

THE AMERICAN CAIN: AN ALTERNATIVE NATIONAL ARCHETYPE

by

W BRETT WILEY

(Under the Direction of James Nagel)

ABSTRACT

There is a national archetype based on Cain, the son of the Biblical Adam. The figure, the offspring of R. W. B. Lewis's American Adam, appears when a character exhibits specific Cainian traits and reenacts his life experiences, most notably the murder of a double, either in pursuit of the American Dream or as a result of a failure to attain the opportunity suggested by the national ideology. There are a number of examples of the archetype, in particular, Frank Norris's *McTeague*, Caroline Gordon's *Rion Outlaw*, and John Steinbeck's *Caleb Trask*. The evidence of a second national archetype is a significant addition to the study of American literature, providing a necessary addendum to Lewis's seminal work, *The American Adam*. The American Cain, who serves as a representative of the consistent conflict in the country that can often turn violent, provides perspective on the overt hope and idealism of the figure Lewis identified in the early writings of American authors and reveals the inherent issues with the dream to which he corresponds.

INDEX WORDS: American Cain, American Adam, American literary archetypes, American Dream, Frank Norris, *McTeague*, Caroline Gordon, *Green Centuries*, *Penhally*, John Steinbeck, *East of Eden*, *The American Adam*, Cain, Abel

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W BRETT WILEY

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M.A., The University of Georgia, 2002

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W BRETT WILEY

Major Professor: James Nagel

Committee: Douglas Anderson
James Kibler

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
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For Elizabeth and Olivia

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
CHAPTER	
1 The Son of the American Adam	1
2 <i>McTeague</i> : The Dentist and the American Dream	77
3 <i>Green Centuries</i> : Progress, Tradition, and the American Cain.....	128
4 <i>East of Eden</i> : Paradox and the American Cain	199
5 The Continued Relevance of the American Cain	275
REFERENCES	323

CHAPTER 1

THE SON OF THE AMERICAN ADAM

“Few literatures can compare with America’s for sustained analysis of national character, and for regular discussion of alternative societies. . . . Through the phenomena of independence, republicanism and the melting-pot, the Old/New polarity became, and remains, a social and literary fixation. There was, of course, no single New World, no single Old: reactions and expectations varied from individual to individual, from one national to another. But the sense of a fresh start of gigantic potential and proportions, the chance to create the world over again, an Eden without a Fall, without an Eve, was common to everyone.”¹

“Generally, what emerges from the antislavery moment, the Civil War, and the inequities of Reconstruction is the problem of democracy in a nation whose destiny was no longer so clearly manifest.”²

“The [Cain-Abel] myth itself . . . is a foundation myth[,] and the emergence of . . . Cain presents the character best suited to lead his time into a new order of being.”³

I. A New American Hero

From its beginnings, America has been characterized as a place of opportunity and freedom

for all those who seek a new start, whether they are natural citizens or immigrants arriving in the United States for the first time. Many of the earliest arrivals viewed their journey to the “New World” in Biblical terms, uniting the Genesis account with their trip to the land of promise and potential. As a letter writer in the anonymously scribed *Mourt’s Relation* declares, the country where the separatists landed on that first journey to what was to become Plymouth was “one the most pleasant, most healthful, and most fruitful parts of the world.” It was as Scott Donaldson and Ann Massa articulate, “in the passage across the Atlantic, [the pilgrims] believed themselves transformed, lifted by God out of history and into a new Eden.”⁴ Richard Slotkin echoes these comments, arguing that the new inhabitants not only believed they were in a second “Garden” but further accepted the idea that “the New World was . . . an Eden from which the serpent and forbidden trees had been thoughtfully excluded.”⁵ David Noble suggests that those early ideals created a pervasive belief that anything was possible for the citizens of the country, a perspective that remained ubiquitous as time passed:

The soaring faith of the American romantic affirmed the ability of the average citizen to rise above his personal weakness and the traditions and institutions of his European ancestors because, in the United States, every individual was in close contact with nature; the West was a limitless national reservoir of spiritual strength.⁶

A seemingly uncorrupted “nature” offered the original settlers the chance for a new beginning; the frontier, which appeared to stretch infinitely to the West, only expanded those initial beliefs. The “soaring faith” of the citizenry increased the possibility that a re-creation of Eden could be achieved, inhabited by Adams and Eves seeking a better life.

The attitude first perpetuated by William Bradford and others in early texts, and then

described by Donaldson, Slotkin, and Noble, was adopted by many of the first arrivals to the land. No matter their original intentions, whether for religious liberty, economic opportunity, or just a new beginning, the first immigrants risked death, disappointment, and financial ruin for the chance to improve their situation in that second Eden. Their efforts and idealism produced a shared belief, the genesis of the American Dream, that setting foot on new soil would free them from the hardships they left behind and would offer them a better, more prosperous life. As William Bradford writes in *Of Plimouth Plantation*, the “New World” promised “vast and unpeopled countries” that were “fruitful and fit for habitation,” a welcomed replacement for the persecution the pilgrims faced in England and the temptations and “great licentiousness” they found in Holland.⁷ In some cases, the experiment worked to great success. Despite considerable obstacles and some questionable methods, communities, towns, and eventually a nation grew out of these first ventures, and roots were laid for commercial, political, and societal development. Those who journeyed across the ocean for the right to practice their beliefs in their own way found the space to do just that. Others who sought business opportunities discovered a viable location in which to pursue such ends. Those who merely wanted to have a fresh start met that desire amidst the burgeoning society. Settlements were established, commerce flourished, and citizens reveled in freedom as they pursued their dreams in a growing country. For those willing to take the chance, the developing states provided space to pursue individual desires; it was, in fact, a new Eden of sorts.

The ideals of future opportunity and freedom from the past pervaded the developing land; as a result, they came to be represented by an archetype that, according to R. W. B. Lewis, was defined in the early writings of the nation. In 1955, he published what was to become a seminal investigation of early American writing, arguing that a national icon did exist that embodied such

optimism and hopefulness and provided a model that citizens could follow. In *The American Adam*, he reports that the most influential thinkers and authors of the young country, reflecting, in some part at least, the collective mind of the culture, recreated the first man of the Bible on the shores and in the forests of the “New World.” The figure established a path of progress for new arrivals and represented potential fulfillment for those who were laying down roots. Lewis illustrates that the writings of American intellectuals and authors offered a varied but continually developing picture of the American Adam, a prescription for what the people, and in turn the nation, could become. Grounded in the beliefs of Protestant pilgrims seeking the Edenic promises of the “New World,” the earliest inhabitants embraced the foundations of the American Dream, an idea that established them in a place of independence, economic and social opportunity, freedom, and the prospect of future success. The dreams of a culture produced a hero that satisfied the hopes of countrymen from all perspectives, whether Puritans, Transcendentalists, Congregationalists, atheists, or others. Each group could, in different ways, recognize and embrace the character for its own ends. As Lewis shows, within one hundred years of the pilgrims’ arrival in what is now Massachusetts, historians, poets, novelists, and theologians as disparate as Charles Brockden Brown, Henry James, Sr., and Walt Whitman adopted the language of re-creation and perfectability and likewise reinforced the idea of a national archetype based on the original resident of Eden.

The story of the young nation and its hero was told in the pages of its fiction and non-fiction; it was a dramatization of the promises and successes that for all appearances were the hallmarks of America. However, some of the newest arrivals, those who sought a second chance in the New World, knew a very different existence. While many found a better life, thousands succumbed to disease and the elements; in addition, the colonies warred against one another as

well as the Native Americans who made claim to the land and fought to preserve their own way of life. Even the claims of freedom and opportunity were sometimes only verbal acknowledgements. Officially-sanctioned liberties and guidelines proved to be as potentially prohibitive and corrupting as they were gratifying; religious dissenters were removed from the colony and those who chose to leave merely to pursue other possibilities were often rebuffed by the leadership.⁸ *Of Plimouth Plantation* presents the odd combination of hopeful optimism and devastating reality that the immigrants experienced. The divinely-appointed death of a “profane” sailor on the *Mayflower*, the particulars of the miracle rain versus the atrocities of the Pequot War, or the horrors of Thomas Granger’s bestiality provide just a few examples of the complications in Bradford’s history that reveal the tragedies that occurred beside tales of grace and provision that displayed the pilgrims’ faith.⁹ Cotton Mather’s *Magnalia Christi Americana*, Mary Rowlandson’s account of her captivity, and William Byrd’s *A History of the Dividing Line* share both the qualities and limitations of Bradford’s annals. All provide the inspiring stories of heroes or redemption from death alongside the disturbing images of murder and failure. The image of the American Adam was simply that: an image.

J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur’s *Letters from an American Farmer* also illustrates both the opportunities promised in America as represented by the Adamic figure as well as the potential for suffering and loss. At the start, the narrator of the text has achieved his desire to settle and establish a life in the New World. He understands the need for a fiercely independent, resilient, and hopeful citizenry for the future. In answer to his own question about what the true American looks like, the letter-writer provides a prescriptive model reminiscent of the model Lewis exposes:

He is an American, who, leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and

manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds. . . . The American is a new man, who acts upon new principles; he must therefore entertain new ideas, and form new opinions. From involuntary idleness, servile dependence, penury, and useless labour, he has passed to toils of a very different nature, rewarded by ample subsistence.—This is an American.¹⁰

The text provides letter after letter praising the idyllic country and recounting the achievements that this staple “American” has accomplished on his own farm. Unfortunately, the writer’s epistolary hero does not continue such an idyllic existence indefinitely; instead, he witnesses violent encounters with Native Americans, the horrors of slavery, and, ultimately, the dangers and struggles of the Revolutionary War, all of which initiate a coda to the hopeful national and personal progress.

For all the autonomy that the text suggests was part of the first farmers’ existence and the opportunity that appears to be promised, the example, in the end, is somewhat pale. The final chapter, “Distresses of a Frontier Man,” describes anything but the optimism that is found in the opening letters. Though the language is idealistic and the descriptions of the land are lush, the letter-writer eventually seems implausible, fantastic, or even crazed. In the end, the farmer laments his unenviable situation:

Never was a situation so singularly terrible as mine, in every possible respect, as a member of an extensive society, as a citizen of an inferior division of the same society, as a husband, as a father, as a man who exquisitely feels for the miseries of others as well as for his own!¹¹

His situation has changed dramatically from the idealistic life he had written about earlier.

Circumstances in the country significantly alter his prospects for the future and leave him dejected and forlorn. The Revolutionary War is beginning and the hopes for future are suddenly unsure; the farmer is faced with the proposition of moving west into uncharted territory, but the Native Americans present a very real threat to his life and way of life. And yet, despite the considerable shift in tone at the end of the book, Europeans read the “reports” and embarked for the New World, emboldened with the promise of the American Dream. The Adamic figure prevailed in the national mindset.

As a result of his place in American history, Lewis’ Adam provides a strong starting point in terms of identifying a national icon; there is little question that the figure was adapted for use in the literature of the United States. Those who experienced life in the nation under far different terms, settlers who knew difficulty and death, were not represented by that idyllic hero. If Adam is an image of possibility and hope, there is need for an archetype who could portray the negative experience as well, a character who shows that the opportunities are in no way assured. The story of Genesis provides the icon; Cain, the offspring of the “first” man, is a strong model for those who know an opposite experience to the potential represented by the national Adam. Like Lewis’ figure, the American Cain borrows not only from the religious foundations of the country but from its social history as well. The son is frustrated in his effort to attain the opportunity that his father’s existence suggests and, as a result, envies those who realize their aspirations, namely a relation who has found some version of success. His own attempts thwarted or simply rejected, the national Cain reacts in anger and brings about the death of his brother-figure. Thus situated, he is exiled and leaves to form a new existence beyond the confines of the original home. The son embodies the characteristics of his Biblical antecedent but, like his forebear, internalizes those attributes in ways unique to his nation. When he

appears, the Cain of the United States shows that the concept of the dream is as given to failure as it is to achievement and that such defeat can lead to violent and devastating ends. Most significantly, he displays the violence, envy, and conceit that were the marks of his predecessor, exhibiting these and other traits in his own failure to achieve his pursuits. The American Cain exists as an important model in the literature of the country, an archetype that reveals the potential failure of the Adam figure and the dream that he has come to represent.

There has been mention of the American Cain in other studies, but nowhere has he been defined or explored in terms of the national dream and its aspects. More recently, some scholars appropriated the label in discussion of works as disparate as *Cane*, *Sula*, and *Deliverance*, borrowing from the details of Lewis' study and from the Biblical account, though these arguments have their problems.¹² There are numerous articles and essays about alternatives to Lewis' Adamic myth, but most simply show the failures or limitations of the original and do not offer any alternatives for a national icon.¹³ Studies about murderers, brothers, outcasts, and farmers exist, all qualities that the son of Adam embodies, but none contain a conclusive explanation of the figure in the fiction of the United States.¹⁴ Not even *The American Adam* makes reference to the sons of the first man; in fact, Lewis argues that the father retains his place as a national protagonist well into the twentieth century, even until the 1950s, when his study was published. For the attention given to the characteristics and history of such a figure as he appears in the literature of the United States and the alternative that he provides to the Adamic hero, there is certainly a need for a thorough description of the archetype. But this particular mythic structuring of American literature and life must first be seen through the lens of Lewis' book, which provides the background and space for Cain as a national archetype.

II. The American Adam in Focus

In the prologue to *The American Adam*, R. W. B. Lewis announces that he is providing “the first tentative outlines of a native American mythology” as found in writings from “New England and the Atlantic seaboard” from “1820 to 1860.”¹⁵ As he explains, he sought a mythic identity that was produced by the culture and encapsulated the overarching ideas, current conversation, and future dreams of the fledgling states and their citizens. He relates that certain ideals surfaced again and again in his search for a national persona: “innocence, novelty, experience, sin, time, evil, hope, the present, memory, the past, [and] tradition.”¹⁶ Lewis makes plain that his aim is to examine these terms and “account for the dialogue that emerged as those ideas were invoked by American writers and speakers, from 1820 onward, in their contentious effort to define the American character and the life worth living.”¹⁷ Ultimately, he introduces the Adamic figure as the character that emerges from the words and aspirations of the thinkers of the day, those who developed and then disseminated the national hopes and possibilities of a new life, culture, and finally, future.¹⁸

Lewis describes a model he believes not only provides a better understanding of early American thinking but one who also acts as a representative of the original settlers and their hopes. It is an “image contrived to embody the most fruitful contemporary ideas[:] . . . the authentic American as a figure of heroic innocence and vast potentialities poised at the start of a new history.”¹⁹ He argues that the archetype materialized from the cultural discussion found in fictional, theological, poetic, and historical works, texts that collectively communicated the ideology of the people as voiced by the men and women of letters. Before he traces the development of the archetype, he presents a composite definition of the hero as he is in his

earliest appearances. He is

a radically new personality, the hero of the new adventure: an individual emancipated from history, happily bereft of ancestry, untouched and undefiled by the usual inheritances of family and race; an individual standing alone, self-reliant, and self-propelling, ready to confront whatever awaited him with the aid of his own unique and inherent resources.²⁰

As the author elucidates, it is no great surprise “in a Bible-reading generation, that the new hero (in praise or disapproval) was most easily identified with Adam before the Fall. Adam was the first, the archetypal, man.” He adds that, just like the earliest settlers hoped to be,

his moral position was prior to experience, and in his very newness he was fundamentally innocent. The world and history lay all before him. And he was the type of creator, the poet par excellence, creating language itself by naming the elements of the scene about him.²¹

Fleshed out by those who most influenced the society’s collective mind, he became an unofficial, national icon, depicting a life to which the citizenry could aspire, whether they consciously imitated the idyllic model or not. As portrayed, Adam was admirable, heroic, and even, at times, seemingly infallible. As Lewis maintains, he was all that a person in the “New World” could hope to be: uniquely individual, unfettered by the past, resilient, resourceful, and blazing a trail toward a better future.

Lewis explains that the developmental process of the American Adam included many phases but none as important as the assumption of the belief that the old was to be put away so that the new creation could emerge. He describes the movement away from accepted wisdom, rooted in Europe and the past, and explains that proponents of the new Adam endorsed a

deliberate step towards the establishment of, to paraphrase Henry David Thoreau, a new “man” who must “start life all over again.”²² The “party of Hope,” Ralph Waldo Emerson’s unofficial group of forward-thinking contemporaries that included the author of *Walden*, proclaimed that, as Lewis relates, “in the New World a fresh start was literally and immediately possible to anyone wide enough awake to attempt it.”²³ The national Adam exhibited the characteristics that the citizenry needed to achieve such a perspective, most importantly the ability to break from history and declare allegiance to the “sovereign present.”²⁴ Having attained the untamed shores and wild forests of a new Eden, the first immigrants were seemingly free of the past and its restrictions, a sign of the colonists’ break from European influences, including religious intolerance and established, now restrictive, examples of philosophy, literature, history, and theology.

Seeking a rise above the influences of the “Old World,” unofficial members of Emerson’s “party of hope” such as theologian Horace Bushnell, poets including Walt Whitman, and novelists such as Oliver Wendell Holmes and James Fenimore Cooper inspired the culture to look ahead, forgetting what was behind and seeking a new existence in the recreated Eden.²⁵

Scott Donaldson and Ann Massa maintain that

as the concept of the New and the Good took shape, so the concept of the Old and the Bad intensified. The Old stood for hierarchical injustice, institutional complexity, and social decadence; the New for the equality of all men, the abolition of social distinction, for freedom, spontaneity, simplicity, and vigour.

The Old World was sophisticated and corrupt; America was simple and innocent.²⁶

As this dichotomy developed, the separation between the entities became more deliberate. Lewis

explains that early in the nineteenth century, particularly after the War of 1812, the young nation exuded “an air of hopefulness” that was apparent not only in the society but in “American letters” as well, an opportunistic perspective that further fueled the optimistic party.²⁷ At the forefront of the movement was the fictional and evolving Adam archetype; he was the future, since, in his “New World” incarnation, he had no attachments or previous history to restrict the present or his potential, which stood unchecked and infinite.

Specific examples of this “case against the past,” as Lewis labels it, are abundant in American literature and letters.²⁸ Emerson himself famously called for a break from previous influences, placing aside the writings, thoughts, and ideas of history, and instead forging a new, national identity that was natural and unique. In “The American Scholar,” he implores his listeners to view existing texts and institutions of learning not as established records of absolute truth or knowledge but rather as motivation to produce something new. In his lecture to Harvard’s Phi Beta Kappa fraternity, he argues that

the book, the college, the school of art, the institution of any kind, stop with some past utterance of genius. This is good, say they,—let us hold by this. They pin me down. They look backward and not forward. But genius looks forward: the eyes of man are set in his forehead, not in his hindhead: man hopes: genius creates.²⁹

Emerson echoes these ideals in other lectures, such as in “Circles” where he proclaims that “in nature every moment is new; the past is always swallowed and forgotten; the coming only is sacred.”³⁰ The responsibility of the thinker, he concludes, is to approach life uniquely and to form something new without being bound to history.

R. W. B. Lewis also points to the fictional works of the nation, such as Nathaniel

Hawthorne's "Earth's Holocaust," for examples of the emphasis on the present. Though not a member of the "hopeful," the novelist did entertain and fictionalize some of their ideas. The tale, Lewis explains, serves as an example of the country's intention

to escape from every existing mode of organizing and explaining experience, in order to confront life in entirely original terms. . . . Hawthorne had articulated the need he detected in the atmosphere of the day for a purgatorial action—preceding, as it were, the life of the new Adam in the new earthly paradise.³¹

The willingness and even passion of the characters to destroy everything from the past is not necessarily rational, as the narrator exposes; however, their intention to rid the earth of all that allegedly corrupts further illustrates the "hopeful" strategy. Early in the story, when symbols of rank and documents establishing official positions are brought to the flames, one man protests this latest kindling for the fire. A "rude figure" rebuffs the detractor, declaring that any future leader of the society will not stand on past laurels or the claims of his ancestors but rather on his own merit:

And henceforth let no man dare to show a piece of musty parchment as his warrant for lording it over his fellows. If he have strength of arm, well and good; it is one species of superiority. If he have wit, wisdom, courage, force of character, let these attributes do for him what they may; but from this day forward no mortal must hope for place and consideration by reckoning up the mouldy bones of his ancestors. That nonsense is done away.³²

The figure he describes, in his rejection of all previous markers of worth, is reminiscent of the American Adam. Hawthorne's story, though ironic in the end, reiterates this rejection of the past over and over again, as more items are thrown onto the pyre.³³

Whitman, who Lewis labels “the representative poet of the party of Hope,” provides “the fullest portrayal of the representative man as a new, American Adam” in *Leaves of Grass*.³⁴ The poet incorporates Adamic and Edenic imagery throughout his collection and, like his contemporaries, advocates the present over the past. In “Song of Myself,” he encourages his readers to accept nothing, including his own words:

You shall no longer take things at second or third hand, nor look through the eyes
of the dead, nor feed on the spectres in books,
You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from me,
You shall listen to all sides and filter them from your self.³⁵

The admonition to forego the establishment returns in “Starting from Paumanok” and later the poet assumes the role “As Adam Early in the Morning.” In a later poem, from the final 1891-92 edition, the theme again surfaces:

I was looking a long while for a clue to the history of the past for myself, and for
these chants—and now I have found it;
It is not in those paged fables in the libraries, (them I neither accept nor reject;)
It is no more in the legends than in all else;
It is in the present—it is this earth to-day.³⁶

The potential in the young society was not to be found in “those paged fables” or “legends” of history but in the “present.” As *The American Adam* expresses, “Whitman had the opportunity to dramatize . . . the creation, that is, of a new world; an account this time with a happy ending for Adam” in this “Yankee Genesis.”³⁷ The poet’s accomplishment and his poetic masterpiece, itself an ever-evolving experiment, clearly depicts an emphasis on the presentness of the figure, an ideal that was seen as imperative to the nation, its people, and its representative icon.

The Adam archetype also embodied, beyond his “present-ness” and a related focus towards the future, all the qualities that were deemed necessary first for mere survival and then for eventual success in the forests and fields of this second garden. His wisdom, natural instinct, adaptability, pioneer-spirit, strength, and cunning were desirable qualities the model embodied and inspired in others. As time passed, however, they realized that the life they had chosen demanded that they adopt a new existence and acquire new skills to survive. The opportunity that was available would have to be attained, sometimes at a cost. The archetype, as Lewis relates, shifted to incorporate this need, and as a result was no longer necessarily infallible, as perhaps Emerson and his group intended. Instead, the realities of the frontier and the politics of the burgeoning states were beginning to undermine the idyllic experience of the initial hero of the nation and complicate the underlying beliefs of the country. He elucidates, however, that the change in the figure’s experiences are further evidence of his status as the American Adam; simply, it is proof of his fortunate fall, a replaying of the Garden of Eden scene where original sin provides the need for redemption. Adam was still Adam, but the world he knew was not the same. Lewis explains that a new group emerges out of the “party of Hope” to depict the development of the figure, a collection of fiction writers that recognized the potential of the hero but also began to realize the tragic actualities apparent in the fledging nation. The “party of Irony,” as they are labeled in the book, did not “meet the request” for a “new kind of hero in a new kind of world, to be characterized in new language.”³⁸ Instead, the ironic “novelists of power” commented “dramatically” upon the nature of that “hero” illustrating “what would happen if [such a figure] entered the world as it really is.” The book proclaims that the protagonist of *The Deerslayer*, and Cooper’s subsequent novels, might be the most “unambiguously treated” Adamic hero, a character that is “celebrated in his very Adamism” but

also is inherently human, faced with the slings and arrows of the world around him.³⁹

Natty Bumppo, this most quintessential of examples, who exists in nature and reads the details of the forest and the people with whom he comes in contact, eventually is confronted with tragedy and pain despite the fact that for all appearances he lives an idyllic life in nature; he is unable to avoid troubles despite attempts to remain separated from societal obligations and complications. As R. W. B. Lewis points out, Natty is “a hero in space,” the first of many examples of the model to be thrust into nature and society as it truly is: potentially problematic and complicated. The national representative, wandering the wild places of the still-developing country and adapting to the natural landscape, the thoroughly-masculine Leatherstocking was still a hero to follow, seemingly perfect in his own way. But even the first novel in which he appears, *The Pioneers*, portrays Natty experiencing suffering or at least the potential for loss or disappointment among not only his companions but in his culture and himself. Though he tries to remain isolated from the village of Templeton, he is forced to deal with the issues that encroach upon his existence. The legendary character, as Adamic as any of his predecessors or those who would come after him, recognizes that his intentions and his wishes carry with them the very real possibility of failure, for the animals and the men he encounters share a proclivity for biting, clawing, and running. The sheen of the model Lewis has identified has become tarnished; the circumstances produce a place for another iconic figure.

The archetypal example most “celebrated in his Adamism” witnesses the fall and its ramifications and learns what effects failure has on the American Dream itself; suddenly the prospect that the national belief is flawed, that the hopes of the present, for the future, are suspect, is depicted. Lewis follows the archetype through this continued development as seen in the novels of authors Charles Brockden Brown and Robert Montgomery Bird and further into the

works of James Fenimore Cooper and Nathaniel Hawthorne; each text that is mentioned portrays the apparent trouble in the new society and the complications this causes for its hero. Brown's Edgar Huntly and Bird's hero in *Nick of the Woods* are protagonists that struggle to attain an Adamic existence. As in Cooper, the books portray a consistent progression as characters come face to face with difficult situations and, as a result, must sacrifice the image of their own infallibility and question the idealism of their culture. In *The Prairie*, the book that covers the end of his life, Natty Bumppo has just such an epiphany. He again experiences the brutality of Native Americans defending their lands, as seen in *The Last of the Mohicans* and elsewhere, but more significantly, this time he witnesses the terror caused by "Americans" as he is faced with horrors caused by the Bush family. He is a man who, unlike his antecedent, does not bring about the fall but still fully learns the implications of innocence lost.

Hawthorne, who with Cooper and Herman Melville comprises the group called the "novelists of power" in *The American Adam*, presents the next progression of the hero in his experience of fallibility. Lewis, however, shows that rather than just analyzing the effect that the Fall has on the American Adam, the author of *The Scarlet Letter* manages to call society itself into question. The result is literature that depicts the lone individual against "the tribe," as in the moral complexity of Hester Prynne's relationship to the town of Salem and its citizens. As *The American Adam* reports, it was the novelist "who saw in American experience the re-creation of the story of Adam and who, more than any other contemporary, exploited the active metaphor of the American as Adam—before and during and after the fall."⁴⁰ Though sympathetic to the ideas of Emerson and others, Hawthorne's works never portray the archetype or what he represents; those who display some Adamic qualities, such as Ethan Brand or young Robin, prove ineffectual in the end or are merely brushed aside, hardly idyllic models. Lewis notes that,

unlike the party of Hope, “he both celebrated and deplored” the hero in the novels and short stories, depicting protagonists that had the equal potential for success and failure, just as the figure and all that he represented was possible but not assured.⁴¹ The archetype, imbued with endless potential, still embodied the personal tools and natural surroundings that promised certain success; as Hawthorne’s novels and stories display, it was the suggestion of America as Eden that was in question.

After tracing the development of the archetype from young innocent to a fallen hero in an imperfect world, Lewis again defines the figure, laying out “the matter of Adam” as he stands after his progression in the writings of the still young nation:

The matter of Adam: the ritualistic trials of a young innocent, liberated from family and social history or bereft of them; advancing hopefully into a complex world he knows not of; radically affecting that world and radically affected by it; defeated, perhaps even destroyed—in various versions of the recurring anecdote hanged, beaten, shot, betrayed, abandoned—but leaving his mark upon the world, and a sign in which conquest may later become possible for the survivors.⁴²

The development of the model from that suggested at the opening of the study reflects the troubles that the hero knows in his life, the suffering he witnesses and experiences in the midst of a normal existence. The book purports that those realities naturally bring about the destruction of Adam, which in turn leads to his assumption of a role as a savior, or in Biblical terms, a second Adam.

Lewis argues that this final phase of the figure is depicted most fully by Melville, who “first made it manifest.”⁴³ Melville was “the one novelist in nineteenth-century America gifted with a genuinely myth-making imagination . . . to elevate the anecdote [of Adam as national

type] to the status of myth, and so give it a permanent place among the resources of our literature.”⁴⁴ He argues that Billy Budd is the quintessential second Adam, or Christ-figure; in other words, Billy acts as representative of the deified, national archetype. As he points out, Melville’s protagonist is wrongly accused, mistreated, killed, and symbolically “resurrected,” ultimately taking on the role of a messiah; he is a “young innocent” without “family or social history,” who is “radically affected” by the world and “even destroyed” by it. As Lewis proclaims, “Billy is a type of scapegoat hero, by whose sacrifice the sins of his world are taken away, the world of the H. M. S. “Indomitable” [*sic*] and the British navy, a world threatened by a mutiny which could destroy it.”⁴⁵ The result is a microcosmic society that receives redemption whether it deserves it or not. Lewis purports that the author has, as in *Moby-Dick*, shown his repudiation for the “hopeful dawn” of potential that Emerson and his party evoked but in the same stroke has restored the possibility “in an apotheosis of its hero. There will be salvation yet, the story hints, from that treacherous dream.”⁴⁶ The archetype has reached divine status, Lewis argues, and has become a second Adam, a figure that offers redemption through sacrifice.

It is here that the argument falters considerably. First, *Billy Budd*, though written by an American author, is set aboard a British naval ship, complicating the protagonist’s role as an Adam figure who is American. Secondly, Billy is hardly idealistic; he is innocent and beautiful, but he is limited by his inability to recognize the gravity or reality of his situation or to express himself with clarity or purpose. He is killed unceremoniously, a virtuous sacrifice struck down in order to establish or retain some sense of order in an unsettling and tragic moment; but no one seems to receive salvation, though Lewis purports that in the “sacrifice the sins of his world are taken away” namely the “world of the H.M.S. ‘Indomitable’ and the British Navy.” The men onboard the ship do not seem to even grasp the situation that has occurred and no great change

take place. Though the titular hero seems to have Adamic qualities, he does not rise to mythic status, despite Lewis' claim; he is merely a sacrifice whose loss seems unjust. The "apotheosis" of the American Adam, though Lewis claims it has occurred in *Billy Budd*, is never realized. The leap, of faith, is perhaps too great. Instead, the archetypal figure is further weakened or undermined; Adam is no longer idyllic but noticeably imperfect. Lewis makes one last grasp at immortalizing the archetype; he opines that "the matter of Adam," at least in 1955, "continues to supply the motivating force in the composition of our liveliest and most durable fiction," but his argument falls flat. His remaining examples are increasingly untenable.

Lewis concludes his study with further examples from historical and theological works and then provides an epilogue to speak about the contemporary manifestations of the figure he identifies, at least contemporary to 1955. However, he has trouble explaining how works such as *The Great Gatsby* or "The Bear," among others, utilize the model he has identified. As the nation has changed, and in turn its literature and heroes, the Adamic model proves untenable. His conclusions provide the opportunity to complain that "most serious efforts at fiction in America have suffered, during the past few decades, from the two cardinal defects of the new hopelessness," a label he affixes to an emergent party of authors and thinkers.⁴⁷ He identifies "defects" in their works such as "an antagonism to nature" and "a distrust of experience," qualities antithetical to the archetype he argues was produced in some of the earliest writings created in the United States. He adds that "the American as Adam has been replaced by the American as Laocoön," another mythological character who is the target of divine wrath rather than a symbol of endless opportunity. Lewis states that the result is fiction and non-fiction that neglects the original archetype, but neglect is not the issue. More accurately, as the vision of the nation consistently shifts, literature portrays the experiences of more citizens and considers the

events of history, many of which are tragic or simply deplorable. The national Adam, though he still appears, engenders an archetypal son that represents a very different existence than that of his father.⁴⁸

III. Running Counter to the Dream

The conclusion to Lewis' study is more than a mere lament on the present state of letters. The suggestion of another American archetype throws suspicion on not only the original figure but also the dream of the nation to which he corresponds. As Lewis recognized, other models could be used as national icons, a fact that complicates the issues of identity and vision for the country. In other words, by the middle of the twentieth century, the figure he describes is no longer the only icon of the United States emerging within the national literature and letters. The dream with which the Adamic model became identified, though it remained an influential ideology, proved difficult to achieve; some forsook the belief altogether, as they realized that no promises were assured and that other conditions affected their efforts, factors that were out of their control. The suggestion that Laocoön or others were possible representatives of the states provides evidence that artists recognized fissures in Lewis' figure and the principles he represented. The most Adamic characters in Hawthorne's works, such as Holgrave from *The House of Seven Gables*, are fallible and eventually affected by the past; however, there is the presence of other "types" in his novels as well, figures such as Dimmesdale or Judge Pyncheon who are central but not idyllic. In the works of Melville, there appear to be far more questions about the national belief rather than a simple reinforcement of that "dream"; many of his protagonists provide a model far different from the national Adam. *The Confidence-Man*, *Typee*,

and even *Billy Budd, Sailor* report and portend the possibility of a disastrous future and a questionable present; the heroes of the books are not ideal. The boat is full of con-men, the village is inhabited by cannibals, and the *Indomitable* has only one outstanding model who, though Adam-like, is naïve, doomed, and stutters in his defense. These examples hint at other archetypes. The American Cain is the figure who ascends to his father's role but not necessarily as a replacement for the mythical structuring that Lewis defined. Instead, he is one alternative to that original ideal, a representative that offers a different perspective on the nation, its principles, and, specifically, the overarching dream that continues to affect the lifestyle, opinions, and pursuits of a country. Cain is a mythic figure who surfaces in the wake of the original and whose presence suggests the inherent weakness and potential failure of the dream of the United States.

A comprehensive definition of the American Dream is difficult to communicate, but the very idea of its presence and power is nevertheless essential to the development of an Adamic archetype and the related American Cain. David Madden, in the introduction to *American Dreams, American Nightmares*, which investigates the effects of such a prominently ambiguous belief on the country and its literature, relates a few interpretations of the concept from some of the earliest figures in the nation, from Cotton Mather to Alexis de Tocqueville. He sums up their statements with his own, which is reminiscent of Lewis' findings: "The edenic [*sic*] promises of the American land helped shape aspects of the American character; ironic and paradoxical tensions between romantic and idealistic elements in that character, as it experienced the land, helped produce the American Dream."⁴⁹ The complexity of the "idealistic elements" that shaped such a belief is reflected in Madden's thoughts. Jim Cullen, in *The American Dream*, also expresses the multi-faceted, complicated ideal but defines the concept in terms of its development through the history of the United States. He explains that

the omnipresence of “the American Dream” . . . is a part of a long tradition. In this view, the Pilgrims may not have actually talked about the American Dream, but they would have understood the idea: after all, they lived it as people who imagined a destiny for themselves. So did the Founding Fathers. So did illiterate immigrants who could not speak English but intuitively expressed rhythms of the Dream with their hands and their hearts. What Alexis de Tocqueville called “the charm of anticipated success” in his classic *Democracy in America* seemed palpable to him not only in the 1830s but in his understanding of American history for almost two hundred years before that.⁵⁰

The belief in “anticipated success,” an idea to which many since the earliest pilgrims have held, is as enigmatic as the “Dream” itself, as the author alludes. He acknowledges that answers to what the dream really “means” vary greatly. Often, he explains, it is “defined in terms of money . . . but there are others. Religious transformation, political reform, educational attainment, sexual expression: the list is endless.”⁵¹ Cullen outlines six ideas that he claims make up the concept: religious freedom, the rights of man, upward mobility, equality, home ownership, and personal fulfillment. In the end, however, he confesses that even his definition is limited. Like Adam, the elements and evidence of this national dream vary, yet its presence is ubiquitous in the culture throughout the history of the United States.

The confusion over a definition illustrates the consistent growth and yet constant adaptation of the American Dream; it is most often dependent upon the group or individual who describes it at a given moment. Katherine Hume offers further perspective on the changes that the ideal undergoes based on the passing of time or a shift in public opinion:

Fairness, material comfort, and freedom: these are probably the core values, but

each generation adds contemporary interpretations of what these might mean. Of course, such dreams are not necessarily reasonable or coherent and compatible; even today, though, they influence our idealist expectations.⁵²

Hume asserts that though there are “core values,” the concept is consistently shifting. The broad nature of the “expectations” is inviting to a wide range of individuals, despite the fact that specific pursuits might conflict or be irrational. As she further explains, the incorporation of so many aspects within the ideology draws many into the pursuit.

As Lewis argues, the party of Hope and its advocates initiated the original tenets of the dream and then personified them in Leatherstocking, Edgar Huntly, and others, providing an early model for the nation. As a result, the Adamic figure, though in no official terms, became synonymous with that same extraordinary and yet elusive American Dream, a concept that still affects the collective vision of the United States. David Madden connects Lewis’ hero with the ideal that the United States held, and still holds, dear. He describes the “first” citizen in terms familiar to readers of *The American Adam*:

In Virgin Wilderness, where all things seemed possible, the New Adam could recreate his lost paradise by the sweat of his brow. In his Brave New World, the young American Adam did indeed transform the Great American Desert into the Garden of the World. Pathfinder, deerslayer, noble savage, this mythic Adam reinstated a primitive innocence in Western civilization as he hacked trails into the wild West. There were visions in those early voices.⁵³

The hopes that were placed on the shoulders of the new hero were essentially the aspects of the dream: acquiring some semblance of a utopian existence that offers comfort, tolerance, and opportunity for all through hard work and change. These aspirations became omnipresent in the

country, as more individuals adopted the mindset of Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman, just some of the “early voices” who were purporting the vision.

In time, however, the optimism of early America as represented by Lewis’ Adam was affected by the stark realities of death, tragedy, and, most daunting, failure. As David Madden’s title *American Dreams, American Nightmares* implies, the chance of a nightmare was as much a possibility as a dream. The actual experiences of some of the earliest countrymen looked, at times, like the past; life was characterized by religious intolerance, poverty, and difficulty as had been experienced in Europe or elsewhere. Many discovered that their lives did not reflect the hopeful image of the future they had been led to believe was inherently theirs as Americans. Melville, in *The Confidence-Man*, depicts the disparity between what was desired and what had come to pass. A merchant, in a moment of epiphany brought on by strong wine, speaks of the disconnect between idealism and the real experience that many knew:

Ah, wine is good, and confidence is good; but can wine or confidence percolate down through all the stony strata of hard considerations, and drop warmly and ruddily into the cold cave of truth? Truth will *not* be comforted. Led by dear charity, lured by sweet hope, fond fancy essays this feat; but in vain; mere dreams and ideals, they explode in your hand, leaving naught but the scorching behind!⁵⁴

Though his auditors are appalled, the base honesty of his brief speech is clear. The “mere dreams and ideals” often do not bring comfort; sometimes they prove false and even destructive.

As more people, and authors, experienced or witnessed the struggles of individuals in the nation, the place of the American Adam changed. Often the figure failed in his endeavors, becoming a representative of the dream deferred. It proved difficult to realize the American

Dream imbued, as it was, with grandiose possibilities, and the existence and the qualities of the original, national hero were often unattainable. For example, many of Hawthorne's protagonists such as Young Goodman Brown or Robin, of "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," who embody Adamic attributes, are unable to attain their desires when confronted with the evil in the hearts of others or with the weight of their own depravity. Crèvecoeur's farmer, though he expected to "cause great changes in the world" and to "finish the great circle" as one of the "western pilgrims," instead retreats to the unsettled frontier in fear, anxiety, and bewilderment when his surroundings and his politics pose a threat to his family and farm.⁵⁵ Even Whitman's manifesto for the new American, *Leaves of Grass*, required frequent updating and revision partially due to national and personal calamities: the Civil War, disappointment in love and friendship, questions about the nation's democratic experiment, and the assassination of Lincoln, to name just a few. These failed Adams, however, were joined by another archetype. In some instances, characters who sought the American Dream reacted in anger, jealousy, and violence when their efforts proved ineffectual or were seemingly rejected. Protagonists did not simply forfeit the ideology but instead murdered brother or partner in the name of their individual pursuits and were in turn ostracized from mainstream society. These figures followed in the footsteps of a different antecedent altogether: Cain.

Critical works about the early writings in the country, though they sometimes identify a hero similar to that of the Adamic archetype, also describe literary figures who display characteristics reminiscent of Cain, implying the presence of the second national archetype. There is no mention of this iconic offspring by name in any of these studies, but the arguments of these scholars aid in the identification of just such a model. Richard Slotkin's *Regeneration Through Violence* offers that Daniel Boone provides another quintessential example of the

mythic, national archetype in the vein of Lewis' example, but one with limitations. Boone, like Adam, is "the lover of the spirit of wilderness, [but] his acts of love and sacred affirmation are acts of violence against that spirit and her avatars."⁵⁶ Slotkin presents evidence of a figure who, though he has some Adamic traits, is not recognizable for his life-affirming or visionary presence but rather for his murderousness or destructiveness. In his work, he focuses attention on the "acts of violence" that result from the initial hopes of "those eighteenth-century gentlemen who composed a nation at Philadelphia" and argues that the often brutal results of their actions and decisions are the controlling myth of the country.⁵⁷ He alters Lewis' argument to include what he says is a more comprehensive perspective on the history of the United States:

The first colonists saw in America an opportunity to regenerate their fortunes, their spirits, and the power of their church and nation; but the means to that regeneration ultimately became the means of violence, and the myth of regeneration through violence became the structuring metaphor of the American experience.⁵⁸

In other words, "violence" was far more influential on the nation and its past than any other "structuring metaphor" or myth, including the idealism of Adam. He cites the "rogues, adventurers, and land-boomers[,] the Indian fighters, traders, missionaries, explorers, and hunters who killed and were killed until they had mastered the wilderness" as more accurate players in the settling of the "New World." "The structuring metaphor" he finds admits the presence of an American Adam-like protagonist but adds that his appearance, though purportedly idealistic, ultimately results in terror and death. Slotkin never names the model he presents, but his focus on violence and destruction is more closely associated with a Cain figure than his father.

David Noble, in *The Eternal Adam and the New World Garden*, shares many of Slotkin's

ideas, but rather than point to violence as the defining quality of a national figure, he contends that Adam's presence created a vacuum in literature that forced writers to look elsewhere for models and ideals. He admits, somewhat sardonically, that in the early nineteenth century "the American democratic citizen is a new Adam" but as a result "there will be no drama in America" since "there can be no drama where all is the timeless and immutable harmony in which every man has transcended all social and individual limitations. Where all is perfection, there can be nothing novel in the life of any individual."⁵⁹ In other words, the idea of citizens and in turn protagonists as Adamic figures provides no conflict for fiction to explore and thus no opportunity for a discussion about such a model in society as the one Lewis identified. Noble's observations bring him to a series of important questions that he believes writers of the period were forced to ask themselves:

Is it possible that Americans are exempt from the human condition? Is it possible that men in the New World have escaped from the need to live within community, within a framework of institutions and traditions—have escaped even from the need to live within a mortal body, or with a soul that is divided against itself? Can nature indeed redeem man, heal his spiritual divisions, and lift him above the constraints of social class?⁶⁰

His answer is rhetorically, yet definitively, negative; though the question is perhaps flawed or the conclusion obvious, the point is made. Noble asserts that the belief in an "Eternal Adam" remained, but tragically "there was no Garden" in which he could achieve perfection; in other words, the potential for the archetype existed, but the culture could not support it.⁶¹ However, he concludes that, as authors such as Twain, Howells, and James depicted, "the human condition continued to prevail in the New World as in the Old" and thus "there was no American Eden and

no American Adam.” The circumstances of life eventually undermined the hopefulness that Lewis’ figure represented and as a result there was no place for him; instead, failures of the national dream brought violence and rejection among other issues, key elements of a Cainian model.

Leslie Fiedler, in *Love and Death in the American Novel*, also argues that an archetype based on the original man does exist, though his appropriation of such a figure is much different from *The American Adam*. He identifies the figure in the comic Rip Van Winkle, whom he says presides over the birth of the American imagination. . . . It is fitting that our first successful homegrown legend should memorialize, however playfully, the flight of the dreamer from the drab duties of home and town toward the good companions and the magic key of Holland’s gin.⁶²

Rip presents, in Fiedler’s estimation, an innocuous example of the American Adam, a dreamlike image of what all people evidently desire and one that is not too far removed from Natty Bumppo. The scholar asserts that “the typical male protagonist” of the fiction of the United States is “a man on the run, harried into the forest and out to sea, down the river and into combat—anywhere to avoid ‘civilization’.” Here, however, he turns from Lewis’ arguments, explaining that the Adamic hero, in his actions, desires, and pursuits, has always been predisposed to danger and suffering rather than the opportunity and freedom that is espoused:

The American novel is pre-eminently a novel of terror. To “light out for the territory” or seek refuge in the forest seems easy and tempting from the vantage point of a chafing and restrictive home; but civilization once disavowed and Christianity disowned, the bulwark of woman left behind, the wanderer feels himself without protection, more motherless child than free man.⁶³

In other words, though the literary works of the nation do include a pioneering, self-reliant, and unfettered hero, his experiences are not entirely hopeful and are more often marked by isolation and disappointment. The very things that the protagonists pursue are those ideals that make their life unsatisfactory, bleak, and hardly Edenic. As Fiedler maintains,

our fiction is not merely in flight from the physical date of the actual world, in search of a (sexless and dim) Ideal; . . . it is, bewilderingly and embarrassingly, a gothic [*sic*] fiction, nonrealistic and negative, sadist and melodramatic—a literature of darkness and the grotesque in a land of light and affirmation.⁶⁴

Hardly as optimistic as Lewis, his observations indicate the potential deficiency of a national Adam and the hopes that American culture assigned to that image. Though he admits that the nation is potentially “a land of light and affirmation,” the citizens are a disappointment. The attention to “darkness,” “terror,” and violence undermines the Adamic figure and suggests another archetype whose experience in Eden was far more tragic: Cain.

Scholars such as these recognize the existence of an Adamic figure in American literature but likewise suggest alternatives to Lewis’ model; in short, the society that emerged did not mirror the idealism that early visionaries had instilled within that original archetype. Beyond the scholarship, the fiction bears out these observations and criticisms. Hawthorne’s “The New Adam and Eve,” from *Mosses from an Old Manse*, provides perhaps the most concrete example of the “new” national archetype confronting American society only to realize that all that has come from a pursuit of the dream is imperfect. The aptly-named protagonists of the story, rather than embracing the splendors of the existing life that they encounter, instead question the trappings of society and recognize the potential problems in the way of life represented by the things they find. In the tale, Adam and Eve are uniquely American, fully optimistic, and freshly

placed in Boston, a city whose formation and impressiveness displayed the achievement of the United States. After the “Day of Doom,” the couple encounters the physical emblems of all that supposedly makes the country great: decadent homes, formal courts of law, lavish churches, and well-stocked shops. Their exposure, however, leaves them unfulfilled and confused, not in any way satisfied with what the country or its citizens have produced. Though they have “no knowledge of their predecessors, nor of the diseased circumstances that had become encrusted around them,” they find artifice that leaves them desirous of Nature and a connection with the divine.⁶⁵ In the prison, the narrator laments the failed attempts at rehabilitation; the opulence of a mansion and its furnishings drive them back into the light of day to view the natural world away from the artificiality. Those things produced by humanity hold no meaning for the two, instead proving false or simply repulsive compared to the creation of “a beneficent Father.”⁶⁶

The very objects that suggest value or mark the achievement of a nation are the very things that are questioned or rejected by the New Adam and Eve. Those who have maintained the dream as embodied in the American Adam have produced an impressive society. But, in effect, the dream of a nation has created a culture that is made up of what the author labels “Art,” or artifice, unnatural products that form a place that is, according to the short story, not especially enviable.⁶⁷ The title characters are repeatedly dissatisfied with the places and items they find, desiring instead a glimpse of nature, acknowledgement of the supernatural, or the opportunity for personal connection. As Adam tells Eve at the close of the sketch,

“Our Father only knows whether what outward things we have possessed to-day are to be snatched from us forever. But should our earthly life be leaving us with the departing light, we need not doubt that another morn will find us somewhere beneath the smile of God. I feel that he has imparted the boon of existence never

to be resumed."

"And no matter where we exist," replies Eve, "for we shall always be together."⁶⁸

What they encounter suggests that the visions of the past have come to fruition, but their disappointment illustrates that life is not necessarily ideal and is certainly not perfect. American citizens, modeling the Adamic hope and opportunity, produced an unnatural culture with definite issues rather than the utopian, free, and impressive society once envisioned. The "American Dream," with all that it offered, proves, in Hawthorne's story at least, somewhat unsatisfactory. In the end, it seems downright undesirable.

No matter how it is defined and despite the often unwanted results it has caused, the American Dream remains. The belief and its elements seem to have developed from the ideas and propositions of Emerson and his counterparts and, as a result, the mindset and cultural discussion of a nation. The possibility and reproduction of the dream, if all would follow the model set before them of a new Adam in an unblemished land, offered opportunity and possibly a better life. But, as these proponents witnessed and their protagonists often portrayed, real circumstances often varied greatly from this idealized vision of the future. As the people struggled and some accepted utter defeat, the idyllic hero began to lose his sheen in the literature of the United States. In many cases, he was nowhere to be found. Oftentimes, in his stead was his son, the American Cain.

IV. The Genesis of the American Cain

While a preponderance of enormous expectations and ideals characterized the national

mindset, the citizens' struggles and losses gained new attention in the culture. As Lewis argues, the belief that the nation was Edenic and its citizens Adamic surfaced again and again in the dominant literature, history, poetry, and theology of the country. But more and more, the men and women of letters depicted a society that knew a life far different from the one suggested by the Emersonian hero. The conflict and debate surrounding the birth of the country, the after effects of the Revolutionary War and then the War of 1812, and the growing regional debate about economics, statehood, and slavery were all nationwide troubles emerging out of the democratic experiment of the United States. In turn, with the onset of Realism, the most-recognized writers presented a more accurate portrayal of human behavior and experience, even if that depiction was negative or less than ideal. But even Romantics such as Hawthorne had already focused, in part, on "a very minute fidelity, not merely to the possible, but to the probable and ordinary course of man's experience." The fantastic and supernatural had to be tempered with reality and solidity; there was need for both "the Actual and the Imaginary," as he writes in "The Custom House" sketch.⁶⁹ In his poetry, Whitman described the real lives of people around him, as in "Salut au Monde!," "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," and "Mannahatta," and catalogued exhaustive lists of occupations and daily affairs in "Song of Myself."⁷⁰ Melville fictionalized some version of his personal adventures in *Typee* and *Omoo*; in *Moby Dick*, which contains carefully crafted descriptions of the whale as well as the whaling industry and its ships, he pursued an accuracy of detail foreign to most literary works. As a result, the protagonists and their plotlines, which pulsed with the experience of humanity, looked very familiar; characters' lives were as potentially fraught with suffering as success. In the end, skepticism arose around the Adamic ideal and some novelists located a suitable, alternative model to the established national "hero"; the life of Cain, which was used regularly in art, was available, and his

experience mirrored, at least in part, that of many in the country.

There is a previous basis for the proposition of Cain as a national archetype. David Madden, borrowing Lewis' model as his starting point, proposes that the national hero based on Adam progressed from the "Pathfinder" phase to become a farmer "who reinstated *pastoral* innocence" in the face of the encroaching city and larger community.⁷¹ He argues that the nation, after being settled, turned quickly to agriculture as a means of subsistence but eventually shifted to the development of urban industrialism. These ultimate economic changes, he suggests, illustrate that the example set forth by the first man of the Bible is merely one option; alternatives to the Adamic ideal exist. In effect, the dream as represented by the American Adam changed over time to incorporate shifting desires and newly-formed pursuits, desires removed from the aspirations of Natty Bumppo or Edgar Huntly. R. W. B. Lewis speaks to just such a revision in the cultural discussion, a change he says that Emerson's "party of Irony" utilized in their works. He describes the conflict in their novels as not merely man against nature but instead as the tragedy that was "generated by the impact of hostile forces upon the innocent solitary, who had sprung from nowhere, and his impact upon them."⁷² This qualification, like Madden's observation, brings to mind a different archetype altogether. The tragedy of life experienced by the writers and their audience does in fact emanate from "hostile forces" that act upon "an innocent solitary"; however, that description is spuriously attributed to Adam. A more direct correlation from another story that has been used throughout history, and would have been familiar to the earliest Americans, is the tale of Cain and Abel. The "innocent solitary" was no longer the focus; suddenly, the "hostile other" took front stage. From the Biblical story of the first second-generation, the equally important and especially applicable archetype of the American Cain emerges. Unlike Lewis' protagonist, the American Cain is not the result of a

society's discussion nor a prescribed identity that early thinkers and writers offered as the model citizen for a successful, national future. Instead, the Cain of the United States is the natural offspring of a fallen national Adam, the literary result of authors' observations of and reflections on a culture and its people. The experiences of this second figure call into question the aspects of the American Dream that are attributed to Adam and suggest that Edenic images and idealism are overstated or too good to be true.

The Biblical Cain, as an antecedent to the national icon, is a figure in a specific story; the details of his life as told in the fourth chapter of Genesis are fundamental to the definition and identification of this second literary archetype. His story is told, almost in its entirety, in one passage:

1 Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD." 2 And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground. 3 In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, 4 and Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, 5 but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. 6 The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? 7 If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it." 8 Cain said to Abel his brother, "Let us go out to the field." And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him. 9 Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my

brother's keeper?" 10 And the LORD said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. 11 And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. 12 When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength; you shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth." 13 Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is greater than I can bear. 14 Behold, thou hast driven me this day away from the ground; and from thy face I shall be hidden; and I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will slay me." 15 Then the LORD said to him, "Not so! If any one slays Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." And the LORD put a mark on Cain, lest any who came upon him should kill him. 16 Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD, and dwelt in the land of Nod, east of Eden.⁷³

After the account of the first murder, Genesis follows the life of Cain beyond his exile, chronicling his future efforts and his offspring and their accomplishments. First, the Bible records that Cain builds the first city, which he names Enoch after his firstborn. Then other descendants are labeled as "the father of those who dwell in tents and have cattle" and "the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe," as well as the original "forger of all implements of bronze and iron."⁷⁴ In other words, Cain, and by implication his descendants, manages to move beyond his destructive act; his offspring initiate important and unique discoveries and lifestyles. He forges a new existence, an original community, away from the place of his parents.

The origin of fraternal discord, a subject both common and relevant in history, has been a consistent object of painting, poetry, and song. As Leon Kass suggests, the tale is the "first exploration" of "the source of human troubles."⁷⁵ Whether the account is viewed as true or not,

the examination of murder, anger, jealousy, punishment, isolation, and discontent offers insight into cultural and societal relations. Ricardo Quinones explains how and why just a few verses from Genesis have had such a profound effect on all the arts:

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. . . . Thus it is ready to represent radically different moments in our cultural history.⁷⁶

The disparate use of the characters and situational details of the story reveals the consistency of the “appeal,” as Quinones puts it. However, the role of the murderer in artistic works as various as Lord Byron’s dramatic poem *Cain* to William Blake’s *The Body of Abel Found by Adam and Eve* or Titian’s *Cain and Abel* also illustrates that the character is open to interpretation and thus has been used in very different ways.

The varied use of the Biblical Cain has an effect, in turn, on the American version. Quinones, in *The Changes of Cain*, argues that the depictions of Adam’s first son in art have shifted dramatically in meaning over time. As he is originally used, Cain is “the true progenitor and patron of evil in the world: in fact, he becomes the serious Christian exemplum of the continuity and enduringness of evil.”⁷⁷ Thus, he is used as a marker of depravity, assuming a place of wickedness and displaying all that is wrong with the world and humanity. He is, simply put, the villain or anti-hero void of any redeeming qualities and incapable of evoking sympathy.

