis dans leurs orgueil et leur sécurité"[55] (Flottes 90). The Academy and the Second Empire Government, which gave expensive pensions and honors to Leconte de Lisle, recognized him as the scholarly translator of Greek and Latin classics, but pointedly ignored his original poetry. The Catholic press reacted against the poem, calling it dark, violent, nearly unreadable, a Proudhon-like attack on God. The liberal and socialist press reacted in favor of the poem, pleased that the poet had finally declared against the Church, and in favor of socialism (Pich, LdeL 481-84).

Further proof that the poem was read as a political allegory came after the revolution. The poem became prime evidence for putting Leconte de Lisle on the revolutionary government payroll--either as an official honor, or perhaps as part of the government--until it became clear that Leconte de Lisle had been receiving money all along from the Second Empire government (Pich, LdeL 485).

Pich puts the political significance of the Leconte de Lisle's

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[55] "Leconte de Lisle denounces, in the voice of Cain, the bishops of the Empire, seated in their pride and their security."

Cain in context:

> Pour un familier de la pensée et surtout de l'imagerie révolutionnaire sous le second Empire, le poème de Leconte de Lisle pouvait donc être lu comme un message chiffré mais facilement dechiffrable, addressé aux républicains de l'époque. Le choix des Géants . . . et surtout celui de Qaïn étaient à eux seuls révélateurs (Pich, LdeL 476).[56]

In Nerval's work, Cain had been a relatively obscure symbol for the revolutionary; by the time Leconte de Lisle wrote on the theme, the symbolism had become transparent.

All seven of the works in this study use and develop the symbol of Cain as a fighter in the French revolution. Each of these works, as far as I can determine, was written and published in a counterrevolutionary age by an author who had, at one point, progressive[57] political leanings; each expresses

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[56] For anyone familiar with the thought and above all the revolutionary imagery of the Second Empire, the poem of Leconte de Lisle can be read as an encoded message, easily decipherable, addressed to the republicans of the era. The choice of giants . . . and above all that of Cain, were singularly revealing to them.

[57] I reluctantly use the terms "progressive" and "counterrevolutionary" in the absence of better ones. "Progressive" is a useful word when it is applied to those who believe in the possibility or inevitability of human progress towards greater equality of political and economic power, and who believe that opposition to ruling establishments will yield that progress. It is a prejudicial word, in that it

a precise response to the defeat of the revolution. The versions of Cain by poets who remain political revolutionaries change the biblical story by adding an epilogue. The conclusion of the story as it has been handed down is unsatisfactory to them, because Cain the rebel deserves better than to end as a wanderer. Cain, as he is punished, signifies the revolutionary in his hour of defeat; but he, or his descendants, will eventually mount a successful attack. The revolution can be crushed, but it will rise again; it can falter, but ultimately it must succeed. Thus Nerval, Baudelaire and Leconte de Lisle write revolutionary versions of the story. Each of these works ends with a call for Cain's revolt to succeed. These versions are specifically Hébertist: they identify political revolution with religious revolution. The battle for freedom from political oppressors must simultaneously be the battle for freedom from God.

Victor Hugo specifically rejects that opinion in his religio-political writings. For Hugo, a right understanding of the nature of the God of love would draw people on to political freedom and religious redemption. Hugo's Cain has dignity,

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implies that those who do not agree are "regressive;" that only evil motives can explain opposition to a progressive agenda. In spite of the implications of the word, it is possible to believe, in good faith, that greater equality is not likely to be achieved, or that opposition to present government is not the way to achieve it.

The same considerations apply to the useful but prejudicial word "counterrevolutionary."

stature and solemnity. His revolt has admirable qualities, but it must fail, for it is a revolt against God. The true political revolution has not yet succeeded, but it will succeed when it is coupled with a true religious revolution.

Each of the French poets found a way to continue to believe in revolution even though the monarchists had regained power; the English poets each lost faith in revolution. Coleridge wrote his version of Cain just at the moment when he could no longer believe in the French revolution. He dramatizes the end of the biblical story without changing its tone: Cain is tormented, lonely and confused, wandering away from the presence of God. The parallel to Coleridge's own view of the revolution is precise: The revolution did not succeed in any of its millennial ends; after the revolution, blood has been shed, and people are as confused and lonely as ever. Byron's Cain ends on essentially the same note as Coleridge's: Cain is guilt-ridden for his crime, still unhappy and tormented. Coleridge, when he wrote his version of Cain, was well on his way to becoming a Tory: Byron was still, and would remain, faithful to his liberal political views. Even so, Byron had no illusions about radical change in the human condition, he abhorred violence, and he remained skeptical about the value of the French revolution. The confused wanderer was an appropriate symbol of the failed revolution for the liberal

Byron as it was for the conservative Coleridge.

