

— Dag Hedman, »Consolation in Christian Heinrich Postel's Biblical Opera Libretto«

— A B S T R A C T —

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This essay discusses the prominence of the consolation theme in Christian Heinrich Postel's biblical opera libretto *Cain und Abel Oder Der verzweifelnde Bruder=Mörder* (Hamburg, 1689). It is shown that in this drama the theme is relevant not only to the persons in the drama, but to the audience as well. This result stands in contrast to earlier research, which incorrectly has pointed out different other subjects as the main themes of the opera.

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■ — CONSOLATION IN CHRISTIAN HEINRICH

POSTEL'S BIBLICAL OPERA LIBRETTO CAIN

UND ABEL ODER DER VERZWEIFELNDE BRUDER=

MÖRDER (1689)<sup>1</sup> — ■

■ — »The story of Cain-Abel is beset by guilt and moral concern; its arena of debate addresses the rightness of actions and finally the legitimation of the self.«<sup>2</sup> This may not automatically sound like the perfect story for an opera libretto. So why did the directors of the Hamburgische Schaufplatz am Gänsemarkt commission Christian Heinrich Postel (1658–1705) to write an opera on a theme as depressing as this, and why opt for an Old Testament theme anyway in a place that most people automatically associate with pleasure and recreation? How was it possible that a Biblical opera – a genre closely associated with Catholicism, and in Postel's days especially with the Jesuits<sup>3</sup> – could be performed in a profoundly Protestant city-state like Hamburg? And what on Earth does all this have to do with consolation?

In 1678, the first commercial opera house north of the Alps was opened in Hamburg with Christian Richters (?–1690) *Der erschaffene, gefallene und aufgerichtete Mensch*.<sup>4</sup> The story of Adam and Eve and their banishment from the Garden of Eden was chosen for the inauguration to appease the city clergy, who were wary of the enterprise as a possible Temple of Sin. In the 1680's the clergymen Anton Reiser (1628–86) and Hinrich Elmenhorst (1632–1704) were the main combatants in an Opera battle, in which Reiser attacked the Sing-Spiele, as the operas were called in Hamburg, and Elmenhorst defended them.<sup>5</sup>

In the period 1678–1689, six operas with Biblical stories and two about Christian saints were performed in Hamburg. The two last of these, *Die heilige Eugenia Oder Die Bekehrung der Stadt Alexandria zum Christentum* (1688; Saint Eugenia or The Conversion of the City of Alexandria to the Christian Faith) and *Cain und Abel Oder Der verzweifelnde Bruder=Mörder* (1689; Cain and Abel or The Despairing Fratricide) were both written by Christian Heinrich Postel, generally considered to be the most skilled of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Hamburg librettists.<sup>6</sup> The majority of the Hamburg operas in the 17<sup>th</sup> century were mythological or historical.<sup>7</sup> Postel's *Die heilige Eugenia* and *Cain und Abel* were the last religious operas written in Hamburg. Using material from Genesis, chapter 4, Postel actually

conceived *Cain und Abel* as a sequel to Richter's *Der erschaffene, gefallene und aufgerichtete Mensch*, which was based on Genesis 1–3.<sup>8</sup>

Postel's task was not only to make the clergy happy, but also the audience and thus also the directors of the opera house. The audience consisted of a wide assortment of residents and foreigners: noblemen as well as members of the middle and lower classes.<sup>9</sup> Postel's text had to appeal to a paying audience, demanding value for money. This called for refunctionalisation of Genesis 4. In *Cain und Abel*, Postel showed considerable skill in producing a moving and entertaining play, with ample possibilities for magnificent production (spectacular views of Heaven and Hell, changes of scenography, a flying demon-wagon pulled by snakes, ballets etc.), which also served as the basis for Johann Philipp Förtsch's (1652–1732) music (lost).<sup>10</sup> It is not known if the choice of Genesis 4 initially was done by the author or by the directors of the opera. However, as Ricardo J. Quinones points out, »The actions themselves, murder and banishment, are highly dramatic and the issues they provoke are compelling.«<sup>11</sup> Quinones identifies »*violence, envy, and mystery*« as central elements in the Cain and Abel story,<sup>12</sup> and it is easy to see that this would be appealing to any dramatist, and indeed the more so the more the text verges towards the melodramatic.

It seems that parts of the clergy were offended by Christian Richter's use of Jehova and Lucifer on stage in *Der erschaffene, gefallene und aufgerichtete Mensch*. In his preface, Postel carefully points out: »Was den Himmel anbelanget/ so hat man sich des Nahmens oder der Persohn des Jehova als eines Nominis essentialis Dei, nicht/ sondern an dessen Stelle der Göttlichen Liebe oder der Göttlichen Gerechtigkeit bedienet. In der Hölle hat man gleichfals/ da sonst der Lucifer hätte sollen auffgeführt werden/ aus gewissen Ursachen/ den Hochmuth gesetzet.«<sup>13</sup> Other devils were substituted by Zorn (Wrath), List (Cunning) and Mißgunst (Envy).

Briefly, this is what happens in *Cain und Abel*: After a prologue, sung by the South, West, East, and North Wind,<sup>14</sup> where they briefly introduce the theme of the drama and start off the meteorological metaphors that pervade Postel's libretto,<sup>15</sup> Act I begins with a grand *theophany*, showing not only Adam, Eva, Abel and his sister/betrothed Debora kneeling in front of an altar in a forest, but also Gottesfurcht (Godliness) surrounded by »vielen Engeln« (»many angels«) in Heaven. Abel and Debora swear each other eternal love, Eva muses on the problem of vanity, which actually is pertinent to her son Cain, even if the viewer/reader does not realize this at the moment (I:3).<sup>16</sup> Adam and Eva have a love scene, where Eva gives vent to her misgivings about their sons (I:4). In a soliloquy, Cain reveals his over-appreciation of himself and envy towards his younger

brother (I:5), and when his wife/sister Calmana and son Hanoch enter and try to establish contact with him, he is lost in egocentricity (I:6). The scene changes to Hell, and Hochmuth, List, Zorn and a Chor der Geister (Chorus of Ghosts) complain that Mankind has not continued on its downward path that began in Genesis 3, after which they elaborate on different schemes that might lead to the downfall of Mankind, and decide that the help of Mißgunst is needed to achieve this goal (I:7–10).

