

A Pre-Biblical Version of the Cain and Abel Story: a Subtle Condemnation of a Dysfunctional Social Arrangement

Abstract:

This paper argues that, in its pre-Biblical version (pre-J), the Cain and Abel story principally dealt with tensions distinctive for dry-farming families identifying the social structure as their main cause. The social structure was problematic because it involved two important imbalances, one between the spouses and one between the children. Pre-J offers a novel solution to problems caused by these interfamilial imbalances: rather than accepting their pre-established social roles, people should develop a merit-based social structure. This is why Yahweh says that acceptance and honour are in doing what is right. Focusing on a pre-J narrative in this way and situating the story within the broader motive of sibling rivalry, solve three puzzles: Yahweh's preference (God challenges unjust social institutions), Cain's reactions (he is angry because his expectations were unmet and depressed because he thought that this was his failure), and Yahweh's final forgiveness to Cain (the conflict was not due to Cain's wicked character).

Keywords: Genesis 4, sibling rivalry, Middle Eastern mythology, conflict.

1. Introduction

The Cain and Abel story is one of the most perplexing Old Testament narratives. Disregarding some minor dissimilarities, both received versions of the story (MT and LXX) generate minimally three important puzzles. The first concerns God's preferences (vv. 4b–5a). In the MT group of texts, Yahweh regards Abel and his offering (מנחה) but not Cain and his offering (מנחה).¹ In LXX, the message is even stronger: God “looked on” (ἐπεῖδεν) Abel and his gift (δῶρον) but “paid no attention,” or even “rejected, forsook” (οὐ προσέσχεν), Cain and

¹ מנחה (minhāh) was used in its general meaning “gift, tribute” (Waltke 1986: 366; Lewis 1994: 482; Byron 2008: 5).

his sacrifice (θυσία). Since it is not immediately clear what caused these preferences, the deity appears to have acted capriciously. The second puzzle involves Cain's behaviour. Cain lacks a motive to kill his brother (he is angry with God) and his reaction to God's preferences is rather peculiar (v. 5b): he is both angry and depressed and these two emotions do not fit well together – anger increases bodily activity whereas depression slows it down (Gruber 1978: 90–92; 1983: 252–260). The third puzzling thing is that Yahweh exempts Cain from what appears to be a deserved punishment: why would the deity fail to regard Cain and his offering for no apparent reason only to forgive him later for such a terrible crime? There is no logic in that.

These puzzles are typically resolved by suggesting that Yahweh is unjust, capricious, or that Cain is wicked, LXX Gen. 4:7 suggests that Cain did not divide the offering correctly or that his “sacrifice” was (in some sense) of lesser quality than Abel's “gift,”² and some scholars argue that the message is that Yahweh's acts are unexplainable (see, von Rad 1972: 104; Brueggemann 1982: 56; Wenham 1987: 104; Kim 2001: 76; Rhu 2004: 495; Moberly 2009: 98–99; Pfoh 2009: 38–45; Perry 2005: 258–275; Swenson 2006: 379). However, while the idea that God is unjust or capricious is theologically problematic, other solutions are *ad hoc* and mainly designed to avoid this problematic explanation. Another plausible answer is that some historical events or ideologies motivated the storyline and that placing the story in a proper context will explain the deity's peculiar preference. I want to suggest something along these lines: I will try to reconstruct the story's pre-Biblical version (*pre-J* henceforth) that I will then

² The LXX version of Gen. 4:7 and the different renderings of מנחה seem to involve the translator's exegetical harmonization. One common hypothesis is that “gift” vs. “sacrifice” terminology suggests that only Abel's offering was brought with love, and some scholars (e.g., Hayward 2009: 103–104) suggest that Abel brings a gift (δῶρον) because he gives everything to God, whereas Cain's sacrifice (θυσία) is an offering meant to be divided between the altar and the worshiper, and Cain did not divide it correctly (he kept some of it for himself). Theories positing that the translator misread verse 7 (e.g., Enslin 1967: 88–90) struggle to explain why θυσία is only used for Cain's מנחה in LXX Genesis (see, Weyers 1993: 52; Scarlata 2012: 54–55).

put into its relevant socio-historical context and observe as a part of the general trope of sibling rivalry.

The pre-J version of this story is one of many stories designed to deal with sibling violence that was prevalent in agrarian societies of that time but, according to my analysis, this story is an exception because it suggests that this violence was caused by (social) inequalities within the households rather than by envy or Cain's wicked character. And pre-J proposes a radically different solution to this violence: while other stories belonging to the same trope are designed to encourage people (e.g., brothers) to accept their socially pre-established roles with grace, pre-J urges his audience to redefine their dysfunctional social structure. On this hypothesis, God's preference is not a rejection of Cain and his offering but rather a rejection of *social roles* that were forced upon both brothers from their birth. Accordingly, God's message that acceptance (or even one's dignity) is in doing what is right (Hughes 2004: 104; Brett 2004: 36) means that the relevant social structure should be based on personal qualities and effort rather than birthright. This hypothesis also makes sense of Cain's reaction: he is angry because his expectations are unmet and depressed because he experiences this as being caused by his failure as the firstborn. Finally, God's overall behaviour also becomes consistent: God does not regard the social status (the institution) of the firstborn (Cain just occupies that role) and he shows mercy towards Cain as a person, which is consistent with Yahweh's instructions from verses 6 and 7.

In short, I will defend three complementary ideas. First, the relevant socio-historical context can help us explain the storyline of the pre-J version of this story and this could be used to make sense of the story's received version: unlike other stories featuring sibling rivalry, pre-J advocates against an unjust social structure and teaches people to seek acceptance in doing what is right rather than conforming to their pre-established social roles. Second, later

redactions added many new layers to this story and, in so doing, they made it even more sophisticated and established connections with other stories of the Primeval Events. However, they also blurred this original message, which, as a result, generated some of the well-known inconsistencies in the storyline. Therefore, third, we can make a much better sense of the current version of the story by reconstructing the pre-J source.

Because my starting assumption is that identifying the socio-historical context makes sense of much of the pre-J storyline, in search of this context, I start by analysing some theories that make similar claims. Section 2 rejects the idea that Gen 4 is designed to legitimize some historical events. Section 3 discusses the view that Yahweh's preference symbolizes and explains the social status of a group of people associated with Cain, the Kenites. I reject this hypothesis (§3.1–§3.3) and offer a novel contextually-informed interpretation of verse 1 (§3.4). In Section 4, I further elaborate my ideas from Subsection 3.4 by arguing that the right historical context is the one involving a simple dry-farming household riddled by social imbalances between the members of that household. These inequalities motivated the pre-J narrative. The first is the imbalance between the *institution* (social role) of a husband and the institution of a wife (§4.1) and the second is the imbalance between the *institution* of an older brother and the institution of a younger brother (§4.2). In short, the pre-J conflict is not between individuals or groups but between pre-assigned social constructs (social roles). On my view, Yahweh's preference challenges these institutions that cause imbalances and generate tension within dry-farming families. Accordingly, Cain's reactions are caused by failed expectations (anger) and perceived loss of self-worth (depression). Section 5 argues that while the analogies between Cain and the Kenites are accidental in pre-J, the connection between them is not completely fortuitous – later traditions added this layer to the story. Section 6 concludes the discussion.