The confused wanderer cannot remain the only symbol of the revolution for Blake. For Blake, there must be a way out of the confusion of political strife, in personal redemption though forgiveness and creativity. So Blake, like the French poets, adds an epilogue to the biblical account. Blake's epilogue gives hope, not of a political response to the failure of the revolution, but of a spiritual and personal response. All seven poets treat the figure of Cain as they treat political revolution, specifically as they treat the French revolution in its defeat.

Chapter Fourteen: Conclusions

The story of Cain, like Cain himself, was destined to wander. Again and again it appeared, suddenly relevant to a new audience in a new place. It was always the same story, yet in each place and time a little different. The new audience was moved by a different feature, or fascinated by a different aspect of the hero; the storyteller felt an urgent need to convey a different point. I have tried, in this study, to track these wanderings. Puzzling out how each version of the story fit into the winding trail has been a delight for me, and has increased the pleasure with which I encountered each version.

I started by wondering why the theme of Cain was so important for a certain few years in the romantic period in England and France, and that has led me to some insight into the role of the Bible in the flowering of romanticism, the character of romanticism, and the relationship between the romantic movements in the two countries.

The Bible was attractive to romantic writers as an ancient,

exotic, oriental text; moreover a text filled with dramatic, violent and enigmatic stories, much like any of the other ancient sources used by writers throughout the ages. At the same time, the literary values of the Bible exerted a stylistic influence, for, as Roston argues in Poet and Prophet, the Hebrew Bible with its prophetic diction, direct language, personal passion and vivid indecorous imagery, served as an important role-model for those poets who broke the bonds of neo-classicism and developed romanticism.

There can be further reasons for an author to use a biblical plot; for the Bible is also a sacred text. The reader is already involved in the Bible with all his attitudes towards the sacred. By choosing to retell a biblical story, the writer is almost assured of evoking the reader's strong emotional associations. Each romantic poet makes literary use of the Bible's power as a sacred text; each, by expressing his concerns through a biblical story, stakes a claim for the ultimate seriousness of his concerns.

Romantic authors identify with Cain.

> Frequently the dramatist would select a biblical figure into whom he could project his own spiritual dilemma without wrenching the original account too drastically out of shape; and in more iconoclastic periods of history, a dramatist might deliberately

> wrench that account out of shape . . . (Roston, Biblical Drama 14).[1]

The romantic period was certainly one of those "iconoclastic periods of history." I have discovered, over and over again, the spiritual dilemmas of each author projected into Cain.[2] But the biblical account of Cain was not exactly a passive recipient; many of the modern spiritual dilemmas were already suggested by the biblical text, so that Cain was, in a sense, waiting for those authors. What had to be "wrenched out of shape" to make that act of identification possible was not the biblical account, but the powerful religious tradition of how to read it. As varied as the seven poets were, they were united in their opposition to conventional reading of the

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[1] Similarly: "On lit les préoccupations politiques, sociales et religueses de l'auteur derrière la masque tourmenté du descendant de Caïn" (Constans 63).

"One reads the political, social and religious preoccupations of the author behind the tormented mask of the descendant of Cain."

Similarly, the Cainite Adoniram "ne symbolise pas moins les mouvements les plus intimes du coeur de Nerval que ses aspirations politiques et sociales et son inquiétude religiuese" (Constans 68).

He "does not symbolize any less the most intimate movements of the Nerval's heart than his political and social hopes and his religious disquiet."

[2] Roston believes that identifying personal concerns with a biblical figure is a peculiarly Protestant manoeuvre, later adopted by writers who might be termed post-Protestant (Prophet and Poet 188). I think that the same process occurs whenever a creative artist tries to present a biblical figure, whether in Catholic France or in Protestant England. Leconte de Lisle and Baudelaire, no less than Byron, present the biblical story as a projection of their own reality, seeing Cain as a hero in expressing their own rebellion against political and religious authority.

