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The Founding Curse: The Cain Myth and its Avatars in Nineteenth Century French Poetry

A dissertation presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Doctor of Philosophy.

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Mark Edward West
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Abstract

Cain as a myth in French literature has been summarized by Philippe Sellier's article in the listing for Cain in his dictionary of literary myths, published in the March 1986 *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*. Ricardo Quinones's book *The Changes of Cain* summarizes the various turns the Cain figure has taken in various literatures and includes a few remarks about the Cain myth in modern French literature. While there are many articles (and at least one entire book) on the Cain myth as it relates to specific works, such as Leconte de Lisle's "Qain," there has been no comprehensive study of the theme in modern French literature.

Although Quinones's synthesis makes important contributions to the study of the Cain and Abel story in literature, he writes very little about French literature. Sellier's synopsis is also very general and brief. As the center of a thematic structure, Cain consists of dualities, as Quinones claims, but I contend that the Cain theme builds an epic and archetypal structure. The development of the Cain theme may be traced from shortly after the French Revolution, through the Industrial Revolution, to the middle of the nineteenth century. This dissertation proposes to develop an overarching Cain archetype from the literary corpus of nineteenth century French poetry. From this study I arrive at the conclusion that the Cain myth and its avatars are interwoven into a system of myths and an archetype of humankind as marked by the curse of the first fratricide. Among the literary works to be treated are the poems "La Conscience" by Victor Hugo, "Qain" by Charles Leconte de Lisle, "Antéros" by Gérard de Nerval, "Abel et Caïn" by Charles Baudelaire, "Ahasvérus" and "Prométhée" by Edgar Quinet, and Ludovic de Cailleux's *Le Monde antédiluvien*.

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INTRODUCTION

Certain French poems and prose works of the nineteenth century used the thematic material that makes up the topos of the curse. This formed a mythical structure for key figures in literature such as Cain, Lucifer, the Wandering Jew and Prometheus. This curse may be characterized as the fatal thirst for the infinite, that is, the inability to grasp the answers to the ultimate questions of justice and existence. Cain's dream in Gessner's *Der Tod Abels* and the rivalry with God in Byron's *Cain* provided the impetus for the expression of the *Genesis* myth in later French works treating or alluding to the first fratricide. Exile and rebellion were common themes of Romantic and Parnassian figures in poetry. Fallen angels, exiles, cursed wanderers, rebellious rivals to the gods arose and established themselves as landmark figures in the literature of one of the most unstable periods of French political, philosophical and literary life. French poets of the nineteenth century, especially Romantics and Parnassians, depicted Cain as the primal exile, builder of cities, founder of sciences, and archetypal rebel. Poets such as Victor Hugo and Charles Leconte de Lisle blended hideous images with the epic contexts of an antediluvian world, creating isolated, profoundly independent heroes such as Prometheus, satyrs, fallen angels and giants. Even in the absence of a Cain character in certain poems, there is nonetheless the representation of man's conscience, human genius and the suffering of outcasts and pariahs. Certain figures, such as Lucifer and other fallen angels, the exiled Cain, the Wandering Jew, Prometheus, and others

extend the myth of the founding murder and form an archetype, a universal symbol hidden in the collective unconscious.

It is not so much the myth, the *Genesis* story itself, that this study is concerned with as with the interpretations of the story in literature which are evaluated and diagnosed in French poetry during the period of the Industrial Revolution and political upheaval which occurred during the nineteenth century. By the first century after the French Revolution, the founding curse had become part of the French national psyche as expressed in literature from "Le Jeu d'Adam" to imitations of Salomon Gessner's *Der Tod Abels*. Moreover, Chateaubriand's translation of Milton's *Paradise Lost* did not escape the attention of French writers who sought to further exploit biblical and epic themes.

Prometheus continued to inspire French poets who envied Shelley's poem "Prometheus Unbound." Raymond Trousson and others have provided a very thorough analysis of Prometheus in literature from Antiquity to the Twentieth Century. There remains, however, the problem of Cain; his is the founding curse which is still a plague on humanity many centuries after the Great Flood. Cain's fratricide is an extension of the Fall from innocence in Eden and Satan's second victim. Cain is also the founding scapegoat and rebel-- a biblical Prometheus. Emerging from the monstrous representations of the Middle Ages, Cain and Prometheus are present as the dark side of man's conscience and a voice of revolt against divine injustice in works of literature from Nicolas Gilbert's "La Mort d'Abel" (1800) to André Gide's *Prométhée mal enchaîné* (1899).

The origin of the name of Cain is linked with the ideas of usurpation of power and the seizure of property: "Le nom de Caïn vient de cette parole: j'ai acquis, je possède (en hébreu, *Kanithi*), que prononce Eve."¹ According to Jean-Louis Roch, the use of French words derived from Cain's name has been reflected in the character of the first murderer in literature and spoken language in the Middle Ages. Roch traces the use of terms related to the Cain of *Genesis* in the French language and finds that a form of the name exists in the modern French term *quémander*, to ask or beg. This term is usually associated with marginalized people: Jews, Saracens, beggars, gypsies, and so forth. Roch provides many examples of how these groups became associated with a race descended from Cain in medieval literature; for instance, the term *caymant* has also survived and links murderers to the name of Cain according to Roch.² The use of *quémander* and *caymant*, Roch suggests, establishes an intimate relationship between the first murderer and popular attitudes toward the marginalized, and it broadens our definition of the myth as it is found in French literature.

Terminology: Myths, Themes, Motifs and Figures

In his book *Mythes et Thèmes*, Raymond Trousson summarizes the uses of key terms for myth criticism and, after examining the works of Pierre Albouy, Roland Barthes and others, Trousson rejects "mythes" and even "mythes littéraires" because, according to him, a myth is not always in the form of a narrative. Trousson argues that a story can be depicted on a vase,

¹ Pierre Leroux, *De l'humanité* (Paris: Fayard, 1985) p. 395.

² Jean-Louis Roch, "Quémander, cayman, Caïn: Réflexions d'un historien sur une étymologie obscure" *Travaux de linguistique et de littérature* 25 (1987) 299-324.

for example, and refer to a certain myth without expressing it entirely. Trousson refers to *thèmes*, such as Prometheus, and on a more general level, to *motifs* such as rebels.³ Rather than adhere completely to Trousson's terminology, I have chosen merely to refer to it for clarification of the distinction between theme and motif. I use these terms simply to elaborate a myth system the center of which is the founding murderer. Trousson has already clarified some of the problems which have made many critics treat myth criticism with scorn; not all heroes are Promethean, and equating too many themes leads to lack of clarity in understanding how themes in a network of myths can best be understood. Rather than equating themes, explaining the relationship between myths and themes that is one of the purposes of the present work. As noted above, this study will use figure or character for the specific personage where Trousson posits themes for Prometheus (Cain appears as a figure or character in Gilbert and Legouv   versions of *La Mort d'Abel*, but Cain appears only as a motif in Ahasv  rus and Prom  th  e); myth will be used to denote a narrative in which the figure is used (*Genesis* 4 contains the original narrative myth of Cain and Abel) and includes reference to and embellishment of the narrative (Hugo's treatment of Cain in "La Conscience" constitutes a myth). The term "motif" will be used to identify a figure, a legend, or an object which can extend outside the narrative and make intertextual connections. A motif can be a seed for a larger theme; for example, the theme of exile is illustrated by the motif of the Wandering Jew in Quinet's prose poem "Ahasv  rus," and the related motifs of rebellious deity/ fallen angels. These are represented by the

³ Raymond Trousson, *Th  mes et Mythes* (Brussels:   ditions de l'Universit   de Bruxelles, 1981) pp.15-20.

figures of Prometheus, Satan and Cain. This study will show how the Cain figure is extended into an archetype, which we define as a universal symbol embedded in the collective unconscious and revealed in dreams and in artistic and literary representations. The theme of Cain is extended and overlaps with the figures of Prometheus, the Wandering Jew, and fallen angels (principally Lucifer). In French literature of the nineteenth century, Cain is no less important than Prometheus in conveying what might best be called the curse of the human condition as expressed in literature from the end of the French Revolution to the beginning of the twentieth century. My goal is to evaluate the place of the Cain myth in French poetry of the nineteenth century and define its place as the center of a web of themes and motifs and its avatars at the periphery. Finally, I shall establish the universality of the Cain myth as a psychological archetype that has its source in the hidden side of the personality, in feelings of guilt, jealousy, and a sense of injustice, instinct of fight or flight, and, as a thematic archetype through its relationship to themes to which it is intimately linked.

Critical Method

The most thorough book on the Cain and Abel myth in literature is Ricardo Quinones' s *The Changes in Cain* , in which he outlines three traditions for the Cain figure from medieval through modern European, American, and Spanish-American literature: Cain as the founder of cities according to Augustine, "Citizen Cain"; the cursed outcast, the "Monstrous Cain"; and the regenerative "Sacred Executioner," whose founding violence brings new order. The objective of this study is to reinterpret these

traditions in the light of a close textual analysis of French poetry of the nineteenth century . I disagree with Quinones on three major general conclusions about the evolution of the Cain myth in literature, because French literature of the modern periods does not support certain of his contentions.

First, his statement that the Cain and Abel myth in literature is to be found only in a Judeo-Christian context excessively limits a myth that is in fact much broader, even universal. I find, rather, that the Cain myth is applied to primitive man in antediluvian settings and to an exotic world although without strict adherence to the story in *Genesis* 4, and is preserved in most of the nineteenth-century manifestations of the story. That is to say that the myth is based on the world before the Flood, before the existence of Judaism or Christianity, and is relevant to all mankind.

Secondly, Quinones's contention that the Cain and Abel story is not epic in nature is not satisfactory. On the contrary, *Genesis* is the basis for many human epics: the ultimate quest of man is to find his way back to a lost paradise and to be reconciled with God. The first fratricide enabled man to build a civilization and to live without God's determining every step in his development. This is the beginning of secular human history, and epics were born of the exile from Eden. I disagree with Quinones's insistence that

Cain-Abel is unlike Faust, Don Juan, Prometheus and Satan, the Wandering Jew, even Frankenstein...The theme does not present us with a single-minded hero, driven through a series of successive episodes to some far-off goal. Not fame nor glory, not knowledge, nor love--none of these by itself determines the character of Cain-Abel. The theme is concerned

with a genuine complex of issues and relationships. In fact, its moral force is derived from this essential encounter with another, which means that its fuller expression is dualistic. (Quinones, p. 7)

Cain transcends dualism, however, and can stand alone in a myth system without a double; although doubles do at times accompany the cursed exile or the founding murderer, Cain in nineteenth-century France had as his source either a Gessnerian conscience tormented by a dream or a Byronic voice of liberation from divine injustice. I hope to establish that Cain is very much akin to Satan, the Fallen Angel and exile, and to Prometheus, the exiled founder of science. The most important dualism that emerges from the Cain myth is that of the scapegoat, which wanders the desert while its counterpart is sacrificed. Manifestations of Cain form a myth system that is indeed epic in nature. The founding and building of civilization with which Cain figures are associated generate metaphors for the development of all science, mankind's epic quest. Cain and Cain-like heroes are engaged in an epic struggle in the face of his discovery of death and the birth of his conscience; this is the essence of the *Genesis* story.

Finally, I find that Cain's curse leads to a profoundly differentiated hero; he has become independent and self-actualized. The Cain myth in French literature, while surrounded by binary oppositions, presents the potential for widespread violence which emerges from psychological and social conflicts. The Cain figure is an epic hero who can produce violence which proliferates or subsides through sacrifice; Cain's function in modern French literature is more varied and more epic than Quinones's work would lead one to believe.

My theoretical method is in part based on critical principles borrowed from René Girard, especially those pertaining to exile, scapegoats, and violence as a necessary foundation for civilization and religion. Girard provides a stimulating perspective that can illuminate the Cain and Abel myth. Although Girard refers to the myth in conjunction with enemy brothers, founding murders and scapegoats, he does not greatly elaborate on *Genesis* 4; he alludes to the story of Cain and Abel several times, but his commentary is limited to a few pages. Girard posits the foundation of religion through violence and comments but briefly on the Cain and Abel story in *Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde*. He points out that violence is ultimately staved off by God's fixing a mark on Cain, which warned others not to kill him lest Cain be avenged seven-fold. Thus, a primitive system of justice is established which has evolved into the deterrence provided by the modern legal system. ⁴ In *La Violence et le sacré*, Girard offers anthropological evidence to confirm his hypothesis that people of different cultures find ritual acts of violence to prevent endless cycles of retaliation from destroying the community. Furthermore, Girard points to Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, Romulus and Remus, and Eteocles and Polynices as brothers whose acts of fratricide provide surrogate victims whose deaths established civilizations. The surrogate victim is tied to the tragic through the fear and terror produced by the founding murders. ⁵ Girard's vision of tragic theater is explained in these terms in *Theater of Envy*, wherein he treats Shakespeare's plays as tragic manifestations of

⁴ René Girard, *Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde* (Paris: Grasset, 1978) pp. 168-172.

⁵ Girard, *La violence et le sacré* (Paris: Grasset, 1972) pp. 93-95.

envy and fraternal rivalry.⁶ Finally, in *Le Bouc émissaire*, Girard establishes the generative nature of the sacrificial victim. Once a victim is identified, an instigator of violence is sought out. Girard builds his arguments on Guillaume de Machaut's identification of the Jews as cause of a plague during the Middle Ages.⁷ Cain's murder of Abel was the founding act of man who began to build civilization and act apart from God's dominion: Cain founded the secular world. Christ's death parallels Abel's in that one dies for all; Cain murdered but once and other men were forbidden to murder him. Cain was exiled and Christ put to death. The Old and New Testaments are thus bound by the model of the two Levitical Scapegoats: Cain, the one that is set free to wander in the desert and Christ the one which is killed. I hope to elaborate Girard's founding murder, a notion claimed also by Ricardo Quinones, using the Cain and Abel myth as a model.

Whereas Girard takes an anthropological approach to literature, Carl Gustav Jung looks inward at the psychoanalytical aspects of men and their imaginations. My analysis uses Jung's personality archetypes to penetrate the emotional and intellectual workings of literary figures who share essentially the same motivation as Cain: jealousy, desire to overcome an injury perceived by the "other," projection of feelings of victimization and the emergence of the Shadow as the dominant force in the personality.

Jungian archetypes applicable to themes relating to Cain are the Shadow, the Persona, the Anima and Animus, and the Mask. Jung contends that the Shadow is the most accessible of the archetypes and the one which most conflicts with the ego. It is not completely evil, for it covers qualities

⁶ Girard, *A Theater of Envy: William Shakespeare* (New York: Oxford UP, 1991).

⁷ Girard, *Le Bouc émissaire* (Paris: Grasset, 1982).

in the personality which, though childish and primitive, could be healthy if permitted to come to light. Jung characterizes the shadow as emotional and autonomy-seeking. He contends that one is not responsible for one's emotions and that the process of discovering one's emotions reveals the Shadow:

Emotion, incidentally, is not an activity of the individual but something that happens to him. Affects occur usually where adaptation is weakest, and at the same time they reveal the reason for its weakness, namely a certain degree of inferiority and the existence of a lower level of controlled emotions ... one behaves more or less like a primitive, who is not only the passive victim of his affects but also singularly incapable of moral judgment. ⁸

Jung's Shadow helps construct a kind of Cain archetype; the *Genesis* story takes on a more universal meaning as psychoanalytical theory is applied to it. Jung further explains that the Shadow typically defends itself by projection, and since it is the unconscious that does the projecting, it is difficult to bring it to the attention of the subject who is doing the projecting. This is a particularly difficult phase to deal with, since the subject isolates himself when his Shadow leads him to project his emotions onto others. ⁹ Cain slays Abel in an outburst of this kind of primitive emotion. In *Genesis* it is apparent that his motivation is jealousy. This jealous rage brings to light Cain's projection of his guilt for murder on God. Underlying Cain's rage is his unspoken accusation of God for His unjustified preference for Abel.

⁸ C.G. Jung "Aion," *Complete Works*, trans. R.F. C. Hull, (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1961, 9 ii, pars. 13-19.

⁹ *Ibid.*

Jung's personality archetypes may be summarized as follows: the Persona is the inner-self, and the Mask, is that which one projects as a representation of the personality to others. The Mask protects the Persona from the intrusion of others into the realm of the true self. In effect, the Mask serves as a defense mechanism against the discovery of the hidden self; it offers protection against discovery of aspects of one's life which are private and would cause great anxiety if they were to be revealed to others. The male personality's inner self is its Anima, its sensitive feminine side; the corresponding masculine part of a female personality is the Animus. Jung contends that the inner-self in men is a weak, feminine soul and the outer appearance, the Mask, is strong and defensive.¹⁰

There are interesting parallels to these archetypes of the collective unconscious at the level of the individual in psychoanalysis to be found at the level of society as opposing groups form. Shepherds and crop farmers, nomadic or migratory food-gatherers and sedentary city dwellers, monarchists versus revolutionaries were the prime examples in late eighteenth century France, and socialist versus conservative forces that of the nineteenth century. All of these conflicts imply opposed but fraternal relationships which have their archetypal source in the Cain archetype and their mythical source in the Cain and Abel story.

French Sources: Le Coq, Du Bartas, D'Aubigné

The list of works, tragedies, poems, and even prose poems that contain elements of the *Genesis* story or heroes related to the Cain and Abel myth is

¹⁰ Jung, *Complete Works*, 7, pars. 305-309.

long and distinguished. The bibliographies of Quinones and Almut Pohle provide us with a good start. The former is rather limited in its enumeration of French works. The latter, a study on Leconte de Lisle's "Qain," is more generous. Catulle Mendès's *Dictionnaire des poètes* in his *Rapport sur le mouvement poétique en France 1867-1900* and Fernand Baldensperger's article "Gessner en France" helped fill in many gaps.¹¹ This is not an attempt to provide an exhaustive list of literary works in which Cain is an important figure, for some were judged too weak in their presentations of the themes related to the Cain myth and in others there is no Cain figure as such. This is a thematic rather than a chronological study of Cain and emphasis is placed on a universal system of myths rather than on a diachronic analysis of the evolution of the theme. Nonetheless, it is important to point out several key works which can be identified as sources of the theme for writers in the nineteenth century. Among the principle works in which a Cain figure is present are: Gilbert's *La Mort d'Abel* (one of many imitations of Salomon Gessner's poem *Der Tod Abels*); Gérard de Nerval's "Antéros"; Charles Baudelaire's "Abel et Caïn"; Victor Hugo's "La Conscience," "L' Océan" and "Et Nox facta est" in *La Fin de Satan*, and Charles Leconte de Lisle's "Qain." Works in which the central focus is related to the Cain figure, but in which Cain is not present as a protagonist, include Edgar Quinet's "Ahasvérus" (relating Cain to the Wandering Jew) and "Prométhée" (Cain as a Promethean figure), Lamartine's *La Chute d'un*

11 Ricardo Quinones, *The Changes in Cain* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991)

Almut Pohle, *Das Gedicht Caïn von Leconte de Lisle* (Hamburg: Hamburger Romanischen Studien, 1961)

Catulle Mendès, "Dictionnaire bibliographique et critique des principaux poètes français du XIX^e siècle" in *Le Mouvement Poétique français de 1867 à 1900* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1903)

F. Baldensperger, "Gessner en France," *Revue Historique de littérature française* 10(1903) 437-456.

ange and Vigny's "Éloa" (Cain as a fallen angel, Lucifer), and Hugo's "Le Satyre" (Cain as pagan deity and rebel).

Énea Balmas discusses the place of *Le Coq's* tragedy (1580) in the canon of sixteenth century drama and reproves modern critics who leave no room for a short, obscure and religious play like *Le Coq's* "Tragédie représentant l'odieux et sanglant meurtre commis par le maudit Caïn à l'encontre de son frère Abel." Balmas emphasizes the primal innocence of the play, despite the portrayal of the incestual relationship between brothers Cain and Abel and their respective sisters Delbora and Calmana and the role of Adam as a priest who intervenes on his sons' behalf. Balmas finds *Le Coq* innovative in that he uses no divisions of scene or act and has no modern costumes; the first family is clad in animal skins in winter and foilage in summer. He also presents six allegorical figures, "l'Ange," "le Remors de Conscience," "le Sang d'Abel," "le Péché," "la Mort" to accompany the six biblical characters, Adam, Eve, Abel, Cain, Delbora, and Calmana. The figure "Remors de Conscience" may have suggested the title to Hugo's "La Conscience." Balmas finds that the play is didactic in nature, but so original and innovative in form and vocabulary that it merits critical attention despite its obscurity and the conclusion of nineteenth century and early twentieth century critics that the play was plagiarized from *Le Mistère du Vieil Testament* and Théodore de Bèze's *Abraham sacrifiant*.¹²

This drama exemplifies the passage from medieval mystery to epic treatment of Cain in poetry. *Le Coq's* tragedy is, like the medieval mysteries (e.g., *Le Jeu d'Adam*), allegorical and didactic, but its formal

12 E. Balmas, "La Tragédie de Caïn de Thomas Lecoq" in *Mélanges à la mémoire de V. L. Saulnier* (Geneva: Droz, 1984) pp. 651-662.

innovations make it a significant link in the series of important representations of the Cain and Abel story in French literature.

In the sixteenth century the figure of Cain still appears to provoke the condemnation of French writers without calling into question God's justice in preferring Abel's sacrifice to Cain, an issue which would become central to the treatment of the Cain and Abel story in the nineteenth century. Du Bartas in *La Seconde Sepmaine* (1584) describes the first murder as the act of a mad brute, inherently jealous, violent and evil. God is sovereign judge and his rendering of justice is unquestioned. The act of sacrifice distinguishes Abel from Cain, the former justified by his righteous intentions, the latter condemned for his offering which was unacceptable to God. Furthermore, Cain believes he deserves to be favored as the first-born. Cain rails against the laziness and piety of his brother Abel. The text is quoted as found in Urban Holmes's edition of Du Bartas's works and is therefore given with sixteenth-century spelling.

Dieu qui sond les reins, et qui, juge, examine
 Le vouloir plus que l'acte, et le coeur que la mine,
 Le don d'Abel accepte; et rejette, offensé,
 Le profane present de son frere insensé;
 Qui, sentant les effects de la fureur divine,
 Se despice, se bat, se ronge, se chagrine.
 "Que te sert-il, Caïn, que te sert
 (Dit-il en soupirant) d'avoir le premier ouvert
 Le fecond amarry de la premiere mere,
 Et salué, premier, Adam du nom de pere?

Que te sert-il d'avoir biens, (hélas, malheureux)
 Le coeur haut, l'esprit grand, les membres vigoureux,
 Si cette femelette en homme desguisee,
 De la terre et du ciel est plus que toy prisee ?
 Que te sert d'occuper et nuict et jour tes mains
 Pour, penible, nourrir le reste des humains?
 Et d'avoir inventé d'une adresse subtile,
 Plus pour eux que pour toy, des arts le plus utile,
 Si ce stupide enfant, ce fai-neant, qui vit
 De tes tiedes sueurs, la gloire te ravit ? ¹³

After the murder, Cain is haunted by anxiety and horror. The slayer of Abel is condemned and given no redeeming qualities by Du Bartas. The characterization of Cain in the brief passage of *La Seconde Sepmaine* emphasizes Cain's rage and guilt; no modern, defiant and triumphant Cain had yet emerged. The Cainite heritage of the Middle Ages still prevailed for Du Bartas. The founding of cities and sciences was not shown to be Cain's great accomplishment; rather, jealousy and violence were what he passed on to mankind.

Les Tragiques of Agrippa D'Aubigné (1616) is a verse account of the terrible violence committed by the French Catholics against the Huguenots. In the first part of this epic poem, France is described as two brothers who fight over the breast of the same mother, and in the last part, entitled "Vengeances," the evil brother Cain's murder of the innocent brother Abel is

13 Urban T. Holmes, ed. *The Works of Guillaume De Salluste Sieur Du Bartas*, Vol. 3, *La Seconde Sepmaine* (Chapel Hill: U North Carolina Press, 1940) p. 83.

again evoked as a metaphor for the wars of religion which were tearing France apart in the sixteenth century. From the medieval mystery *Le Jeu d'Adam* and Thomas Le Coq's *Caïn*, French literature begins to build a niche for the Cain myth. By the time of the appearance of *Les Tragiques* the Cain and Abel story begins to occupy a prominent place in the French national psyche and its myth system.

Les Tragiques is epic, lyrical, and tragic and these modes are heightened by the extension of that tradition of Cain in poetry which depicts the social upheaval and misery of a nation that was torn between Protestant uprising and a strong majority Catholic establishment. Mérimée's *Chronique du règne de Charles IX* used D'Aubigné's work to enhance his portrayal of rival brothers, one in the Catholic camp, and the other Protestant, both loyal to a cause but reluctant to bring harm to each other. The tragedy in Mérimée's novel is particularly enriched by the research the author did in reconstructing the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre and his preferred source for this event was D'Aubigné's work; this is apparent from the large number of explicit allusions to D'Aubigné and the copious footnotes in the Pléiade edition which refer to *Les Tragiques*.

Foreign Influences: Gessner and Byron

The Swiss-German author Salomon Gessner's *Der Tod Abels* made quite a sensation in eighteenth-century France. At least ten French poems and plays in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries dealt with the Cain and Abel story and many openly claimed to be inspired by or imitations of Gessner's five-act prose drama. Among these were Gabriel Legouvé's

short verse play in three acts, *La Mort d'Abel*, and Nicolas Gilbert's verse imitation of Gessner bearing the same title in two *Chants*.

The fascination in France with Gessner was at first due to the idyllic style and the melodramatic treatment of the first family's discovery of death. The traditions of the *pastorale* and the new *comédie larmoyante* were very fashionable in France at the time when Gessner's influence began to be felt. Imitations by Legouvé and others began to become more tragic and less sentimental than Gessner's work. Cain's dream is depicted, not as the result of a psyche predisposed to violence but as a fatal curse which brought death and exile to mankind. In Gilbert's "La Mort d'Abel" (1758), the dream was not directly inspired by a demon as in Gessner's poem, and Cain after 1800 bears more responsibility for his murder of Abel. Later in the century, as in Leconte de Lisle's "Qäin," Cain rises up to accuse God of inspiring murder and bringing about the first death.

Lord Byron's mystery *Cain* has often been cited as one of the chief sources for the Cain myth in French poetry and drama of the nineteenth century. Henri Bernès, Edgar Pich and René Descharmes are among the critics who have analyzed the unmistakable inspiration of Byron in Leconte de Lisle's "Qäin," and Edmond Estève's *Byron et le romantisme français*¹⁴ has documented the widespread influence of Byron in French Romanticism. Fabre D'Olivet's translation of Byron's *Cain* into French with critical "Remarques" appeared in 1823, about the same time Chateaubriand's translation of Milton's *Paradise Lost* appeared in France (1826 in his *Oeuvres Complètes*). With Byron's *Cain* was born the Romantic rebel of the

14 E. Estève, *Byron et le romantisme français* (Paris: Boivin, 1907).

largest possible proportions. Just as several minor French dramatists and poets had earlier imitated Gessner's *Der Tod Abels*, many followed Byron's lead in writing works in the same vein of metaphysical rebellion. In his preface Byron claimed to have little memory of his childhood reading of Gessner's Cain idyll, but in his annotations on Byron's *Cain*, Truman Steffen reports that Byron had belittled Gessner's sentimentality and that while his German teacher was weeping while reading the Gessner work to him, young Byron was thinking that "any other than Cain had hardly committed a crime in ridding the world of so dull a fellow as Gessner made brother Abel."¹⁵ Quinones discusses the Cain figure in Gessner and in Byron as two steps in the evolution of the myth in modern literature, but he scarcely mentions French imitations and adaptations of these works and their treatment of Cain. Nevertheless, it is clear that Byron's Cain recognizes that God requires blood sacrifice, and in his rage he provides a mock sacrifice of his own, killing Abel. The notion that good can come out of evil confounds Cain, who sees, after a long conversation with Lucifer, only that what God provides is called good though evil may come from it. Byronian tenets of divine injustice and the indistinguishability of good and evil are developed by French Romantic poets, some of whom, no doubt, had Byron's Cain in mind when writing their own poems with Cain as a character or theme. As the poets and playwrights of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in France imitated Gessner and let it be known, Leconte de Lisle publicized the fact that his inspiration came chiefly from Byron. It appears that imitations of Gessner and Byron attracted interest in French poets who dealt with the Cain

15 Truman G. Steffen, *Lord Byron's Cain* (Austin: U of Texas Press, 1968)p. 261.

myth. The theme of Cain was born of sentimentality and fell into the mainstream of Romanticism. French literary taste moved from Gessner's idyllic sensibility to Byron's Romantic rebellion in the course of the nineteenth century.

Philosophical Conceptions: D'Olivet, Leroux, Renouvier

In his thorough study of Leconte de Lisle, E. Pich has pointed out, but not discussed, three philosophical views of the Cain figure in nineteenth-century literature. The first important philosophical statement about Cain to which Pich referred was that of Fabre D'Olivet in the latter's "Lettre à Lord Byron" and "Remarques," both published with his translation of Byron's *Cain*. (1823). D'Olivet objected to the liberties Byron took with the *Genesis* story, such as the anachronism of Lucifer's referring to Christ when speaking to Cain and the use of the names of Lamech's wives for those of Cain and Abel (p. 33). However, D'Olivet's objection in this case is not convincing, for Lucifer, like God, can be considered to exist beyond the limits of time and space. D'Olivet attacked Byron for referring to Moses as the source of his setting. The Hebrew of the *Pentateuch* was incompatible with Byron's interpretation. Furthermore, because the philosophy exposed in *Cain* favored the inspiration of evil over that of good, D'Olivet criticized Byron's raising evil to the level of the divine and promoting the idea of God's injustice and the power of knowledge as being superior to obedience to God. D'Olivet sees the first brothers not as actual human beings but as "cosmogonique" constructs that portray the universal conflict of material and spiritual forces (p. 7). For D'Olivet, Abel is the symbol of sentimentality while Cain symbolizes jealousy and gives birth to materialism, possessions, and property. Consequently, for D'Olivet, Cain is the founder of cities as refuges in exile, and of a legal system designed to stave off the violence of endless conflict over property.

Pierre Leroux, in his *De l'humanité* (1840), speculates that the first murder may have been the infamous moment Rousseau referred to in his *Discours sur l'inégalité* when, for the first time, a man claimed “Ceci est à moi” and the institution of property was thus born.

Je dis donc que Caïn tue Abel, son frère, c'est l'établissement de la propriété, ou, en général, la subjection de l'homme du sentiment par l'homme de la sensation. Le premier né d'Adam fut l'homme de la manifestation, de la sensation, de l'activité physique, et de la propriété... ¹⁶

Whereas Renouvier makes this point in passing, Leroux goes on at great length to demonstrate that the Cain myth is, rather than just the story of the first fratricide, a parable for the introduction of the evil of the usurpation of property. Thus Cain is associated with the introduction of evil into the world. The introduction of evil affects all men at all levels of society, in that the natural rights of man are being transgressed. It is easy to understand Leroux as a devout *rousseauiste* justifying a horrible revolution which had occurred just over half a century before *De l'humanité* was published:

Cherchons, en effet, la cause du mal.

Le droit de l'homme, conforme à l'essence et au besoin de sa nature, est, comme nous l'avons vu, le droit de communier avec tous ses semblables et avec tout l'univers. La famille, la patrie, la propriété, n'existent même qu'en vertu de ce droit. Donc, si, au lieu de tendre à l'extension de la communion générale des hommes entre eux et avec l'univers, elles tendent à la négation ou à la restriction du droit même qui les fonde, il en résulte

16 P. Leroux, p. 395

nécessairement un mal; ou plutôt de là résultent tous les maux. (Leroux, p. 145)

According to Leroux, man has passed from a state of inequality based on opposing classes, even to the exclusion of all other groups, to a state of equality. The link between Leroux and Rousseau is reinforced by the fact that the former's *De l'Humanité* is the continuation of the latter's *Essai sur l'égalité*. Leroux's title seems to complement Rousseau's *Discours sur l'inégalité parmi les hommes* in content as well as in title. In chapter six of the section entitled "Tradition" in *De l'humanité*, Leroux discusses at great length the origin, meaning, and continuation of the race of Cain. Everything moves toward unity in Leroux's metaphysical analysis, and evil will be vanquished by itself in this process that brings all men together into a state of equality.

Pich also cites Charles Renouvier's *Introduction à la philosophie analytique de l'histoire* (1896) as an analysis of the Cain myth as a social phenomenon in history. In Chapter 4 of this work, "Développement solidaire du mal. Point de vue moral des races," the Cain legend is tied to the spreading of evil throughout humanity and the origin of races. Similar to Leroux, Renouvier suggests that property rights may well have been established by the first murder: "...n'est-il pas permis de dire que l'institution de la propriété de la terre, toute juste qu'elle est, se fonde sur l'exclusion et, par suite, sur l'exil et le meurtre, hyperboliquement parlant?"¹⁷ Renouvier goes on to claim that this founding murderer can be rehabilitated and that in

17 C. Renouvier, *Introduction à la philosophie analytique de l'histoire* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1896) p.63.

him good and evil can become intertwined. However, once the crime of passion has become one of habit, Renouvier finds in him

...celui qui passe du crime au divertissement et du divertissement au crime, et traverse la vie dans l'ivresse et le vertige. Ce sera le scélérat qui se connaît lui-même, et bientôt ne se connaîtra plus; l'homme perdu, auteur d'une race perdue, dont la nature même est profondément altérée et ne se rétablira peut-être jamais. (pp. 64-65)

This is how Renouvier envisions the origin and proliferation of evil in society.

To what extent the Cain and Abel myth becomes a philosophical rather than an artistic structure is debated by M. Magnin in his preface to Edgar Quinet's "Ahasvéus." Many poets of the late eighteenth century and those of the first half of the nineteenth chose the form of prose poetry to produce works that were more in the spirit of the Enlightenment than lyrical in nature. As I shall demonstrate below, "Ahasvéus" (the Wandering Jew) and other poems connected with the Cain myth were often prose poems. By the middle of the nineteenth century, prose poems had become more numerous and more visionary in nature than lyrical poetic works than narrative prose fiction; they were marked by the curses of the exiled, the tormented and the marginalized. Prose poetry is a kind of aberration as a *genre*, in which the poet's lines wander without an orthodox metrical form. Yet artistic expression is in no way lacking in poetry, whether in verse or prose form, treating Cain and related themes; even in those works which are admittedly obscure, there is an outburst of lyric and epic voices that breaks

from the style of Enlightenment literature. Magnin praised this break from Enlightenment reduction thus:

L'homme, en effet, est né pour connaître; c'est un des buts principaux de sa destinée. Or, pour y parvenir, il lui a été donné deux instruments, la raison qui poursuit et atteint la science, et l'imagination qui n'atteint que la poésie qu'on peut appeler la demi-science, et, mieux encore, la prescience. L'imagination est l'avant-courrière de la raison...Nos grands poètes dramatiques et nos romanciers ont, par leurs chefs-d'oeuvres de psychologie sentimentale, rendu vulgaire et presque scientifique la connaissance des mouvements de l'âme et des passions. Aussi le champ de la poésie va-t-il se rétrécissant de siècle en siècle; la raison et la prose s'avancent, comme une marée montante, et couvrent peu à peu les rivages où se jouait la poésie.¹⁸

Poetry was a genre which suffered throughout the eighteenth century and biblical mythology contributed to the renaissance in French verse into the nineteenth century. The foundation for the epic and tragic modes was recaptured in the Cain and Abel myth as inspired by Gessner and Byron. Certain French poets, Hugo, Leconte de Lisle, and Quinet in particular, took this extension of the Fall of man and recreated the founding curse in their age.