Quinones explains that the appearance of such a figure established a dominant or consistent “theme.” As he elucidates, “the Cain theme is centripetal, marked by inwardness, emotional tension, and secret conflict, by moral struggle and the closing off of possibility. It looks forward to the continuity of evil, even to its aggravation, to the grim consequences of action.”⁷⁸ He continues that, at the root, the story of the original brothers, as used in art, explores issues of violence, envy, division, and dualism. Cain is “monstrous” and a “sacred executioner” as seen in *Beowulf* and *Inferno* respectively. However, as Quinones contends, the essence of the character eventually changes, particularly after Lord Byron’s epic *Cain*, which presents, for the first time, an empathetic version of the fratricidal brother as regenerative.⁷⁹ This new “metaphysical rebel” is “a supremely conscious hero, one who is sharply aware of division and the need for separation, who, by means of violence, rupture, and symbolic slayings, will attempt to restore wholeness.”⁸⁰ The shift from anti-hero to hero is ascribed to the progression of thought through the Renaissance and the breakdown of religious absolutes that resulted. The complication that the poet initiates and then others reproduce provides more space for discussion and effectively muddles the tradition, the story, and the use of the figure in art, and particularly the American adoption of the archetype.

As a result, the American Cain, like his antecedent, is complex, often evoking more questions than answers. There are, however, some defining characteristics directly from the Genesis account that distinguish the figure; these qualities, though, do not have to occur in this sequence. The son is born to parents who, traditionally, brought sin into the world and thus prohibited their children’s attempt at an Edenic existence; the fallenness of the paternal figures enacts a tradition of failure, depravity, or indifference alongside any possibility of a hopeful life. The Cainite figure has a double, often familial, that for some reason is favored or is in some

other way advantaged; this relationship leads to competition, jealousy, and violence that limits or prohibits the full experience of existence. The archetype is often awkward because he feels himself outside of general society or sometimes is not accepted in the community of which he is naturally a part. As a result, his engagement with the larger culture is strained or non-existent. At some point, the Cain figure presents some offering or concession to court favor or in the least attempts to maintain the success that he or she has already achieved; most often that gift is not accepted or not on par with the submission of the brother-type, which leads to murder. Finally, the character receives punishment or loses status as a result of actions toward the double and in turn is forced to leave an established community, be it familial or societal. The related correction that takes place involves a marking of some sort, whether for protection or negative association. The removal results in isolation in its most basic form and, more severely, can result in unending wandering as God decreed; despite those pronouncements, some of the figures do establish new forms of existence with varying degrees of success.

These characteristics are a significant means of identification; however, to understand the archetypal American Cain fully, it is also important to express the things that he is not. First, he is not simply the Biblical Cain placed in the United States. Second, the “hero” is not merely a character who serves as a villain, wanders during the plot, murders his brother, works as a farmer, or incorporates another single quality of Eve’s firstborn. While the proof of his manifestation in a particular literary work might focus on one of these areas, the archetype always shares multiple, developed characteristics with the original from Genesis: angry murderer, jealous brother, successful farmer, self-righteous creation, marked outcast, or disgruntled offspring of a fallen first generation. At least some of these distinguishing stamps, in some form or fashion, must exist for a character to fit the pattern; however, the figure is also the

fallen offspring of Lewis' Adam. All those ideals that the original archetype represents are the very ways in which the subsequent model experiences failure. Simply, the Cain of the United States pursues the American Dream to the detriment of some relation, makes additional "sacrifices" or reacts in Cainian ways as a result of failures in the search for the national ideal. Ultimately, the emergence and identification of an archetype based on the son of Adam operates as evidence, in literary works, of the potential for the failure of the dream and all that that ideal proposes and endorses. His appearance reveals that no opportunities are without potential failure and that oftentimes the pursuit of those hopes ends in disillusionment.

Importantly, the defining of a new national archetype does not discount the existence of the American Adam in the literature of the United States. The father is a prerequisite, for he and his actions give birth to the son and his reactions. The foundational ideals that are aligned with Adam prove potentially destructive: innocence falls victim to a tragic experience of suffering and inflicted pain; liberation from family and society often results in isolation; freedom begets intolerance and underhandedness; opportunity for influence brings about exploitation and inequality; optimistic advancement ends in painful failure; the possible suffering that could bring redemption more often ends in additional pain instead. A hopeful heritage engenders a less than desirable existence for his offspring. And yet, the cycle is perpetual. In fact, in most instances, the Cain figure, at least initially, actually desires the traits and existence of his parent, following the prescription for success set forth by Emerson and his fellow proponents of an idealistic society. Ultimately, however, the American Cain emerges as a representative of an alternative experience, one characterized by suffering and failure rather than hopefulness and optimism. When he is unable to attain a better life or capitalize on the opportunities offered, a common reality for many in the United States, he reenacts the signature actions of the Biblical antecedent,

the most tragic possible reaction to the disappointment and disillusionment. The modeling of the son of Adam and his life events is an overwhelming potential, one that illustrates the significant effect the dream has on the country and its citizens.

The ubiquity of American Dream means that, as Lewis contends, the American Adam never goes away; he identifies “Adams” all the way through the 1930s and 40s in his book. The dream endures, and, thus, he is still a viable, role model for those who seek that which he has achieved. However, as the citizens of the nation become more and more disillusioned by all that they fail to attain, the appearances of the American Cain increase in American literature. The stories that feature the national Cain often begin with a character attempting to achieve the promises and hopes of the earliest generations; they end, though, not in freedom and opportunity but rather in death and exile. The separatists had hoped to establish a “Citty [*sic*] upon a Hill;” Emerson sought a utopian existence; and Whitman advocated an equal, democratic, all-inclusive union.⁸¹ Nevertheless, the potential for tragedy and loss in the midst of life was made very apparent. Those ideals that had suggested possibility, in whatever form, proved improbable or problematic. The effort people made to realize their dreams often proved ineffectual. Rejection and disappointment led to jealousy, anger, violence, and finally banishment. The American Cain represents the worst possible end of that alternative experience.

V. Early Examples of the American Cain

There are glimpses of the second national archetype in some of the earliest writing of the nation; however, because the cultural mindset was intent upon the development of the dream and the defining of its promises, the American Cain is rarely mentioned, or even alluded to, by name.

He is rather a shadowy “other” that the representatives of society cannot or will not acknowledge. In the first texts to emerge from the continent, Lewis’ Adam and the ideas to which he is attached are far more prevalent. Nevertheless, the first signs of discord and disappointment likewise appear early, upsetting the idealistic hopes of a people seeking a fresh start in a new Eden and creating a place for appearances of the second national icon. In these first records, most of which are historical works or personal memoirs, those deemed villainous or depraved by the authors sometimes assume the role of American Cains. These embodiments of evil exhibit jealousy and anger, betray their companions, and finally commit murder when their efforts are not recognized or do not succeed; their actions undermine the prospect of an Adamic existence for themselves and others. In most instances, these figures are initially seeking the potential of the newly-settled land; however, their personal pursuits pervert the very freedoms and opportunities of the forming colonies as opposed to establishing a path for the future. These qualities, all of which point to the first murderer, are mere signposts. In the end, the characters who assume the role, at least in the histories themselves, limit rather than define the possibilities inherent in a life in the New World, raising questions about the opportunities suggested by the American Dream.

In William Bradford’s *Of Plymouth Plantation*, the author records the experiences of the first colony, attempting an unbiased account of the separatists’ flight across the Atlantic. Bradford, who served as governor of the settlement in Massachusetts, acted as chronicler of events prior to, during, and after his group’s removal to the New World. His text, though full of stories and descriptions that potentially undermine his intentions at impartial history, provides a thorough recounting of the annals of the Bay Colony. Plymouth was founded as a new start for a group that had been persecuted and ridiculed in Europe; they came with the hope of a re-creation

on foreign land just as Lewis and others describe. Their beliefs, pursuits, and dreams serve as the groundwork for the eventual national mindset that was to dominate the identity of the country. It was their vision, along with the hopes of John Winthrop and the Puritans, to establish a “city upon a hill,” that sparked the idea of an American Eden and thus an Adam. Nevertheless, the ensuing complications and setbacks resulted in an example of the American Cain.

Even before Bradford and his fellow pilgrims leave Holland, the “historian” explains that the people were determined to embark to a place of opportunity for gospel propagation, of freedom for religious expression, and of promise for the future. To meet these requirements, the leaders looked across the Atlantic Ocean:

The place they had thoughts on was some of those vast and unpeopled countries of America, which are fruitful and fit for habitation, being devoid of all civil inhabitants, where there are only savage and brutish men which range up and down, little otherwise than the wild beasts of the same.⁸²

To those who doubted these promises, “it was answered that out of question the country was both fruitful and pleasant and might yield riches and maintenance to the possessors,” an allusion to Eden as well as the land of Canaan, the land promised to the Israelites, God’s chosen people, when they came out of Egypt.⁸³ Unfortunately, the residents of that first American “plantation” found their lives in the new Eden instead characterized by disappointment, struggle, and death. Over half of the original group died either en route or within the first year of arrival. Troubles with Native Americans, food supply, adequate shelter, and the even less specific outbreak of “notorious sins,” as Bradford labels it, brought complication, fear, and ultimately the loss of life. Though the separatists maintained their community amidst the suffering, interlopers from within and without compromised the foundation of success that they sought, according to the writer of

the record; one of these outsiders provides an early example of the second national archetype.

Thomas Morton, one of the most infamous characters of the book, is more than just an “evildoer” the likes of Thomas Granger, the sex offender, or Isaac Allerton, the swindler; through the descriptions of the author, he also becomes an American Cain. Morton, as Francis Murphy explains in a footnote, “left his country [England] for his country’s good,” forced into a form of exile because he, reportedly, has “the tendency to get into fights and lawsuits.”⁸⁴ Though he arrives as part of a legitimate business, he and some associates eventually “thrust” out one Lieutenant Fitcher and free legally-bonded men; then, he appoints himself, as Bradford reports, the “Lord of Misrule.”⁸⁵ Once assuming leadership of the plantation, the new “lord” initiates “a School of Atheism”; this new community erects “a maypole, drinking and dancing about it many days together, inviting the Indian women for their consorts, dancing and frisking together like so many fairies, or furies, rather.” That his actions result in, as the author states, “riotous prodigality and profuse excess” only strengthens his role as a national Cain figure; Morton is, at least in the eyes of the historian, “the true progenitor and patron of evil in the world,” as Quinones describes the Biblical antecedent.

His apparent “sin” alone, of course, does not make him an example of the figure; in fact, the descriptions of his actions must be questioned since they are filtered through the lens of Bradford, who records the history. Nevertheless, Thomas Morton assumes the archetypal role in *Of Plimouth Plantation*. The account reports that the founder of Merry-mount, in his own pursuit of the American Dream, reenacts the key moments of the life of Cain. Morton first achieves what appears as progress, offering a place of freedom to servants, providing an ungoverned community with no limitations, and using commerce as a means to financial gain without thought to consequences. However, he perverts the settlers’ attempts for an Adamic

existence, takes advantage of the opportunities afforded by the situation, and establishes a model that goes against the beliefs and principles of the pilgrims. When he is confronted by the separatist leaders, he reacts in anger and pride; then, having “scorned all advice” and, in an effort to attain economic success, he sells guns to the Native Americans, who turn them against the “plantation.” His decision, which is based in his personal desires, results in murder among those who came to the New World, like him, for future possibility. The loss of life is, as Bradford refers to it, “the blood of brethren sold for gain.”⁸⁶ What the example of Thomas Morton fully explores is the negative potential that freedom and opportunity can provide. Though he is not one of the pilgrims nor is bound by their laws or morals, his existence and conduct are a testament to the failure that could take place and, in some cases, was occurring in the new colonies; disease ravished their ranks while crooked political and business dealings undermined their efforts. The separatist experiment in a new Eden resulted, in many ways, in similar fashion to the Genesis account: a promising start that moves in the right direction and an unfortunate fall that leads to future suffering.

While texts such as *Of Plimouth Plantation* appropriated the figure, works of fiction, which first appeared in America almost a century or so after Bradford’s history, presented national Cains as well. One of the first hints to his appearance in a fictional piece is in Michel-Guillaume Jean de Crèvecoeur’s *Letters from an American Farmer*, which was published in London in 1782 under the well-known *nom de plume* J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur.⁸⁷ The author immigrated to the New World as a soldier in the French army and took part in the attack on Fort William Henry, an event later made use of by Cooper in *The Last of the Mohicans*. Ultimately, the Frenchman settled on a farm in Orange County, New York, and in 1764, after becoming a naturalized United States citizen, penned the work that was to become an

advertisement for the country to the masses in Europe. The praises of a fellow immigrant, newly inked and unlike any other reports of the colonies, gave hope that America was the place to start life again. Warren Barton Blake records in his introduction to the fictionalized, epistolary work that “one finds no ‘echoes’ in Crèvecoeur” which is one of the reasons “for praising his spontaneity and vigor.”⁸⁸ The uniqueness of *Letters*, particularly at the time of its publication, makes it more telling as a display of the present and future of the nation. As Blake states, “though the *Letters* are distinguished by an idyllic temper, over them is thrown the shadow of impending civil war.”⁸⁹ In other words, the farmer reflects the dream and its tenets as well as the potential for conflict, an ideal setting for the appearance of the American Cain.

Though Crèvecoeur does not make allusion to a Cain figure, the narrator, by the final sections of *Letters*, embodies the key attributes as he examines the negative potential within his society and its unofficial ideology. The farmer begins his correspondence with enthusiasm and delight in the life he leads in his new home, calling attention to the natural abundance, the uncomplicated society and lifestyle, as well as the opportunities available to everyone. His descriptions assign Adamic qualities to his fellow citizens and to himself, all of whom serve as examples of what can be achieved. Like the party of Hope, he draws a sharp distinction between the Old World and the one he has come to call home. He notes that in other countries

misguided religion, tyranny, and absurd laws everywhere depress and afflict mankind. Here we have in some measure regained the ancient dignity of our species; our laws are simple and just, we are a race of cultivators, our cultivation is unrestrained, and therefore everything is prosperous and flourishing.⁹⁰

At some length, he records evidence of the prosperity of the society and the success of the citizens, hallmarks reminiscent of the promises attributable to the national dream. In the later

part of the book, however, the tone shifts dramatically, as he finds that his eyes are “fatigued now by so many disagreeable objects.”⁹¹ He recounts “the horrors of slavery” in South Carolina and one particular gruesome story of a slave tortured to death that he admits has “oppressed [my mind] since I became a witness to it.”⁹² Suddenly, the seemingly endless possibilities of the nation are tainted by very real examples of hardship and tragedy.

The final epistle, entitled “Distresses of a Frontier Man,” is the burdened cry of a hopeless man, certainly not the findings of another Adam. His lamentation reveals Cain-like thoughts and actions:

I never can leave behind me the remembrance of the dreadful scenes to which I have been a witness; therefore never can I be happy! . . . Once happiness was our portion; now it is gone from us, and I am afraid not to be enjoyed again by the present generation! Whichever way I look, nothing but the most frightful precipices present themselves to my view, in which hundreds of my friends and acquaintances have already perished: of all animals that live on the surface of this planet, what is man when no longer connected with society; or when he finds himself surrounded by a convulsed and a half dissolved one? He cannot live in solitude, he must belong to some community bound by some ties, however imperfect.

Driven into solitude, removed from his previously settled existence as a result of violence and death, and left with grievous memories of his former life, the narrator feels punished by the impending revolution that has been brought on, he argues, by the overwhelming power of England, which he refers to, rather bitterly, as “the master of the world.”⁹³

Forced to flee his home as a result of the threats of the “Mother-Country,” who has

assumed a divine role, he has seen the end of the hopes upon which he staked his future:

Let us live where we will; I am not founding my future prosperity on golden dreams. Place mankind where you will, they must always have adverse circumstances to struggle with; from nature, accidents, constitution; from seasons, from that great combination of mischances which perpetually lead us to new diseases, to poverty, etc.⁹⁴

The brutality of nature and the suffering of man are evident to the farmer, even in America, and he has forfeited the original optimism he once held. Instead, he expresses an envy of those acquaintances who are loyal to the invading British army and the king and are thus able to remain in their homes; however, he displays a renewed commitment to his adopted homeland. And, though he has not yet fought, he expresses a willingness to kill if the integrity of his nation and the security of his family are compromised. The acts of England have incited his anger; as he writes, “thus impiously I roam, I fly from one erratic thought to another, and my mind, irritated by these acrimonious reflections, is ready sometimes to lead me to dangerous extremes of violence.”⁹⁵ It is a reaction that he has not displayed until this point, despite the pressures and horrors that he has experienced and witnessed. Nevertheless, he realizes that “dangerous extremes of violence” may be the only means he has to retain his freedom and protect his wife and children. In *Letters from an American Farmer*, the possibilities are manifested, but ultimately the “distresses” overwhelm the opportunity; in his fatigue and hopelessness, the narrator decides to take his family to live with the Native Americans, a proposition that is equally necessary and unwanted. Though he originally embraced an Adamic existence, Crèvecoeur’s farmer eventually becomes an American Cain, exhibiting the jealousy, anger, and murderousness spirit of the Biblical antecedent when his opportunities and successes are taken

away. In the end, he is forced out of his home and is driven out of society to establish a new life in another place. Thus, he becomes another precursor to the very prevalent examples of the archetype to come in the literature of the nation.

Wieland; or the Transformation: An American Tale, by Charles Brockden Brown, provides perhaps the first example of the second national archetype in a novel. One of the earliest novels to be produced in the nation, the book was published in 1798 by the writer who was “born in Philadelphia on January 17, 1771.”⁹⁶ Brown grew up in a Quaker family between the French and Indian War and the Revolutionary War, a time of great change in the country that was just finding its footing. *Wieland*, the author’s second work, “expands an account, as related in the *New York Weekly Magazine* of July 20, 1796, of James Yates’ murder of his whole family in Tomhanick, New York, in December 1791.”⁹⁷ In the book, this tragic event is perpetrated by Theodore Wieland, an emotional and intellectual man, who shares his father’s bent toward fanaticism and mysticism; however, the horror of that moment is not the fictional depiction of the first fratricide and *Wieland* is not a Cain of the United States. Rather, Carwin, a wandering bilquist, assumes the role of the American Cain when his pursuits go unfulfilled and he experiences frustration as a result of the foundational principles of the nation; his actions mirror the signature events of the Biblical antecedent.

The full details of Carwin’s life, those that help establish him as an American Cain, do not come only from the novel but also from *Memoirs of Carwin the Biloquist*, an unfinished fragment that was published in serial form almost five years after the book appeared. This shorter work provides additional details about the man’s early life and also explains his initial display of Adamic pursuits as well as his eventual assumption of the role of the archetypal son. *Memoirs* reveals that the man was the son of a farmer, though he does not seem fit for the

profession; he ultimately rejects agriculture as an occupation and decides to pursue an education.⁹⁸ One evening, when he has stolen away from the house to read, he discovers that he has the gift of biloquism, a talent he quickly hopes “to render . . . as powerful in [his] hands as it was capable of being.”⁹⁹ He eventually moves to Philadelphia to live with an aunt, freeing himself from a life in agricultural, and there engages in a lifestyle that initially mirrors that of the American Adam. His new opportunities are only furthered by his ventriloquism:

I entered with exultation and triumph on this new scene; my hopes were by no means disappointed. Detested labour was exchanged for luxurious idleness. I was master of my time, and the chuser of my occupations. . . .

My biloquial faculty was not neglected. I improved it by assiduous exercise; I deeply reflected on the use to which it might be applied. I was not destitute of pure intentions; I delighted not in evil; I was incapable of knowingly contributing to another's misery, but the sole or principal end of my endeavours was not the happiness of others.

I was actuated by ambition. I was delighted to possess superior power; I was prone to manifest that superiority, and was satisfied if this were done, without much solicitude concerning consequences.¹⁰⁰

During this period of freedom, he continues to develop his “biloquial faculty,” and, though he claims that his use of the talent is wholly free of “evil,” he admits that his ability motivates him and provides him with a feeling of “superiority.” His self-proclaimed innocence and altruism in the midst of his “luxurious idleness” undergoes a significant shift when he meets Ludloe, an Irishman who encourages Carwin to use the vocal talent as a means of influencing others; as the “charismatic utopist” tells the young man, the ability “would open for him the straightest and

surest avenues of wealth and power.”¹⁰¹ This patron supports the young man and eventually indoctrinates him in an Emersonian-like perfectionism and idealism.

With that encouragement, the young man decides to use his unique skill as a means to influence people, another decision that reflects his Adamic role; other events reinforce his connection with that archetype. When his new friend offers him the opportunity to travel, the former farmer eventually agrees, having “thirsted after an acquaintance with new scenes.”¹⁰² On his way to Europe, he tells himself that “my future pursuits must be supposed chiefly to occupy my attention”; in his quest for new lands and the attention to his personal future as well as his desire for power, influence, and security, he has become a version of Lewis’ figure.¹⁰³ However, his arrival in Ireland marks an adaptation in Carwin’s identity, his experiences there revealing the Cainian traits inherent within him. Ludloe, who advocates a strict life of personal liberty and opportunity, free from responsibility, provides his charge with all that he needs and then leaves his companion to his own devices. The younger man does not enjoy the unending period of reading and studying alone and eventually admits to himself that “the solitude in which I lived became daily more painful.”¹⁰⁴ When the two men do interact, their conversations are engaging; the lessons his mentor offers are progressive but yet they are sometimes disturbing. The biloquist vaguely learns of a utopian plan that his friend is devising with others; the scheme is based on the foundational, American traits of individualism, freedom from the past, and the promise of new opportunity and a better life. He is initially intrigued by this possibility, which appeals to his original desires, but, in the end, he forfeits this endeavor and instead decides to pursue a romantic relationship, a form of attachment, though Ludloe warns him that “the present institution of marriage [is] a contract of servitude.”¹⁰⁵ Despite his mentor’s warnings, he willingly relinquishes his unfettered existence, a characteristic of the American Adam, and

chooses a life of responsibility. However, though there is no specific reasoning given in either work to explain the events, this new direction has a horrific end. Carwin murders his wife, steals from Ludloe, and then returns to the United States where he crosses paths with the Wieland family, where his actions reveal his place as the national Cain.

When he first appears in *Wieland*, Carwin wears the outfit of a “rustic” or rural farmer and is seen wandering the area, having assumed an identity not unlike the one into which he was born and also attributable to Cain.¹⁰⁶ Though his general appearance is unimpressive, Clara, the narrator, is struck by his physical features and his voice, which serve as his particular marking; they affect her so greatly that her friend suggests that she is in love. However, Carwin’s influence on the young woman seems hardly romantic; after he leaves her home, she falls into deep contemplation, sketches out a picture of the stranger’s face, and, the next day, is still consumed by the impression he has left with her. Her continued concentration upon his visage and presence fill her mind with “thoughts ominous and dreary,” and she is soon given over to reflections on death and violence.¹⁰⁷ The significant and unsettling effect that the biloquist, somewhat unknowingly, has on the narrator hints at his overpowering and evil influence. Later, he exhibits more overt, depraved characteristics, traits that expose his true nature. After the wanderer has endeared himself to the Wieland family, he, by means of his ventriloquism, ruins Clara’s reputation in the eyes of her friend, Henry Pleyel. When the woman realizes what has happened, she refers to the villain as a “man of mischief” who uses “innumerable avenues to the accomplishment of [his] malignant purpose.”¹⁰⁸ Pleyel, upon being apprised of the circumstances, echoes her sentiments, confessing that he was convinced from the beginning that the biloquist’s “eyes and voice had a witchcraft in them, which rendered him truly formidable.”¹⁰⁹ Their suspicions, it turns out, are warranted. It is Henry who finally discovers

the truth about Carwin; he reads that the stranger is a fugitive from Europe, where he has escaped from Newgate Prison while awaiting trial for murder and robbery.¹¹⁰

Landing in America to avoid prosecution, Carwin has given up any prospect of using his vocal talents to secure financial gains, as Ludloe had suggested; instead, as a means of sociological and psychological experiment, he determines to test the propriety and fortitude of Clara Wieland and, eventually, her brother, Theodore. His motivations and intentions reveal an evil nature that is not unlike the original tempter, the double-tongued Satan. Nevertheless, the specifics of his actions reveal his identity as an American Cain. Jealous of Clara's relationship with his former friend, Pleyel, and curious about the effect he can have on those around him, the biloquist uses his linguistic ability to test the relationship between the two. Then, welcomed as he is into the homes of these unsuspecting people, he ultimately uses his knowledge of their lives and convictions to perpetrate the final, Cainian act: murder. Using his ventriloquism to assume the voice of God, he speaks to Theodore and demands the sacrifice of the man's wife and children as evidence of the religious fanatic's obedience. When Wieland completes the requested action, and then later takes his own life, the Cainian murder is reenacted. The husband and father assumes the role of double for Carwin; his victim has a happy family and a loving wife, the respect of his friends, and the leisure to pursue his personal interests, things that the biloquist sacrificed when he killed his spouse in Europe.

There are questions in scholarship about Carwin's guilt, considering that Theodore committed the actual murder;¹¹¹ however, according to Clara at the end of the novel, Carwin is the "author" of "evils," the reason that the deaths occurred.¹¹² The young woman, in contemplation of the tragic event, immediately suspects that the stranger is in some way responsible for her brother's acts. She concludes that "darkness reigns upon the designs of this

man. The extent of his power is unknown, but is there not evidence that it has been now exerted?"¹¹³ When Carwin later confesses his part in the deaths, his role as an image of the first murderer is complete:

“Great heaven! what have I done? I think I know the extent of my offences. I have acted, but my actions have possibly effected more than I designed. This fear has brought me back from my retreat. I come to repair the evil of which my rashness was the cause, and to prevent more evil. I come to confess my errors.”¹¹⁴

Despite the bilquist’s claim to innocent intentions, he has brought about the murder of an entire family. His actions, instigated by jealousy, lost opportunity, and his disappointment in the trademark ideals of America, result in murder, internal guilt and punishment, and exile. The narrator reports at the end of the novel that the wanderer has removed himself to “a remote district of Pennsylvania” and is “probably engaged in the harmless pursuits of agriculture,” a return to his Cainian, and familial, roots.

Brown’s novel, which certainly draws into question the issue of religious fanaticism, also portrays the potential complications and troubles inherent in the American experience and ideology. As David Lee Clark writes, the author “interpreted America to herself and to the world, and the world to America; he held the mirror up to nature and showed his countrymen their comely and their horrid features.”¹¹⁵ In other words, the hopes of Emerson and his party are countered by Brown’s portrayal, which depicts the possible end of the pursuit of American ideals. In the end, the American Cain, as seen in *Wieland*, presents the potential negatives that the nation and its institutions can effect as well as the troubles that individual rights and liberty can cause. Steven Watts argues that Carwin represents both of these complications:

Carwin suggested what *Wieland* offered . . . in a larger sense: a devastating picture of social relations and consciousness in late eighteenth-century America. Brown presented a frightening depiction of society crumbling from the collapsing supports of religion and the patriarchal family, of human agency choosing disastrously under the burden of social deceit, of liberated individuals whirling apart under the pressures of sensory delusion.”¹¹⁶

Carwin’s actions and existence suggest that all is not idyllic in America or in its systems and ideology. In fact, as Bill Christophersen contends, the depiction of life in the United States as Brown describes is supposed “to shock and frighten” but also to “awaken.” He continues that “Brown’s America needed awakening to the extent it needed to acknowledge various gaps between ideals and experience that had grown too large to ignore.”¹¹⁷ In other words, those ideals that had provided a foundation for the country were not having the desired effect in the society. There was a disconnect between the hopes of a new nation, as represented by Lewis’ Adam, and the experience that people lived each day. The possibility of failure was very real; the American Cain, as depicted in *Wieland*, proves that the pursuit of opportunity can be violent and destructive and that there are no assurances of success in the end.

Though an honorary member of the party of Hope, an acquaintance of Emerson, and an author certainly versed in the use of an American Adam, Nathaniel Hawthorne also utilizes the American Cain figure. The novelist did not merely present ideals that reinforced the hopeful ideas of his acquaintances and contemporaries. As *The House of Seven Gables* and *The Scarlet Letter* suggest, the past is forever relevant, a realization antithetical to the Emersonian “case against the past.”¹¹⁸ Many of his works also display the United States as a place far from the image of an unspoiled Biblical Eden. For instance, in “The New Adam and Eve,” the institutions

of the nation and the evidences of its success are shown to be “artificial” and ultimately prove wholly unacceptable to the couple given a second chance in the perfect “garden” of Boston.¹¹⁹ As Scott Donaldson and Ann Massa argue succinctly, “Hawthorne denies that the New World will ever reach perfection,” a perspective that undermines the Lewis figure.¹²⁰ The writer and his family originally resided in Salem, where he was born, but later moved following the death of his father, also Nathaniel. He “sprang from primitive New England stock,” as Henry James explains, born on the fourth of July, 1804; James adds that he was “in his disposition an unqualified and unflinching American.”¹²¹ Perhaps as important as his nationality was the fact that he also “was by race of the clearest Puritan strain.”¹²² Infamously, the author is the descendant of a tyrannical judge who was involved in the Salem Witch Trials, an ancestor who had the family’s original surname of Hathorne; the author changed his name later once he began writing. The checkered past of his family as well as that of his country was prime material for the novelist and short-story writer. He often used legends, tales, and memories as starting points for his work to look again at the situations and issues of real life. As Lawrence Hall explains in *Hawthorne: Critic of Society*, the artist “was struck with the sinfulness of the past holding the present to its outmoded contracts,” a reflection of the Genesis account where the sins of Adam and Eve affect the lives of their children and, according to Christian tradition, all of humanity.¹²³ F. O. Matthiessen echoes these ideals about Hawthorne’s relationship to the history of the nation in *American Renaissance*:

Even while he was examining his changing New England, he felt the past weighing heavily on the present’s back. Unlike virtually all the other spokesmen for his day, he could never feel that America was a new world. Looking back over the whole history of his province, he was more struck by decay than by

potentiality, by the broken ends to which the Puritan effort had finally come, by the rigidity that had been integral to its thought at its best, by modes of life in which nothing beautiful had developed.¹²⁴

These thoughts raise questions about the ideas of the party of Hope, which contended that the past was to be pushed aside and advocated a focus on the future rather than on the “decay” of that which had come before.

As Larzer Ziff shows, Hawthorne presents, in a letter written in 1854, a critical view of his homeland, which, based on the events of the first half of the nineteenth century, was leading to civil war:

Residing abroad from 1853 to 1860 and agonized by each successive piece of news from home about the excesses on both sides that were precipitating his homeland toward a civil war, Hawthorne wrote to William Ticknor in Boston, “You seem to be in such a confounded mess there, that it quite sickens me to think of coming back. I find it impossible to read American newspapers (of whatever political party) without being ashamed of my country.”¹²⁵

Drafted prior to the American Civil War, during perhaps his most productive and best period of writing, Hawthorne’s missive communicates not only a deep concern for his country, it reveals the shame that the author internalized about the “confounded mess” taking place in his homeland. Though he used an American Adam ideal in many of his works (Lewis in *The American Adam* explores *The Marble Faun* and its main character, Adam, at length), his works more often portray the failure of such a figure, as Holgrave, Goodman Brown, and even the New Adam suggest. Hawthorne’s depictions of the future, however fanciful or imaginary, are also not those of the American dream; “The Celestial Railroad” and “The Birthmark” are cautionary

tales and thus cause for trepidation. As Peter Buitenhuis maintains, Hawthorne did not see “eye to eye” with Emerson’s “optimistic, future-oriented, philosophical, and individualistic” viewpoints.¹²⁶ As the narrator of “Earth’s Holocaust” reports, “man’s age-long endeavor for perfection had served only to render him the mockery of the evil principle.”¹²⁷ Instead, “Hawthorne was mostly pessimistic, obsessed with the past, instinctual, imaginative, and deeply aware of the power of social mores and convention.”¹²⁸ Some of his novels and short stories are instead complicated by an American Cain.

The most explicit reference to the Biblical antecedent is found in his most famous novel, *The Scarlet Letter*. The narrator refers to Hester Prynne in Cain-like terms, noting that the letter she bears as well as the heroine’s life is similar to the first, famous outcast:

Hester Prynne came to have a part to perform in the world. With her native energy of character and rare capacity, it could not entirely cast her off, although it had set a mark upon her, more intolerable to a woman's heart than that which branded the brow of Cain. In all her intercourse with society, however, there was nothing that made her feel as if she belonged to it. Every gesture, every word, and even the silence of those with whom she came in contact, implied, and often expressed, that she was banished, and as much alone as if she inhabited another sphere, or communicated with the common nature by other organs and senses than the rest of human kind. She stood apart from mortal interests, yet close beside them, like a ghost that revisits the familiar fireside, and can no longer make itself seen or felt; no more smile with the household joy, nor mourn with the kindred sorrow; or, should it succeed in manifesting its forbidden sympathy, awakening only terror and horrible repugnance.¹²⁹

Hester's penalty is harsher, in her mind, than that which God placed upon the first murderer, as she is initially exiled physically and psychologically outside the morally-accepted bounds of the community. She reaps the fruits of her actions, which, just as Cain's, are beautiful and bountiful, but because of the norms of the law her "offering" is unacceptable and she is cast out.

Nevertheless, as Roland Bartel observes, "the references to Hester's badge as the brand of Cain may actually suggest that Hester enjoyed divine protection and compassion in dealing with the heartless Puritan society."¹³⁰ That "protection" allows her, in a spirit of grace, to salvage the life and standing of Roger Dimmesdale, her lover and the town's minister; she fully bears the weight and effects of her exile, leading an industrious existence on the outskirts of the town where she raises Pearl. She does not murder, but her actions lead to the forfeiture of an existence for herself for many years; it is the "fratricide" in the novel, as life is lost at least for a time. Rather than sacrificing her daughter or the position of her lover, Prynne preserves her child and never reveals the name of the father. It is an action that evidences Ricardo Quinones' claim that examples of Cain figure begin to assume a more sympathetic role in many works and can be salvific.¹³¹ The argument could be made that, in the end, the child will be the foundation upon which the future of society is built, a place far removed from the strict moralism of the society. Much like Enoch, Cain's son, serves as the namesake of the first Biblical city founded by the first murderer, Pearl presents an alternative model for the future. Ultimately, Hester's sacrifice is rewarded; relationships are restored and she is redeemed in the eyes of the community.

Hester assumes a Cain-like role, and, yet, her assumption of the role is uniquely American. The heroine serves as a mirror, reflecting the society in the novel as one that promises opportunity, tolerance, freedom, and success but yet is governed by the religious myopia exhibited by the leadership of the town and the self-centered individualism of Reverend

Dimmesdale. The work presents, as Lawrence Hall argues, the portrayal of “the American state of mind and spirit.”¹³² He had already explained that

instead of adding his own fanaticism or fad to the others, Hawthorne merely allowed himself to scrutinize the thousands already in existence. For this reason he represents his age more faithfully than many of his contemporaries. In his role of critic he was panoramic. He wore no blinders like a prophet, apostle, or hermit, devoting himself to one great creed alone. He reacted to many and confined himself to none.¹³³

There was no need to create a new viewpoint in fiction. And, as R. W. B. Lewis suggests, there was no greater prevailing ideal than the Adamic strain. Borrowing that established blueprint, *The Scarlet Letter* presents a society where the beliefs in and hopes of such a figure are perhaps sought but are not realized. There is a theme of hope in the novel characteristic of the “party of Hope”; Hester’s actions depict what is possible through acts of love and sacrifice. And yet, Hawthorne also turns the spotlight on the people themselves and reveals an image of the world not as they had intended to create it but one that had existed in the not too distant past. The novel portrays a culture that is struggling to achieve a better life but, in that pursuit, has found another existence marked by jealousy, failure, outcasts, and the loss of life.

More so than Hester, Jaffrey Pyncheon in *The House of Seven Gables* assumes the role of the American Cain. As Lewis points out, *Seven Gables* features an Emersonian new man, Holgrave, who spouts beliefs that are akin to those ideals attributed to the American Adam. Nevertheless, the novel is not a mouthpiece for the party of Hope but more so a presentation of the generational effects of evil and the potentially devastating results of such, an adapted retelling of the Cain and Abel story set in the northeast region of the United States. For all of the

pronouncements of faith in future promise, the present over the past, and the reliance upon the self, the narrator says in the preface that the “moral purpose” for the book is to expose the “truth,” which in this case is the effect of generational “wrong-doing”; the result is hardly Emersonian.¹³⁴ In the end, the daguerreotypist ultimately denounces his rather Adamic statements and pursuits, marries Phoebe, his own Eve, establishes a home, and invites his new relatives and even the “patched philosopher” Uncle Venner to live with them.¹³⁵ By the end, he admits to Phoebe that he is “a conservative already,” renouncing his antipathies for permanence and tradition. This rather romantic ending is hardly characteristic of the party of Hope. There is a prevalent Adam figure, Holgrave, but he ultimately relinquishes his archetypal traits; in addition, there is a national Cain whose actions model the Biblical antecedent and reveal the potential problems with the pursuit of the American Dream and its tenets.

At the center of the novel are the Pyncheons, who were at one time an established, wealthy, and influential New England family. Over time, the ancestral home, with seven gables, has fallen into disrepair, as one branch of the family lives under a curse placed on the patriarch, the Colonel. One of the few remaining ancestors is Hepzibah, who lives in the house yearning for the return of her brother Clifford from prison, where he has been incarcerated for the murder of his own uncle. Details later reveal that the heir to the fortune of the family, Judge Pyncheon, actually committed the murder, in effect killing not only his uncle but also, simultaneously, his cousin, Clifford, who is imprisoned for the crime. The narrator explains that the prisoner’s existence after he is released from prison, devoid of any sense of time or purpose, is really no life at all:

With a mysterious and terrible Past, which had annihilated his [Clifford’s] memory, and a blank Future before him, he had only this visionary and

impalpable Now, which, if you once look closely at it, is nothing.¹³⁶

A past only to be forgotten, a future of no promise, and a present that is merely “nothing” results in no existence at all. The two cousins were close relations and childhood playmates, something like brothers who had a strong kinship; the Judge’s actions result in the “fratricide” of the story. In addition to the killing, however, there are other elements that connect the Judge to the national Cain.

The ancestor of the Pyncheon clan, the Colonel, though successful and powerful, is a horrific presence who creates a pattern of sin within the family, an allusion to the Edenic couple whose consumption of the fruit introduces sin into the world.¹³⁷ Most significantly, he steals the land for his famous home from Matthew Maule, who he unfairly accuses of being a wizard and who is put to death for the offense. The colonel’s tyrannical influence eventually leads him to isolation; he dies from apoplexy, a condition that affects certain members of the family. His progeny, who live under the weight of a curse uttered by Maule at his execution, are affected by the transgressions of the patriarch, as in the original story of Genesis where original sin influences all who come after Adam and Eve, including Cain. In the preface, the narrator explains the moral of the work is

namely, that the wrong-doing of one generation lives into the successive ones, and, divesting itself of every temporary advantage, becomes a pure and uncontrollable mischief; and he would feel it a singular gratification if this romance might effectually convince mankind--or, indeed, any one man--of the folly of tumbling down an avalanche of ill-gotten gold, or real estate, on the heads of an unfortunate posterity, thereby to maim and crush them, until the accumulated mass shall be scattered abroad in its original atoms.¹³⁸

His emphasis on the sins of the father and their affect on his children immediately draws comparison to the story of Adam and Eve. But the tale is not about these originators but the “successive” generations that are burdened with the affects of that first “wrong-doing.”

The judge, who inherits the appearance and the qualities of the colonel most directly, is very distinguished, having achieved notoriety and attained great wealth in his life. As the narrator expresses, “he showed more of the Pyncheon quality, and had won higher eminence in the world, than any of his race since the time of the original Puritan”; he is “unquestionably an honor to his race.”¹³⁹ He is, though, envious of Clifford, who was a favorite of their uncle; he also believes his cousin holds the secret to locating an as yet unrealized piece of the family fortune, the famed “eastern lands.”¹⁴⁰ Finally, Jaffrey, after his anger brings on a fit of apoplexy, suffers the same fate as the Colonel, and he is left, physically outcast from society, slowly dying in a chair in the house of seven gables. His punishment for taking the life of his cousin is a loss of his future political and social goals, all forfeited by an early death brought on by the stress of his anger and jealousy, a result of his cursed condition.

Like Hester, the judge displays qualities of the American Cain. The adaptation of the original in Genesis emerges in Jaffrey’s aspirations as well as in the observations that are made about his society. While he appears to have realized so much already, Pyncheon hopes for more: winning the governorship, gaining wealth, and rising in power. As the national belief suggests, there is always more for which to strive, and satisfaction with the current situation, no matter how enviable, is merely stagnation. Hawthorne, in *The House of Seven Gables*, as he does elsewhere, calls into question that Adamic pursuit, so often carried out at the expense of others, undermined by murderous or other questionable acts. Like Cain, Judge Pyncheon forsakes familial ties, disregards his current position, and forfeits his moral obligations in order to attain

something more. As a manifestation of the second archetype, his endeavors are inherently tied up in the American dream, implicating the ideal as much as the character. There is a critique here of not simply the man but of the culture as a whole. As T. S. Eliot argues, “the work of Hawthorne is truly a criticism—true because a fidelity of the artist and not a mere conviction of the man—of the Puritan morality, of the Transcendentalist morality, and of the world which Hawthorne knew.”¹⁴¹ That “world,” as shown by *Seven Gables*, as well as many of the other novels and short stories, was a potentially destructive place, one plagued by Cain-like figures and perversions of the ideology of a country.

Three additional examples of the Cain figure in America help establish a definition of the archetype whose presence and actions illustrate the potential problems with the pursuit of the dream and reveal that the alleged promises are in no way assured. Frank Norris’ titular hero of *McTeague*, Caroline Gordon’s Orion Outlaw of *Green Centuries*, and Caleb Trask of John Steinbeck’s *East of Eden* offer three specific instances of the American Cain used within almost fifty years of each other between 1899 and 1952. These cases of the model emerge in texts that are written during unsettled times, periods when the country is adapting to significant political, economic, or social shifts. The changes that occur in the United States affect how the foundational principles of the nation are applied, but those ideals and the related dream still exist. The authors’ portrayal of people experiencing those tumultuous times and the related search for constancy, opportunity, and a better life allows for an investigation of some or all aspects of the American Dream; in these stories, the archetype emerges. Writing in the throes of American decadence and a Second Industrial Revolution, Norris creates a Cainian figure whose thwarted pursuit of the nation’s dream leads to jealousy, greed, and murder. Gordon produces a work within an American society that is preparing to enter World War II and, more importantly to the

author, a Southern community that is still reeling from the after-effects of Reconstruction. Her protagonist, Rion, follows in the literal footsteps of Daniel Boone and the figurative ones of the American Adam, seeking a new life and future success; in the end, he adapts his aspirations, a decision that though pure in design, reflects his assumption of the role of Cain and results in death and exile. Steinbeck's novel, a book that borrows directly from the fourth chapter of Genesis, presents Cal Trask, a character whose qualities force him into an altered version of the quest for the country's ideals; that search, nonetheless, brings about Cain-like ends including the death of his brother. All three examples point to the prevalence of this second archetype who represents an alternative experience to that of Lewis' figure, one that many in the United States know: a life of hardship, loss, and the potential that the dream, and all its elements, might not be attained. The American Cain is that archetype.

Notes

¹ Scott Donaldson and Ann Massa, *American Literature: Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1978), 9.

² Jerome Loving, *Lost in the Customhouse* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993), xiv.

³ Ricardo J. Quinones, *The Changes of Cain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 132-33.

⁴ Donaldson and Massa, 14.

⁵ Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), 30.

⁶ David Noble, *The Eternal Adam and the New World Garden* (New York: Braziller, 1968), 5.

⁷ William Bradford, *Of Plimouth Plantation 1620-1647* (New York: Modern Library, 1981), 26, 25.

⁸ Bradford, 369-70.

⁹ Bradford, 66, 144-45, 329-33, 355-56.

¹⁰ J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, 1782 (New York, E. P. Dutton, 1912), 43-44.

¹¹ Crèvecoeur, 199.

¹² See Charles Scruggs, "The Mark of Cain and the Redemption of Art: A Study in Theme and Structure of Jean Toomer's *Cane*." in *American Literature*, 44 (1972): 276-91; Susan Spencer, "James Dickey's American Cain" in *College Language Association Quarterly*, 36, No.

3 (1993): 291-306; and, Carolyn M. Jones, “*Sula* and *Beloved*: Images of Cain in the Novels of Toni Morrison” in *African American Review*, 27 (1993): 615-26. Only Spencer specifically uses the term American Cain, but all three essays discuss the use of the Cain figure and his use within American literature. Ricardo Quinones’ *The Changes of Cain* makes full use of the label in one section of his book, but no where does the scholar define the archetype.

¹³ The list of articles that question the role and ideology of the American Adam is somewhat daunting. A brief selection includes: David W. Noble, “Cooper, Leatherstocking and the Death of the American Adam,” *American Quarterly*, 16 (1964): 419-31; Kathy Cackett, “‘Barn Burning’: Debating the American Adam,” *Notes on Mississippi Writers*, 21, No. 1 (1989): 1-17; John Whalen-Bridge, “Some New American Adams: Politics and the Novel into the Nineties,” *Studies in the Novel*, 24, No. 2 (1992): 187-200; and Molly Boyd, “The Southern American Adam: Simms’s Alternative Myth,” *Southern Quarterly*, 41, No. 2 (2003): 73-83.

¹⁴ For starters, see Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Stein and Day, 1960); Geoffrey S. Proehl, *Coming Home Again : American Family Drama and the Figure of the Prodigal* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1997); Roy R. Male, *Enter, Mysterious Stranger: American Cloistral Fiction* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1979); and, Mary Weeks-Baxter, *Reclaiming the American Farmer: The Reinvention of a Regional Mythology in Twentieth-Century Southern Writing* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006).

¹⁵ R. W. B. Lewis, *The American Adam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), 1.

¹⁶ Lewis, 2.

¹⁷ Lewis, 3.

¹⁸ Lewis is not the only scholar to identify a pattern or ideal to help explain the writings of early America. For some related and some unrelated investigations see D. H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (New York: T. Seltzer, 1923); F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1941); Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1950); Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel*; Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964); and Richard Slotkin's *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860*.

¹⁹ Lewis, 1.

²⁰ Lewis, 5.

²¹ Lewis, 5.

²² Lewis, 26.

²³ Lewis, 7, 18.

²⁴ Lewis, 18.

²⁵ Lewis, 7.

²⁶ Donaldson and Massa, 10.

²⁷ Lewis, 13.

²⁸ Lewis, 13.

²⁹ Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The American Scholar," *Essays and Lectures*, ed. Joel Porte (New York: Library of America, 1983), 57-58.

³⁰ Emerson, "Circles," 413. Emerson continues, providing a model of futurity for his nation and its people. He declares that

the new position of the advancing man has all the powers of the old, yet has them all new. It carries in its bosom all the energies of the past, yet is itself an exhalation of the morning. I cast away in this new moment all my once hoarded knowledge, as vacant and vain.

Here, he suggests that the new persona does not destroy the past as much as supercede it. But, he recognizes that when a new order is established, it is built upon the ruins of the old.

³¹ Lewis, 14.

³² Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Earth's Holocaust," *Mosses from an Old Manse* (New York: Modern Library, 2003), 304.

³³ A simple and fuller articulation of the ideas that Lewis argues were pervading the culture came from Hawthorne's *The House of Seven Gables*. Holgrave's lengthy diatribe to Phoebe proclaims the essence of "the case against the past" held by the party of Hope:

"Shall we never, never get rid of this Past?" cried he, keeping up the earnest tone of his preceding conversation. "It lies upon the Present like a giant's dead body! In fact, the case is just as if a young giant were compelled to waste all his strength in carrying about the corpse of the old giant, his grandfather, who died a long while ago, and only needs to be decently buried. Just think a moment, and it will startle you to see what slaves we are to bygone times, –to Death, if we give the matter the right word! . . .

A Dead Man sits on all our judgment-seats; and living judges do but search out and repeat his decisions. We read in Dead Men's books! We laugh at Dead Men's jokes, and cry at Dead Men's pathos! . . . Whatever we seek to do, of our own free motion, a Dead Man's icy hand obstructs us! Turn our eyes to what point we may, a Dead Man's white, immitigable face encounters them, and freezes our very heart! And we must be dead ourselves before we can begin to have our proper influence on our own world, which will then be no longer our world, but the world of another generation, with which we shall have no shadow of a right to interfere.”

See Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The House of Seven Gables* (New York: Penguin, 1981), 182-83.

³⁴ Lewis, 44, 28.

³⁵ Walt Whitman, “Song of Myself,” *Leaves of Grass* (New York: Library of America, 1992), 189-90.

³⁶ Walt Whitman, “I was Looking a Long While,” *Leaves of Grass*, 512-13.

³⁷ Lewis, 45-46.

³⁸ Lewis, 7, 91.

³⁹ Lewis, 91.

⁴⁰ Lewis, 111.

⁴¹ Lewis, 124.

⁴² Lewis, 127-28.

⁴³ Lewis, 128.

⁴⁴ Lewis, 127.

⁴⁵ Lewis, 151.

⁴⁶ Lewis, 152.

⁴⁷ Lewis, 196.

⁴⁸ Lewis, 195. Laocoön, or Laokoön, was a priest of Apollo who joined Cassandra in calling for the destruction of the Trojan Horse. As punishment, “Apollo sends two sea-serpents to devour his children (and according to some accounts, Laokoön himself).” The act is seen “as a confirmation of Laokoön’s impiety.” See Richard Buxton, *The Complete World of Greek Mythology* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2004), 138-39.

⁴⁹ David Madden, introduction, *American Dreams, American Nightmares* (Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press, 1970), xvii.

⁵⁰ Jim Cullen, *The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea That Shaped a Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 5.

⁵¹ Cullen, 7.

⁵² Kathryn Hume, *American Dream, American Nightmare: Fiction Since 1960* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 4.

⁵³ Madden, xviii.

⁵⁴ Herman Melville, *The Confidence-Man* (New York: Dix, Edwards, & Co., 1857) rpt. in *Herman Melville: Pierre, Israel Potter, The Piazza Tales, The Confidence-Man, Uncollected Prose, Billy Budd, Sailor* (New York: Library of America, 1984), 911.

⁵⁵ Crèvecoeur, 43-44.

⁵⁶ Slotkin, 22.

⁵⁷ Slotkin, 4.

⁵⁸ Slotkin, 5.

⁵⁹ Noble, 5.

⁶⁰ Noble, 5.

⁶¹ Noble, 47.

⁶² Fiedler, 25.

⁶³ Fiedler, 26.

⁶⁴ Fiedler, 29.

⁶⁵ Hawthorne, "The New Adam and Eve," *Mosses from an Old Manse*, 195-96.

⁶⁶ Hawthorne, "The New Adam and Eve," *Mosses from an Old Manse*, 200.

⁶⁷ Hawthorne, "The New Adam and Eve," *Mosses from an Old Manse*, 195.

⁶⁸ Hawthorne, "The New Adam and Eve," *Mosses from an Old Manse*, 211.

⁶⁹ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (New York: Penguin, 2003), 35.

⁷⁰ Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 287-97, 307-13, 585-86, 188-247. See sections 8, 15, 16, 26, and 33 specifically for examples of the lists Whitman created in "Song of Myself.

⁷¹ Madden, xviii.

⁷² Lewis, 92.

⁷³ Genesis 4:1-16 Revised Standard Version.

⁷⁴ Gen. 4.20-22.

⁷⁵ Leon R. Kass, "Farmers, Founders, and Fratricide: The Story of Cain and Abel," *First Things*, 62 (April 1996): 19.

⁷⁶ Quinones, 3.

⁷⁷ Quinones, 6.

⁷⁸ Quinones, 6.

⁷⁹ See also Martha Davis, "Cain since Lord Byron: A Study of the Sympathetic Treatment of the Character of Cain in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," (Ph.D. diss., University of Arkansas, 1975).

⁸⁰ Quinones, 88.

⁸¹ John Winthrop, "A Modell of Christian Charity," *American Sermons: The Pilgrims to Martin Luther King Jr.*, ed. Michael Warner (New York: Library of America, 1999), 42.

⁸² Bradford, 26.

⁸³ Bradford, 29. See Leviticus 20:24.

⁸⁴ Bradford, 226fn.

⁸⁵ Bradford, 227.

⁸⁶ Bradford, 231.

⁸⁷ Biographical information comes from Warren Barton Blake, introduction, *Letters from an American Farmer* (New York, E. P. Dutton, 1912), vii-xxi.

⁸⁸ Blake, xv.

⁸⁹ Blake, xvii.

⁹⁰ Crèvecoeur, 12.

⁹¹ Crèvecoeur, 198.

⁹² Crèvecoeur, 160, 171.

⁹³ Crèvecoeur, 209.

⁹⁴ Crèvecoeur, 202, 216.

⁹⁵ Crèvecoeur, 210.

⁹⁶ Biographical details are from Harry R. Warfel, *Charles Brockden Brown* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1949).

⁹⁷ Warfel, 104.

⁹⁸ Charles Brockden Brown, *Wieland and Memoirs of Carwin the Biloquist* (New York: Penguin, 1991), 281.

⁹⁹ Brown, 288.

¹⁰⁰ Brown, 295.

¹⁰¹ Brown, 300.

¹⁰² Brown, 305.

¹⁰³ Brown, 306.

¹⁰⁴ Brown, 309.

¹⁰⁵ Brown, 331.

¹⁰⁶ Brown, 78.

¹⁰⁷ Brown, 62.

¹⁰⁸ Brown, 130.

¹⁰⁹ Brown, 142.

¹¹⁰ Brown 147.

¹¹¹ Numerous scholars mention the lack of sufficient, incontrovertible evidence to convict Carwin, legally, for the murders. Jay Fliegelman, in his introduction to the novel, asserts that “since Carwin is himself, to some degree, a victim” of habit and impulse, “the complex questions of who is morally accountable and in what degree remain unresolved” (ix). See also John Clemen, “Ambiguous Evil: A Study of Villains and Heroes in Charles Brockden Brown’s Major

Novels,” *Early American Literature*, 10 (1975): 190-219, and Laura H. Korobkin, “Murder by Madman: Criminal Responsibility, Law, and Judgment in *Wieland*,” *American Literature*, 72 (2000): 721-50;

¹¹² Brown, 278.

¹¹³ Brown, 206.

¹¹⁴ Brown, 223.

¹¹⁵ David Lee Clark, *Charles Brockden Brown: Pioneer Voice of America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1952), 311.

¹¹⁶ Steven Watts, *The Romance of Real Life: Charles Brockden Brown and the Origins of American Culture* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1994), 89.

¹¹⁷ Bill Christophersen, *The Apparition in the Glass: Charles Brockden Brown’s American Gothic* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993), 3.

¹¹⁸ Lewis, 13.

¹¹⁹ Hawthorne, “The New Adam and Eve,” *Mosses from an Old Manse*, 195, 197.

¹²⁰ Donaldson and Massa, 35.

¹²¹ Henry James, *Nathaniel Hawthorne* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1901), 5.

¹²² James, 6.

¹²³ Lawrence Sargent Hall, *Hawthorne: Critic of Society* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944), 124.

¹²⁴ Matthiessen, 321-23.

¹²⁵ Larzer Ziff, *Literary Democracy: The Declaration of Cultural Independence in America* (New York: Viking, 1981), 116-17. Ziff quotes Hawthorne, [Letter to William D.

Ticknor, July 7, 1854], *The Letters, 1853-1856*, ed. Thomas Woodson, et al. (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1987), 237.

¹²⁶ Peter Buitenhuis, *The House of Seven Gables: Severing Family and Colonial Ties* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), 5.

¹²⁷ Hawthorne, "Earth's Holocaust," *Mosses from an Old Manse*, 319.

¹²⁸ Buitenhuis, 5.

¹²⁹ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 76.

¹³⁰ Roland Bartel, "Hawthorne's Use of the Bible in *The Scarlet Letter*," *Biblical Images in Literature*, ed. Roland Bartel (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975), 22.

¹³¹ See Quinones, 87-88.

¹³² Hall, 182.

¹³³ Hall, 6.