2. Explaining some Historical Events

Some theories that attribute the storyline to the Yahwist source (J) say that Yahweh's preference is a metaphor that presents some historical events or practices in a positive or negative light. According to one such view, the story is a critical recollection of the relentless dispossession of peasant-owned land by the Davidic monarchy, which had a professional administration that provided appropriate conditions for J to begin its work (e.g., West 2006: 404–409; Davies 2006: 11–27). On this hypothesis, J used the story to legitimize this dispossession: God's disregard for Cain's effort signals that the peasant's harvest was not an acceptable offering while Abel represents the victorious groups and the Israelite monarchy as victims (Mosala 1989: 33–37; see West 1990: 299–320; Brett 1995: 71; Tourage 2011: 4). However, because it is possible to draw opposite conclusions from the same premises in this particular case, some scholars write that J argues against city-building and civilization. Accordingly, Abel's blood symbolizes the cry of the oppressed and the story is understood as depicting the righteous peasantry oppressed by the wicked (Byron 2012: 347–348).

Both explanations are problematic. The archaeological findings do not suggest that the Davidic monarchy possessed an administrative apparatus sufficient to enable the collecting and writing of national epics. J was active no earlier than the last quarter of the 8th or 6th century B.C.E. For example, the theory claiming that the non-P (J and E) *primaevial* history was based on Mesopotamian traditions dates J no earlier than the 7th century B.C.E. (Levin 2007: 228, 230; Gertz 2012: 133). One could argue that a 7th-century J retroactively justifies or condemns the disposition of the land, but David's presumed empire could not have made this possible. The biblical ideas of a centralized state and bureaucratic organization seem to reflect the state of Egypt, whereas the biblical maps portraying the Israelite state as the new Eden mimic the maps borrowed from Egypt and Babylonia (Havrelock 2007: 654, 660–664). At best, the monarchy was an unfortified transitional early state capable of controlling only a few urban

centres (Thompson 1987: 28–40; Whitelam 2003: 122–176; Rogerson and Davies 2005: 66–68, 225; Finkelstein and Silberman 2006: 261–292, esp. 274, 281; Grabbe 2007: 65–122; Albertz 2010: 31–45; Ben-Ami and Wazana, 2013: 368–382). Therefore, these hypotheses cannot explain God’s preference. This is not the correct socio-historical context.

3. A Group That God (Dis-)Favours

It is often said that the brothers symbolize groups that God (dis)favours and that Yahweh’s observations represent that (dis-)favour. According to one popular view, Cain is the eponymous ancestor of the tribe of Kenites (*Qeni* or *Qayni*). On the most basic version of this theory, the Kenites were known to the Israelites both as nomads and as city dwellers, and generally hostile; thus, their ancestor Cain figures as the first murderer, the first nomad, and the first city builder (Zimmerli 1978: 171–172; Graves and Patai 2005: 96; Hendel 2005: 11). On this view, Yahweh’s disregard symbolizes displeasure with the Kenites, whereas Cain murders Abel because he is wicked and violent, just like the people whom he represents.

What lends support to this view is the fact that Cain and the Kenites seem to share seven features: city-building, wandering, peculiar social status, the shared cult of YHWH, the mark, the name, and Cain’s descendants – Enoch and Tubal-Cain (see, Day 2009: 335–346). I will argue that these features cannot solve the puzzles from the introduction (§3.1–§3.4) but that there is a connection between Cain and the Kenites: they descend from Tubal-Cain (§5).

3.1 City-building and Wandering

Cain’s behaviour is sometimes understood as portraying a wanderer who settled down, paralleling the experience of the Kenites. However, it seems odd for a wandering vagrant to settle down, while Cain’s founding of a city sits uneasily with the biblical assumption that Babel is the first city. Therefore, some scholars (e.g., Gunkel 1901: 2; Hendel 2008: 95–97)

believe that originally distinct stories were joined together in Gen 4 and that Cain amalgamates two different characters, a patriarch and a farmer. I will argue that these activities should be understood by appealing to the pre-J layer and that they were originally intended as metaphors.

City-building is easy to explain. The dominant organizational element of Canaan society was the kinship group and there was tension between less-kin-based urban Canaanite centres and more kin-based countryside; urban centres attempted to extend control over the countryside (Younker 2003: 159–160). Because people of the Iron Age Palestine could survive only as part of a household or in cities (cities and walls were primarily built for protection), city-building is an expected consequence of Cain's filial apostasy and it symbolizes loneliness and fear – he needed to protect himself since he was now alone. This behaviour principally emphasises the importance of a harmonious household for the individual's survival, members of the household relied deeply on each other, and this interdependence is an important motive in pre-J and other stories of that time (see, §4.2).

Loneliness, depression, and fear are consistent with wandering if we plausibly understand wandering as a metaphor for depression or some kind of mental disturbance (Barré 2001: 177–187; Moudhy 2014: e.g., 156, 166). Because people of that time did not have our modern diagnostic categories, rather than referring to mental disorders (e.g., depression) directly, they described their behavioural manifestations (e.g., wandering, changed countenance); that is to say, they treated mental disorders as disorders of behaviour (Reynolds and Kinnier Wilson 2014: 2614; Moudhy 2014: 32–35). With this in mind, I will argue that, by building a city and wandering about, Cain seems to exhibit stereotypical behavioural manifestations of what we today call sadness, depression, anxiety, and anger. Here are my reasons.

Behavioural manifestations of wandering about – agitation and aimless locomotion (the inability to sit still) – characterize depression, and wandering is also a sign of depression in

Sumerian and Akkadian literature. For example, grieving over his friend Enkidu (*ANET*, 90–91) is one of the reasons why Gilgamesh “roams the steppe” (Kenneth 1999: 113) and the Akkadian *Diagnostic Handbook* associates *rapādu* “to wander” with disorders with a strong mental component, like *ašuštu* (depression). A person can be seized by or fall ill with *rapādu*, while pale or gloomy face or changed countenance are non-verbal expressions of distress (*ašāšū*), depression (*ašuštu*), or sadness (e.g., *šapālu*) throughout ancient Semitic literature (Moudhy 2014: 150–152, 236). The Bible describes depression as resulting from divine displeasure – Hos 9:17, Job 15:23 – or from a traumatic experience, such as the death of a loved one (Barré 2001:187, 177–181; see Kselman 2002: 275–277). These two causes of depression can easily be identified in the Cain and Abel story, which is full of behavioural manifestations of depression and distress.