Act II begins with Cain not only complaining about his lot in life, but also showing the ambition to become ruler of the world. Calmana coerces her husband into promising to offer to God, in spite of Cain's openly professed atheism and blasphemies (II:2). In a second theophany, Göttliche Liebe (Love of God) gives comfort to Adam and Eva, who are broken-hearted over Cain's attitude (II:4). Adam and Eva promise Debora that her union with Abel is approaching (II:5), and she jubilantly hurries to her brother/beloved with the good news (II:7). The sets change into a forest with the altars of the two brothers (II:9). The offering scene is given as in Genesis 4, i.e. with the Lord accepting Abel's offering, but rejecting Cain's. The latter, upset, calls on the forces of Hell and contemplates murder for revenge. He is rebuked by Göttliche Liebe in a short theophany (II:10). List, Zorn and Mißgunst appear on the scene and resume their plans for the downfall of Mankind. They realise that their last and only hope is Cain (II:11).

In Act III, Adam tells Eva, Calmana and Debora the outcome of the offering scene (III:2). A spiral of increasingly heated arguments between Cain and Abel escalates into open violence (III:4), gleefully hailed by Zorn, List and Mißgunst (III:5). The set changes into a barren field, in which Cain murders Abel (III:6). This unpleasant scene shows us Abel begging for his life and Cain striking him repeatedly at intervals.<sup>17</sup> Zorn, List and Mißgunst exult (III:7), and Abel dies in the arms of Debora (III:8). The set changes into Hell, where the three jubilant devils report the good news to Hochmuth (III:9–10). A new set change brings us back to a forest, where the scene between Göttliche Gerechtigkeit and Cain from Genesis 4 is enacted, i.e. God confronts Cain with his crime and pronounces his sentence (III:11).<sup>18</sup> Cain is defeated; he has overcome his pride, wrath, cunning and envy, and leaves in despair with Calmana and Hanoch (III:12–13). Adam, Eva and Debora, downcast, are comforted by Göttliche Liebe (III:14–15), and the finale of the opera is an elaborate theophany involving the three humans, Gottesfurcht and the Chorus of Angels, mirroring the first scene of Act I, thus giving the libretto a symmetrical structure (III:16).

In his preface to *Cain und Abel*, Postel discussed the addition of the two daughters, missing in the *Bible*.<sup>19</sup> Postel wouldn't have been Postel if he had missed this opportunity.<sup>20</sup>

He added two more women, and there was no way around the fact that these also had to be children of Adam and Eva. This incestuous theme enraged Julius Elias, who wrote the article about Postel in *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*. Elias was disgusted with the liberties Postel took with his stories in general when adapting them to the stage: in *Cain und Abel* »finden wir gar ein widerliches Liebesverhältniss zwischen Bruder und Schwester, welches der Verfasser in einer gelehrten Einleitung zu rechtfertigen sucht.«<sup>21</sup> True: Postel quotes several authorities, and is especially triumphant when he pulls Martin Luther from his sleeve (pp. [2, 4, 5]). The names Calmana and Debora are authorized by Luther in his Commentaries to Genesis 4:17. Postel ends his lengthy deliberations with the flippant remark: »Weil aber alle diese Sachen in blossen Muthmassungen bestehn/ stehet einem jedweden frey davon zu halten und zu glauben/ was ihm beliebt/ es befo[r]dert und verhindert die Seeligkeit nicht.«<sup>22</sup>

Interestingly, the main theme in Postel's *Cain und Abel* is not guilt, moral concern, the rightness of actions, the legitimation of the self, violence, envy, or mystery (all suggested by Ricardo J. Quinones), the erotic (suggested by Auguste Brieger) or offerings and murder (suggested by Solveig Olsen). Rather, this opera is about consolation.<sup>23</sup> In the first sentence of the first recitative of the opera, Abel calls his beloved Debora »mein Trost« (I:2; »my comfort«), a rather peculiar epithet if it were not seen as a hint. Soon enough, Eva vividly and bitterly recapitulates her guilt concerning the eviction from the Garden of Eden and her husband's tribulations.

— Ach meine Schuld hat dich auch mit getroffen.  
 Das Paradies ist nur um mich verschertzt.  
 Der saure Schweiß den du must lassen fliessen/  
 Den Acker zu begiessen/  
 Von dem doch nichts als Dörner nur zu hoffen/  
 Durchs höchsten Fluch; Dringt mir der Thränen Tropffen/  
 Mit banger Herten=Klopffen  
 Zum Augen aus. Diß ist der Schmerz  
 Der mich am meisten schmerztt. (I:4)<sup>24</sup>

Adam immediately tries to give her consolation by saying: »Getrost mein ander Hertz!« (»Be comforted, my second heart!«) He carefully avoids taking up her role in the story, and instead tactfully concentrates on himself, ending his reply by telling her that even if his present life is full of hardships, he still has Paradise in her. He then sings an aria, in which he comforts Eva with the certainty that God always takes care of you. There is a similar scene at the beginning of Act II, where Adam and Eva ask God for comfort:

— Aria.

1.  
 Grosser Schöpffer aller Erden/  
 Wann sol abgewendet werden/  
 Was dein' arme Kinder drückt?  
 Wann geschicht es daß die deinen/  
 Nach dem trüben Trauer=Weinen/  
 Gnädig werden angeblickt?