¹³⁴ Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, 2.

¹³⁵ Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, 155.

¹³⁶ Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, 149.

¹³⁷ See Genesis 3 and Romans 5:12-14.

¹³⁸ Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, 2.

¹³⁹ Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, 24.

¹⁴⁰ Hawthorne, *Seven Gables*, 18.

¹⁴¹ T. S. Eliot, "American Literature," *Athenaeum*, No. 4643 (April 25, 1919): 237, qtd. in Matthiessen, 193.

CHAPTER 2

McTEAGUE: THE DENTIST AND THE AMERICAN DREAM

McTeague “is really not so much an attack upon greed as another attack—like *Vandover and the Brute*—upon commercial civilization. Even Charles Hoffman goes too far when he says that Trina and McTeague are defeated by their own follies. They are victims of civilization, but a civilization that is evil not because it has defects but simply because it exists.”¹

Norris’s “deepest concern was actually with the passions and forces that grip and darken the heart of man.”²

“As Howells pointed out in his review of *McTeague*, it was a step forward in the expansion of American fiction; it dealt with life in more serious and realistic terms than did its companion novels; it defied the attitude long prevalent in the country that fiction must be both safe and optimistic enough to suit all of the members of the American family. Moreover, it appeared at a time when its influence was most needed.”³

I. McTeague as American Cain

Just after the publication of Frank Norris’s *McTeague*, an autographed letter appeared in the Philadelphia *Book News* signed by the author.⁴ Briefly, the novelist expressed that his

object in writing “McTeague” was to produce an interesting story – nothing more. It has always seemed to me that this should be the final test in any work of fiction independent of style, “school,” or theory of art. If I had any secondary motive in its production it was in the nature of the protest against and a revolt from the “decadent,” artificial and morbid “prose fancies” of latter-day fiction. I believe that the future of American fiction lies in the direction of a return to the primitive elemental life, and an abandonment of “elegant prose” and “fine writing.”⁵

The story of a murderous dentist obsessed with a gilded tooth is certainly “interesting” and also far different from the “latter-day fiction” to which he refers in the letter. As in *Vandover and the Brute* or *The Pit*, *McTeague* includes a bold presentation of American life, including depictions of base scenes and circumstances that reflect an uncomely part of society. Unlike the “prose fancies” against which he protests in the newspaper, Norris’s book presents life as he witnessed it; the novelist did not shy from harsh circumstances or tragic depictions. Instead, as William Dillingham argues, “for him, details, gathered through experience, close observations, and hard work, objectified reality.”⁶ This setting provides a space for a Cain of the United States, a figure determined to grasp the opportunities offered by the national dream but whose desires are not realized. In the end, he reenacts the Biblical account of Cain and Abel by murdering a relation in anger and jealousy and ultimately finding himself exiled.

McTeague is far removed from the “fine writing” that Norris criticizes in his letter; a work of his contemporaries, such as Henry James or Oscar Wilde, it is not. This “interesting story” instead describes an experience far from the decadence or elegance depicted in other works of the period. The loss and tragedy that ultimately occurs, however gross, suggests the potential, negative end for many who dream of success and achievement. As opposed to the

effeminate aesthete, Dorian Gray, the author offers a gross, uneducated man driven by base interests whose rage and jealousy culminate in the murder of his wife when his aspirations prove unattainable. Rather than the psychological realism of *The Turn of the Screw* or *Portrait of a Lady*, the Naturalist novel portrays a protagonist who becomes the victim of circumstances over which he has no control and a system that ultimately thwarts his efforts to realize his desires.

II. Naturalism and the American Cain

In fact, the Naturalist period, out of which *McTeague* emerges, proves a fertile place for the continuing development of the Cain of the United States. In American Naturalistic works specifically, the depiction of “Promethean forces of heredity, society, and a hostile nature, powers outside the control of the protagonists,” produced, in some cases, figures who reacted against such an existence in Cain-like ways, exhibiting envy that leads to murder, denial, and exile.⁷ Many of these “protagonists,” such as George Hurstwood and Tom Joad, react in anger and jealousy after they are crushed by environmental factors and the systemic circumstances that prohibit their efforts to attain a better life, but they are not examples of the archetype; in the end, they lack certain, fundamental traits. Others, however, with the evidence of their unrealized aspirations before them or in an attempt to grasp the opportunities of the American Dream, exhibit attributes of the son of Adam and reenact the major events of his life, including the killing of a figure who represents an alternative viewpoint or lifestyle. These figures, examples of the Cain of the United States, provide perspective on the national dream and reveal the potential tragedy of all that such an ideology involves. No where is this representative Cain more evident in a Naturalist novel than in Frank Norris’s *McTeague*.

Though the definition of literary Naturalism is debated and the central novels of the period are widely contested, James Nagel provides as succinct as possible an explanation of the movement in his introduction to *The Portable Realism Reader*.⁸ The theory, he writes, had its roots in Claude Bernard's *An Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine* and fictionally, in Émile Zola's *The Experimental Novel*. He continues that, according to proponents, the obligation of a novel was to portray social pathology, analyzing its causative forces, and, by suggesting ways of altering these factors, improve society. Naturalism was, unabashedly, a "reformist movement."⁹ As Donald Pizer expresses though, the tradition, like many literary genres and modes, has "barriers of established terms and ideas to overcome or outflank." He continues that Naturalism has two such assumed "barriers," presumptions that confuse any potential explication:

The first is that since naturalism comes after realism, and since it seems to take literature in the same direction as realism, it is primarily an "extension" or continuation of realism—only a little different. The second almost inevitable approach involves this difference. The major distinction between realism and naturalism, most critics agree, is the particular philosophical orientation of the naturalists. A traditional and widely accepted concept of American naturalism, therefore, is that it is essentially realism infused with a pessimistic determinism.¹⁰

These often presupposed parameters, Pizer contends, do not take into consideration all the tenets of the tradition and overlook the wide influence of the French novelists who established the Naturalist movement in literature. Some of these specific hallmarks of the school relate directly to the use of an American Cain and particularly to Norris's use of the figure in *McTeague*.

Lars Åhnebrink, in *The Beginnings of Naturalism in American Fiction*, provides one of

the most comprehensive studies of the movement and its effect on literature of the United States; he also identifies and explains the specific tenets of literary Naturalism. He explains that the tradition “was an outgrowth of nineteenth century thought and involved the application of scientific methods to literary creation.”¹¹ Simply put, he writes that “the basic philosophy . . . was deterministic and positivistic and consequently the naturalists focused their interests on external reality.”¹² In light of these theoretical perspectives, authors presented “external reality” unemotionally and with scientific precision, offering a factual portrayal that was to reflect all aspects of life, including taboo subjects “such as prostitution, free love, social misery of many sorts, and burning questions of the day.”¹³ The honest depiction of society and its citizens, including the minutiae of daily experience, was to be objective; the texts were, Åhnebrink succinctly states, “critical of society” though without didactic pronouncements. There was, nevertheless, the underlying drive of reform within some of the proponents of the school. According to him, none had more of a “reformer’s zeal” than Émile Zola, the French novelist who had a profound influence on Frank Norris as well as on *McTeague*.

As Lars Åhnebrink and others contend, the unofficial shift to Naturalism and the emergence of American texts influenced by that perspective related to the drastic changes taking place within the world during the last half of the nineteenth century not only in the United States but also in the world. The adoption of Zolaesque techniques and ideals, specifically, by authors such as Hamlin Garland, Stephen Crane, and Norris was not merely an attempt to join the newest literary movement. Rather, the tenets of the French school, adapted within the literature of the United States, provided a literary model through which the circumstances of life in the country could be presented. The overwhelming shifts in economic, intellectual, religious, and social ideals that occurred wrought significant changes both positive and negative. Financial disparity

and unprecedented wealth, the undermining of religious authority and the pursuit of scientific advances, and the prevalence of corruption and increased immigration characterized the dramatic transition occurring in the country. The result was an unofficial divide among the American people, one reflective, at its root, of the ideological struggle between Cain and Abel. The transition helped to emphasize the opposite experiences of many in the country. Some, as in the past, realized their dreams, reinforcing the ideal of Lewis' American Adam who suggested that the pursuit of freedoms and opportunity could result in a better life. On the other hand, many continued to struggle or even fail. Works of Naturalism, committed to a portrayal of real life as well as to reform, naturally depicted the potential for this negative reality. In some cases, the American Cain surfaced as a figure who experiences that potential tragedy and reacts in violence, murdering his double and evidencing an alternative existence to that of the Adam archetype.

Not all characters in the works of this late nineteenth-century literary movement are examples of the Cain of the United States; however, the focus of Naturalist texts provides a place for the archetype to appear. As Nagel iterates, many novels of the period are "set in a hostile environment" and depict characters "who tend to be uneducated, representative, lower class 'types' of some oppressed group," those individuals who often struggle to realize the American Dream, though the opportunity of a better life remains available.¹⁴ These protagonists, who experience life in the midst of "the dull round of daily existence," are familiar and honest rather than fantastic or romanticized. The inclusion of these common people, affected by previous generations, the conditions of life, and often unfortunate moments of chance, often know life as disappointing or unforgiving, such as Humphrey van Weyden, the Joad family, or even Bigger Thomas. But, again, they are not all American Cains. The archetype emerges when these

circumstances lead a character to a level of anger and envy that culminates in the taking of a life and some form of exile for the murderer. That reenactment of the first fratricide stems in part from the systems in place as well as from the failures of human nature, emphases of Naturalist fiction. The national Cain emerges, however, when specifically American institutions and processes, such as democracy and capitalism, prove overwhelming or destructive, driving the naturally weak character to violent ends and reflecting the penchant for reform that characterizes both Naturalism and appearances of the American Cain.

The titular hero of Frank Norris's *McTeague* provides one example of the archetype within a work from the Naturalist movement. Though the author's commitment to the school is as debatable as a definition of the period itself, there is little question that he was influenced by the theory. No matter its specific adoption in the themes and action of his works, he is most often mentioned in the first breath when scholars speak of Naturalist novelists. However, the author, who died at just age thirty-two, was exposed to any number of scientific, social, religious, and psychological theories that garnered attention during his lifetime, many of which affected his thinking and his books. In addition, as a Western writer, a seasoned traveler, and the son of a successful businessman, Norris brought a unique perspective to the national experiment and the unofficial dream of the country as well as to the powerful changes underway not only in the United States but around the world as the twentieth century approached. These viewpoints influenced the young artist and, in the case of *McTeague*, resulted in a prime example of an American Cain.

III. Opportunity and Loss

Norris lived a rather unique life, benefiting greatly from the wealth of his family and yet also choosing, at times, to place himself in dangerous locales or among tragic circumstances.¹⁵

In spite of the opportunities that his family and its resources afforded the young man, he witnessed, in the world at large as well as within his own household, the profound suffering and disillusionment that life can bring. Biographers Joseph McElrath, Jr. and Jesse Crisler, cataloging some of the more difficult periods of his life, assert that he

repeatedly experienced disappointment. The choice of painterly vocation did not pan out. He could not meet the requirements for graduation at the University of California. The South African adventure yielded little journalistically. The apprenticeship with *The Wave* dragged on with nary a taker for the collections of short stories he assembled. His affiliation with S. S. McClure in early 1898 marked a promising new development; but that too was a disappointment, particularly in regard to the meager consequences of his Spanish-American War experience.¹⁶

Though the list of obstacles may present an unbalanced picture of the author's life, it does provide evidence that the author was no stranger to the potential failures of life. Ultimately, he was not insulated from the hardships around him; he observed the devastation and violence taking place in South Africa and Cuba and experienced setbacks in his career and personal life. Just as John Steinbeck would later do, he also witnessed the struggles of others in the United States, conducting research for his novels at a friend's mine in California and among the wheat farmers in that same state. His exposure to the potential pitfalls of the American Dream relates to his use of a national Cain, whose murderous act results when aspirations are continually frustrated and violence becomes the chosen means of expressing the related anger at personal

failure and the jealousy of others' endeavors, an extreme end of that experience.

Despite a life that included great opportunity and significant disappointment and loss, Norris retained, as his biographers recount, his own specific version of the American Dream, the "goal of self-support as a professional novelist."¹⁷ His father provided a model of the American Adam, rising above his circumstances and utilizing the promises suggested by the dream of the country to achieve the good life and provide opportunities for his family. However, the writer was also exposed to those whose aspirations were not realized, a group represented by the national Cain who embodies that negative experience and carries it to a violent end. The duality presented was not uncommon and reflects the transitional period in which he lived. Born just after the end of the Civil War, he witnessed the dramatic progress that occurred during the last half of the nineteenth century as well as the significant hardships that characterized the period as well. The author was born into a time of great change, the genesis of "what is commonly called 'modern America.'"¹⁸ It is a fact that would profoundly affect his writing.

The considerable shift that took place in the country during Norris's life, as Lars Åhnebrink describes, "transformed American civilization to a marked degree, demanding new ways of living and thinking and a reevaluation of established codes of life."¹⁹ When the author was born in 1870, the United States was still reeling from war, and yet the nation was also beginning a period of unprecedented progress. It was a time of great opportunity and yet profound disappointment; in other words, though many had lost their lives and brother had fought against brother, the dream remained with all the prior potential. Walter Taylor writes that despite the division and loss of life that occurred during the Civil War,

America had developed, by the middle of the nineteenth century, a clearly defined ideology, wide-ranging, inclusive, immensely dynamic. That American cultural

pattern had, for its philosophic groundwork, the cosmic optimism of the eighteenth century, together with the associated ideas of progress and perfectability.²⁰

Taylor contends that the democratic foundations of the United States initialized “a tradition, a philosophy, almost an entire way of life in itself” that promised “the generous end of the enlargement of all the possibilities of life for the common man.”²¹ In other words, the American Dream, established in the early writings of the nation, coupled with the “progress” of the late 1800s, engendered a renewal of that “clearly defined ideology.” Lewis’ Adam, and all he represented, was still very relevant in the cultural discussion.

That positive ideology, in conjunction with theories such as Determinism and “survival of the fittest,” produced dramatic economic and social changes as the Second Industrial Revolution took shape in the United States. There was unprecedented growth, as seen in the experience of Norris’s own father, who established an expanding and profitable jewelry business. The emphasis on progress, however, also brought unparalleled disparity within the culture. As Tom Quirk describes, the conditions and social philosophies created a culture of corruption, inequality, violence, and financial crisis. He catalogues works of the Realist and Naturalist periods that depicted, among other things, “the harshness and deprivation frontier life,” “the meanness and narrowness of America’s ‘idyllic’ villages,” and “the dehumanizing brutality of the cities.”²² The “catastrophic suddenness” of changes in the systems of the United States, as Taylor describes it, had positive results but also produced a great amount of confusion and disillusionment.²³ Disgruntled workers protested against unfair wages and unsafe working conditions, immigrants poured into the country, and new tensions surfaced

within the already unstable nation. While the American Dream remained prevalent, the harsh circumstances for some created a place for the Cain archetype to emerge again in the literature of the nation.

By the time Norris died in 1902, the world had undergone a significant shift from the prescribed morality, order, and tradition of the Victorian era toward the scientific advancement, industrialism, and new theories of the twentieth century. As Robert Schneider argues, “Americans who came of intellectual age between 1890 and the end of World War I,” the “Progressive generation” that included the author of *McTeague*, “found themselves engaged in a dramatic struggle between traditional dogmas and the forces of a new scientific and industrialized world.”²⁴ Schneider maintains that though many “writers of the Progressive period were themselves convinced that they had liberated their minds from the shackles of the past and had gone, unencumbered, toward the future,” they were mistaken; Norris was under no such misapprehension. As a young writer emerging during this period, the author was exposed to influences from everywhere and anywhere, including the more traditional dogmas of the fleeting nineteenth century. He borrowed from myriad progressive theories and arguments including those of Joseph LeConte and Émile Zola but simultaneously voiced a respect for the ideas of the past such as Lewis Gates’ Romantic-Realism. Despite knowledge of evolutionary theory and Determinism, he retained some respect for traditional religion and personal faith. Turning “neither to Darwin’s agnosticism or Zola’s militant atheism,” he was “very spiritual,” as his wife “declared” after his death; college friends remembered their fraternity brother as “‘a good orthodox Episcopalian’ ” who had said that faith was “‘one thing one did not question.’ ”²⁵ These disparate influences, which represent one side or the other of the cultural shift occurring at the close of the nineteenth century, evidence that the author was in the middle of the marked

division between the established Christian and agrarian traditions and a scientific, industrial progressivism. That conflict, reflective of the ideological tension between Cain's agricultural leanings and Abel's herding that served as the catalyst for the first fratricide, was the defining ideal during Norris's lifetime.

IV. Zola, LeConte, and the American Cain

Frank Norris and his fiction have been assigned to many different literary and theoretical schools; each, it has been claimed at one point or another, is an ideology to which the writer ascribed. Indeed, many movements or social theories are referenced in some of the author's works and some are directly utilized. All, in some way, affected his view of humanity and its pursuits and failures and thus eventually influenced his use of an American Cain figure. Those ideals that surface in both his fiction and non-fiction writings, namely Naturalism, Romanticism, and Christian evolution, relate to one individual or another to whom the novelist was exposed personally, or through their writings, during his time at the University of California or his year at Harvard College. At Berkeley, the author met Joseph LeConte and became acquainted with his intellectual attempt to rectify the seemingly incongruous teachings of Darwinism and the geologist's own Calvinist beliefs.²⁶ Prior to that experience, during his time at Harvard, he began to display his interest in the theory to which his name and novels are most commonly attached: the Naturalism of Émile Zola. That school and its writings deeply influenced *McTeague* and in turn Norris's use of a Cain archetype.

Naturalism was not the first philosophy to capture the young artist's attention, but it is the ideal that scholars connect with him more than any other.²⁷ Lars Åhnebrink contends that the

writer “looked upon the French writer as his avowed master” and references one of the books in Norris’s personal library that he had inscribed to his wife as “The Boy Zola.”²⁸ Many scholars refer to the French novelist and political activist as the American’s mentor; when *McTeague* was published, Norris even earned the nickname of “American Zola.”²⁹ The direct influence on Norris and his novels has been well-documented. Lars Åhnebrink, states that “the influence of Zola is predominant in *McTeague* and shows that Norris consciously aimed at adapting Zola’s naturalistic method to native American material.”³⁰ His biographers, addressing the same connection, add that, “like Zola,” Norris

also dealt with the nature-versus-nurture question, and he dramatically emphasized environment as a determinant of human behavior: to be reared in a capitalistic milieu may also render one especially aggressive as an economic combatant, determined to prove him- or herself fit to survive and flourish rather than unfit and thus slated for failure or even extinction.³¹

In other words, in much of the novelist’s work including *McTeague*, the determining factor in human experience is “environment,” a synonym here for the natural system. The “capitalistic milieu” of the United States, for instance, is a system that rewards the most “fit” and leaves the “unfit” to be “slated for failure or extinction.” Norris, the son of B. F., knew quite well the problems that could occur within a society that places such an emphasis on economic success; in fact, he depicts just such an ideal in the Wheat Trilogy, *The Octopus*, *The Pit*, and *The Wolf*, drawing into question the health and sustainability of a culture based on financial achievement and survival of the fittest. A similar, critical depiction is evident in *McTeague*, a novel that offers a portrayal of the potential tragedy inherent in the American experience and utilizes a Cainian figure to present the violence that can occur when the system bears down. The influence

of Zola thus relates to the use of the archetype in the California writer.

Joseph LeConte, his zoology and geology professor at the University of California, was another influence on the aspiring writer whose ideas provided additional theoretical support for an American Cain figure. McElrath and Crisler explain that Norris most likely did not hear a lecture focused solely on the LeContian ideology but rather picked up pieces of the idea in his courses.³² His direct exposure to the ideas appears to be a non-issue; his biographers maintain that the philosophy that attempted to “reconcile Darwinism with Christian doctrine and, in particular, natural selection with the biblical concept of not only a compassionate but a just deity” was, at least by students at the university, “widely understood and generally accepted as verified.”³³ Though the association seems antithetical, the relation between evolutionary theory and Christian tenets was one that LeConte retained and for which he argued around the region; his ideals are reflected in Norris’s works, namely *McTeague*, and influence his use of an American Cain.

Donald Pizer argues that the novelist, whether he wholeheartedly accepted his professor’s theory or not, used some of its principles within specific novels. He contends that Norris “found in Le Conte two basic ideas which satisfied needs deep within his own temperament.” Pizer continues that the first viewpoint was

a confirmation of the belief that there is a moral order inherent in nature and its laws—a belief present in his earliest writings. Second, he found a way of dealing coherently with two aspects of man’s animal nature—his sensual drives and his pleasure in violence and conquest—which he felt strongly within his own nature. Le Conte, in other words, supplied Norris not with any new insights, but rather with a way of shaping and confirming his deepest feelings about man and about

himself.³⁴

In other words, the theorist's ideals provided an alternative to Zola's Naturalism, which depicted characters in the hands of Fate, unable to attain an experience other than that which they had already been slated. LeConte's beliefs, grounded as they were in religious principles, offered another explanation for the evil perpetrated by individuals, a more hopeful alternative to the Determinism of the French literary movement. Norris's novels, specifically *McTeague*, while certainly incorporating some of the tenets of the Naturalist school, also depict characters who have the opportunity to evolve and improve despite their environment and heredity. More specifically, the LeContian philosophy relates to the American Cain. The dentist, as an example of the archetype, has the chance to reject the influence of his fallen ancestry and overcome the Deterministic factors that appear to hold him down; at times, he even pursues "a more complex and higher form of life," displaying small signs of self-improvement. However, as an example of the second national archetype, held down by his own innate depravity and the systems in place that limit his ability to achieve his dreams, he ultimately embraces his inherent characteristics and degenerates along the evolutionary scale, eventually reenacting the violent act of the Biblical antecedent.

The novelist's exposure to the disparate theories of his unofficial French mentor and his Christian evolutionist professor during the formative years of his writing career, 1890 to 1895, clearly influenced the writings of the California author and his use of an American Cain. Norris, however, incorporated elements of many disparate viewpoints in his novels. He exposed himself to numerous viewpoints and theories in an effort to take in all that he could from the world around him. It was an endeavor that he endorsed in the fourth installment of his "Salt and Sincerity" essay series, 1902:

The function of the novelist of this present day is to comment upon life as he sees it. . . . How necessary then for him—of all men—to be in the midst of life! He cannot plunge too deeply into it. Politics will help him, and Religious Controversies, Explorations, Science, the newest theory of Socialism, the latest development of Biology.³⁵

These varied influences were then to be incorporated into an author's works; Norris, in *McTeague*, seems to take his advice to heart. The novel references Lombroso's theories on criminology, reflects Zola's Naturalism, and makes use of the Cain and Abel story, depicting an American version of the murdering brother.

V. The Cainian Dentist

At first blush, *McTeague* does not appear to embody Cainian attributes. Despite some unusual traits that he exhibits early in the novel, the dentist can be viewed as a version of Lewis' Adam; in fact, scholars have referred to him as such. John Conder describes him as "the Adamic *McTeague*" and Richard Chase argues that the dentist represents "the underlying myth of Adam."³⁶ "Mac" initially displays qualities of the archetype Lewis identifies just as many other examples of the Cain of the United States do, though his ambition and vision pale in comparison to original figure's idealism.³⁷ He works among the common, and often tragic, personalities on Polk Street, providing dental services mainly to "a clientele of butcher boys, shop girls, drug clerks, and car conductors"; however, his existence is, at least to him, quite satisfactory and far improved over his rather bleak childhood experiences (3). He has accomplished some version of the American Dream, rising above his circumstances to create a better life for himself in San

Francisco, far from the mines in which his father had labored. He is independent, no more so than on Sundays, when he is free to indulge in his few, chosen comforts:

McTeague looked forward to these Sunday afternoons as a period of relaxation and enjoyment. He invariably spent them in the same fashion. These were his only pleasures—to eat, to smoke, to sleep, and to play upon his concertina. (2)

These lazy weekend afternoons, which find him “crop-full, stupid, and warm,” are, in the dentist’s mind, ideal (1). Unfettered by family or responsibility, Mac enjoys the spoils of his position and the life he has created for himself. Norris’s figure stands “alone, self-reliant, and self-propelling, ready to confront whatever awaits him with the aid of his own unique and inherent resources”; he is a model of the American Adam.³⁸

Having established his dental practice and a routine of life, he has become an icon of the neighborhood, an easily recognizable figure if for no other reason than his unusual and yet remarkable physical image and abilities. Though he has few friends, he is known and, for the most part, respected: “Polk Street called him the ‘Doctor’ and spoke of his enormous strength.” The narrator continues, describing the dentist’s rare stature that his neighbors find awe-inspiring:

McTeague was a young giant, carrying his huge shock of blond hair six feet three inches from the ground; moving his immense limbs, heavy with ropes of muscle, slowly, ponderously. His hands were . . . hard as wooden mallets, strong as vises, the hands of the old-time car-boy. Often he dispensed with forceps and extracted a refractory tooth with his thumb and finger. His head was square-cut, angular; the jaw salient, like that of the carnivora. (3)

His impressive attributes and abilities further cast him in an Adamic mold; his sheer strength and size distinguish him from other residents in the area and demand that other people take notice.

Despite a rather dense mind and ogreish appearance, Norris's protagonist rises above mental limitations, genetic disadvantages, and social and economic obstacles to create a comfortable and sustainable existence, following in the footsteps of the national Adam and serving as a role model for others, particularly the unfortunate residents of the neighborhood. However common his personal aspirations, he is almost completely satisfied with his existence. As the narrator reports, "when he opened his 'Dental Parlors,' he felt that his life was a success, that he could hope for nothing better" (3). In other words, he has achieved a life marked by freedom and satisfaction, a picture of the American Dream.

In spite of his brutish traits and doltish mind, McTeague has achieved what his mother dreamed for her son back when he was a "car-boy at the Big Dipper Mine in Placer County . . . trundling the heavy cars of ore in and out of the tunnel under the direction of his father" (2). The agreeable life of relative comfort and personal accomplishment that the dentist has created for himself is a goal that was instilled within him by his mother, who never knew any measure of success herself. Her husband was a miner and an alcoholic who eventually drank himself to death; the unfortunate woman served as a cook "for forty miners" in order to provide some semblance of opportunity for her child. Though "she was an overworked drudge, fiery and energetic for all that," she remained committed to "having her son rise in life and enter a profession." Mac adopts this version of the American Dream, however diluted by his simplicity of needs, and ultimately realizes it, in part through monies he receives from his mother's meager estate after her death. He opens the "Dental Parlors," purchases the necessary instruments, and outfits the office with medical and personal effects that comprise his work and living quarters. He also acquires some evidence of his place in society, simple artwork, outdated books, a chattering canary, and a tired concertina that, in his mind, marks his elevated status though they

are hardly signs of refinement. In fact, because of his unsophisticated needs, his accumulated belongings leave him with few remaining desires:

But for one thing, McTeague would have been perfectly contented. Just outside his window was his signboard—a modest affair—that read: “Doctor McTeague. Dental Parlors. Gas Given”; but that was all. It was his ambition, his dream, to have projecting from that corner window a huge gilded tooth, a molar with enormous prongs, something gorgeous and attractive. He would have it some day, on that he was resolved; but as yet such a thing was far beyond his means.

(4-5)

The comfortable, if simplistic, existence that McTeague has created in San Francisco is not quite enough; as an American Adam figure, the dentist hopes for more, even if that desire is focused on a gaudy, “gilded tooth.” That “molar,” however unusual a “dream,” is a version of the national ideology as represented by Lewis’ archetype.

McTeague almost unconsciously pursues an Adamic existence throughout much of the novel, though his efforts consistently fall short and ultimately fail completely. His actions and decisions are often based on a desire to prove his place as a progressive, model citizen, worthy of others’ respect and imitation. Such is the motivation behind his invitation to his future in-laws to join him at the theater; the idea is not even of his own devising but is suggested by his friend, and Trina’s cousin, Marcus Schouler. The scene, of course, is famous for “Owgooste” Sieppe’s “dreadful accident” (106), but the dentist’s attitude at the show reveals a sense of accomplishment, his feeling that he has attained an honorable place in society:

McTeague was excited, dazzled. In five years he had not been twice to the theatre. Now he beheld himself inviting his "girl" and her mother to accompany

him. He began to feel that he was a man of the world. He ordered a cigar. (97)

The scene, of course, is ironic. The show, a vaudevillian production, is anything but sophisticated, though the dentist does not realize it. Under the impression that he has arrived, Norris's protagonist does present, at this point of the novel, an example of an Adam figure. Following in the footsteps of Lewis' archetype, McTeague, despite his disadvantages, has risen above his circumstances to achieve an independent and comfortable position in the world, modeling impressive, physical traits and providing a path for others to follow.

Despite his unenviable upbringing and remaining limitations, he continues to make strides toward an American Adamic existence. The addition of an archetypal Eve is the next step, though that relationship and its ramifications mark a dramatic change in the nature of the dentist. When Trina Sieppe first comes to the Dental Parlors, Mac is surprised by her initial effect upon him. The dentist, innocent and simplistic, is inexperienced with women. As the narrator explains,

Trina was McTeague's first experience. With her the feminine element suddenly entered his little world. It was not only her that he saw and felt, it was the woman, the whole sex, an entire new humanity, strange and alluring, that he seemed to have discovered. How had he ignored it so long? It was dazzling, delicious, charming beyond all words. His narrow point of view was at once enlarged and confused, and all at once he saw that there was something else in life besides concertinas and steam beer. Everything had to be made over again. His whole rude idea of life had to be changed. (27)

The narrator reveals that once the two are married, "gradually the dentist improved under the influence of his little wife," becoming more sophisticated or perhaps less awkward (190). The

couple takes part in an official wedding ceremony, establishes a home removed from the “Parlors,” and forms a respectable life within the unfortunate environment in which they find themselves (157-64).

Now married, Mac begins to search for alternative diversions to fill up his leisure time since his new bride has forbidden him from continuing his Sunday afternoon ritual of simple pleasures. The narrator explains that

he began to observe the broader, larger interests of life, interests that affected him not as an individual, but as a member of a class, a profession, or a political party. He read the papers, he subscribed to a dental magazine; on Easter, Christmas, and New Year's he went to church with Trina. He commenced to have opinions, convictions. (191)

In addition to the new and respectable “interests” with which the dentist involves himself, he, as the narrator also relates, “began to have ambitions—very vague, very confused ideas of something better—ideas for the most part borrowed from Trina.” These new “ambitions” include settling down and having a family, a further development of the Adamic existence:

Some day, perhaps, he and his wife would have a house of their own. What a dream! A little home all to themselves, with six rooms and a bath, with a grass plat in front and calla-lilies. Then there would be children. . . . McTeague would grow old among them all. The dentist saw himself as a venerable patriarch surrounded by children and grandchildren. (191-92)

His “dream” of children, and even grandchildren, as well as a home in which to raise these successive generations, further reveals his Adamic commitment to the American Dream.

These improvements and the continuing development of the dentist are enabled by

Trina's lottery winnings; the young woman wins five-thousand dollars, a serendipitous event that places the McTeagues, at least economically, above the people and conditions around them on Polk Street. The windfall initially improves their prospects and potential future, though the young bride decides to invest the money and only draw a modest, monthly interest. The wife's decision, though seemingly responsible, reveals the first hint of potential trouble in the marriage. The dentist imagines that the winnings will pay for other improvements in his life, further evidence that he moving up in the world:

He had had uncertain ideas about that five thousand dollars; had imagined that they would spend it in some lavish fashion; would buy a house, perhaps, or would furnish their new rooms with overwhelming luxury—luxury that implied red velvet carpets and continued feasting. The old-time miner's idea of wealth easily gained and quickly spent persisted in his mind. (132)

He does not get the lush “carpets” and “feasting” that his simple mind connects with the “good life”; however, his greatest desire is met. Trina purchases “the Tooth” for her husband as a birthday present, “the famous golden molar with its huge prongs” that is “his sign, his ambition, the one unrealized dream of his life” (147). The physical proof of his position and status delighted the dentist: “ ‘Ain't she—ain't she just a—just a JEWEL,’ exclaimed McTeague under his breath, ‘a JEWEL—yes, just a JEWEL; that's the word.’ ” The narrator shares his enthusiasm: “The thing was tremendous, overpowering—the tooth of a gigantic fossil, golden and dazzling. Beside it everything seemed dwarfed. Even McTeague himself, big boned and enormous as he was, shrank and dwindled in the presence of the monster.” Now that his final ambition is realized, he is fulfilled: “For a whole hour the dentist sat there in his little “Parlor,” gazing ecstatically at his treasure, dazzled, supremely content. The whole room took on a

different aspect because of it” (148). He attains that thing that has always seemed unreachable and realizes the desire that had provided his only means of ambition to that point in his life.

The dentist’s every desire now satisfied, there is a sense that the couple has realized the “good life.” However, when the existence they have created is threatened by considerable obstacles and their relationship is strained by progressively troubling circumstances, their Adamic beginning is undermined by ideological conflict and disunity, an issue in the Cain and Abel story. In fact, though the McTeagues establish a new life together, there is a foreshadowing of problems within the union itself even before the wedding takes place. Trina repeatedly rejects her suitor’s advances and proposals and is clearly hesitant to marry (33, 83-84). McTeague displays a painful awkwardness throughout their courtship and engagement and embodies a deep-rooted depravity, facts that denote future complications (87-90). Even those who attend the actual wedding ceremony are somehow disappointed by the festivities and their “inadequateness,” suggesting that others recognize the incompatibility of the two participants (164-65). The official joining of the two, despite their momentary reflection of the first inhabitants of the Garden of Eden, is actually the beginning of a shift within the novel from the creation story of Genesis to the account of Cain and Abel. The pursuit of the American Dream and its spoils has enabled the relationship between McTeague and Trina; this adapted Adam and Eve, living in “a kind of run-down Eden,” has embraced the national concept and realized its potential rewards, creating an enviable existence for themselves.³⁹ However, as their circumstances change and they are forced to relinquish the markers of their status, the continued desire for the opportunities inherent in the national ideology results in envy, anger, discord, and ultimately a reenactment of the first fratricide; it is the place of the Cain of the United States.

Though he does display characteristics reminiscent of Lewis’ archetype and models that

figure's endeavors, the dentist ultimately is unable to maintain that identity when conflict, both internal and external, arises. Instead, as he experiences difficulty in his pursuits of an Adamic identity, innate qualities, inherited from his fallen parents, surface within him, and, like Cain, he is not able to combat them; the sins of the parents are returned upon their children. These attributes, which continue to appear as he strives for the promises suggested by the dream of the country, eventually lead to anger, jealousy, pride and finally murder and exile. His features, which first seem to distinguish him as a model for others to follow, eventually prove to brand him as a deviant; just as the sign given to Cain by God sets him apart from others, so too Mac's unique characteristics ultimately have that same affect. His impressive strength and abilities have negative potential in spite of how helpful they can be. His Sunday afternoons, during which he celebrates his freedom and indulges his desires, also make him, as the narrator reports, "an irresponsible animal, a beast, a brute, crazy with alcohol" (2). His marriage and efforts at improving instead serve to expose the baser elements at work within him. These unsettling details are coupled with additional destructive, sexual desires that the dentist is able to control initially. Most significantly, in a scene that has been thoroughly discussed in scholarship, Mac, upon first meeting Trina, is tempted to seduce and perhaps even rape the young woman within his Dental Parlors. He has never really known a woman like his future wife, and his reaction to her surprises even him: "The male virile desire in him tardily awakened, aroused itself, strong and brutal. It was resistless, untrained, a thing not to be held in leash an instant." (27) His initial curiosity is quickly replaced by a depraved, innate, "virile desire" that increases with each passing moment, though the dentist resists these inherent tendencies. In other words, his potentially innocent, Adamic interest in an Eve quickly becomes nothing more than base desire and ultimately turns into more profound deviancy.

McTeague experiences the ancient, spiritual battle between good and evil reminiscent of the Cain and Abel story; his reactions to the situation are disturbing considering his seemingly simplistic existence. The narrator relates that “the animal in the man stirred and woke; the evil instincts that in him were so close to the surface leaped to life, shouting and clamoring” (30).

The narrator continues:

It was a crisis—a crisis that had arisen all in an instant; a crisis for which he was totally unprepared. Blindly, and without knowing why, McTeague fought against it, moved by an unreasoned instinct of resistance. Within him, a certain second self, another better McTeague rose with the brute; both were strong, with the huge crude strength of the man himself. . . . It was the old battle, old as the world, wide as the world—the sudden panther leap of the animal, lips drawn, fangs aflash, hideous, monstrous, not to be resisted, and the simultaneous arousing of the other man, the better self that cries, "Down, down," without knowing why; that grips the monster; that fights to strangle it, to thrust it down and back. (30)

As if Mac has returned to Eden and the tree of Knowledge, he is faced with a difficult decision. For the moment, he is still the Adamic hero, able to restrain himself. However, he ultimately gives in and kisses Trina “grossly, full on the mouth,” while she lies unconscious (31). His “weakness” frightens him, but still “he believed himself strong.” When he is finally able to master “the animal” within him, he convinces himself that he is still a reflection of the national figure Lewis describes; his determination, however, is merely a sign of pride at his supposed restraint.

His powerful and selfish reaction exposes the underlying depravity that is characteristic of Cain, the embodiment of evil who, like his father before him, also cannot stop himself in a

moment of temptation; in the aftermath of the revealing scene, McTeague is struck by the force of his feelings. The narrator describes the dentist, just after his act, as “disturbed, still trembling, still vibrating with the throes of the crisis” (32). He has pursued some form of an Adamic existence, but his instincts seem opposite of that idealized image. He seems unable to avoid the depraved actions of his brutish, animal self in this instance. The narrator expounds, revealing that in spite of his momentary self-control

the brute was there. Long dormant, it was now at last alive, awake. From now on he would feel its presence continually; would feel it tugging at its chain, watching its opportunity. Ah, the pity of it! Why could he not always love her purely, cleanly? What was this perverse, vicious thing that lived within him, knitted to his flesh? (32)

There is recognition that his innate evilness is not restricted to himself but is the result of his ancestry and, ultimately, the scene in the Garden of Eden, when, in the Christian tradition, sin entered the world. As William Dillingham maintains, “the overwhelming force in his life is heredity. From his father and other ancestors he has inherited bestial tendencies which rapidly come to the surface.”⁴⁰ Like Cain, the dentist suffers under the curse of sin:

Below the fine fabric of all that was good in him ran the foul stream of hereditary evil, like a sewer. The vices and sins of his father and of his father's father, to the third and fourth and five hundredth generation, tainted him. The evil of an entire race flowed in his veins. Why should it be? He did not desire it. Was he to blame? (32)

Even without an answer to the narrator’s question, the incident exposes the depravity at work within the dentist. He continues to combat the “evil of an entire race” that is “in his veins” by

marrying Trina and pursuing a respectable life, but those innate feelings cannot be easily overcome; in the end, they will lead him to more specific Cainian traits, as he assumes the role of archetype and reenacts the first murder.

Before McTeague carries out that most Cain-like act, he exhibits additional attributes of the Biblical antecedent as he pursues the opportunities suggested by the national ideology. Beyond the innate, appetitive qualities that surface in his interaction with Trina, the dentist also displays a jealousy that exists just below his rather doltish exterior; just as Cain envies his brother's offering and acceptance, Mac manifests the same feeling toward those whose efforts meet with greater success than his own. He first shows that emotion toward a competing dentist who, Norris's protagonist feels, puts on airs. The "other dentist" is "a young fellow just graduated from the college, a poser, a rider of bicycles, a man about town, who wore astonishing waistcoats and bet money on greyhound coursing" (49, 26-27). McTeague envies the "young fellow" and his success; after his brutish behavior toward his future wife, Mac also realizes that she is "too delicate" for him and admits to himself that she should see his competitor who usually treated "the younger women of Polk Street" (49, 26). In light of that determination, he "began to loathe and to envy this fellow," even resorting to spying on him "going in and out of his office" (49). This one-sided competition based on jealousy will continue; when Trina presents him with the gilded tooth, he thinks about what "that other dentist" would "say when he should see this marvelous molar run out from McTeague's bay window like a flag of defiance" (148). His envy reaches its greatest level when the couple is forced to sell their belongings after he can no longer practice dentistry; when the "Other Dentist" makes an offer for the tooth, Mac refuses even though they are in need of the money (277-78).

In addition to his jealousy of his dental counterpart, McTeague projects the same feeling

toward Marcus Schouler, his former friend and eventual antagonist. The relationship between Trina's cousin, also called Mark, and the dentist is complex, revealing faults on both sides. Nevertheless, the envy that develops between the two serves as further evidence of the protagonist's Cainian nature. Mac first admits a measure of invidiousness towards Schouler after he has had his initial awkward interaction with his future spouse. His realization that Mark gets to spend time with the young woman consistently leads to a "jealousy" that "harassed him" (40). He is under no misapprehensions; his friend is more articulate, refined, attractive, and he is a relation of the Siette family. Mark's speeches against capitalism, his readiness with money, and his comfort in the midst of social situations that confound the dentist constantly remind McTeague that he is not the sophisticated man that his friend is. As a result, the dentist consistently harbors some measure of envy toward Marcus. Like Cain, the dentist is not sure why his companion is more accomplished and confident than he is, but their relationship suffers as a result of the evident competition between them.

The greatest measure of the dentist's jealousy is reserved for his wife, the Abel to his Cain; the husband is envious of his wife and her winnings from the lottery. McTeague's efforts in life have provided him modest successes: a dental practice, a home, a wife, and the smallest comforts. Trina's endeavors, in relation, are quite minor and yet it is she who is rewarded, by the gods, as it were, with the five thousand dollars. Mac's labors ultimately prove inadequate after he loses the opportunity to work and eventually must sacrifice almost all the things he has acquired. His wife, on the other hand, seems blessed as Abel is; after her ticket is chosen, her money gains interest every month, and she even manages to provide income in the midst of the couple's troubles as a painter of children's toys. Norris's protagonist is rejected by the system that appears to have preferred the efforts of his spouse; as a result, he exhibits, like the first

murderer, a profound jealousy. When Trina, at one point, refuses to give her husband change for the streetcar, he admits to himself that

Trina's avarice was a perpetual annoyance to him. Oftentimes when a considerable alleviation of this unhappiness could have been obtained at the expense of a nickel or a dime, Trina refused the money with a pettishness that was exasperating. (285)

McTeague's jealousy surfaces because he is conscious that others, most notably Trina, have things that he desires. In his pursuit of those things, most notably money that he believes can alleviate his "unhappiness," his true nature as the American Cain is exposed in another way.

Just as he is envious, he also exhibits an anger that sometimes erupts in violence, traits of the impetuous Cain. Like his sexual desires, Mac is most often able to restrain his temper early in the novel, particularly as he pursues his version of an Adamic identity; at times, however, the emotions arise and he is not able to control himself. When the dentist visits the theater to buy tickets for the vaudeville show, he realizes that the seller is making light of him. He retreats but then all at once he became enraged, he did not know exactly why; somehow he felt himself slighted. Once more he came back to the wicket.

"You can't make small of me," he shouted over the girls' shoulders; "you—you can't make small of me. I'll thump you in the head, you little—you little—you little—little—little—little pup." The ticket seller shrugged his shoulders wearily. "A dollar and a half," he said to the two girls.

McTeague glared at him and breathed loudly. Finally he decided to let the matter drop. He moved away, but on the steps was once more seized with a sense of injury and outraged dignity. (95-96)

Though he is eventually able to restrain himself, he initially, and inextricably, is “enraged” by the treatment he receives. It is the first of many such incidents that, through the course of the novel, reveal the brewing anger beneath the rather calm, though dense, exterior of McTeague, a fury that further suggests his Cainian identity.

Later, during a picnic at Schuetzen Park with the Ryers, Heises, and Marcus, one of the most famous scenes of the novel provides further evidence of the dentist’s temper. Though the episode is comic in nature, the ultimate outcome is brutal. The men perform feats of strength and agility for the women of the party, and finally one competitor suggests a wrestling tournament (228-30). The competition ends with a contest between McTeague and Marcus, the latter of whom still harbors a deep grudge and resentment towards the former. Mac’s “enormous strength, his crude, untutored brute force” is too much for his former friend and the match ends quickly; however, Mark’s own rage is aroused and he bites his combatant’s ear (229). The narrator declares that what followed was “a terrible scene. The brute that in McTeague lay so close to the surface leaped instantly to life, monstrous, not to be resisted” (234). Reacting to Schouler’s attack, the dentist loses all form of self-control:

Sluggish enough and slow to anger on ordinary occasions, McTeague when finally aroused became another man. His rage was a kind of obsession, an evil mania, the drunkenness of passion, the exalted and perverted fury of the Berserker, blind and deaf, a thing insensate. (234-35)

As he rose he caught Marcus's wrist in both his hands. He did not strike, he did not know what he was doing. His only idea was to batter the life out of the man before him, to crush and annihilate him upon the instant.

The dentist’s “rage” cannot be quenched and he breaks Schouler’s arm. When the other

members of the group finally separate the two, Norris's protagonist cries " 'Ah, I'll kill him! Ah, I'll kill him! I'll kill him!' " (236) The violent reaction is the beginning of the end for McTeague's attempts at an American Adamic existence; it is also a murderous threat that belies his Cainian identity.

Within a week, Mac receives the news that he is no longer able to practice dentistry, a sudden complication that he and his wife believe is Marcus's doing (263). It is the final rejection of Mac's efforts by the system; fate, or the gods, have deemed his labors unacceptable. From that point forward the McTeagues experience a continual downward spiral into further economic, social, and psychological disappointment and suffering that marks the appearance of the American Cain and thus ends with the dentist's murder of his wife, his Abel. Trina's miserliness becomes the focus at this point, mainly because her husband is unable to work and the couple is forced to either live on their savings or seek increasingly less expensive and less desirable accommodations and means of subsistence. Their relationship, always complicated, deteriorates exponentially in the face of destitution. The narrator, describing their depleted and depressed situation, states that

then the grind began. It would have been easier for the McTeagues to have faced their misfortunes had they befallen them immediately after their marriage, when their love for each other was fresh and fine, and when they could have found a certain happiness in helping each other and sharing each other's privations. Trina, no doubt, loved her husband more than ever, in the sense that she felt she belonged to him. But McTeague's affection for his wife was dwindling a little every day—*had* been dwindling for a long time, in fact. He had become used to her by now. She was part of the order of the things with which he found himself

surrounded. He saw nothing extraordinary about her; it was no longer a pleasure for him to kiss her and take her in his arms; she was merely his wife. He did not dislike her; he did not love her. She was his wife, that was all. (284)

The divide that the results between the couple confirms their relation to the sons of Adam. The waning affections of the dentist are compounded by the fact that “he sadly missed and regretted all those little animal comforts which in the old prosperous life Trina had managed to find for him.” In other words, when those things that had made Mac a man of the world are stripped away and his Adamic pursuits are finally prevented, he, just as Cain did, reacts violently, giving in to the depravity instilled within him as a result of his parents’ sins.

Without work and having forfeited the spoils of not only his married life but also those few indulgences and pleasures of his single life as well, McTeague’s sense of respectability and propriety acquiesces to the baser elements within him. The benefits of the “good life,” as well as the freedom and opportunity of the American Dream that the man had pursued as a version of Lewis’ Adam, are no more. The couple still has the lottery winnings but that resource is no longer available to Mac, a fact that broadens the divide between the couple, now opposing entities in a struggle for the money. “Trina’s stinginess . . . increased to such an extent that it had gone beyond the mere hoarding of money” and even her husband is refused the simplest of pleasures; as a result, as an American Cain, he gives in to his brutish and crude characteristics and ultimately reenacts the first fratricide (296). In one such episode that evidences the alteration occurring in Mac, the young wife refuses her husband “a nickel for the car fare,” and, after he is caught in the rain, he returns home in a rage after having a few whiskeys at the saloon. His wife pleads innocence: “ ‘But, Mac,’ ” protested Trina, “ ‘I didn't know it was going to rain’ ” (297). His answer is harsh, his words and appearance reminiscent of his interaction with

the theater ticket seller and characteristic of the national Cain:

The dentist put back his head and laughed scornfully. His face was very red, and his small eyes twinkled. "Hoh! no, you didn't know it was going to rain. Didn't I *tell* you it was?" he exclaimed, suddenly angry again. "Oh, you're a *daisy*, you are. Think I'm going to put up with your foolishness *all* the time? Who's the boss, you or I?"

"Why, Mac, I never saw you this way before. You talk like a different man."

"Well, I *am* a different man," retorted the dentist, savagely. "You can't make small of me *always*." (297)

His attitude toward his wife is perhaps understandable to some degree, but it is his cruelty, a result of his changed state, that is of interest. In the moment, the dentist gives in to the anger he is feeling rather than attempting to quell the innate rage and related jealousy of his wife's monies; there is no attempt to restrain himself, but rather Mac embraces his Cainian emotions.

Following this surrender of control, a situation exacerbated by his drinking, McTeague more readily exhibits Cainian traits; in the end, the result is murder. Driven by jealousy of his wife's luck and enraged by his own rejection by the systems in place, he reacts in the same way as the Biblical antecedent: with malice. The possibility of restraint is still there; as the narrator details, he "never became a drunkard in the generally received sense of the term. He did not drink to excess more than two or three times in a month, and never upon any occasion did he become maudlin or staggering" (306). However, this small measure of self-discipline is not enough, and "the alcohol had its effect." Mac was no longer the same person. The drinking roused the man, or rather the brute in the man, and now not only roused it, but goaded it to evil. *McTeague's nature changed*. It was not only the alcohol, it was

idleness and a general throwing off of the good influence his wife had had over him in the days of their prosperity. McTeague disliked Trina. She was a perpetual irritation to him. She annoyed him because she was so small, so prettily made, so invariably correct and precise. Her avarice incessantly harassed him. Her industry was a constant reproach to him. She seemed to flaunt her work defiantly in his face. It was the red flag in the eyes of the bull. (306-07, italics added)

The details of their relationship and the attitudes of the dentist provide further evidence of their roles as Cain and Abel. McTeague's "dislike" of his wife further drives the two, in a way reminiscent of Cain and Abel, toward opposite sides of an ideological divide; while she continues to work and have success, he becomes more and more incised at his own listlessness and failure. His "nature changed" and his circumstances unacceptable, the dentist follows in the footsteps of the Biblical Cain. He had known some version of the national dream and even enjoyed the spoils of such an existence; however, with that life now ended, he models the actions of the first murderer, assuming the role of the American archetype.

The McTeagues continue to experience additional misfortunes mainly resulting from the alteration in the dentist's nature; each brings them a step closer to the inevitable end. First, Mac lands a job but subsequently loses it (289). He then begins to abuse his wife verbally and then physically, displaying a more calculated depravity than previously seemed possible (298-300). Ultimately, the protagonist, devoid of hope and a future, forfeits all sense of his previous American Adamness. The narrator notes that "McTeague had lost his ambition. He did not care to better his situation. All he wanted was a warm place to sleep and three good meals a day" (304). As usual, the good and the evil battle within him:

At the first . . . he had chafed at his idleness and had spent the days with his wife in their one narrow room, walking back and forth with the restlessness of a caged brute, or sitting motionless for hours, watching Trina at her work, feeling a dull glow of shame at the idea that she was supporting him. This feeling had worn off quickly, however.

By this point, the former dentist does not fight his laziness, loss of spirit, or even his violent fury. Instead, embracing his baseness and depravity, he quarrels with his wife and “at times—fortunately rare—he was more than ever brutal to her”; he would “box her ears or hit her a great blow with the back of a hairbrush, or even a closed fist” (309). His nature changed and no Adamic traits left, his sense of rejection and the feeling of impotence in the face of his situation raises the violent beast within him; he is an American Cain with only the murder to come.

Before that defining act, however, Mac makes one last attempt to reclaim his unfettered, Adamic existence that, for him, characterizes the American Dream. He rejects the affections and attentions of his wife, removes himself from any sense of shared responsibility, and does not concern himself with the welfare of anyone but himself. He is, as Lewis describes, “an “individual emancipated from history, happily bereft of ancestry, . . . standing alone, self-reliant, and self-propelling.” He even adopts a ritual that reflects the habits of the first national archetype in nature and providing for his own needs:

He had fallen into the habit of taking long and solitary walks beyond the suburbs of the city. Sometimes it was to the Cliff House, occasionally to the Park (where he would sit on the sun-warmed benches, smoking his pipe and reading ragged ends of old newspapers), but more often it was to the Presidio Reservation,

[where] . . . he would work down to the shore of the bay, follow the shore line to the Old Fort at the Golden Gate, and, turning the Point here, come out suddenly upon the full sweep of the Pacific. (332-33)

These hikes, reconnecting the protagonist with nature around him, illustrate his efforts to return to the existence that his ancestors, both iconic and familial, knew. Much like the first man of the Bible or his archetypal offspring, Cooper's Leatherstocking, "the dentist loved these walks. He liked to be alone. He liked the solitude of the tremendous, tumbling ocean; the fresh, windy downs" (333). In addition, "he developed a passion for fishing," a past time that reminded him of when "he used to do this sort of thing when he was a boy in the mountains of Placer County, before he became a car-boy at the mine" (333, 334). In his rather primitive or boyish pursuits and despite "the stress of his misfortune[,] McTeague was lapsing back to his early estate" (334). That return, though it appears Adamic in some sense, does not result in freedom or opportunity; instead, in its failure, the effort evidences the dentist's decline into the role of the American Cain as his dreams again go unfulfilled.

McTeague ultimately gives in to the depraved notions he has always felt within himself, those he has labored to keep below the surface. One evening he fails to come home; then, when Trina leaves to search for him, he returns, breaks into his wife's trunk, steals the money she has hoarded, and deserts her (344-47). His actions reveal another level of his depravity, but, more importantly, they help to confirm the young woman as a sympathetic figure, Abel-like despite her greed. Like the antecedent, Trina is industrious and innocent, working within the existing systems to survive; Mac is regressing into a deplorable state, his efforts deemed unworthy. Though bound in marriage, the two find themselves, like Adam's sons, on either side of a divide. Now without any money besides the lottery winnings that were originally invested, she

experiences a series of misfortunes that make her increasingly pitiable. The theft drives her into a hysteria and when a doctor arrives he informs Mrs. McTeague that some of her fingers, and perhaps her hand, will have to be amputated as a result of blood-poisoning (350-51). As a result, she becomes “a scrub-woman” at “a little memorial kindergarten”; she is reduced to a lonely existence living above the schoolroom, and, though she still has her five thousand dollars, “she was alone, a solitary, abandoned woman, lost in the lowest eddies of the great city’s tide” (352-53). Juxtaposed to her husband’s criminal and crude life, she is an innocent victim who, though she understandably harbors resentment towards her spouse, still retains some measure of affection for him in his degenerate state (364). Pitiable and vulnerable, Trina will lose her life at the hands of the Cainian McTeague.

The murder occurs when those attributes most-characteristic of the antecedent, jealousy, anger, and rejection, arise within the dentist. He refuses to restrain his most base desires any longer and rather gives in to the worst aspects of his depraved ancestry and the vilest of his intentions. As a result, Trina becomes a victim of her husband’s desire for a better life and continued opportunity. Now unable to work up any sense of his previous, Adam-like persona, Mac gives in to the rage and violence that he feels; he determines that his wife’s fortune is the means he needs to reestablish his previous existence and to provide some potential for his future. When his first attempt to beg money from her ends in rebuff, he relinquishes any remaining affection he has for her and instead resorts to threats, increasing the divide even further between this Cain and Abel (362-63). Walking away from his wife, who refuses to offer any level of assistance though she has withdrawn all her monies she had invested with her uncle, he is filled “with rage, hating her with all the strength of a crude and primitive nature. He clenched his fists till his knuckles whitened, his teeth ground furiously upon one another” (365). As time passes

and Mac acknowledges the desolate state into which he has fallen, he embraces his rage:

His hatred of Trina increased from day to day. He'd make her dance yet. Wait only till he got his hands upon her. She'd let him starve, would she? She'd turn him out of doors while she hid her five thousand dollars in the bottom of her trunk. Aha, he would see about that some day. She couldn't make small of him. . . . McTeague was not an imaginative man by nature, but he would lie awake nights, his clumsy wits galloping and frisking under the lash of the alcohol, and fancy himself thrashing his wife, till a sudden frenzy of rage would overcome him, and he would shake all over, rolling upon the bed and biting the mattress.