For example, Cain’s sadness and depression from verse 5 (Goldenberg 2003: 180–181; Moudhy 2014: 102–104) indicate that he interpreted God’s surprising regard as displeasure with Cain’s effort and Cain himself, whereas the depressive reaction from verses 13–14 resulted from his sudden realising the gravity of his behaviour and his fear of an uncertain future, which is why he built a city. The sin that is crouching (lurking) in v. 7 could also be connected to Cain’s mental state. Disorders like depression were regarded as caused by evil demons (spirits) or by the anger of personal gods (Reynolds and Kinnier Wilson 2014) and the Akkadian *Diagnostic Handbook* also describes a man who “is continually worried (*ašāšū*), and his face continually becomes pale” by saying that “the Lurker [the Demon] has struck him, from (when) it touched and connected with him” (from Moudhy 2014: 143–146). Yahweh could be suggesting in verse 7 that humans “invite” illnesses or distress by not acting rightly, and the presence of the Lurker-sin could also explain Cain’s (apparently) insufficiently severe punishment. In verse 14, Cain exhibits feelings of worthlessness, excessive guilt, and recurrent thoughts of death, which are clinical (behavioural) symptoms of what we today call depression

(*DSM-5*: 160–161). Finally, he overemphasizes his punishment by adding to God’s words from Gen 4:11–12 that he shall be hidden from God’s face (shame, sense of worthlessness) and that anyone may kill him (self-destructive thoughts, anxiety, and panic are also typical for depressed people).

Therefore, insofar as the received storyline is not substantially different from its pre-biblical version, Cain’s behaviour should be understood as symbolizing his overall mental state and his apostasy rather than as constituting a historical connection with the Kenites. As my analysis will suggest, one important motive in pre-J is a complex, behaviourally described, agony that the first-born son goes through: he is first overprotected and loved too much (§3.4), then he thinks that he and his efforts are discarded in favour of the inferior brother (§4.2), this causes him terrible suffering (§3.1), (due to the influence of the lurking daemon) he mismanages his emotions and loses control over his reasoning and behaviour (God’s words from vv. 6–7 have no effect), he bursts in rage (verse 8) only to finally realise his guilt and fall right back into severe depression and self-blame (God’s words from vv. 10–11 have an immediate effect).

3.2 Social Status of the Kenites

Some scholars believe that Cain’s descendants had a reputation as people who were respected but also feared and that this high regard was a result of Cain’s impunity and the mark set upon him by Yahweh, whereas the cause for fear was their vengeful character described in Lamech’s boast. Supposedly, this corresponds to the social status of the Kenites: some hypothesize that they were respected and feared because of the mystical character of their profession, metalsmithing. Metalsmithing made Kenites both marginal and important: as bearers of profound knowledge and powers, smiths were often viewed as “sacred,” but in an ambivalent sense, since they were also dangerous (McNutt 2003: 17). And Moberly (2007: 17, 24) argues that Cain’s mark is not visible but is a reputation embodied in Lamech’s boast.

Cain's behaviour and the behaviour of his descendants – namely, intensified malice and blood vengeance – are their defence (see, Clines 2004: 73).

This hypothesis answers all three questions. Cain's wicked character explains both why Yahweh does not regard him and his offering and why Cain kills Abel. Also, Yahweh does not exempt Cain from his deserved punishment but rather recognizes an already existing trait that protects Cain. However, the hypothesis also overemphasizes both the status of the Kenites and the Lamech's boast. The Kenites did not exercise blood vengeance, they were mentioned only in a few biblical passages (Gen 15:19; Num 24:21–22; Judg 1:16, 4:11, 4:17, 5:24; 1 Sam 15:6, 27:10, 30:29; 1 Chron 2:55), and we have no reason to believe that they were feared. In fact, Moses was married to a Midianite woman (Judg 1:16; 4:11), while both the Kenites and the Rechabites were regarded as friendly, which makes them unique among Israel's neighbours (Sparks 2009: 22–24). The view that Cain's mark is a reputation embodied in Lamech's boast is also problematic: Lamech has killed only one person, which makes him no more dangerous than Cain. Lamech just wants the reputation of a dangerous, violent person; he is boasting. Therefore, plausibly assuming that the main story comes from pre-J, we have no reason to assume that pre-J intended Yahweh's preferences or Cain's behaviour to explain the reputation of the Kenites – they did not seem to have a particularly important reputation that needed to be explained.

3.3 The Cult of YHWH

On the Midianite-Kenite hypothesis, the pre-Israelite origin of Yahweh's cult indicates that the story is a critical recollection of the period in which Kenites were the original worshippers of Yahweh, but their cult was primitive. Accordingly, Yahweh's preference mirrors God's selection of the Israelites and rejection of the Kenites' primitive cult.

This theory is consistent with the marginal role of the Kenites and Israel's friendly attitude towards them, some Kenites (or closely related groups) the Bible mentions could be devotees of Yahweh, and the mark of Cain could parallel their tribal marks. Also, it has been suggested that the theory preserves the parallel between Cain's impunity, on the one side, and the Kenites' immunity from the Israelites' aggression in 1 Sam 15:6, on the other. However, the theory is also problematic. The immunity (1 Sam 15:6) was not granted based on their ethnicity, but rather because of their valuable metalsmithing services and, in the words of Saul himself, due to their kindness towards Israel at the time of Exodus. Besides, the aggression was directed at the Amalekites (see, North 1964: 381–385; Blenkinsopp 2008: 140–144; Chung 2011: 251). Therefore, the usefulness of their profession explains the Kenites' marginal role and Israel's friendly attitude better than their supposed connection to Cain.

3.4 Cain's Name

Another parallel might be the name. Cain is the name of a tribe (e.g., Num 24:22; Judg 4:11) and a town in Judah close to Kenite country (Josh 15:57), and it might be translated as “blacksmith,” which matches the occupation of the Kenites. However, Westermann (1992: 31) observes that, although *Qayin* seems to be derived from the Semitic root, it appears only in Arabic at a later epoch in the meaning of “blacksmith” and it cannot be found in biblical Hebrew (see, Hensel 2011: 46). Furthermore, because it has three similar semantic domains – “to form, fashion or forge,” “to produce, create,” and “to acquire, own” – and several etymological connections, the root of the name (קין) allows numerous translations. Augustine (*Civitate Dei* 15–17: 105), Philo (*Cher.* 41, 47), Josephus Flavius (*Antiquities* 1.52–1.71), and scholars like Vermeulen (2014: 34) understand it as “ownership, possession, and acquisition,” while other existing translations are “envy,” “jealousy,” “reed,” and even “song” (see, Franxman 1979: 65, 71; Gesenius 1906: 883–884, 888–889; Hess 1992: 806–807; *APOT II*, 138). So, there is a lack of consensus on how to exactly understand the name, and due to very

good reasons. To solve this and related mysteries, I proceed to defend four interconnected claims.

First, in pre-J, Cain's name reflects his close relationship with his mother and highlights the conversion of the creation of אִשָּׁה ('iššāh) from אִישׁ ('îš) – Cain's name signals that she forged him from herself, that he is her precious son. Second, the peculiar structure of verse 1 makes sense on the thesis that it indicates that there is an important inequality between the spouses in a dry-farming household that, in turn, worsens the inequality between siblings since mothers turn their attention towards older sons. Third, the pre-J story is developed to deal with these two imbalances. Fourth, Yahweh's preference and instructions from verse 5 make good sense on the hypothesis that Yahweh rejects the pre-established social roles imposed on the members of the dry-farming society, since these roles cause interfamilial tensions. My defence of these claims starts with an analysis of verse 1.

