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Doubling in Byron's *Cain: A Mystery*

Keiko Ikeda

Introduction

One puzzle is to "know oneself": If the self objectified in self-consciousness is "other", then the self is ultimately unintelligible. We are in this essay concerned with the thematically self-conscious aspects meshed with the family in Byron's *Cain: A Mystery* (1821), rather than theological issues. Byron's *Cain* has provoked a great deal of theological controversy, particularly focusing on the issue of theodicy.¹

From what we know of the biblical episode, Cain is the first murderer, which builds up his general image of villain. However, to judge from Byron's drama, Cain is not a simple villain. Given our quest for (re-) appreciation of his dramatic poetry of worth, it is proper for our project to read in the theological text the self-analytic reading of the hero's double functions — at once a condemner of his parents for their guilt in the paradise as the unreasonable model, and a committer of murder. Why does this drama reveal such a self-conscious aspect? To answer the question, we will pursue Cain's significant relationship with Adah, his sister and wife, in terms of his characterization, and explain what his slaying Abel symbolically means in terms of the drama's the self-analytic theme.

1. Cain and Adah

"I sought not to be born" (1.1.68)

As Cain emphasizes the absurd charge upon him for his parents'

sin, the sin committed before his birth, so like negative inheritance from his parents before his birth, his complaints are inherent in his own life with its conflicting reality, prior to his question. When he raises a conceptualized question in his mind, he has already been frustrated by something difficult to solve. Cain's passive statement, "I sought not to be born" is paradoxically expressive of the infinite regression into the origin of the self. Just as it is allogical that he can recognize anything before his birth, so we cannot say the strict point of the origin; for the very point of the beginning is always undividable and describable, and forever splitting and doubling. That doubling and splitting relationship is represented in the hero's family. Cain's family consists of three generations; first Adam and Eve, secondly their four children, Cain, Adah, Abel, and Zillah, and thirdly the former couple's infants Enoch and his sister. As Cain and Adah are at once twins and husband/wife, so are Abel and Zillah without any children. Only given this familial organization, one might speculate about the doubling relationship between Cain and Adah, like that of Manfred and Astarte, as well as between Adah and Zillah in their duplicated name's ending, "-ah". Considering their names derive from Lamech's wives' (Gen. 4.19), Byron's choosing them instead of Mahala and Thirza (Preface 228) is worth considering.

To examine Adah's function, we have to consider Cain's silence and Eve's curse in advance. His silence is emphasized in the opening scene, where his family offers up their earnest "orisons" (1.1. 47), whose derivation from the Latin "*ôrâtîon-em*", meaning "speech", "oration". Considering its meaning in Christian context "an address to God" or "a prayer" (OED 204), and his behavior toward his family, Cain's silence implies at once his lost communication with his God and his function as outsider from his communal cult who makes no speech. When his family

advised him to bless God for his good life, he retorts if his parents had plucked the tree of life, they could defy God; for, according to Cain, both the tree of knowledge and that of life cannot be evil since "knowledge is good, /And life is good" (1.1.37-38). All of his family, however, does not understand his feeling nor listen to him sympathetically. He keeps silent again when his family appears in the murder site and demands him to explain the situation or with their wish to deny his murderous commitment. From their entrance in 379th line to his parents' and Zillah's exit in the 454th — more strictly, till after Adah's 6-line part from 454th —, no words are uttered by him throughout 80 lines. Against sole defense by Adah for Cain, Eve persists that Cain "hath left thee[Adah] no brother — / Zillah no husband — me *no son!* — for thus I curse him from my sight for ever!" (3. 407-409). Her attack on Cain deprives not only his mother of him, but also of Adah her husband-brother.

Note here Eve's long curse during which Cain keeps silence. While an 80-line span of Cain's silence with no stage direction implies the ignorance of his existence itself, we can read his attitude in two ways: his words are circumstantially repressed by his family though they superficially urge him to speak. The second interpretation is he dares to stick to a silent pose, as his defiance or last nobility without any excuse. Generally, speaking is one of the features that distinguish human from other animals, but here his silence reversibly grades the brutal irrational murderer Cain whose emotion overcomes his reason in the murder as high-minded Cain who is aware of his sin.

We will agree with Murray Roston's view of Byron's hero who is "part of a new trend to transform Cain from villain to hero". (203). This is why Adah serves Byronic modification of Cain's character. As Caroline Franklin criticizes, Adah had been often recognized as "a passive, gentle, and nurturing wife and mother"

(233), more negatively as a "bovine" and fond "zombie". (Blackstone 249). Truman Guy Steffan somewhat mildly suggests that she "absorbed a part of Cain's personality." (64). Though our viewpoint is similar to Steffan, yet let us look at Adah from more neutral angle. After Eve, Adam and Zillah exit, the angel of the Lord visits Cain, where his similar attitude is more remarkable, compared with the biblical text:

And Cain said unto the LORD, My punishment *is* greater than I can bear.

Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass, *that* every one that findeth me shall slay me. (Gen. 4. 13-14)

In Byron's text, Cain's earnest treaty is transferred from him to Adah's.

ADAH. This punishment is more than he can bear.

Behold, thou drivest him from the face of earth,
And from the face of God shall he be hid.

A fugitive and vagabond on earth,
'Twill come to pass, that whoso findeth him
Shall slay him.

CAIN. Would they come! but who are they
Shall slay me? where are these on the lone earth
As yet unpeopled? (3.1.477-484)

What matters here is that Byron's Cain does not make the biblical Cain's speech. As the angel's words almost correspond to the Lord's in the bible, one character of Cain in the bible is split into Cain and Adah in Byron's drama so that the splitting can build their personalities each other; while Cain is answerable for

his fault without any plea, Adah merciful. Pierre Bayle's Dictionary, whose article Byron referred to, explains the biblical Cain may design to prevent God from imposing a heavy penalty upon him (672). Cain's sarcasm in the drama effectively serves Byron's obvious identification of Byronic hero with both haughtiness and Cain's awareness of his loneliness. Instead of asking for the forgiveness, he claims "but who are they / Shall slay me? where are these on the lone earth / As yet unpeopled?" The interesting aspect is that the work's bitter humor depends upon Cain's calm acceptance of his situation, his rather cynical calm which awakes him to his loneliness. His cynical composure, functioning as a whole keynote, can regress into the poet's bitterly-humorous viewpoint on his creature, Cain.

So far, the passage quoted from the Bible and shifted from Cain's line to Adah's, links not only with Byron's reciprocal building Cain's notable personality, but with Cain's doubling relationship with Adah. Cain's remark that Adah is his sister "Born on the same day, of the same womb" (1.1.331) and Adah's that Cain is "Born of the same sole womb, in the same hour with [her]" suggests Byron's emphasis on their doubling relation.

Just as Adah vicariously weeps for Cain, associated with her splitting and doubling relationship with him, so in a similar manner Enoch, Cain's young son, does instead of his father who cannot do. Cain wonders, "Ah! little knows he what he weeps for! / I who shed blood cannot shed tears!" (3.520-521), where Enoch's innocently assimilating emotion in human nature is projected by his father. This sympathetic emotional tendency is not a virtue but rather a mechanism where the difference between self / other is confused as the acceptor / sender of some emotional message. If Enoch and Cain in the relationship of father / son is oscillated between the splitting / assimilating polarities, then Adah's weeping for Cain and Abel sets its feeling to the

assimilation with them, and therefore, in some way at the end of the drama, frees herself from her double's emotion as "one other" human existence. Though the second fall by Cain's murder shows the human reversal to animal, Cain's and Adah's doubling independence ironically reverses from the simple innocent to the noble-minded spirit as human.

Their doubling relationship, however, always oscillates between the split/assimilation, when Cain is exiled eastward and Adah says to him "Let us depart together" (3.1.527-528). Though she encouragingly says to Cain, "I will divide thy burden with thee," (3.1.551) it is doubtful whether she can actually fulfill it or not. Their different farewells to dead Abel reveals Cain's or Byron's realistic viewpoint: Adah's "Peace with him!" contrasts Cain's "But with me! —" (3.1.561). To differentiate her attitude from Cain's, "Though the play is deeply tragic, her dream of building an earthly paradise does survive as an ideal for the future." (Franklin 242). Though Adah's decision to share Cain's burden means her sympathy with him and suffering together, yet her love and sympathy alone can not save him. Their split is intermingled with their assimilation, Adah's aspiration for assimilation in Cain carries the light of salvation to Byron's work and at the same time emphasizes Cain's loneliness. So far we have considered the doubling and splitting structure within Cain and his sister in terms of the intersection of the self/other opposition. For our following discussion, we must consider the fatal dual of Cain and Abel whose relationship is also mirrored in Byron's drama.

2. Cain and Abel

Abel is also "sprung from the same womb with thee [Cain]" (3.1.535) like the relationship between Cain and Adah. Moreover, their incestuous relationship is doubled with that between Abel and Zillah, though differentiated in that the former couple have

their children but the latter has none. Cain's murderous motivation is hidden in his inner conflict, where his conscious-unconscious struggle is in the doubling structure reflected in that between self and self/other. Though Byron explains, "Cain is a proud man" and his murder results "from mere internal irritation — not premeditation or envy — of Abel — . . . but from rage and fury against his inadequacy of his state to his Conceptions";² yet his inner envious conflict is indirectly associated with his slaying Abel. Rather, his pride unconsciously tries to repress his envy and even his "rage and fury against of his state to his Conceptions" from his journey. Act 2 seems clear that a war between Cain and Abel caused by Cain's anger about Abel being favored by his parents and God.

