Did Cain Kill Abel? or was it the other way round?

And ye shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free

By Karla von Hofmannsthal

The Problem

This is what we are told in church and school and synagogue: in the beginning God created not only the heavens and the earth but also a nice heterosexual couple, Adam and Eve. The couple, in this narrative, gave birth first to a male called Cain, who

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became a farmer, and then to Abel, who became a “shepherd.”

We are then told that the farmer Cain killed the shepherd Abel, an entirely unprovoked crime in this narrative, and that this crime was the first murder known to man or God.

We are now in the twenty-first century, and nobody alive can claim to have been an eyewitness to these alleged events. But we do know more than a little what the authentic voices of the past can teach us. To reach at the truth, we have to go beyond the conventional twaddle of priest, rabbi, and theologian.

In this article we shall hear a more authentic narrative, one that has passed down to us in the oral and written literature of oppressed peoples of Europe and peoples of color everywhere. This oft-forbidden, hidden, persecuted but very robust tale tells us that a) it was in fact Abel who killed Cain, b) the brothers Cain and Abel had two mothers, Lilith and Eve, and c) the idea of a male “Adam”

\[2\] The Douai and other Catholic versions, the King James and other dominant Protestant versions, and the Jewish Masoretic texts all tell essentially the same tale in the first four chapters of Genesis.

\[3\] Concerning the authenticity of Lilith as the second mother of Abel and Cain, see, inter alia, Raphael Patai, Adam ve-Adama, tr. as Man and Earth; Jerusalem: The Hebrew Press Association, 1941-1942, pp. 19, ff.
as a parent of these brothers is a fabrication of the homophobic, patriarchal officialdom of Western religion. This article can deal with no more than the first part of this liberation narrative, the killing of Cain by Abel.

**The Liberation tradition**

Among those resisting the manufactured consent⁴ to the Cain-Abel fraud, the name of Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) ranks high indeed:

Race d'Abel, voici ta honte:

Le fer est vaincu par l'épieu!⁵

Of course Baudelaire was also the first modern writer to celebrate lesbian love.⁶ No wonder he is so despised by the self-appointed guardians of conventional morality!⁷

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A deeper consideration of the life and work of Baudelaire gives us a clue to why he, alone among his contemporaries in the French literary canon, could grasp the true meaning of the age-old folk wisdom that has been turned upside down in the conventional version of Genesis.

Baudelaire was, before being a Frenchman (he was that too, of course) a man of color. Born in Haiti, deeply immersed in the tradition of Jean Jacques Dessalines (1758-1806) and Toussaint L'Ouverture (1743-1803), he married his comrade Jeanne Duval (?)-1862) in Jacmel (Haiti) in about 1840. Together they devoted a lifetime of study into the false and the true in biblical transmission. Their independent discovery -- although of course they were not the first – that it was Abel who killed Cain, and that the parents were the lesbian couple Lilith and Eve, constituted an intellectual achievement of the very highest order.  

8 Many of the biographers of Baudelaire try to equivocate on these points. But see the work of Lloyd, op. cit., and especially the book by Jean-Paul Sarte, *Baudelaire*, Paris, 1946. See also Fred Stockholder, “Mirrors and Narcissism,” *Theory Culture Society*, vol. 4, 1987, pp. 107-123.
But the Baudelaires were very exceptional. In the sections to follow, we will have little opportunity to refer to writers in the conventional canon; generally speaking, these gentlemen (how rare it is to find women in this group!) always knew on which side their bread is buttered. It is a knowledge that is obviously indispensable for canonic status. To get at more truthful narratives, we will have to search those anonymous sources through which the wisdom of the oppressed of all ages has been preserved: folk tales and folk lore, the scriptures of Third World peoples, and, last but not least, the collective unconscious as revealed to us in the work of Carl Jung and the analytical psychologists.  

“**Shepherd**” and “**Farmer**”

(a) Abel

Bible translations that are promoted by Western religious establishments portray Abel as a “shepherd” (or similar expressions, like “keeper of sheep,” etc.). The Hebrew of the

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Masoretic text, however, speaks of “ro’e tson,” 10 which, in the most ancient traditions, carries quite a different meaning.