(367-68)

His increased envy of her financial situation and his anger at her unwillingness to help him culminate in the Cainian act; her situation, though less than ideal, flies in the face of the rejection that McTeague feels he has experienced. Days later he returns to the kindergarten classroom and exacts his revenge upon his innocent wife. After breaking down the door of the cloakroom in which she hides, he “all at once sent his fist into the middle of her face with the suddenness of a relaxed spring” (375). From that point, as the narrator relates, “it became abominable,” as the schoolroom filled with “the sounds of stamping and struggling and the muffled noise of blows.” With the murder completed, McTeague departs, again modeling the Biblical story, and flees from the authorities into the hills of California, his childhood home.

The dentist, now filled with the guilt of what he has done, returns to his roots, seeking refuge in the mountains of Placer County in an attempt to start life again as Cain did following Abel's death. Having committed murder, the signature act of Cain, Mac attempts to establish a new existence, one that is reminiscent of the original Adam, as he enters a wild land with hopes

of solitude and freedom. He is attempting to regain the innocence and simplicity of Eden, though that chance has been forfeited by the evilness of his actions against his wife; it is an impulse that eventually plunges him further into depravity. Wandering northeast away from San Francisco, he intuitively returns to his birthplace, an “untamed” place, “a vast, unconquered brute of the Pliocene epoch, savage, sullen, and magnificently indifferent to man” (379, 380). The former dentist’s foray into wilderness seems to agree with him, and he suddenly exhibits pioneering instincts similar to those of the national Adam (381-82). He finds himself back at the Big Dipper Mine and adapts to his new lifestyle directly; in fact, “within a week’s time it seemed to him as though he had never been away” (385). This newly found liberty and opportunity is his last effort at such an existence:

The life pleased the dentist beyond words. The still, colossal mountains took him back again like a returning prodigal, and vaguely, without knowing why, he yielded to their influence—their immensity, their enormous power, crude and blind, reflecting themselves in his own nature, huge, strong, brutal in its simplicity. And this, though he only saw the mountains at night. (387)

The life that he has sought is an American pursuit, a point that the author makes clear when Mac meets the mine’s foreign foreman. The German asks:

“Are you a ‘cousin Jack’?”

The dentist grinned. This prejudice against Cornishmen he remembered too.

“No. American.” (384)

He acquires a job in the mines tending a “chuck” and even notices “a resemblance between his present work and the profession he had been forced to abandon.” The connection between mining and dentistry is an additional quality that illustrates the joy he experiences as a result of

his return to a life he knew before his marriage (386-87). Exiled from San Francisco as a result of his actions, he establishes a new existence in the mines and away from what he has known, a second chance at life much like Cain's forced removal to Nod to begin again.⁴¹

The level of comfort he feels eventually dissipates and McTeague is banished farther from civilized society. When he senses the threat of capture, he moves to avoid the authorities by heading south to Mexico; however, he inextricably ends up "east of Eden" as Cain had: "It seemed as though he were bitted and ridden; as if some unseen hand were turning him toward the east; some unseen heel spurring him to precipitate and instant flight" (412). Oddly, he pauses in his intended escape to join a partner in a search for gold, a final reminder of his American Adam-like desires for wealth and security (407-08). Nevertheless, even the discovery of gold cannot provide the liberty he covets nor remove the guilt and anxiety he feels (413). He is both drawn further into the wilderness by fear and forced there by the officials who have "tracked and harried" him; like Cain he seeks escape from the authorities and eventually, as a result of his actions, finds himself an outcast from any and all forms of society (422, 424). In a final act of desperation, Mac decides to "strike straight out into that horrible wilderness where even the beasts were afraid. He would cross Death Valley at once and put its arid wastes between him and his pursuer" (424). This determination will be his last step toward any sense of freedom or opportunity and will eventually result in his own death; it is the final stage of banishment and punishment for the American Cain.

Death Valley, in its starkness, is a wasteland not unlike the one Eliot would describe some twenty years after the publication of Norris's novel. According to D. B. Graham, the protagonist is again, in that place, the national Adam. He argues that "McTeague alone in space is R. W. B. Lewis's American hero once more. But the irony of McTeague's final situation is

that in his flight toward space he gets the wrong kind; he gets Death Valley, which is neither ocean nor fertile land; it is the bed of 'some prehistoric lake.' ”⁴² The man's flight and his arrival in that place, however, is not ironic nor some form of freedom but rather punishment; it seems that the actions of the dentist, like Cain before him, have resulted in his exile to an uninhabited wilderness. The heat and barrenness of the desert strike McTeague heavily and suggest the very image of Hell. The narrator describes the landscape: “Miles upon miles to the east and southeast the desert unrolled itself, white, naked, inhospitable, palpitating and shimmering under the sun, unbroken by so much as a rock or cactus stump” (418). More telling is the heat, which is “intense; the atmosphere was thick and heavy with it.” As the day carries on, “it grew hotter” and “at eleven the earth was like the surface of a furnace” (419). As he endures the raging sun, he experiences as well “the silence, vast, illimitable” that “enfolded him like an immeasurable tide.” The idea that Mac is in some version of Hell is reinforced when he stumbles across a snake that seems to confront the dentist, a symbol of Satan: “For fully thirty seconds the man and snake remained looking into each other's eyes. Then the snake uncoiled and swiftly wound from sight amidst the sagebrush” (420).

Finally, as evening falls and he attempts to sleep, he is aroused by an anxiety that his pursuers are near. He addresses them in laments and pleas that, like Cain's own protests, might as well be addressed to God:

“What *is* it, then? What is it?” he cried, between his teeth. “Can't I ever get rid of you? Ain't I *ever* going to shake you off? Don' keep it up this way. Show yourselves. Let's have it out right away. Come on. I ain't afraid if you'll only come on; but don't skulk this way.” Suddenly he cried aloud in a frenzy of exasperation, “Damn you, come on, will you? Come on and have it out.” (422)

He decides to push on during the cooler hours of the night and finds that he is wandering like his archetypal predecessor, which he continues to do for three days. Nevertheless, “on he went, straight on, chasing the receding horizon; flagellated with heat; tortured with thirst; crouching over; looking furtively behind, and at times reaching his hand forward, the fingers prehensile, grasping, as it were, toward the horizon, that always fled before him” (428). His punishment, it would seem, is “greater than [he] can bear,” as Cain complains after he hears God’s judgment.⁴³ He is lost, both literally and figuratively, expelled from civilization and devoid of options.

In the end, Norris’s American Cain is confronted by Marcus Schouler, who miraculously appears in Death Valley after joining the posse that is searching for the dentist. Marcus has pursued his old friend in the hope of recovering Trina’s lottery winnings; once he apprehends his former friend, he immediately asks for the bag of gold (436). After a struggle over the money, Mac kills his pursuer but finds that he is handcuffed to the corpse. There are no options left; it is the final judgment on the dentist. Mark’s death is another murder perpetrated by the American Cain; McTeague, in anger and jealousy, kills to protect his last remaining hope for a future and a better life though that act is ineffectual. Though the victim is not innocent, he does serve as a double for the dentist. As Susan McFatter argues, “Norris parallels many aspects of their lives.”⁴⁴ Both have sought a relationship with Trina as well as advancement within society, and each displays jealousy and anger when their aspirations remain unfulfilled. McFatter adds that “neither man is capable of achieving his version of the American Dream because the dreams themselves are based on lies.” Though Mark is not an example of a national Cain, his reappearance at the end of the novel reinforces the idea that the archetype represents: the opportunities implied by the national ideology are not assured and the pursuit of those promises can be destructive.

McTeague, as the American Cain, is the offspring of a fallen parentage who instill within him a depravity he is unable to overcome. His unusual and rather disturbing physical attributes mark him within the society of Polk Street. When his efforts to pursue his ideal life are thwarted, the dentist exhibits anger and jealousy, emotions that are inherited from his ancestry and that have always existed just beneath the aloof exterior he presents. Faced with complete failure, Mac lashes out violently at his wife who, though a tragic figure herself, has been blessed with her lottery winnings that provide a means to rise above her situation. In the end, he murders Trina, escapes the authorities, and is banished into the California mountains and eventually to Death Valley, experiencing final judgment in that hellish landscape. McTeague's life, modeled after the Biblical antecedent, is also characterized by truly national goals, including the pursuit of freedom and comfort and a desire for the good life. His experience is a fictional depiction of that fact that the opportunities of the national ideology are often not realized and that efforts to achieve those aspirations can be destructive and tragic.

VI. The Great American Novel

Norris's work reflects or makes reference to numerous perspectives in addition to his use of an American Cain; scholarship about *McTeague* often centers on the different schools and viewpoints that the author incorporates into the novel, including Zola's Naturalism, which many argue is the main influence on the book.⁴⁵ However, the preponderance of theories that are brought to bear on the work has a negative effect; too often the book is overlooked entirely in a discussion of a particular philosophy or misinterpreted as a treatise about a specific ideal. And yet, as George Spangler asserts, the abundance of interpretations has also helped *McTeague*

overcome the claim that it is common or unsophisticated:

For most readers the first impression of Frank Norris's *McTeague* must surely be that it is a novel almost embarrassing in its obviousness—in its simple characterization, melodramatic plot, ponderous style, and jejune philosophizing. Yet *McTeague* is anything but obvious, and from the large number of very able critics who have written about the novel come appropriately diverse interpretative conclusions, even as they agree about its intensity and power. What at first seemed simple begins to appear very complicated indeed as references to LeConte, Zola, Lombroso, and Freud, to Calvinism, the success ethic, the American Adam, and the genteel tradition, proliferate.¹

As Spangler contends, the many theories that appear in the book, those identified by “able critics,” evidence the strengths of Norris's work. He correctly argues that the “intensity and power” of the novel is due in part to the complications created by the inclusion of these often seemingly conflictive ideas.

The interplay of myriad perspectives within *McTeague* reflects the time in which the novel was written, the Progressive Era, when society itself was in the throes of a complex transition. In 1899, when the novel was published, the United States and the world stood on the brink of a new century, an opportunity to start over and push aside the failures of the past. For America specifically, the nineteenth century had been marred by war, slavery, corruption, and financial disparity. The shift into the twentieth century provided promise; some novels reflected this optimism, adopting some semblance of the idealism that the party of Hope had prescribed decades earlier. The murder, times of isolation, storms, and con-games that epitomize most of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* are pushed aside when the games and plans of the boys take

over in the final chapters, and Huck is ultimately able to “light out for the territory,” an Adamic endeavor. Silas Lapham’s losses, though financially debilitating, lead to a moral epiphany, and the family moves back to the farm, creating a life for themselves in the place where their fortunes had begun and freeing the protagonist from the stresses of business. There was still a belief in the American Dream, though evidence of the struggle was apparent.

McTeague, which Norris had started almost ten years before, reflects this dichotomy. However, the novel emphasizes the difficulties inherent within the culture and the Determinism at work in the systems of the society rather than the possibility embodied in an individual, such as the American Adam. Despite the dentist’s impressive rise in society and his establishment of a satisfying life, his bloodlust and depravity, which emerge as a result of his rejection and failures, are the starkest images in the end, a fact that most contemporary reviews of the novel noted. As Warren French argues, what is particularly upsetting to readers is not the violence or depravity; instead, the greatest shock is “a character who so completely violated the American dream of the young man ‘making his way’ in the world. Norris contradicted not only that spinner of popular dream, Horatio Alger, but the guardians of the genteel tradition—Howells and James.”⁴⁶ In other words, the depiction of a character who represents some version of the Adamic ideal and yet nevertheless performs such abominable acts undercuts the ideology and serves as a sobering statement on the country and its citizens. If the national Adam is capable of theft, murder, and greed, then the dream that such a figure personifies is also called into question. It is perhaps one of the reasons that the novel has been misread, misinterpreted, and even passed over at times; in 1899, with the dawn of a new century just ahead, strong leaders and model citizens were needed. Instead, Norris, reflecting a Naturalist bent, offers a man driven by his innate desires and impulses, a murderous deviant who is overwhelmed when his aspirations are

thwarted. Nevertheless, that difficult presentation is the place of the American Cain, a figure whose presence provides an alternative to the unchecked optimism of the national dream. Those who seek the opportunities suggested are not always satisfied and sometimes their reactions to such rejection mirror those of Adam's son, the first murderer.

Notes

¹ Warren French, *Frank Norris* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1962), 73-74.

² William B. Dillingham, *Frank Norris: Instinct and Art* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1969), 79.

³ Franklin Walker, *Frank Norris: A Biography* (Garden City: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1932), 235.

⁴ See Mukhtar Isani, "Frank Norris on the Purpose of *McTeague*," *American Notes and Queries*, 10 (1972): 118.

⁵ Frank Norris, "Aims and Autographs of Authors," *Book News*, 17 (1899): 486.

⁶ Dillingham, 128.

⁷ James Nagel, "The Literary Context," *The Portable Realism Reader*, ed. James Nagel and Tom Quirk (New York: Penguin, 1997), xxviii.

⁸ Nagel, xxvii-xxix.

⁹ Nagel, xxviii.

¹⁰ Donald Pizer, *Realism and Naturalism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1966), 9.

¹¹ Lars Åhnebrink, *The Beginnings of Naturalism in American Fiction* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1961), 33.

¹² Åhnebrink, 22.

¹³ Åhnebrink, 25.

¹⁴ Nagel, xxviii.

¹⁵ See Joseph McElrath, Jr. and Jesse Crisler, *Frank Norris: A Life* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 57-95, for background information about the privileges afforded the author particularly as a young man.

¹⁶ McElrath and Crisler, *Frank Norris*, 431. See the biography for further details about the incidents listed.

¹⁷ McElrath and Crisler, *Frank Norris*, 431.

¹⁸ Åhnebrink, 1. The scholar references Allan Nevins' book, *The Emergence of Modern America, 1865-1878* (New York: MacMillan, 1944), volume VIII of *A History of American Life*.

¹⁹ Åhnebrink, 1.

²⁰ Walter Fuller Taylor, *The Economic Novel in America* (New York: Octagon Books, 1969), 23.

²¹ Taylor, 21.

²² Tom Quirk, "The Historical Context," *The Portable Realism Reader*, ed. James Nagel and Tom Quirk, xiii-xiv.

²³ Taylor, 3.

²⁴ Robert W. Schneider, *Five Novelists of the Progressive Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), 1.

²⁵ McElrath and Crisler, *Frank Norris*, 20, 366. Norris's personal religiosity has been the subject of debate. However, as his biographers point out that

Frank Norris demonstrates in his canon a remarkable familiarity with the Bible and the *Book of Common Prayer*. Echoes of the prayer book reverberate

throughout his work; biblical incident, phraseology, and doctrine surface again and again. One reasonably suspects that it all began in boyhood with Gertrude reading from the prayer book and the Bible to her son. (57)

Later, his later life reflected a deeper commitment, evidenced his charitable work with William Rainsford, the socially-conscious priest of St. George's Episcopal Church in New York City where the author and his wife attended at the time of his untimely death (368-70).

²⁶ McElrath and Crisler, *Frank Norris*, 121-25. The biographers point out that there is little evidence that Norris was exposed to the theories of his professor beyond his lectures in zoology and geology, classes which the author took from LeConte. However, they add that since the mid-1960s, Norris's discipleship to this Christian religionist and philosophical idealist . . . has been a veritable *idée fixe* among all but a few interpreters of Norris's life and works. (122)

The professor's name is spelled both LeConte and Le Conte, depending on the source. I will use LeConte but will retain whatever original spelling scholars use in their writing.

²⁷ McElrath and Crisler contend that "the literary remains of the Harvard experience indicate Norris had begun in earnest the composition" of *McTeague* and, in the novel, "was for the first time executing undeniably Zolaesque, sketchlike drafts dealing with characters and scenes intended for use in that Naturalistic novel" (*Frank Norris*, 133).

²⁸ Åhnebrink, 277, 461.

²⁹ McElrath and Crisler, *Frank Norris*, 152.

³⁰ Åhnebrink, 290.

³¹ McElrath and Crisler, *Frank Norris*, 22. See also Joseph McElrath, Jr., *Frank Norris Revisited* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992), 37.

³² McElrath and Crisler, *Frank Norris*, 122. The biographers, in fact, question what actual effect the professor had on Norris. As they point out, “Norris never directly referred to LeConte in his writings” and professor never mentioned the author though he completed an autobiography and lived until 1901 (122). See endnote 42 of the biography for more specifics.

³³ McElrath and Crisler, *Frank Norris*, 123.

³⁴ Donald Pizer, *The Novels of Frank Norris* (New York: Haskell House, 1973), 16.

³⁵ See Frank Norris, “Salt and Sincerity, V,” *The Literary Criticism of Frank Norris*, ed. Donald Pizer, 222. Rpt. of *The Critic*, 41 (September, 1902): 267.

³⁶ John J. Conder, *Naturalism in American Fiction* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1984), 70 and Richard Chase, *The American Novel and Its Tradition* (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor, 1957), 202. See also Chase, 191; Conder, 77; David Noble, *The Eternal Adam and the New World Garden* (New York: Braziller, 1968) 105, 108-09; George Spangler, “The Structure of *McTeague*,” *English Studies*, 59 (1978): 48.

³⁷ Frank Norris, *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco*, 1899 (New York: Penguin, 1985), 3. All subsequent references to the novel will be cited internally.

³⁸ R. W. B. Lewis, *The American Adam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), 1.

³⁹ French, 64.

⁴⁰ Dillingham, 74-75.

⁴¹ Genesis 4:16 Revised Standard Version.

⁴² D. B. Graham, "Art in *McTeague*," *Studies in American Fiction*, 3 (1975): 153.

⁴³ Gen. 4:13.

⁴⁴ Susan Prothro McFatter, "Parody and Dark Projections: Medieval Romance and the Gothic in *McTeague*," *Western American Literature*, 26 (1991): 126.

⁴⁵ Scholars connect the novel to theories and traditions beyond those of the Naturalist school. See Chase; Stanley Cooperman, "Frank Norris and the Werewolf of Guilt," *Modern Language Quarterly*, 20 (1959): 252-58; George W. Johnson, "The Frontier Behind Frank Norris' *McTeague*," *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 26 (1962): 91-104; and McFatter, 129.

⁴⁶ French, 64.

CHAPTER 3

PENHALLY AND GREEN CENTURIES: PROGRESS, TRADITION, AND THE AMERICAN CAIN

“Caroline Gordon’s epic treatment of America establishes just how dear the cost of freedom to Western civilization is. Sensitive to the loss of primal freedom and man’s communion with nature, Gordon’s account of America bears witness to Cain’s curse, as well as Eve’s; the hero who is the instrument of the founding and the protector of the city finds that it ceases ‘to be a sanctuary only to become a prison.’ ”¹

“ ‘An artist was not meant to have a fixed habitation,’ Caroline thought. ‘He is meant to wander.’ ”²

“As he pursues the American Dream, the alluring something that is always just out of reach, Rion Outlaw is necessarily a man never at rest. Like Crèvecoeur’s frontiersman, he seems to acquire the worst of the two societies between which he moves, but can accept neither of them fully. . . . In his ability to live in the past or present and in his obsessive pursuit of the future, he is in a tradition of American protagonists, all of whom stem from this frontier ethic.”³

I. Caroline Gordon’s American Cain

In two novels, *Penhally* and *Green Centuries*, published in 1931 and 1941 respectively, author Caroline Gordon utilizes American Cain figures. The two characters who assume the role, Chance Llewellyn and Orion Outlaw, surface in works that appear ten years apart and vary significantly in terms of setting and plot. Chance, in *Penhally*, is a farmer who, though he values the traditions of the South that his ancestors have defended, finds his future and livelihood at the mercy of his brother Nick, a progressive businessman, who sells the family estate to investors. Orion, a reformed pioneer who settles a farm in what will become eastern Tennessee prior to the Revolutionary War, eventually finds himself on opposite sides of a conflict between the white settlers and Native Americans tribes, one of which has adopted his younger brother Archy. Despite the significant differences between the two books, they share common themes that relate to the Cain archetype and its function. The characters, one in the eighteenth century and the other in the twentieth, experience a threat against their interests in an agricultural existence and in conflict with their aspirations for the future; as a result, both display rage, violence, and envy, ultimately taking the life of their siblings. The locations are distant. The time periods are significantly different. The men are affected by unique circumstances. Nevertheless, in both novels, Gordon, a Southern writer, employs an American Cain figure to depict the potential tragedy that can result from the pursuit of opportunity and the national dream. The archetype, in many ways, is a good fit for literature produced in the American South.

II. A Southern Archetype

As R. W. B. Lewis states in *The American Adam*, his study of a national mythology is limited to what he found in literature produced in “New England and the Atlantic seaboard” from

between the years of 1820 and 1860.⁴ As a result of this restriction, there is no attention given to works from the South except for a brief mention of William Faulkner's "The Bear" in the epilogue. There are, however, many works written by Southern authors that utilize Lewis' figure; with the appearance of an American Adam comes the possibility that his son will also emerge to present an alternative ideology to that which the father represents. A number of scholars have identified the national Adam in the works of William Gilmore Simms or Mark Twain, for instance, though often the alleged appearances are mere appropriations of the original archetype.⁵ Unquestionably, there are books about a "young innocent, liberated from family and social history . . . advancing hopefully into a complex world" and "radically affecting that world and radically affected by it"; Gabriel Harrison, Huckleberry Finn, and Bayard Sartoris provide sufficient evidence of just such a figure.⁶ There are also examples of the Cain of the United States in Southern texts, depictions that expose the potential downside to the Edenic, opportunistic perspective that the iconic parentage represents. These characters react in typical, Cainian anger, jealousy, and violence and reenact the signature events of the first murderer's life when their attempts to realize the opportunities of the American Dream go unfulfilled. In ways similar to Judge Pyncheon or McTeague, the national Cain, as found in literature from the South, suggests that a pursuit of the ideology of the country offers no promises and very often leads instead to tragedy.

The South, because of its history, provides particularly rich soil for the appearance of the American Cain. The region, no matter the reasons for secession, became involved in the Civil War, an event that makes for easy comparison with the Cain and Abel story. The conflict, as Walt Whitman describes in *Specimen Days*, literally pitted brother against brother and thus presented an adapted version of the fourth chapter of Genesis.⁷ A rivalry that spiraled into war

resulted at least in part from the antagonism between two conflicting ways of life, presenting a scene reminiscent of the sons of Adam who also pursued different means of subsistence. In the American version, the pro-slavery Confederate states contend with the slowly industrializing and predominately abolitionist North. The two regions had different means of commerce and unique societal norms, and, in the end, the South was defeated. The “siblings” clashed and violence ensued; as in the Genesis account, both suffered as a result of the conflict. As the region that surrendered, the Southern states were in a sense the disgruntled brother, a Cain who begrudged the North its victory and the ensuing Reconstruction era when the victors attempted to bring their economic system to the former Confederacy. The Southern hope for a future based in agriculture was eventually replaced by elements of the American Dream as interpreted by the Union, although they were hard to realize in the wake of the war. Their “offerings” had been deemed unacceptable and their way of life called into question. As the defeated, their plight was to reform and adapt, forced out of an established way of doing things; ultimately, outcast or exiled from the particular existence that they had chosen, they shifted their methods of subsistence.

Despite a past that might be characterized, at least on some level, as Cainian, the South, like New England or the West, continued to share in the American Dream and all its aspects. As a result, the inherent possibility of failure is perhaps more relevant in the former Confederate states than it is in other parts of the country; in fact, considering the long-reaching effects of the Civil War not only on human life but on property and lifestyle as well, the reality of disappointment and struggle is all too familiar. The American Cain, a representative of that negative experience and its possible, tragic end, appears in the literature of the South to portray that potential just as he did in Hawthorne’s *The House of Seven Gables* or Frank Norris’s *McTeague*. In some instances, he emerges as a result of failures to realize specific Southern

ideals that help form the identity of the region and complement the national ideology. In other cases, however, the figure represents the possible deficiencies in the more common characteristics of the national dream. Either way, the archetype, who exhibits the characteristic Cainian traits of violence, rage, and envy, ultimately murders a double when he realizes that his pursuits of the opportunity suggested by the American Dream have been thwarted by circumstances or others' efforts; in the end, he is outcast from the community and forced to live outside the bounds of society.

Scholars have noted a few examples of the American Cain in works from the region. Many writers borrow either directly from the Genesis account or allude to it. Charles Scruggs argues that Jean Toomer utilizes the “themes that develop from the myth of Cain” in *Cane* although there is no direct reference to the characters or account nor to the archetype.⁸ “‘Cane,’ ” he writes, “also means ‘Cain,’ and it is not by accident that Toomer wanted to depict the black experience in mythic terms,” particularly the “experience” of African-Americans in the United States.⁹ Scruggs asserts that “Toomer uses Cain as a symbol of the African in a hostile land, tilling the soil of the earth, a slave, without enjoying her fruits”; he is “a fugitive” and then a “city-dweller,” though he is not necessarily a murderer, just one detail that undermines the presence of a national archetype in the work. Nevertheless, based on the title alone, Cain is a representative figure whose appearance provides a foundation on which to depict the experience of African Americans in the United States. Carolyn Jones discusses Toni Morrison’s *Sula* and *Beloved* in terms of the Cain and Abel theme, noting that both novels depict violence and murder among close relations, events that are perpetrated by jealous, angry, marked characters who desire individualistic, opportunistic ends.¹⁰ She does not name any character an American Cain but her essay provides evidence that at least *Sula* assumes such a role. Susan Spencer

investigates James Dickey's *Deliverance* and claims that Ed Gentry is Cainian, committing a murder and then returning to his suburban existence.¹¹ Her argument is perhaps the most spurious, as she first claims that all four, city men are American Adams and then contradicts herself and labels Gentry a Cain figure based on rather unsubstantial evidence. Other examples of the icon are found in Flannery O'Connor's more grotesque anti-heroes such as Hazel Motes and in some of William Faulkner's novels, where protagonists such as Henry Sutpen or Joe Christmas are affected by the sins of their parents and, as a result of lost opportunity, react in violent ways.

Despite these examples from some of the best known writers of the South, there is one author who more thoroughly adopts the Cain and Abel story. Caroline Gordon, who penned more than a dozen books, uses the model in two of her novels. Her depictions of the second national archetype, which appear during the 1920s and 1930s when the nation is in the midst of significant ideological change, present an alternative experience to the idealism and hopefulness suggested by the figure Lewis identified. Their lives end in profound tragedy, marked by betrayal, isolation, and murder, the result of the pursuit of opportunity, independence, and control. They are, by definition, examples of the American Cain.

III. Influences of the Past and the Present

Born in Kentucky in 1895, Caroline Gordon was instilled with an appreciation for the region of her birth as well as a respect for the past.¹² There were a number of strong perspectives to which the future author was exposed that inspired this awareness of history, both Southern and ancient; among them were her grandmother's stories of the "Old South" shared on the porch of

Merry Mont, the ancestral home, and her father's interest in the Classics.¹³ Though she was to retain this regard for the ancient past and the heritage of the South, an early remove to modern New York City introduced her to a considerably different world. As an artist developing at the start of the twentieth century, Gordon lived in a period marked by considerable change. Exposed and seemingly drawn to two irreconcilable extremes, her work presents some form of a compromise. Each of her books is set predominately in the South and many offer themes of the region or some of the ideas of the literary Agrarians. Gordon's novels often include some image of the declination of the Southern states; Veronica Makowsky is so bold as to say that "in her first six novels, [Gordon] is attempting to portray and explain the decline of the South."¹⁴ She did not, however, forfeit her commitment to the region; her eventual removal simply prodded her past a sentimental attachment to an idealized image of the Old South. Ultimately, she entered into a more progressive existence and developed a more cosmopolitan art.

In 1924 she moved to New York, where she found individuals to whom she could listen and from whom she could learn, artists living a life she desired far from the South. Early on, she was introduced to contemporary writers such as Malcolm Cowley and Hart Crane and later worked with famed editor Maxwell Perkins. She also read and knew the work of William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway, and F. Scott Fitzgerald, among others, and she eventually met many of the authors as well. Though she was most often not impressed with the fiction or the figures, Gordon recognized the genius of these exemplary artists and the advances their works were bringing about in the literary world.¹⁵ Her own fiction reflects an interest in neo-classicism and a borrowing of that tradition as in the work of Modernists such as Ezra Pound or T. S. Eliot. She was also spurred on by her early mentor, Ford Madox Ford, "who conveyed to her a deep appreciation of the power and mystery of the written word"; as a result, she placed the utmost

importance on every jot and tittle of her writing, laboring over her creative process to the point that she was often afraid to share her work with others, even Ford.¹⁶ Despite her traditional Southern childhood, she eventually became, as Robert Brinkmeyer argues, a “modern artist”; it was a position she embraced “for a longer period” than even her husband, Allen Tate.¹⁷

Undoubtedly, the greatest of her literary influences was Tate, the poet and scholar, who was a central member of the Vanderbilt Fugitives. In short, he was just the type of influence and inspiration for which she was looking, an artist who, though he had come from the region she knew best, had learned to adapt to the progressive era in which they lived. Though the relationship was often dysfunctional or strained, Caroline became, for better or for worse, the wife of Allen Tate, a label by which she is still most often referred. Most significantly, the hallmarks of the South and its systems, including agrarianism, were Fugitive ideals advocated by Tate that affected his wife’s perspective and thus came to bear on her novels. The ideology of the Vanderbilt collection and their manifesto, *I’ll Take My Stand*, published in 1930, provided an intellectual and well-articulated defense of a way of life that the author had witnessed firsthand and of the tradition for which she shared an affection. Gordon “was proud of *I’ll Take My Stand*: she thought it ‘worked up into quite a book.’”¹⁸ Eventually, though, she came to question such an intellectual pursuit of an actual way of life. Robert Brinkmeyer asserts that she doubted the practical application of the ideas of the group: “Gordon could not take Tate’s Agrarianism very seriously and could not help but speak of the Agrarians . . . in a vein of jest.”¹⁹ In short, the novelist could support the ideas of *I’ll Take My Stand*, but she realized that the book espoused an ideology from a group of intellectuals rather than actual steps toward change or improvement.

Nevertheless, the Fugitive-Agrarians provided Gordon with an example of how the ideals she had known during her childhood could be intellectually conveyed. The efforts of her

husband and his fellow essay writers proved to the aspiring novelist that the life and traditions of the South were not inconsequential. And yet, living in New York City at the beginning of her career and having been mentored by Ford, her own experiences revealed that the advancements and development of the culture, and specifically the literary arena, were significant as well. As Robert Brinkmeyer asserts, “her loyalties [were] split between two ways of life—modern and southern—neither of which she found entirely satisfactory.”²⁰ He continues that

Gordon found herself in a precarious intellectual position. Though she never lost her nostalgic love for the traditional, orderly life of the rural South, she recognized its shortcomings and its irrelevance both to her future and to that of contemporary society. At the same time she could not embrace what she saw as the anarchy of contemporary society and the easy answers proposed by the prevailing social philosophies.

In her novels, Gordon often depicts the dissonance of the “precarious intellectual position” in which she found herself. It is a conflict not unlike the contention between two lifestyles that is at work in the Cain and Abel story, where the juxtaposition of two opposing perspectives initiates rejection, betrayal, murder, and exile. Her own experience reflected a few of these experiences.

IV. An Artist’s Pursuit of an Artist’s Life

The dual influences of a traditional upbringing in the South and an exposure to the progressive world and the Modernist movement in New York City placed Gordon in a unique position. The place she held in both worlds proved to be a significant obstacle to her career; with feet in both spheres, she was neither purely a Southerner nor an artist. Still, she pursued her goal

of becoming a writer, her own version of the American Dream. The path to her chosen career, however, was immediately strewn with obstacles. In a sense, her actual journey to become a published author ran counter to the national ideal that she could accomplish anything she desired. That belief proved dubious and, at times, completely untenable; as a result, she came to understand disappointment in the midst of her aspirations, a situation not unlike the plight of many individuals represented by the national Cain. Late in her life, she described the instability and deracination she experienced much of her life, a reality that ran counter to the rootedness she desired and relates her experience to that of Adam's son. She declares,

all my life, I have craved, more than any other worldly good, a fixed abode.

Divine Providence saw fit to make me a wanderer over the earth. I cannot recall, offhand, the names of all the cities and towns I have lived in.²¹

When she was rooted in one place it was never for very long, and Caroline consistently struggled to establish routine and define her own existence. However, the lack of "a fixed abode" was just another of the difficulties Gordon confronted.

Another issue that undermined her efforts at a writing career was her gender, which resulted in a wide range of obstructions. She eventually assumed the roles of wife and mother during a period in social history when the duties of family and home took precedence over any other interests a woman might have; it was a life she saw modeled by the women of Merry Mont and even ultimately by her relatively forward-thinking mother. Though she might have considered herself progressive when she arrived in New York City, within ten years Gordon would adopt the role of housewife; she cleaned and cooked while entertaining the family's unending stream of visitors, a who's who of literary illuminati of mid-twentieth century America. Nancy Lee Novell Jonza's biography depicts Gordon's life as one more often

characterized by the duties of hosting than by the practice of her chosen career that she more deeply desired. After she had finished *Penhally*, her editor, Max Perkins, wrote to encourage her to continue writing, though as he knew, “it is so much harder for women to write, with all the detail that they have to think about.”²² Though the family had domestic help at that time, Jonza records Gordon’s response to her editor:

“It is, certainly, much harder for a woman to write than it is for a man,” she responded. “It is so much harder that I am in a panic half the time fearing something will happen to prevent me from writing. But, she added, he did not have to worry about her: “I am very fierce about it, I assure you.”²³

Without question, the author committed herself to her work, even in the midst of familial and domestic responsibilities that could not help but distract her.

Along with the difficulties Gordon experienced as a result of her gender and the related, domestic responsibilities, the Tate family experienced additional frustrations in the form of financial restraints and relationship issues, troubles that reflect the common, modern experience of many in the United States. The couple faced numerous periods of monetary shortages that increased the stress on their relationship but also resulted in their reliance upon friends and family as well as their participation in “creative” endeavors that were often less than desirable. At one point, the novelist wrote a lament to Katherine Anne Porter that expressed the frustration she and Allen felt much of their married life: “We have no money at all, as usual, and I am even more depressed than usual about it. . . . How in the hell can you write a book if you can’t get your mind off finances for two hours a day even?”²⁴ This ever-present reality taught the two to be extremely resourceful and dependent; it did not, however, help in their creative pursuits. As Caroline’s father wrote to her in 1929, “‘if you and Allen can just settle the “economic basis,”

then you can really express yourselves and write what is in you, good or bad.’”²⁵ It was additional evidence of her failure to realize a version of the American Dream as the demands of life pressed down upon them.

In addition to the constant fear about financial woes that weighed heavily on Gordon throughout much of her career, her relationship with her husband also threatened her creative work and undercut her aspirations. From the inauspicious beginnings of their life together through the struggles they faced during their on-again, off-again marriage (the couple divorced and then remarried in 1946 only to divorce again in 1959), the Tates’ matrimony was anything but complementary to a literary career. Caroline often felt frustration with her husband’s lack of production while Allen would make untimely recommendations about his wife’s work.²⁶ As she struggled to complete *Penhally*, he recommended a title change and “read sections of her manuscript and offered suggestions for improvements” that “Caroline was not always able to handle.”²⁷ Allen, often a severe critic and hindrance to her work, frequently, as Jonza relates, “adopted a lofty and condescending attitude toward Caroline’s abilities” and “suggested she could not write much else” besides fiction. In numerous letters, Gordon recorded her husband’s harsh words about her limited talent and potential; Jonza suggests that he “may not have consciously intended to destroy Caroline’s self-esteem, but he did little to improve it or preserve her emotional well-being.” The novelist wrote that on many occasions he declared that his wife “had as little intellect as any human he had ever encountered.”²⁸ The tense relationship, along with chronic, financial troubles, disagreements about religion, family issues, and some level of jealousy from each resulted in a marriage that oscillated between happiness and misery. The impact of such a tempestuous relation was at times demoralizing but also inspired some of her

fiction. Gordon's *The Strange Children* and *The Women on the Porch* borrow heavily from her own life, particularly her rather troubled relationship with Tate.

Despite the struggles she knew in her life and marriage, the experiences provided perspective and specific lessons for the fiction she would write. Both her traditional experiences as a mother and wife and the realities of the modern life she lived proved stifling to her pursuit of her writing career. As the American Cain experiences obstacles to efforts at a future accomplishment, so too she knew the hardship and loss of opportunity that was possible in the pursuit of a dream. However, as she would articulate in *How to Read a Novel*, a collection of essays she published in 1957, "the primary concern of the novel, then, is life, and life as it manifests itself in change, in action."²⁹ Her life was characterized by that change, the shifting abodes, tumultuous relationships, dubious career pursuits, and emotional, psychological, and financial concerns; she had seen and lived through those things that, according to Gordon, are "the primary concern of the novel." While she sometimes buckled under the weight of loss, rejection, jealousy, and disappointment, she forged ahead in pursuit of her desires.

Late in her life, she described the practice of the writer and suggested that art resulted from a gathering together of those hard memories, discarded relations, and lost opportunities, rather than a collection of the good times. In "Always Summer," an essay-memoir which appeared in 1971, she suggests that

a novelist, it is now clear to me, is like those men who wander about in public parks, a huge sack slung over their shoulders, holding in their right hands sticks which have a sharp piece of metal attached to one end. The sharp pointed stick is for impaling any fragments of wastepaper, rags, cigarette butts, any debris that human beings have left lying about under the trees. The capacious sack in which

the wanderers stow the litter was handed to them in the early morning and they will have to carry it as long as there is light enough to see what is lying on the grass.³⁰

She collected “fragments of . . . debris” from her life and the lives of others in order to present some sense of clarity and orderliness in her art, to portray an experience she knew was real. However, as she implies, the artist must learn to bear the burden of all that trash. Gordon knew the limitations and obstacles to her dream quite well, but she continued to labor at her craft, the task to which the “wanderers” are called. The myriad obstacles she faced, both those caused by the traditional lifestyle she had and the modern experiences she pursued, had a profound effect on her and also gave her a unique perspective not only on the national experience and the creative life but also on suffering, envy, and exile. The author, unintentionally, learned the experience of the American Cain, realizing that all dreams are not assured, though she did not reenact his life events. Ultimately, some of her characters do just that, including the definitive act of the fratricide.

One final hindrance to Gordon’s career was the era in which she lived and wrote. Having arrived in Manhattan in 1924, she experienced a significant period in the history of the world, a time of dramatic change that was having a direct effect on America. The transition taking place in the culture reflected the two ideologies she was balancing herself; her respect for Southern traditionalism and her adoption of a modern life mirrored the prevalent contention between the Victorian Era’s established beliefs and the progressivism of the twentieth century. The United States, still reeling from the aftershocks of World War I, was nevertheless on an upswing again, though the stock market crash of 1929 was only a few years away. Not too far removed from the throes of the second Industrial Revolution, an era of monopolies and industrialists that Frank

Norris knew well and wrote about in *The Pit* and *The Octopus*, the country was experiencing fantastic success in spite of the complications of economic disparity, mass immigration, and corruption that also surfaced during this period. In the midst of those questions, the American Dream remained, though undoubtedly altered, still promising opportunity and suggesting success despite the horrors of battle, financial ruin, and societal upheaval. In fact, the concept of the national ideal was first defined in 1931 in James Truslow Adams' book *The Epic of America*, a work of history that traced the development of the country.³¹ After "the war to end all wars," the nation had established itself as an international power, welcoming the influence and particulars that such a role demanded. Economically, militarily, intellectually, and politically, the land of Woodrow Wilson and Henry Ford was a place that had captured the attention of the world.

Gordon was the newest player in a cast of fellow artists, many of whom were trying to make sense of the changes and construct some picture of the future; some, of course, such as Hemingway or F. Scott Fitzgerald, had escaped to Europe to take the pulse of their homeland from abroad. Even still, as Jonza describes, New York City remained a hub of literary existence, a role it had held since the end of the nineteenth century; in the 1900s it was still drawing in writers such as Frank Norris, Willa Cather, John Dos Passos, Theodore Dreiser, and Thomas Wolfe.³² Among the urbanity of the city and the modernity of the times as well as of fellow writers, the aspiring author was producing novels that attempted to negotiate the myriad influences to which she was exposed from the strong heritage of her birthplace to American idealism to the after-effects of World War I. And yet, her place as a Southern modernist allowed her to view the historic moment uniquely. Gordon's work, which most often is about the places and people in her own region, placed her amid the ideological struggle between tradition and

progress. As Robert Brinkmeyer explains, the writer never rejected her heritage nor embraced the modern experience, balancing a fine line between both ideals:

Gordon never became thoroughly modern. Despite her realization that the aristocratic southern milieu stood far outside the mainstream of contemporary life, she never entirely repudiated her southern identity and clung fiercely to values and ideals imbibed during her childhood.¹

She was a fierce representative of her homeplace even though, as H. L. Mencken and others charged, it was too focused on the past and memory and tied to an outdated economic system that went against the general direction of the country. The “modern” experience, typified by future opportunity, industrialism, mobility, adaptability, and progress, went against much of the South’s established identity. Many of Gordon’s characters, such as Chance Llewellyn of *Penhally*, live in the midst of that contention; some, in reaction to the difficulty of negotiating that divide, become American Cains.

V. Heroism and Morality

Many of the protagonists in Gordon’s novels face difficult decisions and must negotiate the issues of the past and the future as well as the question of traditionalism and progress; the author’s works, in many instances, depict the difficult balance that the writer herself faced between her heritage and her endeavors for the future. She portrays heroes who attempt to negotiate that dichotomy; it is a task to which many are not equal. Critics have noted the presence of such figures in some of the author’s works; however, as many express, the characters’ efforts often have tragic ends as they attempt to look both backwards and forwards in

order to create a space for the present. Robert Brinkmeyer maintains that she “depicts heroic characters struggling to assert order and meaning in an unstable world”; however, he adds that “as indomitable as Gordon’s heroes seem, disaster awaits them all: the dark forces of life destroy the heroes and—we finally see—their fragile edifices of order.”³³ In other words, many of “Gordon’s heroes” follow in the footsteps of the Adam of the United States in their aspirations, but their experiences are more reminiscent of the second national icon, Cain, as they realize the “disaster” that “awaits them all.” In most instances that destruction results from their own failed attempts at controlling the world around them, because the “edifices of order” that they create are “fragile,” as Brinkmeyer describes it, or their actions bring about just such a collapse. The protagonists’ quest for an idealized existence align with the more typical characteristics of the country’s unofficial ideology: opportunity, freedom, and success; however, the characters’ pursuit of their piece of the national dream, in whatever capacity, leads to failure, anger, and violence, mirroring the image of Adam’s first son.

Virginia Arbery echoes Brinkmeyer’s arguments and, utilizing language that is reminiscent of the party of Hope and R. W. B. Lewis’ *The American Adam*, suggests that such a life and ideology result in the loss of all that this character seeks, the inevitable outcome of his own efforts:

But as Gordon’s study of the hero shows, it is man’s relentless desire for his unimpeded freedom which makes him most aware of how fragile the forms are which he seeks to reject, not because they are simply false, but because they can never fully comprehend the dimensions of truth and falsity which contend even within his own soul.³⁴

According to Arbery, the “unimpeded freedom” ends in a “relentless desire” that has devastating effects for the “hero’s” pursuit as well as his own moral state. More importantly, the contention that the scholar identifies in Gordon’s characters reflects the dichotomy that emerged in the country as she was developing her literary skills and finding her voice. It is a theme that returns again and again in her novels.

Her depiction of the hero, as well as the ideological implications of the pursuits of such a figure, was influenced by the modern world in which she found herself and the South that she had left behind. Producing much of her catalog between the end of the First World War and the end of the second, Gordon examines the American experience in all of its forms and the significance of those experiments in the face of a changing world. Borrowing from past memories, like those she heard on the front porch of Merry Mont, and incorporating aspects of and questions about modern existence, the author created characters and situations that reflected her heritage as well as the current culture. That combination, Thomas Landess writes, results in works that address larger issues and engage the progressivism that was pervasive without neglecting the established elements that still remained in the culture. As he asserts in the preface to *Green Centuries*, the novelist

touches on the immutable truths of human experience and reminds us of the perennial need for community, rituals, and a religious vision to give form and meaning to life. These truths remain essential to the survival of a people, whether in pioneer days, when America had yet to discover a national identity, or in the last decade of the twentieth century, when we have all but forgotten who we once were.³⁵

Landess argues that Gordon's fiction "reminds" readers of needs that are, as a collective, characteristically traditional; those "truths," he contends, are as forever "essential" to the nation as they were when the country was founded. Considering the changes taking shape just before the middle of the twentieth century, those ideals were just as central to the "survival of a people" and the formation of a "national identity" when the novelist was writing as they were at the founding of the United States.

Along with the identity of a hero specific to her homeland that her works suggest, the author's books also focus on the issue of morality, particularly those of her protagonists as they wrestle with the question of tradition versus progress. Writing in the 1920s, her works often include a diagnosis of the ethical state of her nation and world, and thus of its people, between the world wars. The author was aware of the battle between good and evil in the world; as she would write in 1965, "in this world the right does not always triumph. It is dangerous to expect that it will."³⁶ Gordon's later conversion to Catholicism at age fifty-two was merely the culmination of an interest in spirituality that began far earlier, an issue she examined in even her earliest works.³⁷ There are specific situations that display that very concern; both *Penhally* and *None Shall Look Back* draw attention to the questionable actions of soldiers, Northern and Southern, and the ways in which they conduct themselves within the realm of war. Both novels, as well as *Women on the Porch*, entertain questions about the moral obligations or commitments that men and women have toward their acquaintances, lovers, or spouses and the issues of integrity and honesty with regard to those unions. Later works, still before her official entry into the church, include this same curiosity, and they give attention to primogeniture, disingenuous relationships, and the generational effects of a failed ancestry. *Green Centuries*, *Women on the Porch*, and many of the stories of *The Forest of the South* introduce the complications that

offenses such as infidelity, murder, neglect, and deceit bring to life. As a result, few of her characters remain exemplary, though they may have appeared heroic and even embodied some honorable qualities. As Rose Ann Fraistat argues, each of the author's earliest novels "criticizes the actions of the protagonists, illustrating that in every age there are few who become heroes and none whose heroism is uncomplicated by some selfish motive or by pride."³⁸ Virginia Moore asserts that "her characters are not saints or villains" because they contain both the "strengths and weaknesses of humanity." The problem of morality, specifically within her homeland, provided a rich field of investigation, particularly as the novelist examined the actions of potential heroes; more often than not, the figures sought respectable ends though they sacrificed their own ethics, and sometimes the lives of others, to achieve those desires, much like the American Cain.

The role of the hero and the issue of morality are themes that surface repeatedly as the author presents the ideological disparity occurring between tradition and progress or the past and present during the time she is writing. Her works reflect a respect for established custom as well as personal progress and the questionable but promising opportunities of the future for the nation. Brainard Cheney, a second generation Agrarian, writes that the novelist did not write about the region in which she was born because she hoped for its future resurrection. He is "more convinced than ever that she turned to the society of the ante-bellum South for her material, not because of any delusion that there was life left in its wrecked and prostrate body, and not with any sentimental notion of sanctifying its memory."³⁹ Instead, he asserts, she "carried on her long wake over the already laid out corpse of agrarian society in the South, because only there, in this whole land, remained any odor of sanctity." In other words, while the modern world around her suggested a heroic future of achievement and success not only for

herself but for her country, Gordon's work contends that some "odor of sanctity" was necessary, some attention to holiness, to the moral elements that were missing.

A "modern artist," her novels do not portray the advantages of a return to the way things were but rather depict the problems with an allegiance to the present and the advancement toward the future. Her works contain traditional, sometimes Southern themes, but implicate all citizens in the troubles of a nation, even in those tragedies carried out in the South before, during, and after the Civil War. The inclusion of universal issues, such as morality, heroism, and accomplishment, expand the scope and effect of her works. There were larger questions with which to deal; James Rocks contends that "as an expounder of the human condition in general, she has recreated a particular world or social milieu which envelops the universal action of mankind."⁴⁰ Virginia Arbery agrees, arguing that "Caroline Gordon's epic treatment of America establishes just how dear the cost of freedom to Western civilization is."⁴¹ She continues that the author's works reflect a far more profound conflict:

Sensitive to the loss of primal freedom and man's communion with nature, Gordon's account of America bears witness to Cain's curse, as well as Eve's; the hero who is the instrument of the founding and the protector of the city finds that it ceases "to be a sanctuary only to become a prison."

According to the critic, the author's works, though modern and American, speak to much more significant ideas, namely the issues surrounding the stories of original sin and the first fratricide, the two stories that, as John Steinbeck writes, have always haunted humanity.⁴² Her novels explore the dualism present during her lifetime: the shifting moments when the past clashes with the present, when memory and experience are brought together, when idealism is upset by a disappointing reality.

The depiction of the dichotomy that surfaced in her homeland results in her use of the American Cain. Her use of the figure is not too different from the way in which others used the icon, though they were not from the South. The appearance of the second archetype in two of her works suggests that whether she intentionally used the model or not, she understood the problems of the region that produced her and the connection between those issues and the opportunity that was an intricate part of the dream of the country. Many of her characters pursue the American belief in its many versions only to find that their attempts lead to failure, anger, and envy. For some, that experience, in turn, results in murder and isolation. These figures are, by definition, American Cains. She utilizes the second, representative icon in her novels, as she portrays the possibilities of the future while depicting the past with a respect for the heritage of what and who had come before. The difficulty of this dualism in her own pursuit of a career as an author was clear; the same duplicity existed in the South's continued movement towards modernity and the simultaneous desire of the region to retain the tradition and elements that characterized its history. James Rocks, in "The Mind and Art of Caroline Gordon," expresses that attitude:

The content of the mind of art of Caroline Gordon reveals a search for the best of two pasts to provide continuity into a confusing present, for which she has offered a possible religious myth, while at the same time suggesting that the particularized problems of man reveal his universal condition.⁴³

That "search," however complex, not only describes the duplicitous role of the author but also suggests the reason why her novels were not widely accepted. As in *Penhally*, Nick and Chance Llewellyn learn that there is no peaceful accord to determine whether an established way of life or a progressive future is best. *Green Centuries* presents the divide between traditional Native-

American culture and the forward-reaching white settlers who disregard any claims of the past. Gordon's place on the dividing line, in the middle of a personal and public dualism, makes her potentially inaccessible or uniquely untenable to both sides. In effect, she is unable to pass for a true traditionalist or a committed modernist.

The ideological questions that Gordon raised resulted in books that are often hard to digest, mostly because they do not fit the mold of modern fiction that was being produced at the time; this fact did not help sales or critical reception. Although her writings were never successful fiscally, Caroline Gordon was a respected author who published nine novels, three collections of short fiction, two scholarly works, and numerous articles and essays in her lifetime. Still, she is most often referred to as Allen Tate's wife or as the co-author of *The House of Fiction*, a textbook anthology that she produced with her husband; her novels are rarely read and many are out of print. W. J. Stuckey contends that "among other reasons that Caroline Gordon has been ignored is the fact that she is a demanding writer."⁴⁴ He admits that her relative anonymity is due, in part, to the fact that "most of her novels are difficult to read." However, as he continues, the books are potentially inaccessible

not because they are all stylistically or intellectually complex, but because they demand moral and esthetic responses that many readers are unable to make. They are vigorously "dramatic" books that require of the readers almost as much talent in the art of reading as their author has lavished on the art of their writing.

Interestingly, Stuckey's argument is not that Gordon's writing style, language, or plots are especially difficult, such as in the works of Faulkner or Eudora Welty, also Southern writers, but rather that the themes she addresses "demand moral and esthetic responses." Later in his book, the critic provides another reason he believes that the novelist garnered little attention. He

contends that her work “runs counter to the main drift of contemporary American literature. Her heroes are neither rebels against society nor self-satisfied exploiters of that society.”⁴⁵ In other words, Stuckey claims that her books do not contain characters like Frederic Henry or Quentin Compson, who drift against the current of acceptable “society,” or figures in the vein of Elmer Gantry or Joseph Wayne, who learn to manipulate “that society” for their own gain. Though the scholar’s argument is compelling, and in some cases true, he misses the similarities between Gordon’s work and those of her contemporaries who utilize such characters.

Though she does not exclusively use “rebels against society” or “self-satisfied exploiters” of society as protagonists, there are important figures in her works that fit into one or the other category. The most common were, as Ann Boyle labels them, “would-be heroes” who were at first glance examples to be followed, Southern, Adamic figures who established a way of life and served as models for the generations to come. However, those characters became “distracted by their particular desires and their unsatisfied relationships,” and, as a result, none are “able to rise above self-defeat, act constructively, and project ideas of value or honor onto a changing world.”⁴⁶ In other words, these versions of R. W. B. Lewis’ archetype based on the first man of Bible become, in time, Cain-like representatives of those types Stuckey incorrectly says do not appear in Gordon’s novel: “rebels against society” or “self-satisfied exploiters of that society.” When these “rebels” display traits characteristic of Adam’s first son, such as jealousy and rage, and then reenact the life events of that Biblical antecedent, namely murder against a double, they assume the role of the Cain of the United States.

VI. Gordon’s Common Hero

The first example of Gordon's use of the American Cain is found in her inaugural novel, *Penhally*, published in 1931. The novel, when it was issued, attracted substantial attention considering that it appeared the same year as *Shadows on the Rock*, *The Good Earth*, and *Sanctuary*; however, most reviews were not positive. Jonza records that most often the reviewers criticized the novel's episodic structure and broad narrative sweep. Many connected the story to the Agrarian movement, sometimes implying *Penhally* was little more than a fictional account of the concerns Allen and his "brethren" had expressed in *I'll Take My Stand*. One critic called Caroline's work a "curious experiment . . . with much fine feeling . . . but very little judgment." Another declared "the book [was] never more than mildly moving," lacking the "fire of more personal tragedy."⁴⁷

The comments were clearly disappointing, and the sales of the book were equally upsetting. Nevertheless, she had, as Jonza describes, "created a landscape peopled with characters she would use for the rest of her life."⁴⁸ These figures, Nicholas, John, and Chance Llewellyn among them, are examples of that common hero that critics repeatedly refer to in investigations of her fiction.

The novel is often misrepresented as merely "a fictionalized treatment of the Agrarian manifesto" or as "an elegy for antebellum days destroyed by the forces of history, probably because Caroline was the wife of Allen Tate and closely associated with the Agrarians."⁴⁹ In other words, the book was read as the simple production of a regional author lamenting the fall of the Confederacy and its principles. However, as Jonza argues, "Caroline was not nostalgic about the defeat of the Old South."⁵⁰ Instead, "she sympathized with the southern people, trapped by the changing world," which resulted in characters that "had taken hold of her before

she even knew what she was writing about.” The protagonists are Southerners, but they are not portrayed sentimentally; in fact, the book provides both a favorable depiction of the region and its history while also offering a picture of the troubles that result from the institution of slavery and the unwillingness or inability of a culture to adapt to the “changing world.” *Penhally*, though it is a historical novel that does portray the struggles of the region in some regards, more directly presents the intersection between the past and the present and uses an American Cain to make reference to the larger issues of tradition versus progress that plague the country without advocating either alternative. As in the Cain and Abel story, a tale about the contention between two different ways of life, the conflict between the past and present results in murder.