The purpose of this research is to evaluate Cain as an archetype that is largely overlooked, that provides a psycho-historical and thematic structure for French literature, particularly for poetry from Romanticism to

18 M. Magnin, "Ahasvérus et la nature du génie poétique," in *Oeuvres Complètes de Edgar Quinet* (Paris: Pagnerre, 1858) pp. 47-48.

Parnassianism. Furthermore, this is a synthesis of the Cain archetype that reveals a meptaphorical projection of a sentiment of divine injustice, of the scapegoat motif, and of the duality of "fight versus flight" in the themes of fallen angels, the Wandering Jew, and Prometheus.

CHAPTER ONE

CAIN IN ROMANTICISM: FALLEN ANGELS, SACRIFICE AND THE SHADOW

Themes related to the Cain myth establish three things: first, that the major Romantic poets took the mythology of *Genesis* and extended the curse of the Fall through presentations of new fallen angels and of violence in the forms of sacrifice and murder; secondly, that the conflict within fallen angels and similar Romantic figures reveals the most essential characteristic of Cain-- a psychological complex hidden within the personalities; finally, that, from the Romantic treatment of the Cain archetype to the Parnassian treatment of it, there emerges from the foundations of guilt an exile in mankind, a Promethean revolt involving the denial of divine justice. Ultimately, the Cain archetype accompanies the loss of faith in the nineteenth century and points to man as the center of his own universe. In the age of political upheavals, the ascendance of industry, Marxism and Darwinism, French poets had moved from the sentimental to the stoic, from the patterns of describing human destiny in terms of transcendence and faith to the positivist adaptation of *Genesis* to show that secular society would stand on its own and reject the need for faith.

Since this study is primarily thematic rather than diachronic, the presentation of works will be organized according to themes rather than

dates. However, dates of first publication are given in the text in works treated below. Furthermore, these themes are organized primarily by author, since interpretations of themes presented tends to be personal and consistent in a given writer. The major poets of the nineteenth century are presented in the first two chapters of this thesis in order to build a thematic framework with poets and works which are more widely known, and works of lesser-known poets tend to be treated in the last three chapters. Myths and writers are further arranged by genre; the first part treats lyric poetry, the second prose poetry, and novels and drama are briefly discussed in the conclusion. The disproportionately lengthy treatment of poetry, including prose poetry, is due to the fact that nearly all of the works which present a Cain figure are poetic. The second most important genre for the Cain myth is drama; this supports the contention that the tragic is closely related to the Fall in *Genesis*. Cain is seldom found in narrative prose, and in novels one has to extrapolate a Cain figure by looking at the function of a main character to determine how it relates to Cain's role in the biblical account. The final chapter presents the curse of Cain in terms of space and the prose poem. Finally, works containing the Cain theme which have no Cain figure and which do not explicitly allude to the *Genesis* 4 story are included in this study to establish a broad context for the archetype for which Cain is the foundation. It is therefore significant that the Cain theme can exist where there is no Cain figure, particularly when motifs such as the Shadow, sacrifice, exiles, founding acts, fraternal rivalry, scapegoats and rebels are essential in a work. It is hoped that further application of the Cain archetype may be made in analyses of novels and dramas not discussed herein.

Nicolas Gilbert's *La Mort d'Abel* : The Dream of Fratricide

An idealistic poet who died young, Nicholas-Joseph-Laurent Gilbert produced several noteworthy poems, one of the last of which appears at the end of an edition of his poems published (with a preface by Charles Nodier) in 1884. Gilbert's "La Mort d'Abel" (1793) is found in *La Poésie de Gilbert*. The preface points out that his rivalry with La Harpe and the latter's ruining of Gilbert's reputation as a poet. The latter was left a broken man with a desire to write a loftier, more transcendent verse than his contemporaries. Despite his *Satire sur le 18e siècle*, Gilbert never knew success and he became the enemy of the philosophical movement. In his preface Gilbert asks the reader to overlook the poet's youth and accept his best efforts to revive lyric poetry, which in the age of Voltaire had become very low in quality and lacking in distinction. Inspired by Salomon Gessner's *Der Tod Abels*, Gilbert wrote a version of the Cain and Abel story in verse-- "La Mort d' Abel." In obvious imitation of Gessner's idyllic style, Gilbert's alexandrine couplets are rich in natural images and pastoral landscapes; nor is Gessnerian sentimentality lacking. A preromantic pathetic fallacy emerges in the imagery surrounding Cain and Abel and their wives. Sleep and shadows are ever present in the *décor* during Cain's tirades.

Il erre sans dessin [sic], et sa voix qui murmure,
 Dans le calme profond où dormait la nature,
 Imite le bruit sourd d'un tonnerre éloigné.

"Cette nuit, dans mes sens quel désordre a régné!

"O songes! disait-il, ô nuit, ô nuit terrible!
 "Mon âme cependant reposait plus paisible,
 "Et déjà s'envolaient mes noires visions,
 "Lorsque ses longs soupirs, ses lamentations
 "M'éveillent, malheureux! et du soin qui la ronge
 "Accroissent mes ennuis, que le réveil prolonge.¹⁹

Cain's "amante," his sister Méhala, has prayed for Cain throughout the night as the poem begins in *Chant Septième* (only the seventh and eighth *chants* of this poem exist). The wandering and restlessness of Cain are reflected in the description of nature and present him as predisposed, albeit against his will, to anguish and violence. He immediately recognizes that Abel obtains God's favor, whereas he cannot. Méhala has a soothing effect on his weary, burdened mind, and as his jealousy slowly builds to rage, he seeks rest :

Sommeil ! ô doux sommeil ! Daigne enfin m'assoupir,
 Toi qui suspends les maux de la nature entière,
 Toi qu'en vain j'appelais dans ma triste chaumière! (p. 209)

Indeed, in Gessner's poem Cain's dream was his motivation for the murder of Abel and as Leconte de Lisle's Qain stirs, he curses the God who awakens him. Cain's sleep is cursed in Gessner and Gilbert, for he scarcely finds it, and when he does his dreams are ominous. I find that Cain is indeed the symbol of man's predisposition to violence, and it is in sleep that man's nature is revealed and contributes to the inspiration of artistic and literary

¹⁹ Nicolas Gilbert, "La Mort d'Abel" in *Oeuvres de Gilbert* (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1985) p. 208.

representations of primitive violence. Nevertheless, God's apparently arbitrary preference of Abel and Cain's remorse, especially in the Gilbert poem, indicates that Cain could do nothing but kill his brother. Elie Wiesel suggests that, although the first murder was indeed evil, it was human and Cain acted in the only way he could, releasing his justifiable rage against God, who had not proscribed murder, nor made known *a priori* what death was and what would bring it about.²⁰ The Gilbert poem, following Gessner's model, brought to French literature a new hero, epic and Romantic, who transcended the medieval vision of him as a cursed monster and gave him a conscience. The anguish of Gilbert's Cain may have caught the attention of Victor Hugo. In any case, it was probably from Gessner's original that Legouv   and Gilbert had written their versions of the death of Abel.

Vigny and Lamartine: The Romantic Vision of Fallen Angels and Sacrifice

In several of Vigny's major poems one finds the suggestion of a Cain and Abel myth without the presence of either brother or the mention of the first murder *per se*. The Old Testament is, however, the context of "Mo  se," "  loa," "La Fille de Jepht  ," and an entry in his *Journal d'un po  te*. This biblical context provides us with an occasion to observe the mythical, intertextual environment in which can be analyzed the elements of the solitary, Romantic hero, sacrifice, doubles, and Cain. The character of Cain is strikingly similar to Vigny's Moses. He has the awesome burden of leading his people, and he is in the privileged but unfortunate position of

20 Elie Wiesel, "Cain and Abel: The First Genocide," in *Messengers of God: Biblical Portraits and Legends*, trans. Marion Wiesel (New York: Random House, 1976) pp. 37-64.

having the knowledge and power (Promethean "fire") necessary to civilize his people. The principal difference between Moses's leadership on the one hand and Cain's and Prometheus's on the other is that the former has divine favor, the latter divine contempt; yet both Cain and Prometheus end up exiles and even Moses wanders in the wilderness with the Hebrews for forty years. Prometheus's liver is forever eaten while he is bound, and Moses dies without being permitted to enter the Promised Land.

In the poem which follows "Moïse" in *Livre Mystique*, "Éloa," the story of a Lucifer who seduces an angel and leads her to Hell, there are several dualities which help develop the theme of the Romantic hero: the gender of the two protagonists, their relationship to God (man/ angel), the opposing causes of their respective falls (moral failure/ seduction). Still, Moses and Éloa are both heroic, tragic figures. In his relationship to God, Moses has a special status. Although he is mortal, Moses is an unhappy hero. Vigny notes this in these verses which contain the poem's refrain:

Vos anges sont jaloux et admirent entre eux.--
 Et cependant, Seigneur, je ne suis pas heureux;
 Vous m'avez fait vieillir puissant et solitaire,
 Laissez-moi m'endormir du sommeil de la terre!
 (Vigny, "Moïse," p. 8)

Cain, like Moses, is larger than life in literary manifestations of *Genesis*. Éloa, dated 1823 by Vigny, is the feminine side of the Romantic hero, or perhaps of the poet .

Éloa, a female angel--although the Scriptures tell us that there is no marriage among angels and they presumably have no gender-- is seduced by the Angel of Light, Lucifer, Satan. Moreover, in French the word for angel can only be given with the masculine article, which is conspicuous in Vigny's references to Éloa as "*un Ange*" in the first verse, but thereafter, Éloa is referred to in the feminine as "*Toute parée*" and "*elle*" (Vigny, "Éloa", p. 13), "*forte*" (p. 19), and then Vigny, cataloguing her feminine charms, takes a small liberty with the French language: "C'est une femme aussi, c'est *une Ange charmante*" (p. 13, all my italics).

Light and shadow distinguish the good angel from the bad just as they do Heaven from Hell: "L' Éther a ses degrés, d'une grandeur immense,/ Jusqu'à l'ombre éternelle où le Chaos commence." It is more than a physical separation that is indicated here, the eternal Shadow referred to is a metaphor for the moral descent and is applicable to the human conscience. There are three levels of "l'éther": light, darkness, and chaos or the abyss. Each level is reserved for a certain rank of angels, and Éloa is "fallen" for having strayed to a sphere which is only for the exiled. It is a place like that reserved for Cain, exiled to the desert land of Nod:

Où, dans leur cercle étroit, se balancent nos sphères,
L'espace est désert, triste, obscur, et sillonné
Par un noir tourbillon lentement entraîné. (pp. 19-20)

The play of shadow and light and allusions to Dante are likewise evident in the treatment of the Cain myth by Hugo and Leconte de Lisle. Vigny begins

the next stanza by extending this motif from the physical to the metaphysical:

Jamais les purs Esprits, enfants de la lumière,
De ces trois régions n'atteignent la dernière,
Et jamais ne s'égare aucun beau Séraphin
Sur ses degrés confus dont l'Enfer est la fin. (p. 20)

Analysis of this passage reveals binaries which associate “les Esprits purs” with light and, by opposition, the shadowy sphere of “Chaos” with darkness. The first pair reflects good, the latter evil. Irony results from the third line; although Lucifer is beautiful and appears good, he has, in fact, gone past this limit, and although Éloa is innocent before her seduction by Lucifer, she does what is unexpected and she too goes beyond the limit, descending to the forbidden level. Even Cherubims, once passing beyond this barrier, are helpless exiles; the next to last stanza of *Chant Premier* ends: “Voilà pourquoi, toujours prudents et toujours sages, /Les Anges de ces lieux redoutent les passages.” Like Cain and Abel, Éloa and Lucifer are “Les rivaux” and each will visit a sphere not intended for her/him; Abel will pass on to death and Cain will be exiled and live in a solitary and forbidding place. It is clear that the transgressors in each story are Éloa and Cain, the difference being that Éloa was led away and Cain acted. Éloa, the feminine figure, reaches her exile passively, as Eve did, after having been tempted and led astray, whereas the man Cain, out of jealousy, is active in his killing Abel.

The third *Chant*, "La Chute," confirms the link between Éloa and Cain. Her reticence and innocence lost, Éloa, like Cain, has come to represent the first step of evil on Earth. As in the case of Adam and Eve, her nakedness for the first time reveals her guilt. She is linked to the original sin and, like Cain and Abel, she has a flawed nature. Her fall from innocence is a great one, as is that of Cain.

As with Hugo's Cain in "La Conscience," *le regard* plays a critical role for the protagonist. God's eye pursues Cain in Hugo's poem, and Éloa's loving gaze is returned by the Deceiver, who is compared to a watch-dog. The watchful eye and the language in the Vigny poem leave little doubt that "Éloa" was an inspiration to Hugo:

Son regard ne peut fuir celui qui la regarde...

Et c'est le chien d'arrêt qui, sombre surveillant,

La suit, la suit toujours d'un oeil fixe et brillant. (p. 30-31)

Baldensperger gives us proof that Vigny's poem struck Hugo's imagination and that the former made it a point to reread Byron's *Cain* while rewriting his "Éloa."²¹ It is certain, therefore, that both poets were influenced by Byron's work and that Hugo knew Vigny's "Éloa" and esteemed it highly.

The descent into Hell after the tragic seduction of Éloa is narrated with many oppositions that parallel the good and evil angels. Their commingling is of a metaphysical nature. Lucifer's name, given less frequently than one might expect, is itself a Promethean sign: the Latin etymons *lux* and *fero* make Lucifer a torch carrier, a giver of light and

21 F. Baldensperger, p. 317.

knowledge. Because light is usually associated with good, this makes Satan's name ironic. Lucifer tells Éloa:

... Bientôt dans un mépris égal
 Se confondront pour nous et le bien et le mal...
 Comme l'aube et la lune au couchant reposée
 Confondent leurs rayons, ou comme la rosée
 Dans une perle seule unit deux de ses pleurs
 Pour s'empreindre du baume exhalé par les fleurs,
 Comme un double flambeau réunit ses deux flammes,
 Non moins étroitement nous unirons nos âmes. (p. 38)

Éloa hesitates, descending to Hell holding Lucifer's hand, after her decision to follow the beautiful angel of light to the nether world. One is reminded of the myth of Persephone in Hades. Love is the hook which Lucifer uses to lead to her fall. She looks back toward Heaven with "des regards irrésolus" until, approaching the darkness of Hell, it is out of sight.

The stanza with a choir of celestial angels is followed by a stanza with "Des Anges du Chaos" who cry out in pain mixed in the flames with the beating of their wings. Again, images of the sublime are brought together with images of the hideous. The chorus of angels from Heaven are heard to repeat, "Gloire dans l'Univers, dans les Temps, à celui/ Qui s'immole à jamais pour le salut d'autrui!" (p. 38)

The sacrificial element serves as a link between this story, the Cain and Abel story, and Christ's passion. Éloa's self-immolation promises redemption, but for whom? Perhaps Satan himself could be rehabilitated.

Philippe Muray, after citing a multitude of works in which Satan plays a prominent role, claims that in nineteenth-century French literature "Racheter Satan devient un devoir."²² Many of the Old Testament stories can be seen as models of Christ's sacrifice, and the poets of nineteenth-century France, particularly the Romantics, exploited the Devil, to fuse good and evil as much as to oppose them. The necessary or beneficial evil, the *felix culpa*, emerges from the notion of sacrifice as seen in the works of "Éloa" and other poems discussed below, notably Alphonse de Lamartine's *La Chute d'un ange* and "Jocelyn" and Edgar Quinet's "Ahasvérus."

Éloa, though she may never escape from Hell, is justified if not redeemed by the sacrifice she makes for love's sake. Éloa had believed she would bring redemption to Lucifer, but the text clearly points out that this is not the case, as the exchange between Éloa and Lucifer shows: "J'ai cru t'avoir sauvé.--Non, c'est moi qui t'entraîne.--Si nous sommes unis, peu m'importe en quel lieu." (p. 38)

The poem suggests that the two symbols of good and evil will coexist. Éloa is content that she is united with him whom she loves and only discovers in the final verse, the final word of the poem, that it is Satan who has made a victim of his loving slave. Indeed, Satan is "plus triste que jamais" in the end; bringing down his beloved to Hell has stung even his conscience. This suggests that even Satan has some redeeming virtue, that in neither Éloa nor Satan resides absolute virtue or evil.

Éloa's counterpart is Lélith, who, according to Jewish tradition, Vigny tells us, was Adam's first wife.²³ She is the daughter of evil and can be

²² Philippe Muray, "L'Affaire Satan", *Stanford French Studies*, 10 (1986) 238.

²³ Victor Hugo alludes to Lilith-Isis several times in *La Fin de Satan*. He does so first in "L'Entrée dans l'ombre" (p. 774) in the tenth part of "le Gibet" entitled "Lilith-Isis" (pp. 859-860,) and again in the third

taken for the mother of Cain. "Lélith" was to be a poem conceived perhaps as a complement to "Éloa," but apparently was either never written or never published, but was nonetheless sketched out by Vigny in his June 15, 1857 entry in *Le Journal d'un poète*:

Un poème à faire--*Lélith* ou le génie de la nuit... Dieu, voyant l'homme seul et ennuyé, créa pour lui la femme. Mais avant lui Lucifer avait donné à Adam une maîtresse, c'était Lélith.

Créée par le Démon, elle vivait avec Adam et avait pour enfants les esprits nocturnes. Depuis la naissance de la belle Ève, Lélith ne fait autre chose que combattre Ève dans ses enfants.

Lélith est la rivale et l'ennemie d'Ève.

Lélith a poursuivi les filles d'Ève dans leurs amours et dans leurs enfantements.

Elle troubla la naissance de leurs fils et surtout de leurs filles.

Elle rencontre Éloa, lui explique la Création des mondes et des cieux.

La Pitié de Dieu a pris une forme appropriée à chaque planète. Pour la Terre, ce fut la rédemption, réparation de la chute.

--Toi, Éloa, dit Lélith, tu es née d'une larme de Dieu versée sur cette misérable espèce humaine; mais moi je suis née d'une pensée d'amour de mon père pour l'homme à qui il me donna pour compagne.

LÉLITH

En ce temps-là, Lélith rencontra Éloa. En vertu des vices égoïstes de l'homme, Lélith croit qu'il faut le détruire, et fonde la religion des étranglements.²⁴

Everything in this description of Lélith parallels the Cain and Abel story, with a feminine transformation of the characters. Taken from extra-biblical tradition, Vigny's project for the poem "Lélith" was never realized, and one sees the unspoken, hidden side of the *Genesis* 1-4 story. It is the Shadow and the dark side of "Éloa." Éloa's origin is divine, Lélith's carnal and inspired by Lucifer's desire to gain power and influence over mankind. God's favor and pity is then scorned by Lélith, and the jealousy which one sees in Cain characterizes her as well.

On the very same page of *Journal d'un poète*, one finds the entry for May 29 with the heading "Caïn." It is a humorous exchange that Vigny intended as the basis for a play, which proves how popular the myth had already become in 1857.

Un Juif, grand industriel, protecteur, directeur et fondateur d'une ligne de chemin de fer, pourra dire dans une comédie ce mot caractéristique: "On parle toujours de la Genèse et de Caïn."
R.--Je le crois bien, c'est le premier des assassins!"
"Ce n'est pas cela que je lui reproche, c'est d'être un mauvais spéculateur."²⁵

²⁴ Alfred de Vigny, *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris: Pléiade, 1950) pp. 1330-1331.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

Indeed, Cain “speculated” on crops rather than on animals to sacrifice. As René Girard points out, the Cain and Abel story demonstrates that violence occurs when there is no sacrificial outlet.²⁶ It is however unclear whether the joke is using the Cain and Abel story to poke fun at Jewish merchants or, rather, to underline the importance of the myth in the everyday world of commerce. This passage also brings to mind Shakespeare's Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*. The Jews are associated with Cain in literature when, ironically, in the mind of the writer, they appear to be inexplicably or unjustly better off than their fellow men. They are then singled out to serve as scapegoats; this is another motif of which the origin is the Cain and Abel story.

Finally, among Vigny's poems, “La Fille de Jephthé” gives an example of a female sacrificial victim, as “Éloa” does. The name of Abel is invoked in the song of lamentation of the daughters of Israel in commemoration of the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter, to make clear the comparison of the sacrificed daughter and the slain brother of Cain. Celebration of victory in battle must be followed by the sacrifice of a virgin to God. There is a mixture of celebration and horror: “Le peuple tout entier tressaille de la fête” (p. 58). The victorious Jephthah, his head lowered, seems to know at the outset that evil will befall him: “Sourd à ce bruit de gloire, et seul, silencieux, / Tout à coup il s'arrête, il a fermé ses yeux” (p.58). His daughter having happily offered incense, Jephthah is confident that, because of her faithfulness and her father's valor in battle, God will favor him always. However, Jephthah must tell her that she will be killed, since he had vowed

26 René Girard, *La Violence et le sacré* (Paris: Brasset, 1972) p. 4.

to sacrifice the first thing he saw upon returning from victory against the Ammonites (Judges 11:31), and he addresses God and then explains to her why she is singled out:

“Seigneur, vous êtes bien le Dieu de la vengeance:

En échange du crime il vous faut l'innocence.

C'est la vapeur du sang qui plaît au Dieu jaloux!

Je lui dois une hostie, ô ma fille! et c'est vous!” (p. 59)

Jephthah suggests apparently that it is God's nature to be vengeful and that violence and sacrifice is fundamental to worship of Him. The sacrifice of an innocent virgin is for expiation of the “crime,” which is presumably the proliferation of violence in battle. Jephthah has become “impure” by his participation in violence against the idolatrous Ammonites. A sacrificial crisis has arisen. Vigny's poem thereby casts God as utterly cruel and unfair, repaying one who has brought Him victory in battle by requiring that his innocent daughter be immolated. This is the role of Iphigenia and of the Cain and Abel myth as seen in Byron's *Cain*, Leconte de Lisle's “Qaïn”, and others that followed.²⁷ Jephthah's daughter requests two months to wander, an exile, to lament her youth and her virginity. Cain likewise

²⁷ Lamartine's *Jocelyn* includes a passage which treats the Jephthah story as well. *Jocelyn* was written between 1831 and 1836 and published with Lamartine's *Oeuvres Complètes* in 1860. In the “Première Epoque” dated “le 1er juin 1786,” Lamartine writes:

Elle a pleuré sept jours, comme sur les montagnes
 La fille de Jephté que suivaient ses compagnes
 Demanda quelques nuits au Seigneur irrité
 Pour pleurer ses printemps et sa virginité;
 Puis, comme un doux agneau revient à sa nourrice,
 Vint elle-même d'offrir sa gorge au sacrifice.
 Ainsi pleurait ma mère, et puis elle a dit: Oui!
 Mais un coeur sur la terre en sera réjoui.
 Sitôt que de ma soeur j'aurai béni la joie,
 Sans regarder derrière, entrons dans notre voie.

wanders in exile in Nod until he builds cities and his race establishes its own civilization. This wandering in the wilderness is that of a scapegoat, which according to Leviticus, is set free while another is sacrificed. Still, the Romantic poets, as with Vigny, often do not assure that there will be a beneficiary of the sacrificial act. It is Girard's contention that the ritual of sacrifice is carried out simply to put an end to retaliation and proliferation of violence.²⁸ Whether a sacrificial victim is animal or human, male or female, is of little consequence according to Girard,²⁹ but the victim's resemblance to the thing it is replacing is what will allow us to know what a suitable object of sacrifice would be. In the case of Jephthah's daughter, she is at the heart of the community, isolated at the highest station of society, as Iphigenia is. This is the position of the Romantic hero in French literature and reveals why sacrifice and the Cain and Abel story are so important to this movement in art and letters.

Alphonse de Lamartine's contribution to the Cain myth is somewhat less celebrated and less pronounced than that of the other major poets of his time in France. He does, however, treat the themes of sacrifice and the fallen angel at great length in the poetic "fragments" *Jocelyn* (1836) and *La Chute d'un ange* (1838). Although these two works are not closely related in their characters and plots, Lamartine did consider *Jocelyn* a "fragment," referring to *La Chute d'un ange* as its continuation or complement.³⁰ The

28 René Girard, *La Violence et le sacré* (Paris: Brasset, 1972) p. 8.

29 René Girard, *La Violence et le sacré*, p. 25.

"Dans une étude générale du sacrifice il n'y a aucune raison de séparer les victimes humaines des victimes animales. Si le principe de la substitution sacrificielle est fondé sur la *ressemblance* entre les victimes actuelles et les victimes potentielles, il n'y a pas à craindre que cette condition ne soit pas remplie quand c'est à des êtres humains qu'on a affaire dans les deux cas." (Girard's italics.)

30 J-L Vaudoyer, ed. *Alphonse de Lamartine: Poésies* (Paris: Hachette, 1962) p. 213.

latter suffered mediocre critical acclaim, and, partly because of its monumental length, was not widely read. Still, *La Chute d'un ange* continues the motif of the fallen angel, with sources in Milton, and it and "Jocelyn" bear striking references to Cain and the sacrificial cult of the Old Testament.

The idyllic style and décor of these Lamartine poems, dramatic if not epic, seem to be inspired by Gessner. Unlike many others who imitated the story and characterizations of the German idyll *Der Tod Abels*, Lamartine contented himself in "Jocelyn" with the Gessnerian pastoral backdrop for his poem without taking anything from the Swiss author's plot or characters. Following an eighteenth century in which the tragic, epic and lyrical voices had been largely replaced in poetry by frivolous *vers de circonstance*, travesty and mock-heroic, Lamartine's poetry revived the French lyric and, in *Jocelyn*, attempted what he called an "épopée du sacrifice." The reintroduction of these lost modes, whether successful or not, was manifested in part by allusions to the Cain and Abel story. The late-eighteenth-century plays by Legouv   as well as the poem "La mort d'Abel" of Gilbert had already introduced the Cain and Abel theme and thereby reintroduced these lost modes. Lamartine, rather than pursuing another pastoral version of Abel's death, writes a more original story in *Jocelyn*. It is the pastoral style and the melodious verse that provide the essential Lamartinian framework for the narrative. Sacrifice of love for honor and purity is the central theme, which harkens back to Cornelian tragedy. This and the theme of sacrifice recall Eden, *Genesis* and the Fall. In the passage

in the *cinquième époque* in which Jocelyn has to leave Laurence, who cannot understand why, she evokes the image of Cain sacrificing Abel:

--Non, cria-t-elle, non! je ne crois que lui!
 Lui! *comme un vil parjure il se serait enfui ?*
 Moi! par Dieu, par mon père, à son soin confiée,
Comme un autre Caïn, il m'eût sacrifiée,
 Il m'eût abandonnée en *cet affreux désert,*
 Comme un agneau trouvé qu'on caresse et qu'on perd?
 Moi sa fille! Sa soeur! sans parents, sans patrie,
Du même lait que lui pendant deux ans nourrie?
A son Dieu sans remords il se fût immolé ?
 Cet abri *sur mon front* se serait écroulé?
 Ce coeur, dont n' approcha jamais *l'ombre d'un crime,*
 Se serait entr'ouvert sous moi comme un abîme?
 M'aurait toute vivante en sa mort englouti?...
 Puis d'un son de voix bas, d'un air plus abattu:
 “ Ah! Jocelyn, dit-elle, *ah! frère, où donc est [sic]-tu ?*” ³¹
 (my italics)

Laurence cannot believe that Jocelyn would forsake her, but he has done so, for a time, to give the last rites to a dying priest. He has fled, like Cain. He has abandoned his beloved. Is she the scapegoat, in the original sense, which has been abandoned in the desert? The image of sharing the same mother's milk is striking, probably an allusion to D' Aubigné's *Les*

31 Alphonse de Lamartine, *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris: Pléiade, 1963) p. 683.

Tragiques.³² The reference to the desert is a typical metaphor for the habitat of the accursed exile Cain. Jocelyn is ostensibly sacrificing Laurence to his duty to God. Jocelyn, his forehead marked like Cain's, asks rhetorically if Laurence's heart would not open and break apart as an abyss if he should ever leave her. The shadow of a crime to which she refers contrasts her heart with his hypothetically shadowy criminal soul. In short, this entire passage postulates a traitorous, Cain-like villain for the characterization of Jocelyn. The final verse from this passage cited above recalls Cain's answer to God's query into Abel's whereabouts, which is "Am I my brother's keeper?" The complaint of Laurence is so lengthy that it suggests the ultimate complaint of unjust suffering, that of Job. The suffering of the innocent inspired by the book of Job is widespread in Romanticism and has been intimately linked to the Cain and Abel story.³³

As in the Cain and Abel story and the book of *Job*, some of the most profound questions concerning the human condition are posed in *La Chute d'un ange*: for example, why does evil occur in the lives of the innocent? In the portion of the poem entitled "Fragment d'un livre primitif," C  dar, who learns from this holy book that suffering is the lot of man, cries out for an answer to this question:

"Le sage en sa pens  e a dit un jour: "Pourquoi,

32 Agrippa D'Aubign  , "Mis  res", *Les Tragiques* (Paris: Edition Lutetia, no date) p. 52.

Je veux peindre la France une m  re afflig  e,
Qui est entre ses bras de deux enfants charg  e.
Le plus fort, orgueilleux, empoigne les deux bouts
Des t  tins nourriciers; puis,    force de coups
D'ongles, de poings, de pieds, il brise le partage
Dont nature donnoit    son besoin l'usage...

33 Claudius Grillet, *La Bible dans Lamartine* (Paris: Emmanuel Vitte, 1938) p. 64.

"Goethe, dont le Werther avait d  j   fait sa rh  torique    l'  cole du l  preux, a tir   de Job son prologue de Faust...Quant    Byron...il a introduit dans ses *M  lodies h  bra  ques* un Ca  n qui ressemble    Werther et    Job comme un fr  re..."

"Si je suis fils de Dieu, le mal est-il en moi ?

"Si l'homme dut tomber, qui donc prévint sa chute ?

"S'il dut être vaincu, qui donc permit la lutte ?

"Est-il donc, ô douleur ! deux axes dans les cieux,

"Deux âmes dans mon sein, dans Jéhovah deux dieux ?" ³⁴

This is the fundamental question of justice posed by Job. It is a mainstay of romantic poets and was pondered much by Byron and subsequently by the French. ³⁵ As with Vigny's journal entry on "Lélith" and Hugo's evocation of "Lélith-Isis," Lamartine has likewise explored the apparent dual nature of God. Man, it seems, was helpless against his impending fall and it seems as if there were a power of evil, equal to the divine benevolence, which led man to choose to sin. The supposed duality in God engenders a dual nature in man that gives him a penchant for doing evil in a heart which basically desires good.

This exploration of man's relationship to God and evil is based largely on God's communication with man. The paradox of God's word is still very much debated today, yet the opening of the *Livre Primitif* makes it clear that God's word cannot be found in its pure form in the written word, since it passes through man's hands and is thereby corrupted. Man can only reflect imperfectly the shadow of God's Word:

Le seul livre divin dans lequel il écrit

Son nom toujours croissant, homme, c'est ton esprit!

C'est ta raison, miroir de la raison suprême,

³⁴ Alphonse de Lamartine, *La Chute d'un ange*, (Paris: Hachette, 1962) p. 270

³⁵ *Ibid.* Byron is quoted: "J'ai eu l'idée de composer un Job, mais je l'ai trouvé trop sublime, il n'y a point de poésie que l'on puisse comparer au livre de Job."

Où se peint dans ta nuit quelque ombre de lui-même.
 Il nous parle, ô mortels, mais c'est par ce seul sens!
 Toute bouche de chair altère ses accents. (Lamartine,
 Hachette, p. 267)

The duality of God has its origin in linguistics and its extension in man, who can only hope to have a shadow of divine knowledge and inspiration and must confront his fellow man in hopes of finding divine meaning. Cédar and Adonai are met with violence; the former flees and the latter is killed, making them a pair of scapegoats. Cédar, the fallen angel, becomes a wandering exile, and Adonai presents, as Abel does, the Girardian sacrificial crisis which all subsequent events in Lamartine's poem must follow. This inherently tragic conflict is at the heart of the Cain and Abel myth in Lamartine.

Violence and exile surrounding Cédar seem to inspire an allusion to the Cain and Abel story in "La Chute d'un ange." However, Cain's descendents lived not by laws but by instincts in a passage from the "Deuxième Vision" and Lamartine at this point places Cain in a Rousseauesque state of nature.

Les enfants de Caïn, familles fugitives,
 Vivaient comme la brute éparse dans les bois,
 N'avaient point inventé le pouvoir ou les lois.
 Les lois n'étaient alors que ces instincts sublimes
 Qui font vibrer en nous nos sentiments intimes; (Lamartine,
 "La Chute d'un ange," p. 846)

In the very next passage, by contrast, (pp.846-847) Abel's offspring are credited with building "les merveilles humaines." This is a reversal of the tradition of Abel as nomadic and noncivilized and Cain as the founder and builder of cities and civilization. In this text the word of the elders was the only law and no other progress is noted. It is even pointed out that their vision of the world is limited to the land where they see the sun rise and set. This suggests a sedentary lifestyle, which is consistent with the tradition of Cain as tiller of the soil, but, contrary to it, this also signifies a nontechnological, godless, ignorant mentality in Cain's race, which would lead to no progress, no development and no city building.

Pareils dans leur démence aux peuples d'aujourd'hui
 Qui ne voient l'univers qu'où leur soleil a lui,
 Proscrivent de leurs droits des nations entières,
 Et pensent que de Dieu l'amour a des frontières. (p. 846)

Furthermore, their lifestyle is nomadic in this "Vision" of Lamartine. The vengeance required by Abel's shed blood has caused Cain's race to roam the Earth. This civilization building is attributed, rather, to Abel's descendants.

As for the role of violence, it is characteristic of Cain's clan that its members maintain peace internally but feud with outsiders. This is the case only until things begin to go wrong: internal strife can break out within the community, or, as is the case with C  dar, he sets a funeral-suicide pyre for himself because sacrificial redemption is no longer possible for himself or his earthly love. C  dar's situation is probably another instance of sacrifice-gone-wrong; he has given up immortality, as Jocelyn has given up his

priestly calling, for love. The C  dar of *La Chute d'un ange* is a French Romantic version of Heracles , who, Girard reminds us, also threw himself on a funeral pyre with his beloved when his intended sacrifice went awry.³⁶

³⁶ R. Girard, *La Violence et le sacr  *, p. 41.