The literal meaning of MT verse 1 contains too many peculiarities for this to be a coincidence: Eve calls her son a man, אִישׁ ('îš), which she has created or forged (קָנִיתִי/qānîṭî, from קָנָה/qnh) with (אֵת/’et) God (יְהוָה).³ To understand the verse, we need to explain (i) why the baby boy is being referred to as man, (ii) why the mother says that she “created” or “forged” this man, and (iii) why the deity is mentioned. I will argue that pre-J's intended message is in the non-literal meaning of the statement, that this message answers all three questions, and that we need to understand the relevant socio-historical context to identify this message. Once we have this message, the meaning of the name reveals itself.

³ Some propose that the translation is “get, acquire” (e.g., Von Rad 1972: 103), but this seems odd considering the אֵת-יְהוָה clause (see, Elwolde 2006: 146–147; Brayford 2007: 248; Whybray 2010: 61; Brueggemann 1982: 56).

Interestingly, two nouns that refer to a “man” – אָדָם (’ādām) and אִישׁ (’îš) – appear in verse 1. An unnamed man, אָדָם, “knows”⁴ his wife, who then conceives and gives birth to another man, אִישׁ. Using the noun אִישׁ in this context is very peculiar, not only because it was nowhere else used to refer to a baby boy (Wenham 1987: 101) but also because the mother might be saying that she created Cain with God, which explains why some ancient exegetes think that he was born with extraordinary abilities or that his father is of a divine/angelic origin. For instance, Latin and Armenian versions of *Vita* (21:3) say that he was born as a full-grown man; another interpretation is that he was lustrous (Charlesworth 1985: 264). Plausibly, the similarity of Cain (קַיִן) and Kewan (כִּיּוֹן), “Saturn,” together with the tradition where his father is Samael (the devil) or an angel (Targum *Pseudo Jonathan*), prompted the legend of his lustrous face (Levine 1976: 73; Kugel 1998: 147–148; Ginzberg 2003: 103, nn. 6). This interpretation could also be based on a very old survival of an Egyptian tradition in which the mother is a goddess who has born a child with the creator-god (Hoffmeier 1983: 47; Strange 2004: 349–350). Yet, it could be that the idea of Cain’s lustrous face echoes the *Cave of Treasures* (2.13–14), which described Adam’s face glowing like the face of the sun. Some Muslim and Jewish traditions believe that Cain was special because he was born in the Garden (Kueny 2008: 115–116), and other interpretations also exist (see, Royse 1988/1989: 221–223).

Because of these peculiarities, there are various accounts of verse 1. Allow me to discuss them by focusing on their main ideas rather than chronologically. Stein distinguishes five senses of אִישׁ: agent, householder, authority, subordinate, and representative. And he argues that this is a term of affiliation, that it often situates the referent in relation to a group, and that

⁴ Although יָדָע (yāda’), “to know,” was sometimes understood as saying that אָדָם learned something about Eve – e.g., that she had engendered Cain with Satan, a fallen angel, or a serpent (Targum Pseudo-Jonathan Gen 4:1, Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer 21, Genesis Rabba 18:6, 1 Enoch 69:6, 2 Enoch 31:5; 1 John 3:10–12, [Gnostic] Gospel of Philip 61:5–10, 4 Macc 18:7–8) – the verb is consistently used as an euphemism for sexual intercourse (Stone 1996: 7; van Ruiten 2003: 6; Hendel 2008: 96; Hauser 1980: 299) and, thus, this is the most likely translation.

it, unlike אָדָם, lays in the semantic domain of relational terms (Stein 2008: 2–24; 2014; see, Crown 1974: 110–112; Grant 1977: 2–11; Hoftijzer and Jongeling 1995: 118–120). Because וַיֵּאֵר was often used to convey a relation where a member typifies or represents a group or category (e.g., Gen 43:17, 19), Stein (2008: 7–9, 23) translates the exclamation with “I have created a member (of humankind),” whereas Speiser (1960: 159–160) understands it as “I have created a member (of a family).” The *Contemporary Torah* (Stein and Meyers 2006: 6) offers “I have created a person” since וַיֵּאֵר can designate a human being without regard to gender (see, Clines 1993: 221–222). However, because Israelites already understood identity as relational – individuals were primarily members of groups (Meyers 2012a: 118–122) – using וַיֵּאֵר to highlight this feature strikes me as unnecessary. Why would a pre-J mother want to say that she created a member of humankind? I think that, in the pre-J layer of the text, she has a rather small group in mind and that Cain’s name symbolises belonging to this group. Allow me to explain.

The mother says that she has קָנָה this man אֱת־יְהוָה (’et-Yahweh) and the fact that comitative (companionship) nuance of אִתָּא was used might indicate that God physically participated in the conception. Dictionaries typically solve this problem by positing that the verse involves an exception to the rule (e.g., von Rad 1972: 103), taking the instrumental nuance of אִתָּא, i.e., “with the help of,” as the applicable meaning (e.g., *BDB*, 85–86; Waltke and O’Connor 1990: 195; Arnold and Choi 2003: 101). In LXX, Eve acquired (ἐκτησάμην) the man: “אֱת־יְהוָה” is rendered as “διὰ τοῦ θεοῦ.” Scarlata (2012: 33) writes that διὰ, unlike אִתָּא, demonstrates the mother’s dependency on God and conveys a sense of humility and Sarna (1989: 32) writes that אִתָּא often has the sense of ‘together with’.

These interpretations are consistent with theological views of the time: early Israelites imagined Yahweh as a co-creator of each human and the motive where an individual assists a

specific god in the creation of humanity is a familiar idea in the Middle East. Therefore, although the instrumental nuance might imply that God is like a tool, on a plausible interpretation, the mother implies that she assists Yahweh in the creation of Cain: the אשה ('iššāh), brings forth an אִישׁ together with Yahweh just as the אִדְמָה (āḏāmāh) brings forth an אָדָם together with Yahweh (van Wolde 1991: 27–28). However, because יָדַע is a euphemism for sexual intercourse between אָדָם and אִשָּׁה (see note 4), the deity cannot be the child's father; thus, we should not think that the comitative nuance of אִתּוֹ implies that the deity physically participated in Cain's conception. Nevertheless, we can safely assume that the idea was that Yahweh was helping her to get through a difficult childbirth, i.e., "creation" (similarly, Rösel 1994: 102; however, Bokovoy 2013).

I will not be making a radical claim if I say that Cain and Abel were not initially sons of the first human couple. Interestingly, however, even though most scholars accept this hypothesis, pretty much no one interprets this story from within the theoretical framework entailed by it. This is not surprising or wrong, of course, given the purpose of Biblical exegesis, but it may leave some important secrets unsolved. The insight that we need to appreciate now is that, in a pre-Biblical version of the story, the exclamation was not made by Eve but rather by an unidentified Early Iron Age woman. The אָדָם–אִדְמָה connection does not exist in pre-J. In pre-J, an unidentified woman, אִשָּׁה, gave birth to Cain, who was not a son of Adam but a son of אָדָם, an unidentified commoner – since אָדָם is usually translated as "man," "humankind," or "commoner" (Kutler 1982: 73–77). Adding this story to stories of the Primeval Events added another layer to its storyline and changed the characters by assigning them specific personal names (Adam and Eve), which substantially enriched it but also blurred the story's older layers and eliminated the hints necessary for understanding the storyline.