2.  
 Aber sind wir nicht zu wenig/  
 Frommer Vater/ ewger König  
 Daß wenn dein Geschöpfe schreit/  
 Deine Güte sich läst sehen  
 Und auff seuffzer=reiches Flehen  
 Rath und Hülffe hat bereit. (II:4)<sup>25</sup>

Göttliche Liebe is revealed sitting on a cloud, and gives them consolation in an aria, which ends in a promise of the coming of The Saviour.<sup>26</sup> Adam and Eva sing an »Aria à 2« (a duet), in which they show their relief at the mercy of Göttliche Liebe. When their daughter Debora appears in the next scene they tell her about this and Debora exclaims: »O süsser Trost/ wenn GOtt in Noth bereit!« (II:5; »O sweet consolation, when GOd is there in [the hour of] distress!«) The discussion then follows a new course, when Adam and Eva promise Debora that she will soon be united with her brother/beloved Abel, and she rejoices at this comforting news:

— Weg Traurigkeit/  
 Weg Hertzeleid/  
 Ihr habt mich lang genug gebunden/  
 Weil Hoffnung meinen Geist erfreut/  
 Ist alle Furcht verschwunden/ (II:5).<sup>27</sup>

If Debora has found comfort, her mother Eva is full of Weltschmerz, and clearly in need of consolation (II:8). She vents her thoughts in a typically Baroque *vanitas*-aria:

— Was sind doch die flüchtigen Freuden der Erden?  
 Ein nichtiger Schaum/  
 Ein Schatten/ ein Traum.  
 Oftt füllet das Schertzen  
 Mit Schmertzen  
 Die Brust/  
 Verdrießlichkeit folget auff Lachen und Lust.  
 Das Unglück läst Blitzen aus Sonnenschein werden/  
 Was Fröligkeit heisset erfähret man kaum.  
 Was sind doch die flüchtigen Freuden der Erden?  
 Ein nichtiger Schaum/  
 Ein Schatten/ ein Traum.<sup>28</sup>

She has to wait for comfort, though, since dramatic events interrupt. In the offering scene (II:9), Abel sings an aria to God, in which he asks Him for comfort and support. »Sey mein Trost auff dieser Erden« (»Be Thou my comfort in this world«) is one of his humble wishes, which stand in stark contrast to Cain's preceding aria, where he only asked for God to ignite his offering with a flash of lightning, »Daß man daraus verspühren kan/ Ob wir von dir herkommen« (»So that we can see, if we are Thine offspring«), typical for Cain's vanity and obsession with dynastic questions. As we know, God only ignites Abel's offering, thus confirming that He indeed is Abel's comfort, but does not endorse Cain's claims as ruler of the world by birthright.<sup>29</sup> Left without any sign of heavenly sympathy, Cain now turns to the forces of Hell in an incantation scene and asks for fire, but is rebuked by the suddenly appearing Göttliche Liebe (II:10). Calmana volunteers to give Cain consolation (III:2). Debora sings of the comfort of Love as shared pain (III:3) and Abel of fortitude and steadfastness, which he sees as the road to heavenly protection; in front of Cain he claims to be surrounded by an army of angels, a consoling thought that Cain ridicules (III:4).<sup>30</sup> After Abel's death, Debora seeks consolation in the thought of her own death (III:8). In a recitative in III:10 we encounter a rather surprising representation of the need for consolation. Of all persons, it is Hochmuth who seeks comfort and receives it from List and Zorn: Hochmuth is depressed because of the failure of Hell to undo Mankind, and List and Zorn maintain that »Der Mensch/ der Sünden=Knecht Wird doch den Giff des Apfels stets bewahren/ Und also mehr zur Höllen=Nacht/ Als in den Himmel fahren.« (»Man, the slave of sin, will always retain the apple's poison, and thus go more to the night of Hell, than to Heaven.«) The scene is quite funny, with List, Zorn and Mißgunst arriving in Hell in high spirits in the snake wagon of Mißgunst, after their mission has been completed and Cain has committed the ultimate sin. Hochmuth, morose, is disappointed and cannot see that they have accomplished anything. He wants Mankind wiped out from the face of the Earth and locked up in Hell. His three assistants, however, are so pleased with themselves and their day's work, that their efforts are rewarded and Hochmuth is comforted: all four of them burst out in a gleeful and mocking »Aria à 4« (quartett) that finishes III:10. In Postel's drama, not even the Prince of Darkness can do without consolation. In III:12 Göttliche Liebe at last offers Cain consolation in the promise, that his mark will prevent others from killing him. At last, Cain becomes the »verzweifelnder« (»despairing«) individual of the title, in need of consolation, not for the futility of his vain dreams, but for his guilt and shame (III:13). After he has left with wife and son, the others are crushed (III:14), but Göttliche Liebe arrives on a cloud in III:15 and offers comfort in an aria:

— Last allen Kummer übergehen  
 Weil eures Abels Seele lebt.  
 Wird gleich sein Leib ein Theil der Erden/  
 Und euren Augen weggerafft/  
 Sol euch an seiner Stelle werden/  
 Ein ander der euch Freude schafft/  
 Aus dessen Stamm die Welt wird sehen/  
 Den/ der der Sünden=Last aufhebt/  
 Last allen Kummer übergehen  
 Weil eures Abels Seele lebt.<sup>31</sup>

After this, Gottesfurcht enters and exclaims: »Adam, Adam sey getrost!« (»Adam, Adam be comforted!«) and Adam, Eva and Debora rejoice at the thought of the promised third son Seth and The Saviour: »Freue dich du Kreiß der Erden/ GOTT wil dein Erlöser werden!« (»Rejoice all the world/ GOD will be thy Redeemer!«), thus ending the opera acknowledging their consolation by God.