CHAPTER TWO

CAIN'S CURSE AS FLIGHT VERSUS FIGHT: ROMANTIC AND POSTROMANTIC VISIONS OF CAIN

Hugo's Cain and Satan

In "La Conscience," Victor Hugo establishes as a theme the compulsion to flee from the guilt of the first murderer. A Cain personage is present in this poem and in several others. The conscience and the Shadow are the aspects of human nature that Hugo highlights in Cain. In *Les Contemplations*, some of the most widely recurring imagery is that of shadows, and the poem in this collection which most thoroughly exploits this image is "Ce que dit la bouche d' ombre." Hugo uses this rocky gorge in Jersey, where he spent part of his exile from France, as the source of a mysterious voice that explains the origins of evil and the universal redemption. It proclaims Hugo's pantheism, according to which spirits inhabit all of nature: "Tout est plein d' âmes." In verses 52-98, the origin of evil is explained in terms of a shadow, which, ever with us and beside us, reminds us of the evil which God allows to coexist with Him. The eternal question is posed of why evil can exist given that God is love (vv. 99-118). Hugo's shadow image then describes the Great Chain of Being on which man is on the half-way point between angels and animals.

In the posthumously published *La Fin de Satan* Hugo has made entry and exit from the shadow figure the framework for several consecutive poems. In “Et Nox facta est” the symbolic shadow is known at first as Cain, then as Judas, and finally as Barrabas. Satan, hidden among shadows, descends from the heavens like Icarus:

Depuis quatre mille ans il tombait dans l'abîme...
 Seul, et derrière lui, dans les nuits éternelles,
 Tombaient plus lentement les plumes de ses ailes.
 Il cria: --Mort-- les poings tendus vers l'ombre vide.
 Ce mot plus tard fut homme et s'appela Caïn. ³⁷

Then Judas and Barrabas are transformed and the Cain figure continues his fall. The fall is paralleled by illuminated skies to fall and be overcome with darkness. A firmament full of stars is gradually covered by darkness, which extinguishes the multiple sources of light until three suns remain, then one, then everything is overtaken by the shadow. The shadow figure, personified in *Les Contemplations*, is the spatial and metaphysical metaphor for man's journey into and out of darkness. In part four of “La Sortie de l'ombre” Satan/Isis calls on the elements of nature, animated witnesses of suffering, “témoins pensifs du deuil universel,” to listen. It associates Abel with nature and refers to Cain as “l'aïeul des noires créatures,” and recounts the first murder by portraying Cain as evil, then claims to hold three accomplices to the murder.

Il le frappa d'abord avec un clou d'airain,

³⁷ Victor Hugo, *La Légende des siècles, La Fin de Satan, Dieu* (Bibliothèque de la Pléiade: Paris, 1950) p. 767.

Puis avec un bâton, puis avec une pierre;
 Puis il cacha ses trois complices sous la terre
 Où ma main qui s'ouvrait dans l'ombre les a pris.
 Je les ai. (*Fin de Satan*, Pléiade, p. 781)

Evil here is in the hands of a divinity, or an anti-divinity, which, in the end of "La Bouche d'ombre," is Bélial, welcomed by God as the prodigal son, brother of Christ. The doubling of Cain and Abel is found in the relationship between Christ and Satan, but there is reconciliation for the latter pair which perhaps is long anticipated by the first brothers as manifested in Hugo's vision of *Genesis*. There is redemption for all in Hugo, even for Satan. Cain's murder of Abel, which is not an unpardonable act, provides for a conscience in man and a model by which Satan discovers that redemption is possible; a man sacrificing his brother is paralleled by Christ's death in place of Barrabas.

In "L' Océan" Hugo uses the ocean, metaphorically, as a battleground for Cain and Abel and their descendants:

"Tais-toi, mer! Les coeurs s'appellent,
 Les fils de Caïn se mêlent
 Aux fils d'Abel;
 L'homme, que Dieu mène et juge,
 Bâtira sur toi, déluge,
 Une Babel..." (Hugo, *La Légende des siècles*, p.549)

The rage of the ocean is compared to the rage of fraternal strife; whereas one normally sees natural images used to describe human emotion, this is the

inverse, and Hugo uses human rage to express his vision of the ocean.

Furthermore, Hugo's ocean and Cain share the isolation of exiles:

“Je m'appelle solitude,
Je m'appelle inquiétude...
“Je suis funeste et salubre...”(p. 540)

The ocean addresses man and the first sons of Eve in particular:

“J'écume à flots sur ma grève.
Va-t'en. Ne viens pas, fils d'Eve,
Frêle rival,
Sauter sur mon dos farouche
Et mettre un mors à la bouche
De mon cheval...” (p. 541)

The ocean, like the shadow, warns man to beware, not to become engulfed inside it. The ocean is to be feared rather than God. It reflects the *malaise* and the rage in man since Cain. The ocean is so awesome that it has no true rival, and this position leaves it in solitude.

Concerning poems in which Cain is a protagonist, Hugo and Leconte de Lisle seem to have been rivals for the honor of the best portrayal of the first murderer. It is Leconte de Lisle's “Qäin” which outdoes Hugo's as the most impressive manifestation of all the Cain myths. This poem, the first of the *Poèmes Barbares*, is also the longest; it is a work of five hundred verses, one hundred stanzas of 5 verses each. The title of the collection shows the author's penchant for subject-matter inspired by the Orient and by

peoples in primitive societies. By choosing to portray these "barbares," Leconte de Lisle was trying to distance himself from Greco-Roman myths and the materialist and bourgeois values of his time.

On the other hand, a completely different perspective is found in Victor Hugo's "La Conscience." I propose to contrast Hugo's Romantic vision of the Cain and Abel story, the birth of conscience in man, and the exile of Cain as a depiction of a Romantic hero with Leconte de Lisle's Parnassian view of the first murderer as a transcendent hero, a villain who projects his guilt onto God himself.

"La Conscience" has a rather traditional form, alexandrines in couplets which are in alternating masculine and feminine rhymes. In contrast, Leconte de Lisle employs a more complex versification, the stanzas in "Qaïn" having an *abbab* rhyme scheme with feminine rhymes in the first and fourth verses; the second, third and fifth verses have various rhyming patterns. As for vocabulary, with Hugo it is biblical and quite orthodox. The proper names are derived from *Genesis* and are much like those one finds in the typical French editions of the Bible. One finds typical romantic motifs in "La Conscience," such as the interplay of light and dark, the pathetic fallacy, and a Romantic hero who seeks rest, which God denies him. This poem has a dramatic five-part structure, according to Berret:

Ce que Victor Hugo conçoit, c'est un drame avec des décors, c'est un
drame en cinq actes. Successivement Caïn met entre l'oeil de Dieu et lui:
le lointain de l'espace--une tente de toile--un mur de bronze--une ville
fortifiée--le tombeau. 38

38 Paul Berret, *La Légende des siècles de Victor Hugo* (Paris: Melotée, 1957) pp. 88-89.

At the end of each act Cain finds himself ever surveyed by God's eye, and, with the desperate cry of the first murderer, he announces to his family that they must tread ever farther to shelter themselves from God's accusing gaze.

Inspired by *Genesis* and by an engraving in *Le Grand Théâtre Illustré* by Thomas de Gueudeville (1707), Victor Hugo depicts a man who cannot flee from the eye of God, which overwhelms him with remorse. In turn, the painting "Caïn Fugitif" by Fernand Cormon was inspired by Hugo's "La Conscience." It is likely that Leconte de Lisle knew Hugo's poem and the Cormon painting before writing his "Qaïn." Hugo was partly influenced by Ludovic de Cailleux's *Le Monde Antédiluvien* and possibly by Vigny's "Moïse," "Le Déluge," and "Éloa" and Lamartine's "La Chute d'un Ange."³⁹

The poem follows Cain's vain search for refuge from the eye of God. He seeks to hide behind architectural structures as though he could interpose them between God and himself, thus blacking out the divine light of His judgment. The shelter Cain seeks in this poem is an analog for the mask that shelters the persona from the ego in Jung's analysis of the personality. The buildings and shelters which Cain constructs in the Hugo poem are architectural metaphors for a mask that protects man from his persona, his guilty conscience, and from God. Cain hears his weary sons propose to seek rest "sur la terre" in the beginning of the poem. This is echoed by Cain's attempt to find shelter from God's eye "sous la terre"; God's eye is still there, even in the grave.

³⁹ Victor Hugo, *La Légende des siècles* (Paris: Nouvelles Classiques Larousse, 1949) p. 34.

Whether above or below the earth, Cain finds no peace. It is not Cain's children who continue to find God's accusing eye but Cain himself. This suggests a psychological complex in Cain and his descendants, one that is archetypal and contained in their collective unconscious. The need to wander or to flee is inherited from the founding murderer. His fear of retaliatory violence from men who would find God's mark on him forces him to seek exile. There being no safe hiding place from guilt, Cain bears within him the primal desire to flee what he cannot eradicate from himself. Cain in Hugo's poem creates the conscience, the horrible awareness of sin, death, murder, and the apparently limitless space in which God has left him to wander.

"La Conscience" presents a nightmare shared by humanity which inherits not only original sin but, worse, awareness of its penetration into his psyche. The reappearance of God's eye to Cain presents a curse on the founder of one of the most heinous of sins, fratricide. Dreams and prophecies are found elsewhere in *La Légende des siècles*, most notably in "D'où est sorti ce livre," "La Trompette du jugement" and "La Vision de Dante." There are also several allusions to prophecy in *Les Contemplations*, especially to that of John of Patmos, the biblical author of Revelations. Hugo attended many seances of the "tables tournantes," and his poem "Aux Revenants" provides further evidence of his belief in the power of supernatural visions.

Hugo often used prophecy in his work, but it is absent from "La Conscience." Hugo's "La Conscience" is dominated by God's eye and its pursuit of Cain. This poem limits itself to the narration of the life of Cain

and his family. The protagonist in "La Conscience" is a prototypical exile who is forever trying to hide from his awareness of death and his role in bringing it into the world.

Hugo did not limit himself to Judeo-Christian myths even in *La Légende des siècles*. He also evokes Islamic myths and Nordic and pagan legends. However, Western myths are much more important to Hugo in *La Légende des siècles* than they are to Leconte de Lisle in *Poèmes Barbares*, the former collection having been dedicated to France and the history of man, and Christianity being reflected in the titles of the divisions of the poems, e.g. "D'Eve à Jésus." To put the focus of his work on man's experience, Hugo states in the *Préface* to *La Légende des siècles* that "[les légendes] ne sont donc autre chose que des empreintes successives du peuple; empreintes prises, tantôt sur la barbarie, tantôt sur la civilisation, presque toujours sur le vif de l'histoire."⁴⁰ In the scheme of Hugo's mythology, "La Conscience" has been largely overlooked as a central part of the myth system of nineteenth-century poetry to which Hugo's epic and lyrical poetry made one of the most important contributions.

Leconte de Lisle's "Qaïn" and Hugo's "Le Satyre": Cain's Vengeance and Rebellion

Leconte de Lisle typically chose to treat more exotic themes than Hugo, opting to detach his imagery and themes from mainstream western civilization. His myths were taken from the first primitive peoples; his poetry dealt with man's primitive "barbarie"; the first men were not yet

⁴⁰ Victor Hugo, *La Légende des siècles*, pp. 3-4.

slaves of government, nor of materialism, nor of a jealous god. Leconte de Lisle begins his collection with the avenging Cain, who defies God, and not with Eve, the mother of men.

In Leconte de Lisle's poem, "Qaïn," the spelling of the names is quite exotic. For instance, Bernès reports that for Cain, after having considered *Kaïn*, Leconte de Lisle used *Qaïn*, more suggestive of primitive language. In addition, the name of God is *Iahvèh*. Probably phonetically close to the Hebrew pronunciation of Jehovah, Irving Putter recounts how it displeased Leconte de Lisle's critics for its erudite ostentation. Other examples of this oriental, pseudo-phonetical spelling include: *le fleuve Khobar*, *la langue Khaldée*, *l'âpre et haut Gelboé-hor*, *les ânes de Khamos*, *la cité maudite d'Hénokhia* (the land where Cain is buried), *Héva* (for Eve) and *le Khéroub* (cherubim, God's sentinel). A few other names have standard spellings: *Elohim* (God), *Géhenne et Shéol* (hell).

The Parnassian poet emphasizes Middle-Eastern vocabulary with somewhat pedantic spellings. Despite the fact that certain critics found fault with his spelling, with time most of them ended up praising his *couleur orientale*. Estève esteems his imagery superb, calling it "le décor ...le plus magnifiquement barbare qu'il y ait dans les *Poèmes Barbares* et dans toute la poésie française." ⁴¹

Whether a myth of Judeo-Christian origin or of "barbaric" inspiration, the status of exile is the essential feature which distinguishes Hugo's Cain from Leconte de Lisle. Hugo's Cain flees, Leconte de Lisle's fights; the Cain of "La Conscience" is the archetypal wandering exile, Leconte de

41 Edmond Estève, *Leconte de Lisle: l'homme et l'oeuvre* (Paris: Boivin et Cie, 1922) p. 76.

Lisle's figure is the Promethean rebellious exile. A furious and rebellious Cain turns against God in the Cain poem in *Les Poèmes Barbares*. Baudelaire would second this vision of Cain, for his Cain turned the tables on God, finding him guilty of inspiring Cain to murder his brother, in "Abel et Caïn." I submit that this vision of Cain, though fundamentally different from that in Hugo's "La Conscience," is nonetheless inspired by it, a reaction to it, and a logical step in the evolution of the archetype in the poetry of nineteenth-century France. Moreover, one can see a kind of one-upsmanship emerge in Leconte de Lisle's poem: the Romantic view of Cain as an exile who first experiences the harsh weight of a guilty conscience is replaced by the Parnassian perspective endowing Cain with the power to turn and judge God.

Critics have commented on the aesthetics of Leconte de Lisle at length; this discussion is concentrated rather on the ideology and thematics surrounding the Cain figure. Leconte de Lisle's Cain presents a kind of manifesto of revolution against God in a modern world in which God has permitted the destruction of man in an industrial society at the hand of his brother, his fellow man. Leconte de Lisle was tempted to throw away the manuscript, believing it to be too "byronien."⁴² Estève, Pich, and Vianey all find in this Cain a prophetic vision with sources in Byron and the pastoral, biblical prose poem of Ludovic de Cailleux.⁴³ In particular, Pich

42 Joseph Vianey, *Les Poèmes Barbares de Leconte de Lisle* (Paris: Les Grands Événements littéraires, 1933) p.130.

43 Edmond Estève, *Leconte de Lisle: l'homme et l'oeuvre* (Paris: Boivin & Cie. 1922) pp. 72-82; Edgar Pich, *Leconte de Lisle et sa vision poétique* (Paris: Chirat, 1975) p. 459; Vianey, pp. 130-140;

Bernès, Henri. "Le 'Qaïn' de Leconte de Lisle et ses origines littéraires," *Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France*, 18 (1911) 485-502.

--*Les Sources de Leconte de Lisle* (Genève: Skatline, 1973), pp. 288-297.

underscores the contemporary political ideas and their relationship with the revolutionary aspect of "Qain." Irving Putter has acquainted us with Leconte de Lisle's pessimism and the loss of faith in nineteenth-century poetry that his poetry reflects.⁴⁴ What seems more essential, however, is the epic, transcendent and universal character of his poetry. Drama is important to the Cain story. From the medieval mystery play *Le Jeu d'Adam* to the dramatic structure of Hugo's "La Conscience," the interaction of the first family of *Genesis* with the Creator is typically dramatic. Neither "La Conscience" nor "Qain" is lacking in tragic action. The action in "La Conscience" unfolds in five parts, but this action is the same repeated flight of Cain from God's view.

If Hugo's vision of the Cain myth presents the flight of man from his conscience, Leconte de Lisle's shows the rage that inspired the act of murder and the reflections of the murderer. In the Leconte de Lisle poem, Qain wants to destroy God's dominion totally. He has imposed His law on man, and guilt and remorse inevitably follow. Jung has suggested in "Job's Answer" that God provided the opportunity and enticement to sin. In fact, Jung's interpretation of *Genesis*, unorthodox as it may be, raises the question of God's justice and logic in the temptation in the Garden of Eden.⁴⁵ This is what I hope to establish as the impetus for Cain in literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: that man turns the tables on the cycle of sin and

44 Irving Putter, *Le Pessimisme de Leconte de Lisle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961).

45 C. G. Jung "Antwort auf Hiob" "Job's Answer," *Collective Works of C. G. Jung*, Trans. R.F. C. Hull (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983), vol. 11, pars. 579-608, in Anthony Storr, ed. *The Essential Jung*, pp. 310-329.

With his [God's] touchiness and suspiciousness the mere possibility of doubt was enough to infuriate him and induce the peculiar double-faced behavior of which he had already given proof in the Garden of Eden, when he pointed out the tree to the First Parents and at the same time forbade them to eat of it. In this way he precipitated the Fall, which he apparently never intended.

guilt and projects his “dark side,” his Shadow, his evil twin onto his Creator. Remorse is replaced by rage. The only two cases of remorse found in “Qaïn” are that which Héva suffers (stanzas 57 and 58), in which she curses the pain of giving birth to her son, and that which God experiences at the denunciation of Qaïn (stanzas 78 and 79), which prompts Qaïn to be the one who will have the last laugh at God's expense; Qaïn “rira du tardif repentir” [de Dieu] (stanza 79) . Qaïn goes so far as to accuse God of having provided the desire in Qaïn's heart to do evil. This is how Qaïn blames God for the murder of his brother Abel:

O victime, tu sais le sinistre dessin
 D'Iahvèh m'aveuglant du feu de sa colère.
 L' iniquité divine est ton seul assassin. (stanza 48)

The Jungian Shadow provides a good model for the experience of Cain as a literary personage or type in the works of French literature in which he plays a significant role. The Shadow exists both on the level of the personality and on the collective level. Cain's jealousy and sense of injustice are psychological and mythological constructs. They plague humanity and are universal ills of mankind. The individual psyche's suppressed jealousy makes him or her unable to provide adequate cover for the Persona, and the Mask disintegrates under the pressure of an intense sense of injustice. Through the founding murder, violence spreads throughout the community until institutions like a justice system or exile can be created to put an end to the cycle of revenge.

Hugo emphasizes God's eye, in that it is Qaïn who, face to face with God, chooses to be entombed above the earth so as defiantly to behold heaven rather than to be buried. Qaïn will remain there forever, while God will become lost in the forgetfulness of the men who will remain after the Deluge (stanzas 98-99). No other literary protagonist had so totally turned against God. In the Leconte de Lisle poem, an abstract divine law is imposed on men. There is not yet any law for Hebrews or Christians. The setting is that of the world before the Flood, well before Moses and Christ. Indeed, many centuries have passed from the exile of Cain to the Babylonian Captivity. This is the era during which the Seer Thogorma lives⁴⁶; it is his vision which provides much of the pretext of "Qaïn." Leconte de Lisle depicts a primitive people, a race of giants born of women who had conceived by relations with angels. This is why Qaïn accuses God of "un divin adultère" (stanza 28). Thus, the Parnassian poet creates a world outside the framework of modern religions so that his God becomes a weak abstraction, easily vanquished.

Much to the contrary, Hugo shows a Cain whose guilt and fear will be inherited by all of humanity. This vision is essentially the opposite of that of Leconte de Lisle. Leconte de Lisle's Qaïn has his eyes wide open, expressing not remorse but vengeance. An apocalyptic horseman awakens Qaïn. Qaïn speaks of his dream, which is neatly framed within the prophetic dream of Thogorma (stanzas 46-50). Qaïn, dreaming of Eden, intends to regain it along with mankind's original innocence. He wishes to hold God at his mercy. As in Hugo's "La Conscience," there is a five-part dramatic

46 Thogorma is one of many Hebrew names that Leconte de Lisle appropriated from Ludovic de Cailleux's *Le Monde antédiluvien*, discussed in chapter 5 below.

structure. The dramatic action of Leconte de Lisle's "Qaïn" is begun by the arrival of the seer at Cain's tomb. There follow five parts and the ending: Cain's tirade and his words to the cursed city of *Hénokhia* (stanzas 22-30), the curse of the knight (stanzas 22-30), Cain's violent retort (45-66), the dialogue between Cain and *le Khéroub* (67-73), and the prophecy of Cain (78-90). Here are five "acts" and there remains but the end--the Deluge, which causes Cain to vanquish God, Whom mankind will forget.

This, then, is the dramatic representation of the action in the two poems; in Leconte de Lisle's "Qaïn" it is given in the form of dialogues, and in nature, which reacts at times to Cain's tirades, particularly in stanzas 29, 33, 34 and 92, which give the cries and the movements of the animals, the palms trees and the heavenly bodies.

The *mise en scène* in "Qaïn" is splendid: an exotic and primitive landscape of the country of *Assur*. The prologue gives the type of brilliant and picturesque description for which the Creole poet is so well known. There is also a narration that takes the form of a prophetic dream. "Qaïn" is one of the longest and most important prophetic dreams in French literature. According to Almut Pohle, Leconte de Lisle no doubt was borrowing the vision of *Ezechiel*, in the book of prophecy in the Old Testament, and the name of the prophet Thogorma as well as a good part of the décor are taken from a long biblical poem in prose by Ludovic de Cailleux entitled *Le Monde Antédiluvien*, dating from 1845.⁴⁷ This dream allows Leconte de Lisle to show both the past and the future in relation to the time of the seer/narrator. This trans-temporality is only implicit in "La Conscience,"

47 Vianey, *Poèmes Barbares*, p. 131.

where it is much less striking than that which one finds in "Qain." ⁴⁸ In Leconte de Lisle's poem the entire human race is indicted because of Cain's murder of Abel. For some, it is this myth, and not that of Adam and Eve eating from the tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, which is the more significant Fall as corruption, sin and death are passed on to all mankind in *Genesis*. ⁴⁹ The vision across time of Cain and the seer in the Leconte de Lisle poem for many critics rivals the loftiest epics of Victor Hugo. This prophetic dream points up the universality of Cain's ill will, for Cain's rage echoes from the world before the Flood to modern times.

The seer Thogorma goes back to the time of "la race des géants," then he arrives at the cursed city where Cain's tomb is found. Cain is furious at being awakened, but the flow of time is reversed so that he can again see Eden lost and his brother slain. His voice reaches several eras. It will go back in time to Eden, move forth to the epoch of the seer during the Babylonian Captivity, and proclaim the re-establishment of man's innocence in a new Eden as it moves back in time plotting to ruin God in the Deluge. The seer goes back in time to the death (and the dream) of Cain, then he contemplates with Cain the old Eden and next the new, and finally the vengeful Cain and the seer together watch the Deluge and the defeat of God.

The symbolism that results from this myth can be addressed to all men in all eras, warning them of the evil that God will do to them. While considering biblical symbols, one must not forget the Deluge. The Ark is the

48 A thorough treatment of the dreams in Leconte de Lisle's work is made by D. Ghazi in "Dialectique de la veille et du sommeil dans les Poèmes Barbares de Leconte de Lisle," *Bulletin d'études parnassiennes et symbolistes*, 2 (1988) pp. 3-12

49 Sellier, p. 17.

"...la Révolte et la Chute se présentent sous trois formes; et l'histoire de Caïn [sic], souvent mise en rapport avec celle de la Tour de Babel, symbolise infiniment mieux le désastre de la transgression que ne le fait l'anodin vol d'une pomme."

symbolic boat for all of mankind. The story of the Great Flood does not derive solely from Judeo-Christian origins; there are similar legends in many other traditions. This myth, like that of Cain to which it is directly linked in the Leconte de Lisle poem, is universal, an archetype in our collective unconscious.

The motif of prophecy serves to prepare the Deluge at the end of the Leconte de Lisle poem, and it is by the Flood that Cain avenges himself. In "Qain" there are several descriptions of animals of all kinds, an art at which Leconte de Lisle had many times shown himself to be a master. The poem makes the reader anticipate the Flood: Noah is soon going to put his animals in the Ark as the rain begins and they tremble for fear of it. Moreover, Thogorma's vision makes several allusions to the Deluge well before Cain reveals his plans:

C'était un soir des temps. Par monceaux, les nuées,
 Emergeant de la cuve ardente de la mer,
 Tantôt comme des blocs d'airain, pendaient dans l'air;
 Tantôt, d'un tourbillon véhément remuées,
 Hurlantes, s'écroulaient en un immense éclair. (stanza 8)

The knight threatens Cain by warning him of the destructive flood waters:

La mer se gonfle et gronde, et la bave des eaux
 Bien au-dessus des monts va noyer les oiseaux.
 L'extermination suprême se déchaîne
 Et du ciel qui s'effondre a rompu les sept sceaux.
 (stanzas 35-36)

The seven seals referred to here are those mentioned in the book of *Revelations* which foretells and describes the second time God obliterates men who are not deemed righteous, the first being the Flood.

Finally, in stanza forty, the poet speaks of “la douleur nouvelle/Celle par qui les fils de l'homme périront.” This reference to the Deluge leads us to consider certain poems of Alfred de Vigny. By contrast with Vigny's “Le Déluge,” Leconte de Lisle's “Qaïn” envisions the complete overturning of God's moral authority and power. In the Leconte de Lisle's poem, Cain is the redeemer of humanity, whereas in Vigny's poem, it is Christ who appears at the end to save Noah's family from the flood waters. The character of Cain is very close to that of Satan in Romantic poetry and is akin to Milton's Satan. In Vigny's “Éloa” the satanic angel seduces Éloa, God's good angel, who only realizes at the end that the seducer is none other than Lucifer or Satan. Leconte de Lisle's Cain is not the Deceiver, but he so violently opposes God in “Qaïn” that he is the perfect rebel. According to Vianey:

...le Qaïn de 1869 est apparenté à tous les grands révoltés...[Le Prométhée de] Goethe... Prométhée de Quinet (1838)...[et celui] de Louis Ménard (1843), Niobé de Leconte de Lisle... Le Satyre de Victor Hugo...Satan et Samson de Vigny...le héros de La Chute d'un Ange:...Satan d'Alfred de Poittevin (1836) dont les imprécations contre Dieu ressemblent fort à celles de Qaïn...Cain de Byron dont le Qaïn français répète bien des mots... il rejette sur Dieu la responsabilité de regarder le tyran en face... il le qualifie de tourmenteur, et ...il lui reproche de faire tomber ses victimes

dans les embûches. [C'est] Lucifer à travers le monde, il n'y voit nulle part le Créateur, partout il voit seulement la Vie et affirme qu'elle existait avant tous les êtres. 50

“Qaïn” and Victor Hugo's “Le Satyre” are perhaps the only characters in nineteenth-century French poetry who have so completely succeeded in revolting against God (Zeus in the case of “Le Satyre”). Stanzas 53-54 of “Qaïn” show just how audacious Qaïn is:

Et l'aurore qui rit avec ses lèvres roses,
De jour en jour, en cet adorable berceau,
Pour le bonheur sans fin éveillé un dieu nouveau;
Et moi, moi je grandis dans la splendeur des choses,
Impérissablement jeune, innocent et beau!
Compagnon des Esprits célestes, origine
De glorieux enfants créateurs à leur tour,
Je sais le mot vivant, le verbe de l'amour;
Je parle et fais jaillir de la source divine
Aussi bien qu'Elohim, d'autres mondes au jour!

This must be compared to the second part of Hugo's “Le Satyre.”

Le chaos est un dieu; son geste est l'élément
Et lui seul a le nom sacré: Commencement.
C'est lui qui, bien avant la naissance de l'heure,

Surprit l'aube endormie au fond de sa demeure,
 Avant le premier jour et le premier moment;
 C'est lui qui, formidable, appuya doucement
 La gueule de la nuit aux lèvres de l'aurore;
 Et c'est de ce baiser qu'il vit l'étoile éclore.
 Le chaos est l'époux lascif de l'infini.
 Avant le Verbe, il a rougi, sifflé, henni. (*La Légende des siècles*, Pléiade, p. 421)

Here one can see Hugo's satyr in relation to Leconte de Lisle's Cain and find that they both put the divinity at their feet. They both have an extraordinary scorn for God. Additionally, there is a mention of "le Verbe," the Word of God, which pronounced the creation of the world and on which depends the existence of God; the *Gospel of John* tells us that the Word is God. Victor Hugo suggests, in his poem "Suite" (following "Réponse à un acte d'accusation" in *Les Contemplations*), that the Word existed before God and therefore the possibility for language exists independent of God--this is the one thing in existence which He did not create.⁵¹ In the poems by Hugo and Leconte de Lisle which have been discussed so far ("La Conscience," "Le Satyre" and Leconte de Lisle's "Qaïn"), it is the two rebels who wish to

51 Hugo, "Suite," *Oeuvres Poétiques* (Paris: Pléiade, 1967):

Car le mot, qu'on le sache, est un être vivant...
 Le mot, le terme, type on ne sait d'où venu,
 Face de l'invisible, aspect de l'inconnu;
 Créé, par qui forgé par qui ? jailli de l'ombre... (p. 500)

The word continues to proclaim itself the precursor of God's creation:

"J'existais avant l'âme. Adam n'est pas mon père.
 "J'étais même avant toi: tu n'aurais pu, lumière,
 "Sortir sans moi du gouffre où tout rampe enchaîné;
 "Mon nom est FIAT LUX, et je suis ton aîné!" (p. 503)

pronounce this creative Word, usurping a divine power and replacing an old, impotent and out-dated God. Qaïn and the satyr have created their world without a need for God. The satyr proclaims a return to chaos, which, like the Word, existed before everything else, and created its universe by taking the form of a constellation full of stars:

Tout en parlant ainsi le satyre devint
 Démesuré...L'espace immense entra dans cette forme noire...
 Il cria...L'azur du ciel sera l'apaisement des loups
 Place à Tout. Je suis Pan; Jupiter à genoux. ("Le
 Satyre," *La Légende des siècles*, p. 430)

In his discussion of intertextuality in the poem "Spes," Jules Brody could have included this poem (which, like "Spes," has the word of creation) with "Et Nox Facta Est" in *La Fin de Satan*, in which creation is plunged into the shadow of the abyss. The expansion of the satyr is the creation of a new universe and echoes the divine pronouncement of creation -- "Let there be light" -- as do the various poems in *Les Contemplations* which Brody discusses.⁵²

Like the satyre, Leconte de Lisle's Qaïn pronounces the end of God (stanzas 88-89):

J'effondrai des cieux la voûte dérisoire
 Par delà l'épaisseur de ce sépulcre bas

52 Jules Brody, "'Let there be Night': Intertextuality in a Poem of Victor Hugo," *Romanic Review*,

March 75 (1984) pp. 216-229.

52 Paul T. Comeau, " 'Le Satyre' dans *La Légende des siècles* de Victor Hugo," *French Review*, 39 (1966) 859.

Sur qui gronde le bruit sinistre de ton pas
 Je ferai bouillonner les mondes dans leur gloire;
 Et qui t'y cherchera ne t'y trouvera pas.

Et ce sera mon jour! Et d'étoile en étoile,
 Le bien heureux Eden longuement regretté
 Verra renaître Abel sur mon coeur abrité
 Et toi, mort et cousu sous la funèbre toile,
 Tu t'anéantiras dans ta stérilité.--

Just like the satire, Qain threatens the Almighty and proclaims His downfall. There are other striking similarities between the Cain figures in these poems: the sun and the stars play an important role in "Qain" as in "Le Satyre;" the heavens, the greatest domain of nature, move according to the word of the Cain figure. Leconte de Lisle could well have been thinking of Hugo's satyr while writing "Qain," for his poem has the same tone as that of Hugo's poem. Nonetheless, the originality of Leconte de Lisle lies in the beauty of his style and the use of imagery to create a Promethean Cain. In contrasting the two visions of Cain, we can see that it is God's eye that dominates the movement of Hugo's "La Conscience," while it is Cain's eye that dominates Leconte de Lisle's "Qain." The large, wide-open eyes of the Parnassian's Cain become the sun, which appears as "un oeil cave et vide." The great eyes of Cain will see those of God reduced to nothingness. The play of God's eyes is reversed with respect to Hugo's "La Conscience."

“Le Satyre” represents Hugo's attempt to revive the pantheism and the free-thinking of the Renaissance. Like Prometheus and Cain, the satyr is a founder of science and technology. His emergence vanquishes Zeus much as Leconte de Lisle's Cain undoes an aging and outmoded God. Paul Comeau summarizes the importance of “Le Satyre” thus:

Il présente trois niveaux: la Nature qui s'enfle et se transforme, qui atteint la vérité, qui devient sa propre Providence, le Poète qui devient sa propre Inspiration, sa propre Muse, qui atteint le Beau idéal, et l' Humanité qui prend conscience d'elle-même et se perfectionne, qui triomphe du destin, de la fatalité, qui atteint le Bien parfait. C'est le dénouement optimiste du grand drame humain qu'il nous expose en allégorie. ⁵³

Irving Putter has given us a fascinating summary of the criticism of these two poets in the latter part of the nineteenth century. According to Putter, Leconte de Lisle was enjoying a renown as great as any of those of the best poets of the time except for that of Victor Hugo. “As far back as 1869 Des Essarts was already saying: 'La fin de l'homme' et 'La Vigne de Naboth' sont dignes des fragments bibliques de la Légende des siècles.” ⁵⁴ And in 1876, the critic Léon Dierx noted that “Les Poèmes Barbares, cet éclatant chef-d'oeuvre, est le seul rival de la Légende des siècles.” ⁵⁵ Finally, among those who answer the question “who is the greatest of all French poets?” by saying “Victor Hugo, hélas!” here is the candid opinion of Lemaître:

⁵⁴ Irving Putter, “Leconte de Lisle and his Contemporaries,” *Modern Philology*, 35 (1951) pp. 82-83.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

Interrogez les poètes, pas tous, mais les meilleurs d'entre les jeunes... et quelques curieux ça et là. Assurément il ne vous diront rien de mal de Victor Hugo, pour la raison qu'Allah est Allah; mais on sait bien que dans tous les temples il y a des saints plus amoureusement chômés que le titulaire du maître-autel; je crois bien que parmi ces saints de chapelle M. Leconte de Lisle est le premier. ⁵⁶

On "Qaïn" in particular, the critics were quite generous. Again Lemaître wrote: "Jamais blasphème n'est sorti d'une bouche d'homme plus tragique depuis Eschyle, ni plus triomphant depuis Lucrèce." ⁵⁷ For Pelisser, it is a "développement d'idées toutes contemporaines," and Bourget adds "N'y a-t-il pas, dans la fièvre révolutionnaire de notre âge, de quoi nous associer aux fureurs de Qaïn contre Iaèveh?" ⁵⁸

Putter summarizes the criticism on Leconte de Lisle thus:

These critics were in fact less impressed by the spurious optimism of the conclusion than by the poet's horror in the presence of universal evil, and by the revolt against the Deity, which represented the collapse of faith in the nineteenth century. The poem was a protest of the body against pain, of the heart against injustice, a protest which the progress of science and morality had today rendered more intense than before. ⁵⁹

Finally, Putter finds that between 1870 and 1890 the poetry of Leconte de Lisle was more and more appreciated by the critics and that many had

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

changed their opinions in his favor as the century came to a close.