We know that the Hebrew ‘ro’e’ is etymologically related to the modern French ‘roué,’ a debauched person. 11 And indeed, the earliest sources portray Abel as disreputable.

But that is only the beginning.

The ancient sources, as they have been preserved in the treasure of popular traditions, show Abel, this “shepherd” of the false bibles, as actually the originator of the rapacious, private-enterprise, wheeling and dealing in livestock that has been part of human history ever since. 12 These early thieves and robbers preyed on the poor and exploited from earliest times. Abel has always been seen, in the traditions of the lower classes, as representing the class

10 B’Reshit 4:2


enemy, the armed general of the exploiting class. In these sources, “Abel” is used as shorthand for later figures of the same type. Over and over, these Abels, in ancient and medieval history, have preyed on farmers and working people, murdering, killing, robbing. And in the early events portrayed in Genesis (in its authentic version) show this first Abel as the killer of his brother Cain.

Perhaps even more instructive than folk tales and ancient scripture, however, is the evidence from archetypes in the recorded dream world of the human race. The great Swiss scholar Carl Jung, among other insurgent scholars, has been able to prove that the conventional Genesis versions are fraudulent.

Wherever we look in this rich depository of human consciousness represented by archetypes, we find an Abel-like predator, wielding the knife of assassination and violation. This figure is always associated with the mercenary dealing in livestock

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14 Andrew S. Birkman, “Abel, the forgotten killer,” in Journal of Gender Bible Studies, forthcoming.

and the robbery of the working farmers. And equally ubiquitous, ruling-class theoreticians have represented “shepherds” as benign and caring. It is the caring of the wolf, of course, not exactly a friend of the sheep!

(b) Cain

The demonization of Cain by the ruling classes throughout history sometimes had a comical side.

In the borough of Brooklyn in the city of New York, working people long ago named one of their streets after Cain, symbol of the working farmer, victim of the rapaciousness of the ruling class. Cain Street persisted until the beginning of the twentieth century. But as bad luck would have it, a group of rich Jewish merchants found a suitable site for their synagogue, an abandoned Protestant church, on that very street. What to do? Tammany politicians were hurriedly canvassed, and one of these gentlemen, an Irish Catholic wardheeler named James Kane (1839-1926), also known as “the silent monarch of the Sixth Ward,”

16 Dave Barry, The shepherd, the angel, and Walter the Christmas miracle dog, New York, Putnam’s, 2006, pp. 329-83.

17 Leonard Benardo and Jennifer Weiss, Brooklyn By Name, New York, 2005, p. 66
graciously agreed to lend his name for a quick name change by City Hall. And so it was that the newly-named “Kane Street Synagogue” was saved the embarrassment of being thought of as a people’s house of worship. But no such Tammany sleight of hand has been able to prevent a steady flow of visitors to this re-named “Kane Street Synagogue,” people of color, working-class New Yorkers, gay, lesbian, transgendered folk, who look to the Cain of old as their tribune. As for James Kane, who remembers him?

What was Cain’s occupation? The conventional Hebrew bible editions say that he [was] “oved adamah,” ‘a tiller of the soil.’ But this interpretation is clearly a distortion of the most original sources. The vowel “o” that modern Jewish (and Christian) versions use here is not justified by the ancient sources. A profound study of these traditional materials reveals, with great clarity, that the initial vowel should be read as “e,” so the correct term is “eved adamah,” a ‘slave of the land.’ So it turns out that, from the


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beginning, as the story was understood by ordinary people from earliest times, Cain was the slave of Abel.

The struggle between Cain and Abel, as the oppressed have always known, was a class struggle. Abel had the power and the weapons, and Cain became his victim, in the first recorded homicide. At least that is the tradition handed down among working people. 21

The Act of Killing

The key passage in Genesis about the alleged killing of Abel by Cain is in chapter 4, verse 8: “... Cain set upon his brother Abel and killed him.” The three-word English expression “and killed him” is rendered in the Hebrew by the single term ‘vayarhargehu,” where the prefix ‘va’ is translated as “and,” the postfix ‘hu’ is

rendered in English as ‘him,’ with the median root letters ‘heh,’ ‘resh,’ ‘gimel,’ (HRG) referring to the verb “to kill.”