Several times in the text, Cain gives vent to feelings of being unfairly treated by Fate (I:5–6, II:1, 10). In his preface to the libretto, Postel described Cain as »einen Gottvergessenen/ ruchlosen und Epicurischen Menschen/ welcher sich auff sein trotziges Gemüth und das Recht der Erst-Gebuhr verlassen/ daher er auch [...] als Erstgebohrner sich einen König des gantzen Geschlechts eingebildet« (p. [3]).<sup>32</sup> Friedrich Chrysan-der calls Cain »ein ungerathener Sohn in einem schwächlichen Hauswesen«. <sup>33</sup> Postel's vain Cain corresponds well to Ricardo J. Quinones description of him in the mystery plays of the Middle Ages: »Cain as the profane other, the other that is not only in our midst, but within us as well, the *homo profanus*, overzealous in the pursuit of vulgarity, shows all the aggressiveness of the new *homo economicus*.«<sup>34</sup> In fact, it is clear that Cain is a person in need of consolation and therapy: as we remember, the subtitle of the opera is *Der verzweifelnde Bruder=Mörder*, The Despairing Fratricide.

Staffan Olofsson has analysed Adam's and Eve's family as a dysfunctional family.<sup>35</sup> This dysfunctionality is exploited by Postel in I:6, when Calmana and Hanoch in vain try to make verbal contact with the monomaniacally egocentric Cain. This is treated in the following way. Cain sings an aria, in which every line is interrupted by either Calmana or Hanoch singing a line of recitative.

— Cain. [Aria] Hoher Geist/ was kan dich binden?  
 Calm[ana]. [Recitative] Mein Bruder/ hörstu nicht?  
 Cain. [Aria] Freyer Sinn was schrenckt dich ein?  
 Han[och]. [Recitative] Mein Vater/ was ist diß?  
 Cain. [Aria] Solten Felsen/ sanften Winden/  
 Calm. [Recitative] Dein Angesicht/



Mein Liebster ist verstelt.  
 Cain. [Aria] Stoltze Zedern/ schwachen Linden/  
 Han. [Recitative] Er schau doch an  
 Sein liebstes Kind.  
 Cain. [Aria] Hohe Berge/ tieffen Gründen/  
 Schändlich unterworffen sein?  
 Cal. [Recitative] Mein Licht/ was kan  
 Die Geister so verstöhren?  
 Cain. [Aria] Nein ach nein.  
 Han. [Recitative] Wil er den nicht sein Kind/ mein Vater  
 hören?  
 Cain. [Aria] Hoher Geist was kan dich binden?  
 Frecher Sinn/ was schrenckt dich ein?<sup>36</sup>

Both verbally and musically this gives a disharmonious and disconnected impression which effectively shows that this is indeed not a happy family with a functioning intercommunication.

It is obvious that consolation is two layered in *Cain und Abel*: it involves the characters in Postel's drama and it involves the audience. Adam and Eva are happy to be comforted, Abel does not need any comfort, since he is a content person,<sup>37</sup> Debora is consoled by the promise of coming nuptial bliss, but Cain is inaccessible to consolation in spite of his desperation, simply because he is too egocentric.

Using Hans-Jürgen Schings as a vantage point, Bernhard Jahn has discussed *atrocitas*, i.e. »die Anhäufung von Greuel und Schrecken« (»the accumulation of horror and terror«), as one of the main poetological ingredients of Baroque tragedy, which the authors serve to their audiences to make them accustomed to the adversities of Fate (*assuetudo*) and for comfort and relief (*consolatio*).<sup>38</sup> We see Christian Heinrich Postel handling this part of his text with great skill: he exploits the murder motif extensively, with several forebodings and foreshadowing (the prologue, I:3–5, II:4, II:10–11, III:2), then Cain's increasing aggressiveness towards Abel (III:4), his failed attempt on his younger brother's life (*ibid.*), retardation by way of Zorn, List and Mißgunst excitedly planning to fan Cain's wrath (III:5),<sup>39</sup> the murder itself (III:6), the triumph of Zorn, List and Mißgunst after the crime (III:7), and finally Abel's lingering and death in Debora's arms (III:8). Also the punishment and subsequent breaking down of Cain (III:11–12) has this poetological function.

Several other parts of the 1689 performance would have a consolatory effect on the audience. We are now looking at pure »feel-good« effects. One is *il meraviglioso* (the marvellous), which has a central position within Baroque theatre aesthetics: changes of scenography in full view of the audience (*change-ments à vue*; I:7, II:9, III:9, III:11), theophanies (I:1, II:4, II:10,

III:11–12, III:15–16), Mißgunst's flying wagon pulled by snakes (I:10, III:7, III:10),<sup>40</sup> the flash of lightning on Abel's altar (II:9), echo effects (III:8) and such.<sup>41</sup> All of this aimed at achieving one of Baroque literature's and theatre's central goals: inspiring astonishment, surprise, wonder.

Dancing plays an important role in Postel's libretto and should definitely also be regarded in the same vein as a part of the work's consolatory strategems. There is no dancing in the parts of the libretto taken from the *Bible*, only in Postel's extrapolations in the prologue and in Hell. The first ballet, performed by the four Winds, ends the prologue (»Folget ein Tantz von vier Winden«), and devils bring Acts I and II to climactic ends with singing and dancing (I:10, II:11). It is noteworthy that Postel dispensed with dancing in the grand finale of Act III. This is in accordance with the absence of ballets in Christian Richter's *Der erschaffene, gefallene und aufgerichtete Mensch*. Obviously, dancing in the presence of Gottesfurcht (Godliness) and the Chorus of Angels was out of the question.<sup>42</sup>

It is significant that Postel – just like Christian Richter – refrained from introducing a »Lustige Person« (Jester) into the text. The Lustige Person, normally a servant, would comment cynically on the other persons of the play and their doings, and would allude satirically to topical subjects. He would sing drinking-songs and street-ballads of the day. The Lustige Person was not only there for comic relief, but also as a contrast to the mythological, royal und noble persons. In short, he (for it was almost always a man) kept the tradition from Plautus and Terence and the Venetian 17<sup>th</sup> century opera alive.<sup>43</sup> Abstaining from the Lustige Person in *Cain und Abel* was not only a good idea in front of the clergy of Hamburg,<sup>44</sup> but also for pure textual reasons: it contributes to the claustrophobic quality of the text.