Brunetière wrote in 1895: "Il n'y a pas de plus beau [vers] dans la langue française que ceux de Leconte de Lisle."⁶⁰

As for the personal relationship between Hugo and Leconte de Lisle, Putter observes that the renown of Hugo posed some difficulties for Leconte de Lisle simply because he was jealous of the great master:

In reality Leconte de Lisle hated Hugo, and Léon Daudet has passed on the Parnassian's remark when Hugo was mortally ill, and again after his [Hugo's] funeral: 'Il l'a bue et mangée, sa gloire; eh bien! Qu'il la digère.'⁶¹

There was a common theme whose treatment was quite different in these two poems; "La Conscience," written by a poet who is mainly known as a Romantic, has a vision of Cain which is practically the other side of the coin of the Parnassian vision of "Qäin." Hugo can be considered the father figure against whom Leconte de Lisle is rebelling. The latter poet, as we have seen, may well have been inspired as much as anything else by jealousy of the great Victor Hugo; thus, the Cain motif is all the more fitting as a point of comparison and evidence that there is a common unconscious *raison d'être* for these poems.

Cainite Violence, Sacrifice and Revolution in Leconte de Lisle's *Les Poèmes Barbares*

⁶⁰ Putter, p. 95.

⁶¹ Putter, p. 102.

Like Vigny, Lamartine, and Hugo, Leconte de Lisle exploited Old Testament myths. The violence founded by Cain spreads and takes new forms in other poems in his *Poèmes Barbares*. In “La Vigne de Naboth” (1 Kings 21), Ahab, Israel's king who ruled in Samaria, desires the land and vineyard of Naboth, a faithful worshipper of Yaweh. It is significant that Ahab covets a fertile vineyard, since it is a symbol for the place where Abel was slain, where his blood flowed in Cain's furrowed fields. It is a place which calls for violence, or a sacrifice to quell violence. When Naboth refuses to yield it to the worshipper of other gods, Ahab is reluctant to kill him, but the king can neither eat nor sleep until he has taken this property, and in the poem he threatens to destroy the cult of Naboth's God, which he has done before, and replace it with an altar to the Golden Calf of Ephraim. In the poem, and not in the biblical account, his jealous rage, comparable to Cain's, is shown by the blood which runs from his mouth. In *1 Kings* 21, Ahab simply offers Naboth another field in exchange for the vineyard. At that point enters Jézabel, whose powers strike fear in the hearts of all men living and dead. Ahab tells her:

--O femme, il faut que je me venge;
Et je ne puis dormir, ni boire, ni manger,
Que le sang de Naboth n'ait fumé dans la fange. ⁶²

Ahab is Jézabel's lover and, much like Lady Macbeth, she undertakes to do for Ahab what he hesitates to do for himself: “Moi seule je ferai ce que mon Seigneur n'ose” (p. 26). Jézabel, as an intermediary of evil, harkens back to

62 C.-M. Leconte de Lisle, *Poèmes Barbares* (Paris: Librairie Alphonse Lemerre, 1929), p. 25.

Satan and the first temptation and deception. Ahab is quickly persuaded, given the economic benefits of heeding Jézabel's advice, "Sa vigne est très fertile et touche à mon verger"(p. 25). Ahab explains to her that Naboth has refused, claiming that his land is more precious to him than all the riches and the best lands of Ahab's domain. Jézabel warns Ahab that unless he acts with force and violence to enforce his will, he will find violence growing against him: "Qui cède au dromadaire accroît sa violence." The references to blood and fertility are present in many poems that treat the first fratricide; the blood called out to accuse Cain before God and fertilized the fields which Cain had cultivated. Thus, bloodshed engenders the possibility of new life and new culture. It attracts those who would profit from another's death, it tempts men and makes them exploitive and envious. In short, violence proliferates, and Ahab has Jézabel use it to enrich and empower him. However, Ahab fears the retaliation of Naboth's neighbors and the God they worship:

--C'est le Jaloux, le Fort de Juda que je crains,

Dit Akhab. C'est le Dieu de Naboth et d'Elie:

Du peuple furieux il briserait les freins. (p. 26)

What Ahab fears is that God and the prophet Elijah will unleash the wrath of the people. He is afraid of violence not only against his person but against his wealth as well. He decides to invoke the gods of Dan and Berth-El, who, when called upon by Ahab, will destroy Naboth.

The evocation of violence and the allusions to the Cain and Abel story in *Genesis* are more direct in this Leconte de Lisle poem than the others

discussed above. Jezabel tells Ahab: "Mon Seigneur lui dira [à Elie]: Qu'ai-je fait sinon rien?" (p. 27), denying, like Caïn ("Am I my brother's keeper ?"), his involvement in murder. In the very next verse Leconte de Lisle doubles the allusion : "A-t-on trouvé ma main dans ce meurtre, ou mon signe?" (p. 27). The word "signe" reminds one of the mark of Cain, which Ahab seems to deny having. If he had committed murder, would he not have the sign of Cain ? Elijah confronts Ahab, having no word of events but having divine knowledge of them through the shed blood of Naboth. "Le sang de Naboth crie en vous poursuivant" (p.34), is yet another reference to Abel's innocent blood accusing Cain.

Ahab agrees, like Macbeth, to pursue the violent plot, and the last verse of the first part of the poem reinforces the association of wine grapes and blood with violence: "J' aurai le sang de l'homme et le vin de sa vigne" (p. 27). This usurpation of Naboth's vineyard metaphorically suggests the holy eucharist and the crucifixion, the death of an innocent in order to take part in his life.

The two hired assassins, referred to as "Les Anciens"(p. 27), "trois beaux vieillards" (p. 27), and "Vils instruments" (p. 28), do not understand the implications of killing Naboth as Ahab does; they are involved only for the money: "Il foulent à prix d'or l'équité sainte aux pieds,/ Sachant ce que le sang des malheureux rapporte" (p. 28). The first sense of these two verses is that the assassins can only see a purse of gold in Naboth's murder, but clearly they do not have Ahab's fear of Elijah unleashing the fury of the Israelites, who still worship their God rather than Baal. The phrase "ce que le sang des malheureux rapporte" is therefore ambiguous; for in the minds of

the assassins, the blood of virtuous victims like Naboth brings wealth, but it can also bring the wrath of the people.

In this poem Naboth stands before the pair of murderers who have falsely accused him, "Comme pour l'holocauste un bouc, noire victime/ Par qui les vieux péchés de tous sont expiés" (p. 28). He is a scapegoat and another metaphor for Christ's sacrifice. His murderers call for him to be stoned, accusing him of a blasphemy that he, of course, did not commit. Naboth denies the charge and bids God to make a burnt offering of him if he is lying: "Si je mens, que le ciel s'entr'ouvre et me dévore, Que l'Exterminateur me brûle de son feu!--" (p. 29). He is willing to be sacrificed, but expects that this would only occur if he had deserved punishment. Naboth is killed by stoning. His death is potentially the sacrifice by the community, in the Girardian sense, which would stave off violence, the initial criminal murder which calls for reprisal. Another allusion to the blood-soaked field of the first murder makes the comparison of Naboth's death with Abel's quite striking: "La cervelle et le sang souillent ce lieu fatal" (p.29). Cain finds that his fratricide began the same kind of vicious cycle of violence. Elijah confronts Ahab; the latter calls for sacrifice to appease the Almighty's jealous desire for vengeance: "Sur l'autel du Jaloux j' égorgerai cent boeufs!" Elijah warns him sternly to do so and to destroy his idols lest "Les vengeurs de Naboth arrivent en hurlant!" (p. 36)

It should be borne in mind that Elijah the prophet is an exile because he dares denounce the Kings of Israel, who worships idols; therefore he resides, like Cain, in the desert. The poem's imagery and description of

Elijah are reminiscent of the Cormon painting of Cain and help make the unexpected connection between Elijah and Cain:

Mais voici. Sur le seuil du juste assassiné,
Croisant ses bras velus sur sa large poitrine,
Se dresse un grand vieillard, farouche et décharné.

Son crâne est comme un roc couvert d'herbe
Une sueur écume à ses cheveux pendants,
Et le poil se hérissé autour de sa narine....

Sur le cuir corrodé de son âpre visage
On lit qu'il a toujours marché, toujours souffert,
Toujours vécu, plus fort au sein du même orage;

Qu'il a dormi cent nuits dans l'antre noir ouvert
Aux gorges de l'Horeb auprès des puits sans onde,
Qu'il a hurlé de soif dans le feu du désert. (p. 30)

His appearance is so frightening that his horses recoil wildly in horror at his approach. The righteous exile claims vengeance against the king Ahab much as Leconte de Lisle's "Qaïn" claims vengeance against God. Ahab heeds Elijah's warning, and sacrifice restores order, according to Elijah's word in this poem, which follows "Qaïn" in the *Poèmes Barbares*.

Leconte de Lisle's *Niobé* (1846) resembles Cain in that she is a rebel whose sacrifices are not acceptable. She is condemning the Olympians,

especially Zeus for his punishment of Prometheus. Whereas Cain, especially in Hugo's "La Conscience," is seeking freedom from God's haunting eye, Niobé is calling for freedom of conscience for mortals. Each is choosing gods to follow and finding him/her self crushed by the divinity or divinities being confronted. Although the Niobé myth has no Cain figure *per se*, it is archetypally linked to it by the desire of the protagonists to cast off cults that suppress them intellectually and morally. These two figures in Leconte de Lisle's poetry, Cain and Niobé, are similar in their abhorrence of divine injustice. Whereas Cain is exiled and marked for life, Niobé is destroyed.⁶³ Leconte de Lisle's Niobé gives a full explanation of the rival divinities. The Olympians are identified with the earth, nature and humanity, whereas the Titans usurp metaphysical powers and leave no place for human moral values such as law, liberty and justice. Pich identifies the Titans as "Hypérion, Atlas, et surtout Prométhée," and attributes to Leconte de Lisle the most original and in fact revolutionary treatment of the Niobé myth by characterizing the Titans thus:

Bref, ce sont des "Dieux humains", qui réuniront la terre "à l'antique Oranos." L'originalité, toute relative, de Leconte de Lisle, consiste dans l'identification des valeurs morales (Droit, Liberté, Justice) aux forces naturelles. Le sentiment de la nature, dont Laprade avait fait sa spécialité, est assimilé à une morale dérivée du jacobinisme.⁶⁴

Cain and Niobé are protagonists who call for a new order to reestablish justice and freedom for men. Pich speculates at some length about the

63 Two other French poets had already treated the Niobé myth, both poems bearing that name for the title, Théophile Gautier in *Poésies diverses* (1834) and Amédée Renée in *Heures de Poésie* (1841).

64 Pich, *Leconte de Lisle et sa création poétique*, p. 73.

events surrounding the 1848 Revolution and Leconte de Lisle's "Niobé" and finds that Leconte de Lisle was somewhat prophetic. The first versions of the poem were completed and the revolution's defeat therein predicted by Niobé's martyrdom months before the February 1848 Revolution.

Martyrdom and sacrifice continue to be prominent in Leconte de Lisle's *Poèmes Antiques*, particularly in "Un acte de charité." The act of immolation harkens back to the first sacrifice offered by Cain. The killing of innocents is the next in the series of sacrificial offerings that we see proliferating in this minor poem in *Poèmes Barbares*, so ironically named "Un acte de charité." During a time of famine in France an old woman sacrifices all of her wealth to feed the starving masses. The townsfolk, "les bourgeois," are much less generous, barricading their homes. Finally, the hungry from the country reach critical mass, six hundred beggars arrive and the old lady decides she must invite them to a final meal in her barn, which she sets afire, sacrificing the starving to prevent violence from breaking out since the town is now overwhelmed with the starving. The "charité" and "équité" with which the woman performs this sacrifice is no doubt ironic; Leconte de Lisle's pessimism is brought to light once again in this collection of poems. To the unaffected observer, this poem's significance lies in the cold fact that this act was indeed a sacrifice, whereby some were spared through the killing of others; a *felix culpa* motif is set up which is a cynical portrayal of humanity rather than an elegy of the woman's "charité."

Finally, the misery of man in exile is presented in "La Fin de l'homme," one of the concluding poems of *Les Poèmes Barbares*, which ends, as it begins, with the figure of Cain: "Voici. Qaïn errait sur la face du

monde" (p. 353). The stanzas are once again of five verses, with an *abbab* rhyme scheme that was used in "Qain" and only two other poems in the collection ("L'Epée d'Angantyr" and "Djihan-Ara"). Pich seems to confirm our suspicion that "La Fin de l'homme" and "Qain" are of the same spirit; if the former is not a continuation of the latter, then they are at least two fragments written together, for "La Fin de l'homme" was originally placed at the beginning of the recueil, where "Qain" is now, rather than at the end of it. He also notes the similar versification and the same themes in both poems.⁶⁵ The Fall and the exile of Cain have taken their toll on mankind. The suffering has not been eased, nor will it end, as Eve's love has engendered fraternal strife and murder, which the Creator has no intention of forgetting.

Eve, l'inexprimable amour de sa jeunesse,
 Par qui, hors cet amour, tout changea sous le ciel!
 Et le farouche enfant, chaud du sang fraternel!...
 L' Homme fit un grand cri sous la nuée épaisse,
 Et désira mourir comme Eve et comme Abel! (*Poèmes
 barbares* , p. 355)

It is still Adam who, like Leconte de Lisle's Cain and the protagonists in Vigny's "Moïse" and Hugo's "La Conscience," can get no rest, no reprieve. Yet in Hebron he will end his exile on Earth and, having repented only of being born, and that by God's doing, he begs for death. A wind storm

⁶⁵ Pich, *Leconte de Lisle et sa création poétique*, p.258.

sweeps up all signs of nature around Adam, whose death is announced with a calling to account of God:

Et sur le désert sombre, et dans le noir espace,
 Un sanglot effroyable et multiple courut,
 Choeur immense et sans fin, disant:--Père, salut !
 Nous sommes ton péché, ton supplice et ta race...
 Meurs, nous vivrons!--Et l'Homme épouvanté mourut. (p. 356)

One is tempted to read these as Cain's words against God and the "ton péché" as addressed to God by the murdering brother. The possessive adjective is in lower case, however, and would not be consistent with Leconte de Lisle's references to God elsewhere. What is capitalized is "Homme," which seems to emphasize Adam's place as father of humanity, if not to deify him somewhat. It is Adam who will die, then, and his progeny will live on as an accursed race, whose patriarch after Adam's death must be Cain. If we read this as an extension of "Qain," then the suggestion is that mankind, as it was before the Fall, and before the primordial murder, is no more, and that God's introduction of evil has left the world to be ruled by the rebellious and independent sons of Cain-- now a race of men who think and act for themselves, without heeding divine will. This, then, is Leconte de Lisle's vision of Cain, which is consistent with the development of the figure that we have traced thus far: he is a Promethean threat to orthodox religion and science, he has put responsibility for evil on God's shoulders, he has proclaimed the injustice of man's suffering and turned that to God's account, and he has wandered, marked and cursed, as an exile who calls on men to do

that which the Deity would inspire them to do and then forbid. He is a shadow of the knowledge of good and evil, an extension of the Fall. He can show the injustice of God and propose the rehabilitation of Satan, like himself a fallen angel with an agenda for the advancement of mankind. Like Ahab, he kills the innocent worshipper of God of whom he is jealous, and like the woman in "Un acte de charité" he willingly sacrifices the other in order to liberate those who will follow. Finally, like Niobé, Cain calls for a new order in the heavens, just as Leconte de Lisle must have been seeking a new order and revolution in France.⁶⁶

The Cain myth in Baudelaire and Nerval: The Curse Reversed

Poets other than Hugo and Leconte de Lisle also confirm the new status of Cain as culpable fleeing exile and raise him to the level of a Promethean rebel. This reversal of destiny for Cain puts the Creator at the feet of the first murderer and rather tersely turns the curse of Cain upon Him. The curse of Cain and his guilt is projected on God in Baudelaire's poem "Abel et Caïn," undoing the Judeo-Christian traditional view of Cain as the link with the founding curse of evil, passed from Satan to Eve, to Adam and to his sons. Furthermore, several critics have discussed the relationship between Gérard de Nerval's "Antéros" and Cain or Satan. John W. Kneller draws from "Antéros" what he calls "a new emotion," which he determines to be "metaphysical revolt." Philippe Muray and others have discussed at length the importance of Satan in Romantic literature.⁶⁷ Kneller takes up

⁶⁶ Pich, *Leconte de Lisle et sa création poétique* (See Pich's chapter "Le Poète contre l'histoire") p. 187-201.

⁶⁷ Philippe Muray, "L'Affaire Satan", *Stanford French Review* 10 (1986), pp. 237-257.

" Pour la première fois, massivement, on prend la défense de celui qui depuis des milliers d'années personnifie le mal dans ce qu'il a de plus radical, donc de plus irréconciliable" (p. 237).

this discussion as well, listing the English writers who had influenced Nerval, and concluding that the author of *Les Chimères*

adhered to Romantic satanism...denied that the devil was wicked...considered evil as an active force produced by energy and traditional good as a passive element whose principal characteristic was to follow reason. ⁶⁸

Bettina Knapp further underscores this association of Antéros with Cain by linking them with Prometheus and calling them “fire beings” whose color is red and whose alchemical force is vital. Knapp concurs with Kneller's determination that Cain is an active force, and by contrast points out that Abel is “ ‘pale’, a shade, a sterile force; he does not possess the energy, the ebullience of the ‘red race.’ ” ⁶⁹ It is surprising that in this passage the Jungian term “Shadow,” though strongly suggested, is not named by Knapp, well-known as an adept of Jungian criticism. It must be emphasized here. There is a Jungian pair at work in Nerval's Antéros: the Shadow of love, Cain, on the one hand, and its counterpart, the “Tu” (line 1), the passive Abel-like Anima, on the other. In fact, these are brought together in a triad with the absent but active figure of the Avenger (line 4). This completes the Jungian descriptor of the Antéros myth and typifies the personality make-up of the innovator, the rebel and the artist. Knapp tells us how this psychological type manifested itself in Romantic poetry:

68 Jonathan Kneller, “Antéros, Son of Cain?” in Mary Ann Caws, ed. *Writing in a Modern Temper* (Amna Libri, 1984) p. 94.

69 Bettina Knapp, *Gérard de Nerval : The Mystic's Dilemma* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1980,) p. 263.

..these fire beings...those responsible for the discovery of metals that saved man from virtual annihilation after the flood. Romantic poets ...viewed themselves as Messiah types, as inventors of new literary credoes and techniques--and as victims of society's callous attitudes.⁷⁰

Invention and creation are derived, then, from a psychological predisposition, an hereditary link, as it were, with Cain's descendants. A whole race of writers emerged as a creative force in literature, especially in nineteenth-century poetry. Among the poems which present Cain as a rebellious voice crying against the unjust and arbitrary judgment of God against him are "Antéros" and Baudelaire's "Abel et Cain."

These two poems are uncharacteristically short in comparison to epic biblical poems such as Lamartine's fifteen lengthy visions in *La Chute d'un ange*, "Qain" (five hundred verses), Ludovic de Caillex' *Le Monde antédiluvien* (446 pages), Vigny's "Éloa" (some 20 pages). Nevertheless, Nerval's poem is a sonnet densely packed with Greek mythology, and Baudelaire's epigram, in sixteen couplets, comes quickly to the conclusion that it is Abel's race which is cursed and God must be cast down from heaven. It has been suggested that the figure of Cain has a contractive effect in literature and Abel has an expansive one.⁷¹ This certainly holds true in Nerval's poem, but is untenable when we analyze lengthy works such as those of Leconte de Lisle and Ludovic de Caillex (see chapter 4 below).

Baudelaire appears to take the traditional perspective that the idle and happy Abel is to be praised; then in the last part of the poem he turns this

⁷⁰ Knapp, p. 204.

⁷¹ Pich, *Leconte de Lisle*, p. 459n19.

praise to scorn: "Ah race d'Abel ta charogne/ Engraissera le sol fumant..." Baudelaire thus curses the rotting corpse of Abel, turning the first act of violence into a promise of a fertile field which, surprisingly, will serve the agricultural lifestyle of Cain. Baudelaire obviously takes God for a capricious and incompetent judge in this case. That evil gains the upper hand is central to Baudelaire's aesthetics and it is likely that the figure of Cain in French literature, though not terribly prominent in Baudelaire, is an important source for his celebration of the beauty of evil.

In one of the few commentaries on this poem, Ernst Fischer makes explicit the traditional distinctions between Abel and Cain that Baudelaire subverts. He finds in "Abel et Caïn" that

...deux races se créent, deux classes s'opposent--le bon Abel, le méchant Caïn. A l'instar des manichéens ou du Marquis de Sade, Baudelaire est convaincu que deux puissances éternelles, le bien et le mal, ne cessent de se livrer un combat incertain pour la possession du monde. Le bon Abel, sur lequel repose le sourire de Dieu tandis qu'il se remplit la panse, peut boire et dormir; dans les entrailles du méchant Caïn la faim hurle comme un vieux chien!...C'est bien là la plus nette, la plus passionnée des prises de parti pour Caïn, l'affamé, le transi, le damné, mais aussi un appel à l'action.

Fischer continues by linking Cain to Satan as figures who are to be lauded for their guidance of mankind:

Dans les "Litanies de Satan", le poète fait de celui-ci le plus savant et le plus beau des anges. C'est lui qui est la providence de tous les

opprimés; il donne aux lépreux le goût du paradis, il protège le somnambule de l'abîme, il aide les impuissants, ceux qui n'ont pas la force de s'aider eux-mêmes. En même temps, Satan est plus que jamais le Titan révolté: "bâton des exilés, lampe des inventeurs, confesseur des pendus et des conspirateurs"; on voit percer le visage du maître des barricades, de l'insurrection à main armée, Blanqui. ⁷²

But Fischer stops short of saying Baudelaire was revolutionary like Cain and Satan. His bohemian indifference left his life with no active agenda. Nonetheless, one can enumerate the ways in which Baudelaire's little poem incorporates the traits of the Cain figure discussed above, and see how the *poète maudit* condenses the Cain and Abel duality into thirty-two verses that invert the traditional interpretation of the story by lauding Cain and cursing Abel. For Baudelaire, Cain is, if not good, at least admirable, and he is unjustly hunger-stricken, exiled, and condemned. His redeeming qualities are, ironically, his likeness to Satan, his rebelliousness, his advocacy of those who blindly and helplessly suffer the misfortune that God has inflicted on them. Finally, they are the hope of exiles, the enlightenment of scientists, and the confidante and confessor of conspirators and those condemned to be hanged.

Evil and the hideous, great sources of poetic inspiration, especially for Hugo and Baudelaire, have their source, to a large degree, in the Cain and Abel story. It sets up a dualism which, as we have seen in Baudelaire, can be totally undone with a striking *coup de théâtre*; Abel is denounced,

⁷² Ersnt Fischer, "Pour le cent-cinquantième anniversaire de Charles Baudelaire: La Beauté du mal," *Austriaca*, 11 (1985) 126.

Cain lauded. Hugo, as we have noted, favored the undoing of the dogmatic parameters for classical French poetry, and his *Préface de Cromwell* is the manifesto for this idea so central to Romantic literature--the grotesque and the sublime must be brought together. That Baudelaire reverses the expected duality Cain/guilty (grotesque) and Abel/ innocent (sublime), to Cain/ accepted and Abel/ cursed undoes the orthodox interpretation of the story. The reader's expectations are further subverted by the fact that in modern literature one of the principal distinctions in the Cain-Abel pair is that Cain is associated with a sedentary occupation of cultivation of the earth, whereas Abel has the nomadic, shepherding lifestyle that produces the offering which God will accept. However, Baudelaire condemns Abel because he gains God's favor without having worked to produce his offering: "Race d'Abel, dors, bois et mange;/ Dieu te sourit complaisamment"(vv. 1-2). Raising animals requires little else than wandering from one pasture to another. Cain, on the other hand, has had to break ground and engage in the hard work of cultivating crops, and Baudelaire points out that this is harsh punishment, even before the act of fratricide: "Race de Caïn, ton supplice,/ Aura-t-il jamais de fin?...Race de Caïn, ta besogne n'est pas faite suffisamment," (vv.7-8, 28-29). As God smiles "complaisamment" on Cain, his countenance is echoed and countered by the "pas suffisamment", which emphasizes the unending toil which Cain suffers. The alternation of focus between Abel in one couplet and Cain in the next enhances this dualism : Abel= ease and God's favor/ Cain=labor and God's curse. The alternating refrains "Race de Caïn", "Race d' Abel" also delays the surprise ending just

long enough to give the poem a gradual build-up toward a quick reversal of its apparent premise.

To conclude, the Cain myth in nineteenth-century French literature had three principle sources: Gessner's idyll, Byron's mystery, and the social and political phenomena which gave rise to the French Revolution. The myth manifested itself as the shadow of the French epic voice in poetry. Cain has changed from a willing ally of Satan to a rehabilitated humanistic hero who calls into question the justice of God and the evil in Satan. The sacrificial element of the Cain archetype brings out the essence of tragedy, especially in Vigny's and Hugo's poems related to *Genesis*. It appears that more modern movements in poetry, particularly those of the Parnassians and Baudelaire, completely reverse the significance of the myth from what it was in the late eighteenth century plays and verse of Legouv  , Gilbert, and Lema  tre, simple imitators of Gessner. The assertion that Cain acts as a force of contraction is disproven by the tirade in Leconte de Lisle's "Qa  n" and in Hugo's lengthy and ever-recurring evocations of the shadow in relation to the Cain myth. Likewise, representations of the Abel figure, rare as they are, can hardly be said to have an expansive effect on literary treatments of him; on the contrary, Cain is the inspiration which echoes the poets' call for a return to human dignity in lyric poetry.

The curse of Cain has, then, been reversed with respect to what it was in Gilbert and those poems which echo Gessner's treatment of Abel's brother. There is a link between the first murderer in the *Der Tod Abels* and the guilty conscience inherited by mankind in Hugo's "La Conscience"-- Cain's guilt. This produces flight as a reaction in the Cain figure whose curse is

passed on to his children. The flight turns to fight as Leconte de Lisle takes up the myth in "Qaïn;" the Gessnerian Cain is now Byronian, even Promethean. Rather than being reduced from a myth to a motif, the Cain archetype expands to incorporate related myths which might be referred to as "fraternal"; Lucifer and other fallen angels in literature certainly bear the curse of *Genesis* and Cain's shadow reaches beyond Nod and the Deluge to the figures of the Wandering Jew and Prometheus, who are heroes in certain important works of Romantic poetry.

CHAPTER THREE

THE WANDERING JEW AND CAIN'S CURSE

From Le Poittevin's "Satan" to Quinet's "Ahasvérus"

The compulsion to flee in the Cain figure is closely related to that of another accursed exile and a rebel, the Wandering Jew, in the nineteenth-century.⁷³ From the haunting internal curse of the conscience, heroes of gigantic physical or mental stature have come forth from their exiles to announce a new age. The cursed exile in the wilderness first suffers, as does Job, then encounters angels or Christ figures who offer them deliverance. George Anderson, who has done the most thorough research on this figure in literature, makes Cain a precursor of the Wandering Jew:

Before we meet the Wandering Jew, the Eternal Wanderer about whom the most has been said and written, it is important to have before us at least the outlines of his most celebrated competitors in wandering. In the scriptures, the classic story of wandering is the account of Cain as it appears in the Book of Genesis (4: 1-15). Cain, son of Adam, obviously a short-tempered man, is piqued by the Lord's preference for the offerings of his younger brother Abel, which favoritism would be inexplicable were

⁷³ In Pierre Brunel's *Companion to Literary Myths, Heroes and Archetypes*, Mary-France Rouart contributes an insightful article on the myth of the Wandering Jew that gives an account of the depiction of this figure as a rebel and an exile. She further attributes to the myth an especially prominent place in the nineteenth century, citing French works such as Bérenger's song *Le Juif errant* (1831), Eugène Sue's novel *Le Juif Errant* (1844-45), Grenier's religious epic *La Mort du Juif Errant* (1857), the Belgian poet Van Hasselt's *Les Quatre Incarnations du Christ* (1867), Paul Féval's *La Fille du Juif errant* (1878), and Richepin's *Les Blasphèmes* (1884).

it not that Jehovah preferred animal sacrifices to vegetable ones, and Cain was a tiller of the soil, whereas Abel was a keeper of sheep...Cain has placed himself in the hopeless position of a man whose pride has violated, without qualms, the law of One greater than he. And so the eternal stigma: "When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth...And the Lord set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him." This desolating power of blight and this stigma, or whatever interpreters subsequently conceived this mark to be, will reappear later on, because in them one can detect a borrowing from the Cain Legend by the shapers of the Legend of the Wandering Jew.⁷⁴

The stigma Anderson refers to is what is here elaborated as the curse that passed from Cain to Ahasvérus. Cain is the Old Testament myth that generates new myths and avatars, such as the Wandering Jew and Prometheus. These two in particular reveal the binary opposition present in the Cain archetype of the nineteenth century: from the shadows of the flight and suffering of the Wandering Jew emerges the rebellious god-slayer, Prometheus.

Hyam Maccoby, who contends that the original meaning of the Fall and the first murder have been distorted in Christian exegesis, also finds an important connection between the curse of Cain and that of the Wandering Jew:

There is an even more interesting parallel between the story of Cain and that of Adam (Edmund Leach, in *Genesis as Myth*, has suggested

⁷⁴ George Anderson, *The Legend of the Wandering Jew* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1965) p.3.

with some plausibility that they are variants of the same story). Adam, as a result of his crime, is thrust out from his true Home. The ground (as for Cain) becomes cursed for him. And yet his crime brings him gifts; he has acquired "the knowledge of good and evil". Without his crime he would have remained an innocent child; now he has grown up. The Hebrew story of Adam...is a profound parable of the human condition. It is primarily about the acquisition of knowledge and the guilt associated with this. The Wandering Jew story, however, like that of Cain, is primarily about violence; but the violence story has its "knowledge" aspects too, the idea that guilt and knowledge are intermixed, that a terrible crime of violence enables the criminal to break through to a higher state of awareness.

"Knowledge through sin" is the common denominator of all these stories...

75

This aspect, "knowledge through sin," is in literature first established by Byron's *Cain* and is part of what I refer to as the *felix culpa*, the benefits of sin and suffering which, as Maccoby suggests, both the story of the expulsion from Eden and Cain's curse and exile exemplify. Moreover, the idea that one should suffer or die for all is the fundamental tenet of Christ's passion, which is discussed in an important chapter of Girard's *Le bouc émissaire*. Though Cain and the Wandering Jew are men who offer no redemption for mankind, they, like Job, are allegorical figures for our suffering.

75 Hiram Maccoby, "The Wandering Jew as Sacred Executioner" in Galit Hasan-Rokem and Alan Dundes, eds. *The Wandering Jew: Essays in the Interpretation of a Christian Legend* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986) pp.242-243.

Moncure Daniel Conway affirms the relationship between Cain and the Wandering Jew even more strikingly than Anderson and Maccoby:

In the first epoch we find counterparts in Cain and Seth. Even the Biblical narrative seems to point to a primitive myth, in which these two were good and evil immortals, which had gone to pieces before the book of Genesis was compiled...It is said (Gen. iv. 25) that Eve called her third son the (scion or germ): "for," she said, "God hath appointed me another seed in place of Abel, whom Cain slew." It is evident that the Seth legend was introduced to avoid having the human race descend from the first murderer and type of evil--Cain.

Cain was the first Wandering Jew. His name, signifying a spear, and Tubal-Cain, "son of a spear," first artificer in brass and iron, suggest the possibility that his doom may have been that of a Semitic Prometheus. At any rate the curse pronounced upon him ("a fugitive and a wanderer shalt thou be in the earth"); the mark (token, or perhaps *weird*) fixed upon him, that none should slay him; the land to which he wandered, itself meaning flight (Nod)--supplied ample materials for the mother-myth of eternal Wanderers.⁷⁶

Conway ties Cain not only to the Wandering Jew, but also to Prometheus, making the leap from the founding murderer and his exile to the immortal defier of the gods which seems to fit the century of Hugo, Quinet, and Leconte de Lisle so well.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Moncure Daniel Conway, *The Wandering Jew* (London: Chatin and Windus, 1881) pp.42-43.

⁷⁷ See my chapter 4 for an elaboration of the view of Prometheus as the new Cain.

French literature of the nineteenth century is indeed rich in works about *le juif errant*. This discussion is limited to identifying and analyzing the relationship of the Wandering Jew to Cain and this chapter is limited to the most influential manifestations of the figures of Ahasvérus and Satan, primarily in the poetry of Alfred Le Poittevin and Edgar Quinet.

The archetypal exile is an essential characteristic of the Cain myth that is found again in the legend of the Wandering Jew. Although neither Quinones nor Sellier draws a connection between Cain and Ahasvérus, the name most often given to the Wandering Jew, Quinones alludes to other exiles and Sellier lists "le Juif errant" among his *corrélatifs* at the end of his article on the myth of Cain; and he does write a section on pariahs, a category to which Ahasvérus belongs. Furthermore, we find in Cain and the Wandering Jew a link between Old and New Testament curses; Cain is cursed and marked upon his murder of Abel in *Genesis*, and, analogously, Ahasvérus, particularly in Le Poittevin and Quinet, is cursed by Christ and made to wander the Earth until the latter's return. In the various versions of the legend, the Wandering Jew grows old without dying, is rejuvenated upon reaching a certain advanced age (which occurs in Quinet) or is reincarnated (as is the case in Le Poittevin and Chavagneux's play, discussed in the Epilogue below), continuing his dreadful existence, being denied the dignity and tranquillity of death.

The eternal wandering of a cursed hero characterizes the Ahasvérus figure in Quinet's poem as well as in Le Poittevin's. The desperate search for shelter and repose is common to most manifestations of Cain and Ahasvérus. Each generation will see a new fugitive, a new incarnation of the

first murderer. Satan reappears under various names. The *métempsychose* motif is also found in the 1866 play by Chavagneux entitled *Caïn*. In this philosophical drama Cain reappears in different eras as a murderer. It is Henri Bernès who lists it among several precursors to Leconte de Lisle's "Qaïn" of 1869 and gives this description of it :

Caïn y renaît de siècle en siècle incarné dans quelque grand fratricide, et
[.] à la consommation des temps, dans une sorte de paradis, où il est révélé
que l'universel amour est la loi première et dernière des mondes,
[Caïn]tombe, ayant oublié ce long cauchemar de crimes, dans les bras de
son frère.⁷⁸

The Cain figure seems to be a founding incarnation of the detective story, in which the murderer is sought over the course of the story and reappears from time to time with a distinctive appearance or demeanor that suggests his guilt, though it may not be definitively revealed until the suspense is over at the end of a novel. Frank Mc Sherry suggests that there are, typically, physical and moral descriptions of a murderer in detective fiction that will give an inkling to the reader that he or she is the guilty one that the mystery of the novel tries to conceal.⁷⁹ Since Cain is the archetypal murderer throughout the ages those who commit murder bear his mark.

Although Alfred de Poittevin is a somewhat lesser poet than those discussed above, he nonetheless contributes to the development of the Cain motif in poetry and in prose fiction. The poetic works that deal with Satan and Cain are "Satan" and "Ahasvérus." No Cain character is developed in

⁷⁸ "Le 'Qaïn' de Leconte de Lisle," *Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France* 18 (1911) p. 501.

⁷⁹ "The Mark of Cain", *Detective Fiction* 17 (1984), pp. 229-232 and 234-243.

either of these, but in the former poem Satan does curse Adam, saying that he will pass on violence and evil to the human race through his elder son, and the wandering Jew has Cain as his antecedent in the latter.