Plausibly, because pre-J did not use שׂוֹאֵל to explain the child's gender (the child has a male name), the intention was to contrast the child, שׂוֹאֵל , with his father, אֲדָמָה – implicating that the two men are somewhat different. Because the father is represented by a non-relational whereas the son by a relational noun, the contrast seems to be in that שׂוֹאֵל has a specific relational role, and because the mother is making the exclamation, this role must be that of a son. From this, we can infer several important insights.

The first insight is that explanations saying that the offering was rejected because the ground was cursed because of the Fall (e.g., Spina 1992: 319–322; Galambush 1993: 35) are incorrect: because Cain was initially a son of an unspecified commoner, the Fall could not have motivated the storyline. This is not to say that the current version of the story does not contain this message, later reworkings might have added this layer to it, but it is to say that this was not initially the reason for Yahweh's selective regard. Relatedly, since the events did not happen shortly after the Fall, we should not assume that Cain did not know what murder was. The second insight is that Cain did not get this name because of the Kenites but rather because he was “crafted” or “forged” by his mother. The connection between Cain and the Kenites exists, of course, but it is not intended by pre-J; rather, it was also developed later when Tubal-Cain was added to Cain's genealogy (see, §5). Finally, the most important insights concern the relationships between Cain's parents and between Cain and his mother: the name of the boy hints at a special connection between him and the mother and the mother is obviously trying to downplay the role of the father. So, we see that this verse is not just about Cain's birth. The relationships between members of the family in general seem to be a very important part of its message.

According to my analysis, verse 1 has a very sophisticated meaning: it contains the relevant socio-historical context (see, §4), the relevant backstory (i.e., Cain being the cherished son),

and it even motivates the plot (Yahweh's preference and the subsequent message). It gives us everything we thought we did not have. Verse 1 is not a just verse but rather a beautiful, heart-breaking story of a woman who has uplifted her significance and social position by giving birth to her first son. Its meaning is not in what it literally says but rather in what it communicates. And it communicates that, once upon a time, there lived a commoner (אדם) and his wife (אשה), who – and this is contextually implicated (see below) – depended on him and was subordinate to him. But one day, she got pregnant with her man and she gave birth to a beautiful baby boy, who completely turned her world around. She is no longer a woman (אשה) of a man (איש) (head of the household) but a creator of a *new* man (*new* head of the household). And she crafted this new man from herself, with the help of Yahweh, who was by her side during the difficult labour (את־יהוה seems to imply that she suffered during the childbirth and that she is grateful to Yahweh for giving her the necessary strength).

Because an important part of the message communicated by verse 1 is contextually implicated, I proceed to reconstruct these implicatures by discussing the relevant context – viz., the relationships among the members of the dry-farming household – in more detail. These relationships are exceptionally important.

4. Dyadic Social Imbalances

4.1 Spousal Imbalance

Thus far, I outlined my reconstruction of the pre-J verse 1 and argued that the verse subtly hints that there was a non-negligible imbalance between the spouses in dry-farming households. I will now reconstruct the relevant socio-historical context and defend my reconstruction of the verse by showing how the spousal imbalance complicates relationships between siblings in the household even further. My main idea is this: pre-J says that an אדם (commoner) rather than an איש (husband, man) knows his אשה (wife), and אשה crafts an איש

(man) rather than a son. Although it is said that אִשָּׁה had known his wife, it is not said that Cain is in his image and, because the mother only mentions herself and Yahweh, she likely intends to make the father's role appear less important. The names of characters given by pre-J, the wordplay from verse 1, and the tension between the brothers make good sense on the hypothesis that the pre-J story addresses inequalities between the spouses and between the sons that are typical causes of conflicts in dry-farming households. The imbalance between the spouses is not dominant but it is important because it makes the imbalance between the sons even worse. So, let us see what this imbalance looked like.

In Israelite households, men were heads of families with certain authority over wives and children. Although women's roles were important, the wife's social position depended on her children: becoming a mother would improve a woman's social position by giving her relative equality with the husband (see, Marsman 2003: 122–153, 252–291; van der Toorn 2004: 427–429; Meyers 2012a: 118–122; Stiebert 2013). The spousal imbalance naturally turns the dominated spouse's affection to children and away from her husband, which we also see in this story. Once we have the right socio-historical context in place, we can plausibly say that the Gen 4:1 exclamation comes from a woman feeling relieved after having given birth to a male child: the allegory is that, by being an אִשָּׁה, the son takes his father's place as the dominant male figure in the life of אִשָּׁה and uplifts her social status. The verse emphasizes the reciprocal mother-son relationship (ʾiššāh-ʾîš) as the conversion of the husband-wife (ʾîš-ʾiššāh) relationship: in a conversion of the creation of ʾiššāh from ʾîš, ʾiššāh now creates the son (see, Galambush 1993: 44; Schneider 2008: 172; Mann 2021: 81–85) who, in return, gives her the identity of a mother. Therefore, because we have good reasons to believe that קָנָה likely originates from a pre-biblical tradition (it is inconsistent with biblical vernacular that typically uses לָדָא “to bear/conceive”) and because the earliest Hebrew conception of creation sees it as

a species of craftsmanship, אִשָּׁה seems to imply that the woman crafted or forged this אִישׁ from herself (see, Katz 1954: 130–131; Bokovoy 2013: 32, 19–35).

There is an additional interesting perspective on the mother's exclamation. Human characters usually misinterpret their situation in this story whereas the deity, who is the voice of the author, sets things straight (Prince 1982: 10–16). We see this in the Cain and Abel story as well: God warns Cain that sin is crouching at his door, reminds him that Abel is his brother, tells him that there is no reason to be angry, and so on (Gordon 2011: 195–210). However, the mother does not misinterpret the situation; rather, she subtly refuses the passive role in the birth of children. This is why she, quite surprisingly, names the child and does not mention the father (similarly, Mann 2021: 84, 95). Her peculiar behaviour caused some people to think that the character of אִשָּׁה emerged from the female goddess Asherah, initially worshipped alongside Yahweh and then merged into Yahweh (Ackerman 2006: 189–192, 196), and some say that she is a fusion of two characters, one of which is the creator goddess Mami from the Atrahasis epic "Creation of Man by the Mother Goddess" (*ANET*: 99–100; Kikawada 1972: 33–37). These hypotheses are problematic. Typically, the man is the creative force of conception, אָדָם knows his wife; he is the subject and she is the object. However, in this story, the wife presents herself as the main agent of crafting thereby directly contradicting the first part of the verse. And, typically, Asherah is Yahweh's companion, a procreator; however, in this story, the mother says that Yahweh is her companion (who helped her with a difficult childbirth).