It would seem that *Cain und Abel* was only a limited success in 1689. It was only performed during one season, and there is only one printed edition of the libretto preserved. However, this may not have depended on Postel's text. It might just as well have been caused by Johann Philipp Förtsch's music or the production. Then again, the Church may have reacted unfavorably, thus forestalling further performances in Hamburg. Hellmuth Christian Wolff does note that Postel's text was later staged as a play (without Förtsch's music).<sup>45</sup> A contemporary of Postel's, Nicolaus Wilckens (1676–1724), maintained that *Cain und Abel Oder Der verzweifelnde Bruder=Mörder* without doubt was one of Postel's three finest librettos.<sup>46</sup> The great Handel scholar Friedrich Chrysander wrote that this libretto shows »dass Postel das dramatisch Wirksame immer richtig heraus zu fühlen weiss«: *Cain und Abel* demonstrates »dramatischen Verstand, Sprachfähigkeit und wirksame Verknüpfung der Scenen; in dieser Hinsicht war er seinen biblisch-drama-

tischen Vorgängern ebenso überlegen, wie den übrigen Librettisten, die sich an dieser Bühne neben ihm hervorthaten«.47 Chrysander enthusiastically writes of Postel's libretto: »An Selbstständigkeit und Einheit ist dieses Stück von allen deutsch-biblichen das beste«.48

Due to its consequential focus on the consolation theme, verbally as well as in action, and 'therapeutical' effects resulting from this (e.g. the pleasure of being reminded of God's omnipresence and benevolence), it seems clear that *Cain und Abel* is indeed an opera about consolation. ■

#### ■ ENDNOTES ■

1 Sincere thanks are due to Robert Lyons, Ph. D., of the University of Gothenburg, for his advice on stylistic aspects of the text.

2 Ricardo J. Quinones: *The Changes of Cain. Violence and the Lost Brother in Cain and Abel Literature* (Princeton, N.J., 1991) p. 6.

3 Cf. Willi Flemming: *Geschichte des Jesuitentheaters in den Landen deutscher Zunge* (Schriften der Gesellschaft für Theatergeschichte 32. Berlin, 1923) and Johannes Müller: *Das Jesuitendrama in den Ländern deutscher Zunge vom Anfang (1555) bis zur Hochbarock (1665)*. Vol. 1 (Schriften zur deutschen Literatur 7. Augsburg, 1930). According to Auguste Brieger: *Kain und Abel in der deutschen Dichtung* (Stoff- und Motivgeschichte der deutschen Literatur 14. Berlin & Leipzig, 1934) there were six German Jesuit dramas in the 17<sup>th</sup> century about Cain and Abel (p. 74).

4 The music by Johann Theile (1646–1724) is lost.

5 Cf. Anne-Rose Bittmann: *Die Kategorie der Unwahrscheinlichkeit im opernästhetischen Schrifttum des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Europäische Hochschulschriften. Reihe XXXVI: Musikwissenschaft 85. Frankfurt am Main etc., 1992 [orig. Diss., Bonn, 1991]), pp. 101f, and Reinholt Quandt (ed.): *Quellentexte zur Konzeption der europäischen Oper im 17. Jahrhundert*. Kassel etc., 1981, pp. 171–191. Different sources give Elmenhorsts Christian name as »Heinrich« and »Hinrich« alternatively.

6 Cf. Menantes [Christian Friedrich Hunold]: *Theatralische, Galante Und Geistliche Gedichte* (Hamburg, 1722 [orig. 1706]) pp. 94f, Feodor Wehl: *Hamburgs Literaturleben im achtzehnten Jahrhundert* (Leipzig, 1856) p. 37f, Chr. [Friedrich Chrysander]: »Die zweite Periode der Hamburger Oper von 1682 bis 1694, oder vom Theaterstreit bis zur Direction Kusser's« in *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* (Leipzig, 1878) column 341. Hellmuth Christian Wolff has written about these Biblical operas in *Die Barockoper in Hamburg (1678–1738)*, vol. 1 (Wolfenbüttel, 1957 [orig. Diss. Kiel, 1942]) pp. 22–38, and about Postel's *Cain und Abel* on pp. 32f.

7 After Postel's death in 1705 there was a sharp decline in mythological operas in Hamburg.

8 [Christian Heinrich Postel]: *Cain und Abel Oder Der verzweifelnde Bruder=Mörder. In einem Sing=Spiel vorgestellet* [Hamburg, 1689]: »daß man gesehen/ daß die allhier/ schon öftters præsentirte Opera von der Erschaffung/ viele gefallen/ hat man wegen Connexität der Historien dieses Stück wollen hinzufügen« (p. [7]); »since the often produced opera on the Creation has met with the appreciation of many, this play has been added because of the connection of the stories«. The first edition of the libretto is quoted from the facsimile at [http://www.sub.uni-hamburg.de/recherche/digitalisierte-bestaende/trefferliste/seitenansicht.html?tx\\_dlf\[id\]=868&tx\\_dlf\[page\]=1&tx\\_dlf\[pointer\]=0](http://www.sub.uni-hamburg.de/recherche/digitalisierte-bestaende/trefferliste/seitenansicht.html?tx_dlf[id]=868&tx_dlf[page]=1&tx_dlf[pointer]=0).