Bible. Part of the energy of these works comes from the authors' efforts to steal the Bible from its more conventional readers.

Throughout much of European history before the romantic period, the Bible indeed belonged to its conventional readers. The sanctity of the Bible was respected in a way that put severe limits on literary versions of biblical tales. More recently, the Bible has been relativized: In intellectual circles, the Bible is seen as only one of a class of ancient literary works whose adherents consider them sacred. Writers in such circles can freely reinterpret, distort or rewrite a biblical story, but without much hope that their changes will trigger violent reactions. Between relativist moderns, who cannot shock their readers, and reverent ancients, who dare not, are the romantics, who have both the will to be shocking, and readers to shock.

As far as assessing the supernatural claims of the Bible is concerned, the romantic period was a one of exciting ferment. The poets who wrote romantic versions of Cain were at the same time thinkers who took part in the debate about whether the Bible can claim a unique status as holy revelation. Whether they found a context for the Bible in the study of ancient literature in order to deny any sacred quality to biblical writings, or to understand their sacredness better, none of

the significant romantic poets is satisfied with traditional formulae. All know that their audiences are similarly involved in this debate.

The role of the Bible in these romantic works is a special case of a more general phenomenon, which is a basis of thematics. In using a known story for a new work of fiction, an author begins with a plot that is probably already meaningful to him. He can, indeed must, then vary the story. If the story is already meaningful to readers as well, the author can manipulate their expectations. Thus, the ideal reader understands the work both as an independent statement, and as in dialogue with earlier versions of the theme.

For all these reasons, the romantic poets were drawn to biblical figures, and, in particular, to those characters condemned by religious tradition. Siding with Cain in some romantic versions was an attack on the Bible, or on religious belief, the technique that Northrop Frye calls "demonic modulation"[3] (Anatomy 156). In others, siding with Cain was an extraordinarily complex technique for expressing both skepticism and belief, rejection of the usual pieties and yet

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[3] Frye defines "demonic modulation" as "the deliberate reversal of the customary moral associations of archetypes" (Anatomy 156), citing the great rebels of the nineteenth century as its chief practitioners (157). Frye asserts that this technique is sometimes the only way to express blasphemy in literature (156).

acceptance of the religious quest. In either instance, identifying with Cain was an act of violence against conventional piety.

After Byron's Cain: A Mystery, was published, and inspired its overwhelming critical notice, no one could escape Byron's influence.[4] Subsequent versions of the story in France and England are responses to his Cain as well to the Cain of the Bible. When Nerval's version of the story was published and widely reprinted, subsequent French versions also respond to Nerval.

The romantic presentations of Cain illustrate the nature of romanticism, for there is no question that they have their own distinct character, quite different from earlier versions of the story. All show sympathy with Cain, either as a hero or as a fellow-sufferer, for each poet identifies with Cain as a sensitive soul, an artist, a philosopher, an exile, and a sinner. These writers felt especially close to Cain as he endures his punishment, in exile from friend and from God. All romantic versions display discomfort with divine justice.[5]

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[4] Blake cast his playlet as a direct response to Byron. Coleridge's versions of Cain, probably written earlier, were published in response to Byron's Cain. Each of the French poets, Nerval, Baudelaire, Hugo and Leconte de Lisle, wrote at least one poem or essay directly in response to some work of Byron's before they wrote their versions of Cain.

[5] Denommé observes that Leconte de Lisle, in Qaïn, is "concerned with . . . the nature of God's injustice toward

These shared values are not characteristic of any earlier literary presentations of Cain, so that identification with the exiled Cain serve as a sufficient indication of romanticism in a literary work.

Inherent in the story of Cain are several factors which made him a prototypical romantic hero. Consider the types in Ridge's catalogue of romantic heroes: seeker, man of fate, the pathological hypersensitive, the poet-prophet, the rebel, the dandy, the anti-hero[6] (Ridge vii). Nearly all of those types are already suggested by the details of the biblical portrait of Cain, for Cain was the first rebel, the first who saw injustice in the world, the first perpetrator of violence, the enemy of God, the guilt-ridden wanderer, the builder of cities and progenitor of artisans. He has, on comparing the two lists, characteristics of each type of romantic hero except the dandy and the anti-hero. Pichois traces the religious rebellion of Byron's Cain, and thus of all subsequent romantic Cains, back to the biblical source, in which Cain revolts against God who has arbitrarily refused his sacrifice (Pichois, notes to OCB 1:1080-81).