We see in verse 1 that pre-J developed a radically different female character and his idea seems to be quite ingenious: אִשָּׁה wants to subtly diminish, though not completely negate, the importance of male elements with respect to קַיִן of Cain and elevate her own social importance even more than what the role of a mother normally carries. Omitting the father and assigning God a commutative role is important for the mother, and it explains the origin of Cain's name.

Because creating implies owing (אדם was formed from אדמה and belongs to אדמה) and because קין echoes קנה, Cain's name likely represents someone who was crafted and implies belonging to the one who did the crafting (e.g., Katz 1954: 130–131). Because Cain is not in the image of his father and because Yahweh's contribution is facilitatory, it follows that Cain, the איש, is in the image of אשה. He is her privileged, precious son: he gives her her identity as much as she is giving him his. Accordingly, pre-J's intention was not that קין has a clear, etymologically reconstructable meaning, such as “blacksmith” or “possession.” Rather, it is there to embellish and proliferate associations to crafting and representing; it symbolizes the mother's love towards her firstborn son (similarly, Kass 1996: 20).

In conclusion, according to my analysis, pre-J verse 1 subtly hints at an imbalance between the spouses that causes the mother to turn her attention away from her husband and towards the firstborn son. But this shift is not what causes the imbalance between the sons. This imbalance already exists; the mother's love only makes it more apparent. So, how serious was the inequality between the brothers in dry-farming households?

4.2. Sibling Imbalance

This story is sometimes described as a part of a popular trope that portrays conflicts between ancient nomads and farmers (Speiser 1964: 31; Good 2011: 47; Glouberman 2024: 6; see van den Brink, Bromley, and Chavas 1995: 373–399; Zucker 2020: 8). Quarrels between a shepherd and a farmer also occur in the Sumerian myths “Dumuzi and Enkimdu” and “Emesh and Enten.” On this view, the story is a metaphor for the disturbing antagonism between farmers and herders competing for the same land. However, because farmers are the heroes in these myths, this hypothesis is inconsistent with Yahweh's preference: the goddess Inanna, for instance, chooses Enkimdu, the farmer-god, over Dumuzi (*ANET*, 41–42). More importantly, ancient pastoral and agricultural economies were deeply interdependent (Baier 1976: 3–7, 9;

Levenson 1993: 73; Schwartz 1997: 178; Graves and Patai 2005: 94; Barker 2012: 84–91, 93–94). Cain and Abel were not competing in this sense at all. The early Israelite household food system was a combination of dry farming and small-animal herding; a single farmer was insufficient in this labour pattern.

The pre-J narrative makes much more sense on the thesis that it addresses only problems burdening the relationship between siblings from a typical dry-farming household and that it criticizes some features of spousal inequality and primogeniture. The mother’s excessive love intensifies the existing imbalance between the brothers but she should not be blamed for it: the imbalance is social in nature. Cain is a worker of the soil not because humans were created from the ground (*contra*, e.g., Jørstad 2016) but rather because this is the task of the firstborn. Abel’s name and his occupation carry completely different associations: they reflect the low social status of a younger brother. He is a shepherd because this task typically falls to the youngest son or daughters (Ackerman 2008: 128; Meyers 2012b: 140–144, 151–152; Steinberg 2012: 287) and the customary readings of הֶבֶל (*hebel*) are “meaningless, transience, worthless, futility, breath, vapour, or vanity” (Lewis 1994: 481; Hauser 1980: 299; Byron 2011a: 31) or even “nothing” (Vermeulen 2014). Also, Abel is not called the woman’s son, but rather the brother of Cain (Craig 1999: 120).

So, there is nothing extraordinary in the distribution of duties: Abel is a shepherd by birthright, not because Yahweh prefers shepherds or sheep. In fact, Cain’s occupation is much harder (Breitbart 2004: 122–123; Zucker 2020: 8). Transforming אִשָּׁה into Eve blurred pre-J’s sub-motive of spousal imbalance and it added important new layers to the storyline, such as the connection between Cain’s occupation and God’s commandment from Gen 2:15 (going back to Gen 2:5). J kept קָנָה wanting to keep the wordplay with קָיָן whereas P used it to accentuate Seth’s importance. Levenson (2006: 116), for example, argues that, in P redaction,

verse 25 presents a pattern where birth reverses death elaborating the origin and designation of the one that has just been born. The names and words describing the birth and origin mimic that reversal: Cain was crafted by her whereas Seth (“compensation”) was provided (תש–šāt) to her.⁵

Because transforming תש into Eve blurred pre-J’s sub-motive of spousal imbalance, the received analyses exclusively focus on sibling imbalance understood as sibling rivalry – since the themes of envy and sibling rivalry are universal (see, Schoeck 1987: 78; Kim 2001). The brothers are typically understood as archetypes of two confronted groups, such as rich and poor, righteous and sinners, orthodox and heretics, black or white, and similar.⁶ However, although the brothers do not have equal social status, they are not portrayed as being competitive – in contrast to, for instance, Dumuzi and Enkimdu. Their first conflict was in the field and this is not the dominant conflict; the dominant conflict is between Cain and Yahweh. Therefore, we seem to deal with imbalance rather than rivalry. If there was rivalry, it was caused by God’s regard.

It is a point of consensus that the story is important because the formula of primogeniture is transgressed (Brueggemann 1982: 56; Knoppers 2000: 115–126; Brett 2004: 37; Perry 2005: 259–260; Lohr 2009: 486, 495). I add that the origin of the conflict should not be associated exclusively with Yahweh’s preference or Cain’s character but principally with *unreasonable social expectations* put in front of each member of the household; *they are the real “villain”*

⁵ Borger’s (1959: 85–86) interpretation of verse 1 is more appropriate for verse 25; Seth, not Cain, is a gift from God (Elohim).

⁶ On various interpretative traditions, see, e.g., Aptowitzer (1922), Isenberg (1970: 433–444), Vermes (1975: 97–99), Bassler (1986: 56–64), Ruzer (2001: 265–271), Goldenberg (2003), Byron (2006: 261–274; 2011b: 743–756; 2012: 332–352), Geljon (2007: 282–312), Kueny (2008: 110–129), Unterseher (2009: 53–80, esp. 59, 71–72), Thatcher (2010: 740–749), Junior (2020), and Zucker (2020).

of this piece. The mother's excessive love and Abel's "nothingness" were designed to show how strong these expectations were.⁷ Sibling imbalance was a very serious problem and fratricide constituted a disturbing 10% of all homicides in agrarian societies (Bremmer 2003: 77–92, esp. 90). The large number of stories dealing with sibling rivalry also suggests that tensions between male children seem to have been quite common in the dry-farming society: younger sons wanted to improve their social position, while older ones had to justify their privileged status. Dumuzi and Enkimdu are among many who fight for acknowledgement: each of the brothers attempts to convince the other of his superiority by praising his own virtues and achievements and ridiculing those of his brother (*ANET*, 41). Cain and Abel do not seem to fight for acknowledgement, but an important imbalance is apparent.