A childhood friend of Gustave Flaubert, Alfred Le Poittevin grew intellectually if not literarily by presenting a pre-Darwinian theory of evolution and transmigration of souls. This is clear from his novella *Une Promenade de Bélial*, in which Satan takes on several names and identities and explains to a Duchess and her erudite husband how plants, animals, and humans are transformed from one level of existence to another. In *Bélial*, Satan takes a walk in the garden with two mortals, the Duke and Duchess De Prévial, to whom, through a magical mirror he shows the past and future lives of various persons they see. The mirror is the instrument by which the Devil, given several names by the narrator, introduces the couple to the transmigration of souls. This is the means by which a life is regenerated or degenerated. The novella is reminiscent of Goethe's *Faust* and in fact alludes to it. They discuss how one's passage from one life to the next is fortuitous, but the next life, by chance, may have him descend the chain of being. *Bélial* describes the recurrence of violence from one generation to another, a central lesson in the Cain and Abel story.

--C'est, dit Bélial, une ville qu'on enlève d'assaut. A la tête des assaillants remarquez ces deux jeunes hommes. Sous leurs coups tombe ce qui résiste...On ne résiste plus...Il frappent toujours. Admirez sous leur figure cette expression inconnue: c'est l'instinct du sang qui s'éveille; il se révèle, comme la mort, à des signes que rien n'imité. Mais voici de nouvelles scènes avec nos deux mêmes acteurs...Sous les portraits des

ancêtres, la violence va s'accomplir... (*Une Promenade de Bélial*, pp. 23-24)

In "Satan," the Devil harasses Adam by foreseeing the hopelessness of humanity, which has been passed on through him to his descendants. The mention of Cain in the poem is the most striking example of Adam's link to human suffering and corruption. It is above all violence that, since Cain's murder of Abel, characterizes humanity. Satan foresees all of this, hiding from Adam no knowledge that may serve the cause of evil, since, having eaten of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, mankind will no longer enjoy the advantage of ignorance. The motive behind Satan's pessimistic account is jealousy, that provoker of rage which caused Cain to slay his brother. Satan tells Adam: "Va! dit-il, favori d'un Dieu que je déteste."⁸⁰ This malediction could just as easily be attributed to Cain as to Satan.

The mention of Cain recalls jealousy a second time in the poem and Satan echoes his prediction of the passage of violence from the first generation to the next:

Ta jalouse fureur y sèmera la guerre !
L'homicide Caïn, teint du sang de son frère,
Sera le premier meurtrier;
Ses fils hériteront des erreurs paternelles. (p. 57)

⁸⁰ Alfred Le Poittevin, *Une Promenade de Bélial et oeuvres inédites* (Paris: Les Presses Françaises, 1924) p.55.

The son of Adam will be forced to wander, an exile, and should he return to call the sons of man back to dwell in peace, it would be in vain, for the Son of God shall be nonetheless crucified. The son of Adam is here linked with the son of God in Satan's discourse: he suggests that they each wander the earth, calling men to repent, but to no avail. Although Adam is the one being addressed by Satan in most of the poem, Cain and Christ likewise have a human lineage and are implicitly linked to Adam; what is happening is that Adam's patriarchy is transferred to Cain and Christ. Violence passes from the former to the latter. The first Fall of man will be repeated and Christ's death, if the logic is taken further, will be a sacrifice made in vain. In the end, only the curse laid on humanity by Satan will be left as Adam's heritage.

Further relationships between Le Poittevin's "Satan" and Leconte de Lisle are pursued by R. Descharmes, who concludes that:

L'idée philosophique qui s'exprime en eux [Satan and Qaïn] est, au fond, la même. Comme Leconte de Lisle, Le Poittevin affirme sa révolte devant le mal cosmique et la souffrance sociale, et clame sa protestation contre l'injustice de la destinée humaine.⁸¹

In a footnote, Descharmes calls this evil revolt "un thème banal" but goes on to describe at length how Le Poittevin had probably also drawn inspiration for his treatment of evil from Sade's *Justine*.⁸² While jealousy and violence bring the Cain myth to the surface in Le Poittevin's "Satan," it is the

81 R. Descharmes, "Le 'Qaïn' de Leconte de Lisle et une poésie oubliée d'Alfred Le Poittevin," *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, 22 (1915) pp. 544-549.

82 *Ibid.*

wandering of an exile which, though mentioned in "Satan," is essential element in the association of Cain with "Ahasvérus." The Wandering Jew, who, according to legend, struck Christ carrying his cross rather than allow him to rest on the way to the Crucifixion, has never experienced the repose of death and begs God to let him end his accursed life. He imagines the amazement aroused in his fellow men, who wonder who this infortunate man is, and he is taken for a reincarnation of Cain:

Et l'on se dit: Quel est ce vieillard solitaire
 Qui va plus vite que les vents ?
 D'où vient-il ? vers quels lieux tend sa course hâtée ?
 Serait-ce toi, Caïn, dont l'âme épouvantée
 Fuit encore un frère mourant?

The first guess is that this man is Cain, the second that he is "...le maudit,/ l'israélite immonde/ Qui frappa le Christ expirant!" (Le Poittevin, *Oeuvres*, p. 72); the connection between these three, Ahasvérus, Cain and Christ, is clear. As in "Satan," there is a chain of violence that extends from Adam to Christ, and the original sin is passed on to the time of Christ and his death is an attempt (a vain one according to Satan) to expiate sin and remove the curse of violence.

Like Vigny's Moses, Le Poittevin's Wandering Jew is weary and can find no rest on Earth. In the final stanza God strikes Ahasvérus dead with a lightning bolt. The poem ends with the ironic but quintessentially Christian twist of Christ pitying him who had not pitied Christ before. The death of Ahasvérus, in the light of the punishment he suffered for so long, is of

course scarcely a reprieve: divine justice strikes him down only after his suffering has run its course and his misery begins to turn to an indifferent melancholia. The Romantic hero's fate should likewise be such that death comes only after suffering has reached its highest point. In these poems Le Poittevin's vision is profoundly pessimistic. His heroes, Satan and Ahasvérus, denounce hope and trust in God. Man's lot in life is maximum suffering and he is assured that the curse of violence will return in each generation. The potential sacrifice of Christ does not extend to Ahasvérus, and Adam can never intervene and stave off the evils in which his descendants engage. The Cain image surfaces in both of these poems as a link between the Fall and Christ's death and to remind us of the violence of which mankind will never be able to rid itself, even after the Great Flood.

Lengthy poems on biblical subjects were somewhat fashionable in the mid-nineteenth century: Alexandre Soumet's *La Divine Epopée* (1841), Ludovic de Cailleux's *Le Monde Antédiluvien* (1845), and Edgar Quinet's "Ahasvérus" were among the most influential of these; of these the first is in verse, the latter two in prose. Exiles, fallen angels and rebels were also themes which seemed to be in vogue, and the Cain myth, even when the Cain figure is not manifested by an actual Cain character, is in part embodied in these related mythical figures. The Wandering Jew is the most abundantly occurring biblical or para-biblical myth of this period and the Cain myth is extended by the literary representations of Ahasverus and the other names by which the Wandering Jew is known.

Quinet's "Ahasvérus"

Even if Edgar Quinet was not noted as the epic poet he aspired to be by some of his contemporaries, they nonetheless were obligated to admit that his efforts to revive epic poetry in France were noteworthy. A bit nationalistic, Barbey D'Aurévilly found Quinet to be pretentious and less than successful in his efforts to create French epic verse:

Tout le monde le sait, M. Edgar Quinet fait dans l'épopée. Si ce n'est pas un poète épique, ni même un poète du tout par le résultat, c'est un travailleur en épopée infortuné, mais acharné, du moins. On fait ce qu'on peut. M. Quinet a toujours cru pouvoir beaucoup. Il n'a jamais pris pour lui le mot insolent et cruel, trop accepté, comme tant de mots: "Les Français n'ont pas la tête épique." Lui, il a toujours cru qu'il l'avait. Il est vrai que, d'esprit, M. Quinet n'est pas Français. C'est un Allemand, né en France, dont l'érudition est allemande, la science allemande et qui a la naïveté allemande de croire nous donner des poèmes épiques en français.

(Barbey d'Aurévilly, *Les Oeuvres et les Hommes*) 83

Nonetheless, Quinet's efforts at writing epics were admirable. He was not, as Barbey chavainistically suggests, a German. He was raised and educated in France and his talent as a writer should not be evaluated on the basis of his German heritage. His treatment of extra-biblical and classical myths in "Ahasvérus" and "Prométhée" was complimented by his "Napoléon"; the three lengthy poems form the epic trilogy for which Quinet is best known. Critics of his time may not have valued Quinet's contribution to epic poetry

83 Cited in Catulle Mendès, "Dictionnaire des principaux poètes français," in *Le Mouvement poétique en France de 1867-1900* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1903), p. 236.

since it was overshadowed by the pantheism and legends of Victor Hugo and by the lyricism of Lamartine and Vigny.

Quinet's *Ahasvérus* is divided into a prologue, four *Journées*, and an epilogue. The prologue takes place in Heaven and the first part is "La Création," while the following two, "La Passion" and "La Mort," lead up to the "Jugement dernier." At the conclusion of each of the first three *Journées* is an *intermède*, in which commentary is provided by choruses of demons, natural forces and fairies. Magnin's critique of "Ahasvérus" credits Quinet with successfully combining the philosophical and the lyrical, although he finds the prose poetry less worthy of the epic nature of the subject than alexandrines would have been. Magnin also very astutely points out the German influence on the imaginative use of personification of forests, mountains, oceans, and birds; Quinet gives everything in nature a voice and places man in a pastoral and pantheistic environment. He concludes his essay, "De la nature du génie poétique": "Il a pour but de reproduire quelques scènes de la tragédie universelle qui se joue entre Dieu, l'homme et le monde."⁸⁴ It is apparent that the work does have an epic scope and tone, its hero is an allegorical Everyman who cannot find rest until the end of time and Christ's return.

Quinet's "Ahasvérus" is tied to the Cain myth principally in that he, as the central figure, suffers as an exile for a crime imputed to him by Christ, whom he has offended, for which the punishment seems unjustly harsh: Ahasvérus must wander the world until Christ's return. He is cursed by Christ, and nature seems to feel and demonstrate Ahasvérus's suffering. It is

⁸⁴ Charles Magnin, "De la nature du génie poétique" in Quinet, Edgar de, *Oeuvres* (Pagnerre: Paris, 1858) p. 3.

this interweaving of philosophical and lyrical modes that Charles Magnin praises in his introductory essay “De la nature du génie poétique.” The pathetic fallacy is at work, but it is almost always accompanied by a philosophical reflection on life, death, eternity, religion, and morality. Quinet's Germanic roots are present in the fantastic atmosphere: a fairy chorus comments on Ahasvérus's wanderings and his love for the fallen angel Rachel; death is present as the character of Mob, an old widow woman; and the mountains and forests and their inhabitants are enchanted and speak. The form of the work is rather complex. It is on the whole a prose poem, yet the prologue frames the story as a play that God requests to be performed as a commemoration of human history. Quinet's *Ahasvérus* is, then, prose poetry within a drama, complete with *intermèdes* and what might be called stage directions, within an epic allegory of the life of the Wandering Jew; the story ends with the termination of the curse upon Christ's return, followed by a return to Heaven for Ahasvérus in the Epilogue.

Fallen Angels and the Curse of Exiles

In the first *Journée*, Quinet presents giants awakening from ominous dreams; they call on giants and Titans to awake. The allusion to giants brings this biblical epic in line with many others that allude to the existence of giants, the offspring of the daughters of men and the sons of angels in *Genesis*. “Éloa,” *Le Monde Antédiluvien*, *La Divine Epopée*, and *La Chute d'un ange* as well as Leconte de Lisle's “Qaïn” likewise have giants and angels as prominent characters and, in the case of Leconte de Lisle in

particular, find a divine incest in these relations. The presence of a fallen angel, Rachel, and her love for the protagonist Ahasvérus remind us of the poems on fallen angels discussed above: Vigny's Éloa and Satan and Lamartine's Cédar and Dahlia are probably precursors to Quinet's Rachel and Ahasvérus. Indeed, there is a male-female pairing in most of the works treated herein. Mob, the Quinet character who acquaints Ahasvérus with death, is akin to Byron's Lucifer, who serves the same function for Cain.

One is reminded also of the presence of Cain's wife in the works of Gessner, Gilbert, Legouv  , and Byron. It seems that Quinet's "Ahasvérus" has been overlooked by Bern  s as a possible source for Leconte de Lisle's "Qain" and by P. Sellier as a work closely associated with the Cain myth; yet Anderson and other mythographers place the Wandering Jew squarely in the line of Cain. It is the objective of this study to discuss Ahasvérus as an extension of the Cain myth.

In section II of the second *Journ  e*, Ahasvérus, the eldest son, is at his father's house in Jerusalem with his brothers. They hear the procession in which Christ is carrying his cross through the streets to the site of the crucifixion. The brothers join in the jeering and mocking of the crowd, and Ahasvérus cries out that Christ is a false prophet who must be killed. Thinking he can hide his voice among those of the crowd, he is an accomplice to the curses heaped on the passing Sacrificial Lamb *par excellence*, Christ. Christ comes to the house of Ahasvérus and calls him by name and the latter disbelieves his eyes upon seeing the transcending brilliance of Christ, whom he encounters face to face:

Ahasvérus: A mesure qu'il avance, son auréole brille mieux que celle d'un prophète élu; c'est encore là un de ses enchantements.

Christ: Est-ce toi, Ahasvérus?

Ahasvérus: Je ne te connais pas (p. 136).

In the gospels, Peter had denied Christ three times; in Ahasvérus's unwillingness to acknowledge Christ, his words are those of Peter's denial: "Je ne te connais pas."⁸⁵ Since the apostle Peter was forgiven and made the cornerstone of Christ's church, perhaps Ahasvérus should be accorded similar mercy. Another apostle, John, is told, according to some interpretations of his gospel, that he will live to see Christ's return. Perhaps, then, Ahasvérus wanders accursed and John lives on in blessed, saintly anticipation of Christ's return. Peter is crucified as John is left on earth to live until Christ's return according to some interpretations of the gospels. These apostles fill the roles of the doubled scapegoat; the one is sacrificed whereas the other is set free. John is a blessed wanderer while Ahasvérus is the cursed exile. In contrast to Cain, John has turned the wandering of an outcast like Ahasvérus into the hope for eternal life until Christ's return. Ahasvérus is the descendant and John is the binary opposite of Cain in the *New Testament*.

Christ first asks for water, then for help in carrying his cross, and finally simply to rest a moment at the doorstep. He is denied each request. Ahasvérus then commits blasphemy against Christ. When he offers to make Ahasvérus's locked door open so that he may bring out a stool on which to

⁸⁵ René Girard dedicates an entire chapter of *Le Bouc émissaire* to the dynamics of Peter's denial making a scapegoat of Christ.

sit, Ahasvérus' s curse comes back to him after he finishes his dialogue with Christ: "Devin, sors de mon ombre. Ton chemin est devant toi. Marche, marche." Christ answers:

Pourquoi l'as-tu dit, Ahasvérus?...C'est toi qui marcheras jusqu'au jugement dernier, pendant plus de mille ans...Tu seras l'homme qui ne meurt jamais. Ton âge sera le mien...Moi, je vais à Golgotha; toi, tu marcheras de ruines en ruines, de royaume en royaume, sans atteindre jamais ton Calvaire...La porte de la ville te dira: plus loin...Et la mer aussi: Plus loin, plus loin; n'êtes-vous pas ce voyageur éternel qui s'en va de peuples en peuples, de siècles en siècles, en buvant ses larmes dans sa coupe, qui ne dort ni jour ni nuit... C'est toi qui iras me demander de temple en temple, sans jamais me rencontrer. (pp. 137-138)

This part of the poem characterizes Ahasvérus as an accursed outcast and a scapegoat, and anticipates the coming of the fallen angel Rachel and the eventual final judgment. The crowd is quickly aware of the identity of this accursed one who has been so inhospitable to Christ, and it rejects him as he had rejected Christ: "Avez-vous vu la main d'airain qui écrivait sur la maison d'Ahasvérus: LE JUIF ERRANT ? Que celui qui le porte soit le bouc de Juda..."(p.138). Ahasvérus is also called "Sanglier de Judée" by Saint Michael, who tells him that he is to go to strange lands to awaken the inhabitants; this is in preparation for the final judgment, which takes place in the final chapter, "Quatrième Journée." Before setting off for his millennium of wandering, Ahasvérus tells Saint Michael that he wishes to bid farewell to his father and brothers before leaving. Michael answers with

some sympathy, saying that, if he were a man, he would pity Ahasvérus. This suggests of course the appearance of Rachel, a fallen angel become human who can pity and share his suffering. Rachel was cast out of Heaven for shedding a tear for Ahasvérus rather than for Christ.

Ahasvérus is allowed a final visit at his family's home. In this scene we have a clear picture of the pair Christ/Ahasvérus as the pair of scapegoats, one of which is sacrificed and the other set free to wander in the wilderness. In Ahasvérus's family, the father and younger sons have names of prophets, Elie and Joel, but their behavior is rather covetous, as their father, named Nathan, has suggested that one of his sons was to become the Messiah. He mocks Christ, saying the false King of the Jews is on his throne of Calvary. Elie notices that Ahasvérus has a gloomy countenance and describes it as a "couronne de ténèbres," remarking that Christ had worn one of gold and asks whether his elder brother Ahasvérus is the true Messiah. Joel notices a "beau calice" in his hand, expecting that it is another sign that Ahasvérus is the anointed one. Ahasvérus tries to disabuse them of their ill-held hopes: "La nuit brumeuse a attaché à mes cheveux ma noire couronne, et j'ai trouvé ce beau calice dans le chemin" (p. 148). The prose poem becomes dominated by dramatic dialogue and indications of the characters' behavior in lines that resemble stage instructions. The wine in Ahasvérus' chalice turns to blood and lamps go out as he passes by them. He asks his sister Martha to sing; she consents, offering to wash his feet as if he were Christ. Her song is about offering a crown to the Messiah; Ahasvérus responds pitifully: "Je n'aime plus ce cantique; ne me le redites jamais" (p.149).

A messenger arrives at the house and Nathan takes it to be of good portent, but it is in fact the command that Ahasvérus begin his wanderings. The young brothers of Ahasvérus still do not understand the curse on their brother and ask him to bring them gifts upon returning from his journey. Nathan then gives Ahasvérus typically bourgeois advice for sons who are leaving home to seek their fortune. The father tells the son how to treat his fellow man during his travels so that he may obtain help and money from them by promising in return favors from his father: show a shepherd to a watering hole so he will give you a lamb chop, be generous to your guide and to women spinning cotton, and to a soldier you must offer your father's silver and other goods in exchange for his protection (p.152).

The Wandering Jew's curse reflects that which he had cast on Christ by refusing to allow him to rest and by cruelly bidding him to continue on his way. Ahasvérus descends into the Valley of Josaphat, where the final judgment will occur, but the appointed time is not yet; he must continue to suffer. He has nothing to drink there but the dregs of Christ's chalice, representing the share of Christ's suffering that he must endure before he can end his wandering. Ahasvérus encounters the echo of the voice of Golgotha; he wishes to sit and hears the very words he had said to Christ: "Plus loin, plus loin"(perhaps this is also a reference to Peter's denial and Christ's rebuke of him).

In the series of choruses, political powers follow natural ones in the persons of emperors and old men. In the second *intermède*, between the second and third *Journées*, there is social commentary in the course of Ahasvérus' experience. The *Choeur de Veillards*, presumably with Quinet's

implicit voice, rails against the bourgeoisie. "Spectateurs de ce mystère, bourgeois de France...maintes choses me déplaisent dans votre Etat: premièrement, votre légèreté; secondement, votre vanité; troisièmement, votre avidité" (p.170). Here, as well as in the scene in which Ahasvéus's family tries to benefit as much as they can from the possibility that the elder brother is the Messiah, Quinet expresses his disdain for those who are so blinded by the banal events of life that they cannot see the sublime truth right under their noses. The chorus of old men brings the story back to the level of associations with French society; the French bourgeoisie are undifferentiated, profit seekers who could never identify with a hero like Ahasvéus. The popularity of the legend in the nineteenth century was remarkable, but the message that Ahasvéus is the humanity which will never find its place in the cosmos was not widely noted. The three things which the chorus deplores, "légèreté," "vanité," and "avidité," read like a corrupted motto for the French Revolution, turning "Liberté, égalité, fraternité" into a motto of those cursed by greed in the wake of history. As pointed out by Rousseau, greed and usurpation of property is a foundational evil in society. Renouvier, as discussed in the introduction, traced this tendency to the race of Cain.

The third chapter brings the appearance of Rachel, the fallen angel who, present at Christ's birth, fell for having pitied Ahasvéus at his confrontation with Christ. Mob, death in the disguise of an old woman, animates the story and provides Ahasvéus with another voice--to Rachel's, that of compassion, is added Mob's, that of evil, which tantalizes Ahasvéus with the possibility of death and the ending of his suffering. Mob poisons

the student suitor of Rachel who serenades her, and upon seeing another's death Ahasvérus laments

Ô Christ! ô Christ! laisse-moi. Si j'étais un sanglier traqué par des chiens, je me sauverais la nuit dans ma bauge...Ô bûcheron de Nazareth! Prends-moi...Fossoyeur de Bethléem! enterre-moi dans ton sépulture. (p. 190)

Ahasvérus, calling Christ a tree-cutter and a grave-digger, challenges him to justify his sentence. He pleads for death and rest from what seems to be interminable roaming, hoping even to be hunted down and his cursed life brought to an end. This is the cry of Cain, the exile from Eden, until he is re-established in a city, sheltered from his anguish. This is much the same vision as we have encountered in Hugo's "La Conscience"; God's eye ever pursuing Cain, there is no respite from it for Cain or for Ahasvérus.

Ahasvérus observes Christ's eye with horror:

Le regard du Christ s'est attaché à mon âme comme une lampe des morts est attaché, par son anneau de cuivre, à un pilier sépulchral, pour éclairer...Un regard sans pleurs, sans mouvement! deux yeux d'airain qui pesaient sur ma paupière! Pour héritage, il m'a transmis son immortelle douleur et sa sueur de sang. Il a fouillé de ses yeux dans mon sein; il y a fait flamboyer, ce roi des morts, son enfer et ses limbes, mais point de ciel (p. 192).

Even Ahasvérus' horse laments and reminds the wanderer, henceforth on foot, of the part of Christ's suffering that he must endure, and echoes the lament of his master: "Dans mon abreuvoir vous mettez des larmes. Ni mes

pieds ni mes flancs ne peuvent plus courir. Si vous m'aimez, dans cet endroit enterrez-moi..."(p. 195). Ahasvérus commands that he stand and continue, promising him golden hay and spring water and a squire to wipe away his sweat of blood.

Like Cédar in Lamartine's *La Chute d'un ange*, Rachel, another fallen angel, has a love interest in a mortal, Ahasvérus. The birds, the flowers and her musical instruments have lost their joyous demeanor and one of the birds, a starling, warns her : "prends garde à l'étranger. Depuis qu'il est ici je n'ai plus faim de branche, d'amandier; je n'ai plus soif d'eau de source." A bouquet of *giroflées* calls out a similar warning to Rachel: "Rachel, sauve-toi. Depuis que l'étranger est ici, que me fait le soleil? Le soleil ne m'échauffe plus...La rosée ne me rafraîchit plus" (pp. 197-198). Quinet's prose admirably blends the metaphaphysical with the natural world. The epic and legendary story has a lyrical and pastoral air to it. The voices of birds and flowers in this scene sense Ahasvérus' curse and Rachel's vulnerable love for him. The work still has not lost its mythical system, which places Ahasvérus in the role of the cursed outcast that even nature must abhor. The pastoral, as it typically does in the Cain and Abel story and the Fall, plays an important role in this passage. Ahasvérus' curse is transferred to the lovely elements of the idyllic scene in which Rachel's companions in nature can no longer perform their duties. The beauty of the landscape is lost as Ahasvérus approaches Rachel. The exiled Ahasvérus who passes through time has not lost the stigma of original sin and, as with Cain, his death is indefinitely postponed; he is placed outside the realm of

divine and natural protection and is left with his conscience and the anguish of anticipating a death which is not to occur until the end of time.

Ahasvérus finally encounters Rachel in the "Troisième Journée"; he sees her for the first time, but she had been witness to his "fall" during his rejection of Christ. She has long pitied him and is moved to love him. She, optimistic, enjoys the view from the Neckar river in "Heile Berg." Mob, after a brief conversation with Ahasvérus, leaves him alone with Rachel. Whereas Ahasvérus can only see blood in the dew drops, rain and sun-brightened violets, Rachel, ever the optimist, emphasizes the natural beauty they behold from the mountain. The chorus of fairies reminds Rachel of her presence at the birth of Christ and how she adores Ahasvérus more than Christ. Ahasvérus has not spoken to Rachel of the origin of his suffering and delays telling his story to her. His silence parallels Cain's unspoken jealousy of Abel and the unspoken suffering of humanity is allegorized in the Wandering Jew and the first murderer. The shadow of Cain's conscience is revisited in Ahasvérus.

Mob tries to find a remedy for Ahasvérus's melancholia; he proposes drink, then travel. The former symbolizes Ahasvérus's infinite thirst for death. Ahasvérus's fate is to continually endure wandering. Drink and thirst are motifs which occur frequently in the poem and link Ahasvérus to Christ. It is from Christ's chalice that the Wandering Jew must drink the dregs of suffering and one is reminded of Christ's thirst on the cross. The Romantic thirst for the infinite and the scientist's thirst for all knowledge are also developed in the third Journée.

Ahasvérus considers becoming a poet rather than travel further; at this point he is considering the action taken by Cain when exiled. Settling down allows each to establish art and science and turn his nomadic lifestyle into a sedentary one. Poetry is the first metaphysical art to be built as shelter from the harsh reality of the material world and it provides liberty of thought and the power of words to counter the blows struck by a punitive universe. Mob encourages this desire to engage in poetry and suggests that Ahasvérus take on science as well, alchemy in particular. "La science est faite pour des hommes comme vous...faites-vous alchimiste" (p. 224). But science cannot fill the depths of his heart's desires, and it appears that Mob is only offering false hope to Ahasvérus; there is no true remedy to his suffering, and knowledge and experiences in the world are trivial in the light of death. Death itself, craved by Ahasvérus, offers no answers, and Mob discusses one vain occupation after another with Ahasvérus. The latter finds none of them satisfying and the necessity to choose tormenting.

Mob: Vous êtes malheureusement organisé; le réel vous déplaît, l'idéal ne vous convient pas; pourtant, de deux choses l'une, il faut choisir.

Ahasvérus: Cette nécessité est un de mes plus grands tourments. (p. 224)

Mob trivializes religion; for him, the best religion is one which is simple and pretends to have all of the answers to life's questions readily available. He ridicules Methodism, citing it as the best example of this kind of religion and summarizes its tenets:

Imaginez-vous que nous avons réduit la vie entière à cinq ou à six petites maximes qui... tiendraient ensemble dans une coquille d'oeuf...et vous verrez qu'il est vraiment fort commode de posséder ainsi à chaque heure tous les secrets de la vie, tous les mystères de l'âme et du ciel, toute la science du coeur et de la nature, sur un bout de papier grand au plus comme une recette contre la migraine. (p. 227)

Ahasvérus' reply indicates that Mob is succeeding in torturing his victim and moving him toward a despair that would cause him to renounce all semblance of faith and embrace death with no reservations and no questions.

Mob's discourse on the brevity of life further aggravates Ahasvérus's emotional wounds. Mob, the embodiment of death, contemplates her nature in speaking to Ahasvérus and concludes by praising the power of nihilism. Her existence-nothingness has no beginning nor ending and has a certain perverse creative (destructive) power in it:

Du néant faire quelque chose, c'est une difficulté; mais de toutes choses faire un néant, ci-gît une pensée, ci-gît le véritable problème. D'un souvenir tirer une ombre, d'une ombre une pensée, d'une pensée un rêve, d'un rêve moins qu'un rien qui s'ignore, ci-gît la vie. (p. 229)

The repeated phrase "ci-gît" echoes the voice of death in formulating a basic truth about life and heaps despair upon anguish for Ahasvérus. Finally, their conversation ends at perhaps the most pathetic moment for the Wandering Jew; midnight has come, and Mob seeks out new victims to devour.

Faith, Love, and the Curse of the Wanderer

At this point the question of Ahasvéus's faith becomes ever more pertinent--in particular, in the conversation between Rachel, who still believes in her beloved, and her friend Berthe. In discussing their love for their suitors, Berthe tells Rachel that Ahasvéus is a bad risk, fearing that he may be a heretic. Berthe mentions that Ahasvéus is never in church and his faith is most suspect. She further warns Rachel that his station is below hers, making him unworthy of her; her remark seems to have social implications rather than metaphysical ones, since it has not been revealed to Berthe that Rachel is an angel in human form. Rachel replies that she has seen him so pained by the sight of the crucifix at the town's entrance that he was obliged to lean on her for support lest he fall, weighed down with grief. One must here contrast Rachel's faith in and support of her beloved with Ahasvéus's lack of faith and cruel treatment of Christ; it takes a fallen angel's love to help redeem Ahasvéus from his fall from grace. In fact, love is the only element of life which has any redeeming quality, especially for the women figures in the poem. When final judgment occurs, in the *Quatrième Journée*, a series of heroic women are resurrected, only to declare that the only reason they would wish to be resurrected would be to be reunited with their lovers. It clear, then, that the redeeming power of love in the relationship between Rachel and Ahasvéus is central to the poem.

The couple spend a rare happy hour in Rachel's room, one in which Ahasvéus's life seems redeemed and Rachel's happiness is complete, except for being reminded that she is a fallen angel.

Ahasvérus: Oui mon ange, c'est dans cette chambre qu'est mon ciel. Je n'en demande point d'autre.

Rachel: ...ne m'appelle pas ton ange (p. 240).

He finds the scent of springtime in her room. She says his voice is the only enchantment there. He becomes enamoured of her and finds her beauty a paradise; but she fears that he will not always love her, because of her unworthy soul. He continues to find in her spirit solace and respite: "Crois-tu que ce ne soit pas un souffle divin qui fait trembler les lèvres...Toi-même, qui sais si tu es autre chose qu'un esprit dont mon esprit a soif, qu'une ombre pour rafraîchir une ombre..." (pp. 244-45). The shadow recurs innumerable times as a part of the natural *décor*, but here it is a question of shelter from the sun which offers Ahasvérus the shadow of existence. The Anima of Ahasvérus is revealed by his dependence on Rachel. She is his Animus--the masculine force of stability and the initiator of love in the female. For Rachel seeks him out, and Ahasvérus works through his feelings until he can accept her. What remains is for Ahasvérus to overcome the unsaid doubts, fears and innermost sufferings, that is, his Shadow, by expressing them through his contact with Rachel. The positive force of the Shadow then allows him to face the end with enough sense of self, enough individuation that he welcomes death and releases the suffering and the anguish which he has had since Christ cursed him. It is through Rachel's love that he is capable of coming to terms with his existence.

Rachel reacts to Ahasvérus, given the somewhat unnatural love she has for him, with fear and trembling. She is shaken, her ears and head hurt,

she becomes dizzy, and her crucifix sheds tears of blood while he speaks to her; the more she tries to wipe them away, the darker the stain becomes. Although she is touched by Ahasvérus's curse, it is not completely transferred to her as it has been to the birds, the flowers, her musical instruments and even to his horse. When Ahasvérus realizes the cause for Rachel's reaction to him, he cries out to Christ in a thinly veiled accusation reminiscent of Christ's words from the cross, "My God, my God! Why have you forsaken me?"

Christ! Christ! je te reconnais là. Oui, c'est toi; que me veux-tu? Jusque sur le coeur qui bat pour moi, tu me poursuis. Tu me défies, n'est-ce pas? tu te ris de moi-même à ma barbe; tu me terrasses; tu m'écrases; tu t'amuses, beau maître, de ce long rêve, que tu appelles ma vie; toi, un rêve s'il en fut, un songe devenu dieu pour un monde de songes. Eh bien, pour mieux te faire fête, vois donc de plus près mon bonheur; sois-en jaloux à en mourir encore. Pleurs, désespoir délivrant, désirs, délices envenimées, angoisses palpitantes, doutes, remords noyés dans une larme, adultère de la terre et du ciel, que la vie, que la mort, que tout t'entraîne avec elle, avec moi, dans ma joie de damné! (pp. 245-46)

Rachel calls out to Christ, as if for mercy for Ahasvérus, but the latter refuses any such plea on his behalf: "N'appelle pas le Christ. Tout ton sang coulerait jusqu'à la terre, que jamais mes rêves ne quitteraient plus tes lèvres." Ahasvérus proclaims his independence and his determination to commit himself to his love for Rachel, come what may. This outburst is that of an individuated hero, a Prometheus, or, remembering Leconte de Lisle's

poem, a bold and defiant Cain. This is a striking expression of what we may call "a Cain complex"; the elements of defiance, sense of injustice, jealousy and rejection of a guilt-stricken conscience make this passage one of the same spirit as "Qain" and, once again, indicate that Quinet's poem probably provided an important source for Leconte de Lisle.

The speeches by choruses of fairies enhance the Germanic element of the fantastic in this philosophical and epic poem. Quinet's German heritage persisted in his writing despite his disavowal of all things German. The fairies bid the world farewell, anticipating the end of the world and the death of all its inhabitants, which is anticipated in the last judgment, the "Quatrième Journée." The natural world becomes as sad and pale as Ahasvérus; the pathetic fallacy is in full bloom in the final pages of the third "Journée." There is little that Rachel's love and beauty can do at this point to save Ahasvérus from judgment day. Her beauty is likened to that of "Yseult la blonde" and her hair offers still some consolation to her beloved: "Pour m'amuser tout un jour, je me bercerais sur un de vos cheveux d'or, en écoutant le vent qui chante: 'Qu'elle est belle, ta maîtresse!'" (p. 248). But the fairy chorus is disguised as Ahasvérus; it is deceiving Rachel:

D'ailleurs, en partant, sur vos blanches mains je lis ceci: Tout ira mieux à l'avenir. D'ici, en me tenant debout sur mon char, je vois d'autres cieux plus bleus qui fourmillent: de ce côté, une mer nouvelle qui n'a point encore baisé son sable m'attend pour la fiancer avec sa rive...sur un pont fait d'un cheveu, légère, votre âme, sans l'ébranler, passera...(p. 250).

Rachel realizes she sees an impostor and rebukes the false Ahasvérus:

“démon d'enfer! Tu n'es pas lui! Tu n'es pas celui que j'aime; tu as pris sa figure pour tromper une pauvre fille...Oh! va-t'en, va-t'en...”(p. 250). She then decides to tell Ahasvérus that she is a fallen angel and, having told Berthe that she is Ahasvérus's fiancée, she closes her windows to the fairies and evil spirits and declares, as if to the real Ahasvérus: “Tu ne me quitteras plus jamais, puisque nous sommes mariés. Nous ne sortirons plus de cette chambre...” (p. 250). However, she is still unsure whether she is speaking to the real Ahasvérus and it requires a moment for her to recognize her true beloved.