LUCIFER. Thy father loves him [Abel] well — so does thy God.

CAIN. And so do I.

LUCIFER. 'Tis well and meekly done.

CAIN. Meekly!

LUCIFER. He is the second born of flesh,
And is his mother's favorite.

CAIN. Let him keep
Her favourite, since the serpent was the first
To win it.

LUCIFER. And his father's?

CAIN. What is that
To me? should I not love that which all love?

LUCIFER. And the Jehovah — [. . .]

[.]

[. . .]too, looks smilingly on Abel.

CAIN. I

Ne'er saw him, and I know not if he smiles.

[.]

[LUCIFER.][. . .] Sufficiently to see they love your brother;

His sacrifices are acceptable.

CAIN. So be they! Wherefore speak to me of this?

LUCIFER. Because thou hast thought of this ere now.

CAIN.

And if

I *have* thought, why recall a thought that — [*he pauses, as agitated*] — Spirit!

Here we are thy world; speak not mine. (2.2.340-357)

Considering Cain's stage direction and the following lines, one might speculate that Lucifer's devilish leading question reflects Cain's internal anger. Though he half unconsciously managed to repress his anger, it is the exclamation marks in "Meekly!" and "Spirit!". If Cain's murder, according to Byron's explanation, derives not from his simple envy but from "his inadequacy of his state to his Conceptions", then his repressed anger is aimed at his own existence worthless for to his parent and God. His self-hatred can be structurally reinforced by his slaying his double, Abel. Note in passing another importance in this scene, and we will find the first-born son in the unprivileged position. Ironically, Cain's sour grapes reveal Eve's human sons are more unprivileged than the serpent, the animal winner of her favour.

His anger repressed is recalled after Cain's return to the earth in Act 3, where at the sight of Abel, while Adah says "Our brother comes," Cain rephrases him, "Thy brother Abel" (3.161-162). Since Cain's slaying double-like Abel is the repetition of their parents' fall, one might predict the battle of the first-second born brothers should also be the key aspect of the conscious/unconscious ego. Just as Byron himself inherits his mother's temper keeping together both "the extremes of uncontrollable anger and demonstrative affection" (Marchand 10), Cain both receives Eve's

cursing violence and sends his furious violence to Abel. Cain and Abel start their argument for and against offering sacrifice.

[CAIN.] [...] what was his [Jehovah's] high pleasure in
The fumes of scorching flesh and smoking blood,
To the pain of the bleating mothers, which
Still yearn for their dead offspring? or the pangs
Of the sad ignorant victims underneath
Thy pious knife? Give way! [...]

ABEL. Brother, give back! thou shalt not touch my altar
With violence: if that thou wilt adapt it,
To try another sacrifice, 'tis thine.

CAIN. Another sacrifice! Give way, or else
That sacrifice may be —

ABEL. What meanest thou?

CAIN. Give —

Give way! — thy God loves blood! — then look to it: —
Give way, he hath more!

[.]

ABEL [*opposing him*]. I love God far more
Than life.

CAIN [*striking him with a brand, on the temples, which he
snatches from the altar*]. Then take thy life unto thy
God,

Since he loves lives.

ABEL. [*falls*]. [. . .] (3.1.298-317)

Interestingly enough Cain's slaying Abel with a sacred brand eventually becomes equivalent to Abel's sacrifice, his killing his lamb with his "pious knife"; for Cain, albeit a criticizer of sacrifice, ironically makes his brother his sacrifice. That Abel becomes a sacrifice implies not only the figure of Christ; but humanistic Cain, who mercifully regards the sacrificed lamb,

degrades himself into the animal murderer. It is reasonable to state that they are doubles whose privileged-unprivileged positions are easily reversed.

From the equivalent representation of Cain and the offered "first-born" sacrifices, William H. Marshal mentions "The image of sacrifice, reminds Cain, first of his own punishment for his father's sin, then of Abel." (139). In the citation, the sacrifice's inhumanity is likened to the sacrificed lamb evokes its mother's pain. Cain's murder is paralleled in his mother's painful shock projected into her curse upon him. The curse within family is referred by Lucifer, when Cain says "Cursed be / He who invented life that leads to death!" (2.2.18-19).