Ancient myths deal with sibling imbalance differently. Petersen (2005: 15–22) identifies three methods of resolving family crises in Genesis: separation (Abraham and Lot), covenant as a contract (Jacob and Laban), and gifting and a war of wits (Jacob and Esau). Some Egyptian myths include a portrayal of the wicked younger brother Seth viciously murdering the wise Osiris (Spence 1990: 63–74). Seth is presented as a general symbol of abnormality in creation in order to caution those younger sons who envied their brothers (Baines 1985: 461–482).⁸ In contrast to Seth, in "The Story of the Two Brothers," young exceptional Baïti was a devoted servant in the house of his older brother Anupu (Maspero 2002: 1–17). Seth's envy and Baïti's devotion justify the social structure by praising the son who accepts his social role and scorning the one who rejects it. Likewise, Osiris's trust in Seth and Anupu's subsequent actions to save Baïti exemplify how older brothers should look after younger brothers and thereby show that

⁷ Greenberger (2016: 121) also suggests that Cain's upbringing may have contributed towards his reactions but her argument starts from different premises.

⁸ The main motive concerns the natural cycle of vegetation – Osiris was a god of creative energy in general (see, Frazer 2009: 896).

they are worthy of their social status. Also, in the Hittite myth “Appu and his Two Sons,” the older son, who tries to trick his brother, is named Wrong, whereas the younger son is Right (Hoffner 2003: 153–155).

The message is everywhere the same: everyone should accept their social roles. The older brother should be the younger brother’s keeper (a role that Cain fervently rejects), whereas the younger brother should be the older brother’s helper (like the Baïti from above). This instruction is quite understandable: because states were unable to control the violence, the household, as the principal organizational structure, needed cooperation to survive economically, and males had to protect each other. Some contemporary scholars (e.g., Swenson 2006; Jørstad 2016: 709) interpret Cain’s occupation and his rhetorical question in light of Gen 2–3 saying that humans should care for the land and other people. This hypothesis commits a very sneaky *post hoc ergo propter hoc* fallacy (inferring that, because event B comes after event A, A caused B). Cain’s occupation does not explain why he should care for Abel. His social position explains both his occupation and why he should care for Abel.

In short, the vast majority of the literature dealing with sibling imbalance tries to solve the problem by providing a set of rules, i.e., moral instructions, on how to deal with the imbalance. Pre-J’s Cain and Abel story deals with sibling imbalance in an importantly different way: it offers a solution to the origin of the problem and tries to solve the problem at its core. Sumerian myths, for instance, end in peaceful settlements and emphasize both brothers equally. Enkimdu, the farmer-god, is an unusually peaceful person who refuses to quarrel with his brother (*ANET*, 41–42). Similarly, Emesh eventually acknowledges Enten as the “farmer of the gods” and the story ends “in brotherhood and friendship” (see, Kramer 1961: 49–51; Kim 2001: 66–67, Fig. 1). These stories, that is, offer implicit instructions on how to live with the problem: people should humbly accept their social roles and do their best to excel in them. In contrast, pre-J

offers a radically different message: the cause of the rivalry is a social imbalance, not a child's wicked character, and this imbalance should be the focal point of any proposed solution to the rivalry, not the character of the people representing the relevant social institutions. Pre-J presents the automatic allocation of roles according to birthright and gender as dangerous for the household as the dangers that come from the outside.

Once we have this layer of the narrative, we see that God's regard is not at all peculiar: the deity rejects the unjust social structure and the practice of favouring the firstborn, which explains the message that Cain should not be angry and depressed and that acceptance and dignity come with doing what is right. Cain is angry and depressed because he thinks that he lost some prerogatives of his birthright or possibly the birthright itself and that they were given to someone clearly inferior, which gives him a valid motive to kill Abel. This motive, then, makes the crime consistent with the narrative. By presenting even the deity as being incapable of resolving problems that lead to disturbingly common fratricides, pre-J shows how deeply difficult and disturbing the relevant problems are (see, e.g., Hensel 2011: 45–57) thus urging the audience to redefine the social constructs that generate these problems. Authors sometimes correct the audience's misconceptions by not meeting their expectations followed by explaining why what was expected did not happen (de Jong 1987: 62), and this is exactly what happens in pre-J. Having discredited social norms by failing to meet the audience's expectations, Yahweh argues against primogeniture saying that acceptance and honour are in doing what is right rather than in birthright. People should not accept their pre-established social roles; rather they should develop a new social merit-based structure.

5. Tubal-Cain

In this section, I argue that, while the analogies between Cain and the Kenites have originally been accidental (this was not pre-J's intention) the connection between them that we have today

is not accidental. The fortuitous parallels between Cain and the Kenites were later used to explain the origin of the Kenites and show the effectiveness of God's forgiveness to Cain.

Cain's descendants, Enoch and Tubal-Cain, also exhibit a connection with Kenites, which is the final major similarity between Cain and them (North 1964: 373–389; Day 2009: 335–346). The name Enoch occurs as one of the sons of Midian in Gen 25:4 and 1 Chron 1:33, while the other son, Tubal-Cain, “made all kinds of bronze and iron tools” (Gen 4:22 NRS), a clear reference to blacksmiths. However, this does not suggest that Cain was initially imagined as the eponymous ancestor of the Kenites. Cain's behaviour and his lineage describe numerous categories of people: farmers, wanderers, city builders, tent-dwelling nomads, musicians, smiths, and so on. Because many different trades and groups originate from him, the Kenites could originate from one of his descendants. And this ancestor seems to be Tubal-Cain.

Plausibly, the third son of Lamech, Tubal-Cain, developed from the character Tubal who was the founder of metalsmithing known from the Akkadian sources, not a descendant of Cain. The name Tubal was in reference to Tabal, a renowned centre of metallurgy. And scholars assume that the suffix “Cain” was added when he was incorporated into Cain's genealogy (Miller 1974: 169–171; Halpern 1992: §4: 17–22). Some scholars argued that “Cain” signifies the activity of the people that originated from him. However, in that case, the suffix to תובל should be תובל הקיין (tûbāl hăqqāyîn) rather than קיין (Skinner 1910: 120). More likely, “Cain” was added to Tubal so that the name of the last male listed in the line of Cain contains the name of the first figure in that line (Hess 1992: 670). Since this suffix also highlights the Cain–Kenites connection, the Israelites' blacksmithing neighbours were thus successfully incorporated into Gen 2:4b–4:26 *toledot* structure having their origin explained.

Understanding Tubal-Cain rather than Cain as the eponymous ancestor of the Kenites resolves the relevant exegetical problem. Because the story describes the classical problems of

a single dry-farming family, it is hard to imagine that it also concerns blacksmiths and their specific position. Having Cain as the eponymous ancestor of the Kenites implies that Gen 4 is comprised of two independent units – the story of a farmer (the older stratum) and the genealogy of the ancestor of blacksmiths (the younger stratum) – joined inelegantly by conflating the two in the character of Cain. However, by taking Tubal-Cain as the ancestor of the Kenites, one can hold both that the story and genealogy form one consistent unit and keep, via Tubal-Cain, the Cain–Kenites connection, which is now a complementary rather than the dominant motive. The later redactors used the initially accidental analogies to incorporate the Kenites in the genealogy of Cain to explain their origin.