The first part contains a somewhat classic depiction of life in the “Old South,” though without a defense of slavery or typical life on the larger, family farms; conventional ideals are presented, reinforcing beliefs in agriculture supported by slavery, rootedness, and the retention of a traditional way of life. However, an evil is exposed with the portrayal of misogyny and familial estrangement and even the allusion to Nicholas Llewellyn’s sexual involvement with slaves and perhaps his rape of a young, black girl. The opening section centers on Nicholas’ fight to keep the homestead and the land within the family, an emphasis that has prompted some critics to argue incorrectly that primogeniture is a main focus of the novel.⁵¹ The elderly man does protect *Penhally* as well as its traditions and people, a sacrificial act; he kills a Northern soldier for physically assaulting a local woman, though the event really results from his anger that the Union army is stealing his crops and supplies. Despite his violent defense of the homeplace and its residents, he is not merely a Southern gentleman who despises the invading troops. He refuses as well to support the military action of the South with either finances or materials, placing significance on relations, property, and the maintenance of a specific way of

life as opposed to attacking fellow countrymen: “ ‘I got one young fool and a thoroughbred mare in the Confederate army now, . . . and that’s all they’ll get out of me.’ ”⁵² Rather than “ ‘riding all over the country looking for trouble,’ ” Old Nick argues the men should “ ‘stay at home’ ” where they can protect their plantations and families. Llewellyn acknowledges the significance of the land and the lifestyle connected with it: “ ‘Land is a responsibility. When a man’s got land he isn’t free to follow any fool uprising that comes along. He’s got people dependent upon him.’ ”⁵³ He maintains a commitment to tradition, history, and the idea that the current system is the best option to secure the future potential of the South. Nicholas is not merely a stock plantation owner; instead, he is a proponent of the agrarian ideal who is likewise shown to have significant faults.

The patriarch of the plantation is something of a “rebel,” though not necessarily a Confederate. He is one half of the first of three central relationships in the novel, one of which presents Gordon’s first use of an American Cain. Like the sons of Adam, these pairs help explore the dichotomy between two perspectives; here, it is the contention between tradition and progress that was prevalent in the culture about which Gordon was writing and the one in which she lived, as characters in the novel stand on either side of a particular divide. The figures directly conflict with one another or their allegiances place them in opposite camps, pitted against the other as a result of personal desires or a wider ideology. Interestingly, all are Southern; these doubles are on the same side of the Civil War, making wider observations about human nature by fictionalizing a collection of regional men and women who labor to understand some mixture of personal desires and corporate ends. Ultimately, no representative of a given system, and, by implication, no way of life, is defended or championed, but rather both are depicted as shortsighted and problematic. The three examples of doubles provide an

investigation of the effects of generational failures that have created the issues that threaten a way of life. As Howard Baker explains, the author

was nurtured too thoroughly on Greek tragedy not to be aware that she was producing a local variant on an ancient theme. . . . In *Penhally*, as in the Oedipus myth, the bloodlines get mixed up, and the disastrous effect of a rigid scruple expressed in the entailment of property recurs in generation after generation. Self-serving customs, like most inherited curses, become planted deep in the blood.⁵⁴

In addition to the Oedipal reference, Baker's arguments reveal the emphasis in the novel on the Biblical idea that the "the iniquity of the father [is visited] upon the children"; as the scholar implies, "like most inherited curses," the curse of Adam's sin is also "planted" in his offspring.⁵⁵ Each successive ancestor bears the burdens of the previous one, the relationships and endeavors clouded by prior mistakes, arguments, and complications. Thus, the stage is set for an American Cain.

The first Cain and Abel pair is Nicholas and Ralph Llewellyn, half brothers who disagree about the legacy and legal ownership of the family's land as well as the wisdom of pursuing war with the North; these contentions lead to an estrangement that colors all the relationships and events to follow. The initial set of doubles are siblings who mirror Esau and Jacob as much as the sons of Adam; Old Nick refuses to give his younger half-brother his share of the family's property, defending his actions with outdated precedents. This breach does not end with the first grouping. As Ann Boyle articulates,

Nicholas bequeaths not stability but conflict, born out of his insular, exclusionary, and autocratic vision. While the conflict is played out between brothers it is

rooted in gender and racial traditions that do not change despite war and changing times.⁵⁶

John and Charles, who reflect the “conflict . . . played out between brothers” are representatives of a later generation and are the second pair; John Llewellyn is the great-nephew of Nicholas who inherits Penhally and Charles is Ralph’s son. They too stand on opposite sides of the original rift and their lifestyles and demeanors are contrasted in instances as disparate as war and lovemaking; both meet tragic ends that stem, in part, from the transgressions of their ancestors. Their efforts in battle, however heroic and respectable, are lost in the South’s defeat. Charles is accidentally shot by his own men near the end of the conflict, an act of destruction that implies that the region is causing its own suffering and death. John’s tenure as the owner of Penhally is marked by the loss of his son to suicide and his wife’s rejection of him as a result his aloofness and distraction in the wake of the war. This second pair appears to have the greatest chance at reconciliation, but they are divided by bloodline and by a shared love for the same woman. Though they do not relate directly to Cain and Abel, they do suffer as a result of the sins of their family, like the children of Adam.

The final twosome is comprised of the grandsons of John Llewellyn, Chance and Nick, modern ancestors whose interests and vision of the future move in two very different directions and who reenact the Genesis account. As Ashley Brown articulates, the third part of the novel, where this final pairing takes center stage, “promises a new vitality, a possibility of regeneration in another spring,” but the reality is “the recurring pattern of history,” a replaying of the previous acts.⁵⁷ It is within this relationship between brothers that the fratricide occurs and the American Cain emerges. In the final scene, Chance Llewellyn, the unofficial defender of the Southern way of life, shoots and kills his brother, the actual inheritor of the homestead who has sold Penhally

to Joan and Douglas Parrish, Northern investors who happen to be distant relatives. Chance's actions result from his jealousy of Nick's control as well as from an anger he feels toward his brother; as in the Biblical account, one sibling is chosen and rewarded, while the other's talents and desires are rejected. Though he respects the right of his grandfather, John, to entail the property on the oldest relation, he realizes how unfortunate it is "that it was he and not Nick that had the love of the land."⁵⁸ More importantly, the younger brother's murderous act seems the only means he has to punish his sibling for sacrificing the family's land, home, and tradition and for taking away his means, however doomed they might be, of sustaining the old way of life. The eldest sibling has become a successful banker and has moved off the land, jeopardizing the future of the plantation. When the offer comes from the Parrishes, Nick tells his brother that he is "behind the times."⁵⁹ Chance

had spoken then, wildly, out of a deep inner confusion:

"Well, by God, I'd hang on to it if it was mine."

Nick had laughed. "I'm a business man," he said.

The response reveals the metamorphosis from agriculture to business that has taken place in the family and reveals further reasoning for the younger sibling's actions: he is no longer able to pursue his aspirations. As an American Cain, Chance is jealous, angry, and murderous because his hopes do not come to fruition and Nick's way of life has been rewarded. It is the murderer himself who calls the authorities after he has shot his brother. He has insured a personal exile from society; his efforts to retain a way of life have actually, like the Biblical antecedent, ushered in a new existence for himself and for those around him.

The ending also illustrates, however, that neither the traditional, historical perspective of the agrarian South nor the progressive, future-focused viewpoint, as represented by the modern

Joan Parrish and Nick Llewellyn, are wholly defensible or assailable. The narrator describes Parrish as a modern woman who only desires to own and organize. Though her husband is a distant member of the family, she has married in and does not share a respect for the heritage to which she has been introduced. Chance is surprised when she asks to see Penhally, but he agrees to give the couple a tour. While there, Joan takes a real interest in the house; eventually she turns it into a hunting lodge, stripping the land of its original purpose:

She would even do away with the names of the places. Cloverlands Foundation she wanted to call it. It was to be a sort of glorified hunt club. She had the whole thing worked out on paper. The land was to be put down in grass. Penhally and Mayfield were to be turned into club houses.⁶⁰

The result, however, is one that Chance had envisioned. While showing the Parrishes the plantation, “he had known that this woman would sooner or later have the land . . . to do what she pleased with.”⁶¹ Her desires are those of advancement, the offer of a profitable return on a dying place that is losing money. And yet, her plans do not show respect for the past, the heritage of the land and its people. Rather, as the younger sibling imagines when showing her the property, she will destroy the tradition and history over a century in the making:

The sun, declining, sent their shadows monstrously before them over the grass.
The gigantic woman’s hand might have been swinging out to uproot the big sugar tree, or demolish that whole row of ragged trees.⁶²

The “ragged trees” are the final vestige of the glory of Penhally, but as the “declining” sun suggests, the age of the plantation is gone. Joan Parrish, looking ahead, completes the uprooting of all that had come before, offering a promising future but one that goes against the history that

both Old Nick and Chance cherish. The sale prompts the final, definitive act, as the disgruntled, farming brother reacts to the progressive decision of his businessman brother.

Fugitive-Agrarian Andrew Lytle explains that the murder is “both desperate and futile, for it can only be an act of protest, in its highly personal nature, the antithesis to the traditional concept and function of order.”⁶³ In other words, the act, however symbolic and dramatic, accomplishes nothing except as an illustration that the South and its representatives have ultimately failed in the effort to preserve a way of life. In fact, the fratricide, an act of disorder that displays the breakdown of tradition, seems to portend the eventual crumbling of the Old South. With that possibility looming, the American Cain figure, in his disappointment at lost opportunity, lashes out violently in defense of the heritage of Old Nick and everything in which he believes, and, as a result, he reenacts the Genesis account. Despite the horror and destructiveness of the final act, neither the traditional nor the progressive ideology assumes a respectable or defensible position. One attempts to sweep aside the past and the quality thereof while the other reacts violently in a meaningless effort to maintain that legacy. Gordon, with her first novel, uses an American Cain to illustrate the potential of the Fugitive-Agrarian ideals but in the end shows that those beliefs are also potentially destructive or at least questionable. This outlook, or some version of the past establishment versus a forward-thinking movement, returns in *None Shall Look Back*, *Aleck Maury*, *Sportsman*, and, most significantly, in *Green Centuries*, where the archetype again appears.

VII. A Colonial American Cain

When *Green Centuries* was published in 1941, the reviews were not as dismissive as *Penhally*, but they did not herald a fiscal success either. Edith Walton, in the *New York Times Book Review*, wrote that the novel was “a superbly rich and authentic picture of life on the frontier” but also concluded that the author had failed “to interest one crucially in any of her characters.”⁶⁴ She added that there was an absence of “human warmth” at times. Critic for *The New Yorker*, Clifton Fadiman, contended that all of Gordon’s “historical novels [including *Green Centuries*] don’t have much pace” and were “not exciting nor . . . the characters complex.”⁶⁵ Like *Penhally*, *None Shall Look Back*, and *The Garden of Adonis*, the book did not sell well and became another in the list of the author’s disappointments. The novel was, however, a bit different from her previous works. Set in the pre-Revolutionary colonies, among the hills of North Carolina, the writer had, for the first time, departed from the “South,” for although the setting was still in the Confederate states, the plot, characters, and themes were not uniquely Southern. Instead, the work took on a far more American tone and subject matter, depicting the efforts of a young man desiring to move West and create his own place in the wilderness. In addition, Gordon introduced new struggles, including racial difficulties between white settlers who moved to open lands for opportunity and the Native Americans whose lands were seized in that push to new areas. At the center, however, is the relationship between two brothers, Rion and Archy Outlaw, who, like Nicholas and Ralph Llewellyn and their progeny, eventually stand on two different sides of a divide. These siblings, one who pursues an unquenchable desire for advancement and personal freedom and the other who ultimately adopts a more rooted and communal way of life with the Cherokees, end up reenacting the Cain and Abel story. Within that drama, Orion Outlaw assumes the role of American Cain. Before he takes on that role,

however, both brothers model the original archetype, initially embodying the characteristics of the national Adam.

The novel opens in 1763, as Orion and his younger brother Archy work the farm of their father, Malcolm. As they gather corn, a stranger approaches on the “Trading Path” that runs by the Outlaw home.⁶⁶ The road is far more than a means of travel; for the boys it is a reminder of all that lies beyond the place of their birth, and it is also temptation to seek what else is available beyond the world they know. Though Rion does not respect the traders who come up and down the “path,” their freedom and mobility captivates his imagination:

Greasy vagabonds all and yet Rion never saw one stop at the gate but that a strange feeling, a feeling that he never had at any other time, came over him. He had this feeling now and he thought as he gazed past the man’s moving head to where the road wound out of sight between two low hills that it was not the traders themselves but the road they came. He never looked up that road without wondering how it would be to start out and keep going till you reached Pennsylvania. . . . You might go on farther than that. (3)

The “strange feeling” that he cannot fully comprehend is the propensity for mobility, a hallmark of the national dream, a fascination with the unexplored and unknown that was first represented by Lewis’ Adam. Rion, who in many ways is Adamic, will eventually assume the leadership of a group seeking “Kentuck,” a promised land of sorts that offers economic opportunity, undeveloped land, and a removal from the bonds of the past (10). Days after hosting the peddler, the young man witnesses some slaves destined for the West, and though he does not envy their situation, he is jealous of their movement. He thinks to himself that

those niggers were going the same road that he himself longed to travel. But they were going chained, packed in straw, like hogs to market. He swelled with a sense of his own freedom. He, too, would go west when the time came. But he would go walking upright on his own two legs and when he got there he would move about free as air, doing service to no man. (42)

Outlaw's dreams will be realized, but for the moment he is to remain on the farm; his thoughts are telling nonetheless. Within the first chapter, the young man will lead the trader to the real man of wilderness, a quintessential example of the American Adam, Daniel Boone, who serves as a mentor for Orion.⁶⁷

The man who appears at the Outlaw farm, John Findley, is searching for the famed pioneer, who he "used to soldier with" and from whom he seeks help to locate a pass to the fabled lands of the future Kentucky about which he has learned (11). At this point, Boone serves as an example for the young farmer, who admires all he has accomplished and everything he represents:

Rion, observing his high forehead and big Roman nose, thought, as he often had, that Daniel was a fine looking fellow. When you came down to it he was one of the finest fellows in the whole country. Of course some people said he was shiftless. That was because he never made much of a crop and was always going off on long hunts, leaving his womenfolks to get along as best they could. But he was acknowledged to be the best shot and the best trapper in Rowan county and when you said that about a man you said something. (16-17)

The disparity in the opinions about Boone illustrates the changing face of the "whole country." Though the frontiersman is respected for his hunting skills, he is also considered "shiftless"

because he has not adopted the most common way of life: farming. Rion desires the life of his mentor though he is from an agricultural family; after all, he “had learned most of the woodcraft he knew from Daniel” (17).

Even in the colonies where values are shifting and the means of subsistence are moving to an agrarian standard, the young Outlaw still hopes for an Adamic existence. When Findley asks if Malcolm works the boys too hard, the older son responds, “I wouldn’t want to eat my bread in idleness . . . whether it was the old man’s or anybody else’s”; still, he feels compelled to add that he “get[s] off to the woods two, three times a week” (7). Later, as Orion is leading the party of fugitives out of North Carolina, they encounter the Robertson family and he tells the husband Jim that the group intends “to go on farther. . . . We aim to go on to Kentuck” (178). That announcement confirms that he embodies important traits of Lewis’ Adam archetype, a fact that even his wife recognizes: “ ‘He can’t ever be satisfied,’ Cassy thought. ‘He’s always got to be going on.’ ” He eventually begins naming the landmarks that he finds, modeling Adam: “Rion came to where a creek flowed into the river. He struck up through the cane and followed it. . . . ‘Falls creek,’ he said aloud. ‘Falls creek. That’s you,’ for he found himself giving things names as he went along” (188). A moment later he identifies a plant that already has a name, “old Adam and Eve,” which further solidifies the connection (189).

Beyond his Adam-like pursuit of new lands, experience, and mobility, Rion displays an avoidance of established institutions such as marriage and education, vestiges of the past that he feels are unnecessary in the colonies. Like the hero that R. W. B. Lewis describes in *The American Adam*, Gordon’s protagonist rejects fixtures that recreate the allegedly corrupt and omnipotent political and social systems of Europe. As a dedicated outdoorsman, he decries “learning” as “too tiresome a business with all there was going on to interest a man” (30). He

chides his brother-in-law, Francis Dawson, for being a teacher, an occupation that the young Outlaw does not respect. He observes that Frank is “not as well set up as himself” though he is, at age twenty-two, “four years older” than Orion (29). Instead, the educator “already had what in time would be called a scholar’s slouch” and “thin, brown hair [that] was always ruffled as if he had just run his hand through it.” In addition to his aversion to education and his disrespect for the profession of teacher, he likewise avoids the trappings of marriage initially, though there have been opportunities. As an American Adam figure, he instead pursues an unfettered existence as “an individual standing alone, self-reliant, and self-propelling,” without concern for family.⁶⁸ A failed relationship with Kate Lovelatt reveals that he is not interested in matrimony and that he has very strong feelings about the social institution: “The truth was he was scared of girls. You got to fooling around with one and the first thing you know you were hog-tied, with a lot of kids running around the dooryard” (34). Despite his fear of being “hog-tied,” he still pursues sexual contact since “to do without women . . . wasn’t in nature”; his connection to Cassy begins in just that way and reflects the young man’s natural urges but little sense of commitment.

More than even his desires to remain unencumbered by familial responsibility and free of the boredom of education, Rion displays Adamic qualities in his misgivings about the fledging institutions of government and religion that have been established in the Carolina colony prior to the Revolutionary War. Like Leatherstocking, the quintessential American Adam, in *The Pioneers*, he does not understand how mere men can extract monies and demand respect for positions that seem arbitrarily assigned, an opinion that his father has engendered. The narrator explains that Malcolm Outlaw “had not liked the Reverend Dawson,” the father of Frank and

Cassy, though “that was because he was Church of England” and had come over “after the Act for the Establishment of an Orthodox Clergy.” The Act contained some elaborate “provisions”:

The minister of the St. Luke’s Parish was to receive a stated salary of one hundred and thirty pounds, and fees for every marriage performed in the parish, whether or not he performed it, and in addition to all this he was to have the free use of a mansion house and a glebe of at least two hundred acres. (33)

Though the Dawsons had never demanded nor received their prescribed rights, Rion seems to have adopted his father’s mistrust of the church and their policies. He later tells his father that a friend was overcharged for a marriage license leading he and his betrothed to “take the short cut though neither of ‘em is Methody” (37). Jonza offers additional proof that he avoids the institution: “He made fun of a friend’s wedding festivities and refused to have his relationship with Cassy recognized by church or legal authorities.”⁶⁹

Like the church, the local government, as established by the English crown, participates in the system of privileges and fraud and as a result is considered suspect by the Outlaws, including Orion. Accompanying his father to town to pay their taxes, Malcolm and his eldest son pass “Edmund Fanning, the clerk of the superior court . . . and also the register” (36). It is common knowledge that the official “had come into [the] country a poor man twenty years ago but he had quickly feathered his nest,” not hesitating “to double a tax when it suited him.” Such dealings, along with a measure of pride, lead Rion to join the Regulators, “a band of men organized secretly to protest illegal taxes” (40). He is disappointed, however, that the group’s mission is not more focused on action:

He had wanted to be a Regulator and now he had taken the oath and was a member of the band. But it was not like he had thought it would be. A lot of men

meeting in a dark room and taking down somebody's testimony so that the Quaker could bring it up in court. He had thought that they meant to fight the sheriffs. And the clerks, the clerks of the courts! (94)

Though he may not be pleased with the judicial steps of the "men meeting in a dark room," Orion is satisfied to be joined with men he respects and with whom he shares a distrust of the powers that be. He still retains this attitude years later, when established on his own farm; his brother-in-law speaks of a new political system set up in the territory they have helped to settle:

"They set up a government," Frank told him. He looked at his brother-in-law and laughed. "You better walk straight now. We got magistrates and a clerk and a sheriff too."

Rion squatted against a tree. "The country's ruined," he said. (259)

Even after he has fashioned a life out of the wilderness, he retains his distrust of a "government" made of potentially corrupt men and women, reflecting an American Adamic distrust of the past and established institutions that do not respect the rights of individuals.

Orion, who initially pursues an Adamic existence modeled after Daniel Boone, in turn sets an example for Archy who idolizes his older brother's ambitions and the way in which he conducts himself. When Malcolm's youngest son learns that his kin is to "leave the country," he begs to be taken along (134). After Rion strikes out for Kentucky with Cassy and Frank Dawson and the Wagners in tow, his sibling secretly follows the party in hopes of escaping the farming life and joining the travelers. The first time he makes himself known to the group they send him back; however, his desire to follow the path west is undeniable, and he continues to track the

travelers. Though he anticipates a rebuff from Rion, possibly violent, he is not dissuaded. He displays an Adamic mindset like his brother, reflecting a desire for freedom and new experience:

This time they could not send him back! He had tracked them for four days through the deep woods. . . . Even Rion could not expect him to find his way home after he had gotten this far. And the worst Rion could do was to beat him. He shrugged his shoulders. He didn't know that he was going to take a beating from Rion. He had a right to come west if he wanted to. At least, and he grinned—there had not been anybody able to stop him. (157-58)

Archy, who has come “this far” with the expectation that he cannot be sent back, wants to have the life his brother is seeking. As Frank Dawson tells Orion, “you ought to be glad he thinks enough of you to follow you” (147). Nevertheless, the elder sibling is not pleased; he believes his younger relation is unfit for the existence he has chosen for himself. His response to his brother-in-law illustrates the difference, in Rion’s mind, between the Outlaws: “ ‘Well, I ain’t . . . and as for being out in the woods, he’s got a good bed at home. Let him lay in it.’ ” The truly Adam-like elder brother, though he has accepted the charge of the other travelers, does not want the responsibility of family, and specifically Archy, as he seeks out his ultimate goal of Kentucky.

Initially the Outlaw siblings share similar desires; for all of Rion’s frustrations with his brother, it makes sense that the two would journey west together, even if Archy does not seem fit for the excursion. They are their father’s offspring, and, like Cain and Abel, they share in his past, which started in Europe and ended in the colonies. Though they will eventually pursue very different modes of life, have unique experiences as a result of those choices, and embrace opposing lifestyles, they are undeniably brothers, together implicated in the aspirations and,

more importantly, the failings of their ancestry. Before their actions correspond to the first, Biblical siblings, the sins of their father are revealed, establishing a generational fallenness. The complete history of Malcolm Outlaw is told gradually, but the pieces that the narrator presents implicitly connect the failures of the progeny with the questionable choices of the family patriarch. The first detail is a memory Orion has in which he recalls the appearance of a “mysterious stranger” who arrives at the farm and implies that his father is not who he says he is (44). Once the question is raised in his mind, the eldest son decides “that his father had not always been called Outlaw, that he had changed his name” because “he had committed some crime” (45). Such an idea makes the young man realize that he “had been called by the wrong name all his life” and also portends the shift in lifestyle and identity that Rion will eventually undergo. Much later, he again meets the man who had stopped at the house and hears the full story of Malcolm, whose last name had been MacGregor (410-13). Having taken part in the Jacobite Rebellion in 1746 as a young boy, he was betrayed by his cousin, wounded, and left behind; upon his capture, he was punished severely, but he escaped to the colonies to avoid execution for treason. Outlaw’s eldest son realizes, as a result of this information, that his father had also fought the law and government: “He had joined the Regulators in the same way his father had joined the Jacobites but neither time had it done any good, just landed one across the water and the other across the mountains” (414). Nevertheless, such an ancestry leads to a rebellious and unsettled progeny; the sons are, like their father, initially Adamic, but ultimately they parallel the lives of Cain and Abel. Rion, as an example of the second archetype of the country, displays Cainian traits, such as anger and jealousy, and then murders to attain the goals he has set for himself in pursuit of his own version of the American Dream.

The “sins” of their shared parentage and their similar desire to move West and experience a new life result in the brothers’ ultimate representation of two different types of existence and in disparate aspirations for the future. Though in the beginning they appear very much alike, the narrator describes their physical differences and contrasting demeanors that become clearer as the novel progresses and they assume their roles as Cain and Abel. The younger and weaker brother, though he desires to follow in the footsteps of his brother, does not seem fit for such a life. Archy’s nature, according to Rion, is innocent and nothing like his own. In the fields, the elder, “noticing how long the lashes were that fringed [the] brown eyes” of his sibling, thinks “the eyes themselves might have belonged to one of the heifers out there in the pasture.” More telling than his countenance is his stature, a fact that Orion also notes:

He glanced down at his own muscular arms. Archy was too thin for a boy of fifteen. He, Rion, had been twenty pounds heavier when he was Archy’s age and he had been only fourteen when he put Tom Allsop on his back at a muster day wrestling. Archy had turned fifteen three months ago but Allsop or any of the Salisbury bullies could take him in their two hands and break him like a rotten stick. (6)

In addition to his physical limitations, Archy also embodies other, less-than-masculine qualities. He feeds the dog “at the table” like the women in the family, which makes the animal “too fat” (9). A poor shot with the gun, he makes excuses that a swan at which he is aiming is “fast as greased lightning,” to which Rion replies, “he is, compared to you” (28). In addition, Archy attends Frank’s field school, “the only one of the Outlaws still young enough to attend,” displaying a commitment to the education that his elder brother shunned (33). In stark contrast to his brother, the innocent Abel-like figure seems bound for sacrifice and death, reluctant to

assert himself within either society or demand any sense of respect. He does ultimately join the party moving west; before the group reaches Kentucky, though, the youngest Outlaw is captured by the Cherokees and, as a result, ends up pursuing an alternative lifestyle to that of his sibling.

Archy's abduction and eventual transition into Native American culture causes the brothers to adopt, eventually, disparate lifestyles and helps establish the younger sibling as an Abel to Rion's Cain; while one farms the other joins a society of herders and hunters. After he is seized, the youngest Outlaw is taken to the town of Setticoe and eventually adopted into "the Nation," where he is renamed the Bear Killer and becomes the foster-son of the Little Carpenter, an elderly chief who works with the settlers and has been to England (228). For all the efforts he makes to follow Orion on his Adamic quest, he ultimately embraces his eventual fate and assimilates to the culture into which he has been accepted. He is able to realize his dream of going west, though the details of his journey are not what he had expected. He comes to represent a way of life that his family would have deemed savage; his experience, however, suggests that the Indian existence is perhaps more civilized than the colonial society. Robert Brinkmeyer writes that,

living with the Indians, Archy discovers unity of life and purpose within an ordered and defined society. His and the Indians' lives are established according to their places within a formalized community; absent is the fierce individualism that fragments white society. The Indian society is also based on religious beliefs and practices, again in stark contrast to the white settlements.⁷⁰

Thomas Landess, in his preface to the novel, echoes these arguments, adding that the author had discovered just such an idea in her preparation for the novel: "In her extensive research on frontier life, Miss Gordon discovered that the Cherokees of that period were more civilized than

the white invaders and more refined in their sensibilities.”⁷¹ The result, as the scholar contends, is that “in tracing Archy’s assimilation into the Cherokee nation, Miss Gordon is able to present dramatic contrasts between life in a traditional society and the life of the frontier.”⁷² In the end, the brothers stand on opposite sides of a cultural divide between progress and tradition, a contention marked by conflict and violence that leads them into the assumption of their roles as Cain and Abel.

Once he assimilates, Archy embraces the culture into which he has been accepted and unofficially rejects his past and the family into which he had been born. In fact, when the two brothers do come into contact, though Rion does not realize it at the time, Archy hides himself from his sibling. The acceptance he has found within the “traditional society” of the Native Americans and the opportunities there lead him to avoid his sibling:

He wished there had been some other way but he had known when he first saw Rion in Atta Kulla Kulla’s yard that he would have to fool him. He had never for one moment considered going with him and, indeed, he hardly ever nowadays thought about his old life, only sometimes just before day, or in the day, waiting at a deer stand, he would be overcome with wonder to know how Rion looked in that instant when he got the news [that Archy was living with the Cherokees].

(332)

In the end, the disparity between the “old life” and the existence he leads with the Indians is too great. Though there are advantages to the world of the white man, the Bear Killer assumes new perspectives and forms new dreams about the future. He marries into the tribe, joins the Nation in their battle against the settlers, and fully embraces the customs of those who had originally captured him. With Archy’s decision, the actions of Orion, and, as a result, the promises of the

American Adamic life, are called into question. The brothers, somewhat unknowingly, align themselves with opposing camps in a war and, more significantly, claim allegiance to either side of an ideological struggle. That situation further reinforces their roles as Cain and Abel, whose different pursuits of farming and herding were judged by God as acceptable or not, a determination that led to the first fratricide. First, however, Rion chooses to forfeit his Adamic pursuits, a transition that reveals an innate Cainian identity.

Orion is quite different from his brother, not only in appearance but in his perspective on life as well. Though at first he appears to be a model of Lewis' archetype, he ultimately exhibits qualities and characteristics that cement him not only as an opposite to the Abel-like Archy but that mark him as the murderous brother, and more specifically, as the American variety of Cain. Before his replaying of the first fratricide that marks him as the second national icon, Rion's actions, attitudes, and "pure contrariness" align him with the first murderer (304), the figure who "looks forward to the continuity of evil";⁷³ even his physical appearance insinuates that identity. A stranger comments on his apparent ancestry, which the protagonist cannot hide:

"You look a red Highlander to me. More likely a MacGregor or McIntosh. Maybe even Gordon. Your folks got in some trouble in the old country and had to leave. Took the first name that came into their heads and stuck to from pure contrariness. Just like you'd do. You look ornery to me."

While Archy is long-lashed and innocent, his older sibling is red-haired and has deep brown eyes, revealing his "ornery," Scottish heritage. Cassy Dawson suggests that his eyes were "not brown, but red, a shining, dark red like a piece of old cherry wood that's had beeswax on it" (101). This coloring also connotes the fire within the young man and implies some measure of vice, further connecting him to "the true progenitor and patron of evil in the world," Cain.⁷⁴

Rion's temper, which is consistently evident, also reflects his ethnicity, at least stereotypically, but more importantly it reveals the anger, pride, and envy that rests just below the surface. A number of instances in the novel provide evidence of these Cainian characteristics. When Jacob Wagner refuses to advance money to him to buy a horse, the impetuous Outlaw threatens his life: "I'm a good mind to crack your skull, you old polecat!" (65). Moments later, he realizes that he "had been as near as nothing to strangling old Jacob in there. He could still feel a twitching in the fingers that had wanted to close on the wrinkled neck" (66). At a wedding for a girl with whom he had had a previous relationship, he challenges the groom to wrestle and then tosses the young man who he believes stole the woman away from him (50). During his time with the Regulators, he often dismisses his acquaintances as unfit to join the group, and he feels the band of men should fight rather than talk; after all, "a man had to fight, one way or another, for everything he got" (92). He follows through on his words when he leads the party of young men in an ambush on a British caravan bringing guns and ammunition to quell the protesters. During the attack, he does not hesitate to combat the soldiers and in the end fires into the gunpowder to blow up the wagons carrying the supplies (128-29). These flashes of violence and venom surface again and again in the Cainian Orion.

Much of Outlaw's confident persona arises out of his connection to the mythological Orion, who Frank describes to him. The figure immortalized in the stars inspires a pronounced pride within Gordon's protagonist after he learns the details of his namesake's life. Late in the novel, he remembers the schoolteacher's version of the tale:

Those stars that Frank used to point out to him were showing. They made a picture: Orion, the mighty hunter. He had been beloved by Diana. One day he was wading though the sea and the goddess' brother, jealous, had showed the dark

thing in the water to his sister. The archer-goddess discharged her shaft with fatal aim. The waves rolled the dead body to the land and Diana, weeping, placed him among the stars. (468)

The image of “the mighty hunter” describes how the young man carries himself. In fact, while drunk at the wedding celebration dreaming of striking out for the wilderness, he imagines that he is, in fact,

the Mighty Hunter . . . come down from the sky. Yes, he, Orion, was the mighty hunter, the lion skin in his left hand, the club in his right. But the right foot was not hidden behind Lepus. He could feel it a part of his own body, gigantic, powerful. (22)

The character’s haughty, yet admittedly inebriated, internal monologue reveals the over-confidence he feels in himself and his abilities, a sense of pride characteristic of Cain.⁷⁵ He projects a manly, powerful presence, so much so that even his father maintains a respect for him; the relationship had changed when Rion “had wrestled with the old man and put him on his back” (23). Despite Malcolm’s deference, he nevertheless seems to have envisioned a bad end for his son. After the attack on the British soldiers, he tells his wife that his oldest child “was born to be hanged anyhow and it was better for [him] to make off to the woods where they was [*sic*] all ruffians and [he] wouldn’t show up so bad” (147). However, he does “show up . . . bad,” completing actions and displaying attitudes that betray his Cainian identity. As the novel progresses, the surrender of his original desires and the adoption of new goals will belie the shift he undergoes from Adam to Cain.

Beyond his physical attributes and his personal attitudes, Rion’s ultimate aspirations mark him as an American Cain figure and move him farther away from the role of the Adamic

archetype. Though he initially rejects the thought of marriage, seeking an unfettered life instead, he overcomes that aversion when he meets Cassy Dawson. Their relationship begins with a sexual encounter, but soon the couple does not want to part company; neither has had a similar connection in the past. Though initially Outlaw admits his fear of women and rejects the thought of marriage, his time with Cassy changes all those supposed convictions. Though they will experience periods apart and together prior to becoming husband and wife, Orion recognizes the depth of their association early. When he is not able to go with Boone and Findley to find the gap to Kentucky, he realizes that she commiserates with his situation:

It was as if she wanted to go herself. It was as if they were one person wanting the same thing. No, it was because she cared more for him than she did for herself. Nobody else had ever felt that way about him. (88)

His epiphany changes his American Adamic perspective and initiates the beginnings of his Cainian state that will lead him to settle with family on a homestead of his own creation and leave him no longer desirous to seek out new lands. Though he had originally wanted nothing more than to join the group going west, his relationship with Cassy reveals a new man: “ ‘I couldn’t stand to go west,’ he said. ‘I couldn’t stand to go anywhere away from you’ ” (88). His aversion to family and responsibility is gone.

In spite of the fact that his verbal commitment to Cassy is somewhat sentimental, it is part of the adaptation that the figure will undergo. However, the most significant change that the character exhibits is a shift in his pursuit of a pioneer existence such as his hero Daniel Boone models. He has held an interest in the lands of Kentucky for many years, but his interest seems to be focused on the ability to get there, the possibility that such a trip offers to a journeyman looking for mobility and future opportunity. As “the Mighty Hunter” he could not be tied down;

however, when Orion reaches an acceptable place with workable land his original dream fades, and he thinks of establishing a farm just as his father had before him. Like Cain, he chooses agriculture as his means of subsistence. Despite his efforts to attain an Adamic existence, a stronger predilection to settle seems to have always been with him. While striking west, he remembers moments when he felt called to take root in certain places:

Several times in his wanderings in the woods he had come on places that he liked better than others. He would be going along, not paying much attention to the country except to look for trace of game, and all of a sudden he would ford a stream or push through underbrush and there the place would be and it would be like he had been there before. They were not always the same kind of places . . . but no matter how different the places were, the feeling was the same, and it would come over him as soon as he saw the place, and would make him turn back as he was leaving and make him see it sometimes months after he was gone—that feeling like he ought to stop, like he was *meant* to stop there. (186)

He experiences “that feeling” when he arrives at the head of the island in what will become eastern Tennessee, the location where he eventually establishes his homestead; he never actually makes it to Kentucky. This particular desire, though it goes against his initial inclination, reveals his true nature and helps to establish his role as an American Cain, willingly fettered by family, farm, and responsibility, no longer “an individual alone.”⁷⁶

Some time later, Orion reconnects with Daniel Boone; the frontiersman is leading more settlers even farther west into Kentucky and tries to tempt Rion to adopt an Adamic existence once again. Though Cassy is sure that her husband will join the pioneer, he surprises his wife and his one-time mentor:

Boone spoke to him. “Well, Rion, you better come on to Kentuck.”

He shook his head. “No, I been here four years. After a man’s worked land that long it don’t look right to turn around and leave it.” (327)

That declaration provides Orion with new perspective on Boone, who he realizes “hadn’t changed much in these six years.” He discovers something new in the man he had once thought “was the finest looking fellow he had ever seen”:

Looking into his face tonight he saw something that he had never seen before— had they seen it all along? That look he had, almost too bold for a human. When a beast was set on going its way you couldn’t stop it, short of killing it. Daniel talked about Kentuck and likely it was all he said it was, but if it wasn’t he wouldn’t care. He’d be off over the next range to see if the land there wasn’t better. Or if Kentuck turned out to be the richest land ever was anywhere, something would take him away from it. He didn’t have any choice. He was one of those men who had to keep moving on. (327)

Clearly the young Outlaw has made a choice, and he has decided to stay put, working the farm he has created. No longer interested in going “off over the next range,” following in the footsteps of the archetype Lewis identifies, he has lost his awe of Boone and instead seems to pity the man and his unquenchable desire “to keep moving on.”

Once Orion has convinced himself and others that he has relinquished the pioneer spirit, further evidence of his American Cain persona surfaces. He relinquishes his desires for an Adamic existence and though his inherent nature betrays the fact that he is Cainian, he now adopts the aspects of the second national archetype; his efforts at attaining the elements of the dream will result in his reenactment of the first fratricide. Just as Adam’s son succeeds at

farming, so too his agricultural efforts are prosperous, and he has established his family in an area that he has helped to purchase, settle, and build. His achievements, however, are overshadowed by an envy of his neighbors and their land, which he feels could be potentially better. His accomplishments and efforts lead to pride in his own abilities and self-satisfaction:

Twenty-five acres cleared in five years . . . and the other room built on to the house, besides the outbuildings that he had put up. . . . There was not a man in the neighborhood better fixed than he was, not even James Robertson, who had got there a year ahead of him, or Amos Eaton who had found his house already built.

Well, there wasn't a man on the Holston who had worked harder." (400)

He has realized his American Dream and has taken advantage of the opportunities placed before him by the land and its possibility. Nevertheless, to defend those labors and further the promises he feels are entitled to him, he ultimately engages in violent means, none more Cain-like than his participation in a conflict that results in Archy's death.

Before the fratricide occurs, however, Orion joins in other depraved actions including the brutal murder of Native Americans that Thomas Landess describes as an "exhibit" of "callous bloodlust more reprehensible than any displayed by the Indians during ritual torture."⁷⁷ No matter who initiates the eventual fighting that dominates the last half of the novel, it is the manner of killing and the attitudes expressed during the battles that help define Orion as an example of the archetype. He takes part in violence that is not merely a defense of his home but that is rather senseless and brutal murder; he commits acts that reveal an innate depravity that aligns him with the quintessential patron of evil, Cain. Beyond efforts at protection, he, along with other settlers, initiates a fight; pursuing liberty and possibility for his own land and family, he limits the opportunities and takes the lives of Native Americans in ways that are often

horrific. During one of the first battle scenes, the narrator describes one such altercation that sums up Outlaw's actions: "They ran forward. An Indian was crawling between two trees. Rion cracked his skull with his tomahawk and they went on" (368). He is certainly not the only man to take life that day, but his lack of hesitation serves as a reminder of the anger and instinct shown in the earlier incident with Jacob Wagner. Gone is the forbearance he showed in that moment or in the Regulators' attack on the British troops.

Instead, in a fit of intolerance and callousness, Orion discounts the Native Americans as people. When the battle is over, his indifferent reaction to the loss of life more directly reflects his racism:

Rion looked down. The Indian had been killed with a knife. He lay half turned over, blood still oozing from his torn entrails. It was seeping into Rion's moccasin. He laughed and standing on one foot took the moccasin off and shook the dark drops down on to the leaves. "We let it out of 'em, didn't we?" he cried. "We let it out of 'em!" (369)

Later, when Cassy protests against the practice of scalping, her husband defends the act, particularly when used against the Native Americans:

Cassy shivered. "I don't think they ought to scalp a man after he's dead, even if he ain't anything but an Indian."

"An Indian ain't hardly a man," Rion said. "He's sort of like a nigger. . . . Naw he's worse 'n a nigger. I ain't got nothing against a nigger, long as he behaves himself but I can't even look at one of them red bastards without having my gorge rise." (398)

Rion transitions from his unsettling declaration into an observation about his own child, who lying nearby during the conversation, has taken notice of his father, an image that further emphasizes the disturbing nature of his comments. The scene displays the tendencies of the protagonist, habits that separate him from other characters who do not share his heartless attitude; it also provides a frightening depiction of him as the depraved and murderous Cain, with the fratricide to follow.

His seeming disregard for human life is a shift from his Adamic efforts to protect the Dawsons and the Wagners during their journey west. Part of the change is his interaction with the Native Americans, on whose lives he places little value as compared to those of the white men. Despite the racial implications of his actions, the larger issue is his sudden willingness to murder without apparent guilt; he had not always felt as such. Early in the novel, the narrator reveals that Rion was responsible, however unintentionally, for disfiguring and crippling his sister Jane. Her state constantly reminds him of the accident and results in not only guilt but contemplation about his personal morality as well. Within his own mind,

he pondered on the moral consequence of his act. Killing a person outright was kinder than disfiguring her for life. He had been guilty of something like murder. Would he be punished for it in the hereafter? It didn't seem right that he should be; he had committed the sin when he was an unknowing child and yet sin was sin. (27)

His preoccupation with the accident displays his concern over his “sin” and the consequences both on earth and “in the hereafter.” Once he is living on his own land, successful and accomplished, he considers those questions unimportant. Like Cain, he avoids issues of guilt or

responsibility to a sibling and, as the American version of the figure, concentrates on his accomplishments as justification for his actions.

Later, when two ministers arrive on the Holston and interact with Frank Dawson, Rion is a participant in their discussions about theology and denominational differences; their conversations bring the incident with his sister to his mind and inspire a resurgence of guilt. That intercourse also reminds him of “his father and Andrew Wallace in front of the fire at night, arguing” about religious issues (409). He remembers that

it was listening to them had got him as a boy wondering whether he would be damned for causing his sister, Nanny, to be burned. . . . Well, sin was something he had never understood very well and hadn't worried about much, of late years anyhow. When a man battled the wilderness he had enough on his hands without pondering the future life. (409)

Outlaw justifies his own sin as well as his current disinterest in matters of the afterlife, because he is a hardworking man and the responsibilities of the farm limit the energies he has for “pondering” morality or his soul. In his pursuit of success and accomplishment, Orion excuses the measures he takes to protect his property and family. Nonetheless, his actions are, at times, excessive; the propensity to kill and find satisfaction in the deed is disturbing, and the haughtiness he exhibits over the fulfillment of his dreams is alienating.

In addition to his enthusiastic participation in murder and his lack of guilt over his actions, Rion takes part in other immoral activities that mark him as a Cain figure. His infidelity with Ann Muldoon, the sister of a neighbor who has come west to escape the law, reveals his violent, prideful, and unforgiving nature and also, eventually, drives his wife to her death. After Frank and the Outlaws' child, Malcolm, are killed in an Indian attack, Cassy no longer gives her

husband the attention he desires and Orion uses the situation to justify his affair with the woman (432). His wife discovers his unfaithfulness and further retreats from him, but the damage has been done; though he feels remorse for his decision, he continues the relationship. His only concern is that the woman will come to his home though he had threatened to “beat her half to death” if she did (446). Instead, after learning that her brother, Tom, is a thief, he finds the excuse he needs to send them away immediately. He questions his decision to force them to leave but condones his actions, for the moment assuming a place of moral high ground:

He had left her there on the floor, still scrabbling in the tail of her gown . . . but he kept seeing the poor bitch’s face. It would be a long time before he got the taste of what had happened out of his mouth. Maybe he ought not to have been so hasty, ought to have given them more time to pack up. . . . No, he couldn’t have done it at all if he’d stopped to wait. It had come over him all of a sudden and he had to do it then or never. (448)

Recognizing his own weakness, if only briefly, Rion finds the method with which to end his wrongdoing, though he himself avoids any official punishment. His choice to demand their removal provides him with an escape from any additional repercussions and allows him to retain his existence as he knows it. Though he has taken part in depraved acts as well, he remains free of persistent guilt by forcing the Muldoons to end the life they know and move on to another place; his calculated plan, self-righteous attitude, and disregard for others’ lives furthermore align him with Cain.

The final and most important of Rion’s actions that establish him as an American Cain is the fratricide, the result of his personal aspirations for control, safety, and the maintenance of his agricultural existence, his own American Dream. Archy has fully embraced his place in the

Nation and has joined the Native Americans, however hesitantly, in their attacks on white settlements. Though he almost kills a man in one such skirmish, it is his Indian brother, the Owl, who gets the scalp, allowing the Bear Killer to retain an innocent persona (376-77). He has assumed the place of an ambassador for the tribe and in one interaction with a British General declares that he is “blood brother to the chief of the Chickamaugas” and knows “no other tribe” (426). Now as members of opposing sides in a battle for the land of Kentucky, the Outlaw siblings are fighting one another. Though they have all but forgotten their previous tie, it is a relationship that cannot be so easily placed aside. Even after the Bear Killer has avoided interacting with Rion when given the chance, he recalls their days on the Yadkin, though he takes pleasure in fooling his brother (331). The elder, though he too had put the memory of Archy out of his mind for the most part, has moments of emotion that remind him of that familial bond. When his second son is born, he hears Frank tell his oldest child, Malcolm, that he has “a baby brother.” Orion, in addition to welcoming a future, male presence to defend the homestead, also finds that “the words just spoken said themselves on in his head” as a reminder of the sibling he lost on the journey west.

These moments of sentimentality, however, do not sway either brother to resist the impending hostilities between the settlers and Native Americans. The Bear Killer, along with his family and town, is ambushed by a group Rion has joined. The attack is one of the more brutal events depicted in the novel, as the women and children are not spared the violence inflicted upon the village. Thomas Landess describes the protagonist’s role in the horrific scene and, in turn, alludes to the death as a fratricide:

Once again Orion is portrayed as an ingenuous butcher, almost joyful in the slaughter until he discovers that Archy is among the dead. Then he realizes a

truth the Indians have always known through their rituals, that it is your brother whom you fight and kill so it behooves you to do it with some decorum.⁷⁸

The loss of life occurs in the midst of the battle, though there is no evidence that one Outlaw kills the other. Nonetheless, Orion is instrumental in his brother's demise, a reality that he accepts with the same coldness he exhibits in earlier skirmishes:

Rion looked down. The bullet had entered the back and must have found the lungs; there was a froth of blood on the mouth and chin. Otherwise the face was unscarred. Hubbard took his foot away. Archy rolled over on his back and lay, one arm upflung, the other crumpled under him. His brown eyes stared up into the trees. His bloody lips were parted in a kind of surprise.

Rion became aware of lively eyes fixed on his face.

"You know the feller?"

"I knew him once," Rion said. He leaned over and pulled the arm out from under the body and straightened it at the side. "I knew him a long time ago."

(465)

As Landess argues, there is a moment of "formality," some show of "human dignity" in the older brother's re-positioning of his sibling's arm.⁷⁹ However, the refusal to acknowledge Archy even at the moment of his death is the moment when the American Cain figure takes the life of his double. It is not important if it was his gun that fired the bullet into the lungs of the Bear Killer; he has discounted the value of his family member's life in his betrayal or refusal to acknowledge.

As in the Biblical story, the Cain figure is left with only emptiness and is forced to wander beyond the place he has known as home once the fratricide has occurred. After the battle, Rion returns to the Holston and an empty home; within a week his wife returns, but she is

dying. In addition to the death of his children, Frank Dawson, Archy, and many neighbors, Rion must come to terms with, in the end, the passing of Cassy. His wife, who had left in the middle of a storm to tend to a sick woman, contracts a fever that eventually takes her life as well. She had been more adamant about leaving after she had learned of her husband's infidelity even though her departure was ill-advised. Indirectly, Outlaw's actions lead to another death, a fact that is all too obvious to him. Though there is reconciliation between the couple before the woman dies, he physically feels the vacuum that is left behind and experiences his own collapse. He initially finds himself "standing alone beside the bed until the walls closed in," but eventually "he stumbled out of the room to where the others sat under the dark trees" (469). By this point, he realizes the emptiness of all he has attained, a fact made more evident as he again considers his namesake, the constellation Orion:

It seemed that a man had to flee farther each time and leave more behind him and when he got to the new place he looked up and saw Orion fixed upon his burning wheel, always pursuing the bull but never making the kill. Did Orion will any longer the westward chase? No more than himself. Like the mighty hunter he had lost himself in the turning. Before him lay the empty west, behind him the loved things of which he was made. Those old tales of Frank's! Were not men raised into the westward turning stars only after they had destroyed themselves?"

(468-69)

The hero has pursued the Adamic dream and then forfeited it to establish a farm and build a home; he has labored to raise an abundant crop and a family, and he has defended the settlers' lands against the "savage" Indians. His accomplishments, characteristically American, are clear, and yet, in the end, he is left with almost nothing. As Thomas Landess contends, "Orion is not

the simple and unchanging character of myth, but a highly complicated man who comes to a tragic awareness of his flaws only after he had destroyed all possibility of leading the good life.”⁸⁰ Veronica Makowsky explains that he is “destroyed by his dream” for “at the conclusion of the novel, he is alone.”⁸¹ In the words of the “complicated man” himself, he has “destroyed” himself, but it is not simply his own life that has ended in tragedy but the lives of all who are around him. He has “lost himself in the turning,” never fully satisfied with what he had accumulated, unfulfilled by the opportunities he was able to realize.

Rion Outlaw embodies the most significant characteristics of the Biblical Cain. A successful farmer and the son of a fallen parentage, he is often envious and angry, sometimes murderous and violent. He adopts an agricultural lifestyle that further connects him to Adam’s son but that also separates him from his brother who has pursued another way of life, a situation that results in Archy’s death. His assumption of the Cainian role results from his unique pursuit of the dream of the country, making him the American version of Cain. Initially, he acts and speaks as an example of Lewis’ Adam, pursuing freedom, opportunity, and an unfettered existence; however, as he experiences life, he abandons these ambitions and replaces them with alternative desires. He is not merely a failed Adamic figure because he voluntarily relinquishes the things that such a character covets. Instead, as the definition of the Cain of the United States suggests, Orion falls victim to the potential downside of the ideology of the nation. As he labors to seize the opportunities inherent within that belief, his Cainian qualities surface. His pursuit of freedom leads to eventual isolation and loneliness. His desire for a large and productive farm results in violence with the Native Americans and a pride in his accomplishments that jeopardizes relationships with family and neighbors. His over-confidence and self-sufficiency leads him to infidelity and a jealousy of those around him. His inability to restrain himself and

his desire instead to carry forth his own agenda eventually brings about the death of family members and, most significantly, the murder of his brother. Unlike McTeague or Carwin, Rion does not assume the role of the Cain of the United States as a result of a failure to realize the desires promised by the country's dream; rather, he evolves into the figure as he achieves the personal aspirations he had formed in light of the possibility presented in those beliefs. In other words, as he attains aspects of American ideology, he realizes that those very things he has pursued can result in loss, disappointment, and tragedy.

VIII. A Tale of Two Cultures

The American Cains of Gordon's books reveal that there are potential deficiencies within the dream of the nation and that the hallmarks of the country can lead to circumstances opposite of those intended; progress can be detrimental, individuality can lead to loneliness and estrangement, and traditionalism is potentially myopic. *Penhally* investigates the modern effects of a regional divide within the country and the related disconnect between past and present perspectives and specific ideologies that continued to create conflict even after the end of the Civil War. *Green Centuries*, though not concerned with the differences between the North and the South, examines the same issue, a complication in which the novelist found herself as well: the contention between two cultures that seek control but that seem diametrically-opposed and unable to co-exist. The historical novel presents questions about the "amorphous, individualistic society of the pioneers" as well as "the formalized, communal society of the Cherokees," options that correspond to the debate the novelist realized existed between her homeland and the region to which she moved as a young woman.⁸² In a somewhat just portrayal of the two systems, both

options are exposed as imperfect in one way or another. The “society” represented by Orion reflects his flaws of pride, impetuosity, violence, individualism, and a lack of religion and tradition. Archy’s adoptive tribe is presented in a far more positive light, but troubles are revealed there as well. Though there are “powerful images of redemption found in the Native American rituals” and the suggestion that the Cherokees’ “every action is invested with transcendent meaning by a traditional society,” the potential for terrible suffering within that community is shown as well.⁸³ Bear Killer’s Indian father, Little Carpenter, attempts to pacify the settlers’ desire for land through treaties and the sale of land. However, his stepbrother, Dragging Canoe, advocates a violent defense of the territory, and it is his decision to refuse negotiation and pursue confrontation that accelerates the inevitable tragedy facing that society.

Green Centuries suggests that both perspectives, progressivism and traditionalism, no matter their specific manifestation, are as potentially flawed as they are possible. Such a situation is the place of the American Cain. Writing for a national audience, Gordon portrays that all citizens of the United States, no matter their region, can experience loss and suffering in their aspirations for the things they believe are promised to them. As Radcliffe Squires argues, this idea that the country did not necessarily offer endless opportunity, however unfortunate, is apparent in all of the author’s works:

The pain of such failure arises from our feeling that the American wilderness constituted a second chance at Eden. Time and again in the early novels [of Gordon] we are reminded that the soil of Virginia has been depleted, that the buffalo come no more to the Carolinas. But the western wilderness is all fertility. In all the novels after *Green Centuries*, a second chance has already been thrown away.⁸⁴

The loss of “a second chance” reflects a dilemma that emerges within the novels; the conflict between progress and tradition, a struggle that the novelist returns to again and again, seeking some measure of understanding. But, as the author asserts, the artist is the perhaps the only person who can provide perspective to just such a question. Nancy Lee Jonza argues that

forced to become something of a nomad herself, . . . Caroline used the novel to explore the tensions of the life she knew all too well. And ultimately, she suggested a way to resolve the tensions: the wanderer, like the artist, needed to adopt various perspectives, to understand the way the past operated on the present, and to assert a connection either in time or in space to other human beings.⁸⁵

She had the advantage of those “various perspectives” in her life as a Southern, modern, wandering author. As a result she was able to pursue some connection between the viewpoints; as Frederick McDowell asserts, her perspective allowed her to determine that “in the green woods of America at any rate, Eden cannot be recaptured, at best only glimpsed.”⁸⁶ Though such a resolution might not make sense under the auspices of the American Dream, it was as true to the author in the twentieth century as it was for Rion Outlaw. Gordon had experienced financial troubles, infidelity in her marriage, career frustrations, and physical suffering; glimpses of Eden were few and far between.

The appearance of the American Cain reinforces that reality and illustrates that there is equal chance for loss and tragedy within the pursuits of the country’s Adams and Cains alike. In *Green Centuries*, he is a representative archetype who exposes the problems of both the forward-reaching pioneer, the settled farmer, and the Native American; all are implicated as each group suffers as a result of and in the midst of their pursuits at opportunity. Despite his failures and

loss, such a figure, Gordon argues, is needed in order for the systems and conditions to be tested, for the inevitable to be questioned, and for the tragedies of life to be confronted. Late in her life, the author, who was still investigating the heroic endeavor and the results thereof, wrote that such a figure, one she had seen first in different members of her family, is timeless and universal and a necessary entity:

Every one of us has his ghostly company, of course. And they are all heroes.

Being heroes, they all fight the same fight. They confront the powers of darkness.

For that has always been the task of the hero, the confrontation of the supernatural in one or other of those forms which men of every age have labeled

‘monstrous.’⁸⁷

For the moment, as she constantly fought for acknowledgement and encouragement and stared down the demons within her own life and in the lives of those around her, she assumed that role, standing at the crossroads of the past and the future, attempting to fight those “monstrous” beasts to determine the faults and opportunities of both progress and tradition. Her novels offer examples of the American Cain, who likewise stare down those questions and monsters, suggesting that though the hero had opportunity for success, there was a possibility of loss and disappointment within the hero’s “task” as well.

Notes

¹ Virginia Arbery, “ ‘Considerable Emphasis on Decorum’: Caroline Gordon and the Abyss, Part 2” *The Modern Age*, 37, No. 1 (1994): 9.