Brieger: *Kain und Abel in der deutschen Dichtung* lists Postel's drama as the eleventh literary work about Cain and Abel in German in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (p. 74). »Out of the vast repertoire of Western myth, one myth stands apart for the extraordinary longevity and variousness of its appeal. This is the Cain-Abel story, which has been present to the Western consciousness since the biblical era as one of the defining myths of our culture. The dramatic elements of the story are powerful enough – the first murder, banishment, the first city – but as we probe the inner resources of the story, we find many other qualities that account for the proliferating and enduring strength of the theme.« (Quinones: *The Changes of Cain* p. 3.) Even modern popular fiction contributes to keeping the myth alive: in Ian Fleming's agent novel *Goldfinger* (1959), the big time American crook Jed Midnight acknowledges Goldfinger's status with the words: »you are undoubtedly the greatest thing in crime since Cain invented murder and used it on Abel« (reprint ed., London, 1961) p. 181. In *The Sandman* (1988–96), Neil Gaiman uses Cain and Abel as recurring figures through the whole 10 volume work. Postels drama is presented in Dian Igor Lindberg: *Literary Aspects of German Baroque Opera: History, Theory, and Practice (Christian H. Postel and Barthold Feind)* (Diss., Los Angeles, 1964) pp. 192–202, and in Solveig Olsen: *Christian Heinrich Postels Beitrag zur deutschen Literatur des späten 17. Jahrhunderts* (Diss., Houston, Texas, 1968) pp. 52–61, but none of them uses the perspectives of the present paper.

9 »Ein bürgerlich-städtisches Publikum, zu dem auch die unteren sozialen Schichten zählten, bestimmte den Charakter des grössten Kunstinstituts seiner Stadt. Dass dieser Hamburger Bürgergeschmack sich selbst in der mythologischen Oper durchsetzte, ist der klarste Beweis für seine nachhaltige Kraft und Wirkung.« (Eberhard Haufe: *Die Behandlung der antiken Mythologie in den Textbüchern der Hamburger Oper 1678–1738 (Mikrokosmos. Beiträge zur Literaturwissenschaft und Bedeutungsforschung* 37. Frankfurt am Main etc., 1994

[orig. Diss., Jena, 1964] p. 263; »A bourgeois-civic audience, comprising even the lower social layers, determined the character of the largest cultural institution of the city. That the taste of the Hamburg bourgeoisie even ruled the mythological opera, is the clearest evidence of its prolonged force and effect.«)

10 The melody of one single aria (sung by Abel in II:6) has been preserved in Hellmuth Christian Wolff: *Die Barockoper in Hamburg (1678–1738)*, vol. 2 (Wolfenbüttel, 1957 [orig. Diss. Kiel, 1942]) p. 55.

11 Ricardo J. Quinones: *The Changes of Cain* p. 8.

12 Ricardo J. Quinones: *The Changes of Cain* p. 9.

13 [Postel]: *Cain und Abel* p. [3f]. (»Concerning Heaven, we have not used the name or person of Jehova as an essential name of God, but instead the Love of God or the Justice of God. In Hell, we have accordingly, for certain reasons, put Pride on stage, since Lucifer would otherwise have been shown.«) – The punctuation mark »/« is equivalent to a modern comma. The printed libretto lacks pagination. In this essay, pagination is inserted in brackets in the preface, while references to the text of the opera proper are given by specification of act and scene with Roman and Arabic numerals: thus I:1 means Act I, scene 1.

14 The four winds correspond to Christian Richter's four elements in the prologue to *Der erschaffene, gefallene und aufgerichtete Mensch*. The winds actually begin Postel's libretto by connecting to Richter's opera by mentioning each of the four elements. There are constant allusions to the material of Richter's text in *Cain und Abel* (e.g. I:3–4, I:6, I:8–9, III:10).

15 The important words here are Himmel, Blitz, Wolcke, Wind, Sonne, Stern (sky, lightning, cloud, wind, sun, star). Connected with these are the motives of looking up into the sky and looking down at the earth.

16 Cf. Solveig Olsen: *Christian Heinrich Postels Beitrag zur deutschen Literatur des späten 17. Jahrhunderts* p. 61.

17 »Abel. Betrachte doch mich armen/ Der dir auf seinen Knien fleht/ Wenn dir ein Bruder nicht zu Hertzen geht. *Cain*. Was arm? was flehn? was Bruder? du must sterben.« (III:6. »Abel. Do look upon a wretch, begging on his knees, if [the sight of] a brother does not soften your heart. *Cain*. What do you mean wretch? what do you mean beg? what do you mean brother? you must die.«) It is typical for Postel, that he devotes a long passage in his preface to discussing the lack of evidence regarding the murder weapon, musing over alternative possibilities given by Christian and Jewish authorities. In the end he sides up with those that advocate a branch from a tree (*Cain und Abel* p. [6]). Cf. the author's deliberations on Cain's mark (p. [6f]).

18 The caption has »Göttliche Liebe«, but all cues have »Göttl. Gerechtigk.«.

19 *Cain und Abel* p. [1]. It is typical for Postel, that this preface fills seven and a half pages and is full of references to relevant authorities.

20 About Postel's life and literary output, cf. Olsen: *Christian Heinrich Postels Beitrag zur deutschen Literatur des späten 17. Jahrhunderts* and Dag Hedman: »Ariadne rediviva. Zur Bearbeitung Christian Heinrich Postels des antiken Ariadnethemas für die Hamburger Oper« (Annie Bourguignon, Konrad Harrer & Franz Hintereder-Emde [eds.]: *Hohe und niedere Literatur. Tendenzen zur Ausgrenzung, Vereinnahmung und Mischung im deutschsprachigen Raum* [Berlin, 2015]). A more detailed version can be accessed at <http://www.pop-zeitschrift.de/aufsätze/>.

21 Julius Elias: »Postel, Christian Henrich« in *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, Band 26 (Leipzig, 1888) p. 469. (Different sources give Postel's middle name alternately as »Heinrich« and »Henrich«.) (»[In *Cain und Abel*] we even find a repulsive love relation between brother and sister, which the author tries to justify in a learned preface.«)

22 *Cain und Abel* p. [2]. (»Since all this only consists of mere conjunctures, everybody is free to think and believe what they want; it neither aids nor prevents salvation.«)

23 Olsen is the first person even to mention »Trost« in connection with *Cain und Abel*, but she does not recognize the significance of this theme. Cf Olsen: *Christian Heinrich Postels Beitrag zur deutschen Literatur des späten 17. Jahrhunderts* pp. 53 and 58f.