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man" (Denommé 74). This concern was shared by all the romantic writers. Even Blake and Hugo evoke the call for rebellion against God, though that is not their concluding position.

[6] Ridge lists types of romantic hero in French literature, but I think all the types are present in English literature except possibly the dandy.

Roston offers another explanation for why the theme of Cain was so important during the period. Romantic writers wanted to challenge the traditional account of the origin of evil in the Fall, but considered that theme to be too dangerous. Iconoclastic writing on the Fall would have offended religious and political powers directly, and would have provoked an unpleasant reaction. The story of Cain was a politically safe way of dealing with the Fall (Biblical Drama 198). Roston is correct insofar as he identifies the importance of the origin of evil in the romantic versions, and he may also be correct that writings on the Fall would have been more controversial. There is no way of knowing whether the writers would have preferred to write on that theme. It seems to me that several aspects of the story of Cain made it, rather than the Fall, important to the romantic poets.[7] Cain commits an act of violence, responds to God initially with audacity, and then, perhaps, with contrition; he endures the punishment of wandering, during which he builds a city and sires a productive family of artisans. None of these aspects is present in the story of the Fall, and all of them come under scrutiny in romantic versions of the story of Cain.

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[7] René Journet thought that Hugo, meditating on the origins of evil in La fin de Satan, preferred the story of Cain to the Fall: "Le véritable péché originel est celui de Caïn, coupable d'amour possesif, comme Satan. . . Certains théologiens actuels ne seraient pas tellement éloignés de ces vues" (Journet 1119 n.9).

"The true original sin was that of Cain, guilty, like Satan, of possessive love. . . . Indeed, certain theologians would not be so distant from these views."

If identification with Cain is a sufficient indication of romanticism in England and France, then consistent differences in the presentations of Cain should correlate with distinctions between the romanticism of the two countries as well. Several of the differences between French and English versions of Cain can be condensed into one observation: The French have a more social orientation than do the English. The French poets, and not the English, envision Cain as worker in contrast with the passive, lazy Abel.[8] The French versions are more overtly concerned with political and economic revolution, and more positive about it. Nerval and Leconte de Lisle, emphasizing the productivity of the children of Cain, use the story to maintain the dignity of workers, craftsmen and artists. Baudelaire, more concerned with the poverty of the children of Cain, calls for the revolt of the poor. Pich's observation about the role of Cain in Leconte de Lisle, applies with even more accuracy to Cain in Nerval, and to the race of Cain in Nerval and Baudelaire:

> De même, l'opposition entre Qaïn, ouvrier, architect, urbaniste, et Abel, insouciant, oisif, se contentant de vivre des produites de la cueillette, à peine suggérée par Leconte de Lisle . . . rappelle l'opposition . . . entre les classes

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[8] The contrast is suggested by Gessner, the Gnostics and the Freemasons. Pichois notes that this contrast can be traced back to the biblical text as well (notes to OCB 1:1080-81).

> productrices et les classes improductives, les industriels et les oisifs. Le triomphe de Qaïn, c'est donc celui de l'ouvrier sur le noble oisif ou, au plus, soldat[9] (Pich LdeL 476-77).

The English works deal with the revolution only indirectly, suggesting that their authors were more reserved in their views of revolution. The English poets do not use the theme of the productive children of Cain; Byron's Cain, at the extreme, entirely refuses to work. On the whole, in their presentation of Cain, the English poets were apparently much more concerned with individual justice than with society as a whole. Byron, in the most socially-conscious of the English versions of Cain, goes as far as to emphasize the healing role of family; even he does not extend his vision to nation, economic or social class. All this suggests as a topic of further study whether the orientation of English romantics on the whole was more personal, and French more social, perhaps because they had a closer experience of the ongoing French revolution.

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[9] At the same time, the opposition between Cain, worker, architect, city-dweller, and Abel, insouciant, lazy, satisfied to live by the what he could gather, just suggested by Leconte de Lisle . . . recalls the opposition . . . between the productive classes and the non-productive classes, the industrious and the lazy. The triumph of Cain is therefore also the triumph of the worker over the noble who is unemployed or, at most, a soldier.