In the older Indo-European languages there is a system of inflection that distinguishes, among other things, between a subject and an object, so it will always be clear who kills whom in those languages. But in Hebrew there is no such inflection, and therefore the question of who kills whom, here and elsewhere in the Bible, has to be deduced from word order alone. So the arrangement of the nouns, in this case the proper names, is crucial to our understanding of who is murderer and who is victim.

It is at this point that it becomes clear that the demonization of Cain has no warrant in the authentic Bible sources. The late Professor Harry M. Orlinsky, a distinguished expert on Bible translation, explains the details of conventional Genesis 4:8 misrepresentation, adding

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... such ancient versions as Septuagint, Samaritan, and Targum Jonathan ... not to mention the Peshittan and Vulgate, reject the demonization of Cain. 24

Collective Consciousness

Transmission of the wisdom of the ages, of course, is not restricted to written records. In fact the unwritten tradition is in certain matters more reliable because it is less subject to manipulation by the powers that be.

In the case of the Cain-Abel legend, it turns out that the unwritten transmission has become a bulwark for preserving the truth.

We noted previously the contributions to this subject by Jungian psychologists. But Jungians have certainly not been the only ones to unearth the strata of truth beneath the mountains of fashionable misrepresentation. A careful study of the writings of Susan Deri, Max Pulver, Werner Wolff, Leopold Bellak, and many

24 Op. cit., p. 68
others, reveals that the murder drive, as exemplified by the crime of Abel against Cain, has been discovered in dreams and folk tales throughout the ages.

Nobody has been more specific on the Cain matter than the Hungarian-born psychiatrist Leopold Szondi (1893-1986). Born in the old Austro-Hungarian empire as Leopold Sonnenstein, he Magyarized his name in 1911, following the assimilationist tendency of many Hungarian Jews. He became a physician in Hungary, and during the Second World War was briefly imprisoned at Bergen-Belsen by the Germans. After the war he settled in Switzerland, where I myself had the privilege of meeting with him on several occasions. He practiced a form of psychoanalysis there for many years, until his death in 1986.

In the United States, Szondi was known chiefly as the inventor of the “Szondi test.” But he was also a powerful thinker and theorist on psychoanalysis. Many hold that he was as important as Sigmund Freud. But be that as it may, he was certainly a great

25 Susan Deri, Introduction to the Szondi Test, New York, 1949, Grune & Stratton
pioneer in psychoanalytic circles concerning the place and importance of the collective memory of the human race.

And he devoted two books to Cain, showing, in each, that Cain had been the victim, Abel the perpetrator, at least in the collective unconscious of all the nations that he studied. These books are not available in English. Except for the most courageous of academic libraries, you will search for them in vain in bookstores or on library shelves. The religious establishment has all but succeeded in obliterating the memory of Szondi (only allowing his “test” to be known). But among those small bands who uphold the banner of truth, on all five continents, Szondi cannot, and indeed will not be forgotten. It is largely due to Szondi’s work that there can be no excuse for an educated person to accept the conventional versions that make Cain out to have been a murderer.

Conclusions


27 For current activities of the International Szondi Movement, see http://www.szondiforum.org/
So where are we on this matter? The priests and rabbis of this world, powerfully aided by imperialist governments and their repressive educational establishments, continue to preach the untenable thesis of Cain the murderer. But in most recent times, and especially now that we are in the twenty-first century, the basic truth can no longer be evaded by an ever-growing thinking public. This public, world-wide, is beginning to see the truth, and the truth shall set it free. More and more, Cain the victim will be recognized, let there be no doubt. The general recognition of the truth cannot help but have a salutary effect all the cultures of our planet. This issue, seemingly petty and perhaps unimportant, will yet turn out to be like the first light of the dawn of a new day in all fields of learning.