24 »Alas, my sin has also affected you. Because of me Paradise has been lost. Your laboured sweat, with which you water the field, from which you can only expect thorns, because of the curse of the Lord, makes my tears flow from mine eyes with timid heart beats. This is the pain which gives me most pain.«

25 »Aria. 1. Great Maker of the Earth, when will the burdens of Thy children be averted? When will Thy offspring after pitiful and doleful crying be looked upon with mercy again? 2. But are we not too slight, righteous Father, eternal King, for Thy goodness to be seen when Thy creatures cry, and for us to receive advice and help after supplication full of sighing.«

26 This is one of several instances where Christ is mentioned in Postel's libretto, rather surprising from a chronological point of view, but naturally an important *persuasio* in relation to the Hamburg clergy and to the spectators (I:9, II:9, III:15–16).

27 »Away sorrows, away pangs, you have fettered me long enough. Since hope delights my spirit, all fear is gone«.

28 »What are the fleeting causes for rejoicing on Earth? A vain foam, a shadow, a dream. Often levity fills your breast with pain, low spirits come after laughing and frolicking. Misfortune makes lightning from sunshine, you hardly know

what happiness is. What are the fleeting causes for rejoicing on Earth? A vain foam, a shadow, a dream.«

29 »Dieweil Abel den letzten Verß singet/ fährt ein Strahl vom Himmel und zündet sein Opffer an/ welches wehrendem Ritornel brennet.« (»Whilst Abel sings the last verse, a ray falls from Heaven and ignites his offering/ which burns during the ritornel [orchestral interlude].«)

30 »*Cain*. Mein Bruder! so allein? *Abel*. Der von dem Heer der Engel ist umgeben Kan nie alleine sein. *Cain*. Einfältigkeit! wer wolte sie dir senden?« (»*Cain*. My brother! all alone? *Abel*. He who is surrounded by the host of angels can never be alone. *Cain*. Foolishness! Who would send them to you?«)

31 »Let all your sorrows pass, for the soul of your Abel lives. Even though his body will soon be a part of the Earth and snatched away from your eyes, another will come in his stead, who will bring you joy, and from whose lineage the world will behold Him, who abolishes the burden of sin. Let all your sorrows pass, for the soul of your Abel lives.«

32 »a godless, vile, sensual being, confiding in his defiant disposition and rights as a first-born, which makes him [...] believe that as a first-born he is the King of all Mankind.« It is tempting to compare Postel's Cain with Dostoyevsky's Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment* (1866). Just as the latter wanted to prove that he was not »a louse« but »a Napoleon«, Cain has ideas about himself as someone better and more important than the rest of Mankind. Cf. his aria in III:11: »Wer auff dem Kreiß der Erden/ Wil hoch erhaben werden/ Kan keinen gleichen sehn. Er muß von Flammen lernen/ Die nach dem Sitz der Sternen/ Zu ihrem Ursprung gehn.« (»He who would be master of the World, cannot allow any equal. He must learn from the flames, who would rise to the stars, their origin.«)

33 Chrysander: »Die zweite Periode der Hamburger Oper« column 341 (»a depraved son in an ailing household«).

34 Ricardo J. Quinones: *The Changes of Cain* p. 55. Postel chooses to use devils as allegories of Cain's constitutive faults of character: the head-devil is called Hochmuth (Pride), since this is Cain's main fault of character, from which all other problems emanate. The other devils are List (Cunning), Zorn (Wrath), and Mißgunst (Envy), Cain's other character flaws.

35 Staffan Olofsson: »Skammens styrka. Kain och Abel som barn i en dysfunktionell familj« in *Arche* 2014:2.

36 In the original, the recitative lines are printed in smaller type than the aria lines, and thus easily distinguishable. (»*Cain*. [*Aria*] High spirit, what could fetter thee? *Calm*[ana]. [*Recitative*] My brother, can't you hear? *Cain*. [*Aria*] Free spirit, what restricts thee? *Han*[och]. [*Recitative*] My father, what is this? *Cain*. [*Aria*] Could rocks, gentle winds... *Calm*. [*Recitative*] Your face, my love, is distorted. *Cain*. [*Aria*] Proud cedars/ supple limetrees... *Han*. [*Recitative*] Pray, look at thy

beloved child. Cain. [Aria] High mountains/ deep chasms/ To be infamously subjected? Cal. [Recitative] My light/ what can disturb your spirits thus? Cain. [Aria] No, oh, no. Han. [Recitative] Will you not, my father/ listen to your child? Cain. [Aria] High spirit, what could fetter thee? Audacious spirit, what restricts thee?«)

37 II:6 is all about this and Abel sings the words »vergnüget«, »Vergnügtheit« and »zu frieden« (all mean »content«) no less than seven times in spite of the scene's brevity.

38 Bernhard Jahn: »Christian Heinrich Postels *Verstöhrung Jerusalem* (1692). Zur Konfrontation divergierender barocker Poetiken und ihrer Destruktion im Opernlibretto« in *Compar(a)ison* 1994:2 p. 133. He is indebted to Hans-Jürgen Schings: »Consolatio Tragoediæ. Zur Theorie des barocken Trauerspiels« in Reinhold Grimm (ed.): *Deutsche Dramentheorien. Beiträge zu einer historischen Poetik des Dramas in Deutschland* (Frankfurt am Main, 1971) p. 12f and 19. Jahn points out that scenes of *atrocitas* normally are contrasted with scenes of gallantry, love or pomp for the sake of contrast and relief, which is clearly signalled by the scenography (p. 148). This is not the case in Postel's *Cain und Abel*, where the audience's knowledge of Abel's pending fate tinges the love scenes between Abel and Debora with melancholy, thus unifying rather than contrasting the scenes, in spite of the scenography (barren field vs. lovely forest etc.). Some of the scenes with the devils in Hell and on Earth bring a certain relief because they display spectacular scenic devices like Mißgunst's flying snake-pulled wagon (I:10, III:7, III:10), but some of them are tightly bound to the atmosphere of the main plot, since we see the devils scheming against Mankind in general or Cain specifically (III:5, III:7).