There is a split between the English and French versions on the religious significance of the story as well. The French versions (Hugo excepted) take an adversarial stance towards monotheist religion, more or less agreeing with Byron's Lucifer. The English works are at least at the margins of a monotheist tradition. Blake, however idiosyncratic his religious beliefs, ends his retelling of the story of Cain with a chorus of angels praising God. Coleridge and Byron alike express tortured relationships with accepted religion.

The French works were later, as, indeed, romanticism as a whole came to France later (Furst, Romanticism 45). Perhaps differences in the presentation of Cain were generated more by the different decade than by the different country. So Pichois: "Vers 1850 le myth [de Caïn] se transforme en tendant vers une image de la lutte des classes"[10] (Notes to OCB 1:1081). Revolutionary anti-theism was also becoming an increasingly powerful force (Pich, LdeL 379).

One possible source of error in this study originates in the controversial religious and philosophical positions taken in these works. Anyone who enjoys philosophical or religious poetry may derive a kind of pleasure from discovering that a poem agrees with his own philosophy, a pleasure which is not

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[10] "Towards 1850 the myth [of Cain] is transformed into an image for the class struggle" (my translation).

entirely related to the quality of the poetry. These works characteristically rouse "other emotions than purely esthetic ones"[11] (Brown 114). So, in studying a theme so charged with controversial religious significance as Cain in the romantic period, I repeatedly wondered whether I undervalued a work because I did not agree with its implicit religious philosophy, or overvalued because I agreed. This is a dangerous pitfall; Brown himself, after pointing it out, apparently falls into it a few pages later, when he praises Leconte de Lisle's Qaïn for its profound this-worldly philosophy (118).

Even more destructive to literary study is the related tendency to be pleasantly surprised at "discovering" one's own views in a work where they are not to be found. The history of criticism of Byron's Cain is unfortunately a catalogue of examples of this tendency. In this study, I have tried to avoid turning my window on the author's work into a mirror, but then, so have many previous critics, whose shortcomings now seem so obvious. Let the reader beware.

Among the first literary critics to discuss Cain as an archetypal romantic hero is Peter Thorslev. In the course of

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[11] Brown's observation about Leconte de Lisle's Qaïn continues: "As with all of his poems treating Western religion, it has roused other emotions than purely esthetic ones" (Brown 114).

comparing Cain with the Wandering Jew, he makes some observations which minimize the significance of the theme of Cain, I think unfairly: "Cain is the simpler of the two heroes, both in origin and development, and it is perhaps because his story is thus capable of fewer variations that he has also been the less popular of the two" (Thorslev 93). I have discussed much material, in the course of my study, which conflicts with Thorslev's characterization of the story of Cain as (comparatively) simple and capable of (comparatively) little variation. Thorslev continues:

> As a matter of fact, although Cain has made occasional or casual entrances in poems or dramas through many hundreds of years, Byron himself is the only major Romantic poet to have used him as a protagonist in an important work. (93).

Thorslev is accurate in his highly-qualified observation that Byron, alone among the major English poets, used Cain as a protagonist in a major work. Coleridge's "Wanderings of Cain" is certainly a minor work, and Cain does not even appear in Blake's The Ghost of Abel. On the other hand, major French poets used Cain as a protagonist in important works, and many minor poets and dramatists in England did use the theme of Cain, according to Roston.[12]

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[12] Roston lists fourteen plays on the theme of Cain published in England between 1822 and 1877 (Biblical Drama 198 n.1); to these plays should be added, presumably, any relevant poems and prose versions. There may have been similar works in France. According to Pich, Alexandre Soumet's Divine

Thorslev's comment thus suggests two areas for further study: How the theme of Cain appears in these minor works, (which should cast light on its popular significance), and how the theme appears in other languages (which should cast light on its universality). Ricardo J. Quninones, in The Changes of Cain: Violence and the Lost Brother in Cain and Abel Literature, (which appeared just as I was preparing to submit this dissertation), extends his survey to romantic and other works in Italian,[13] Spanish[14] and German.[15] The Bible and the Church Fathers were, of course, ubiquitous sources, and the works on Cain by Gessner and Byron were so widely translated that it is likely that, under their influence, the theme of Cain appeared elsewhere in Europe.