LUCIFER. Dost thou curse thy father?

CAIN. Cursed he not me in giving me my birth?

Cursed he not me before my birth, in daring

To pick the fruit forbidden?

LUCIFER. Thou say'st well:

The curse is mutual 'twixt thy sire and thee —

But for thy sons and brother? [. . .] (2.2.22-27).

Like the suicidal duel of the doubles, "[t]he curse is mutual" between father and son, and between brothers. Cain's curse on the Creator/Destroyer God is reasonable, for God and human are also Father and Son.

LUCIFER. [. . .] But let him [Jehovah]

Sit on his vast and solitary throne,

Creating worlds, to make eternity

Less burdensome to his immense existence

And unparticipated solitude! (1.1.147-151)

According to Lucifer, Jehovah unhappily works to "[c]reate / re-create" his world. His painful isolation from his creation is

accentuated:

Could he [Jehovah] but crush himself, 'tis the best boon
 He ever granted: but let him reign on,
 And multiply himself in misery!
 Spirits and men, at least we sympathise;
 [.]
 [. . .] But *He!* so wretched in his height,
 So restless in his wretchedness, must still
 Create, and re-create — perhaps he'll make
 One day a Son unto himself — as he
 Gave you a father — and if he so doth
 Mark me! — that Son will be a Sacrifice. (1.1.154-166)

Lucifer's repeated remark "let him rein" implies the reversal of master/slave. While Father God sacrifices his happiness for the Creation, his children creature is made a sacrifice for him. Recall, here, the repetitive trauma shifted from Adam to Eve, and to Cain. To maintain safe their subjective world, Cain's god-like parents demand sacrifice.

In summary, we have noted that a sacrifice restricts father/son (i. e. parent / child) within their reciprocal dependency. If so, we may expand the idea into the temporal limitation, such as death, which sacrifices human life. To show the relationship between Cain and Abel, Byron emphasizes Cain's title of 'first-born son' employed 4 times (including "eldest-born"), while Abel is called "the second-born" son only once. What is significant for our purposes is this 'first-born' distinction represents Cain's burdensome privilege within his family. Let us turn back to Lucifer's indication that the "second-born" Abel gains the "first" love of his mother and God. In Act 1, when Adam urges Cain to pray God, he emphasizes Cain's first-born status "Son, Cain, my first-born, wherefore art thou silent?" (1.1.22) and "But thou, my eldest-

born, art silent still" (1.1.26).

It is true the privileged/unprivileged status is reversed between Cain and Abel; Before the cult in Act 3, Abel forces Cain to "Choose one of those two altars," which satisfies Abel, -not Cain — since "'Tis the highest,/and suits thee, as the elder." While Abel's respect for Cain seems rather obligatory and self-satisfactory, Cain himself partly avoids his privileged status. For example, Cain always tries to be a follower of his brother and sister. When the family cult is over, he meekly hopes to be alone.

[CAIN.] I fain would be alone a little while.

Abel, I'm sick at heart; but it will pass:

Precede me, brother — I will follow shortly.

And you, too, sisters, tarry not behind;

Your gentleness must not be harshly met;

I'll follow you anon. (1.1.57-62).

Though Franklin here explains "because as a male he is superior in patriarchal status to his elder sister, he peremptorily orders her to leave" (236), I rather dare to interpret that his patriarchal privilege is paradoxically reversed by his own ordering action: Cain has no practical privilege, except a formal one. We can see the similar pattern when he and his younger brother offer prayer to God in Act 3: although Abel says, "My brother, as the elder, offer first/ Thy prayer and thanksgiving with sacrifice," Cain replies, "No — I am new to this; lead thou the way,/ And I will follow — as I may" (3.1.220-223). Obviously, it is mainly because of his reluctance to pray to God that he does not feel like exercising the initiative in the familial ceremony in which he manages to avoid his priority.

[CAIN.] [...] let it [this ceremony] be alone —

At least, without me.

Enoch in his binary position; he is at once Cain's son and nephew. The biblical description says Enoch is born after Cain's exile. To this question, Franklin answers: that Byron made "Cain and his sister parents before their expulsion" is "in order that he can have them express a positive and joyous attitude towards their parenthood" and that "makes a contrast with the patriarchy of the rest of the family, who emphasize the authority of the father-god, not his love." (235). By a different viewpoint, we can multiply her interpretation: Enoch's existence can make up three generations: the third generation structurally gives Cain his binary self-definition, son / father. His binary self is asymmetrically duplicated in the drama's structure, almost divided into Act 1 and Act 3; the former focuses on Cain as a son, and the latter as a father.