² Caroline Gordon [Letter to Katherine Anne Porter, undated], qtd. in Nancylee Novell Jonza, *The Underground Stream: The Life and Art of Caroline Gordon* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 201. Jonza cites the unpublished letter of Gordon held in the Papers of Katherine Anne Porter at the Rare Books and Literary Manuscripts Department of the University of Maryland at College Park Libraries.

³ Veronica Makowsky, *Caroline Gordon: A Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 148.

⁴ R. W. B. Lewis, *The American Adam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), 1.

⁵ See Molly Boyd, “The Southern American Adam: Simms's alternative myth,” *Southern Quarterly*, 41, No. 2 (2003): 73-83, for one such example.

⁶ Lewis, 127-28.

⁷ Walt Whitman, “Specimen Days,” in *Walt Whitman: Complete Poetry and Prose* (New York: Library of America, 1982), 771.

⁸ Charles Scruggs, “The Mark of Cain and the Redemption of Art: A Study in Theme and Structure of Jean Toomer's *Cane*,” *American Literature*, 44 (1972): 278.

⁹ Scruggs, 277.

¹⁰ See Carolyn M. Jones, “*Sula* and *Beloved*: Images of Cain in the Novels of Toni Morrison,” *African American Review*, 27 (1993): 615-26. See Chapter 5 for further discussion of *Sula* and the titular character's role as an American Cain.

¹¹ See Susan Spencer, "James Dickey's American Cain," *College Language Association Quarterly*, 36, No. 3 (1993): 291-306. Spencer's arguments are unsubstantiated. Gentry, as well as his three friends, are failed American Adams; there is no American Cain in Dickey's novel. See Chapter 5 of this dissertation for a more thorough critique of the essay.

¹² Biographical information is primarily from Nancylee Novell Jonza's *The Underground Stream: The Life and Art of Caroline Gordon* and from a few uncollected autobiographical pieces that Gordon published in journals and magazines: "Always Summer," *Southern Review*, 7 (1971): 430-46, and "Cock-Crow," *Southern Review*, 1 (1965): 554-69. There is additional information available in Veronica Makowsky's *Caroline Gordon: A Biography* and Robert H. Brinkmeyer, Jr., *Three Catholic Writers of the Modern South* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1985).

¹³ As Jonza recounts, once in New York "she made no attempt to hide or reject her love for the South: on Lincoln's birthday she pulled down the blinds in the apartment and declared a public fast" (59).

¹⁴ Makowsky, 172.

¹⁵ Jonza records that "Caroline respected Ernest's [Hemingway's] writing; like Allen, she thought that *A Farewell to Arms*, published that fall, was a masterpiece (109). About Faulkner, Gordon wrote that he was " 'only person who conducted himself like a real he-writer, in the best Hemingway style, with some good touches of the old South' " (109). Jonza adds that the novelist felt "he was a great writer, . . . but he did not have the necessary 'humility before his material.' "

¹⁶ Brinkmeyer, xv.

¹⁷ Brinkmeyer, xiv.

¹⁸ Gordon, [Letter to Sally Wood, November 3, 1930], *The Southern Mandarins: Letters of Caroline Gordon to Sally Wood 1924-1937*, ed. Sally Wood (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 1984), 64.

¹⁹ Brinkmeyer, 79.

²⁰ Brinkmeyer, 79.

²¹ Caroline Gordon, "A Fixed Abode," qtd. in Makowsy, 221. Makowsky cites an unpublished fragment found in the Caroline Gordon Papers held in the Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Book and Special Collections of the Princeton University Libraries.

²² Max Perkins [Letter to Caroline Gordon, July 28, 1931], qtd. in Jonza, 108. Jonza cites the unpublished letter of Perkins held by the Archives of Charles Scribner's Sons held in the Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Book and Special Collections of the Princeton University Libraries.

²³ Gordon [Letter to Max Perkins, August 1, 1931], qtd. in Jonza, 108. Jonza cites the author's unpublished letter held by the Archives of Charles Scribner's Sons held in the Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Book and Special Collections of the Princeton University Libraries.

²⁴ Gordon [Letter to Katherine Anne Porter, undated], qtd. in Jonza, 123. Jonza cites the unpublished letter of Gordon held in the Papers of Katherine Anne Porter at the Rare Books and Literary Manuscripts Department of the University of Maryland at College Park Libraries.

²⁵ J. M. Gordon [Letter to Caroline Gordon, December 12, 1929], qtd. in Jonza, 80. Jonza cites the letter of J. M. Gordon held in the Caroline Gordon Papers held in the Manuscripts

Division, Department of Rare Book and Special Collections of the Princeton University Libraries.

²⁶ See Jonza, 108 for one such example of Caroline's frustration with Allen's productivity.

²⁷ Jonza, 95, 96.

²⁸ Gordon [Letter to Ben Toledano, October 31, 1977], qtd. in Jonza, 223. Jonza cites the unpublished letter of Gordon held in the Caroline Gordon Papers held in the Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Book and Special Collections of the Princeton University Libraries as one example where the author mentions her husband's use of this type of language.

²⁹ Caroline Gordon, *How to Read a Novel* (New York: Viking, 1957), 18.

³⁰ Caroline Gordon, "Always Summer," 438.

³¹ See James Truslow Adams, *The Epic of America* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1931), 214-15.

³² Jonza, 40.

³³ Brinkmeyer, 80.

³⁴ Virginia Arbery, "'Considerable Emphasis on Decorum': Caroline Gordon and the Abyss, Part 1," *The Modern Age*, 36, No. 2 (1994): 162.

³⁵ Thomas H. Landess, preface, *Green Centuries* (Nashville: J. S. Sanders, 1992), xv.

³⁶ Gordon, "Cock-Crow," 557.

³⁷ The specifics of Gordon's conversion are found in Jonza, 270-72.

³⁸ Rose Ann Fraistat, *Caroline Gordon as Novelist and Woman of Letters* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), 38.

³⁹ Brainard Cheney, "Caroline Gordon's Ontological Quest," *Renascence*, 16 (1963): 5.

⁴⁰ James E. Rocks, "The Mind and Art of Caroline Gordon," *Mississippi Quarterly*, 21 (1968): 15.

⁴¹ Arbery, " 'Considerable Emphasis on Decorum': Caroline Gordon and the Abyss, Part 2," 9.

⁴² See John Steinbeck, *East of Eden*, 1952 (New York: Penguin, 2002), 264 and, *Journal of a Novel: The East of Eden Letters*, 1969 (New York: Penguin, 1990), 104.

⁴³ Rocks, 16.

⁴⁴ W. J. Stuckey, *Caroline Gordon* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1972), 12.

⁴⁵ Stuckey, 15.

⁴⁶ Anne M. Boyle, *Strange and Lurid Bloom: A Study of the Fiction of Caroline Gordon* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002), 57.

⁴⁷ Jonza, 99.

⁴⁸ Jonza, 107.

⁴⁹ Makowsky, 103-04.

⁵⁰ Jonza, 88.

⁵¹ W. J. Stuckey argues that the laws of inheritance are one reason for the loss in the novel:

For one of the intentions of the novel is to trace through the history of this period the causes of the destruction of "Penhally" [*sic*] and the kind of life it exemplifies. Among these causes must be included the discarding of the laws of primogeniture and entail, as well as the Civil War which not only beggared the South but

hastened the disintegration of the old land-based human relationships and in time made the South over into an image of the North. These are the main historical causes. A less important one, which is also related to the first main cause, is permitting women to inherit riches without the responsibility that such wealth traditionally carries with it (26).

⁵² Caroline Gordon, *Penhally*, 1931 (Nashville: J. S. Sanders and Company, 1999), 92.

⁵³ Gordon, *Penhally*, 95.

⁵⁴ Howard Baker, "The Stratagems of Caroline Gordon, or the Art of the Novel and the Novelty of Myth," *Southern Review*, 9 (1973): 534-35.

⁵⁵ Genesis 20:5 Revised Standard Version.

⁵⁶ Boyle, 59.

⁵⁷ Ashley Brown, "The Achievement of Caroline Gordon," *Southern Humanities Review*, 2 (1968): 283.

⁵⁸ Gordon, *Penhally*, 233.

⁵⁹ Gordon, *Penhally*, 267.

⁶⁰ Gordon, *Penhally*, 265.

⁶¹ Gordon, *Penhally*, 268.

⁶² Gordon, *Penhally*, 256.

⁶³ Andrew Lytle, "Caroline Gordon and the Historic Image," *Sewanee Review*, 62, No. 4 (1949): 577-78.

⁶⁴ Edith H. Walton, "The Frontier South," *New York Review of Books* (November, 2, 1941): 4, qtd. in Jonza, 215.

⁶⁵ Clifton Fadiman, "Review of *Green Centuries*," *The New Yorker* (November 1, 1941): 70, qtd. in Jonza, 215.

⁶⁶ Caroline Gordon, *Green Centuries*, 1941 (Nashville: J. S. Sanders, 1992), 3. All subsequent references to the novel will be cited internally.

⁶⁷ The words of Daniel Boone serve as the epigraph to the first part of the novel and which suggest the movement to come in the novel: "I think it time to remove when I can no longer fall a tree for fuel so that its top will lie within a few yards of my cabin" (1).

⁶⁸ Lewis, 1.

⁶⁹ Jonza, 209.

⁷⁰ Brinkmeyer, 88.

⁷¹ Landess, preface, viii.

⁷² Landess, preface, xi.

⁷³ Ricardo Quinones, *The Changes of Cain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 6.

⁷⁴ Quinones, 6.

⁷⁵ Just before Rion's inner monologue, the narrator recounts Frank's lesson when he explains the layout of the constellation, a description that amplifies the character's thoughts about himself:

The stars were not as bright as they had been a few hours ago. But he could still pick out Orion, the Mighty Hunter. Frank had pointed out to him how the hunter stands, facing the bull, his shoulders marked by two bright stars, the lion skin in his left hand, the club in his right. "His belt, consisting of three stars of the second

magnitude, points obliquely down towards Sirius. From the belt hangs the sword, composed of three smaller stars lying north and south. A magnificent white star is there in the left foot. He has no right foot, or if he has it is hidden behind Lepus.” (21)

⁷⁶ Lewis, 1.

⁷⁷ Thomas H. Landess, “The Function of Ritual in Caroline Gordon’s *Green Centuries*,” *Southern Review*, 7 (1971): 503.

⁷⁸ Landess, “Function of Ritual,” 504.

⁷⁹ Landess, “Function of Ritual,” 504.

⁸⁰ Landess, preface, x.

⁸¹ Makowsky, 149.

⁸² Landess, “Function of Ritual,” 507.

⁸³ Jonza, 209 and Landess, preface, xiii-ix.

⁸⁴ Radcliffe Squires, “The Underground Stream: A Note on Caroline Gordon’s Fiction,” *Southern Review*, 7 (1971): 468.

⁸⁵ Jonza, 209.

⁸⁶ Frederick P. W. McDowell, *Caroline Gordon*, No. 59 of *Pamphlets on American Writers* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966), 29.

⁸⁷ Gordon, “Cock-Crow,” 562.

CHAPTER 4

EAST OF EDEN: PARADOX AND THE AMERICAN CAIN

“With the exception of Harriet Beecher Stowe in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Upton Sinclair in *The Jungle*, and perhaps Richard Wright in *Native Son*, no protest writer had a greater influence on how Americans looked at their country.”¹

“Like some authors, such as Mark Twain, Robert Frost, and Willa Cather, John Steinbeck became beloved because he was so essentially American, a writer for and about the people.”²

I. An American Cain in *East of Eden*

Even before *East of Eden* was published in 1952, its author was convinced that it would have a rocky reception. In *Journal of a Novel*, the writer records the warnings he made to himself and his editor, Pat Covici, about what he believed would be the inevitable critical response: “This book is going to catch the same kind of hell that all the others did and for the same reasons. It will not be what anyone expects and so the expecters will not like it.”³ Indeed, he had set out to do something completely new in his “big book,” and, as he often did throughout his career, he experimented a great deal in terms of technique, attempting some new combination of styles and perspectives; as he said, “I want it to be all forms, all methods, all approaches.”⁴ Ultimately, for all his efforts, the critics lambasted the work for many of the same things they

had said about previous works and for some of same reasons that he suggested: it was not like *The Grapes of Wrath* and was instead sprawling, unfocused, and too wide-ranging. Jackson J. Benson records a few of these in his biography of the author, such as the statement by the critic in *Time* who said the book was “ ‘too blundering and ill-defined to make its story point.’ ”⁵ Despite the critical reception, the novel reached the top of the best-seller list by November of 1952, another reason, at least in Benson’s opinion, why critics panned the work.⁶

Undoubtedly, *East of Eden* is a puzzling work. The book ranges over six hundred pages and includes over twenty-five characters, ten or so of whom are developed fully. It is a work of fiction and yet incorporates parts of the writer’s family history. There are random asides and narratorial intrusions. And, beyond oddities in subject matter and style, the book borrows heavily from the account of Cain and Abel, quoting almost the entirety of the fourth chapter of Genesis in its pages. More directly than other works that utilize an American Cain, Steinbeck’s novel presents a character who models the traits and actions of Adam’s son in his pursuit of opportunity and success. Cal Trask assumes the role of the archetype, taking the life of his brother as a result of his anger and jealousy and in his desires for personal achievement; his previous attempts to win his father’s affection, through thoroughly national pursuits and attitudes, lead only to rejection and isolation. The inclusion of the figure further complicates an already complex work that no one, including the critics, expected. But then, Steinbeck quite often received harsh criticism from the literary reviewers. As he wrote in a postscript to *Steinbeck and His Critics*, “critics, instead of making observations, are led to bring charges”; he, perhaps more than other authors, heard a great many against himself and his works.⁷

II. John Steinbeck’s Conflicted America

Though a Nobel Prize winner in literature, a successful novelist, and a father of two, there were many accusations made about John Steinbeck by critics, opponents, and ex-wives. Benson comments in his preface to *The True Adventures of John Steinbeck, Writer* that at “various times he was accused of being a communist, a fascist, a puritan, and one of the most immoral men that ever published a book in the United States. He was none of those things.”⁸ There were many tags, however, that did apply to him: Californian, playwright, New Yorker, traveler, journalist, and writer. However, the label that perhaps best identified the author was one with which he was born and one that he never wavered to claim: American. As his son Thom said, his father was “a total American. There’s no question about it; Steinbeck loved America more than anything else. He believed in America and what it did.”⁹ During his career, in the midst of literary works, travels, and research as well as the realities of death and divorce, his political, social, and philosophical opinions changed dramatically, but he communicated his commitment to the United States consistently. Despite all the names that he had been called, criticism he had taken, and ideas he had entertained, the author retained hope, however cautious, for his nation. At the end of his career, he reassured his fellow citizens that though the nation needed direction, it was not completely aimless: “We have not lost our way at all. . . . I think we will find one, but its direction may be unthinkable to us now.”¹⁰ Interested in the fate of the country and its “path to the future,” the writer offered encouragement to his homeland, even at the close of his life. His optimism is not unlike the idealistic writings produced by Emerson and the party of Hope in the nineteenth century, the group who engendered, as R. W. B. Lewis explains, the American Adam archetype.

John Steinbeck, however, was not merely a national spokesman or critic; such labels limit the scope of his accomplishments. He was also an activist and witness to those situations

happening around him. The topics that he addressed in his writings, from labor laws to poverty, war to personal morality, were often, in their own way and at the time, reflections on contemporary life in the United States; in fact, he has been called “a first-rate interpreter of the American scene.”¹¹ The writer actively examined the people and situations around him whether it was in the migrant camps of California, the battlefields of Europe and Africa, or the hamlets of the Northeast; in some cases, he fictionalized them in such a way as to raise questions, doubts, and calls for change. As Tetsumaro Hayashi and Kenneth Swan assert,

Steinbeck focuses on the American scene in such a manner that we as readers can envision ourselves in a mirror. His literature, like the literature of other great American authors, has somehow helped to define and extend America and Americans. He has joined other great authors to help to amplify our vision of reality so that America is not merely a confluence of politics, a mass of history, or current events, but a reality that is both outward and inward.¹²

His ability to hold a mirror up to “reality,” depicting life in his own country as a means of amplifying a true “vision,” is nowhere more evident than in his critical and commercial success, *The Grapes of Wrath*. As he wrote in a letter to Pat Covici, “I tried to write this book [*Grapes*] the way lives are being lived not the way books are written.”¹³ Having painstakingly researched the struggles of migrant workers in southern California, Steinbeck’s novel not only revealed the horror of actual conditions, it initiated a firestorm of activism and political discussion that brought poverty, migrant workers’ rights, and the plight of farmers into the national spotlight.¹⁴

With financial and critical successes such as *Grapes*, he maintained an emotional, yet strained relationship with his homeland, which continued throughout his career. In many of his works he depicts typical situations, identifiable characters, and pressing issues of the day. No

matter the work, Steinbeck is never far from the life around him, whether it was joyful, mundane, or tragic; there is George Milton's gracious murder of Lennie, Jody Tiflin's commitment to a sick pony, and the life-giving act of Rosasharn. F. W. Watt writes that the author maintained a large audience "because of the range of moods he represents—angry, gay, tender, erotic, thoughtful, sad, whimsical—and because of his power to communicate sympathetically and refreshingly an awareness of the experiences of common humanity."¹⁵ From the examination of the American Dream and its effects in *The Pastures of Heaven* and *Of Mice and Men* to the questions he raises throughout the ethics-charged atmosphere of *The Winter of Our Discontent*, his works are ever on the pulse of his nation and its people. The Munroe family, rather accidentally, expose the paradisiacal façade that surrounds *las pasturas del cielo* and its residents, an area not far from Steinbeck's birthplace. George Milton learns that his future will not hold all that he hoped to attain; in the words of Joseph Fontenrose, the novelette illustrates that "reality defeats the dream."¹⁶ The author's final work, *Winter*, resulted from observations and reflections upon popular culture and political scandals surfacing around him that helped produce a book that demonstrates the ease with which all men might fall into crime, infidelity, dishonesty, and murder.¹⁷

Steinbeck's attention to his homeland and its health is somewhat perplexing since at times he was accused of attacking the nation; he wrote repeatedly of the problems and suffering around him and the damage those issues wrought on America. As a result, he attracted labels such as Communist, liar, activist, and agitator that were heaped upon him after the publication of *The Grapes of Wrath* and were still used, at times, at the end of his life.¹⁸ The voyage he took with his first wife, Carol, and Ed Ricketts that eventually led to *Sea of Cortez* was not only a fact-finding and collecting trip but also an excuse to get away from the critical attention and

constant attacks that resulted from the publication of *Grapes*.¹⁹ Without question, the complexity of his ideals and the sometimes apparent, incongruous pattern of his beliefs confused many, even the journalists who questioned him on a visit to the Soviet Union late in his life. His biographer recounts that “he was also usually asked why he criticized his country so sharply in his books, to which he would reply, ‘Because I love it. If I did not, I would not bother.’”²⁰ That declaration, however honest, suggests the paradox that Steinbeck recognized in his nation. For all the love he might have felt for his homeland, he simultaneously “bothered” to communicate the need for change.

Much of Steinbeck’s non-fiction, mainly written later in his life, presents both sides of such a dichotomy. Despite the conflictive ideals Steinbeck expressed about America, he acknowledged the potential that existed for a country that held to promises of opportunity and a better life for all. Even at the end of his life, he admitted that such hope existed:

For Americans . . . the wide and general dream has a name. It is called “the American Way of Life.” No one can define it or point to any one person or group who lives it, but it is very real nevertheless, perhaps more real than that equally remote dream the Russians call Communism. These dreams describe our vague yearnings toward what we wish we were and hope we may be: wise, compassionate, and noble. The fact that we have this dream at all is perhaps an indication of its possibility.²¹

And yet, as the author states, while the “dream” was possible, the nation was not reveling in the success that those “vague yearnings” sometimes bore. In numerous letters, Steinbeck declared that there were problems within the country, issues that needed to be exposed or examined. One letter, written to his editor in July of 1961, offers one such perspective:

Through time, the nation has become a discontented land. I've sought for an out on this—saying it is my aging eyes seeing it, my waning energy feeling it, my warped vision that is distorting it, but it is only partly true. The thing I have described is really there. I did not create it. It's very well for me to write jokes and anecdotes but the haunting decay is there under it.²²

The dissonance between what the author heralded as the potential of the nation and the discontentment and decay that characterized life as experienced by many around him, including the author himself, at least at some times in his life, resulted in literature that examined the disconnect.

As a result, many of Steinbeck's novels portray members of a nation who are experiencing the paradox between dream-like expectations and harsh reality. Frederic Carpenter, writing in 1941, argues that "always his fiction has described the interplay of dream and reality; his thought has followed the development of the American dream."²³ As Carpenter and others acknowledge, however, the author often portrays the hardship that results from a failed attempt at the "American Way of Life." Kenneth Swan contends, and rightly so, that in most of the writer's work that "explores the American scene, we see many of the characters in search of what America promises but caught in the clutches of circumstances which often seem to frustrate their search."²⁴ In the introduction to *Rediscovering Steinbeck*, editors Cliff Lewis and Carroll Britch assert that "life for Steinbeck's characters is fraught with suffering, with an intensity of feeling which as often as not raises them up or lays them low." John Timmerman leaves no doubt: "Beyond question, Steinbeck explored the nooks and crevices of human nature, bringing the hidden to light, exposing lies and fabrications, and exploring the costs of pursuing dreams."²⁵

Cup of Gold, To a God Unknown, The Pastures of Heaven, Of Mice and Men, The Grapes of

Wrath, and *East of Eden* all depict protagonists who experience tragedy while in the midst of yearning and striving that characterizes the national drive. As John Ditsky implies, even the successes that some people attain can lead to disillusionment, disappointment, and further problems; he argues that the novelist's later works "attempted to deal with and assess" the "American malaise" that occurs "in the midst of dreams fulfilled."²⁶

As the definition of the American Cain suggests, it is in violent reaction to that dissonance between the promises and opportunity that the archetype emerges. He is the reflection of the Biblical antecedent plagued by the vague notions and unrealized potential inherent in the country's famed "dream." Steinbeck is an author that scholars have long associated with the fourth chapter of Genesis and even with the figure of a national Cain. The story of the first fratricide, grounded in the eternal dichotomy of good and evil and a complex instance of divine intervention, is a tale that the author called "a strange story" and "the basis of all human neurosis."²⁷ Both Peter Lisca and William Goldhurst, in separate works, argue convincingly that the Cain and Abel story is adapted in *Of Mice and Men*.²⁸ Barbara Heavilin in "Judge, Observer, Prophet: The American Cain and Steinbeck's Shifting Perspective" suggests that Adam's children are used in many works, including *The Grapes of Wrath*, *The Winter of Our Discontent*, and, of course, *East of Eden*.²⁹ Michael J. Meyer edited *The Betrayal of Brotherhood in the Work of John Steinbeck: Cain Sign*, a somewhat haphazard and untrustworthy collection of essays about the author's use of the Genesis account in almost all of the novelist's works. Some of these pieces make worthwhile contentions, such as the editor's introduction, though many of the arguments are hopelessly attached to spurious connections.³⁰ Finally, Ricardo Quinones, in *The Changes of Cain*, commits an entire section to *East of Eden*, and, though he does not define the archetype, he does argue that there is an American Cain in the

novel.³¹ Steinbeck's borrowing of the first fratricide reflects the paradox he declared existed between his love for his homeland and the criticism he routinely voiced. In the story of good and evil, brother against brother, God versus man, and acceptance or rejection, there exists the clear duality that the author identified in his country and his own feelings toward the nation, a doubleness that influenced much of his life and writing.

III. *America and Americans* and *Travels with Charley*

There is no American Cain in the final two books Steinbeck published, both non-fiction works; however, what does emerge is the culmination of a lifetime of observation and his more recent analysis of his homeland as he examined the experiences of his fellow countrymen, the dream, and the paradox of what he called "the American Way of Life."³² In *America and Americans*, the author writes that the "strong and imperishable dream the American carries" is often found to have "little to do with reality in American life."³³ That book followed *Travels with Charley*, Steinbeck's exploration of the clichéd by-ways and highways of the country and description of his interaction with "the common man" from Vermont to New Orleans and even his native northern California. Setting out with his trusted poodle, Charley, the writer spent from September of 1960 to January of the following year driving throughout the nation in Rocinante, his simple motor-home, "in search of America," as the subtitle to the work proclaims. What he found, along with delicious apple pie, dirty motel rooms, and breathtaking landscapes, was a perspective on the complex make-up of those in the United States, and as a result, a picture of the states as a whole. He had set out with an idea of the typical citizen and ultimately realized that this model was perhaps not realistic. He asks that

if there is indeed an American image built of truth rather than reflecting either hostility or wishful thinking, what is this image? . . . [T]he more I inspected this American image, the less sure I became of what it is. It appeared to me increasingly paradoxical, and it has been my experience that when paradox crops up too often for comfort, it means that certain factors are missing in the equation.³⁴

The “paradox” that he found, similar to the implication he made about his criticism of his homeland, resulted from his own ideas of what people desire and actually have. In other words, Steinbeck, in his travels, witnessed the conflicting ideals and disconnect between the Edenic dream (“wishful thinking”) and a Cain-like reality (“hostility”). He writes that rather than the passion, drive, and hopefulness he expected to find in those around him, he instead discovered lives characterized more often by deracination, struggle, and individualism, realities antithetical to the possibility and opportunity said to characterize Americans and their homeland.

He suggested some reasons for the heartache, racism, and isolation he encountered, explanations beyond a simple lack of initiative or a corrupt nation; there were systems and attitudes in place that though they appeared progressive, were actually attacking the lifeblood of a culture. The writer-turned-pilgrim determined that “the new American finds his challenge and his love in traffic-choked streets, skies nested in smog, choking with the acids of industry, the screech of rubber and houses leashed in against one another while the townlets wither and die. And this, as I found, is as true in Texas as in Maine.”³⁵ He viewed the so-called advances of urbanism, mobility, and commercialism with a wary eye: “I wonder why progress looks so much like destruction.”³⁶ Steinbeck found more than just a simple grasping after an unrealistic future and a frustrating acceptance of things as they were; his dissatisfaction with what he found

included the personal defeatism and endless mobility of those he met. “Nearly every American hungers to move,” he said and few, it seems, were making their way towards anything in particular.³⁷ The times he appears most encouraged, though few and far between, usually involved some type of ancient or traditional experience: the sense of community among immigrants in upstate New York or the minister’s sermon in a country church in Vermont. These moments, however, were not reassuring enough to sustain the investigation upon which the author originally embarked.

In the end, he shortened his trip after witnessing the famed, sardonically-labeled “Cheerleaders” of New Orleans who were verbally berating and abusing the first children to integrate the schools of Louisiana.³⁸ This scene left him “sick with weary nausea” and “helpless”; later he would remember the situation with “the weight of savage fear.”³⁹ Those experiences and perhaps the long miles he had already traveled left Steinbeck feeling “stranded far from home.” He eventually returned to Sag Harbor far more quickly than he had intended because, as he said, his “journey went away.” The paradox between the hopefulness he had expected to find and the reality that he discovered left nothing to look for but “one shining reality—my own wife, my own house in my own street, my own bed.”⁴⁰ The trip had been the search for an “American identity,” but what the author found was no such collective entity or character. Instead, he discovered an amalgam of people, places, and experiences that created an incomplete picture of a nation unfulfilled, stretched, and endlessly moving. The Cheerleaders’ episode, though unpleasant, provided him with an explanation for the troubles that plagued the country as a whole. He reflected that he “knew, as everyone knows, that true but incomplete statement of the problem—that an original sin of the fathers was being visited on the children of succeeding generations.”⁴¹ Later in *America and Americans* he would express the same idea a

different way: “We have succeeded in what our fathers prayed for and it is our success that is destroying us.”⁴² As he said, he and his fellow citizens were reaping the fruit of what had been sown, and those seeds were more often than not anything but positive.

These rather negative viewpoints were written late in his life as he reflected upon his full experience of over sixty years: the Great Depression, two world wars, his frustration with American politics, the Cold War, the Vietnam conflict, and the death, sometimes tragic, of many of his friends and family. Even prior to his journey across the country, he had told his friend Adlai Stevenson that there were problems; nevertheless, he tried to look ahead and asked Stevenson to join him:

Someone has to reinspect our system and that soon. We can't expect to raise our children to be good and honorable men when the city, the state, the government, the corporations all offer the highest rewards for chicanery and dishonesty. On all levels it is rigged, Adlai. Maybe nothing can be done about it, but I am stupid enough and naively hopeful enough to want to try. How about you?⁴³

A year even before *Travels* was published, *The Winter of Our Discontent* provided a fictional portayal of the “chicanery” that he proposed existed at every level. It also, however, presented the naïve optimism that Steinbeck mentions to Stevenson. Barbara Heavilin finds a “hope” in the ending of *Winter* that is “contrary to the cynicism of Hemingway and the darkness of Faulkner”; the light and tradition is passed on from father to daughter.⁴⁴ She continues that the author’s ideal, as presented to the senator,

concludes with *The Winter of Our Discontent* and its prophetic implications that the lights of this nation will continue. . . . Like Ethan Allen Hawley, in Steinbeck’s vision of America, the American people have been actualized and

have entered into the realm of reality, revealing a nation capable of growing up and assuming moral responsibility for its own future.

Despite his criticism, his works often present a hope, perhaps naïve, that even in the midst of wrongdoing a positive future can be attained.

With some remaining faith and a related despair, Steinbeck remained committed to writing honestly and hopefully about his homeland, for all its scars and failures. In fact, with what were indeed the final words of his last publication, *America and Americans*, the writer paraphrases a declaration he had made almost thirty years before in *The Grapes of Wrath*: “We have failed sometimes, taken wrong paths, paused for renewal, filled our bellies and licked our wounds; but we have never slipped back—never.”⁴⁵ His ability to balance his criticism of the nation with his intense dedication, in many ways, helped provide perspective that aided in his use of the American Cain. His critical eye never left him. He eloquently expressed such an ideal in an interview given after the announcement of his Nobel Prize for Literature. When asked what the major function of the author was in society, he answered, simply, “Criticism, I should think.”⁴⁶ He resisted the temptation to portray the United States falsely as something idyllic or perfected, yet simultaneously holding out that such idealism was not unsubstantiated.

The type of criticism that Steinbeck mentioned was designed to be constructive. For the author, improving America and the global society through criticism was something he pursued openly throughout his career. He portrayed the experience of the nation, from the plight of migrant workers (*Of Mice and Men* and *The Grapes of Wrath*) to the false sheen of promise in the rural valleys (*The Pastures of Heaven*) and townships (*The Winter of Our Discontent*). Susan Shillinglaw and Jackson Benson argue that “he developed into a writer who was constantly engaged with the manners, morals, and controversies of the world around him.” They continue,

quoting his friend Toby Street, who observed that

“John was actually a missionary. He was essentially a journalist, you know, that is, I think he could see things going on. . . . I mean journalist in the power of observation. I think some of his so-called tendencies toward you might say the ‘left wing’ were motivated by this strong missionary urge to set things right.”⁴⁷

With the opportunity to expose the truth as a “journalist,” he, as Street suggests, had a bent toward reform. His now famous Nobel Prize acceptance speech, includes an assertion about the possibility inherent in humans and mostly in the democratic ideal that a collective people could accomplish significant things. His words reveal a belief in the “perfectibility of man” and the need for humanity to act for the good of all, but he also was concerned about the present state of that “man.”⁴⁸ He announced, with typical paradoxical flair, that “man himself has become our greatest hazard and our only hope. So that today, St. John the apostle may well be paraphrased: In the end is the Word, and the Word is Man - and the Word is with Men.” Had he not been speaking on an international stage, he could have said that “the Word is American – and the Word is with Americans.” In the midst of all he lamented about his homeland, he held out a hope, not necessarily in the American Dream but in the spirit of the individual and the democratic system in the midst of the pursuit of that ideal. Elaine Steinbeck expressed her husband’s belief this way, interpreting his earlier speech: “You see John believed in *man*. That’s what his Nobel Prize speech says. . . . ‘Man will never be perfect, but he has to strive for it.’ That’s the whole point. That was his whole point about life.”⁴⁹ Mrs. Steinbeck recognized in her husband the unparalleled and seemingly paradoxical faith in people, specifically those of his own country.

The paradox lay in what he witnessed and described in *Travels with Charley* and in many

of his novels: limitless potential and disappointing reality. Really it was nothing more than the epic struggle, whether internal or external, between good and evil, the main theme of *East of Eden*, as well as *The Winter of Our Discontent*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, and *The Pearl*. Many critics have recognized the prevalence of this obvious, but essential, theme of opposing absolutes. F. W. Watt maintains that

like America itself, his work is a vast, fascinating, paradoxical universe: a brash experiment in democracy, a native quest for understanding at the level of the common man: a celebration of goodness and innocence; a display of chaos, violence, corruption and decadence.⁵⁰

The observation explains the conflicting actualities found in the writer's works, and interestingly, he is not bothered by the seemingly incongruous presentation of the evilness and the beauty, the idyllic and the tragically realistic. That portrait of paradox could work to expose the truth, point out inconsistencies and inequalities, and reveal America to itself in order to inspire change. As Barbara Heavilin explains, "Steinbeck holds the mirror so that people can see themselves as they are, with the hope for reform."⁵¹ It is this tendency that led Woodburn O. Ross, among others, to label Steinbeck a literary Naturalist, another label and one that might fit him categorically, but one that most likely the author would not have claimed.⁵² Still, like Frank Norris, Stephen Crane, and Theodore Dreiser before him, the novelist definitely wrote about the improvements that his nation could make and those he could bring to others' attention.

In fact, in *America and Americans*, he diagnoses the state of the nation and then issues an urgent, reformative call, a vigorous cry for some adjustment in values. Susan Shillinglaw and Jackson J. Benson explain that the essays "are impassioned pleas from a man who cared deeply about his country. They are jeremiads, exhorting America to take heed."⁵³ A passage from the

fittingly entitled “Paradox and the Dream” provides a telling example:

We spend our time searching for security, and hate it when we get it. For the most part we are an intemperate people: we eat too much when we can, drink too much, indulge our senses too much. . . . The result is that we seem to be in a state of turmoil all the time, both physically and mentally.⁵⁴

Critical of what America and her citizens had become in their pursuit of the country’s infamous “dream,” the author’s writings, nevertheless, communicate some measure of hope for the future. A final essay of the collection, “Americans and the Future,” argues that the present situation could not continue and that a new, as yet unknown, direction was needed but assured: “We have not lost our way at all. The roads of the past have come to an end and we have not yet discovered a path to the future.”⁵⁵ Ultimately, he refused to allow his observations of the nation in *Travels* and his analysis of the state of his home in his final book to destroy completely the potential he believed had to be there. He firmly held that the United States would find that new “path to the future.” That endeavor, however would take a communication of the truth; as he had earlier written to his editor, Pat Covici, during the writing of *East of Eden*, “books—at least the kind of book I am writing—should contain everything that seems to me to be true. There are few enough true things in the world.”⁵⁶

Perhaps there is no other of his works where this is more evident than the novel he called “The Book,” *East of Eden*, which unabashedly borrows from the Cain and Abel story.⁵⁷ Steinbeck uses the account from Genesis directly, incorporating the sixteen verses about the brothers into the work, and including multiple “C” characters that correspond to the first murderer in one way or another. The author also uses an example of R. W. B. Lewis’ archetypal figure in the book, Adam Trask; he is a version of the unfettered, potential-filled character,

though he is somewhat tame in comparison to the American “first man.” His existence, however, reflects the same issues that plagued the original: isolation, over-confidence, and failure. That portrayal provides the space for the alternative archetype, the American Cain. He represents the experience of those whose pursuit of the national dream leads not to a better life but to tragedy instead; the paradox of the ideology is that those characteristics that are encouraged in citizens can result in failure, and in some cases, murder. The biographical elements of the novel and the background of the author help explain the appearance of the icon in *East of Eden* as well as the author’s specific use.

IV. Samuel Hamilton’s Grandson and the Influences of a Nation

John Steinbeck’s upbringing and early experiences have been covered adequately in sources such as Jackson J. Benson’s *The True Adventures of John Steinbeck, Writer and John Steinbeck, A Biography* by Jay Parini.⁵⁸ However, for a discussion of the California writer and the American Cain, there are particular items, such as his views on his homeland and an explanation of what some might call his philosophies and personal morality, that are more important than a complete biography. The existing paradox that the writer identified in America corresponds to the national Cain figure, but there exists a theoretical background to these ideas that emerges from his own experiences, both good and bad, with his country and with the beliefs and systems to which the nation holds. At quite a young age, he realized he had a passion for writing and he determined to pursue that vocation.⁵⁹ In fact, as Benson observes, he “was one of the very few important writers of his generation to receive a significant amount of training in a college creative-writing program.”⁶⁰ He practiced his art, though somewhat haphazardly,

producing short stories while at Palo Alto, a few of which were published in the *Stanford Spectator*, the campus newspaper. As Jackson Benson remarks, these early stories “display some of the typical vices of college literary-magazine writing.”⁶¹ They were apparently unpolished works of an aspiring writer and nothing more, but they demonstrate an early commitment to his chosen career path, the pursuit of his own version of the American Dream. In a 1924 letter to Carl Wilhelmson, Steinbeck himself recalls his efforts and one particular, early tale:

There have been six short stories this quarter. I wonder if you remember the one about the machinist who made engines and felt a little omnipotent until his own machine pulled his arm from him. Then he cursed God and suffered retribution at the hands of God or thought he did.⁶²

Unnamed in the letter, “the one about the machinist” bears resemblance to some of the ideas in *To a God Unknown* and is reminiscent of the Cain and Abel account, including the idea that human labors can lead to pride, punishment, and a curse from God.

This seemingly simple recollection does reveal a few things about the writer in this period of his life. First, the story itself suggests that the Stanford student was not yet confident in his creative works; the piece reflects an awareness of the power inherent in creating, the corresponding danger an artist must feel, and the potential jealousy or reaction such a creation might inspire in a retributive Creator. On a broader level, the memory reveals an awareness of the Bible and an acknowledgement of the potential enmity between humanity and God. The tale reflects feelings of inadequacy and fear but also depicts the chance that an artist takes, modeling the actions of a deity who makes something of nothing. The intensity of emotions portrayed and the layering of ideas presented about God and artists suggests a multifaceted picture of religion. Raised in the home of Olive Steinbeck, the daughter of the real-life Samuel Hamilton, the young

John was exposed to just such a complex religiosity based on a strange mixture of influences. His upbringing included readings in, lessons from, and contact with different texts of American fundamentalism, mythology, and Irish fairies, a paradox of influences that would affect his future life and work.⁶³

Beyond a childhood exposure to mystical and religious ideologies, Steinbeck's early life was also characterized by transience, isolation, and struggle, both his own and that which he witnessed in the lives of others. He worked diverse jobs and experienced short, occupational stints that provided the young writer with varied experiences and perspectives on California and his nation, on people from all walks of life, and on the "real world." From the classrooms and English club of Stanford he wandered to the farms and factories of northern California and found the fabric of society working in the fields and stores of everyday America. A catalog of positions he held during his college years is random and certainly unfocused, yet telling: salesman, chemist, day laborer, caretaker, and ranch hand, the occupation that he would later make famous with characters such as Billy Buck, George Milton, and Slim.⁶⁴ He also spent some time as a bindlestiff, or wandering hobo, listening to the histories of his companions and seeking a "humanistic story" as he told some men in a "hobo camp" near San Francisco in the early 1920s.⁶⁵ The odd-jobs and random traveling exposed a still impressionable young man to the struggles of everyday people, as he shared their labor, their exhaustion, and even their past experiences and language. As Jackson Benson argues, it is during these days that he heard and internalized the voices and vocabulary that would emerge in such characters as Pilon and Danny, Curley and Crooks, and even Lee of *East of Eden*.⁶⁶ Beyond simple observation, the future writer also participated in the daily grind, going door-to-door, chopping firewood, and even "wading waist-deep through swamp" as part of the effort to drain the swamps that were on the

edges of his hometown.⁶⁷ As a result, he witnessed the opportunity and potential drudgery involved in the pursuit of the American Dream; the lives he saw reflected both the experiences of Lewis's Adam and, in turn, the American Cain as well.

Most importantly, Steinbeck learned the difficulty of achieving goals and realized that the men and women he met were often not living the dream that the country had instilled within them, but they were instead experiencing the paradox of potential and actuality. He was aware of the painful reality of everyday life for many of those he met; he witnessed the challenges of failure, the dissonance between the hopes and goals of the people and the struggles and disappointment that most folks felt. Later, when he began investigating the migrant camps in southern California, he lived in the places himself, meeting the people, sharing their meager meals, and seeing firsthand the sickness and death of those who came west in anticipation of work and a new start. Unfortunately, what the author found was anything but promising; there were, instead, defining moments that helped shape his perspective on labor, opportunity, and the future. As he wrote to his agent, Elizabeth Otis, during one such trip taken prior to his writing of *Grapes*, it is "funny how mean and little books become in the face of such tragedies" as those he witnessed in places like "Weedpatch," a labor camp in Arvin, California.⁶⁸ Above all, he would not avoid the truth of what he found. Benson makes plain his motivation, providing an improvised motto for the author: "Fiction need not be realistic, but it must be true."⁶⁹ Unfortunately, as he found, that truth was not always pleasant. Even as early as 1933, Steinbeck wrote to Mavis McIntosh, another agent, that the "reviewers (what lice they are) complain that I deal particularly in the subnormal and the psychopathic. If said critics would inspect their neighbors within one block, they would find that I deal with the normal and the ordinary."⁷⁰ In other words, the horrors he depicted were anything but extraordinary; rather, they were the

experiences of the people around him, those of his fellow Americans. His portrayals reflected the separation between the national dream and the reality that most knew, a great paradox of the nation and its unofficial beliefs as well as an impetus for the actions of the American Cain.

Despite his own meandering and early failures, he continued to write, though that effort resulted in his own frustrations with finances, relationships, and success; nevertheless, those difficulties were a part of his education as well. A career as a novelist was a dream that his mother saw as hopelessly romantic and but one that his father supported both financially and emotionally. During his early years as a full-time writer, a period that corresponds to the beginning of his first marriage, his mother seemed to be right. His initial failings as a writer cut against all that was allegedly suggested to young Americans and the vision they were given of life; but, in those first attempts and rejections were also important lessons about the value of money, achievement, and perseverance. The struggle to support himself and his wife proved the harsh possibilities inherent in his nation's famed dream. As he explains to friend and fellow author George Albee in a letter from February of 1931, some two years after to the publication of his first novel, he learned that the relative value of money depends on a given situation:

This afternoon my parents will drive over to get us and take us to dinner [for John's birthday]. Dinner at Highlands or Del Monte. The check will be not less than thirty dollars, and I can't pay a dentist bill. There's something silly about it. I just don't know what it is, but it's crazy some way.⁷¹

Though a published author, Steinbeck still could not support his family and would not be able to until after the success of *Tortilla Flat* in 1935. In fact, in another letter to Albee later that year, he expresses that "money is not for us. . . . I have come to be a complete fatalist about money."⁷² Almost three years later and after the death of his mother, the author communicates a progression

of his views on financial stability and personal accomplishment, one that smacks in the face of the ideals of the country: "I don't want to possess anything, nor to be anything. I have no ambition because on inspection the ends of ambition achieved seem tiresome."⁷³ These difficult lessons in reality, like his early education in religion and the fantastic, deeply influenced not only his career but also the books he wrote. After *Tortilla Flat* provided some security, the author turned his attention to the tragic existence of the Okies in California that in turn, of course, resulted in his most critically-acclaimed and highly-praised novel. But the themes of internal struggle and humiliation, monetary freedom and restriction, and the American Dream and the grim opposite that was experienced by many returned in many of his works, *The Pearl*, *Cannery Row*, and *The Winter of Our Discontent* among them. In *East of Eden*, when he revisits the issues again, he utilizes an American Cain to relate the devastation and loss that is possible within the pursuit of the dream and its tenets.

V. Non-teleological Thinking, the Phalanx theory, and the American Cain

Beyond these early life experiences that affected and complicated the way he wrote and what he decided to write about, there were further and more theoretical ideals that influenced the career of the future Nobel Prize winner. John Steinbeck incorporated philosophies, moral, social, ontological, and otherwise, many of which originated from his interaction with one man: Ed Ricketts. In a letter written after his friend's death, the author sums up his relationship with the scientist: "There died the greatest man I have known and the best teacher. It is going to take a long time to reorganize my thinking and my planning without him."⁷⁴ The two main ideas that originated with his "teacher," non-teleological thinking and the phalanx theory, are significant

not only within his novels but also to the idea of the American Cain. The eventual proprietor of Pacific Biological Laboratory in Monterey, California and later the model for the infamous “Doc” of *Cannery Row* and *Sweet Thursday* fame, Ricketts served as confidant, collaborator, drinking buddy, and, most importantly, mentor for the novelist.⁷⁵ The two men joined forces on *Sea of Cortez*, published in 1940, part log of a specimen-collecting trip and part detailed, scientific catalog of items found. The biologist was, as Benson reports, “a serious thinker, a man who was not an academic, but who in ordinary life, day by day, considered questions of metaphysics, ethics, and epistemology.”⁷⁶ In that, as well as other ways, he was much like the author he befriended. These interests were mulled in the living space of the scientist’s laboratory during long conversations with Steinbeck and others, including Joseph Campbell, who would later become a famed professor of mythology and pen seminal texts such as *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. The ideas that these people shared, most of which originated with Ricketts, are intricately tied to certain works of the novelist. Their influence on Steinbeck is without question, but it is the development of these thoughts that is perhaps most interesting to a discussion of the second national archetype, the son of Lewis’ Adam.

The idea of non-teleological thinking, a theory that Ricketts developed from the ideas of one of his professors at the University of Chicago, W. C. Allee, was a perspective on life that took the Calvinist ideas of providence and removed the role of a deity.⁷⁷ The philosophy said that things happened purely because they happened. Benson explains that the idea is “thinking that eliminates man-centered concepts of the nature of reality.” He continues, summing up the academic’s views:

Man seems too determined to explain the world and events that take place in it on the basis of cause and effect. If he cannot see the cause, he is likely to turn to the

supernatural and invent one; if he can see the cause, he is likely to attribute human motives to it, or, if that is too difficult, interpret conditions or events totally in terms of human welfare. This kind of behavior obscures man's ability to see things as they are, to pursue "is" thinking, as Ricketts called it.⁷⁸

In other words, occurrences and events in life take place for no other reason than because nature works that way. In this system, "the question 'why' becomes irrelevant."

This philosophy affected Steinbeck throughout his career and is an ideal that he seems to have utilized directly at some points. In *In Dubious Battle*, for example, there is a hesitation to point a finger of accusation for wrongdoing towards any group, Communist or landowner. Though there is blame to be assigned, it would seem, for the corruption, rioting, and deaths, the novel merely depicts the situation without raising the question of why such events took place. On the other hand, non-teleological thinking seems to have been occasionally neglected by the author at times, such as is evident in Juan Chicoy's seemingly indifferent dismissal of his bus passengers, a decision he reverses when he ultimately returns to the "wayward bus" and works to remove the vehicle from the mud and the people from their stagnancy. Nonetheless, the idea that things just happened (the original title of *Of Mice and Men* was "Something that Happened"), allowed the novelist the freedom to create without restriction. The idea let the author simply put things down as they are and not be required to explain why. This idea characterizes much of the early work, from a good deal of *The Long Valley* through *Cannery Row*, all of which came after he had met Ed. During that period, when most critics would argue he was doing his best work, the writer was in regular contact with his friend. With the advent of the second world war and the novelist's move to New York, however, their relationship waned, marked by a significant rift over the production and script of *The Forgotten Village*, a film project that delayed the *Sea of*

Cortez trip.

Non-teleological thinking is significantly opposite to one tenet of the American Dream. The unofficial, national belief implies that citizens choose their own way and are responsible for achieving individual success with their hard work and applied efforts toward promised goals; the theory argues, however, that events simply take place despite any choices or intentions. As such, it is important to note that Steinbeck's use of and commitment to the philosophy wavered after his unceremonious rift with Ricketts. The author would maintain a respect and friendship with his friend, but their relationship was never to be as it was when both lived on the California coast. By the time the writer had begun the planning for *East of Eden*, where an American Cain emerges, the theory was no longer as influential, as his novels illustrate. The two works previous to his revised Cain and Abel story, *The Wayward Bus* and *The Pearl*, suggest that men and women are affected by the chance occurrences that take place as well as the decisions they make; interestingly, both books were published in 1947, after the falling out between the two friends and before *Eden*. Both Juan Chicoy and Kino experience despair and elation as a result of their desires, a situation antithetical to the randomness of "is" thinking that suggests that nothing happens for a reason or as a result of choices made. The hero of the novelette set in Mexico, though he does happen upon "the Pearl of the World," makes the decision to pursue its sale though tragic circumstances consistently occur as a result of his efforts.⁷⁹ Chicoy, who drives a bus of random passengers, eventually interacts with this particular assortment of characters. By chance, the bus becomes stuck in the mud, but the protagonist chooses to desert the strangers, consciously pursues an affair with Mildred Pritchard, and ultimately resolves to return and rescue the stranded vehicle; though non-teleology proposes that all things just happen and nothing has inherent meaning, Juan tells Mildred " 'I really mean everything.' "⁸⁰ The development of the

theory in Steinbeck's works as well as his movement away from that ideal illustrate another paradox and reflect the ideas of individual responsibility and opportunity that are intricately connected to the country as well as its second archetype.

In the same way, Steinbeck's "argument of phalanx," as he worded it, was influential on his writing, but it too adapted as he aged. Originally, the idea stated that devotedness to a group and the potential of that group's individual parts working together as a whole was greater than a single achievement of effort. As time passed, the author no longer committed himself to such an idea, instead emphasizing, in many instances, the individual alone and the responsibility and possibility inherent in that one being. This change, which does not discount the original theory, is simply a shift in emphasis from the whole to the lone human initially. The writer believed that any person could attain perfectibility, as he suggested in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, which once achieved could lead to a happier and more fulfilled whole.⁸¹ Judith Mulcahy describes his alteration this way:

At first he is the proponent of mutual responsibility, but as the years go by and the days of Ed Ricketts's lab become a memory – and as his experiences with real-life children change his theories – his native concern with individual responsibility becomes more prominent.⁸²

The adaptation is significant in that once it fully takes form, the writing changes ever so slightly; gone are the efforts of the mob as in *A Dubious Battle*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, or *Cannery Row*, instead replaced by the individual efforts of potentially admirable men and women like Jim Casy, Rosasharn, Juan Chicoy, or even Doc. As Mulcahy suggests, having children affected his viewpoint; his new ideas took shape during the end of the 1940s, when his two sons had grown to some age of accountability and the author had moved his family to New York City, far from

Ed Ricketts.

These years are otherwise arbitrary, except that they coincide with the beginnings of what was to become *East of Eden*, a book initially written for and to his sons about the issue of personal responsibility and the contention between original or inherited qualities. Just previous to starting the novel, Steinbeck had a firsthand view of the devastation and death caused by group-think and the evil of which humanity is capable. His time reporting on the second World War had a tremendous impact on the author, who labored for his country at home and eventually abroad.⁸³ During the war, his work on behalf of his homeland cut against the anti-American sentiments of which he had been accused after the publication of *The Grapes of Wrath*. In fact, during World War II, Steinbeck wrote to President Roosevelt numerous times and eventually met with him about suggestions for a propaganda campaign against Germany, one aspect of which included dropping counterfeit bills over Germany.⁸⁴ He spent a great deal of time in Europe and northern Africa as a war correspondent, and his columns, syndicated by New York's *Herald Tribune*, were reprinted throughout the United States.⁸⁵ By the time he returned from overseas he had seen the harsh realities of the war; in addition, his journalistic endeavors had separated him from his second wife, Gwyn, who was pregnant. His second son, John, was born in 1946 after he came home and *The Wayward Bus* was published in 1947. Success and happiness seemed at the doorstep. Within a year, there would be quite negative changes afoot in the novelist's life.

On May 11, 1948, Gwyn announced that she wanted a divorce, a decision she communicated on the day the author returned from Ed Ricketts' funeral after an unexpected, horrific accident took the life of the biologist. Benson interprets his state of mind:

Despite the appearance . . . of a man who is already beginning to make some

adjustment to what he called in an earlier letter “the ring-tailed, doublebarrelled impact” on him of these events, he was really a man cast adrift about to enter a long crisis of the soul. He had had such crises before, but never as severe as this one. Only a couple of weeks earlier he had been determined as a writer to pull himself up by his own bootstraps; now, that effort would have to wait while he tried to save himself.⁸⁶

The up and downs, the starts and stops, the hope and devastation seem to have finally caught up with him and even the typical, American reaction of “bootstrap-pulling,” a hallmark of the Adamic figure, could not provide any solace or future. Though he had theories to which he adhered, vague ideas of religion and philosophy, significant relationships, and many proofs of success, wealth, and fame, nothing seemed to offer reassurance or perspective. His circumstances suggested that the author had attained the fulfillment of the American Dream: freedom, opportunity, success, and a chance to pursue his original vision of life as a writer. And yet, his experience drove him to write years later in *America and Americans* that “on inspection, it is found that the dream has little to do with reality in American life.”⁸⁷ The potential of that Adamic ideal was undermined by the writer’s experience of loss.

Steinbeck, whose fear of popularity and publicity was monumental, now more than ever wanted to disappear, which he more or less did in the months after separating from Gwyn.⁸⁸ After they were divorced in 1948, it appears that Steinbeck began preparation for what he called “the first book”: *East of Eden*.⁸⁹ John Ditsky suggests that just before the author began the novel, he had become “along with a renewal of interest in his family’s history, . . . a Steinbeck ready to accommodate a vision of the self.”⁹⁰ The work was to be a “history” of the Hamiltons, his mother’s family, an account of the past written for his sons, John and Thom. But more than

just a depiction of the past, it appears to have been much more for the author. Later in the daily letters he wrote to Pat Covici during the writing of the novel, the author explained the centrality of his latest work within the spectrum of his life's efforts:

We will have to see whether the practicing through the years has prepared me for the writing of a book. For this is the book I have always wanted and have worked and prayed to be able to write. We shall see whether I am capable. Surely I feel humble in the face of this work.⁹¹

With critical and financial successes such as *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Cannery Row* behind him, the author embarked upon a project that left him in awe. Even the previous hesitancy to be photographed and interviewed that had marked much of his career left him by the time *East of Eden* began in his mind. After all, he includes the names of his own family as part of the novel, records events that took place in their history, and mentions a "John" as a character in the book who, in terms of relations and experiences, models the author himself.⁹² Balancing this personal inclusion against his aversion to fame and exposure, it is clear that the themes and ideals of the novel were far more important to Steinbeck than his earlier avoidance of his own life history and experience. In fact, the author even agreed to "an appearance in a motion picture" just before the book was released.⁹³

He had overcome early struggles and had incorporated the myriad influences of his life into his work, from the theories of Ed Ricketts to the mythology and religion of his family. From literary achievements to personal disappointments, the author had known the profound paradox that is possible in life. From all those experiences, Steinbeck felt sure that *East of Eden* would be "the best book [he had] ever done" but also his "most difficult."⁹⁴ In order to communicate the internal lessons and observations, which were originally intended for his sons, his family's

story, as well as his own, evidently had to be told. All his friends' philosophies, the family's influences, and the tragic and joyful moments he had experienced joined together as he set out to tell the story of not just two families, but "about the whole [Salinas] Valley which I am using as a microcosm of the whole nation."⁹⁵ In the end, he retells the Cain and Abel story of Genesis in the United States, placing it alongside the memories of his grandfather; thus, he utilizes an American Cain that not only reflects the characteristics of the Biblical antecedent but also, more importantly, exposes the paradox of the national dream.