Also, Cain’s genealogy seems to be an addition to the Gen. 2:4b–4:26 *toledot* structure that may not belong to the original *toledot* sources. According to Gertz (2012: 117–118), for example, Gen 2:4a and Gen 2:4b originate from two authors. Plausibly, a *toledot* heading was given to it in order to connect the *toledot* of humans, ultimately Israel, with the *toledot* of the world (Childs 1979: 145–150; Woudstra 1970: 187–188; Garrett 1991: 97–100; Thompson 1987: 156; Petersen 2005: 8–9; Levin 2007: 220; Steinberg 2012: 281–282; DeRouchie 2013: 219–247). J inserted Cain’s genealogy here to situate the story within his narratives and to introduce the origins of trades operating within the *toledot* structure, but he also wanted to communicate an important message. In J’s version (probably Gen 4:17–24), Noah is Cain’s descendant.⁹ And because all people originate from Cain and because Noah, who found mercy in Yahweh, is Cain’s descendant, J’s motivation for including Cain’s genealogy most likely is portraying the effectiveness of Yahweh’s forgiveness (Davies 1986: 35–42; Knohl 2004: 63–67). Perhaps, in J’s version, settling down is not only a metaphor for apostasy and loneliness

⁹ Lewy (1956: 431) argues that verse 26b initially followed the verse 16. Interestingly, he claims that Cain, the ancestor of the Kenites, established the Cult of YHWH, whereas his reconstruction of Cain’s genealogy suggests that *all* people, rather than just the Kenites, originate from Cain.

(pre-J layer) but also for mitigation of Cain's punishment to be a wanderer (see, Steinmetz 1994: 205). The final priestly redactors inserted verses 25 and 26 to separate Noah from Cain – in P, Seth was in Adam's image (Gen 5:3) – which distorted J's important message by rendering Cain as Seth's brother whose descendants did not call upon the Lord.

I conclude this section by offering a plausible reconstruction of how the current version of the story developed. J added a popular story about a dysfunctional family to this specific place in the Bible because it (i) referred to the father as 'ādām and (ii) involved the 'iššāh-'iš conversion of the 'iš-'iššāh creation, which gave it a nice touch. This insertion fit perfectly with other stories but it, in effect, gave this story a completely new set of characters: a random stereotypical dry-farming family became the first family. Because the pre-J source did not contain this *toledot* structure, this version of the story probably ended with the birth of Enoch and building of a city (a version of verse 17). The *toledot* structure was first added by J (to suitably situate the story and add the message of mercy to it) and then later modified by P (to revise this message according to its theological doctrine [Set vs. Cain]). These revisions enriched the story and its messages significantly but, because they also blurred the first layer, a great deal of its richness also got lost. This paper is an attempt to reconstruct what was lost.

6. Concluding Remarks

According to my analysis, in its pre-Biblical version, the Cain and Abel story presents consequences of tensions distinctive for dry-farming families, identifying the problematic social structure as their main cause. The story argues that the society needs to be restructured using different criteria. This message was communicated by God directly and the numerous plot twists are designed to make it more compelling and memorable.

The real protagonist of the story is not Cain but Yahweh, who is also the voice of the author. The mother is the first to fail the expectations of the original audience: she puts herself as the main agent in Cain's procreation. The main plot twist is God's not accepting Cain's offering, not the murder of Abel. God's observances are conversions of expectations developed from dangerous social stereotypes. Yahweh starts his monologue with three rhetorical questions in order to show that there is no need to be angry or depressed because there is a simple way out of this. The proposed solution is "doing" (what is right) rather than complying with one's pre-assigned social status. Interestingly, God does not mention sacrifices, which implies that they are not important (Breitbart 2004: 123). Possibly, the acceptance, dignity, or lifting of one's face up that Yahweh sees as resulting from acting rightly concerns one's becoming a part of a desired (rather than pre-assigned) social group: the one who is the best fit for the social role should occupy it. I do not think that Cain chose to ignore God's words: doing what is right is much easier than killing your brother. Cain was probably so shocked, hurt, and terrified (recall §3.1) that he was unable to pull himself together and understand or perhaps even properly hear God's words.

Reconstructing pre-J in this particular way allows us to solve the three puzzles discussed in the introduction. The first puzzle concerns God's preferences: God's behaviour is not directed at specific people and their gifts but rather at automatically assigned social roles represented by those people and their gifts, which explains why Cain should not be angry and depressed and why acceptance and dignity come with doing what is right. Pre-J presents the automatic allocation of roles according to birthright and gender as exceptionally dangerous for the household. The cause of the tensions between the brothers is important social imbalances, not Cain's wicked character. No one is happy in this story: this is why all characters with an active role in the storyline ('iššāh, Yahweh, and Cain) reject their roles in this social structure. With time, however, this layer of the narrative and the relevant message got lost: the relevant society

changed, and the old problems disappeared and were substituted by new problems. In consequence, the verse 1, Yahweh's preference, and Cain's behaviour became puzzling.

With this pre-J story in mind, Cain's behaviour and his reaction involving anger and depression are also not puzzling. Cain seems to be angry and depressed because he thinks that he lost some prerogatives of his birthright or possibly the birthright itself in favour of an inferior brother. He is angry because his expectations are not met and he is depressed because he thinks that this is because he failed to live up to his social status. In short, Cain thinks that this is his fault: he thinks that his failure explains why God did not regard the crops (his strength and creative power affect the fertility of the ground). Thinking that "meaningless" Abel is taking over the prerogatives of his birthright gives Cain a valid motive to kill him, which then, makes the crime consistent with the narrative. However, we do not need to say that Cain was envious or evil or to think that the crime was premeditated: the conflict in the field seems to have been caused by multiple unfortunate factors and fuelled by fear and panic that probably resulted in anger, rage, and the perception of Abel as a threat. And considering that Gen 4:8 involves phrases that indicate a large passage of time and are used far less frequently in Hebrew than in English (Tamarkin Reis 2002: 110, 112), Cain had enough time for his emotions to build until they were strong enough to overcome him.

Finally, the third puzzling thing is that Yahweh exempts Cain from what appears to be a deserved punishment. If my hypotheses are correct, the answer is that Cain did get what he deserved; it is just that he did not deserve what we have initially thought – since the murder is not premeditated or caused by Cain's evil character. This is not to say that none of this is Cain's fault but rather that a very unfortunate and traumatic series of events affected Cain's deliberation, reactions, and behaviour in a way that significantly contributed towards the tragedy. The tragedy was preconditioned not only by God's preferences and Cain's wrong

choices but equally by unreasonable social arrangements and expectations; the mother's excessive love also contributed to it but we should not think that she is blamed for the murder. The blame principally lies on unreasonable social expectations. The sad and dialectically brilliant part of the story is that Cain failed to realise that God's behaviour is not directed at him and that there was an easy way out of this situation. He was so shocked by Yahweh's behaviour that he failed to understand the deity's message (verses 6–7) completely. The real tragedy of the story is that the solution to the problem was incredibly simple but Cain was so shocked and hurt by not being praised and favoured that he could not understand God's words.

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