Mob reappears to them and laughs. At the beginning of part XVII, as if inserting a stage direction, Quinet writes: “Mob entr'ouvre la porte avec un éclat de rire. Elle n'est vêtue que d'un pan de manteau qui laisse voir son squeletette” (p. 251). Mob lists her various names as if in “une litanie” and concludes it by declaring: “et finalement, en toutes choses, je suis le RIEN” (p. 258). Mob coerces Ahasvérus to go with her to save Rachel, who wants to sacrifice herself for Ahasvérus. They fly on Mob's wings into darkness, to the cathedral of Strasbourg. The cathedral gives a speech three pages long (pp. 258-263), in which it expresses its desire to expand vertically. It suffers, like Romantic heroes, from the thirst of the infinite, and, like Ahasvérus, it embodies time on Earth.

Encore! encore! Oh! je veux monter plus haut. Encore un degré, encore un pan de mur, encore une tourelle, encore un fût rongé qui me grandisse assez pour que je jette leurs voix avec ma voix sur le plus haut nuage où le Seigneur est assis ! (pp.259-260)

The cathedral asks which master builder of cathedrals designed her, that of Cologne, Reims, Vienna, or Rouen ? It answers its own question, attributing its construction to evil: "Non pas, non pas. C'est le diable qui l'a rendu à l'ouvrier pour le prix de son âme"(260). Cities and cathedrals are founded by evil; the cathedral aspires to be a kind of Tower of Babel which is built over centuries through the exploitation of workers who will never see the completion of their work and will reap no benefit from its construction. The cities that Cain built were likewise founded on evil, but they have contributed to mankind, in providing shelter and establishing a place for civilization to develop. Cain is the demonic side of man which builds cities in order to climb back to Heaven, which it realizes, as the cathedral does, it can never reach. The cathedral's voice is an extension of Cain's, the construction of a cathedral is a metaphor for the Wandering Jew. The laborers cry out: "Maître aurons-nous bientôt fini ? L'ouvrage est long, la vie est courte" (p. 262). The cathedral answers:

Dans les plis de ma robe je traîne des peuples éternels...Pendant mille ans, j'ai cherché dans la ville le carrefour le plus fréquenté à toute heure une place pour m'asseoir. (p. 262)

As Ahasvérus and Cain do, the cathedral is ever condemned to seek out a refuge from time, a place of respite.

Christ and his saints in the stained-glass windows of the cathedral discuss the approach of judgment and the dance of the dead that will precede the resurrection of the elect. The chorus of the dead asks Christ why he has

apparently lied to them, for they see no heaven, no bread, no salvation, only worms and venomous vipers. A chorus of women poses the same question to the Virgin Mary: "Pourquoi nous avez-vous trompées ?" (p. 265) Choruses of children and emperors follow with similar accusations; the children are frightened because their parents have gone away and the emperors find no realm nor heritage that Christ had promised them (pp. 265-267). There is doubt and despair everywhere as the judgment approaches in the end of the *Troisième Journée*. Like Baudelaire, Quinet was inspired by the dark, macabre side of life. The fantastic and the melancholic elements of German *Märchen* are present in Ahasvérus despite Quinet's denunciation of the same in the *intermède* following the *Troisième Journée*:

Non, je n'aime plus en Allemagne, ni partout où la brume s'épaissit au nord de ce côté des Alpes, les sentiers sous les sapins qui tous mènent à un regret, ni les grands tilleuls trop pleins d'ombres et de souvenirs, ni la ruine gothique...(p. 290)

Judgment and Redemption of Ahasvérus

In the final *Journée*, choruses of cities follow choruses of nature, structures and men. Rome, Babylon and Paris must answer the call to awaken at the call of the trumpet of the last judgment. Rome, the most widespread and developed civilization in the West and, therefore, an extension of Cain's foundational city-building and Augustine's earthly city, reluctantly answers the angels call, abandons its inhabitants, even its popes, and asks to descend alone into the valley of Josaphat. Babylon and Paris also awaken from their dreamy slumber. The latter, still decadent, offers the

angel bracelets and believes it is going to a grand celebration; the former war-like, invoking Napoleon as its protector, wishes to prove it only followed him as the sentinel "sur le bord de la haute tour que le genre humain s'était bâtie." (p. 325) This is in reference to the cathedral, which bore witness to the Napoleonic Wars and to the destruction that resulted and also alludes to the Tower of Babel. Paris believes it is, after Rome, the seat of civilization and that it is justified in its belligerence.

Section V of the final part of the poem presents us with "Le Docteur Albertus-Magnus," a scientist and a Faust-figure who cannot bear for the world to end without his discovery of the last secrets of science. The questions he poses are metaphysical problems that Quinet addresses in the course of "Ahasvérus" and are left somewhat open even at its conclusion. "Que suis-je? corps et âme? le tout ensemble, ou plutôt l'un sans l'autre? Suis-je un rêve? une bulle de savon, un mot? ou bien un Dieu? ou bien un rien? Fatale question !" (p. 326) Upon pondering the ultimate questions of man's existence, he considers the possibility that, if this world should pass, he would become a second Prometheus, reigniting life with his knowledge. However, the angel tells him it is too late to find ultimate answers: death and resurrection are imminent. It is pertinent here to recall that Cain is, as are Prometheus and Albertus-Magnus, a founder of science, and possesses the basic spirit of inquiry into all knowledge in man. The search for knowledge makes all three of them vulnerable to the consequences; it seems a universal curse on scientists that the knowledge they attain will lead inevitably to suffering.

The poet and a chorus of women are revived only to find that it is not life to be without their lovers. One heroine after another, Sapho, Héloïse, Berthe la blonde, Gabrielle de Vergy, the Shakespearean heroines Desdemona and Juliette, as well as those from French literature, Julie de Wolmar, Virginie, and Atala, all reach this conclusion: only love can answer the needs of human suffering and make resurrection desirable.

The following scene returns to the main characters, Rachel and Ahasvérus. She calls him Joseph (the only use of that name for him in the poem) and asks that they remain together under the shadow of a tree, happy for eternity. The name of Joseph harkens back to the duality inherent in the legend of the Wandering Jew; on the one hand there is the possible allusion to Joseph of Arimathea, who takes up Christ's cross whereas Ahasvérus refuses, and, on the other, the man who shoves or strikes Christ and denies him rest at his house. This man is often held to be Malchus, the high priest's servant in John's Gospel (18:4-10), whose ear Peter severed and who is perhaps the same man (18: 20-22) who strikes Jesus. There is also the doubling of disciples in the legend of St. John, the disciple who, according to some interpretations of Matthew 16:28 and John 21:21-22, should live until Christ's return. It is, of course, natural that legendary figures' lives become extended; from saints' lives to Elvis Presley, these heroes allegedly make many reappearances and reports of their deaths are frequently premature.⁸⁶ John's counterpart would be Peter, who denied Christ yet became the founding stone of his Church, and again, according to legend, died crucified

⁸⁶ For an analysis of the relationship between French Saints' Lives and Elvis Presley see Mary Keebler's thesis *Persistence of Hagiographic Themes in Modern Culture: Parallels Between Selected Medieval Saints' Lives and the Life of Elvis Presley*, Thesis, University of Tennessee-Knoxville, May 1993.

upside-down. If there is a mythical sinner wandering the Earth, there may well be a corresponding saint serving God for the rest of time. These wanderers, then, serve as binary opposites, positive and a negative symbols for mankind. Ahasvérus still has a compulsion to go forth, but Rachel assures him that they are at the ends of the Earth and, ever the optimist, adds: "après cela vient le ciel"(p. 337). The sole instance in which Rachel is less than hopeful is when she finds that even her pure and boundless love is not sufficient for Ahasvérus, his suffering leaves a gulf too wide for even her love to fill completely. Ahasvérus's thirst for the infinite puts him squarely in the mold of a romantic hero:

C'est la maladie de mon âme. Quand mes lèvres ont bu ton haleine, j'ai encore soif, et la même voix me crie: Plus loin! plus loin! va-t'en jusqu' à ma source; et, quand je te presse sur mon sein, mon sein me dit: Pourquoi n'est-ce pas la vierge infinie qui demeure au ciel? (p. 338)

Rachel's love, if not sufficient for healing, is nonetheless redemptive, whereas God's love is an illusory source of tranquillity and brings suffering rather than deliverance.

Si seulement une heure, je savais ce que c'est que d'être aimé du ciel, je serais plus tranquille, plus certain. Je me fais mille chimères sur l'amour divin...(p. 339).

He finishes by wishing he could drown himself with Rachel in "cette mer d'infini..."(p. 340).

Rachel baptises him with her tears and adds that it is in the heart that they each thirst, she for him and he for an end to his cursed wanderings and inability to find divine love.

Mob attempts to prevent the dead who are beginning to be resurrected from escaping his clutches and admonishes the “maudit troupeau” (p. 341) to return to the grave before the master sees them. He encounters Ahasvérus, who has found hope for Christ's pardon and another life. Mob scoffs that “hope” is but a sweet, empty word he gives to the dead. Faced with the passing away of the natural world, Mob claims that her wings are large enough to shield Ahasvérus. The eternal cynic, Mob plays down the advent of the last judgement: “Ce sera une journée comme une autre, un peu de fumée, surtout de cendre et puis ce sera tout”(p. 344). Mob also piques Ahasvérus's conscience one last time by recalling the source of his curse, the image of the seat which the latter refused Christ. Ahasvérus is chilled by his fear of Mob, though he knows that death, alas, cannot touch him. Death does not befall Cain either, as God, rather than bringing a retaliatory death sentence on Cain, curses him, marks him and exiles him .

The firmament begins to crumble and flowers and birds have their last dialogue with cosmic forces. *Le père éternel* announces the final hour, and, again, irritating Ahasvérus' conscience, calls to the mountains that he will level them all and make them into “un banc de pierre pour m'asseoir sur ma porte” (p. 349). The Ocean, the first to speak in the play, returns to ask why God is so mercilessly drying it up; it cries “Qu'ai-je donc fait, Seigneur?” as a plea of innocence which reminds us of Christ's unjust suffering and Ahasvérus' lament. The ocean asks if it is God's jealousy which brings this

judgment, and if God had abandoned the Earth and the Ocean to permit life only in Heaven? God answers that the Ocean has doubted to its depths and declares: “Va! je prendrai toute ton eau dans le creux de ma main pour laver la plaie et le calice de mon fils” (p. 350). Once again the themes of thirst and Ahasvérus's sharing Christ's sufferings is illustrated by metaphor. It is easy to imagine, from the story in *Genesis* and representations of Ahasvérus and Cain as exile in art and literature, that Cain suffers a thirst as desperate as does Ahasvérus.

The litany of a vanishing world continues with the stars, who claim innocence as well. God wishes simply to make earrings and a ring for his finger out of their golden light. He tells the lamenting chorus of women that He will grant the ring as a dowry for their wedding, which will take place in heaven. They are the only ones who, through their desire for love, have preserved the memory of divine love. In this poem, it seems to be the part of the female to give and seek love and the part of the male to desire to receive it though it be unattainable, and the part of the Deity to make it the redemptive force of the cosmos, albeit through suffering.

Time and Mob call for the end to come; Time has brought suffering to Ahasvérus, in the form of drops of venom at each passing moment of his life, and Mob has tantalized him with death that would not come to end his woe. God permits Mob to use his sickle to reap his due harvest of dead; the latter gleefully calls forth first the dead gods, who question their existence and echo some of the major metaphysical problems posed by the poem:

Qui sommes-nous ? ou tout ou rien; ou l'univers ou moins qu'un mot;
peut-être une ombre; ombre de quoi ? de l'infini qui va, et vient, et monte,

et descend tout le jour dans sa tour ? dites-le-nous; fumée ou cendre, que sommes-nous dans l'encensoir ? (p. 355)

To this God answers that they have never been more than dust and names the Titans first in a list of gods and prophets whom He considers non-existent.

The cities of the Orient, beginning with Babylon, are judged and rebuked by God. Athens has thought only of her beauty and, jealous of the stars, the islands and the olive tree's shadow, she has used her marble to be like God, without rivals.

Rome is condemned by all the dead with one voice while vultures praise her and credit her with providing food for their young with those Rome has killed in battle. Rome defends herself by claiming she was tending her fields peaceably when hoards of peoples overran her. The agrarian imagery fits the Cain myth as well, and the foundation of civilization has been reproduced and extended to the greatest empire in Western history. Rome claims it sheltered these people within her confines and kept them under her control. In vain does Rome seek pardon, for God reminds her : "C'est toi qui a tué mon fils à Golgotha" (p. 363). This accusation reaches Ahasvérus, Judas, and ultimately Cain. After Rome argues that it provided a church for Christ, Saint Bonaventure, who had initially condemned Rome, has a change of heart and calls in vain for God to pity her. The judgment on Rome is harsh:

Dès ce soir, quatre comètes sanglantes s'attelleront pour traîner jour et nuit,
dans mon cirque, tes âmes qui pleurent sur ton char triomphal; et le monde

tremblera quand elles secoueront sur leurs épaules leurs chevelures
souillées dans ta poudre. (p. 364)

The people of the Middle Ages are accorded mercy; in their poverty and humility they have been “une pauvre âme nue que la foi vêtissait, peuple d'esprits sans corps, foule sans ville et sans murailles,”(p. 365) for they have nothing to boast of and have furnished no place to rest as had Rome.

Building is associated with evil, with Babylon in particular, because of its Tower of Babel, as with Rome because of its monuments and temples of marble; this sign of civilization, city and tower building has its origin in Cain's first city and its divine double in the city that God announces at the Final Judgment. God welcomes these poor, humble travelers into his new celestial city. Asking Mob to identify those people whom he does not recognize to be among the faithful, God then turns toward the east to hear the pleas of a choir of Arabs. Those of the Muslim faith, sons of Esau, are the rival brother of Christianity and also as Semitic descendents of Cain.

The Arab chorus has spent its existence sowing in the desert:

quand votre fils est mort et que le Carmel a tremblé, je suis parti pour
semer devant moi le sable et le sel, partout où me menait mon prophète de
colère. Sur mon écu enluminé, je portais pour devise Feu et sang. J'ai
élevé mes minarets dans le désert, comme des phares sur la mer. (p. 366).

The Arab chorus, wandering and cursed, also resembles Cain in its violence and defiance: blood and fire is the motto etched on its shield. The “Peuple du Moyen Age” now appear to be uniquely Christian and most likely French

and Spanish, as they call on God to push back the Arabs and the voice of a saintly chorus laments the renewed violence that is at hand.

The voices of saints Christopher and Michael describe the collapse of the firmament, and the heavens seek to flee from the piercing of its walls by the arrow drawn from God's bow. The Eternal Father has seen enough of fighting between East and West and witnesses the depletion of kingdoms, the decimation of their populations. "Les peuples modernes" have lost touch with God and call to an old man whom they do not recognize as the Heavenly Father. They ask where He may be found; He answers with directions to the abyss of death. God is somewhat vindictive in applying the punishment of Ahasvérus to all men: "Maudits, disparaissez! je ne veux point de vous dans ma nouvelle cité" (p. 371). This is a profound commentary on the loss of faith in the nineteenth century.

There remain only the voices of America and the Pacific Islands before Christ appears to judge Ahasvérus and the human race with him. America is young and has scarcely discovered its expanse. C. Crossley has suggested that

...Quinet longed for a return to religion which would signify the overcoming of the individual's estrangement from nature and from mankind. Indeed the idea of America, land of the future, is echoed in Ahasvérus. When the westward movement of religion and history is complete universal harmony is restored.⁸⁷

87 Ceri Crossley, *Edgar Quinet: A Study in Romantic Thought* (French Forum: Lexington, 1983) p. 32.

It is with the westward expansion of America that the ends of the Earth have been reached and Christ's return would be at hand along with the end of the wanderings of Ahasvérus. At the ends of the Earth, the Pacific Islands are the last to speak before the judgement is concluded. They offer to make a new Babylon for humanity and a new Bethlehem for a new Christ. The conclusion of the epilogue has thus been foreshadowed by the suggestion that the entire experience of humanity and God be repeated as the Eternal Father gives his consent for these plans.

Mob informs God that only one is left to pardon or curse; death has been hiding Ahasvérus in her wings and Mob presents him to the Divine Judge:

Il y a encore un homme qui marche jour et nuit. Sa barbe tombe jusqu' à ses pieds. Il reste dans mon ombre pour que vos yeux ne le voient pas. Il plie la tête sur ses genoux pour que vous n'entendiez pas son souffle. Il s'appelle Ahasvérus. (p. 377)

God asks where this cursed wanderer is, a sign that he is perhaps, in Quinet's vision of Him, less than omniscient. One is also reminded of the first fratricide coming to God's attention; Jehovah calls to Cain: "Where is your brother Abel?"

Rome curses Ahasvérus as he passes by, recalling, once again, the words of Peter's denial of Christ: "Va-t-en! Je ne te connais pas. Ne monte pas par mes degrés"(p. 377) . Babylon likewise curses him and tells him to continue on his way. Rachel re-enters and encourages Ahasvérus to look upwards in anticipation of the celestial city, pointing out angels who are

weeping out of pity for him and the Virgin Mary praying for him. Despite her hopeful admonishments, he can only see the cross on the summit before him and cannot lift his eyes to it.

A dialogue between Heaven and Hell follows Rachel's last plea to Ahasvérus to ask for mercy. They come closer together as the firmament disappears and Hell asks Heaven what it sees approaching in the distance in the course of their conversation:

Heaven: Je vois, comme un cavalier, la poussière qui poudroie sur le chemin de l'infini." To which Hell responds, "C'est un nouveau Dieu qui vient...Je suis sauvé. Plus tard, le jugement dernier sera refait et le juge sera jugé. (p. 382)

The most fundamental questions about metaphysics and Quinet's beliefs are here answered. Quinet is certainly not atheistic and not really pantheistic, but the sufficiency of Christianity is called into question by this poem. It is apparent that he rejects original sin and thus perhaps implies that God is not altogether just in his judgment. As Christ finally appears and Ahasvérus must confront him in order to come to the end of his woe-plagued life, the Wandering Jew recognizes the one who cursed him. Like Cain and Job, Ahasvérus has grounds for finding his punishment unbearable, excessive and unjust. He refers again to the seat at his doorstep, which he denied to Christ. Ahasvérus reports his activities since his last encounter with Christ: "J'ai cherché le repos, et j'ai trouvé l'orage; j'ai cherché l'ombre et j'ai trouvé le soleil; j'ai cherché le chemin de mes jeunes années, et j'ai trouvé le chemin de l'éternelle douleur " (p. 383). Christ must be assured that Ahasvérus has

indeed drunk the last dregs of the bitter cup of suffering from which he required him to drink until this final hour of judgment. Reminding the Wandering Jew of his curse, he says: “Je t'avais envoyé du Calvaire pour cueillir après moi dans chaque lieu ce qui restait de douleur dans le monde. Es-tu bien sûr de l'avoir toute bue?” (p. 384). The answer given by the surrogate sufferer, the symbol of humanity, indicates that he has. More than that, he has been marked: “Vous aviez attaché à mon front une auréole, non pas de lumière ou d'amour mais de deuil, de ténèbres et d'obscurs soucis” (p. 385). Those who encounter him recognize this mark much as those who fled the sight of Cain in *Genesis*:

Quand les rois me rencontraient... ils murmuraient entre eux:
 'L'avez-vous vu?' ...Quand le flot me maudissait dans ma barque, l'orage
 dans mon sentier, l'épée dans son fourreau, la foudre sur ma tête, ils se
 disaient tout bas: Prenons garde de le toucher, puisque les doigts du Christ
 l'ont touché avant nous. (p. 385)

Christ then asks Ahasvérus if he wishes to return to his journey to the orient and the latter answers that he can neither continue nor sit; he asks only for life, not rest, and desires to rise to Heaven with Christ. Rachel decides to follow him to Heaven as well and the voice of the universe has the final word on the mystery of women: “Une femme m'a perdu, une femme m'a sauvé” (p. 387). The entire poem presents the fusion of opposites. Christ, the victim of abuse, will return to meet the accursed abuser, Ahasvérus. Rachel, the female angel, will join him at their ascension at the last judgment. The natural elements come together to lament, to despair, then to

disappear. The kings, kingdoms, peoples and cities cry more and more in unison; even Heaven and Hell are joined in the end of this universe and the beginning of a new one. The duality of Cain and Abel is, then, but one in a myriad of Romantic antitheses found in this work.

The question of religious faith is one which is essential to the interpretation of "Ahasvérus." Quinet was criticized for his apparent loss of faith in Christianity and for his pantheism. Ahasvérus appears convinced that there is no longer any God to Whom one can pray. Quinet's God, like Hugo's satyr, is defined and limited by physical and cosmic space. Only Christ's passion seems to transcend the natural world, and, although he is resurrected, even he seems demystified in the end. He returns to the grave and is a second time resurrected in the final part of the poem, but one is left to wonder if Quinet's poem does not posit a new religion to replace Christianity, as does C. Crossley:

The later parts of the poem are directly concerned with the spiritual crisis of the nineteenth century. Is Christianity dying? What new religion can replace it? The mood of Ahasvérus is often one of doubt and despair: 'ô Christ! ô Christ! pourquoi nous as-tu trompés?' ⁸⁸

This reminds one of Leconte de Lisle's pessimism as expressed in "Qaïn" and contributes to our suspicion that Ahasvérus was a source for the Parnassian's Cain.

It is rather liberating for Ahasvérus that, when death finally approaches, he believes there will no longer be any suffering. Rest, long

⁸⁸ Ceri Crossley, p.29.

sought after by Vigny's Moses, is likewise desired by Ahasvérus. The cursed existence that Ahasvérus endures is an unmeasurable and disproportionate punishment for his crime of not allowing Christ to rest and pushing him along his way during the procession with the cross to Golgotha.

Ahasvérus's suffering may be considered to be, like Cain's, an exile that constitutes a banishment that would remove a pariah from the community; he is also the scapegoat who is set free to suffer in the desert while the other is put to death. If Cain is the banished goat and Abel the corresponding sacrificed goat, then Ahasvérus is the wandering exile whose immolated counterpart would be Christ. The scapegoat relationships provide a metaphorical link between the Old and New Testaments as represented in literature.

CHAPTER FOUR

PROMETHEUS AND CAIN'S CURSE

Prometheus and Cain: Merging Classical and Biblical Mythologies

Whereas the Wandering Jew is a representation of the Cain figure as an exile, Prometheus, its Greek counterpart, is a rebel and the founder of human genius. Prometheus parallels Cain as founder of all of the arts and sciences. It is the first exile in *Genesis* who, in seeking protection from the eye of God (in Hugo's "La Conscience," for example) and from the harsh natural elements of his exile, founds civilization in the Hebrew version of the history of the first men. Raymond Trousson has written the definitive book on Prometheus in European literature in two volumes and it is the objective of this chapter to identify the relationships between Cain, the Wandering Jew, and Prometheus according to the system of themes studied by Trousson.

Another treatment of the Prometheus myth and its origins, *Prométhée: Histoire du Mythe, de ses Origines orientales à ses Incarnations modernes* by Jacqueline Duchemin, updates Trousson's work, calling Trousson's massive contribution to criticism of Prometheus in literature more comparative than her analysis. Indeed, Duchemin reaches back to Hesiod and Aeschylus, defines the origin of the myth and then finds modern reinterpretations of it. The second half of her book discusses Prometheus in

other classical works, then in French works beginning with his chapter VIII "Prométhée chrétien" which treats Edgar Quinet's "Prométhée." Duchemin and Trousson discuss a number of other important poetic treatments of Prometheus, most notably Goethe's and Shelley's and mention briefly those in nineteenth-century France (Duchemin analyzes Le Sar Péladan's "Prométhiade", Roger Dumas's "Prométhée" and André Gide's *Prométhée mal enchaîné*), but Trousson is more interested in Louis Ménard's "Prométhée enchaîné" and Quinet's "Prométhée"). Louis Ménard's "Prométhée enchaîné" (1843), ostensibly a French version of the Shelley poem "Prometheus Unbound," has been mistaken for a translation of Aeschylus' poem. Henri Peyre corrects this misconception, pointing out that it is a work of his youth, written without a mature grasp of classic Greek poetry. Peyre points out that Ménard, who published "Prométhée enchaîné" under the pseudonym of Louis de Senneville, owes much more to Shelley than to Aeschylus.⁸⁹ Whereas Quinet's "Prométhée" is among the most important French manifestations of the Cain myth in poetry of its time (in a section of his chapter "Le Prométhée des romantiques" Trousson describes Quinet's "Prométhée" as a "Prométhée-Christ"),⁹⁰ Trousson and Duchemin discuss a number of others, thus giving further prominence to the myth. Since Quinet distinguishes himself as a poet who treats both the Wandering Jew and Prometheus, his "Prométhée" will be examined at some length in this chapter.

In Edgar Quinet's *Avertissement* to the Pagnerre edition of his work, he signals the need for epic poetry in French. He finds that foreigners do

89 Henri Peyre, *Louis Ménard* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1932) p. 43.

90 Raymond Trousson, *Le Thème de Prométhée dans la littérature européenne* (Genève: Droz, 1964) pp. 351-364.

not yet see an epic French masterpiece in the nineteenth century. First with "Ahasvérus", then with "Prométhée," and finally with "Napoléon" in the Pagnerre edition, he sets out to "gravir des sommets encore déserts" (*Avertissement*, p.v). Quinet mixes biblical and classical mythology in *Prométhée*. The protagonist is born of the same matter as the human race, which he creates as he emerges from the waters of the Great Flood. He has half-finished *débauches* of men around him, but he is essentially alone on Earth and prepares to finish forming the first men from the "limon primitif" as giants.⁹¹ In the Preface to "Prométhée," Quinet defends himself against the charge of pantheistic disavowal of Christianity:

Placé comme au dénoûment des traditions universelles, lié par des rapports connus avec tous les temps de l'histoire, l'homme de nos jours tient, pour ainsi dire, dans sa main, la trame entière du passé; au lieu de se diminuer volontairement et de se renfermer dans un passé d'un jour, il faut donc travailler à s'étendre et à s'accroître avec la tradition. Les temps ne sont plus divisés par des autels intolérants. L'unité de la civilisation est devenue un des dogmes du monde. Un seul Dieu, présent dans chaque moment de l'histoire, rassemble en une même famille les peuples frères que des années rapides séparent seulement les uns des autres...(Preface,p. viii).

The universe must move toward unity according to Quinet and others, e.g. Renouvier and Leroux, whom we have discussed above. The pantheism of Hugo and the exoticism of Leconte de Lisle further suggest that man's

⁹¹ The biblical creation myth also describes giants among the first men. Giants are also found in the primitive world in Leconte de Lisle's "Qaïn" (chapter 2) and in Ludovic de Cailleux's *Le Monde antédiluvien* (Chapter 5)

future lies beyond the Judeo-Christian realm. Quinet traced the origin of the Prometheus myth, taking the myth from eastern tradition to the Greeks⁹² and from the Middle Ages into the nineteenth century as it progressed from Calderón to Goethe, Beethoven, Byron and Shelley. The myth is so universal, according to Quinet, that even the whole of humanity itself cannot fully express its importance (p. xiv).

Quinet defends the intermingling of pagan classical mythology with the biblical myths in literature, and cites the most widely-praised masters as proof that “les sujets de la haute antiquité grecque se laissent interpréter et pénétrer par le génie de l'Ancien et du Nouveau Testament” (p. xiv). In the plastic arts, Quinet gives Raphaël and Michelangelo as examples of this “alliance” (p. xvii) between classical and biblical mythologies. He even goes so far as to suggest that the seeds of Christianity existed in the Greek antiquity that preceeded it, and that “il reste au sein du christianisme un bien...grand nombre de débris et de souvenirs du monde païen” (p. xvii).

The author of this “Prométhée” concludes that dogma has no place in art and that Prometheus is the perfect subject to demonstrate this. Furthermore, he calls on the modern democracies to press on to grasp the virtues of man. The final lines of his preface to “Prométhée” take on a political tone, as Quinet calls for free men to choose their destiny. He declares

Qu'il y a longtemps que les peuples, s'agenouillant dans le désert autour
du veau d'or, crurent que c'était là le but de leurs travaux, et qu'il fallait

92 See Raymond Trousson, *Le Thème de Prométhée dans la littérature européenne* (Genève: Droz, 1964), pp. 3-46 and Jacqueline Duchemin's discussion of the Eastern origin and Greek development of the Prometheus myth in the first five chapters of her book, *Prométhée: Le Mythe et ses origines* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1974).

s'y arrêter! Et, au contraire, ce fut le moment où il fallut se relever et marcher au-devant de meilleures destinées. Plus tard, les affranchis dans Rome ne songèrent, comme vous, qu'à leur pécule. Et pourtant, de plus hautes pensées ne manquèrent pas d'envahir les esprits et d'emporter le monde. De même aujourd'hui, les démocraties modernes, ou seront condamnées à une honteuse infériorité à l'égard des pouvoirs qui les ont précédés, ou se mettront à la tête des éternelles et splendides doctrines du genre humain; justice, amour, beauté, immortalité, héroïsme, conscience, plaisirs de l'âme, traditions de toutes les intelligences qui ont éclairé et orné les temps passés, ne périront pas sitôt, et l'humanité ne sera point inféodée à la matière et au sépulcre. Relevons donc nos coeurs en prenant possession du gouvernement du monde, ou, ne le pouvant, retournons à la glèbe. Entre ces choses, point de milieu. Il faut choisir. (p. xxiv)

Quinet's Prometheus proceeds from the exile and curse imposed by Zeus to build and develop on his own. This is essentially the role of Cain in nineteenth-century literature.

Founder of Humankind, Defier of Gods

Prometheus fashions men out of clay while already envisioning new gods to replace the Olympians; not only Titans, but, beyond that, the God who will guide human destiny to liberty and hope for eternal life and an end to suffering. Like Cain, who abhors his brother's idleness, Prometheus finds reprehensible the Olympians' laziness and lack of concern for justice. The Shadow, reinforced by the poem's imagery, presents the dark side of the

mind of such a one as Cain and Prometheus, but obscures the truth of divine adultery found in *Genesis* (Cain and Abel having to reproduce through sister-wives and the giants-angels who conceived with women) and in works treating *Genesis*.

The state of sleep with which Cain has often been associated is found here again. The enlightened rebel, who is Cain in Leconte de Lisle's poem, is Prometheus for Quinet; yet the two seem almost intertwined in mythology. Jealousy, that of God who avenges Himself on those who follow other gods, and that of Cain who cannot accept that another's worship is preferred to his, is essential to the reasoning of Quinet's Prometheus:

D'un rebelle Titan, ô blasphème odieux!
 Ils craindraient l'injustice!...Aux bras de la paresse
 Ils ne cuveraient plus l'olympienne ivresse;
 Mais toujours sous la pourpre enchaînés par des lois,
 Des mondes suppliants ils entendraient la voix.
 Plus d'ombres dans la nuit pour voiler l'adultère.
 Les coupes s'emplissant des larmes de la terre,
 Comment d'un pur nectar abreuver les autels?
 Et qui dissiperait l'ennui des immortels?...
 Comme un songe échappé des portes du sommeil,
 Ils croiront dissiper ce monde à leur réveil. ⁹³

Prometheus announces to the gods that his creation of humanity has been accomplished. The first human creature is endowed by Prometheus

93 Edgar Quinet, "Prométhée," in *Oeuvres Complètes*, vol. vii (Paris: Pagnerre, 1858) p. 27.

with many divine traits, and the possession of others which give it power but may entail suffering:

Tous mes biens sont à toi: liberté, conscience,
 Obstinés souvenirs, pleurs, aveugle espérance,
 Et désirs insoumis qu'enchaîne l'univers.
 Possède en même temps les cieux et les enfers.
 Que de fois, dans la lutte où le monde s'élance,
 Tu croiras des grands dieux égaler la puissance. (p.28)

Freedom and conscience are dangerous for a new, innocent and naïve creature like Hésione whose first glimpse of her existence is her shadow:

Ce ciel, est-ce encore moi? Cette image qui passe,
 Cette ombre, sous mes pieds, qui décline et s'efface,
 Est-ce moi? toujours moi qui partout me poursuis?
 Dans ce nuage errant est-ce moi qui me fuis? (p.29)

Light and darkness form the first images of her self-awareness and the shadow is, from the beginning, a part of her psyche. This imagery reveals the fundamental psychological features already observed in the Cains of Hugo, Leconte de Lisle and Byron. The first emotion experienced by this new-born consciousness is fear and the first instinct is that of flight.

Although there is no question of a crime, it seems Prometheus's first human is innately fearful. Upon becoming acquainted with herself as substance rather than merely as shadow, she meets her maker with delight mixed with fear, and she establishes quickly that her life is dependent on Prometheus:

N'es-tu pas sur mon front le rayon descendu,
 Ma voix qui me répond, mon âme, mon génie,
 Des mots aux ailes d'or l'invisible harmonie? ...
 Prométhée est-il là quand ma lèvre s'agite?
 Dans le coeur d'Hésione est-ce lui qui palpite?...(p.29)

She recognizes Prometheus as a father-figure who has founded language. Her existence is doubled and reflexive; first she sees her shadow, then she hears her own voice. Her self-identity is confirmed by her recognition of Prometheus as the source of her substantive, emotional, and linguistic existence. Her initial fear is accompanied at this point by joy at knowing her creator.

Faut-il fuir ou rester? Frayeur! Joie inconnue!
 Je te vois, si le jour n'abuse pas mes yeux.
 Ton front, comme le mien, se lève vers les cieux...(p.30)

The image of the "front" recurs with startling frequency and is that of innocence as opposed to Cain's infamous, marked forehead.

Prometheus must explain to Hésione who the gods are, who have made him suffer; mortals must also suffer at the hands of Zeus; the gods are their common enemies. The lot of humanity is toil and suffering, a lesson that Cain also learns. One has to choose sides, and Prometheus tells his creature of the responsibility involved in exercising the free will with which he has endowed Hésione: "tu choisiras tes dieux: tu le peux, tu le dois:/ Et

de ta volonté tu porteras le poids" (p.32).⁹⁴ He offers Hésione the choice of existence and the dangers of living in a world with gods, or else a return to the abyss of nothingness. He assures her that in the development of her race he is on her side. She accepts and celebrates life; fearing solitude, she greets the heavens.

In section two of the first part of the poem, Prometheus encounters a chorus of Cyclops at the volcano of Lemnos. The fire and forging of the Cyclops is at the pleasure of the gods, and it parallels the forging done by the descendants of Cain. The image of fire is a symbol present in poems dealing with the Cain myth, as are those of the shadow and the forehead in Quinet's "Prométhée." These symbols serve much the same function for the Cain theme as for that of Prometheus; they show both figures as discoverers and purveyors of knowledge.

Forging armor for the gods, the Cyclops need to protect themselves from the new gods that threaten them. Prometheus recognizes this and calls on the future gods to cast their shadow on him and to protect humanity: "Dieux inconnus, soyez les dieux de Prométhée. / Sur mon oeuvre, sur moi, sur tout le genre humain, / Du fond de l'avenir étendez-vous votre main" (p.36). He then adds, after a silent moment, "Mon oeuvre! ah! je le sais, il te manque la flamme, / Secret des tout-puissants et symbole de l'âme" (p.36). Seeing his opportunity to supply the human race with the fire of knowledge, with a soul to assure their eternal existence, he musters his courage through anger and scorn for the gods:

Déjà des immortels la colère est lassée;

94 These two verses echo the last lines of the preface and ring true to the Sartrean admonishment "Engagez-vous" as demonstrated by his hero Orestes in *Les Mouches*.