If his splitting self implies the fatal repetition of father/son, or parent / child, is it inevitable that Cain repeats his parents' fate? The answer is yes and no; it is true Byron's conception of history is "a blind series of cycles" (Macgann 249), but the perfect repetition cannot actually be carried out. Though Cain is a repeater who causes the second fall, yet in the ending of the drama, Cain's course is contrasted with Adam's; while Cain begins his new life with his wife and children, Adam proclaims that he will live henceforth alone (3.1.445-446). Cain at first wants Adah to leave him alone; it may be comfortable for Cain to be alone, for he can be or pretend to maintain his nobility or pride intact. A spontaneous independence from his loving family is self-righteous compensation for sin. Unlike his son, Adam shrewdly and successfully escapes from his wife and his responsibility. If so, Cain is a hero who outstrips his father and mother in his acceptance of his responsibility. In Cain's figure the drama is shifted from the mode of being exonerated from responsibility for his action to that of making one action and its incidental consequence - i.e.

responsibility (Beatty 247).⁴

Another example can be seen in the brotherly-doubled connection to Cain's broken silence. Unlike Cain's arrogant silence underlying his family, he speaks just after slaying Abel: his calling God's name whose exclamatory swearword evokes his pleading resonance.

CAIN [*after a moment's stupefaction*]. My hand! 'tis all red,
and with —

What?

[*A long pause. — Looking slowly round*

Where am I? alone! Where's Abel? where

Cain? Can it be that I am he? My brother,

Awake! — why liest thou so on the green earth?

[.]

Why, so — that's well!? thou breath'st! breath upon me!

Oh, God! Oh, God!

ABEL [*very faintly*]. What's he who speaks of God?

CAIN. Thy murderer.

ABEL. Then may God forgive him! [. . .] (3.1.321-335)

Before his acknowledgement of "Thy murder," Cain gives himself the confused questions "Where am I? alone! Where's Abel? where / Cain? Can it be that I am he?" All of which the brothers are depicted as reversible doubles, and where we can see the mobilization of the self-definition. Cain's pronounced identity produces Abel's one as forgiver, for Abel's words in themselves, "Then may God forgive him!" reveals his generous mercy. Cain's confession causes Abel's forgiveness, unlike the following scene where the suspect Cain is questioned in quick succession by his family.

CAIN. Oh! thou dead

And everlasting witness! whose unsinking
 Blood darkens earth and heaven! what thou now art,
 I know not! but if *thou* see'st what *I* am,
 I think thou wilt forgive him, whom his God
 Can ne'er forgive, nor his own soul. — Farewell!
 I must not, dare not touch what I have made thee.
 (3.1.528-534)

As the citation illustrates, Abel is not only Cain's sole god-like forgiver, but also an "everlasting witness" who, though participating in the event, is far from victim / criminal. As both Abel and Adah cannot be his partner in crime, so his combination with Abel, like Adah, is repeatedly splitting and assimilating. If they should become his accomplices completely, he could forget his sin and probably kill other men. His unforgettable self-reproach reverses master / slave between assailant Cain and victim Abel; for Cain's remorse is supposed to continue till his death. Consequently, Cain must go away from the forgiving Abel both mentally and physically by killing him and being banished. As Cain says, "I must not, dare not touch what I have made thee," his parting from Abel is half spontaneous, for he cannot be "one" man until he is independent from his forgiving god-like brother.

Conclusion

In playing the tragic hero in the drama, Cain has to separate himself not only from Abel but also from Adah in terms of the double's oscillation of splitting / assimilating. While the mind's grasp of the self comes from the differentiation between self and other, at the same time its grasp of the world also involves the interplay self and other, the assimilation based on the differentiation from other — for example, Adah's mercy and Enoch's

vicarious weeping. Adah, functioning as Cain's double, assumes a significance which includes the complex relationship between Cain and Abel. Adah sheds a new light on Cain's character and on the world which the readers see from the work.

Notes

1. See Truman Guy Steffan. *Lord Byron's Cain: Twelve Essays and a Text with Variants and Annotations by Truman Guy Steffan*. (Austin: U of Texas P, 1968) 289-296, 309-470.
2. His letter to Murray on November 3 in 1821: *Byron's Letter and Journals*. Vol.9. ed. Leslie A. Marchand (John Murray, 1979) 53-54.
3. The similar pattern can be seen in *The Prisoner of Chillon* (1816); among three imprisoned brothers, the narrator, the eldest, survives in Chillon.
4. He on the premise distinguishes "behavior" from "action"; the former is a mode of being to "tend to blur human responsibility for actions and their consequences", and the latter is a movement of "making through how we choose to act." (241). Cain, namely, changes the man of behavior into that of action.

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