VI. The Double-Sided Coin of *East of Eden*

What began as a collection of remembrances written specifically for his sons in the vein of family history, and which at one point included direct letters addressed to Thom and John, Jr., *East of Eden* eventually swelled to include two parallel tales that attempt to work together. Dual plotlines that ultimately interconnect coupled with an authorial narrator called John, who also appears as a character in the work, confused scholars. No such novel had appeared or perhaps, more accurately, had not been seen since the eighteenth century. Steinbeck includes seemingly unrelated stories about his maternal grandparents and his aunts and uncles that seem to have little to do with carrying the story-line forward and more to do with sharing memories with his boys. Most famously, the novel incorporates the tale of Olive Hamilton's "ride in an army airplane," spending almost four pages recording a seemingly unnecessary anecdote about the writer's mother.⁹⁶ Despite the apparent holes in the book, ultimately the structural element of two, somewhat balanced foci in *East of Eden* is reflective of not only the doubleness in the novel but of the author's stated intention. He tells Covici in *Journal of the Novel* that he "want[s] always

balances in this book” and “must have them”; the doubleness that results reflects his seemingly aggressive attempts at juxtaposing and intertwining the story of the Trasks and the Hamiltons.⁹⁷

The two cords are brought together with great difficulty, but, by the end of the novel, the themes and ideals expressed prove that both strains are necessary to one another. The paradox of man he identified, or the two-sidedness that the novelist recognized was inherent in himself and those around him, demanded that he reflect that natural, internal duality. As he wrote in *Journal*, “surely a man is a most treacherous animal full of his treasured contradictions. He may not admit it but he loves his paradoxes.”⁹⁸ His purpose for writing, as he told the reporters in the Soviet Union, was to criticize; however, that critique was necessary because he loved his country. *East of Eden* reveals both of those purposes, using an American Cain to achieve the effect.

The aspect of doubleness is immediately evident in the novel. Steinbeck’s description of the Salinas Valley and his attention to the history of that place immediately root the novel in the past, placing import with that which has come before. He begins with the land, a location that he knew all too well having grown up in that locale. Before introducing Adam, Cal, Aron, Samuel, and the rest of the Hamiltons, the author must first describe the area in which they live, a location that shares the duality of its inhabitants. The valley, like the book itself, is two-faced. The river is extremely wet in winter, sometimes “a destroyer,” and then very dry, when “the summer sun drove it underground” (3,4). Likewise the Galiban and Santa Lucia mountain ranges represent the day and the night, the east and the west (3). There is little consistent in the valley and the people are never sure, from one year to the next, exactly what the conditions will be.

The land, according to the author, is a double-edged sword, both a protector and a taker of life. As Benson expresses it, nature, or specifically the land of northern California that

Steinbeck knew so well and most often wrote about, was hardly reliable and rather duplicitous:

Steinbeck [brings] the American to the ultimate frontier, to a place almost incomprehensible to sensibilities formed in tamer surroundings. The Joseph Waynes, the Adam Trasks, the Joads hardly know whether they have found paradise or hell.⁹⁹

For Adam, the farm he believes can be “a garden,” his own Eden, proves to be just the opposite. The landscape is beautiful, full of potential, and awe-inspiring, but like man it is two-sided. The author himself admitted to feeling the negative potential of the valley: “ ‘I cannot place my hand on it,’ he stated. ‘I do not know why I feel this evilness, but it is here [in the Salinas Valley]—in the air, the trees and all about us.’ ”¹⁰⁰ Adam is wearied and defeated by a land that inspires such feelings of “evilness.” Though he expects abundance and growth from the land it ends up as a reminder of his failures, turning his dreams into emptiness.

From the initial descriptions of the dualistic valley, Steinbeck turns to the families, presenting the Hamiltons and Trasks in randomly alternating chapters for almost half of part one, the introductions themselves a bit of a balancing act. The families, their make-up, characteristics, and qualities are as opposite as the nature the narrator describes. The Hamiltons are Irish-Americans living in California on worthless land, a family of nine children headed by the “patriarch” Samuel, a man “big but delicate,” and the indefatigable Liza, “a tight hard little woman humorless as a chicken” (9). The Trasks, by contrast, are an established, farming family in Connecticut, dysfunctional by comparison, and comprised of the fake war-hero, Cyrus, his first and second wives who are barely mentioned, and his two sons, Adam and Charles, each born of a different mother. The combined mysticism and practicality of Steinbeck’s maternal grandparents answer the brutality and callousness of the northeasterners; the two units mirror the

dualism of nature and the developing plot of the book.

Before the infamous Cathy Ames appears, or Lee and the twins, the stage is set with two families, in some way doubles in the ultimate story he means to relate: a retelling of Cain and Abel in modern times and in America. It is a story of good and evil, another dichotomy, which is, according to the first chapter of the fourth part of *East of Eden*, the “one story in the world” (411). That “story” has “frightened and inspired” though it is not too complicated:

Humans are caught—in their lives, in their thoughts, in their hungers and ambitions, in their avarice and cruelty, and in their kindness and generosity too—in a net of good and evil. I think this is the only story we have and that it occurs on all levels of feeling and intelligence.

That idea, central to the novel, not only results in an appearance of the American Cain, but provides the structure for the entire work, the impetus for all the duplicitous action and reality. *East of Eden* provides, as he explains to Covici, an investigation of doubleness that echoes the terms and themes of the novel:

And so I will tell them [his sons] one of the greatest, perhaps the greatest story of all—the story of good and evil, of strength and weakness, of love and hate, of beauty and ugliness. I shall try to demonstrate to them how these doubles are inseparable—how neither can exist without the other and how out of their groupings creativeness is born.¹⁰¹

It is the same dichotomy that produces the American Cain and that reflects the paradox Steinbeck recognized in man.

VII. The Devil, Cain, and the American Cain

It is impossible to avoid the Cain and Abel story in *East of Eden*.¹⁰² Along with the “C” and “A” designations, the story of brothers in conflict, and the fact that the book was at one point entitled “Cain Sign,” the author includes the actual sixteen verses from Genesis within the novel. There was immediate recognition that this recitation posed problems, but the story was central to the ideas presented in the novel itself. Steinbeck writes Covici that

at the risk of being boring I’m going to put it [the Cain and Abel story] all in today. And it will only be boring to people who want to get on with the plot. The reader I want will find the whole book illuminated by the discussion: just as I am. And if this were just a discussion of Biblical lore, I would throw it out but it is not. It is using the Biblical story as a measure of ourselves.¹⁰³

The author writes that the tale of fratricide “illuminated” not just *East of Eden* but all of life: “What a strange story it is and how it haunts one. I have dreaded getting into this section because I knew what the complications were likely to be. . . . In other words this one story is the basis of all human neurosis.”¹⁰⁴ His usage of the model twice in the novel certainly proves his conviction that not only is the theme important but that it was prevalent, perhaps even rampant, in the world in which he lived.

For all the criticism surrounding the novel, there is little confusion about the roles that characters play and assume in *East of Eden* and no question that those assignments are connected to the Genesis account. Many of the players in the novel correspond to Biblical antecedents, most prevalently Adam, Eve, Cain, and Abel. To aid in the categorization of these “symbol people,” as he calls them, Steinbeck uses a less-than-cryptic system of naming, giving figures with Abel-like qualities names that begin with “A” and “C” names to those with more Cain-like

characteristics.¹⁰⁵ Thus, there are immediate designations that connect certain qualities with and assume particular things about a given character; as the author wrote to Covici, “there is a key and there are many leads” to the “symbol meanings” of each person in the book.¹⁰⁶ What works as an aid in designation, however, is also misleading to most critics. It is clear that the “C” and “A” names align people with a specific side, again creating a duality, but there is some misappropriation of the roles, assigning each individual to the absolutes of good and evil. Without question, there are gradations to these categories and it is in this approximating of levels that the distinctions between the “bad” side and the “good” side are made. For example, the “A” characters of Alice Trask, Adam Trask, and Aron Trask have unique levels of “goodness” in them. Alice is a simplistic, quiet wife of a tyrant who seeks to cause no stir but does provide a model of kindness for her step-son; Adam serves as both an Adamic and Abel-like figure, though he is anything but innocent; Aron’s meekness and mild demeanor draw people to him, but his perfectionism and intensity make him oddly antagonistic.

There are no character absolutes in the novel; in fact, though the players are easily designated into the categories that help define their qualities, most of them are resistant to the aspects of their “assigned” natures. Central to a discussion of the American Cain are the “C” characters of the book who are the most complex and those that are most often misinterpreted. There are three key figures with Cain-like qualities in the novel: Cathy, Charles, and Cal.¹⁰⁷ Cyrus, obviously a “C” as well, contains few if any characteristics of Adam’s son and, more significantly, acts as an all-powerful, unjust, and flawed deity to his sons, a veiled god-figure. The three main “Cains” of *East of Eden* are made explicit in the rendering of their physical appearance, their actions, and the reactions they elicit from those around them. Nevertheless, they are three very distinct entities and represent different purposes each of which are explored

in the book. Only one acts as an example of the national archetype while the others serve as comparatives.

Cathy Ames, or Kate, is no doubt connected with evil, an immediate hint that she is like Cain, who is, as Ricardo Quinones describes him, “the true progenitor and patron of evil in the world” and “the serious Christian exemplum of the continuity and enduringness of evil.” In one of the most famous lines from the novel, the narrator declares at the opening of the chapter in which Cathy first appears that “there are monsters born in the world to human parents,” no subtle hint that one such individual is about to be introduced (71). Later, once she has shot her husband and abandoned her children, she becomes a prostitute, a return to the first profession she knew. Her monstrosity will be questioned later, but Kate’s actions in the novel reinforce the idea of her initial depravity (182). The narrator observes that in her “some balance wheel was misweighted, some gear out of ratio. She was not like other people, never was from birth” (72). She is shown to be a manipulator, liar, and thief, as well as an oddly sexual being from an early age and the eventual murderer of her parents. Like Cain, she has a scar on her forehead, a mark she receives from the severe beating she takes from Mr. Edwards and that exists ever afterward; as she tells Adam, “the scar on my forehead isn’t going to go away, I’m afraid” (158). The narrator relates that “it looked like a huge thumbprint, even to whorls of wrinkled skin,” a mark of God perhaps.

As a taker of life, marked by some outside force, and wicked, she is easily aligned with the national archetype; she is also angry, untrusting, jealous, and covetous of attention for much of the novel. But, to limit Kate to merely an American version of Cain or simply an appropriation of the Biblical figure is misleading and ignores all the facts. Without question, Cathy is Cain-like, but she is much more; she more closely resembles a Satan figure, having serpentine and goatish characteristics and eerily controlling powers over those around her. After

Adam has confronted Kate at the whorehouse, he tells Lee that he ““can’t believe there is such a creature in the world”” (328). Lee’s response suggests her devilish quality: “ ‘The trouble with you Occidentals is that you don’t have devils to explain things with.’ ” Steinbeck, in *Journal*, calls her his “dear Cathy,” surely a tongue-in-cheek pet-name like those Ethan Hawley spouts to his wife Mary in *The Winter of Our Discontent*.¹⁰⁸ But it is in his daily letters that he also refers to her as almost inhuman, remarking that her “horror is her lack of human reaction. And also that you don’t know what she wants.”¹⁰⁹ Dr. Tilson, who examines her in California after she attempts to abort the twins, has a strong aversion to her (134). Samuel Hamilton reacts similarly when he first meets Mrs. Adam Trask: “He felt a tenseness coming over him that was something like the feeling he had just before the water wand pulled down, an awareness of something strange and strained” (171). The narrator describes her as having “a boy’s body, narrow-hipped, straight-legged, but her ankles were thin and straight without being slender. Her feet were small and round and stubby, with fat insteps almost like little hoofs” (72). One can almost imagine a pitchfork in her hand and little horns on her head. If any question remains, Jackson Benson recounts that the author told a friend that “ ‘ “Katie is a total representative of Satan.” ’ ”¹¹⁰

Beyond her appearance, which is certainly devilish, Cathy yields an astonishing power over her parents, classmates, teachers, and even Adam:

Even as a child she had some quality that made people look at her, then look away, then look back at her, troubled at something foreign. Something looked out of her eyes, and was never there when one looked again. She moved quietly and talked little, but could enter no room without causing everyone to turn toward her.

She made people uneasy but not so that they wanted to go away from her. Men and women wanted to inspect her, to be close to her, to try to find what caused the

disturbance so subtly. (72-73)

Her presence in the book and control over other characters signifies something far greater than a Cain figure or an American version of the same. As John Timmerman argues, Kate (the change of name that she chooses is surely significant, a loss of the “C”) is a standard of evil far beyond any hope of redemption: “She represents a dark force unleashed in the world, a dark principle in relation to which other characters must order their lives.”¹¹¹ Thus, it is clear that she is, like the meteorite found on Adam’s California property, a fallen angel, indeed the embodiment of Satan and the serpent in the California garden. Timmerman suggests that Cathy Ames Trask is the pivotal character, the plumb-line by which others are compared, another hint that she serves as a satanic figure or even as the Devil.¹¹² There is no statement to be made about the nation in the analysis of Kate; in fact, she a character that no one should model, unlike Cal and Charles who have their redeeming qualities. As whore, madam, murderer, temptress, pistol-wielder, and con artist she is the basest of all characters, some have argued, in all of literature.

Charles Trask, like Cathy, is not an American version of the archetype but by no means is another example of the devil; he is, at root, a definitive Cain figure modeled after the Genesis account. The original Trask brothers maintain a textbook Cain and Abel relationship, a fact made very clear in the details of the book. Early in the novel, the two are described as undeniable opposites, figures who mirror their Biblical counterparts in demeanor, appearance, and action. The older, yet milder sibling is Abel-like:

Young Adam was always an obedient child. Something in him shrank from violence, from contention, from the silent shrieking tensions that can rip at a house. He contributed to the quiet he wished for by offering no violence, no contention, and to do this he had to retire into secretness, since there is some

violence in everyone. (20)

Charles, on the other hand, though he was younger, “grew up with his father’s assertiveness” and “was a natural athlete, with instinctive timing and coordination and the competitor’s will to win over others.” He also assumes the role of farmer and remains one the rest of his life. Later, he receives his own scar; he tells Adam in a letter that it looked “ ‘like somebody marked me like a cow.’ ” The wound results from a battle with a boulder, a telling example of his pride and aggression (46). The narrator explains the marking further:

There was a long torn welt on his forehead from hairline to a point between his eyebrows. . . . When the wound did heal, it left a long and crinkled scar, and while most scar tissue is lighter than the surrounding skin, Charles’ scar turned dark brown. . . .

The wound had not worried Charles, but the scar did. It looked like a long fingermark laid on his forehead. (46)

The discoloration that results, almost as if by the hand of God, sets him apart, like Cathy’s own mark. His anger and murderousness, as well as an unaccepted gift, complete the characterization.

There are two scenes explicitly used to show the Cain and Abel relationship between the Trask brothers; the first is the attempted fratricide, an unrealized step towards a replaying of the Biblical events. Before the conflict takes places, Adam sees potential for the violence and recalls earlier instances of his brother’s fierce anger:

Rage came first and then a coldness, a possession; noncommittal eyes and a pleased smile and no voice at all, only a whisper. When that happened murder was on the way, but cool, deft murder, and hands that worked precisely,

delicately. (29)

Even without a murder, the scene is especially brutal, with Charles beating his sibling without remorse. He does not complete his act because Adam hides from him when he returns with an axe. Nonetheless, the hatred and “darkness” are apparent in this example of the “evil” Cain figure (30).

The other direct connection between the Biblical story and the novel is the event that serves as a catalyst for Charles’ attack. The birthday gift he has given to their father, a German knife that he worked to purchase, is discarded, and Adam’s gift of a mongrel pup is accepted, even cherished by Cyrus. Mirroring the gifts given by the Biblical antecedents of favored livestock and a rejected crop, the jealousy and forlornness that Charles experiences is enough to drive him to thoughts of murder; he repeatedly recalls the humiliation and pain of the unaccepted “offering.” In fact, in a letter to Adam written much later, Charles questions his identity in the memory of the gifts, since he has failed to kill his brother and thus has not fully assumed his role as a “C”:

I want to say—I want to say—I mean, I never understood—well, why our father did it. I mean, why didn’t he like that knife I bought for him on his birthday.

Why didn’t he? . . . Seems like to me there’s something not finished. Seems like when you half finished a job and can’t think what it was. Something didn’t get done. I shouldn’t be here. I ought to be wandering around the world instead of sitting here on a good farm looking for a wife. There is something wrong, like it didn’t get finished, like it happened too soon and left something out. It’s me should be where you are and you here. (36)

The letter communicates the confusion of both, the lack of understanding that each felt as a result

of the controlling effects of their father and the painful memories of their upbringing.¹¹³ There is a feeling that their roles are somehow reversed or that both somehow have taken on Cain-like characteristics as a result of Charles' failure to murder Adam.

As it happens, Adam is the one serving in the army wandering around the country, and Charles is farming, though the soldier-son contains a spirit "of nonviolence that causes him to act with conspicuous bravery, yet keeps him from actually doing injury to an enemy."¹¹⁴ Both are lonely and somewhat aimless, with the "A" character later drifting about the country in search of some purpose. Neither of them appears inherently evil after the moment of the attempted fratricide, but neither seems to have assumed a satisfactory role for himself either; it is the "something wrong" mentioned in the letter, and both brothers feel the inconsistency. Here again is the tendency of the novel to expose duality and the doubleness of man; either brother has the capacity for one role or the other, though their names, markings, and nature might suggest otherwise. But, finally, Charles does embody most of the clear, Cainian qualities and does not pursue any type of uniquely American goals. He does realize some form of success, but he is in no way consumed with the national dream. In fact, it appears that he makes no superfluous efforts to attain all that he has but rather simply does what needs to be done, almost Adamic in his work ethic and focus (82-83). His role as the evil brother allows the other "C" characters of the novel, by comparison, to assume additional roles beyond merely that of the world's first murderer, Cain.

Charles is not to be confused with Cathy or Cal. They are to be compared as a means of distinguishing one from another but clearly serve different purposes within the novel. Nevertheless, it is significant that Caleb Trask has a mother and an uncle, who perhaps is his father, both of whom serve as Cainian mentors. As a result, he ultimately is shown to have a

connection to the same Biblical antecedent, but he assumes the unique role of American Cain, embodying the characteristics of the Genesis model but displaying those qualities in his pursuit of the American Dream and the aspects that the ideal incorporates. Portraying uniquely national qualities that are adaptations or perversions of the foundational beliefs of the nation, he is an “Everyman” who represents the failure and suffering that can result when the opportunities prove empty or idealistic hopes are not realized. Unlike McTeague but like Rion Outlaw, *East of Eden* suggests that Caleb can be saved, redeemed from his Cainian ways; however, in the end, he is shown merely to be a paradox, a combination of good and evil that merely has the opportunity to rise above. The book centers clearly on the character the author saw as a representative of all people and someone with whom he feels some deep connection. In 1957, in a letter to his agent, Elizabeth Otis, and a friend, Chase Horton, Steinbeck wrote that

it is nearly always true that a novelist, perhaps unconsciously identifies himself with one chief or central character in his novel. Into this character he puts not only what he thinks he is but what he hopes to be. We can call this spokesman the self-character. You will find one in every one of my books and in the novels of everyone I can remember.¹¹⁵

In *East of Eden*, that “self-character” is Caleb Trask. As he wrote in *Journal of a Novel*, “Cal is my baby. He is the Everyman, the battle ground between good and evil, the most human of all, the sorry man.”¹¹⁶ His “baby” will assume the role of American Cain.

VIII. Steinbeck’s National Villain and Hero

Steinbeck’s interest in an “Everyman” was not restricted to Cal Trask. In the extensive

travels he took throughout his life, the novelist was fascinated by the different individuals that he met as well as the commonality he found in the citizens of different countries. Jackson Benson recounts the author's interest in the local cultures and populations in all his travels such as to North Africa and Europe during World War II or to the southern coast of England for research about the Arthur legend. In Paris after *East of Eden* was published in France, the biographer records one such instance of the writer conversing and laughing with autograph seekers and local "youngsters" at an outdoor charity event, stopping to speak with individuals and ask them questions about their lives.¹¹⁷ Judith Mulcahy suggests that his visits around the world and the corresponding writings he produced were grounded in "correcting false stereotypes of various nationalities" and reveal "an issue he finds endlessly fascinating: the idea that various national characters can be defined."¹¹⁸ Steinbeck's apparent love for his country and his interest in the paradox that exists within humanity naturally led him to investigate the idea of an everyman of the United States. Often, the representative "national characters" he created in his works were not the ones most people would look to as examples or models. They were, instead, the people who John Steinbeck knew and had known, often the unspectacular, the anti-heroic, the downtrodden, and the ordinary; but, as he explained early in his career, " 'the truth about a country can be learned only from its commonest people.' "¹¹⁹

The most ordinary figures in his fiction, such as Ma Joad, George Milton, Juan Chicoy, or Jody Tiflin, all act, in some ways, as representatives of the common person in the United States, though they each present different aspects of a typical man or woman. All unsettled physically or uncomfortable with their situation, seeking more from life but unable to attain it, and often emotional or even violent, these men and women are seekers of the American Dream; they are also all distraught by its elusiveness. From his later work, no one more represents the

nation's identity and its desires in the 1960s than Ethan Allen Hawley of *The Winter of Our Discontent*, a sort of stock New Englander with a wife and two children, an inherited failure, an unsatisfactory job, and dreams of a better life. Though he exudes a cynicism about the current state of things and projects indifference about the trappings of the typical pursuit of success, he is eventually drawn into the mix. With experiences perhaps characteristic of Lewis' Adams, these new, national heroes, or villains, instead have witnessed the realities and tragedies of life and are caught in the grind and struggle that was life for many of those reading about them; they are Everyman and Everywomen-type figures.

While *East of Eden* is not his first attempt to define such a national hero, it does reflect a new perspective. Steinbeck, who was in his forties when he began the novel, had already witnessed a great deal, had identified those things he felt were the central issues, and had called for change both openly and in his fiction. He was determined to begin what he said he had been working toward his entire life: a "history," as he called it, of his family and one that reflected his desire to speak truth. A statement of this type might be considered dubious after his creation of fiscally-successful novels and a number of works that honestly pointed the finger at questionable conditions and made a claim for internal improvements in his nation. But, his latest attempt was to retell his own story and reflect on his own experience from a place of infinite openness. In *Journal*, he speaks to his intention to write honestly, from his own perspective: "The kind of book I am writing—should contain everything that seems to me to be true. There are few enough true things in the world."¹²⁰ He famously noted that the novel was "the story of my county and the story of me."¹²¹ This stated focus was further intensified by the fact that he viewed the novel as the most important and most revealing of his life's work:

I seem to have been writing on this book forever. I guess the last is true. I have

been writing on this book all of my life. And throughout, you will find things that remind you of earlier work. That earlier work was practice for this, I am sure. And that is why I want this book to be good, because it is the first book. The rest was practice.¹²²

The build-up of his career, from the early struggles to the eventual successes of *Tortilla Flat* and then *Grapes* through the disappointment and tragedy of his life prior to *East of Eden*, makes his statement all the more profound.

For all his achievements and failures, the lessons he learned through his own American experience, he gleaned observations about his country and people in general that he knew he must share. He understood what later he declared in his Nobel Prize speech: “The ancient commission of the writer has not changed. He is charged with exposing our many grievous faults and failures, with dredging up to the light our dark and dangerous dreams for the purpose of improvement.”¹²³ With *East of Eden* he was prepared to do just that, to declare the paradox of the dream, the possibility that the opportunity could be missed or realized. To accomplish that “ancient commission” he utilized an American Cain, a dualistic, representative everyman who, though he embodies the negative qualities of the Biblical original, is likewise given the opportunity for a future; Cal Trask is that figure. He is a holistically rendered image of a duplicitous reality, containing inherent evil and violence but also a spirit of individuality and potential. He is equal parts villain and hero, the offspring of Adam who, affected by that ancestry, is a jealous individual, a taker-of-life, and an opportunist. He is a national archetype, a vehicle through which observations can be made about American life, the pursuit of the dream, and the reality of the promise of opportunity offered to the citizens of the country. Cal’s own pursuits and achievements reflect the foundational beliefs of the nation, but in the ultimate

failure of those attempts he becomes Cain-like.

When the novel reaches the second generation of Trask brothers, there is no escaping the account of the first murder as recorded in the fourth chapter of Genesis. The author clearly believes that the story provides some insight into their natures and the makeup of all people. As he wrote to his editor in *Journal*, “as I went into the story more deeply I began to realize that without this story—or rather a sense of it—psychiatrists would have nothing to do.” He adds that “if you take the fall along with it, you have the total of the psychic troubles that can happen to a human.”¹²⁴ Within the novel, Samuel Hamilton reads the entire story and then discusses the details at some length with Lee and Adam. There is a general agreement among the three that the details of the narrative provide important perspective on life, and their thoughts echo much of what Steinbeck wrote to Pat Covici:

“Two stories that have haunted us and followed us from the beginning,”

Samuel said.

“We carry them along with us like invisible tails—the story of original sin and the story of Cain and Abel. And I don’t understand either of them. I don’t understand them at all but I feel them.” (264)

Though the Irishman admits that the story of Cain and Abel baffles him, he nevertheless acknowledges that these haunting tales speak to his own existence and to the true experience of humanity: “ ‘Here we are—this oldest story. If it troubles us it must be that we find the trouble in ourselves’ ” (265). The Chinese servant concurs: “ ‘No story has power, nor will it last, unless we feel in ourselves that is it true and true of us. What a great burden of guilt men have!’ ” (266) The men’s conversation underscores the centrality of the fratricide and its underpinnings but also illustrates the weight that they feel in light of the implication that “ ‘We are Cain’s children’ ”

(268). In that statement there is a suggestion of the weight of original sin and the Biblical idea of God “visiting the iniquity of the father upon the children.”¹²⁵ These three men respect their plight in the wake of the personal injury, loss, failure, and racism that they have witnessed and experienced. Each has his individual stories of ancestors’ failures or limitations, those moments that have defined or influenced his life and the inherent burden he carries as an offspring of Cain.

Great frustration and sadness result from the reading, but the men return to their original purpose of naming the twins. This action of identification, always significant, takes on new meaning in light of the Genesis story they have just read. When the eldest member of the group suggests Cain and Abel as possible names, adopting the natural monikers as the offspring of their father, Adam quickly dismisses the idea. Hamilton asks,

“Have you thought of your own name?”

“Mine?”

“Of course. Your first born—Cain and Abel.”

Adam said, “Oh no. No, we can’t do that.”

“I know we can’t. That would be tempting whatever fate there is. But isn’t it odd that Cain is maybe the best-known name in the whole world and as far as I know only one man has ever borne it?”

Lee said, “Maybe that’s why the name has never changed its emphasis.” (264)

The two boys will not be named after the first brothers of the Bible in fear that they might recreate the Genesis account; no matter their names, they will indeed do just that. But, Lee’s comment is telling; should someone take on the name of Cain, the curse or “emphasis” might be “changed,” a possibility that the book investigates. Ultimately, when Adam decides upon Caleb, because the Biblical antecedent was a soldier but not a general, and Aron, a respelling of the

name of Moses' brother, the choice is made. For the author, the assignments of "C" and "A" follow the system already established in the novel. A second Trask assumes his role, embodying Cain-like tendencies early in life and fulfilling his place as the book progresses, though as an American Cain.

Caleb is quickly aligned with his Biblical antecedent. His "C" name, from the start, provides a clear designation for this Trask, though his characterization is more complex than Cathy or Charles. His dissimilarity from his brother, a picture of innocence and frailty, and his overall, negative quality is obvious from an early age. When Samuel comes to see the twins after an absence of some months, Lee tells him that "Cal is sharp and dark and watchful" unlike his brother who is inherently likeable (292). As he gets older the verdict is the same: "He grew tall and rangy, and always there was a darkness about him" (439). This less than subtle assignment stamps Caleb for the path marked out by his uncle and mother, one of depravity and vengefulness. He chooses farming, Cain's profession, and takes pleasure in torturing his brother, and others such as Abra, through psychological and emotional means. He exhibits anger, resentment, and most markedly, jealousy, all in the vein of the original in Genesis. As a teenager he wanders the town aimlessly, reflecting a Cainian isolation as well as serving as a veiled reference to the condition to which Cain is reduced after being confronted over the murder of his brother. Beyond simple characteristics, there are two instances that clearly connect the antecedent and the version of the figure within the novel, both of which are presented first in the relationship between Adam and Charles.

The first, direct event that connects the novel and the Genesis account is Cal's jealousy of his brother and the "gift" that Aron gives to his father, a modeling of the sacrifices that Cain and Abel bring to God and the resulting envy and anger. Adam's rejection of Caleb's offering leads

to anger that drives Cal to disclose Kate's identity to his brother and ultimately ends in Aron's death. The Abel-like Trask, who has spent his short life in confusion about his vocation, relationships, and future, eventually pursues a college education at Stanford and has just completed his first semester when his introduction to his mother incites him to join the military. His father, like everyone, has taken great pride in his likeable and seemingly invincible son, whose lightness and innocence have defined him. On the contrary, Adam's relationship with his "dark" son is unintentionally conflictive, a fact that drives Cal to seek a way to please his father. Even before he gives his father the offering of fifteen thousand dollars, he realizes that he is jealous of his twin:

He covered his eyes with his hands and he said, "It's just jealousy. I'm jealous. That's what I am. I'm jealous. I don't want to be jealous." And he repeated over and over, "Jealous—jealous—jealous," as though bringing it out into the open might destroy it. (535)

But his initial emotions cannot dissuade him from presenting the gift, and when his father rejects it, Caleb reacts in Cainian ways; his father asks for a gift like that which Aron has seemingly given rather effortlessly. Adam tells Cal that

"I would have been so happy if you could have given me—well, what your brother has—pride in the thing he's doing, gladness in his progress. Money, even clean money, doesn't stack up with that." His eyes widened a little and he said, "Have I made you angry, son? Don't be angry. If you want to give me a present—give me a good life. That would be something I could value." (541)

Adam's words are harsh enough to drive his son to unintentional fratricide, as his hard work and dream have been discounted in comparison to his brother's apparently effortless studies, which

he eventually quits.

The second, related event is the resulting murder of one brother by the other. While Caleb does not physically take Aron's life, the death results from one sibling's direct actions. In his blind jealousy and blazing anger, he takes his twin to see their mother, which drives the fairer Trask to join the army where he is killed. Initially Cal has no feelings of guilt, instead replaying the original plot by appropriating Cain's now-famous statement:

Adam asked, "Do you know where your brother is?"

"No, I don't," said Cal.

"Weren't you with him at all?"

"No."

"He hasn't been home for two nights. Where is he?"

"How do I know?" said Cal. "Am I supposed to look after him." (562)

He does not see himself as his brother's keeper. Eventually, the "C" figure recognizes what he has done and even feels remorse; he has committed fratricide, however unintentionally. Later, he admits what he has done:

"I did it," Cal cried. "I'm responsible for Aron's death and for your [Adam's] sickness. I took him to Kate's. I showed him his mother. That's why he went away. I don't want to do bad things—but I do them." (593-94)

Whatever the reasoning, it is his actions that have driven Aron to his death, and he eventually realizes that he must come to terms with the events he has set in motion. He, like his antecedent, has taken the life of his sibling, no matter his motivations or regret.

This second piece of the Cain and Abel story reflects the tale of Charles and Adam and fully aligns Caleb with Cain. But Cal's Cain-ness, unlike his uncle's, is developed and defined

in American terms, making him an archetype who represents an alternative to the opportunity for a better life suggested by the dream of the nation. Caleb, like his fellow countrymen, is living in pursuit of the national concept that is both general in its definition but also unique, in certain ways, to him; he seeks economic success and future opportunity that he believes will earn his father's favor. His Cainian traits emerge when his attempts to realize the promises he seeks are deferred or finally dashed. Though the young Trask embodies some unique elements of the nation's ideal, all his pursuits are informed by the foundational beliefs of the United States. His search for financial success, for community, and for individual choice all lead him to impressive gestures that ultimately have tragic ends. His motivations are respectable in most cases, but his execution is flawed because the opportunities provided are also potentially fraught with complications, temptations, and suffering. Caleb, an American Cain, is a paradoxical character of equal parts national hero and villain, pursuing qualities that relate to the spirit and possibility of America but simultaneously embodying evil qualities like jealousy, anger, and vengeance when those things he desires are not attained.

The first American trait that marks Cal is his pursuit of financial security and his capitalistic spirit, a seemingly innocuous interest that is naturally related to a national obsession with the promise of a better life realized through wealth and prosperity. In Caleb, an interest in economic success is evident from a young age. As a child, he is excited about the possibility of farming an acre on the farm, an act of production that not even his father has accomplished (297). Later, when the California Trasks learn of Charles' death, his reaction is not emotional, but fiscal:

Cal asked, "Was he rich?"

"Of course not," said Adam. "Where'd you get that idea?"

“Well, if he was rich we’d get it, wouldn’t we?”

Adam said sternly, “At a time of death it isn’t a nice thing to talk about money. We’re sad because he died.”

“How can I be sad?” said Cal. “I never even saw him.” (389)

Still later, when he discusses his future with Adam, he determines that he “could make money on the ranch,” enough to send Aron to college (454). That need leads him to his grand business venture with über-capitalist Will Hamilton, who is described in the book as a person who “could not help making [money]” and who views his new partner almost as family: “Will understood him, felt him, sensed him, recognized him. This was the son he should have had, or the brother, or the father” (39, 476).

At this point, however, Cal’s interest in making money becomes coupled with his desire for his father’s approval; that connection, a corruption of the original spirit of the national interest in business and wealth, reveals his role as an American Cain. No longer does the money represent hard work or mere success, but rather it is a means of buying his father’s love, a fact that he himself accepts when Will exposes the truth (535-36). The idea of financial security or comfort is no longer Caleb’s motivation; instead, his business venture is a sign of his pride and the means to earn approval. When Aron suddenly decides to become a farmer, his brother shows that his agricultural work has instead become a means to an end:

Cal said, “There’s no money in farming.”

“I don’t want much money. Just to get along.”

“That’s not good enough for me,” said Cal. “I want a lot of money and I’m going to get it too.” (533)

That arrogance makes his gift to his father of fifteen thousand and the subsequent disapproval of

such an offering all the more revealing and tragic. What began as a harmless desire to produce, to realize the national dream, has led to, in the American Cain, a twisted pursuit of wealth in the name of earning the love of a father.

Like the Biblical antecedent, Caleb is proud of his crop, the fruit of his labors, and he cannot understand when Adam deems that gift unacceptable or undesirable. The resulting anger and actions that end in the death of his brother expose a far greater problem: the potential for such goals to be corrupted. The novel, in no uncertain terms, communicates a very different perspective about the country's unofficial belief that success and prosperity bring a better life. As suggested in one of the narratorial inter-chapters, the pursuit of affluence leads to unhappiness and disappointment as often as the fulfillment that is promised:

And in our time, when a man dies—if he has had wealth and influence and power and all the vestments that arouse envy; and after the living take stock of the dead man's property and his eminence and works and monuments—the question is still there: Was his life good or was it evil? (412)

The argument continues, as the narrator recounts the lives of two men who were rich and successful. One, “the richest man of the century, had “clawed his way to wealth through the souls and bodies and men.” The second, who was “smart as Satan,” lacked “some perception of human dignity” and “used his special knowledge to warp men, to buy men, to bribe and threaten and seduce until he found himself in a position of great power.” At the time of one of their deaths, the book relates that, “the nation rang with praise and, just beneath, with gladness that he was dead”; at news of the other's passing, many people said “ ‘Thank God that son of a bitch is dead.’ ” The possible selfishness of the country and its citizens, as well as the idea that prosperity and goodness are incongruous, are evident in Cal, an American version of the Cain

figure. The novel reveals that the duplicity in humanity creates the possibility that the national concepts held in such high esteem have equal potential to end in evil as in good.

Beyond the pride and need for approval that become associated with the pursuit of wealth, Cal also seeks fraternity, one of the foundations of the nation. That desire for brotherhood, however, leaves the American Cain feeling isolated; he only finds some measure of connection with others after the fratricide has occurred. Like the Biblical model, Cal is initially desirous of interpersonal relationships. Despite the aloofness that he eventually projects, the narrator explains that he “craved warmth and affection just as everyone does” (440). Just as Cain pursues relationship and approval from God and his family, as seen in his distress over the final punishment of exile, the American version also seeks acceptance and interaction with family and friends. He loves his father and brother at times and wants the physical as well as emotional connection that is often natural between familial relations. The narrator relates one such step that Cal takes to experience that type of interaction:

When he was quite small Cal had discovered a secret. If he moved very quietly to where his father was sitting and if he leaned very lightly against his father’s knee, Adam’s hand would rise automatically and his fingers would caress Cal’s shoulder. . . . [T]he caress brought such a raging flood of emotion to the boy that he saved this special joy and used it only when he needed it. (440-41)

Caleb’s desire for some form of connection, even an automatous gesture, is not limited to his father or even his brother, for whom he “felt a deep love” at times (371). He also longs for a relationship with Abra, who he admits to himself belongs to Aron, and Lee, who he both respects and fears (371). Despite his desires, however, he remains in isolation, some of his own creation and some a result of the idiosyncrasies of his family.

Though Caleb wants connection, his tendency from quite a young age is to be alone, a state that results at least in part from his “darkness,” as the narrator calls it, which made him at times unapproachable (439). Like his mother, he has a quality that intrigues people but that simultaneously pushes people away: “No one liked Cal very much and yet everyone was touched with fear of him and through fear with respect” (419). Competing with Aron’s natural charm and charisma proves impossible and he eventually builds “a wall of self-sufficiency around himself, strong enough to defend himself against the world.” Once the Trasks move away from the farm, the facts remain the same:

Things do not change with a change of scene. In Salinas, Cal had no more friends than he had in King City. Associates he had, and authority and some admiration, but friends he did not have. He lived alone and walked alone. (441)

As he ages, his propensity for a state of isolation advances to the point that he often wanders the streets late at night (441). He initially pursues his business venture alone and only takes a partner, Will Hamilton, who shares his desire for success and has the means to help him achieve his goal. That relationship, which for Will feels in some way familial, appears to be purely business to Cal.

The American Cain, as a result of the potential failure that exists within the national dream and beliefs, reacts in jealousy, anger, and violence when he cannot have the interpersonal connections he desires. His father’s rejection of his gift destroys him, particularly since that gift was to be a sign of their relationship or connection. When he grasps the level of estrangement between him and his brother, Abra, the town of Salinas, and finally his father, Cal exposes the truth about Cathy Trask to Aron. As Lee explains early in the novel, “the greatest terror a child can have is that he is not loved, and rejection is the hell he fears”; Caleb feels just that. And, as

the servant explains, those initial feelings lead to much more:

I think everyone in the world to a large or small extent has felt rejection. And with rejection comes anger, and with anger comes some kind of crime in revenge for the rejection, and with the crime guilt—and there is the story of mankind. I think that if rejection could be amputated, the human would not be what he is. Maybe there would be fewer crazy people. (268)

Lee's diagnosis implicates everyone including Cal but also shows the young man's further connection with Cain; it is, in fact, the reading of the fourth chapter of Genesis that prompts this brief soliloquy. Caleb's failure to satisfy his intense want of fraternity leads him to react in Cainian ways.

Interestingly, it is only after news of Aron's death that the American Cain finds some semblance of the connections he desires, a hint that some means of restoration is possible. No longer in competition with his seemingly perfect brother, Cal is able to establish a relationship with Abra, a tie that appears to have a future at the end of the novel. No matter the interpretation of the scene of Adam's death, some manner of blessing occurs between father and son in the strained cry of "*Timshel!*" (601). Like the Biblical figure before him, Cal has reformed or initiated interconnectedness after his apparent exile. It is after moving "east of Eden" that Cain has his first child, Enoch, and then builds the first city, which he names in honor of his son.¹²⁶ Caleb Trask has sought relationship with family and friends and is rejected by each of them in different ways; however, he is able to create his own existence once the fratricide has occurred. It is the national promise of fraternity, a very natural, human desire, that Cal recognizes and needs; it is the failure of that pursuit that leads him to react in anger and envy, leading to Aron's death.

Lastly, and most importantly, Caleb assumes the role of the national Cain through his pursuit of individuality and as a result of the choice that he faces concerning who he will become. The American Dream is perhaps most characterized by the freedom that it provides; represented by Lewis' Adam, the national ideal implies that anything is possible no matter a person's starting point, history, or resources. In the Cain of the United States, liberty, that most fundamental of elements, does serve as a means of opportunity and promise, but ultimately it leads to confusion, anger, and the realization that the past can truly thwart future endeavors. The past, as Emerson suggested, was to be put aside and forgotten. Indeed, Cal's accomplishments are not limited by the fact that he is the son of an unsuccessful farmer, a failed businessman, and a mother who abandoned the family to become a prostitute. His economic endeavors, no matter their motivation, still portray the Adamic spirit. Yet, despite his industriousness and energy, he remains trapped between his father's aloofness and simplicity and the depraved existence of Kate. This complicated ancestry, which includes the possibility that his uncle Charles is actually his father and the fact that he is raised primarily by the family's Chinese servant, Lee, suggests an unsettled life that is full of paradox. He is never purely the evil of his mother nor the indifference of his father. He need not pursue the failed agriculture of Adam, but he also does not follow in the questionable ventures of Kate. Instead, he appears to have the freedom, like any American, to decide what direction he will take in the future. Unfortunately, Caleb, just as Cain learned, cannot escape his past nor use that freedom to become an individual apart from the ancestry that claims him; his history and humanity do in fact lead him to assume the role of American Cain.

The powers at work in the young Trask are diametrically opposed; they mirror the doubleness at work in the novel and present the paradox within humanity that the novel portrays.

There is the suggestion that he has a choice about what he will become; and yet, though he embodies characteristics of both his parents, he is a “C” character, aligned with Cain or the evil side. He is indeed like his mother in many ways; even as a boy, he recognizes the potential power he has over people, including his family:

Cal saw the confusion and helplessness on Aron’s face and felt his power, and it made him glad. He could outthink and outplan his brother. . . . Aron here, looking helplessly at him, was a lump of soft mud in his hands. (371)

He is free to use that influence to affect the actions of his father and specifically his brother. Once Cal learns about his mother and her life, the truth was “another implement, another secret tool, to use for any purpose he needed” against his brother (335). Unpleasant, at least in comparison to Aron, insolent, hard-hearted, and controlling, Cal appears to be the spitting image of Cathy Trask.

Once he discovers the truth about his mother, however, he seeks freedom from that past and attempts to reject, in his own life, the mistakes Kate had made and the suffering that she had caused. Eventually, he wants to believe he has a choice about how that ancestry will affect him, but he is at first resolved that there is no decision to be made. When he first learns of his mother’s choice to abandon the family, he tells Lee that he hates Cathy: “ ‘It’s like you said about knowing people. I hate her because I know why she went away. I know—because I’ve got her in me.’ ” But, Lee reminds him Kate is only one part of him:

“You’ve got the other too. Listen to me! You wouldn’t even be wondering if you didn’t have it. Don’t you dare take the lazy way. It’s too easy to excuse yourself because of your ancestry. . . . Whatever you do, it will be you who does it—not your mother.” (445)

That bit of advice provides Caleb with his first opportunity to free himself from his “ancestry” and he acts on that chance when he confronts Kate just days later, telling her,

“I was afraid I had you in me.”

“You have,” said Kate.

“No I haven’t. I’m my own. I don’t have to be you.”

“How do you know that?” she demanded.

“I just know. It just came to me whole. If I’m mean, it’s my own mean.” (462)

Though he still recognizes his own potential for “mean,” he demands that those feelings and actions are uniquely his, providing him the freedom, possibly, to rise above the innate evilness of his mother.

Caleb, once he recognizes the potential to put aside the monstrous side of his genes, works harder to earn the approval of his father and to provide for his brother. That concern for his brother has always existed, but the internal paradox of Caleb has always warred between provocation and protection. When Cal first realizes the influence he can have over his brother, he understands also that Aron is weaker and feels “an impulse to protect him in his weakness” (371). But just as often, however, he gives in to the tendency to belittle his brother. He originally disrupts Aron’s relationship with Abra by making the girl distrust his brother’s rather charming offer of a gift (346-47). That internal conflict within him, the struggle between good and evil, is an eternal battle, a conflict that the narrator acknowledges as the “only story” that is merely replayed over and over: “Humans are caught—in their lives, in their thoughts, in their hungers and ambitions, in their avarice and cruelty, and in their kindness and generosity too—in a net of good and evil” (411). That duplicity provides the ultimate choice for Cal to make. In the end, following in the footsteps of the Biblical model, he does not choose good, even though,

as an American, he had the freedom to do so. Cal's final rejection of his mother and his apparent movement away from her path of life is not necessarily a sign of his redemption or a hopeful future but a part of his assumption of the role of American Cain, different from the fully depraved "monster" that birthed him. He has the choice as to what he will become. In the end, when his gift is not accepted by his father and he in turn takes Aron to see Kate, Cal has decided to follow the path, at least for the moment, of Cain. Ultimately, that decision leads to the greatest sacrifice, the life of his brother, and Caleb must deal with the guilt that results from his choice. The makeup of the American Dream, whether financial pursuits, interpersonal connections, or freedom, proves to be, in the case of the Cain of the United States, anything but promising and productive. The choice was there to be made, but in the end, Cal is not able to overcome the depravity within himself.

IX. The Great Paradox of *Timshel*

Though an American Cain who represents the potential failure of the dream and the systems that produce such an idea, Cal is offered the chance for redemption. Unlike his predecessors, Judge Pyncheon, McTeague, or Rion Outlaw, Caleb receives a second chance. The elements of the country's overarching concept have proven destructive in the second archetype, but in *East of Eden*, even he is provided with one additional opportunity for a better life, or in the least, some sense of forgiveness and a future. That suggestion of renewal and reinstatement comes in the final scene of the novel and is captured in just one word, a term that perplexed Steinbeck during the writing of the book. The key phrase is in verse seven of the Genesis account, when God tells Cain that he must "master" his sin. The author found a version

that translated “master” as “*timshel*,” or “thou mayest,” which he believed was “the offering of free will” and the suggestion of “individual responsibility and the invention of conscience.”¹²⁷ Perhaps the most American ideal in the novel and the one that, as the novelist hints, reinforces the centrality of choice and individualism, “*timshel*” is a Hebrew word that plays an important role in the Cain and Abel story and proves a significant detail.

The word is first discussed, at length, by Samuel Hamilton and Lee after the Irishman has told Adam that Cathy has become a whore in Salinas. Lee relates his consternation over one particular aspect of the chapter in Genesis. He explains that in the King James version, God promises Cain that he “would conquer sin” if he so desires but that in the American Standard Bible the same verse presents “not a promise” but “an order” to avoid wrongdoing (300). That discrepancy leads him to seek out the correct interpretation; after lessons in Hebrew, dialogue with Chinese wise men, and a two-year search, the word *timshel* is finally determined to mean “‘*Thou mayest.*’ ‘Thou mayest rule over sin’ ” (301). That determination is, to Lee, profound:

The Hebrew word, the word *timshel*—“Thou mayest”—that gives a choice. It might be the most important word in the world. That says the way is open. That throws it right back on a man. For if “Thou mayest”—it is also true that “Thou mayest not.” . . . Why, that makes a man great, that gives him stature with the gods, for in his weakness and his filth and his murder of his brother he has still the great choice. He can choose his course and fight it through and win. (301-02)

Lee’s determination, in light of the emphasis that the Cain and Abel story bears in the novel, is an integral concept. The suggestion that people have the choice as to their fate, behavior, and attitudes gives them power; it is a humanistic emboldening that Samuel recognizes as well:

“ ‘Thou mayest rule over sin,’ Lee. That’s it. . . . “*Thou mayest, Thou mayest!*”

What glory! It is true that we are weak and sick and quarrelsome, but if that is all we ever were, we would, millenniums ago, have disappeared from the face of the earth. . . . But the choice, Lee, the choice of winning!’ ” (306-07)

The meaning of *timshel* and its place in the Genesis account is an idea that remains significant. The power of choice that the word implies for all humanity is a recurring theme and one that assumes an additional importance since the essence of the concept is a foundational American belief as well.

The possibility, “thou mayest,” and the connected freedom that such an idea suggests, returns throughout the novel; the characters discuss its meaning and implications at numerous points. Immediately following the discussion between Samuel and Lee, Adam confronts Kate and after the interaction declares his own freedom (326-27). Subsequently, the Trask servant requests his release from service to the family as well, though he returns quite quickly (329-30). When Adam is appointed to the draft board and must decide who will or will not be sent to Europe to fight, he takes some comfort in the belief that choice brings loneliness but also freedom (519-20). Most significantly, it is virtually the final word of the novel, a closing thought. With Adam on his deathbed after learning of Aron’s demise, Cal chooses to tell his father the truth: “I killed my brother. I am a murderer” (595). Lee intervenes and calls for Adam to forgive his remaining son, a request from which Cal shies. The father’s “blessing” comes in the form of possibility, the wearily “whispered word” of “*Timshel!*” (601). Without question, Adam has offered his remaining son some form of forgiveness, as coaxed out by Lee.¹²⁸ The potential to rise above sin and recast himself provides Caleb with the chance at redemption.

In the end, however, even that moment of restoration cannot fully redeem Cal. Adam, the bearer of the blessing, has expressed some sense of fatalism again and again; even with that

choice, the dye has been cast. Early in the book, he tells Samuel and Lee that Cain “ ‘is our father.’ ” He continues:

Some of our guilt is absorbed in our ancestry. What chance did we have? We are the children of our father. It means we aren't the first. It's an excuse, and there aren't enough excuses in the world.' ” (267)

Later, he tells Cal that he too suffers the effects of being forced into a certain role, unable to choose his path: “ ‘My father made a mold and forced me into it,’ Adam said. ‘I was a bad casting but I couldn't be remelted. Nobody can be remelted. And so I remained a bad casting’ ” (450). He does not believe that any person can overcome the “mold” into which he or she has been placed. Adam's declaration of “*Timshel*,” spoken to Cal on the elder's deathbed, is indeed a form of forgiveness, a blessing that both the father and son need to experience; however, the weakly intoned pronouncement does not simply provide Caleb with the freedom he needs to continue his life as he always has.

If the entire novel as well as the paradoxical view of man that the author held is taken into consideration, Trask's statement reminds all those present at his death that there is the possibility of power over sin: “Thou mayest” indeed but thou may not also. And, for all that the Cain-like brother has done in the novel, though he struggles through guilt and suffering, there is every indication that the novelist hints that he will continue in the path set before him. His actions have led to the death of Aron, and Adam, on his deathbed, is almost forced to offer forgiveness to his son. Eventually, Caleb is forgiven the indirect murder of his brother; he is marked with the tragedy and is psychologically cast out from society. Nevertheless, it seems that in Cal's pursuit of the country's dream, sin “mayest” rule over him. As John Ditsky expresses, “Cain is, as Steinbeck knew, true man, for the itch to better is upon him—and leads him to sin as

well as to glory.” Caleb, like his antecedent, reflects that reality; there is a final statement about the possibility of failure in that belief and the paradox that exists. The national concept is that nothing can stop or limit potential. *East of Eden* and its American Cain expose the holes in that theory, showing that there is chance for failure, for destruction, and for struggle as well as for success and a better life.

In November of 1951, the month *East of Eden* was published, Steinbeck wrote to Bo Beskow about “ ‘the book,’ ” which he called “a definite milestone.” His feeling of achievement, though, is only a part of the statement he had to make. The author suggests that he had told only half of his story:

Always I had this book waiting to be written. But understand please that this is only half the book. There will be another one equally long. This one runs from 1863 to 1918. The next will take the time from 1918 to the present. But I won't start it for a year or perhaps two years.” (431)

If, as some critics have suggested, *The Winter of Our Discontent* is the other half of the story, there is every indication that the son is not redeemed, the choice for good is not made. Given Steinbeck's view of society and his country by the time *Winter* was written, the later book illustrates that the citizens he witnessed, though given the chance, have not changed. He writes Pat Covici in July, 1961 that “the nation has become a discontented land. . . . The thing I have described is really there. I did not create it. It's very well for me to write jokes and anecdotes but the haunting decay is there under it.”¹²⁹ The state of the nation, “discontented” and “decay[ing]” according to the author, reveals his continued dissatisfaction with his country's plight, and by implication, its dream as well. Those elements of the national belief that he had exposed in *East of Eden* are still prevalent in *Winter*. The citizenry is still as selfish, disgruntled,

sardonic, opportunistic, and dissatisfied as they are fulfilled; the novelist describes the culture of 1952 and 1961 in the same way as that of 1929 in *Grapes*, 1947 in *The Wayward Bus* or 1966 in *America and Americans*. The issues are identical, the potential for failure as real whether the people are east of Eden, in the pastures of heaven, in the cotton fields of California, or on the back roads of the nation.

In the end, John Steinbeck's American Cain is a paradox. He is equal parts Kate and Adam, or Cain and Abel, and though he is given the choice to reject his ancestry, in the end, he cannot. He does find some mode of forgiveness, some possibility of a future, but the evidence suggests that there will be no change. Though he initially reflects the dualism of the families and the plots of *East of Eden*, Cal's nature, in the end, is finally exposed. He is a "C" character who cannot escape the model that was set before him. Even his purely national endeavors cannot redeem him; as an example of the second archetype, his pursuit of the ideology of the United States cannot remove him from the effects of a fallen ancestry and the evil within him that instead drive him to Cainian attitudes and actions. The young Trask embodies the characteristics of the Biblical antecedent and reenacts the original figure's actions, most notably the murder of his brother, in his efforts to attain his desires and realize the opportunity suggested by the dream of the country.

Notes

¹ Morris Dickstein, "Steinbeck and the Great Depression," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 103, No. 1 (2004): 12.

² Susan Shillinglaw and Jackson J. Benson, introduction, John Steinbeck, *America and Americans and Selected Nonfiction* (New York: Penguin, 2003), ix.

³ Steinbeck, *Journal of a Novel: The East of Eden Letters* (New York: Penguin, 1990), 26.

⁴ Steinbeck, *Journal*, 117.

⁵ Jackson J. Benson, *The True Adventures of John Steinbeck, Writer* (New York: Viking, 1984), 731.

⁶ Benson, 732.

⁷ Steinbeck, "A Postscript from Steinbeck," *Steinbeck and His Critics*, ed. E. W. Tedlock and C. V. Wicker (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1957), 307.

⁸ Benson, ix-x.

⁹ Thom Steinbeck, "My Father, John Steinbeck," *John Steinbeck: A Centennial Tribute*, ed. Stephen K. George (Westport: Praeger, 2002), 8.

¹⁰ Steinbeck, *America and Americans*, 400.

¹¹ Kenneth Swan, "In Search of America," *Steinbeck's Prophetic Vision of America*, ed. Tetsumaro Hayashi and Kenneth Swan (Upland: Taylor University Press, 1976), 13.

¹² Tetsumaro Hayashi and Kenneth Swan, preface, *Steinbeck's Prophetic Vision of America* (Upland: Taylor University Press, 1976), 2.

¹³ John Steinbeck, [Letter to Pat Covici, January 16, 1939], *Steinbeck: A Life in Letters*, ed. Elaine Steinbeck and Robert Wallsten (New York: Penguin, 1975), 178.

¹⁴ Benson records the process of Steinbeck's extensive research of the migrant camps in southern California as well as the author's direct use of actual events, circumstances, and language that he witnessed (334-46).

¹⁵ F. W. Watt, *John Steinbeck* (New York: Grove Press, 1962), 1-2.

¹⁶ Joseph Fontenrose, *John Steinbeck: An Introduction and Interpretation* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1963), 29.

¹⁷ See Benson, 858, 872.

¹⁸ As Benson reports in his biography, even the American politicians spoke out against the novelist and assigned him particular associations after *Grapes*:

Few novelists have been the recipient of so much personally directed hatred, and of all novelists, he was probably the least able to shrug his shoulders and let the venom run off his back. A variety of epithets were applied to him, describing his character, motives, and ancestry, but the most common were "liar" and "communist." Typical were the comments made in Congress by Representative Lyle Boren: "I say to you, and to every honest, square-minded reader in America, that the painting Steinbeck made in his book is a lie, a black, infernal creation of a twisted, distorted mind." (418-19)

¹⁹ Benson, 425, 441, 449.