La mienne plus longtemps fermente en ma pensée.
 Oh! malgré votre foudre et votre inimitié,
 Grands dieux! dieux tout-puissants! vous me faites pitié!
 Rien n'égale à mes yeux votre immense misère;
 Froidure, ardents soleils, pluie, aquilons, poussière,
 Tout vous blesse et vous nuit, et rien ne vous défend.
 Un roseau fait pencher votre front triomphant.
 Vous vivez de fumée, ô pasteurs des nuages! (p.37)

Like Cain, Prometheus refuses the cult of sacrifice and burnt offerings of flesh; he rejects the cult of Abel, and the rage of Cain moves him to rail bitterly against the gods. Yet, whereas Cain's rage moves him to fratricide to end the cult of Abel, which requires divine fire, Prometheus's crime is to steal fire that mankind may establish its own order; when humanity, Prometheus' creation, possesses fire, it will be free of divine constraints and develop and build on its own and be able to choose or create its own gods or God. Prometheus is one of the boldest, surpassing all rebels in literature, except perhaps Leconte de Lisle's Qaïn, in declaring the death of the Olympians:

Vous mourez dans chaque être...
 ...Vous sentant défaillir, vous doutez si vous êtes!
 Allez! rêves d'une ombre! une ombre vous fait peur.
 Votre pourpre enlevée, il reste une vapeur.
 Dans un ver, un ciron, votre âme est absorbée;
 Et j'écrase en passant Jupiter Scarabée! (p.38)

After stealing a hammer from the Cyclops, declaring that he will forge a new world that will thirst for justice, he leans over the abyss of the volcano's crater and, with a vase, he collects and stores fire from the volcano.

In the following scene he presents the fire he has stolen to Hésione and explains to her the benefits it will bring her offspring: "Tes fils pourront changer la figure du monde" (p.41). Prometheus teaches her how to manipulate fire in case it should be carried off by the wind. Humans, a new creation of cold clay and intellectually inert, now have the possibility of becoming awakened to art, science, development, and a spiritual existence. A chorus of men begins, as infants do, to pose questions about the origins of the natural world to their sister Hésione, and Prometheus recognizes their need for the fire of knowledge. Hésione notices that the race of men ages and pales. It is at this point that the knowledge of death is introduced in Quinet's version of the Prometheus myth. This knowledge comes upon the first fratricide in *Genesis*; bestowing the knowledge of death is a power which Cain shares with Prometheus.

Hésione: Qui courbe les humains comme un lis du vallon?

Et de quel triste bord s'élève la tempête

Qui des ans a semé les neiges sur leur tête?

Prométhée: Ce rivage est la mort; tu le verras un jour. (p.44)

Hésione then turns to a chorus of women who show an innate thirst for spirituality and the eternal in their maternity; but they continue to feel the cold, fear and death in their infants' crying.

The women's chorus is followed by those of kings and prophets. The kings, needing guidance, ask where to lead men, their “rudes troupes” (p.46) . The prophets are accompanied by poets with their lyres: “Ils enseignent les cieux, il mènent les poètes” (p.47). They reveal that mankind is weary and spiritually thirsty because of the mystery of death: “Quel est le mystère/ Que le ver de terre/ Annonce aux humains ?” (p.48). Prometheus explains that men hold on to hope, but he has the “triste science” (p.48), the unbearable knowledge of his future death.

Hésione, recognizing all of suffering humanity as her brothers, calls for hope for her fellow man. The chorus of men, echoing the toil of Cain's cultivation of the earth, laments the heat, their fatigue, the bitter fruits of the earth and fears of the future: “l'avenir, sans doute,/ recèle un poison” (p.49). She again bids them to hold on to hope and they drink from a vase in which there is fire.

Merging of Myths: Biblical and Classical Founders

Biblical imagery is mixed with classical figures in this scene in which fire is given to men by Prometheus; the god who offers fire to men declares: “voici le pain de vie,” a biblical and Christian metaphor (p.50). Prometheus, “père des arts, fils de la liberté,” has given fire to men. From the moment of obtaining fire, the gods are dead ancestors, but men ask Prometheus for new gods at the conclusion of the third section of the first part of the poem.

In the fourth and final section of the first part, the chorus of Cyclops awakens and discovers Prometheus's theft. They understand the dangerous

consequences for the gods and that their own existence is determined by that of the Olympians. Fire in the hands of mankind means the funeral pyre for the gods is at hand. The Cyclops envision the development of the civilization of men, the towers and citadels they will build, and the violence and wars that will eventually ensue:

Un marteau d'airain se soulève;
 L'homme a forgé le premier glaive;
 De héros s'allument les fronts;
 Et les nations éperdues,
 Comme des armes suspendues,
 Frémissent aux cris des clairions. (p.51)

The Cyclops explore further the consequences of fire in the hands of men; as they take possession of the Earth, natural sciences will be born and their words and thoughts will totally reshape the world of the former gods. To his woe, man will ultimately explore death. That which he establishes will be destroyed by the violence that will overtake his progress: "Lui-même il détruit ce qu'il fonde; La mort entre dans tous ses jeux" (p. 52). As a consequence, he will become nomadic, like Cain, wandering from one desert to the next. Thought will empower humanity, and the gods, fearful of its force, will be overtaken and left behind in antiquity with the Cyclops. The enlightened mind will end man's fatal existence and project him into a new age. Mankind is leaving the shores of antiquity. The first part of the poem ends with the Cyclops' song, which says: "Il part, vaisseau bercé sur le roulis des âges,/ Pour aborder chez d'autres dieux"(p.53) .

The entire first part of Quinet's "Prométhée" recounts the action of the Cain and Abel story in the fourth chapter of *Genesis* with a Titan serving as the creator of mankind and the founder of civilization. He has given the power of thought to men; creative, spiritual and developmental power comes from this gift, stolen, in this poem, not from the gods, but from a volcano and the Cyclops. Knowledge of death follows that of good and evil in *Genesis*, and Cain and Prometheus bring this curse of the knowledge of mortality to men. The most profound part of human awareness is founded by these mythical heroes; Cain is mortal, Prometheus immortal, but fundamentally they function in the same way. Prometheus also falls into the mould of Cain in that he provides the impetus for men to move away from an old cult and toward the freedom of a new age. Violence and migration of mankind to all parts of the world originates in these myths. Biblical Cain and Classical-become-Romantic Prometheus appear to merge in the myth system of Quinet's "Prométhée." The first part of "Prometheus" presents the foundation of the sciences, without which humanity could never advance nor shed the shackles which bound it to old, powerless gods and death with no hope for immortality.

The second part of the poem focuses on the rebellion and punishment of Prometheus. This second part is Quinet's version of "Prométhée enchaîné" and bears that title. The Cyclops and Nemesis bring Prometheus to a peak in the Caucasus to be bound to a rock where a vulture will torment him forever. Prometheus is bound, but still retains his freedom in that he will curse the gods and suffer without remorse despite his agonizing

punishment. Another Christian metaphor is used by a Cyclops, who regrets his part in carrying out the gods' command to bind Prometheus:

J'obéis; et pourtant sa souffrance me touche;
 Car qui saura jamais ce qu'avant de mourir
 Un dieu crucifié sur l'autel doit souffrir!
 Pour plaire aux dieux nouveaux faut-il des déicides? (p.55)

Prometheus becomes the sacrificed god who, in his suffering for humanity's sake, resembles Christ. Yet he does not possess the mortal side of Christ and cannot be killed. Cain likewise is not killed, but left to wander in the desert and eventually to found civilization.

Némésis poses a question that makes of Prometheus a hero akin to Oedipus: "Mais l'orgueil du géant, qui saura le dompter ?" (p.56); for pride is the archetypal fatal flaw of the tragic hero. Cain's jealousy and rejection of Abel's cult of offering flesh as a sacrifice is prideful, especially in the French imitations of Gessner; e.g., Gilbert's poem and Legouvé's drama. In Leconte de Lisle's poem, pride becomes defiance and rebellious denunciation of God.

Némésis and the Cyclops raise the specter of the possible overthrow of the Olympians by the Titans and question whether their allegiance would be won by the victor of that battle. Despite the Cyclops' faithful adherence to the old gods, Némésis holds to the "golden rule" of the nineteenth century that to the victor go the spoils:

Le Cyclope: Les dieux sont sans pitié quand ils viennent
 de naître.

Némésis: Les dieux sont tout-puissants et t'entendent
peut-être.

Le Cyclope: Qu'est devenu Saturne, à la barbe d'argent?
Les jours coulaient en paix sous son règne
indulgent.

Prends des pensers nouveaux dans un nouvel empire.

Le Cyclope: Sous des maîtres nouveaux tout s'altère et s'empire.
Quand Saturne est vaincu, partage le butin.

Le Cyclope: Quoi? Moi? changer d'autel quand change le destin?

Némésis: Vertu de l'âge d'or!

Le Cyclope: Siècle enfant du blasphème!

Némésis: Jupiter seul est libre.

Le Cyclope: Il ne l'est pas lui-même.

(pp.57-58)

The lesson of this exchange is that in this age one takes advantage of any political change and may switch sides to favor the winner of a struggle. In *Genesis*, Cain challenges Abel's cult through force, exercising what Rousseau called "le droit du plus fort;" though not a legitimate right, it does provide a rationale for those with no real convictions to switch allegiances whenever it is in their interest to do so. The issue of freedom comes to light once again, but this time it is Jupiter whose liberty is discussed. Némésis curses the Cyclops and the ground surrounding the volcano opens up and devours them at his command, but he has not won the philosophical argument.

Némésis's curses next turn to Prometheus; he scoffs at the fire-giving god: "Pasteur des songes d'or et dieu des éphémères,/ Convoque autour de toi la troupe des chimères"(p.58). Prometheus answers using Christian symbols, finding himself the founding sacrifice for the cosmos, "Le temple est l'univers, Prométhée est l'hostie,/ Et Jupiter tyran le sacrificateur" (p.59). He declares his liberty is intact since he can proclaim that he has no regrets and that his will is unshaken. In a verse which rings of existentialist freedom he declares: "je suis content; j'ai fait ce que je voulais faire" (p.59).

As in "Ahasvérus", *L'Océan* plays a significant part in the drama between Heaven and Earth. In the former it participated in the discussion with God in the framing part of the narrative and lamented its disappearance just before the end of the world, whereas in the latter it is a *confidante* to Prometheus, a kind of miserable comforter of Job to the bound and suffering Titan. Prometheus's main concern is humanity; he asks the ocean about their condition and progress, and if they remember him. Sadly, the Ocean answers that, on the contrary, they no longer sing of him and their existence has degenerated. Mankind is now serving the gods and the law of the strongest is in full force. Prometheus refuses to yield to the gods despite the hopeless situation that the Ocean describes and his bidding that Prometheus abandon hope and serve the gods.

The Ocean asks why Prometheus must defy the gods alone and to what avail he claims to have such sublime and privileged knowledge. To this the completely differentiated and unyielding hero answers:

Moi, je connais ces biens que Jupiter réclame.

Au faîte des douleurs je règne sur mon âme.

Sous l'ongle des vautours, d'espérance enivré,
 Je fais et défais l'avenir à mon gré.
 Pendant que l'univers sourit à l'esclavage,
 Moi, je reste libre, et, par delà cet âge,
 De ces liens d'airain mon esprit s'affranchit,
 Et vois sous d'autres dieux le monde qui fléchit. (p.66)

Prometheus is a creator, but also the prophet of a new age. Yet he is equally proud of a profoundly human characteristic-- the capacity to exercise his free will and to remind the gods that they are made in man's image. He has a sharp retort for the weak-minded, capitulatory Ocean:

Conserve ta pitié pour tes frêles roseaux.
 Ce que tu n'entends pas, tu le nommes folie;
 Caressant sous la vague une ombre ensevelie,
 Adore, sans penser, les dieux que tu connais.
 Ils plaisent au limon; le limon les a faits. (p.66)

Their exchange concludes with a debate on the question of the legitimacy of force and whether it will be Prometheus or the gods who will ultimately become the supreme power, and which will be the vanquished.

Overcoming Death: from Prometheus to Christ

Hésione, seeking Prometheus, reappears to implore her creator to restore her life, which is fading from old age. It is at this point in the poem,

when the central issue of human mortality arises, that a word on the meter of Quinet's verse is in order, since Quinet changes the versification according to who is speaking, the immortal Prometheus or his mortal creature Hésione. First, the poem is in verse, as opposed to "Ahasvérus," which is prose poetry; despite this difference, both poems are biblically inspired epics. Secondly, it is noteworthy that Prometheus's lines are in couplets and Hésione's are cross rhymed, masculine rhymes alternating with feminine rhymes. Whereas in the first scene of the poem Hésione's dialogue with Prométhée was completely in couplets, in the fourth section of the second part of the poem the speeches alternate between couplets and crossed rhyme as described above. The metrical structure, at first rigorously classical alexandrines, has, at the moment of Hésione's plea for eternal life, become a more flexible and Romantic metrical pattern. Still, Prométhée being a Classical immortal speaks in couplets, and the human Hésione uses the alternating rhymes. This adds emphasis to the human awareness of mortality that Hésione presents. Yet the inflexible Prometheus can offer her little hope for life after death. The exchange takes on an ever more modern air as Hésione expresses her new-found existential *Angst* and feelings of absurdity:

Hésione: De mon génie éteint viens rallumer la flamme
Inventeur du foyer, te supplierai-je en vain?

Prométhée: Je ne puis rallumer ton âme dans ton sein.
La tombe est plus savante, et l'essaiera peut-être.

Hésione: Mais, s'il me faut mourir, pourquoi m'as-tu fait
naître?

As God had hidden the knowledge of death from Cain in Byron's mystery, so too Hésione can get no answers from Prometheus. In Byron's work, Satan promises to reveal this knowledge to Cain, but it is only attained upon his murder of Abel. The immortal Prometheus, having but the shadow of the secret of death because he has no experience of it, can only offer faint hope of new life to Hésione just before she dies. Prometheus has no answers to the questions of the mystery of death until this moment when, like Cain, he sees it for himself. Hésione is the first to see death (as was Abel in the biblical story) as the exiled Prometheus can only look upon her helplessly; Cain, his counterpart in the *Genesis* story, has also learned of death through murder. All Prometheus can say at that point is that the clay from which he made Hésione no longer belongs to him.

In the ensuing dialogue with the *Choeur des Sibylles*, Prometheus is asked to tell the future. He speaks with the Chorus of Sibyls, as he did with the Ocean, of the plight of the nations of men. Prometheus's lament contains images of nightmares, doubt and despair which show parallels between his suffering and that of mankind. His speech ends with three images of the Cain and Abel story: the fertile field of the first fratricide, the desert into which Cain fled, and the power of the differentiated mind.

J'ai vu des cieux nouveaux dans les regards des femmes.

Le croiras-tu? Le pain ne nourrit plus les âmes.

Mais loin du champ fertile où mûrit le froment,

L'âme dans les déserts cherche un autre aliment.

L'esprit, nouvelle idole ébranlée à sa base,
S'écroule en blasphémant sur l'homme qu'il écrase. (p.73)

The Cain myth is again intertwined with that of Prometheus; the common elements being suffering in exile and the cult of the mind as a result of the protagonist's blasphemy. Prometheus and Cain are founders in exile.

Biblical imagery again accompanies Promethean tirades:

Changez, changez le sceptre en un serpent d'airain:
Aux prophètes nouveaux j'enseigne le chemin.
Les devins de Chaldée ont noué leur ceinture.
Des promesses du ciel ils font leur nourriture.
Je les vois...Au désert, quel dieu vont-ils chercher?...
...D'un peuple de pasteurs l'innombrable famille,
L'encensoir à la main, entoure le foyer
Qu'attise un dieu-géant penché sur le braiser. (p.77)

Prometheus appears as the new Christ, although up to this point the imagery suggested an accursed exile like Cain. The following passage makes Christ the new Prometheus, but the old, a rebel and a refuser of the old cult, is more akin to Cain.

Quel est sur la sainte colline
Cet autre Prométhée à la face divine?
Le monde à Jupiter l'a-t-il sacrifié?
Est-ce un Titan esclave? un dieu crucifié?
O prodige! Il bénie l'univers qui l'opprime.

Les cieux obéissants s'inclinent sous ses pieds,
Et des sommets sacrés s'ébranlent les trépieds. (p.78)

Two verses, clearly biblical allusions, make clear that Prometheus speaks of Christ: "Le dieu des dieux est proche; il vient dans son orgueil./ Ouvrez, ouvrez vos coeurs. C'est lui qui frappe au seuil" (p.78).⁹⁵

In the fifth section of part two, as he rails against a dying god, Prometheus's disdain for the gods almost becomes pity; yet he refuses to listen to the god's pleas to reject the new gods in favor of the old ones. In his final plea, the god suggests that Prometheus's pride is masochistic: "Veux-tu sur ce rocher passer l'éternité? La douleur infinie, est-ce ta volupté?" (p.82). Prometheus's hatred intact, his retort attributes his suffering to the gods' cruelty. He believes his defiance and hatred are justified: "Que la haine aujourd'hui par la haine se venge!/ Des cieux c'est la coutume. Est-il rien là d'étrange?" (p.83). A chorus intervenes, asking both the god and Prometheus to reconsider their irreconcilable and dangerous reasoning. It asks Prometheus if he does not fear suffering eternal punishment from the eagle (*vautour* and *aigle* are used almost interchangeably, the choice of bird depending mostly on the rhyme needed) devouring him, and it calls on the god to change his ways, but declares that the gods will vanish as Prometheus has predicted. Pity has moved the chorus to favor Prometheus. The last word of the god, just before it sees the Olympians fall into an abyss, is that Prometheus has brought punishment and suffering upon himself. In

95 In Revelation 3:20: Christ says "Behold I stand at the door and knock..."

desperation and vengeance, this fourth section of the second part ends with the twelve Olympian gods descending on Prometheus to punish him.

This attack from the Olympians weakens his rhetoric, but not his resolve; rather than succumb to those who together are stronger than he, Prometheus takes responsibility for the punishment, denying the gods' power to harm him. Nearly driven to despair, he discovers hope at one extreme and the abyss at the other. He is only afraid of the torment that doubt brings. This is the crucial moment in the poem during which Prometheus appears to be totally abandoned, when hope for justice and the promise of a new God appear to have been in vain. The chorus adds its pity to Prometheus's laments and denounces the law of the strongest and injustice as the latter begins to doubt that he will be delivered.

Although he falls close to despair, he can still claim to be the source of his fate: "Car, je veux bien le dire, oui, mon âme est domptée./ Mais Pométhée a seul subjugué Prométhée" (p.88). This is the most clearly differentiated statement a hero can make, and is echoed by other bold declarations of independence of will. Prometheus in this poem is in absolute defiance of the gods as Qaïn was in Leconte de Lisle's "Qaïn." The *Genesis* story itself suggests Cain would not answer God's call to account for his brother and was thereby defiant and would accept no guilt upon God's impugning question : "Where is thy brother Abel?" His answer, "Am I my brother's keeper?" is as defiant as Prometheus' refusal to recant his prophecy of a new order in Heaven. Suffering is accepted stoically by Cain and defiantly by Prometheus. Both figures bring benefits to humanity through their suffering. Although in the conclusion of "Prométhée" it is Jehovah

who brings redemption, Cain has no less hope for reconciliation according to the pantheistic vision of Hugo. In Quinet's "Prométhée," likewise, the hero is delivered.

The chorus of Sibyls returns to cast a glance into the future. The *choeur* asks when the new god will finally come to fill the void left by the Olympians and Titans. Their vision reflects the desire of Prometheus as a Romantic hero who thirsts for permanence and divine justice. They begin to sense his presence in their hearts and minds; yet they wonder if he too will pass away. Finally, they envision their eternal and omnipotent deliverer:

L'oeuvre accompagne sa parole;
Il tend son arc; son penser vole,
Et tout l'Olympe est déserté.
Au loin les étoiles émues
Diront: C' est le vrai roi des nues,
Sans aïeux, sans postérité. (p. 93)

God's son is to be born and he will bring justice and an end to oppression. A prayer is chanted to welcome the new Master Deity, bidding Him to come quickly to fulfill this vision and bring swift justice to Earth.

In the final part of the poem, "Prométhée délivré," the archangels Michael and Raphael describe the grace of God in nature and human suffering. They encounter Prometheus, still bound, and descend from a summit in the Caucasus to speak with him. Inquiring about his origin, Michael addresses Prometheus first; he is unsure whether he has found a mortal or a higher being, but by comparison with an archangel he is

obviously but a “fragile roseau” (p.103). Michael supposes that he may be a fallen angel, who, like Cain, bears the mark of an exile “car ton front luit au sein des ténèbres...N'es-tu pas de l'enfer un archange égaré?” (p.103).

Without immediately answering Michael's question, Prometheus recognizes in the archangel's voices a song from an earlier and better world. He can scarcely recall the peace of the primordial universe. Prometheus exists in a fallen universe and his exile is punishment for the creation of man and for the divine fire which he has given him. His identification as a fallen angel associates him with Lucifer and his exile establishes him as a Cain figure, a founding outcast. Prometheus is a reincarnated deity who has been reborn; upon hearing the angel's voices, he has a vision of the former, perfect world:

D'un monde qui n'est plus, ô langage sacré !
 Et d'un hymne oublié, que je crois reconnaître,
 Écho sévère et doux, et qui me fait renaître!
 Où donc ai-je jamais entendu cette voix ?
 Dans un monde meilleur...Oui, peut-être, autrefois,
 Parmi des lyres d'or, qu'enfant, dans les prairies,
 Je suspendais au front des saintes rêveries. (p.104)

This suggests the reincarnation of Prometheus and his presence at the dawn of the world; this places him in the context of *Genesis* and puts him on the same mythical plane as Cain. As mentioned above, Cain and Abel are reincarnated as enemy brothers through history in Chavagneux's play “Caïn: le premier et dernier maudit de la terre,” and Le Poittevin's *Bélias* reveals the

transmigration of souls as a means of evil passing from one generation to the next. Quinet does not hesitate to blend biblical and classical mythologies. His poem "Prometheus" ends with the classical being absorbed and assimilated into the biblical as the archangels set Prometheus free from his bonds and ascend with him to the New Heaven.

Still unsure of his nature and origin, Michael twice asks Prometheus his name. Prometheus delays his response by posing the same question to the archangels and names himself within his question: "Et quel ciel vous a fait cette paix enchaînée,/ Si votre âme est fermée aux maux de Prométhée?"(p.104). The next question Michael poses is, logically, who has put him in chains as a vulture eats away at his liver? Explaining that there is no love lost between him and the gods, Prometheus proclaims his utter repugnance for the other immortals, whose cult of burnt offerings and smoking flesh he rejects; again, this immortal rebel's rejection of worship through animal sacrifices echoes Cain's refusal to conform to Abel's form of offering. Prometheus disdains his very immortality; his existence under the gods' reign is intolerable: "Moments que vit une ombre! ennui sans majesté/... du néant je goûtai le vaniteux plaisir !" (108). Using the imagery of the abyss and the desert to describe his exile, Prometheus destroys his own altar and abandons the gods with scornful laughter, using the imagery of the abyss and the desert to describe his exile.

He describes his creation of mankind, "D'un vil et noir limon recueilli par hasard,/ Je fis un demi-dieu, fragile enfant de l'art" (p.109). He endowed his creation with his own soul; Prometheus, though born immortal, takes the side of mortal man and goes so far as to suffer and put himself at risk in

giving them the fire of knowledge, “pour lui, visitant les enfers,/ Je lui soumis la flamme, esprit de l'univers”(p.111). This suffering for humanity, this identification with the human race makes Prometheus something of a Christ figure, and contempt for divine tyrants and rejection of worship through offerings of flesh put him in a line with Cain. In addition, Prometheus resembles Cain in his founding of the arts and sciences, a status which Quinet clearly attributes to Prometheus; he not only gives humans fire, but also language and poetry, as well as the power to apply knowledge to build cities. From freedom and independence from the gods resulted the birth of secular civilization.

Je délirai sa langue, et, réveillant sa lyre,
 Des mètres nouveau-nés je lui marquai l'empire.
 C'est moi qui, le premier, sous la fatalité,
 Dans la nuit de son coeur trouvai la liberté.
 Le temps vint à marcher; la cité vint à naître,
 Et l'univers muet, enfin, connut un maître ...
 J'enseignai chaque usage et créai tous les arts. (p.111)

Still, Prometheus' creation was not satisfying, for men were still mortal. As he had explained to Hésione, there was nothing he could do to vanquish death. Having given knowledge and freedom to men, he could not give them immortality, and he had left with them the arrogance of the gods. The fatal flaw of pride and the threat of death required a new redemptive power, that which Raphaël and Michael were sent to declare to Prometheus. The fire-

giving god concludes his explanation of his suffering to the archangels in terms which make clear his connection with Christ:

J'ai trop aimé, peut-être aimé-je trop encore.
Voilà, voilà pourquoi ce vautour me dévore,
Et pourquoi sur ce mont, deux fois déifié,
Des mains de Jupiter je suis crucifié. (p.112)

Michael promises Prometheus that the gods will perish, "Ainsi meurent les dieux aux pieds de notre père;/Lui seul demeure en paix; tout autre est éphémère" (p.114). The new God is named Jehovah, Michael tells Prometheus, and Raphaël assures him that good seed will germinate and mature in the grave, that peace will again be granted to the broken-hearted. Yet, despite these promises from archangels, Prometheus has some doubt left; about the new God he asks:

Ressemble-t-il aux dieux qui sont nés de la terre?
Est-il fils du chaos ou fils de l'adultère ?...
Nous promet-il un autre Jupiter ?...
Pardonnez aux soupçons; ils sont fils des tristesses.
Mais tous les dieux nouveaux sont féconds en promesses...
Sous un masque d'amour déguisant leur visage,
De pluie et de rosée ils se font leur breuvage. (115-116)

Prometheus must know if the cycle of violence and tyranny will begin anew. There is apparently latent political commentary in this passage, which is not surprising since Quinet was involved in the politics of the day and lived in a

century in which one regime replaced another relatively often. Revolution can be fruitful provided it brings peace and stability. This, however, has not been Prometheus' experience. The gods have hidden behind a mask of love and festive *bacchanales*. What is behind the mask is eventually revealed: violence, oppression and tragedy. Their fall from power has been anticipated for a very long time and finally, when it occurs, truth and justice will reign under the new Deity; as they decline their mask falls off and they are revealed for the tyrants that they are: "Le masque se détache et tombe dans l'abîme" (p.116). Prometheus's search for a new order in Heaven is recognized by Raphaël, who wonders at the firegiver's masochistic incredulity in face of the archangels' arrival: "Que profond est le mal en qui tu mets ta joie!" and Quinet imitates a line from Hippolyte in Racine's *Phèdre* to emphasize how difficult it is for Prometheus to accept his long-awaited deliverance: "Absents, tu nous cherchais; présents, tu nous repousses" (p.117).⁹⁶ Prometheus loses something of his power in being redeemed; he no longer has the ability to denounce gods who are swept away into the abyss. He is now under the control of the new regime, represented by Michael and Raphaël. Prometheus's doubts are still not quelled even when his chains break, leaving him free. He asks in disbelief whether his despair has not ended and then asks the haunting question: "Mais si c'était un songe!" (p. 119) . Michael immediately rebukes Prometheus's lack of faith. He then witnesses the gods bound and begging for their existence before God and his angels. They are reduced to asking only for a ray of the light which mankind, Prometheus, and even the lowest creatures possess:

96 This verse's structure is remarkably similar to a verse from Racine's *Phèdre* in which Hippolyte, in love with Aricie, exclaims: "Présente, je vous fuis; absente, je vous trouve;" (*Phèdre*, act 2, scene 2, v. 83). *Théâtre complet de Racine* (Paris: Editions Garniers Frères, no date) p. 59.

“L'insecte au front luisant qui regarde le ciel” (p. 120). Michael refuses them their wish and bids them disappear and fill the abyss of nothingness. Their cult being rejected, the old gods are driven off; their last words are curses and their last hope is the outbreak of violence. They would confirm Prometheus's fears that existence is but a dream:

Mais tout ce faux brillant ne cachant rien qu'un rêve,
L'ambrosie, en un jour, se convertit en fiel.
Contre ses vains serments l'oracle se soulève;
L'enfer est dans le ciel. (p.124)

This final blasphemy is particularly intriguing, since it attempts, much in the spirit of the Cain of *Genesis* and Leconte de Lisle's Qain, to reverse the order of legitimacy, placing God in the camp of the unjust. Again, this is a political statement as well, since the new regime is demonized and its legitimacy challenged by the old. The gods will ever reside in the minds of those who doubt and who think. Though spider webs may clutter their temples, their memory may yet be preserved in mankind.

Prometheus himself continues to have doubts even after Michael assures him that “Ils sont évanouis;” he hears their chanting. As predicted, the memory of the gods lives on in the minds of those who doubt and reflect. Even as he is carried on the wings of the archangels into Heaven, he has doubts and must ask where he is being taken. The answer he is given is: “Au sein de Jéhovah” and the poem ends with a Chorus of Seraphim singing of the suffering of man and the continuing doubt and despair which make his

existence that of one wandering in the desert. This recounts for us the story of Prometheus and Cain, and, metaphorically, of mankind:

Liée au désespoir, l'âme, aveugle, captive,
 En un monde désert, de poisons s'enivrait;
 Parmi de noirs serpents, sur sa couche plaintive,
 L'ennui la dévorait. (p. 129)

Hésione and her children are resurrected and witness a new Prometheus. The renewed classical bestower of knowledge is reborn and now bestows eternal and pure knowledge.

Il répare l'homme fragile;
 Et d'une impérissable argile
 Il environne les esprits...
 Au vase il donne son empreinte,
 Et le noir limon devient or. (p. 130-131)

This last verse brings an alchemical metaphor for the ultimate resolution. Death has brought the blessing of forgetting suffering, and new life has given ideal shape to human existence:

Et comme autour d'une statue
 D'or et de bronze revêtue,
 L'éclat de la pierre abattue
 Jaillit sous les coups du ciseau. (p. 131)

The story of man's suffering continues, sing the Seraphim, and only in death is he delivered. God's return comes only at the last moment of existence, and man's curses turn to praise upon this metamorphosis:

Vers l'abîme il penchait, résolu de maudire;

Et sa bouche déjà s'efforçant de sourire

Chantait l'hymne de mort.

Mais un doigt le frappant sous sa fausse cuirasse,

Le chant du désespoir en un hymne de grâce

S'est converti d'abord. (p. 133)

It is the song-of despair that Cain and Prometheus are destined to hear in their long hour of suffering. From the myth of the founder of the knowledge of death in *Genesis* to the classical immortal who steals fire and bestows knowledge on man is a very small leap to make in this poem. Here Quinet's Prometheus is redeemed in this pantheistic vision, and the same is true of Cain; as in Hugo, even Satan is reconciled to God. The classical and biblical mythologies come together in the promise of restoration of man to immortality. The desert, so important to Quinet's imagery in "Prométhée," is the habitat of the accursed Cain. The common milieu for the exile for Cain and Prometheus establishes a founding myth. The archetypal founder is a surrogate-exile who suffers in the place of those who depend on intellect and do not heed what seem to be arbitrary standards of behavior set for them by Heaven.

CHAPTER FIVE

CURSED SPACE AND CAIN IN LUDOVIC DE CAILLEUX'S *LE MONDE ANTÉDILUVIEN*

In his book *Le Sacré et le profane*, Mircea Eliade posits the reflection of the *imago mundi* in architectural structures which establish what he calls sacred space. From primitive habitations to modern cathedrals, Eliade sees architectural space as the shelter of man seeking a place to abide with his kin and his Maker. In the above analysis of Hugo's "La Conscience," it is argued that building structures enabled Cain and his descendants to find refuge from God. However, Abel, the good son of Adam, was a nomad and sought and built no shelter, whereas Cain, the murderer, was compelled to seek refuge from the elements and from God's potential vengeance, but was spared. God does not kill him, rather forbids that he be killed. The curse God puts on Cain makes sacred shelter impossible; it is rather in cursed wandering and cursed construction of cities that Cain endures. His abode and architecture, unlike that imagined by Eliade, is the cursed space of an exile.

In Ludovic de Cailleux's *Le Monde antédiluvien* (1845), the curse of the exile dominates the characterizations of Cain's descendants and the description of the physical environment in which they live. This prose poem continuously links the curse of Cain with images of architectural structures

and geographical features. Cailleux's landscape is highlighted by the bleak desert in which Cain and his children wander, the city of Héniochia, monument built by Cain's exiled family in honor of his son, and the violent volcano Gelboé-Hor, which vomits its lava on the cursed city and the surrounding desert. The space in which Cain and his descendants live is clearly marked by a curse.

Cailleux's lengthy biblical prose poem, already alluded to as a likely source for Leconte de Lisle's "Qaïn," may well have influenced Hugo's "La Conscience" as well and despite the relative obscurity of *Le Monde antédiluvien* it serves as a confluence for the major ideas on Cain that have been borrowed from various writers and thinkers. The setting of Cailleux's work emerges from the depths of *Genesis* and of all the works heretofore discussed it is the most thoroughly illustrative of Cain's curse. The organic and sensual prose descriptions of the world before the Flood and the harshness of the elements faced by the characters, giants descended from Cain, make the curse inherited by humanity tangible, all but giving it a scent, a texture, and a heartbeat.

The obscurity of the work is curious; no copy of it is to be found in the libraries of North America and it has seldom been alluded to in journals of literary history. Henri Bernès summarizes it and provides a reference to a critical evaluation of it in *La Phalange* and Nathalie Vincent-Munnia discusses its role in establishing the prose poem as a genre of melancholia in nineteenth-century France.⁹⁷ Vincent-Munnia submits that, as part of the

97 Henri Bernès, "Le 'Qaïn' de Leconte de Lisle" et ses origines littéraires," *Revue d' Histoire de la France*, 18 (1911) 495-499.

and Nathalie Vincent-Munnia, "Premiers Poèmes en prose: Le Spleen de la poésie," *Littérature*, 91 (1993) 3-11.

reaction against the restrictions on French versification from classicism through the eighteenth century, the prose poem was a poetic form which expressed a radical break with tradition and reflected a modern "malaise" and self-reflective melancholia.⁹⁸ She points out that none of Cailieux's works have been reedited. Her argument is extended here to contend that prose poetry is the genre of the cursed in the nineteenth century, practiced as an epic by Cailieux and as a lyrical expression of evil by Baudelaire, *le poète maudit par excellence*.