39 This is a type of scene in which Postel really shows his strength as a dramatist, always successful in exploiting the bizarre and the perverse. »Zorn. Nun ist es Zeit/ den Cain anzuhetzen. Ihr Freund' auf/ auf/ nun muß der Schlag geschehn. List. Wir müssen itzt mit Macht ansetzen. Mißg. Nun können wir das Werck vollendet sehn. List. So kan ich Abels Ehe trennen. Zorn. Und ich Verderben richten an. Mißg. So muß man mir den Ruhm vergönnen/ Daß ich auch Brüder zwingen kann. Mißg./List./Zorn. à 3. Nur fort/ hier ist nicht zu verweilen/ Die Zeit ist da/ wir müssen eilen. (Folgen dem Cain nach.)« (»Zorn. Now is the time/ to goad Cain. Friends away/ away/ the blow must come. List. Now we must stick to our task with might. Mißg. Now we can have the work completed. List. Thus I can ruin Abel's marriage. Zorn. And I can do mischief. Mißg. No one can deny me the honor/ That I even can coerce brothers. Mißg./List./Zorn. à 3. Away/ no rest/ The time has come/ make haste. (They follow Cain.«))

40 Chrysander: »um den Zuschauern einen vergnüglichen



Schrecken einzujagen« (column 341; »for the purpose of striking some enjoyable terror into the hearts of the audience«), Olsen: »eine bühnenwirksame diabolische Dynamik« (p. 57; »stage-effective diabolical dynamics«).

41 For a discussion of the interaction between text and scenography in 17<sup>th</sup> century opera in general, cf. Dag Hedman: »Trädgårdar i 1600-talslibretti« (in the forthcoming conference volume *Det återvunna paradiset. Tidigmoderna trädgårdar i fiktion och verklighet, teori och praktik* from the Department of Literature, History of Ideas und Religion at the University of Gothenburg). – Echo effects were popular and had been used frequently in operas right through the 17<sup>th</sup> century since Ottavio Rinuccini's *La rappresentazione di Dafne* (Florence, 1594). Cf. Dag Hedman: »Io che quasi pastor tra questi boschi. En diskussion av två favola in musica-prologer av Ottavio Rinuccini« in *Tidskrift för Litteraturvetenskap* 2012:2–3 pp. 111–123.

42 Here Dian Igor Lindberg: *Literary Aspects of German Baroque Opera* must be corrected, where the author writes about »the simplicity of its [*Cain und Abel*'s] stage settings. The story afforded no opportunity for splendid decorations [...]. There is thus a total absence of that pomp and circumstance so dear to the heart of the Baroque opera audience.« (p. 201) As we have seen, the very opposite is the truth. Lindberg quite logically has to retreat from this position: »On the other hand considerable use is made of the customary flying machines. Not only do allegorical figures descend from the clouds on several occasions[,] but the devils repeatedly travel through the air [...]. There are also the usual ballets: a dance of evil spirits at the end of the first act and a dance of Furies at the end of the second.« (pp. 201f) It is not clear how Lindberg is able to conciliate the assertions of the first quotation with the facts in the second.

43 For information on the »Lustige Person«, cf. Hellmuth Christian Wolff: *Die Barockoper in Hamburg (1678–1738)*, vol. 1 (Wolfenbüttel, 1957 [orig. Diss. Kiel, 1942]) pp. 132–182 and Reinhart Meyer: »Hanswurst und Harlekin oder Der Narr als Gattungsschöpfer. Versuch einer Analyse des komischen Spiels in den Staatsaktionen des Musik- und Spechtheaters im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert« in *Théâtre, nation et société en Allemagne au XVIIIe siècle* (eds.: J.-M. Valentin and R. Krebs. Nancy, 1990) pp. 13–39.

44 »Eine weitere Folge des Bestrebens, mit dem heiligen Gegenstände möglichst vorsichtig und würdig zu verfahren, war die Ausschliessung des Hanswurstes, welcher doch seit dem Mittelalter in den geistlichen Spielen eine legitime Persönlichkeit ist.« (Chrysander: »Die zweite Periode der Hamburger Oper von 1682 bis 1694« column 340. »Another consequence of the effort to handle the sacred subject with as much caution and dignity as possible, was the exclusion of the

jester, who actually had been a legitimate person in religious plays since the Middle Ages.«)

45 Wolff: *Die Barockoper in Hamburg* p. 30, quoting Johannes Bolte: *Von Wanderkomödianten und Hantwerkerspielen des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts* (1934) p. 476.

46 The other two were *Die Wunderbar=errettete Iphigenia* (1699; The Miraculously Saved Iphigenia) and *Die Wunder=schöne Psyche* (1701; The Wonderfully Beauteous Psyche). Nicolaus Wilckens: »Christian Heinrich Postel, J. U. L.« in *Hamburgischer Ehren=Tempel* (published posthumously: Hamburg, 1770) p. 701.

47 Chrysander: »Die zweite Periode der Hamburger Oper von 1682 bis 1694« column 340f (»that Postel always finds what is dramatically effective by intuition«, »dramatic know-how, stylistic brilliance and skilled handling of the plot; in this he excelled over his biblical-dramatical predecessors as much as over the librettists of his own day, who were his rivals [at the Hamburg Opera house]«).

48 Ibid. column 341 (»Of all German biblical plays this is the best when it comes to originality and unity«).