In The Changes of Cain, Quinones attempts a nearly compendious study of the Cain-Abel theme in literary works from biblical times to the present. His study is focussed on how literary

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Épopée explicitly conflates Cain and Abel with Robespierre and Louis XVI, mythologizing the French revolution in terms of the biblical story (Pich, LdeL 468).

[13] In Dante's Commedia, and in works by Tasso and Leopardi (mentioned by Radcliffe-Umstead 397 note 2); Byron mentions a work by Alfieri, called Abele, in the Preface to his Cain (157). See Quinones, The Changes of Cain 188-191.

[14] Miguel de Unamuno's Abel Sanchez. For an extensive list of sources relevant to this work, see Quinones, The Changes of Cain 271 n. 1. Quinones himself devotes an entire chapter to Abel Sanchez in Changes of Cain (173-181).

[15] Radcliff-Umstead (399) and Quinones (262-3 n.3) list several works and studies (399).

use of the theme has changed in the course of its encounter with history. My study is focussed on a related issue, how the romantic writers based their literary works on original or esoteric readings of the Bible to express political and religious commitments: I have tried, in the course of this study, to demonstrate the way in which each work depends on a particular reading of the enigmatic story in the Bible. Quinones, study does not share my concern with a close reading of the Bible, nor with how each work is rooted in a tradition of biblical analysis. The details of the biblical text, the influence of the esoteric exegetes, and the particular approach to the Bible in each literary work, are thus peripheral to his work and central to mine.

Where our studies do overlap, in the outlines of the history of the theme, the extent to which his results and mine coincide is a significant test of the accuracy of each work, what scientists call "repeatability." A glance at Quninones' chapter headings (v) is enough to show that he and I have divided the history into very similar periods. While he does not devote a chapter to the biblical account, in his introduction Quinones characterizes the theme, "in its original spare telling," as mysterious, "for there is reticence, if not confusion, not only as to the question of <u>why</u> it has happened but even as to <u>what</u> has happened" (17; his emphasis). His chapter on Augustine, who connects Cain with

the ills of the city, is called "Citizen Cain." Quinones' chapter on Beowulf and the medieval legends, which identify Cain as the progenitor of monsters, is called "Monstrous Cain." While he does not devote a chapter to the counter-tradition, he does explains the positive view of Cain in the ancient gnostic texts (29-32), without dealing with parallels in Masonic, kabbalistic and Christian mystical sources. Both Gessner's Der Tod Abels and Byron's Cain appear under the heading "Regenerate Cain." Gessner's work is subsumed in "Byron's Cain and its Antecedents." Quinones describes the prose-poem very much as I have.[16] Baudelaire and Leconte de Lisle, who emphasize the economic and apocalyptic significance of the race of Cain, appear in the chapter entitled "Cain of Future History" (vi). Our works corroborate each other on the periods of the history of the theme. Quinones continues his study to the present day, and so has additional chapters on post-romantic works.

Another difference between our two projects is the scope: Quinones includes works written over the course of a longer period, and more countries, so necessarily treats each work more briefly. Thus Quinones disposes of the retellings by Blake and Coleridge in a single footnote (265-6 n.18). He

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[16] He is impressed with "the sympathetic qualities" which Gessner assigns to Cain (89). He further notes the work's theological regularity (89), its optimism, its sentimental values of caring, family unity, and emotional expressiveness (88-92).

does not mention Nerval's novella at all. Hugo gets a footnote (273-74 n. 6), while Baudelaire and Leconte de Lisle, a little over two pages each (191-95). Only Byron's Cain receives Quinones' sustained attention. A great deal of my dissertation, then, focusses on material which Quinones has barely touched.

In studying Christian and Jewish legendary material about Cain, I did not look at the complementary Islamic sources. These are intimately intertwined with other ancient legends, and certainly deserve consideration in the context of a complete study of the theme of Cain. They would have been additionally relevant, for Nerval explicitly identifies them as direct sources for his version of the story of Cain.

Cain is not the only traditional villain whom the romantics reevaluated and claimed as their own.[17] At the head of the

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[17] A ces visions épiques de la préhistoire [Caïn, Noé] Leconte de Lisle associe étroitement le thème essentiellement romantique de la révolte de la création contre le créateur, la protestation de l'homme contre Dieu qui a créé ou qui tolère le mal, et qui tient l'homme responsable sans lui a donné la liberté. Ici encore les précédents abondent: toute une suite de héros sataniques--bibliques, mythologiques ou imaginaires--ont, dans la poésie moderne, accusé le ciel et revenediqué ou prophétisé la libération de l'humanité accablée par la tyrannie divine. (Eggli 122-23).