Le Monde antédiluvien incorporates the basic thematic structures of the theme of Cain more thoroughly than any of the works discussed above. It is chiefly for this reason that it concludes this analysis of this theme in the era of French literature dominated by Romanticism. The imagery reflects the tone of the work; desert landscapes establish the solitude of the main characters, shadows and fire their profound anguish and violent disposition. The biblical language and poetic structures which Cailieux advocated in his preface to this work are complemented by the genre chosen--prose poetry. This anti-lyrical poetic form provides the medium for the nightmarish milieu of the descendants of Cain before the Flood. The cursed space of Cain's children extends from beginning to end in this poem and is metaphorically revisited by all those who may have inherited the curse in modern times. Cailieux's effort to create a poem addressed to "Le Genre Humain" (as he

98 Vincent-Munnia, p. 3-4.

"La fin du dix-huitième et le début du dix-neuvième siècles constituent à cet égard une période essentielle de l'histoire de la poésie française: après l'insurrection contre les contraintes de la versification que traduit la naissance de la prose poétique, L'apparition [sic] d'une autre forme poétique, celle du poème en prose, reflète, elle, moins une nouvelle révolution qu'une seconde rupture esthétique qui témoigne d'un sentiment de malaise et offre à la prose des pouvoirs neufs et des possibilités poétiques inédites ... le poème en prose ... génère un discours poétique qui provoque une réflexion sur lui-même: un "spleen" de la poésie à l'image d'une poétique moderne..."

signals at the end of his preface) describes a cursed world which survived, despite the Deluge, to his lifetime and beyond.

Ludovic de Cailleux contributed to the biblical epic, fulfilling in his work the objective he stated in his preface: to create truly biblical poetry. It is the lyricism and thematic structures in Chateaubriand that Cailleux praises in his preface above all other poets of his day, calling him: “le père d'une poésie sans exemple dans les temps modernes” (p. xiii); but even Chateaubriand is too influenced by Homer and Brittany and too sensible to be able to create biblical poetry perfectly. Cailleux finds that followers of Chateaubriand have done little but take his ideas and inspiration and put them into verse and add rhyme.

The first part of *Le Monde antédiluvien* is a framing narrative; ten *Testaments*, some 81 pages. It establishes the character of the giant Méthousaël, descendant of Cain and so of his *race collossienne*. This frame sets up Méthousaël's discourse to Noah, which covers most of the remainder of the text and anticipates the end of the race of men who choose not to enter the Ark and who perish by God's hand. It is fitting, just prior to the age of Darwinism, that the survivors are not pure, but inherit the curse of Cain, as if by recessive genes that occasionally cause a defect to occur in subsequent generations. Further, men adapt to evil and continue to build a secular world in which the fittest survive, and the evil in men often allows them to subdue the good in other men. The ideology reflected in this work is consistent with nineteenth-century loss of faith and meditations on evil that have been alluded to above. Evil survives and, according to interpretations of the Cain myth by Leconte de Lisle and Cailleux, God is the originator of this disease;

man is its carrier and, despite the best efforts of God and man, it cannot be eradicated.

Poetic Prose Description of Cain's Curse

Prose poetry as a genre is recognizable as poetry despite the lack of verse structure and rhyme. Nonetheless, Cailleux's *Le Monde antédiluvien* has several poetic features which separate it from prose narrative. The biblical inspiration that Cailleux so strongly advocated is indeed present in the poetic devices of his prose poetry. The style evokes images of the harsh environment in which Méthousaël wanders. Cailleux imitates the biblical convention of repeatedly beginning chapters with the phrase “Et il fut en ce temps-là”; makes the narrative read as if it indeed comes from a biblical source. Several chants sung by the descendants of Cain and Abel have their verses marked with roman numerals and their style is much like the verses found in the *Psalms*. Quotations given of this prose poem are faithful to the style of short paragraphs and frequent, albeit unexpected, indentations. Repetitions of modifiers in descriptions are common and resemble the use of two similar metaphors to give the same image as in Hebrew wisdom poetry such as the book of *Proverbs*. There is no lack of evidence that the work is indeed poetry cast in sentences and paragraphs and inspired by the poetry of the Bible.

As far into his pilgrimage as the fourth *Testament* Méthousaël still wonders what mysterious power is the source of his desire to depart on a pilgrimage: “Méthousaël, le fils d'Abdénago, pérégrine vers ces régions;” and he admits confesses: “moi-même je ne sais quoi m'y entraîne” (p.38).

Méthousaël is unaware of what is driving him to wander. This is the malady which haunts Hugo's Cain, a conscience that forces Cain to seek refuge from the eye of God that ever threatens judgment for fratricide. Cailleux's Méthousaël, a Cainite, is more like Hugo's Cain than Leconte de Lisle's in that the guilt is not explicit and can be considered unconscious. This part of the unconscious covers itself with darkness, hiding and suppressing the motivation for its desire to flee. This model of the Shadow's impetus to flight is characteristic of Cain in the poems of Cailleux and Hugo; by contrast, Leconte de Lisle's Cain manifests a Promethean fight response to the divine injustice of his exile. This ties Cailleux's Méthousaël and Cain, whom he emulates in everything he does, to the Cains of Leconte de Lisle, Hugo, Byron, Gilbert, and Gessner and to the Wandering Jews of Quinet and Le Poittevin. These figures are all compelled to roam the wilderness because they are unable to bear their guilt before others.

Méthousaël is overwhelmed by a cursed *Wanderlust* inspired by his forefather Cain: “Eh bien! s'écria l'enfant de l'esclave du soleil, je veux pérégriner dans ces régions: l'ombre de Kaïn me tourmente” (p. 7). Compelled to make a pilgrimage, Méthousaël obeys the mysterious call to go forth:

La nuit, une face que j'ignore, un esprit passe devant moi,
et le poil de ma chair se hérise.

Et la vision debout, dans le silence m'a murmuré:

Avance vers l'Héden, tu vengeras ta race, et tu semeras
les germes de ta gloire, dans des sillons immortels. Vath!

Et j'avancerai parce que je veux (p.7).

In this poem the compulsion to flee in Cain and his ancestors appears to be hereditary. This passage links the murder of Abel with an exile's thirst for revenge and flight away from guilt and judgment. There is, nonetheless, benefit to be gained in the outcast's flight. The builder of cities becomes the founder of urban civilization. City-dwellers come to dominate those with a nomadic lifestyle. There is then a reversal in the social roles of the descendants of Cain in Cailleux's poem: the Cainites, at first wanderers, become city builders and dwellers, seeking shelter from the elements and God's wrath. Cain's descendants win out; the sedentary lifestyle of shepherds, characteristic of Abel's race, is kept within the bounds of city walls built by the sons of Cain. Other reversals take place in that, during several battles, the city of Hénochia passes from the sons of Cain to the sons of Abel and back again to the Cainites.

Méthousaël's journey is preceded by two events. First, Méthousaël has Manassès swear an oath by Cain, made beside the "puits du jurement," to watch over and console his family, who will grieve his absence from them. She takes the oath and cries in anticipation of his departure. Second, there is at the end of the first *Testament* a series of curse-blessings pronounced by Abdénago, whose name the narrator tells us means "esclave du soleil" (and suggests *abnévation* of life and self in French), on his son Méthousaël. The torment of a restless wanderer is tempered by the tenderness of Méthousaël's departing words as he embraces Manassès, his father and mother. It will be recalled that Quinet presents a familial farewell

scene before the departure of Ahasvérus. The lamentation of both cursed wanderers, Ahasvérus and Méthousauël, was great.

La vie m'ennuie, s'écria le fils d'Abdénago; voilà que je meurs, si je ne suis vaguant sur la terre, comme mon père Kaïn, et j'aurai beaucoup de maux de pérégrinateur, loin du palais de la ville du feu et du sang, et je le sais encore.

Mais toi, voilà que ton souvenir sera doux à mon âme, comme l'odeur d'un champ plein d'une riche moisson; si tu souffres, mon coeur tressaillira au désert. (p.8)

Nature is part of this farewell as the tearful family hears “le bruit de la solitude,” the sea, the howling of wild dogs and the the desert in the darkness before dawn accompany the son's departure.

Manassès seeks Méthousaël in Hénochia after his departure from his family's house and leaps from the top of the tower of her family's abode to a secret place which overlooks the desert at the base of Mount Horeb. During the day preceeding his journey, Méthousaël assembles his provisions and his camels and mules. He returns to his father and asks his blessing before his definitive departure:

Répandez sur mon front la bénédiction maudite de Kaïn père des géants (p.14)..Implorez donc pour moi l'ombre de Kaïn...Si je veille, un visage inconnu m'appelle dans les régions inconnues.

Et celui que je ne connais pas est toujours là, devant moi, dans l'horreur de la vision. (p.15)

Cain's vision of God's eye in Hugo's "La Conscience" is strikingly similar and Cailleux's divine eye image may have inspired Hugo's.

The departure of Méthousaël is difficult for his family and for his father in particular. Abdénago, a patriarch, has many children, of which the youngest and favorite is Méthousaël. He possesses two palaces and several thousand head of livestock. His children are beautiful, but have a penchant for evil. He is particularly proud of Méthousaël and laments his departure, for he was born when Abdénago was in his advanced years. Méthousaël leaves behind his mother and brothers as well. The name of his mother, Ararat, signifies "le désordre des sens" and is also the name of the mountain on which Noah's Ark is said to have come to rest after the Flood. The mentally disturbed mother can be considered a metaphor for the delusion of salvation offered by Noah, which Méthousaël rejects at the end. She has borne him, but can offer no hope nor solace during his lifetime. Noah's Ark, like Méthousaël's mother, presents false hopes for security and redemption from a life of torment in the wilderness. His pilgrimage leads him away from both refuge and security with his mother and the promise of the same in the Ark. Among the many siblings to whom Méthousaël bids adieu are his brothers Asiongaber and Hébrona, are twins "choqués dans le sein maternel, enfants des ténèbres et du désespoir" and a sexually mal-adjusted brother Néhustan "qui est d'airain, méprisant les femmes, et abandonné au crime profond des pasteurs dans la solitude." His entire family shares the curse of Cain in one form or another (p.17).

Abdénago calls for “les Thérapim de Kain,” a bronze image of the first murderer and strikes his son seven times on the shoulder as he gives his cursed benediction,

avec la voix du père, avec le gémissement sombre de la douleur,
du désespoir et de la révolte contre le Créateur:

“Que la terre te fournisse sa rosée et ses biens.

“Que l'ennemi inconnu, qui dévore ton coeur, s'apaise.

“Plutôt que de changer le nom de ta race, meurs.

“Bois à la coupe du sang des passions; le torrent des

“désirs de l'homme ne tarit jamais.

“Sois prudent. Que tes chameaux, tes serviteurs et ton

“cheval Nahum, et tout ce qui est à toi, te soient en aide,

“à la nuit du danger.

“Invoque le nom de tes pères. Hâte le retour.

“Que celui qui te maudisse, soit maudit.

“Dors en paix, aux bords des citernes de la solitude.

“Qui osera te réveiller?

“Encore une fois, la terre est devant toi, Vath.” (pp. 18-19)

Méthousaël is admonished to take pride in his race, to embrace his nature and his heritage as a son of Cain. Passion is a trait to be cherished.

Cailleux's religious imagery is quite violent; drinking blood, a kind of cursed Eucharist, is the hope of Cain's progeny. The patriarchy of Cain is violent and sacred. Whereas Christ calls his disciples to return blessings for curses in the Sermon on the Mount, Abdénago reverses this divine directive.

Curse is to be met with curse, violence with violence. "Dors en paix...Qui osera te réveiller?" may have been borrowed from Cain's dream and irritation at being awakened in Gessner, which was imitated by Gilbert and is echoed in the ire of Leconte de Lisle's Cain. Cain's sleeping in Gessner and Gilbert has become a convention in Cailieux's and Leconte de Lisle's poems. It is striking that Cain's slumber recurs and that since Gessner certain French poets have produced texts which lend themselves to dream analysis; Cailieux's entire poem can be considered humanity's collective nightmare. The source of Cain's anger at being awoken is apparent in each poem-- Cain's conscience. This beleaguered conscience is passed on from generation to generation and the consequential violence it engenders stems from the founding act of fratricide.

The rest of the first ten *Testaments* that constitute the frame for Méthousaël's narration of Cain's life to Noah is full of terrifying but beautiful landscape descriptions. Méthousaël's pilgrimage to Eden is followed by his arrival at Noah's home. During his journey he encounters foreboding howls of wild animals, the smell of the lava spewed out by the volcano Gelboé-Hor, and the sensations of heat, fatigue, and the most frequently occurring phenomena of shadows and solitude. A remarkable synesthesia develops throughout the poem; this continuously reinforces the feeling of the curse of Cain. The description of landscapes is often accompanied by narratives and characterizations that recall Cain's fratricide. The inescapable effect of this is that one is aware of the pathetic fallacy; the description of the first-built structures and the natural world coincides with the feelings of the main character, which brings to light the hereditary and metaphysical nature of

Cain's curse. First, the description of Hénochia, the city founded by Cain from which Méthousaël departs bears many signs of the curse:

En ce temps-là, les flots orageux des géants battaient les noirs
créneaux de l'antique Hénochia, fille de l'homicide.

Les tentes de tout un peuple étaient vers les portes qui
regardaient la solitude et le torrent de Bésor.

Les murailles de la ville, couleur de rouille, étaient
cicatrisées par le feu du ciel, comme les donjons brunis de l'enfer.

(p. 11)

Then, as Méthousaël begins his journey, Cailleux continues to make his description of nature correspond to the effects of Cain's curse:

En même temps que le bruit des pérégrinateurs s'effaçait dans les
gorges du mont; celui de multitudes s'élevait, comme le mugissement des
grandes eaux dans la solitude...Or, Méthousaël...commençait à gravir les
rochers arides et déserts du mont Galaad: et les pieds nerveux de Nahum
frappaient les angles des rocs.

Or, les vagues de la mer étaient peintes de rouge sanglant.
Hors quelques oiseaux voyageurs et des colonnes de fumée, tout
était désert sur les plages.

Le vent soufflait sur l'hysope et sur les bruyères; les lueurs du
crépuscule enveloppèrent une partie de la terre.

Le vent apportait, du côté de la ville, les accents confus et
lointains des géants et des pasteurs.

La lune se leva, comme une globe d'albâtre noyé dans les
brouillards. Sa lumière blanchissait les rebords du crépuscule et
la cime des palmiers ... (p. 21)

Light, darkness and shadows depict the search for stillness and solitude in
the face of the threat of nature:

Le soleil se couchait sur le monde, aucune vapeur ne couvrait la
face des flots. Les volcans de Gelboé-Hor, illuminaient les
ombres de rubans de feu. (p. 23)

The synesthesia and organic imagery further make a coherent and
metaphysical work of this prose poem. This is essentially what Cailleux
claimed to be doing in his preface to *Le Monde antédiluvien*, writing a truly
biblically inspired prose poem that tells the story of the human race.⁹⁹

Incest and Rivalry: The Heritage of Cain's Curse

The first men were cursed through incestuous inbreeding relations
between the sons of God and the daughters of men (see references to Genesis
and to “divin adultère” in Leconte de Lisle's “Qaïn,” p. 62). This detail in
Genesis caught the attention of Lamartine and other poets who wrote of
fallen angels, but it is Cailleux who stresses the importance of incest in
relation to Cain and his race of giants. There being no proscription for
incest, it is nonetheless one of the marks of God's curse on mankind, a curse

⁹⁹ Cailleux traces biblical and classical epic poetry, finding, as did Quinet, that their mythologies and
inspiration are connected. He says of biblical poetic inspiration: “...on ne découvrira jamais un seul atome
de poésie virginale que là. La Bible créa la poésie.” In his Preface to *Le Monde antédiluvien*: “Sur la
Conception biblique”(Paris: Comptoir des Imprimeurs, 1845) p. vi.

which is inevitable and hereditary. As suggested by René Girard, incest provides an important catalyst for tragedy; this is no less true for Cain and Abel than for Oedipus.¹⁰⁰ Although not every Cain figure in the works discussed below makes an issue of incest, two key portrayals of Cain, those of Byron and Cailleux, certainly do. It is a revelation of evil, for these two writers, the English poet himself was accused of it and presented it as a fundamental argument in his *Cain* that if it were a sin then God must be its originator. The issue of marriage between brothers and sisters arises in Byron's *Cain*; the hero maintains his innocence before Satan. The primordial incest is just as striking in Cailleux's prose poem; it brings to life the great size, bloodthirstiness, and haunting desire to wander of the colossal race of Cain.

The poem begins by contrasting the early descendants of Abel with the sons of Cain. Among Abel's race are daughters of shepherds, drawing water from a well outside the cursed city of "Hénochia," built by Cain's offspring and named for his son. Thus from the very first *Testament* the duality of the first brothers is depicted; pastoral scenes are overshadowed by urban structures. This is somewhat reminiscent of Gessner, but the shepherds, after watering their livestock, re-enter Hénochia. The daughters of Abel were not born in Hénochia, but live there, their mothers held there by the exiled sons of Cain since they were cast out from Eden. Some of these gigantic girls, "enfants de Dieu," tend their flocks and wash their snow-white veils. They smile gaily and pick wild flowers. Their song (pp. 4-5) summarizes the relationship between the sons of Cain and the daughters

100 See chapters 7 and 8 in *La Violence et le sacré*.

of Abel. The girls lament Eden lost. Cain's children have taken captive the children of Abel, actually the children of Seth, the third brother born after Abel's death whom Eve says was born to replace Abel's line, thus the only race apart from Cain's. The girls' song curses the race of Cain for its violence, destruction and incest. Curiously, the incest cited here is the reverse of that which produced the race of giants that is Cain's progeny:

Et vous, géantes collossiennes de la race de Kain, qui séduisez
nos frères et nos pères, le Créateur déroulera vos cheveux dans l'écume
des flots. (p. 5)

The female children of Abel are as gentle as “une troupe de colombes,” whereas the gigantic daughters of Cain are guilty of promiscuity and intermarriage within their own clans. A notable exception, Manassès-Macéda, is the colossal grand-daughter of Cain who has remained chaste and becomes devoted to Méthousaël, the main character, giant and grandson of Cain. Cain's male descendants are rugged, living an insufferably harsh existence. Yet the first character to play a significant role in the story, Manassès-Macéda, is a giant who descends from Cain's line; she is Cain's grand-daughter. There is, however, something sacred about her appearance and her purity. Unlike the other girls of Hénochia, she does not sing; alone, she looks longingly toward Eden. To her feminine beauty is contrasted the brutal entrance on horseback, armed and full of rage, of Méthousaël. All the girls except Manassès flee at the sight of this man. In a scene reminiscent of Rebecca at the well in *Genesis* 24, she is called to him. The beautiful and

the hideous coexist in Méthousaël: “Sa beauté était grande, mais le désespoir vivait dans son regard, parce qu'il était de la race de Kaïn ” (p.6).

Upon saving a remnant of mankind from the Flood, Noah's family repopulates the world through incest. Like the giants who were the children of angels and women, Noah's children, whom Méthousaël meets in Testament 10, are beautiful. Noah names his daughter Haghar-Bénoui, whose name means “fille de ma douleur” since she was born of a woman whom his wife Sahraï had sent out into the desert to die (p. 75). This story seems to allude to the story of Abraham and Sarah. Abraham's concubine having borne him a son, the mother and child were sent out into the desert. This scene from *Genesis* has its parallel in *Le monde antédiluvien* and illustrates the themes of rivalry, jealousy, and violence.

In Testaments 13-15, Kerren-Happucca (giant maiden and descendant of Cain) is pursued on two occasions by her brother Gédéon. When he attempts to rape her the first time (p. 107) he is pushed away by Kerren and repents of his lust; then, the second time, he is thwarted by sons of Cain, who pull him away from her and stone him to death (pp. 130-131). Kerren falls in love with Joseph (the son of Jacob in *Genesis*), who is killed in battle in Hénochia. The brother-sister incest suggested between Kerren and Gédéon is paralleled by that which is to take place between Noah's beloved outcast daughter Hagar-Bénoni and his son Cham, who, as the resemblance of his name to Cain's suggests, is predisposed to violent behavior. Cham is in fact jealous of Méthousaël, descendant of Cain, who takes Bénoni away as his wife. Incest is here linked with jealousy and suggestive of fraternal rivalry; as with the first brothers, there is a sister-wife marriage expected

between Cham and Bénoni. Méthousaël seems to offer an alternative to the incest, but at the price of violence and infection of Noah's family with Cainite blood as he takes Bénoni as his wife. The surviving descendants of Noah will include Cham, who bears the curse of Cain in jealousy and the rage of having his future wife stolen away from him by Méthousaël.

Thoghorma-Maholaël-Abba: Cainite Prophet and Scientist

While Méthousaël is unconsciously drawn to the tomb of his ancestor Cain, his beloved Manassès seeks to learn his whereabouts and visits the sage Thoghorma-Maholaël-Abba. The daughter of the latter, Corozäim-Méhaulalaï-Tzila, tells Manassès that he is seeking wisdom in the shadow of the sanctuary of eternal misery: "Il est, dit-elle, retiré dans le sanctuaire des misères éternelles: là son génie croît dans l'ombre. Il interroge, dans les astres, la destinée du monde de Kaïn" (p. 29). Tzilla then bids Manassès to retire, for it is time to sleep. *Testament Quatrième* begins as Manassès leaves and Tzilla falls into a deep sleep in which she is overtaken by a prophetic dream which portends the Deluge. Méhaulalaï murmurs a narration of her vision:

La terre est immobile: le monde collossien dans l'agonie.

Il va s'engouffrer dans le vide.

Les hommes se roulent dans la poussière.

Ils blasphèment.

L'amour meurt.

L'amour de tous, excepté le mien.

Écoutez ces cris, ces hurlements, ces glapissements...

and at the end of her utterance the metaphor of the cursed wanderer is used for mankind:

Ne sommes-nous pas des voyageurs, qui marchons sur les grèves d'une
éternité,

N'ayant pour nous guider, que la brulante flamme, qui s'exhale de
notre sein,

Thoghorma-Maholaël-Abba ? (p. 32)

Thoghorma, the name which Leconte de Lisle appropriated for his prophet, had already appeared in *Le monde antédiluvien*, not only as a prophet, but as a kind of priest-scientist who builds a shrine to Cain. He makes statues of Cain and his wife, Moïle, in this poem, places them “sur le faite des pyramides” and pronounces his satisfaction with his work as God had with his creation: “Et il dit: ceci est bon” (p.33). He resembles Quinet's Docteur Albertus-Magnus in “Ahasvérus,” a Faust figure, a Cainite alchemist seeking the deepest secrets of science.¹⁰¹

Et son coeur était profond comme le sein de la mer.

Et il avait une science universelle, il discutait sur les
chevaux du désert, sur les poissons de la mer, sur les oiseaux du
ciel, sur les astres du firmament et sur le coeur de l'homme et de la
femme.

Et il fit plusieurs milliers de paraboles et de poèmes. (p. 33)

¹⁰¹ See p. 117 above.

Through Thoghorma's instruction to his daughter, Cailleux explains the mystery of Cain's curse and its relationship to the human race:

Contemplez, je vous prie, le monde qui nous a engendrés.
 Monde voisin du chaos, chef-d'oeuvre des puissances
 morales révoltées.
 Et splendeurs de la matière.
 Monde épuisé de science et de mal, et qui pèsera plus
 un jour en pensée de malice que l'univers ensemble.
 Monde dont les créatures ont l'âme géante comme le corps.
 C'est pourquoi nous sommes.

Thoghorma worships Cain and concludes his discourse by crediting mankind, Cain's descendants in particular, for the founding of all building, all arts and sciences:

Qui éleva des palais? Qui rassembla les hommes en cité?
 Qui dompta la solitude?
 Qui dicta les premières lois humaines?
 Qui inventa le cinnor et les arts?
 Qui connut les routes des étoiles et planètes? Qui par-
 courut les solitudes du firmament?
 Avec qui nous avait ravalés la volonté inconnue?
 Avec les brutes de la solitude, dans la terre du dénûment.
 (p. 35)

The unspoken answer to this rhetorical question is mankind; the pride of Cain is characteristic of his descendants and followers like Thoghorma.

Building helps mankind overcome his solitude. Having been banished to a cursed existence by God, Cain and his children will have to build shelter and establish a new habitat. Hugo's "La Conscience," as discussed above is about the impossibility of man finding sufficient shelter from his guilt and building as a metaphor for seeking protection from guilt and for the separation of the ego from the Mask of the Persona. The crucial elements in analysis of space in both Hugo's poem and Cailleux's are the flight from the cursed milieu and the building of structures that can provide shelter from the elements and separation from divine order. Man gains autonomy, becomes individuated and secularized as he builds. Cain is founder not only of architecture but of all sciences that distance men from arbitrary divine justice. Thogorma cites laws as the natural evolution of men in society. In *Testament Sixième*, Méthousaël's pilgrimage takes him to the ruins of what was Eden, and in the following *Testament* Thogorma enters a cave in which he finds Cain's tomb. These scenes are synchronous and parallel; they bring together the pilgrimage of Méthousaël with that of Cain which the former recounts to Noah and his family beginning in *Testament Dixième*.

The Battle for Hénochia: Fraternal and Social Struggle

The two principal events of Cailleux's poem apart from Méthousaël's framed narrative are the battles for Hénochia and the conclusion of the poem in which all but the family of Noah perish in the waters of the Flood. As indicated above, there are reversals in the struggle of the sons of Cain versus the sons of Abel, supplanted by the descendants of Seth. It is "le Livre de Seth" that Méthousaël uses as the source of his account of the history of his

ancestors' loss and recapture of the first city, founded by Cain and built by his clan.¹⁰² Cain's descendants, after having built the first city, have established civilization there. Cain himself established agriculture, living a sedentary, but work-weary lifestyle. After his offering was rejected and he murdered Abel, however, he became a nomadic hunter until he re-established himself in the shelter of a city. These reversals in Cain's livelihood and existence continued as "les enfants de Dieu" attacked Hénochia and expelled Cain's sons, returning them to a nomadic culture.

Noah's daughter Kerren listens to Joseph's narrative in *Testament Douzième*. The sons of Seth, surrogate of the murdered Abel, still have continued to keep flocks as shepherds. Led by Joseph's brothers, they attack the city of the sons of Cain.

Des paroles terribles sortaient de la bouche des hommes et leurs regards étaient comme celui de l'aigle qui fond sur sa proie.

Quand ils furent tous enfoncés au loin dans les sables, je marchais encore en poussant mes troupeaux devant moi. Sur le soir j'arrivais aux portes de la ville de Kaïn.

Et j'appelai Ruben, Aser et Gad, pasteurs enfants de Dieu.

Ils me reconnurent et vinrent m'ouvrir les portes, et j'entrais dans Hénochia.

Et Ruben me dit: voilà que le Seigneur nous a livré la ville de Kaïn. Entrez et fermez les portes, car voici le jour du sang dans Hénochia...

102 Cailleux reports that his source for the battles for Henokia are found in "Le livre de Seth" in the Vatican library in Rome. See Cailleux's Appendix to his *Le Monde antédiluvien*, "Notes Scientifiques," p. 434 n34:

"Il existe un livre antédiluvien que j'ai lu à la bibliothèque du Vatican et à Marseille, à la bibliothèque de la Ville, livre de Seth, fils d'Adam, intitulé les Batailles du Seigneur."

En ce temps-là donc, Hénochia, où régnaient les enfants de Dieu, fut assiégée, durant de longs jours, par les Collossiens qui s'étaient retirés en Horreb. (p. 123)

Later, as Joseph's account continues, those who had just taken Hénochia from the sons of Cain fell victim to a famine and a drought. The sons of Abel are vulnerable to attack and it is quick in coming. Unlike the "enfants de Dieu", Abel's camp, the first city is besieged at night by "les enfants des hommes", descendants of Cain. The battle is waged with the ferocity of a "torrent," an allusion to the Flood (p. 125). Joseph chooses to join the fight to defend his brothers. Joseph's narration closes and the omniscient narrator concludes the story of the battle. Hénochia is regained by Cain's camp and Joseph is killed during the fighting. The carnage is so horrifying that even the people of Cain are shocked and demoralised by it (p. 129).

The first fratricide, which founds society, is, in the episode of the battles for Hénochia, expanded to mankind at war with itself, split into two clearly defined groups: "les enfants de Dieu," as Abel's camp is identified as "les enfants de Dieu" and Cain's descendants as "les enfants des hommes." These identifications show a dichotomy between Abel's association with the sacred and Cain's founding of the secular. The question to be resolved at the end is which part of man will be justified, which does the narrator-prose poet favor? The scene in which Kerren is saved from the incestuous rape of Gédéon by Cain's sons suggests that Cain's descendants are not always evil, but are sometimes deliverers. They are portrayed as builders, founders of society and science. Though they worship Cain rather than God, they are shown to be more humane, even in war. When the sons of Abel capture

Hénochia they are proud conquerors and just as fierce in battle as the sons of Cain. It is, however, the sons of Cain, not those of Abel who sense the horror of killing. Indeed the conclusion of this monumental prose poem favors the secular over the sacred and calls into question the justice of a God who destroys humanity in vain, for the curse of Cain lives on even on the Ark. God has destroyed an evil world without being able or willing to replace it with a good one.

As his name and lineage would suggest, Abdénago, concludes that “Il n'y a point de Dieu” and loses all fear and respect for Jehovah. Even Noah aboard the Ark is driven to despair by the loss of his daughter Hagar-Bénoni:

Et Noé reconnut l'ombre de l'enfant de sa douleur, d'Hagar-Bénoni,

Et la nuit, dans l'agonie du monde, Noé se livrait à son désespoir, disant:

Ma mission est trop amère. Je succombe. J'ai vu le fantôme de mon enfant chéri, le sein percé, errant parmi les cadavres d'hommes...

Pour moi, je succombe à mon agonie, et j'ai sondé mon coeur et n'y ai trouvé que le désespoir et une grande pitié pour le genre humain expirant qui a tordu mes entrailles.

Noah becomes, despite his wish to the contrary, a Christ figure, as an angel brings him a sponge with vinegar to strengthen him in his emotional anguish (p. 347). Yet among those in the Ark, as among those who perish, there is little faith in divine justice.

In the final *Testaments*, the narrative returns to characters introduced in the first episodes of the work. The families of Méthousaël and Thoghorma are revisited. They each echo the thematic refrain of divine injustice and despair. The most striking of these maledictions is that of the learned Cain worshipper Thoghorma: “Je n'ai jamais tant haï, et l'humanité que j'ai vu périr et Celui qui a consommé le meurtre” (p. 368). The clear implication of this line is that God is the source of the founding murder. The descendants of Cain have inherited Cain's curse and hatred, but God initiated the cycle of violence and hate by arbitrarily accepting Abel's offering and rejecting Cain's. The first murder is also a thematic parallel of the Flood, God being the instigator of the founding and the concluding act of murder; the first fratricide is again extended metaphorically to the first genocide, the Deluge. Thoghorma, like Leconte de Lisle's Cain, blames God in both cases. It is, however, as Hugo's “La Conscience” illustrates, *le propre de l'homme* to bear the guilt of these acts of fratricide and genocide.

CONCLUSION

Cain's Curse: Epic and Archetypal

A thematic system emerges from the interrelationships between Cain, Prometheus and the Wandering Jew as myths, as themes, as motifs, and as figures in which Cain is the nucleus. Placing the *Genesis* 4 text in the center of the schema as a myth, it encompasses the themes of exile, wanderer, rebel, and founding genius. In the latter, Cain is also the primal Faust, source of the sciences and mythical alchemist. Cain overlaps with the mythical figure Ahasuer as exile and wanderer, with Prometheus as founding genius and rebel, and with Lucifer as primal agent of evil and knowledge of death. The Cain archetype does not exist in a vacuum, nor does it depend on doubles, as Quinones seems to suggest (but, to his credit, in *The Changes in Cain*, Quinones provides the best model for the idea of the founding murder, which is also espoused by Girard). In the literature of the period in French literary history which began with the struggle for liberty in the French Revolution, the Cain archetype continued to serve as a model for those who would seek to replace the ideal of a paternal monarch for a fraternal order albeit through violence.

The Cain myth in this thesis has been studied in poetry, not only because it occurs more frequently here than in drama or novels, but also because it is the genre in which the thematic system works best. Poetry may be lyrical or not, but in the nineteenth century it is metaphorical; its imagery must be evocative, one image must suggest another. A poetic thematic

structure is quite evident in *Le Monde antédiluvien*, and, though it be in prose form, it must be recognized as a web of metaphors which demonstrates the many relationships between fallen angels, Satan, Prometheus, the Wandering Jew and the founding murderer discussed in chapters 1-4.

As one poet sets forth Cain as the founder of the guilty conscience in man, his rival chooses the same figure to show the other side of the first murderer, rebellion against divine injustice. As the Romantic poets sought to satisfy their *soif de l'infini*, questions of justice were bound to arise. One conclusion that can be drawn from mankind's experience is that justice is an illusion. The torch being passed from the chief Romantic poet to the leader of the rival Parnassian movement, Hugo's Conscience in Cain was followed by Leconte de Lisle's Titan-Cain. Old and New Testament myths, Classical and biblical mythologies came together in Quinet's poetry in his "Ahasvérus" and "Prométhée"; his epic trilogy was completed his "Napoléon."

As a psychoanalytical structure, the Cain archetype illustrates the projection of the Shadow elaborated by Jung and establishes a portrayal of the guilty conscience. Cain is the primal bearer of the mark of human guilt. This guilt is expressed in Hugo's "La Conscience" as Cain seeks refuge from God's judging eye, and, in Cailieux's *Le Monde antédiluvien*, as social warfare between fraternal groups, the sons of Cain, builders, and the sons of Abel, shepherds. In an age of industrialization the Cain figure takes on a social identity. In the century of Darwinian evolution, poetry with Cain as a central focus shows the impossibility of eradicating evil because it is passed on, as if by heredity, from one generation to another.

The Cain figures, themes and motifs have provided a vehicle for the epic in the poems discussed above. Whether in a Romantic, a Parnassian, or simply a biblical context (as Caillex advocated), the Cain theme is typically tied to the epic mode. Quinet and Caillex explicitly claimed to be making epics and they succeeded in those of their poems discussed above. Hugo is master of the epic in the nineteenth century, and Leconte de Lisle's "Qain" is monumental in scope, incorporating a multitude of antediluvian motifs in its dramatic structure.

Binaries are indeed in evidence in treatments of Cain from Gilbert to Leconte de Lisle, but it is the intertextual thematic structure (and not simply in making meaning through pairing of one figure with another) that reveals the complexity of the Cain myth in poetry of nineteenth century France. For a concise synthesis of this evaluation of poems related to the Cain myth, there may be no better conclusion than that of Ludovic de Caillex, who reveals archetypal Cain as the cursed brute which is man:

...l'homme, la première et la plus étonnante merveille de ces sombres créations; l'homme géant d'âme et de corps; l'homme, qui par sa malice a excité le repentir du Créateur et la ruine d'un monde; l'homme dont le coeur était ravagé par un tourment né de Caïn, dont René et Manfred ne sont que des restes apauvris; l'homme qui inventa tous les arts; l'homme, dont l'Univers moderne, à chaque fois qu'il se remue, vomit des traces palpitantes; l'homme qui ressentit des passions profondes et infinies, dont la sublimité, la spiritualité, et la prodigieuse malignité, ont disparu avec lui; l'homme, rival de Dieu; l'homme conspirateur contemplateur, maître absolu d'une création morale et physique, en face de laquelle la nôtre et

pygmée, cet homme-là ne serait qu'une brute; alors, quel Dieu serait comparable à cette brute-là?"(preface p. xiv)

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