With such epic visions of prehistory [as Cain, Noah, etc.], Leconte de Lisle strictly associates the essentially romantic theme of the revolt of creation against the creator,

list is Satan. A thorough comparison of the treatment of Satan and of Cain in the romantic period might help explain much. I am specifically interested in to what extent the rehabilitation of Cain was related to his specific characteristics, as I have argued throughout this study, and to what extent it was a simple reversal of allegiances.[18] Satan is, at first glance, no more than an unequivocal figure of evil, and his rehabilitation in the romantic period might be no more than a reevaluation of evil. I suspect, however,

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> the protest of man against God, who has created and who tolerates evil, and who holds man responsible for his actions without giving him liberty. Here again, precedents abound: A whole series of satanic heroes--biblical, mythological, or imaginary--have, in modern poetry, indicted heaven and demanded or prophesied the liberation of a humanity [now] weighted down by divine tyranny.

[18] A study of Satan in the romantic period could begin with the works of Jeffrey Burton Russell: Satan: The Early Christian Tradition (Ithica and London: Cornell UP, 1981), Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages (Ithica and London: Cornell UP, 1984) and Mephistopheles: The Devil in the Modern World (Ithica and London: Cornell UP, 1986).

Other, similar works are:

Arturo Graf, The Story of the Devil (London:??, 1931).

Maximillian Rudwin, The Devil in Legend and Literature (Chicago:??, 1931).

Mario Praz, The Romantic Agony.

E. N. S. Thompson, "The Rebel Angel in Later Poetry." Philological Quarterly 27 (1948) 1-16.

Peter Thorslev, Jr., The Byronic Hero Chapter 8, "Satan and Prometheus" 108-124.

that the control is flawed, because thoroughgoing study of the legends of Satan will reveal reasons for sympathizing with him.

There was a moment in European history, after the hopes and the disappointments of the French Revolution, when much of the underpinnings of society seemed subject to challenge (Ridge 135). The legitimacy of political authority was subject to public debate, as was the legitimacy of religious authority: There were people who doubted the authority of the Bible, of those who spoke for the Bible, even of God. It was a time for idiosyncratic religious belief and passionate disbelief. The question of the source of authority was intimately related to the question of the source of evil: Is evil inherent in the human condition? Is evil an artifact of society? Can evil be overcome? Are some societies more or less evil than others? There was a moment when all those questions were open. That was the moment for the story of Cain: When a biblical story still had the power to shock, when religious, political and economic orders were all subject to question. The story of Cain addresses all of these issues. In retelling the story, these seven poets modify the story of Cain to challenge the religious, political or economic order. Those who felt all order called into question as if for the first time were the romantic poets.

Appendix

Abreviations:

ANF = The Writings of the Ante-Nicene Fathers

BL&J = Byron's Letters and Journals

CSEL = Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum

LdeL = Leconte de Lisle et sa création poétique

LJ = The Letters and Journals of Lord Byron

OC = Oeuvres complètes (Hugo)

OCB = Oeuvres compètes (Baudelaire)

PSEL = Patrologiae Cursus Completus Series Latina

Translations:

On the assumption that a general reader may well know French, I have endeavored to provide the text of materials originally in French, along with English translations in the footnotes. When I rely on a published translation, I cite the English work. Where published English translations were not available, or where I felt that there was some reason not to rely on the published ones, I did my own. In that event, the translation usually appears without citation. Please understand that as if I had written "my own translation."

On the assumption that a general reader may well not know Hebrew or Aramaic, I have not, in general, provided a text of

works originally in that language. My usual practice has been to do my own translation from Hebrew. Where I have relied on a published translation, I cite the English work. Where a work is cited to the Hebrew orginal, and no translation is cited, please understand that to mean "my own translation."

Texts in Latin, Greek or German are invariably quoted from published translations.

Transliteration from Hebrew:

In the interests of providing a reasonable sense of the pronounciation of Hebrew words, I have followed the general rules for transliteration from Hebrew as presented in the Encyclopedia Judaica (1:90), with two modifications. To avoid the need for special diacritical marks, I have used "h" for the letter "het," and "ts" or "tz" for the "tsadi."

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