²⁰ Benson, 932.

²¹ Steinbeck, *America and Americans*, 338.

²² Steinbeck, [Letter to Pat Covici, July, 1961], Steinbeck and Wallsten, eds., 703.

²³ Frederic I. Carpenter, "John Steinbeck: American Dreamer," *Southwest Review*, 26 (1941): 454.

²⁴ Swan, "In Search of America," 24.

²⁵ John H. Timmerman, "John Steinbeck: An Ethics of Fiction," *The Moral Philosophy of John Steinbeck*, ed. Stephen K. George (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2005), 37.

²⁶ John Ditsky, *Essays on East of Eden*, Steinbeck Monograph Series 7 (Muncie: John Steinbeck Society of America, 1977), 41.

²⁷ John Steinbeck, *Journal*, 104.

²⁸ See Peter Lisca, *John Steinbeck: Nature and Myth* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1978), 81-2; and William Goldhurst, "Of Mice and Men: John Steinbeck's Parable of the Curse of Cain," *Western American Literature*, 6 (1971): 123-35.

²⁹ Barbara Heavilin in "Judge, Observer, Prophet: The American Cain and Steinbeck's Shifting Perspective" *The Critical Response to John Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath*, ed. Barbara Heavilin (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2000).

³⁰ Michael J. Meyer, ed., *The Betrayal of Brotherhood in the Work of John Steinbeck: Cain Sign* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellon Press, 2000). See Chapter 5, "The American Cain in the 21st Century," for a further discussion of the some of the essays in the book.

³¹ Ricardo J. Quinones, *The Changes of Cain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 135-44.

³² Steinbeck, *America and Americans*, 338.

³³ Steinbeck, *America and Americans*, 332.

- ³⁴ Steinbeck, John, *Travels with Charley In Search of America* (New York: Penguin, 1986), 244.
- ³⁵ Steinbeck, *Travels with Charley*, 72.
- ⁹ Steinbeck, *Travels with Charley*, 181.
- ³⁷ Steinbeck, *Travels with Charley*, 10.
- ³⁸ Steinbeck, *Travels with Charley*, 247.
- ³⁹ Steinbeck, *Travels with Charley*, 258, 259, 268.
- ⁴⁰ Steinbeck, *Travels with Charley*, 275.
- ⁴¹ Steinbeck, *Travels with Charley*, 245.
- ⁴² Steinbeck, *America and Americans*, 400.
- ⁴³ Steinbeck, [Letter to Adlai Stevenson, November 5, 1959], Steinbeck and Wallsten, eds., 653.
- ⁴⁴ Barbara Heavilin, "The Existential Vacuum and Ethan Allen Hawley," *The Moral Philosophy of John Steinbeck*, ed. Stephen K. George (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2005), 57.
- ⁴⁵ Steinbeck, *America and Americans*, 404.
- ⁴⁶ Anon., "Steinbeck Got First Word on TV: Asserts His First Reaction Was One of 'Disbelief,'" *The Associated Press* (October 26, 1962), rpt. in *Conversations with John Steinbeck*, ed. Thomas Fensch (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1988), 79.
- ⁴⁷ Qtd. in Steinbeck, *America and Americans*, 65.
- ⁴⁸ Steinbeck, "Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech," *America and Americans and Selected Nonfiction*, ed. Susan Shillinglaw and Jackson J Benson (New York: Penguin, 2003), 174.

⁴⁹ Donald V. Coers, “‘John Believed in Man’: An Interview with Mrs. John Steinbeck,” *After the Grapes of Wrath*, ed. Donald V. Coers, Paul Ruffin and Robert DeMott (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1995), 271.

⁵⁰ Watt, 2.

⁵¹ Barbara Heavilin, “Steinbeck’s Spirituality: A Sense of the Ending,” *John Steinbeck: A Centennial Tribute*, ed. Stephen K. George (Westport: Praeger, 2002), 97.

⁵² See Woodburn O. Ross, “Naturalism’s Priest,” *College English*, 10 (1949): 432-38; Charles Child Walcutt, “John Steinbeck’s Naturalism,” *Readings on John Steinbeck*, ed. Clarence Swisher (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 1996): 40-49; and, Warren French, *John Steinbeck* (Boston: Twayne, 1974).

⁵³ Steinbeck, *America and Americans*, 314.

⁵⁴ Steinbeck, *America and Americans*, 330.

⁵⁵ Steinbeck, *America and Americans*, 400.

⁵⁶ Steinbeck, *Journal*, 24.

⁵⁷ Steinbeck, *Journal*, 124.

⁵⁸ See Jay Parini, *John Steinbeck, A Biography* (New York: H. Holt, 1995). For a shorter, yet thorough, example, see Peter Lisca’s “John Steinbeck: A Literary Biography,” in *Steinbeck and His Critics*, edited by E. W. Tedlock and C. V. Wicker (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1957), 3-22.

⁵⁹ Benson, 26-27.

⁶⁰ Benson, 55.

⁶¹ Benson, 60.

⁶² Steinbeck, [Letter to Carl Wilhelmson, 1924], Steinbeck and Wallsten, eds., 7.

⁶³ Benson, 20.

⁶⁴ Benson provides a short list and of course covers his varied jobs in the run of his biography (46).

⁶⁵ Benson, 47.

⁶⁶ Benson, 40-42.

⁶⁷ Benson, 46.

⁶⁸ Steinbeck, [Letter to Elizabeth Otis, February, 1938], Steinbeck and Wallsten, eds., 159. See also Benson, 338-39.

⁶⁹ Benson, 233.

⁷⁰ Steinbeck, [Letter to Mavis McIntosh, January, 1933], Steinbeck and Wallsten, eds., 68.

⁷¹ Steinbeck, [Letter to George Albee, February 27, 1931], Steinbeck and Wallsten, eds., 35.

⁷² Steinbeck, [Letter to George Albee, 1931], Steinbeck and Wallsten, eds., 47.

⁷³ Steinbeck, [Letter to George Albee, 1934], Steinbeck and Wallsten, eds., 93.

⁷⁴ Steinbeck, [Letter to Bo Beskow, May 22, 1948], Steinbeck and Wallsten, eds., 312.

⁷⁵ The full story of the friendship between Steinbeck and Ricketts and the ramifications of that relationship is chronicled in Richard Astro's *John Steinbeck and Edward F. Ricketts: Shaping of a Novelist* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1973).

⁷⁶ Benson, 193.

⁷⁷ Benson talks about the influence of Allee on Ricketts and specifically on the theory of non-teleological thinking in Steinbeck's biography (191-93).

⁷⁸ Benson, 192.

⁷⁹ John Steinbeck, *The Pearl* (New York: Penguin, 1994), 27.

⁸⁰ John Steinbeck, *The Wayward Bus* (New York: Penguin, 1995), 253.

⁸¹ As Steinbeck expressed in his speech, all authors must maintain such a belief: "I hold that a writer who does not passionately believe in the perfectability of man has no dedication nor any membership in literature" (173).

⁸² Judith Mulcahy, "The Journalist as Serious Writer: Steinbeck in the 1950's," *Rediscovering Steinbeck: Revisionist Views of his Art, Politics, and Intellect*, ed. Cliff Lewis and Carroll Britch (Lewiston: Edward Mellen Press, 1989), 247.

⁸³ Benson discusses, at length, the attempts that the author made to enter active duty during World War II. Though he didn't necessarily desire to fight on the front lines, Steinbeck seemed to cherish the idea of a military rank and tried every avenue possible to enlist. He did work for the Office of Strategic Services, the Foreign Information Service, the Office of War Information, the Writer's War Board, and the Air Force, "a series of unpaid jobs" that included film-making and writing (486-90, 508-11).

⁸⁴ Benson, 465.

⁸⁵ Benson, 521.

⁸⁶ Benson, 617.

⁸⁷ Steinbeck, *America and Americans*, 332.

⁸⁸ Benson, 617-19.

⁸⁹ Steinbeck, *Journal*, 117.

⁹⁰ Ditsky, 20.

⁹¹ Steinbeck, *Journal*, 5.

⁹² See John Steinbeck, *East of Eden* (New York: Penguin, 2002), 41, 43, 146-53, 276-80, 382-84. All subsequent references to the novel will be cited internally.

⁹³ Benson, 730.

⁹⁴ Steinbeck, *Journal*, 112, 4.

⁹⁵ Steinbeck, *Journal*, 65.

⁹⁶ Steinbeck, *East of Eden*, 151.

⁹⁷ Steinbeck, *Journal*, 34.

⁹⁸ Steinbeck, *Journal*, 6.

⁹⁹ Benson, 11.

¹⁰⁰ *Conversations with John Steinbeck*, ed. Thomas Fensch (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1988), 51, rpt. of Jack Hollimon, "Country History: Writer to Chronicle Changes Since 1900," *Salinas Californian* (Rodeo Edition, June 1948).

¹⁰¹ Steinbeck, *Journal*, 4.

¹⁰² According to some scholars, Steinbeck used or adapted the Genesis account in previous works. Peter Lisca, in *John Steinbeck: Nature and Myth* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1978), 81-82, and Goldhurst, in "Of Mice and Men: John Steinbeck's Parable of the Curse of Cain," argue that the story is used in *Of Mice and Men*. Barbara Heavilin in "Judge, Observer, Prophet: The American Cain and Steinbeck's Shifting Perspective" in Barbara Heavilin, ed., *The Critical Response to John Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath* (Westport:

Greenwood Press, 2000): 233-46, suggests that the figures of Cain and Abel are used in many works, including *The Grapes of Wrath*, *The Winter of Our Discontent*, and, of course, *East of Eden*. Also, Michael J. Meyer edited *The Betrayal of Brotherhood in the Work of John Steinbeck: Cain Sign* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellon Press, 2000), a somewhat haphazard collection of essays about the novelist's use of the account in many of his works.

¹⁰³ Steinbeck, *Journal*, 104-05.

¹⁰⁴ Steinbeck, *Journal*, 104.

¹⁰⁵ Steinbeck, *Journal*, 27.

¹⁰⁶ Steinbeck, *Journal*, 16.

¹⁰⁷ Cathy will assume the name Kate after she has left her family. The change from "C" to "K" is significant, placing her outside the Cain and Abel dichotomy and thus suggesting that she plays another role.

¹⁰⁸ Steinbeck, *Journal*, 51.

¹⁰⁹ Steinbeck, *Journal*, 97.

¹¹⁰ Benson, 734.

¹¹¹ John H. Timmerman, *John Steinbeck's Fiction: The Aesthetics of the Road Taken* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986), 247.

¹¹² Timmerman, *John Steinbeck's Fiction: The Aesthetics of the Road Taken*, 218-28.

¹¹³ In *Journal of a Novel*, Steinbeck tells Covici that Charles' letter to Adam "is a very tricky one and it has in it, concealed by certainly there, a number of keys" (28).

¹¹⁴ Ditsky, 20.

¹¹⁵ Steinbeck, [Letter to Elizabeth Otis and Chase Horton, April 26, 1957], Steinbeck and Wallsten, eds., Steinbeck and Wallsten, 553.

¹¹⁶ Steinbeck, [Letter to Pat Covici, September 11, 1951], Steinbeck and Wallsten, eds., 429.

¹¹⁷ Benson, 755. For other examples of Steinbeck's attention to common people, see also 530-31, 601-02, 931-33.

¹¹⁸ Mulcahy, 249-50.

¹¹⁹ Benson, 283.

¹²⁰ Steinbeck, *Journal*, 24.

¹²¹ Steinbeck, *Journal*, 3. This quote is often quoted as "my *country* and me" (italics mine). This common mistake, while it seems to make sense given the emphasis of the novel, is simply inaccurate. Later in the same work, he would write that the novel is "about my country for the last fifty years" (81).

¹²² Steinbeck, *Journal*, 117.

¹²³ Steinbeck, "Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech," 173.

¹²⁴ Steinbeck, *Journal*, 104.

¹²⁵ Genesis 20:5 Revised Standard Version.

¹²⁶ Gen. 4:16.

¹²⁷ Steinbeck, *Journal*, 108.

¹²⁸ Carol Hansen writes that the ending is "ambiguous," because "we don't know what choice Cal will make after the final scene; he appears strangely passive and the ending is open-ended, enigmatic, and ambiguous." She adds that it is not Adam or Caleb driving the plot at this

point in the book, but rather “Lee’s energy which propels the action at the end of the novel (218).” See “Cathy and Cal in *East of Eden*,” *Beyond Boundaries: Rereading John Steinbeck*, ed. Susan Shillinglaw and Kevin Hearle (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002): 212-19.

¹²⁹ Steinbeck, [Letter to Pat Covici, July, 1961], Steinbeck and Wallsten, eds., 703.

CHAPTER 5

THE CONTINUED RELEVANCE OF THE AMERICAN CAIN

“ ‘In Cain,’ writes Oliver Quick, ‘there appears for the first time that perennial conflict in the soul of fallen man, the conflict between the passionate claim to be left alone, the assertion of independence, and the no less passionate terror of being left alone, the obscure foreboding of the hell to which independence leads. The first produces the indignant question. Am I my brother’s keeper? the second, the bitter complaint, Behold, thou has driven me out this day from the face of the earth, and from thy face I shall be hid.’

Like Cain, we are conscious at one and the same time of defiance and desire.”¹

I. A Difficult Task

The prospect of defining a national archetype is daunting, a lesson that R. W. B. Lewis appears to have learned in writing *The American Adam*. When he argued that a figure based on the first man of the Bible was the primary protagonist in the mythology of the United States, he based his assertion on evidence from writing by New England authors produced during a span of only forty years. The self-imposed restrictions he adopted, though they limit his arguments, reflect the difficulty of identifying such a model. The parameters allowed him to focus on a specific, significant moment in the history of the United States and a region that produced some of the most recognized artists of the country; a more comprehensive attempt might have missed

the formative ideal for which he was searching. As Lewis shows, the writing that emerged from that northeastern area of America during that given time did indeed help form an overarching ideal that was integral to the formation of the nation and continues to pervade the collective mindset: the hopeful, optimistic, American Dream. The fiction, poetry, theology, and historical works of writers such as James Fenimore Cooper, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, and others certainly depicted, disseminated, and defended fundamental principles including the unofficial national ideology, ideas that, in turn, helped create the Adamic figure that Lewis identifies. That representative icon served as an example to which citizens could look, no matter their religious backgrounds, personal aspirations, or previous experiences; his values and aims, as well as the promises that his presence suggested, provided a prescription for the future that all could support and pursue. The daunting enterprise had practical results.

Despite the prevalence of that model in the literature of the country, many people experienced circumstances far different from the lifestyle that the American Adam represented and never knew the opportunities his existence suggested. Without question, many in the United States were unable to attain the “good life” since that hope was reliant upon their own efforts and initiative or because they were unwilling to emancipate themselves from their parentage and personal history in order to chart an original path to the future. In addition, problems arose and events transpired that undermined the overt idealism of the icon and his proponents and weakened the possibilities of a better life for those who sought it. Wars with England and France as well as strained relations with Native Americans resulted in a significant loss of life and liberty. Religious persecution, as evidenced in the expulsion of Quakers from the Massachusetts Bay Colony or the Salem Witch Trials, suggested a lack of freedom and reintroduced the type of oppression many groups had experienced in Europe and had come to the New World to avoid.

Even supposed progressive movements, such as Westward expansion or the eventual rise of industrialism, though they did breed some measure of success and demonstrated the potential in the nation, also engendered poverty, corruption, and further persecution of minority groups. Eventually, the horrors of slavery, the Civil War, and the growing economic disparity in the country proved that alongside the possibility inherent in the American Dream there existed another experience. There were no assurances of the “good life” in the young nation, only principles and systems that offered that hope for the future. As a result, the argument that just one figure represents the United States and its citizens’ experiences does not seem entirely plausible. Lewis contends that in spite of these unfortunate changes, the original archetype still retained his place as a representative icon within the national mythology, adapting to reflect the increasing complications and difficult situations as post-lapsarian or as a Christ-like, second Adam. However, the consistent troubles that many witnessed or knew firsthand demands a different model altogether, one that represents the alternate experience of those Americans who struggled or even failed in their attempts to realize the opportunities provided to the people of the United States.

That second representative figure is the American Cain. The strengths of Lewis’ arguments provide a firm foundation for the suggestion of another archetype borrowed from Genesis. Just as in the Biblical story when the desires of the first man and woman led to the introduction of sin, the expulsion from the Garden of Eden, and ultimately the first fratricide, so too the ideals and aspirations that the national Adam pursued brought about, in some cases, tragic and violent results. Thus a son of that fallen parentage makes particularly good sense as a related icon; it is the offspring who reap the benefits and bear the burdens of the past. Looking at literature produced within and outside the parameters that Lewis set for himself, there is

evidence of the Cain of the United States, the son of the original icon, who represents a far different perspective on the country and, more importantly, on the aspects of its unofficial dream. And yet, the prospect of introducing an additional icon is no less overwhelming than Lewis' attempt; in fact, in some ways, it is far more difficult. The adoption of Cain as a national archetype brings its own set of complications. Adam's son is perhaps one of the most enigmatic figures in all of Biblical or literary tradition, making his installation as a representative figure an inherently complex choice.² In addition to the ambiguity surrounding the character himself, the Cain and Abel story as a whole is also less than explicit. As Ricardo Quinones explains in *The Changes of Cain*, the account of the fratricide is "a master story for addressing fundamental divisions in existence," but there are "varying ways of response to those differences."³ In other words, the account, though rich in themes ripe for examination, includes details that are quite problematic; this fact has resulted in numerous interpretations of the "master story" as well as various adaptations of the figures and their definitive actions in American literature and beyond, as Quinones asserts in his book.

In order to claim the existence of the American Cain, a figure who presents an alternative to Lewis' icon, strong and conclusive examples from a breadth of works are needed. Fortunately, those instances are available. In these cases, the representative embodies the characteristics of the Biblical antecedent and mirrors the major life events of that original; the examples, however, model the Cain figure in their pursuit of the American Dream and the foundational principles of the nation. He is found in some of the most respected fiction of the United States. His existence is implied in the figure of Thomas Morton from William Bradford's *Of Plimouth Plantation*, a derisive figure whose actions are in some ways Adamic but nevertheless result in divisiveness, murder, and exile. Morton leads a coup in one of the

commercial enterprises of the colony and then collects a group around him that pursues the American ideals of personal liberty, freedom of expression, and self-interest to their full extent. Their lifestyle, however, is opposite to the principles of Bradford's colony; in fact, the author reports that "they fell to great licentiousness, . . . pouring out themselves into all profaneness."⁴ The newly-formed society is challenged by the confirmed leaders of Plymouth to change their erring ways, but the Cainian Morton "scorned all advice" and, in an effort to attain economic success, sells arms to the Native Americans who kill a number of citizens; the historian laments the loss of life, referring to it as "the blood of brethren sold for gain."⁵ In the end, Morton is arrested, and then, just as Cain is cast out to the "land of Nod," he is banished back to England, sent away from the community. Eventually, according to the history, he escaped any legal proceedings and, after pursuing suits against the separatists, he returned to the new world and began new enterprises. Cast as an evildoer and the "Lord of Misrule" by the author, the interloper, like other detractors, exposes the potential problems with the pursuit of American ideals and thus assumes the place of an American Cain.⁶

Carwin from Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland* and the narrator from J. Hector de la Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer* fall into the same category, as does another early example, Judge Pyncheon, from Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The House of Seven Gables*, who carries forward the tradition. The judge, in his pursuit of additional wealth, opportunity, and power, murders his uncle and steals any sense of a life from his childhood friend and cousin, Clifford, the true heir to the family fortune. Pyncheon desires to improve his already successful and privileged life and to use the opportunities afforded him to extend his influence, but he displays Cainian traits and reenacts the actions of the first murderer to achieve his aspirations. Despite a political sheen that purports kindness and justice, he retains a jealousy of Clifford, who won the

affection of their uncle and, beneath the surface, internalizes the life-threatening apoplexy from which other ancestors of the family have suffered. The judge makes one final effort to realize his lifelong dream of locating a hidden map that allegedly will reveal additional family lands and wealth; he is convinced that his cousin holds the secret. However, frustrated with his relative's mental instability and finally vexed by his absence when the judge comes to make an ultimate threat, Pyncheon dies in a chair in the famed house, refused a life of future promise and cast out from the society which showered him with respect and opportunity. His grasp for a better life, despite his enviable position, has resulted in the death of his uncle, by his own hand, and the lack of a life for his cousin, by his false testimony; ultimately, it takes his own life as well. As an American Cain, Judge Pyncheon represents the possible tragic end of the pursuit of the American Dream and the all-encompassing desire for continual opportunity.

More directly, the American Cain appears in Frank Norris's *McTeague*, Caroline Gordon's *Penhally* and *Green Centuries*, and John Steinbeck's *East of Eden*. After achieving some measure of success, McTeague, Rion Outlaw, and Caleb Trask face rejection or failure and, then in response, commit an act of betrayal and murder against a double, which brings about punishment and exile. In the end, the existence and experiences of the second national archetype and the replaying of the actions and attitudes of Adam's son provides perspective on and evidence of the potential problems with the dream of the country and illustrate that the opportunities implied in that ideology provide no assurances of a better life. These three instances of the archetype illustrate the continued relevance of the figure from American Romanticism into the Realist and Naturalist traditions and through Modernism.

II. A Misapplication of Terms

The account of the first fratricide is thoroughly compelling and contains themes that continue to resonate in contemporary society; history is replete with examples of violence between brothers, both literal and figurative, that results from differing ways of life or what might be construed as favoritism from outside forces. As a result, there are strong examples of the American Cain in literature. However, the ambiguity that surrounds the tale and the commonality of “fundamental divisions” within society make the account, and thus its major figures, easily misappropriated; in other words, there are many literary characters who are misidentified as Cains, and more specifically, as American versions of such.⁷ The actual appearances of the icon are weakened by scholarship that spuriously assigns the label and misrepresents the archetype, widening the definition to include far too many cases. There are many examples of the term being misapplied, instances where the name is used to classify characters in literature based merely on one or two characteristics that are too common to justify such a categorization.⁸ It is important that the tag not be assigned based purely on the occasion that one detail or another from the Genesis account surfaces within a work of an American author. Not all characters who commit murder are versions of the figure. Every set of brothers in a literary work is not necessarily Cain and Abel, even if there is a level of contention between them; and, if they do relate to the Biblical siblings, the evil or less sympathetic of the two is not decidedly a representative of the United States. Finally, any hero whose actions, attitudes, or words serve to provide perspective on the nation, its ideology, or its collective pursuits is not automatically the figure. Based on the existence of one or two criteria, many figures could be called American Cains, protagonists or antagonists such as Simon Legree, James Claggart, Pap Finn, or even Cathy Trask; ultimately, none of these characters, though they each exhibit distinctive traits, are cases of the archetype.

There are a number of examples of this type of misclassification. *The Betrayal of Brotherhood in the Works of John Steinbeck*, edited by Michael Meyer, is a collection of essays which asserts that the account from the fourth chapter of Genesis influences most of the books of John Steinbeck; some of the articles in the text purport appearances of the American Cain. There is no question that the California author utilizes the themes and details of the Biblical account in some his works, most notably *East of Eden*, where the tale cannot be avoided. However, some selections from the critical work use specious arguments to assert that characters are models of Cain and Abel, and more specifically, that some are American versions of the first murderer. Patrick Shaw, in “A Fugitive Upon the Earth: Tom Joad and the Myth of Cain,” draws a comparison between Jim Casy of *The Grapes of Wrath* and the son of Adam based on the former preacher’s murder of a policeman and by virtue of the similarity of the names Casy and Cain, both weak and rather ineffective arguments.⁹ It is an example of a figure being classified as a representative figure based on one or two traits. Though Shaw does not assign the title of the national archetype to the man, his assertion does illustrate how easily the terms and labels can be misapplied.

In a similarly misleading way, Mashkoo Ali Syed, in “Dual Duality: Kino as Cain and Abel in *The Pearl*,” actually connects the protagonist of Steinbeck’s novelette with both of Adam’s sons.¹⁰ His argument is that the character displays both vengeful, violent tendencies as well as the instinct for innocence and brotherhood. In other words, the essay purports that the figure embodies good and evil traits, and, though the analysis is correct, the proposed correlation to the Genesis account seems forced. In order to compare Kino and Cain, Syed notes the similarity in sound between the names and, like Shaw, alleges that the homonymic quality denotes a connection between the two figures. He too does not mention the American archetype

by name, but he does allude to the existence of such a figure, insisting that the protagonist of the book, in the end, “becomes representative of the American people, something of a national type.” Coyotito’s father does commit murder in defense of his pursuits, but he does not kill a double; it is not envy or rage that motivates his actions but an instinctive desire for survival. The pearl that he refuses to relinquish is suggestive of the dream of the country, but the claim that Kino is a “national type” who represents the people of the United States is simply confusing since the characters in the book are Mexican-Indians and make no claim to American ideals.

The Betrayal of Brotherhood does include an essay in which the actual label itself is used, though incorrectly. Susan Garland Mann, in “The Pastures of Heaven: Agrarianism and the Emergent Middle Class,” asserts that there is an “American Cain featured in *The Pastures of Heaven*” who “is chiefly characterized by aggressiveness and competitiveness and consumption.”¹¹ Her relation of the archetype to American idealism and “competitiveness” makes sense; it is certainly an association that Steinbeck also uses in *East of Eden* to help define Cal Trask as an example of the national icon. However, there is little else to justify the designation of the American Cain label. Mann contends that Bert Munroe is that character in *Pastures* because in the end he “remains as the best developed example of middle-class post-war success.”¹² Her assignment of the name is not based purely on his economic achievement, though that is her main focus; she does add that he is also the icon because he “is often blamed for the disastrous things that occur in the valley.”¹³ In contrast, she suggests that John Whiteside is Abel-like, or at least his “family is linked more closely to Abel than they are to Cain.” Despite that assertion, she then connects the Whitesides to the first murderer and many of his traits, contradicting her initial assessment.¹⁴ The inconsistencies weaken her essay, as do the criteria she uses to label Bert as an American Cain. Munroe commits no murder, and, though she claims

he is a “regenerate Cain,” borrowing Quinones’ term from *The Changes of Cain*, the truth is the character remains rather harmless throughout the collection of short stories, though he does indirectly cause some unfortunate events.¹⁵ *Pastures*, like other Steinbeck books including *East of Eden*, depicts situations that display the potential problems with the economic and social systems in the American culture; however, to maintain that Bert Munroe is a “national type” who, as an example of the icon, provides some sort of commentary on those structures is simply misguided.¹⁶ Mann incorrectly assigns the label, weakening the claim that any such model exists.

Ricardo Quinones himself provides two, additional cases in which the archetype is misidentified; he accurately assigns the label of American Cain to Caleb Trask, but he places characters from *Shane* and *The Caine Mutiny* in the same category. His book *The Changes of Cain*, which argues that the Biblical antecedent has undergone a significant shift in terms of identity and function since he first appeared in Genesis, makes good sense. Quinones convincingly contends that the figure eventually assumes a sympathetic place within a culture that increasingly questions the dogmatic Christian tradition that paints the first murderer as “the true progenitor and patron of evil in the world.”¹⁷ However, problems arise when he eventually turns to American literature, specifically some texts that appeared after World War II, and introduces a “New American Cain,” a version that bears similarity to the actual archetype.¹⁸ The cases he identifies, beyond Cal, display characteristics of the Biblical character; however, there is no attempt to place the examples within the context of Lewis’ Adam or the national dream to which both icons relate. He does speak of his examples as “national types,” but this designation is unsubstantiated beyond the fact that the protagonists are citizens of the United States. Quinones fails to explain adequately how *Shane* from Jack Schaeffer’s book of the same name

and Queeg, Maryk, or Keefer in *The Caine Mutiny* (all of whom he identifies as Cains) assume the role, instead utilizing some attributes of the first murderer, such as a marking or a rejection, to assign the term. There is an association between these characters and Cain, but they do not represent the second national archetype. The confusion comes when he attempts to apply his arguments to works from authors of the United States specifically, adopting the name of the icon incorrectly. Simply put, he identifies Cain-like figures that happen to be American, not examples of the American son of Adam.

One additional example thoroughly illustrates how easily the archetype can be misidentified within literature, weakening the contention that such a figure is found in the literature of the nation. In “James Dickey's American Cain,” Susan Spencer explicitly uses the label and even attempts to discuss the figure in terms of the American enterprise and the model that R. W. B. Lewis identifies in his book. However, she nevertheless misrepresents the figure and, in the end, incorrectly claims that Ed Gentry is a Cain of the United States. Her identification of these characters reveals confusion about their roles and functions, which requires some analysis to understand. She opens her argument with a quote from Robert Armour, who writes that Dickey’s novel “contributes four more Adams to our mythology. It is unusual for a work to contain more than one Adam; but . . . each man in *Deliverance* is uniquely a variation of the pattern.”¹⁹ Armour’s argument, which Spencer initially adopts, makes sense to a point. The four men leave civilization behind and escape into nature in order to regain some sense of their independence, prove their manhood, and establish some pathway for others to break from their conventional, suburban existence. However, as Spencer herself then asserts, only Lewis Medlock can make any claim to the American Adam role.

After quoting the definition of the archetype from *The American Adam*, Spencer states that Medlock “certainly fits the mold better than any of the other characters.”²⁰ She adds that “what he really wants is to return to a fictional past where there will once again be a new, fresh world, and he admits that his obsessive staying in shape is a preparation.”²¹ Lewis hopes that the supposed, idyllic existence of the first settlers of the nation can be restored or recreated, even though he seems to know that such a possibility is unrealistic. Rejecting, at least in principle, the conventional life that his friends have embraced, he leads “his disciples into needless danger under the guise of ‘breaking the pattern’ and rescuing them from the stifling effects of their own banal existence.” He imagines that their adventure will re-enliven something of the pioneer ethic and instinct in himself and his companions. Ed Gentry, who serves as the narrator of the novel, recognizes his friend’s Adamic attributes. He states that Lewis is “the only man [he] knew who could do with his life what he wanted”; he is a man “not only self-determined” but “determined” as well, the markings of a rugged individualist. Medlock, though married, has “no evident ties to the world around him” and, as Spencer points out, “comes off as the celibate hero of romantic fiction” in the vein of Natty Bumppo.²² The narrator reports that the Adamic man “is independently wealthy,” having achieved the traditional hopes and domestic desires of comfort and a better life, and he now wants to conquer the natural world, though such a place “if it ever existed,” as Spencer contends, “is gone.”²³ His successes, which enable him to live a life of leisure, reinforce his place as an Adam of the United States.²⁴

Spencer ultimately focuses on Gentry and Medlock who, she says, present a conflict between two versions of the figure R. W. B. Lewis identifies.²⁵ Drew Ballinger, who dies mysteriously, and Ed Trippe, who is raped, are clearly not examples of the Adamic archetype. Ed, she asserts, is a reluctant hero who eventually learns to appreciate the benefits of both

civilization and nature while Lewis, though he reaps the rewards of the contemporary culture and its opportunities, still makes claim to the original, Adamic identity, detached from the trappings of society and reliant only upon himself. Spencer contends that Dickey is purposely providing the contention between these two versions of the American Adam in order to establish a new type of hero.²⁶ She identifies Ed as a new, national Adam, a model who, though he is adapted from the ideal that R. W. B. Lewis presents, suggests a progression of that icon. Oddly however, as the title of the article states, Spencer ultimately rejects the idea of Ed as an American Adam. The character, she seems to recall midstream, commits premeditated murder and in the end lacks “Lewis’s fundamental innocence”;²⁷ thus, if he is used to represent a common, national citizen then something must be awry.

In a strange twist at the close of the essay, Spencer maintains that Ed’s violent act must be characterized as evil and “places him squarely on a moral level with the rest of the civilized world”; in other words, Gentry cannot be a role model in the vein of Lewis’ model because, though he acts extraordinarily, he is rather ordinary. Since, as Spencer maintains, he feels a “connection with the mountain man whom he would kill,” a debased “hillbilly” who commits murder and rape, he cannot be idyllic; she explains that, as a result of his actions, he loses “the American Adam’s illusion and sense of moral outrage.”²⁸ She suddenly abandons the idea that the narrator of the novel is idyllic at all, though she recognizes some of the traits of the Edenic hero in him. Instead, she concludes that “if Lewis is the American Adam, then perhaps Ed is an American Cain.” After all, she contends, he has committed murder and embodies one or two other attributes of the second national archetype:

Cain, like Ed, discovered in the end that it is the ties of one’s family that form the most important thing in life. And Ed, like Cain, “buildded [*sic*] a city.” Rather

than leading others into danger, he has led them back to safety and the world of technology.²⁹

After naming him as a national Cain figure, she concludes her essay with the idea that Gentry “is the new breed that will supersede the outdated and ineffective Lewis/Adams: softer, perhaps, but canny and able to cope with mechanized society.” That assertion, however, contradicts her claims. Ed is, in fact, not a “new breed” but rather a progressive form of a national Adam, cunning, adaptable, and able to work within the system that has become commonplace, no matter its moral structure or level of desirability. He is a failed version of the icon, at least of the kind that R. W. B. Lewis describes in his book: unfettered, pioneering, self-reliant, and hopeful. Ed is none of these things nor does he purport to desire them. In the end, her labeling of Ed as some form of an American Cain does not take into consideration all the necessary criteria and utilizes the details of Genesis account incorrectly.

His connection to the Biblical antecedent is problematic; the suggestion that he is a representative Cain of the country is even more misleading. The protagonist does not murder as a means of pursuing the unofficial dream or as a result of a failure to achieve the opportunities promised within that overarching ideology. In fact, his act could be seen as self-defense; it is simply the step Gentry takes to survive. Prior to ever venturing out onto the river, the narrator of the novel reveals that he is married and has children, works a job that satisfies him, and “interacts with and feels responsible for his business partner and employees.”³⁰ Though he does get caught up in the romanticism of a trip into nature, he seems fulfilled with the life he has established for himself and only participates in the excursion as a diversion and as a means of appeasing his mentor, Medlock. He has already realized a version of the American Dream as represented by R. W. B. Lewis’ icon and has no need to murder in some form of grandiose

defense of that lifestyle; he, instead, merely wants to return to that existence. In the end, he is reunited with his family and his responsibilities, despite the epiphany Ed experiences as a result of his survival and the actions he takes. Gentry is a failed Adam, at least in terms of achieving the existence that the party of Hope described, a life he does not seem to desire in any way.

Therein lies an important distinction. Spencer's argument illustrates how easily the term of American Cain can be misapplied based on the identification of a particular attribute or action. To label Ed Gentry in that way is misleading and unfortunately weakens the significance and purpose of those characters that actually do represent the ideals and reflect the attributes of the Cain of the United States. The term cannot be assigned to all figures who have a characteristic or two of the Biblical Cain, and the label should not be used for all protagonists whose experiences and actions draw into question the assurances of the national dream. The misappropriation of the label and its components undermines the claim that an alternative archetype exists.

III. Other Contemporary American Cains

Though the identification and definition of an archetype such as the American Cain is rife with complications, there are strong examples. Beyond the early instances of Thomas Morton and Judge Pyncheon and the more modern cases of McTeague, Rion Outlaw, and Cal Trask, there are additional contemporary characters that strengthen the claim for a representative figure based on the son of Adam; one is found in Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood*. In 1952, just a year after *East of Eden* was published, Hazel Motes appeared, a disillusioned veteran of World War II who preaches "the Church without Christ."³¹ Though at first glance he appears to be a

detached loner and a passionate anti-evangelist, Haze ultimately is a Cain of the United States. The novelette met with mixed critical reviews, many people in her hometown of Milledgeville, Georgia were outraged; clearly she had struck a nerve and perhaps depicted life too accurately for some of O'Connor's neighbors.³² Her work presents an Everyman whose non-traditional philosophy, struggle for freedom, and personal desires relate to the prescriptive model identified by Lewis. However, as Motes' aspirations are thwarted, his place as the second national archetype is exposed, and he recreates the account of the first fratricide in the American South.

Despite his eccentricity, Haze's story is not too different from those of many young men in the late 1940s, the period during which O'Connor was composing the novel. A small-town product, the protagonist leaves his family and all he has ever known to fight overseas in a conflict he does not really understand. He is unique, however, considering that his main concern upon being recruited into the army is not survival but rather the maintenance of his personal morality and the preservation of a spiritual inheritance he has acquired through his very religious family. As the narrator relates, Motes clung to his purity as a badge of honor and was convinced it would protect him:

He meant to tell anyone in the army who invited him to sin that he was from Eastrod, Tennessee, and that he meant to get back there and stay back there, that he was going to be a preacher of the gospel and that he wasn't going to have his soul damned by the government or by any foreign place it sent him to.³³

However, when faced with the opportunity to join his fellow soldiers on a trip to a brothel, he finds that he has no real reason to resist those desires with which the others entice him. In fact, as a result of the incident, he determines that he no longer believes the things he was taught as a child. He does not, however, allow his rejection of those past traditions and lessons to justify the

indulgence of his every whim; instead, he decides that he has been “converted to nothing instead of evil.”³⁴ His rather strict religious upbringing proves to be ineffectual for the young man, and he forfeits his previous convictions. It is the first step in his assumption of an American Adam identity; as Ralph Waldo Emerson’s unofficial “party of Hope” advocated, the young man seeks a removal from the past and the constrictive ideals that his family espoused.³⁵ Ultimately, as Leatherstocking or Hawthorne’s Holgrave before him, he will pursue a life remote from responsibilities or other relational attachments and will instead consistently clamor towards the next place in search of future opportunity.

And yet, the intensity of his unwanted religious inheritance makes it difficult for him to reject his history completely and to embrace his new found liberty. The beliefs instilled within him at a young age continue to torment him; the influences have been profoundly troubling. He has listened to fire and brimstone sermons delivered on the streets by his grandfather, who “had a particular disrespect” for his grandson. At age twelve, he realized “that he was going to be a preacher” as well, a calling it seems he could not ignore.³⁶ He is haunted by a dream of Jesus moving

from tree to tree in the back of his mind, a wild figure motioning him to turn around and come off into the dark where he was not sure of his footing, where he might be walking on water and not know it and then suddenly know it and drown.

He cannot seem to escape the image. One additional memory stays with him, a story that also exemplifies the unusual spiritual heritage that Haze knows. His mother, a rigid woman who “wears black all the time” and is a harsh disciplinarian who uses strict modes of punishment to communicate her beliefs, confronts her son after he has been to an X-rated show at the carnival.³⁷ Learning the truth, she strikes him with a stick and inspires a “nameless unplaced guilt” within

him that drives him to walk a mile with rocks in the bottom of his shoes, a self-inflicted form of penance. Haze finds the rather fierce spirituality of his family almost impossible to reject, though his experiences in the army provide some semblance of a break from those traditions.

Having converted to nothing in another attempt to overcome his spiritual heritage, Motes finds himself overseas, where “he had all the time he could want to study his soul in and assure himself that it was not there.”³⁸ He determines in his reflections that his “misery . . . had nothing to do with Jesus,” a further remove from the religion of his parents and grandparents. When he completes his duty, he returns home “pleased to think that he was still uncorrupted,” a claim to innocence that connects him to the American Adam, who was beginning again in the New World. Upon his return to Eastrod, he finds nothing but “the skeleton of a house” and no living relatives.³⁹ Suddenly, he is more aligned with the Adamic figure. It is mainly a result of circumstances beyond his control, but he is now, like Lewis’ figure, “a radically new personality, . . . emancipated from history, happily bereft of ancestry, untouched and undefiled by the usual inheritances of family and race; an individual standing alone, self-reliant, and self-propelling, ready to confront whatever awaited him with the aid of his own unique and inherent resources.”⁴⁰ Haze is devoid of a family or even a past: his parents died during his teenage years and two younger brothers have also passed away, one in infancy and one at age seven.⁴¹ He has, at least in his own mind, forfeited the beliefs ingrained within him as a child. Now free to go where he pleases and to seek his own desires, he is convinced fully of his own innocence. With his military pension and twelve-dollar suit, he decides to move to the big city of “Taulkinham” where he attempts to forge a new existence removed from a personal history he is trying to forget.⁴²

Motes finds himself in a modern-day Eden, a bright and progressive metropolis that presents a contemporary version of the place that the new Adam and Eve discover in Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story of the same time. Full of man-made products and impressive structures, it is a place of opportunity and a signpost of the economic successes, as well as their potential downsides, in America. After his eye-opening experience in the army, he has arrived in the city to proclaim an anti-church that he believes can unburden a culture bound by religious dogma and self-righteous spirituality. That effort, along with other qualities, mark his assumption of an Adamic identity; he starts his own life over and invites others to join his endeavor to move beyond the past and toward an existence unaffected by established rules and rituals. Despite an inherited naiveté, he attempts to establish a path that others can follow: a new church with a unique theology. To confirm his freedom from his religious ancestry, if only to himself, he goes immediately to Lenora Watts, a prostitute, after arriving in Taulkinham. And yet, his unwanted, spiritual heritage surfaces again, despite his efforts. The taxi driver who drops him at his destination is convinced that he is a minister because his "hat looks like a preacher's hat" and "a look in his face" suggests the same thing; Motes responds " 'I don't believe in anything.' " ⁴³ However, when he encounters Lenora, he feels it is necessary to reiterate firmly, and yet rather hollowly, his unbelief and lack of religion: " 'What I mean to have you know is: I'm no goddam preacher.' " The tension between his inherited spirituality and his desires for freedom and self-reliance will continually plague him; however, his adamant pursuit of qualities inherent in the American Dream, including mobility, independence, and new opportunities, will ultimately expose Cainian traits and lead the man to reenact the first fratricide.

Though he seems unable to break completely from his religious inheritance, other initial endeavors and actions in the city, such as his visit to the prostitute, reflect his progressive

adoption of American Adam characteristics. Despite forced interaction with Enoch Emery and Sabbath Hawkes, he rebuffs others' attempts at personal connection, reflecting his desire for an unfettered existence.⁴⁴ In place of human relationships, Hazel commits himself to a car. One of his earliest decisions is to purchase a brown Essex, a hallmark of the American Dream that reflects the national propensity for mobility that Steinbeck references in *Travels with Charley* and *The Grapes of Wrath*. The desire for a means of transportation comes to him suddenly one morning, and he immediately buys "a high rat-colored machine with large thin wheels and bulging headlights."⁴⁵ He tells the salesman that he wants the car "mostly to be a house," but, as soon as the sale is complete, Haze "found the highway" and "began going very fast."⁴⁶ The vehicle is a modern means of chasing and expressing his freedom, providing Motes with the opportunity to remove himself from people and the city and return, in an Adamic sense, to nature. Later he realizes that "the advantage of having a car" is that he has "something that moved fast, in privacy, to the place you wanted to be."⁴⁷ In addition, it is a source of pride and a symbol of personal accomplishment as well as a rejection of his previous, religious beliefs. As he tells Sabbath, " 'nobody with a good car needs to be justified.' "⁴⁸

The potential for mobility that the car represents relates to the freedom that Hazel longs to attain from the powerful remains of his inherited spirituality and his unpleasant past. Like the earliest arrivals to the country, those who adopted the American Adam language to describe their own journey to the "New World," Motes desires a release from the religious practices and teachings instilled within him. Haze constructs a personal philosophy to achieve some separation from his grandfather's teachings, but he appropriates traditional terms and tenets to form his religion. He claims that his own "church of truth without Jesus Christ crucified" is a system in which "there was no Fall because there was nothing to fall from and no Redemption

because there was no Fall and no Judgment because there wasn't the first two."⁴⁹ This rather progressive and yet personal ideology, which is merely a form of anti-Christianity, never asserts a rejection of his past or the teachings to which he was exposed as a child despite his efforts. It is, however, his attempt to forge a new existence and belief system apart from that which was instilled within him.

In a sermon he gives from the hood of his car, Haze communicates his personal beliefs and proclaims a relativism that invites adherents to look internally rather than externally for any sense of meaning and purpose, though even that prospect, he asserts, is hopeless. Though his existence has many of the hallmarks of the American Adam, he professes a philosophy that suggests, in its lack of idealism, a different nature altogether:

"I preach there are all kinds of truth, your truth and somebody else's, but behind all of them, there's only one truth and that is that there's no truth" he called. "No truth behind all truths is what I and this church preach! Where you come from is gone, where you thought you were going to never was there, and where you are is no good unless you can get away from it. Where is there a place for you to be? No place."

"Nothing outside you can give you any place," he said. "You needn't to look at the sky because it's not going to open up and show no place behind it. You needn't to search for any hole in the ground to look through into somewhere else. You can't go neither forward nor backwards into your daddy's time nor your children's if you have them. In yourself right now is all the place you got."⁵⁰

His proclamation of futility smacks against the connections he has to Lewis' icon. There is no optimism in his words and no call to future opportunity. The Adamic attributes of self-reliance,

physical prowess, and initiation are undercut by the pointlessness the protagonist claims in his sermon. But then, by the time he delivers his sermon, his experiences have exposed a very different perspective from the potential within the society the national Adam archetype represents: Hoover Shoats has invited Motes to use his teachings to con people; Haze learns that Asa Hawkes, the allegedly blind evangelist, is a fake; Hawkes' daughter, Sabbath, makes sexual advances to him; and, he has witnessed Enoch Emery's odd, obsessive attraction to the shriveled man at the museum. Hazel sees no hope for himself or others; instead, he is continually hounded by his past, the religious beliefs of his grandfather more than anything else. His attempt to live by the empty tenets of the anti-system he proclaims is never fully accomplished. In the end, his pursuit of freedom from his spiritual inheritance is thwarted; his car, a symbol of liberty and opportunity, proves to be a lemon. Attempts at attaining an unfettered existence prove impossible. Even his self-reliance is called into question as Haze seems unable to take care of himself. The Adamic characteristics he has adopted or unintentionally modeled do not fit the man.

The failures he experiences and the hopelessness he espouses reveal another identity for Haze; O'Connor's protagonist is an American Cain. Early in the novel, he exhibits traits of the national archetype based on the son of Adam, innate qualities that are hidden beneath some traits that are reminiscent of Eden's original inhabitant. His reactions and words reveal a sense of superiority and arrogance in spite of his awkwardness as well as an evilness, all of which are characteristic of the first murderer. On the train to Taulkinham, he displays profound racism towards the African American porter he is convinced is from his hometown. The implication is that Motes is unable to distinguish one black person from another and that he implicitly distrusts the man. Additionally, his interactions with his fellow passengers are punctuated with jealousy

and anger. He tries to belittle both Mrs. Hitchcock and the young women with whom he is placed for a meal, questioning their sense of personal redemption.⁵¹ When the steward in the dining car stops him from advancing to a table, his “face turned an ugly red,” a sign of his inner rage.⁵² During his meal, the waiter insults him in front of his dinner companions, inciting the boiling animosity deep within him. His wrath is reserved, however, in its greatest sense, for those in the city who make claims on his time, his money, and ultimately his truth.

In Taulkinham, he exhibits hatred toward Enoch Emery, who incessantly clamors along beside him, and he repeatedly dismisses Sabbath Hawkes and her father, though he seems drawn to them for some reason. After the young city worker shows Haze the “shrunk man” at the “MVSEVM,” Motes assaults Enoch and then, in a burst of anger, throws a rock that hits the diminutive man in the forehead.⁵³ In a scene that depicts a telling fit of fury, he exhibits key characteristics of Cain, and his actions suggest an underlying murderousness. Later, Hazel decides to move on to another town, desiring mobility, new experiences, and another opportunity for personal liberty; his desire displays the hallmarks of Leatherstocking, the quintessential American Adam. However, while packing for his departure, he finds his mother’s glasses and, putting them on, sees himself in the mirror. His reflection denotes his true nature:

His blurred face was dark with excitement and the lines in it were deep and crooked. The little silver-rimmed glasses gave him a look of deflected sharpness, as if they were hiding some dishonest plan that would show in his naked eyes.⁵⁴

The narrator’s description unequivocally communicates the nature of this man; his face is “dark” and “deep and crooked,” contains a “deflected sharpness,” and seems to suggest the presence of a “dishonest plan.” As he considers this picture of himself, his subsequent actions then reveal the presence of these inherent traits. Sabbath enters the room with the “new Jesus” that Enoch

has stolen from the city museum, and Motes is struck by the thought that a new family, though unwanted, has formed around him; unintentionally, he has attached himself to this rather grotesque unit comprised of the woman and the “shrunk man.” The suggestion is reinforced by Hawkes’ words to the decomposed “baby,” the withered remains she holds: “Ask your daddy yonder where he was running off to—sick as he is?”⁵⁵ Haze’s reaction confirms his violent and wrathful nature as well as his aversion to the relationships; in a frenzy, he “snatched the shriveled body and threw it against the wall,” flinging the remains outside into the rain.⁵⁶ The young girl iterates the evidence of Hazel’s role as the second, national icon: “I knew when I first seen you you were mean and evil.” The scene suggests his place as the American Cain; his endeavors thwarted, he displays the anger, jealousy, and violence of the son of Adam. All that remains is for Motes to reenact the murder of Abel.

A final turn of events leads to the “fratricide” of the novel. When the con artist Hoover Shoats appropriates Motes’ sermonizing into a moneymaking scheme, using the young man’s message of freedom from religious tradition to dupe the listeners out of their pocket-change, Haze reacts violently; his efforts are rejected and instead turned into a con man’s game. O’Connor’s protagonist refuses to participate in Shoats’ plan, an illegal and yet practical means of achieving financial security, so the shyster hires a man to dress and play the role of the original proponent of the “church of truth without Jesus Christ crucified.” The replacement for the original “prophet” is a mirror-image; in fact, the two are so similar that Haze is “struck with how gaunt and thin he looked in the illusion.”⁵⁷ The narrator adds that “he had never pictured himself that way before. The man he saw was hollow-chested and carried his neck thrust forward and his arms down by his side.” Even a woman in the crowd asks Motes if

“ ‘him and you twins?’ ” With the double in place, the characterization is almost complete; all that is needed is a murder, an act to which Haze alludes in his answer to his petitioner: “ ‘If you don’t hunt it down and kill it, it’ll hunt you down and kill you.’ ”⁵⁸ The fratricide is to come.

Solace Layfield, the “twin,” is ultimately innocent of wrongdoing, an Abel-like pawn in the hands of Hoover Shoats and a victim of Hazel’s failure. The narrator explains that “he had consumption and a wife and six children and being a Prophet was as much work as he wanted to do.”⁵⁹ He agrees to imitate Haze and be Shoats’ straight man, a decision that costs him his life. After the con man and his assistant finish a night of testifying, the original “prophet” follows his twin into the country. There, after drawing Layfield out of his car by ramming into it with the Essex, Motes “knocked him flat and ran over him.”⁶⁰ Apparently not satisfied, “Haze drove about twenty feet and stopped the car and then began to back it. He backed it over the body and then stopped and got out.” After completing the act, he addresses the dying man: “ ‘Two things I can’t stand,’ Haze said, ‘—a man that ain’t true and one that mocks what is. You shouldn’t ever have tampered with me if you didn’t want what you got.’ ” Interestingly, the murderer’s words implicate himself rather than Layfield, who has merely followed the lead of the con man Shoats to make a quick buck; it is the protagonist that “ain’t true” to the beliefs that appear to have claimed him and who “mocks” others’ attempts, however flawed, to pursue their convictions. Solace then begins to confess his sins, which his attacker attempts to stop. The victim’s final words are “ ‘Jesus hep me,’ ” a cry to the Son of God reminiscent of the Genesis account, where Abel’s blood calls out to God for justice and as a result indicts Cain.⁶¹ A version of the fratricide has taken place again.

Mirroring the reenactment of the fourth chapter of Genesis, Hazel flees the scene of the crime and returns to his previous plans: a remove to another city. However, an escape is

hopeless, and, though he drives on, “he had the sense that he was not gaining ground.”⁶² When a patrolman pulls him over, the final details of the Biblical story are replayed. The police officer, without motivation to express malice or forgiveness, pushes the Essex over a hill, an odd moment of justice from a seemingly ambivalent authority figure and a reenactment of God’s decision to punish Cain for his act against Abel.⁶³ With no means to pursue his original plan, Motes returns to Taulkinham, exiled back to the life he has known in the city. In a fit of penance, he blinds himself with lime, an act that results in a physical mark reminiscent of the sign God places on Cain.⁶⁴ Though he sought an escape from urbanity, restriction, tradition, and obligations, familial or otherwise, in the end he is returned to and enveloped by all these things. Now unable to fend for himself, to survive by his own means or efforts, Haze resorts to the painful forms of religious penance he had known as a child including placing stones and glass in his shoes and wrapping barbed wire around his chest. In addition, he must rely on Mrs. Flood, who hopes to marry him for his money, another reminder of an existence of which he wants no part. Finally, he dies while walking the streets of Taulkinham, making one last, impossible attempt “to go on” to another place.⁶⁵

In the end, Hazel Motes’ experience mirrors that of Cain; as a result of his specific pursuits and beliefs, he becomes the American version of the archetype. Home from war, he finds himself in an Adamic existence, devoid of responsibility and family, fiercely independent, and antagonistic towards a past that includes his own unfortunate religious background. He tries to establish a life filled with the American hallmarks of mobility, urbanity, and freedom, however, he is unable to maintain the lifestyle modeled by Lewis’ figure. Disappointed by his failures to convert people to his anti-church, frustrated with his inability to forget his past, and confronted with an image of himself that he finds despicable, he lashes out violently, drawing on

his anger and jealousy to commit murder. Like McTeague, he then flees the scene of the crime, but after losing his means of escape, he is punished and brought to justice in some form.

O'Connor's novelette provides perspective on the dream of the nation; Haze attempts to claim his own individual identity, free from his past and those teachings that have influenced him since childhood. That pursuit, however innocuous, proves impossible. The opportunities afforded him have a violent and tragic end. When he is unable to achieve his aspirations, Motes murders an innocent double, is exiled back to the city, is marked, and finds himself in a hopeless state. The promises to which he has clung prove empty and the opportunity of a different life from that which he had known remains unfulfilled. His experience displays, very tangibly, that there are potential hardships in any endeavor to realize the American Dream.

A second, contemporary example of the American Cain is found in Toni Morrison's *Sula*, published in 1973 after the major events of the Civil Rights movement but still during a period when African Americans were asserting their rights as individuals and as a people.⁶⁶ The events of the book take place between 1919 and 1965, a period that marks the end of the First World War and continues past the second conflict into an era of dramatic social change for the United States. Her second novel, Morrison's work presents a character that embodies the main traits of the son of Adam, reenacts his life events, and provides perspective on the American Dream. The novel tells the story of two young girls who act as doubles for one another throughout their lives; Sula Peace is Cain to Nel Wright's Abel. A murder occurs at the beginning of the story, when the titular hero accidentally kills Chicken Little by throwing him in the river, a playful act that the young boy does not survive. The tragedy, however, is merely the beginning of the development of the figure since the child's death is considered an accident and no one knows that the girls were involved. After this initial killing, Sula goes on to take the lives of others; by

the end, pursuing individual desires and further opportunities for her specific endeavors, she assumes the role of an American Cain.

Though her characterization, like Haze's, is complex, Sula bears one distinctive trait of the archetype from her childhood: a birthmark on her face that distinguishes her from others. The narrator explains that it "spread from the middle of the lid toward the eyebrow, shaped something like a stemmed rose. It gave her otherwise plain face a broken excitement and blue-blade threat."⁶⁷ That discoloration "was to grow darker as the years passed" and eventually developed a longer stem that some people maintained was more like a snake than a flower; others said it was her mother's "ashes marking her from the very beginning."⁶⁸ As Carolyn Jones argues, "her mark is interpreted in various, mostly negative ways throughout the novel," a hint that this blemish harkens back to the same brand that God places upon Cain after he has murdered his brother.⁶⁹ That unusual imperfection in her skin is only the first sign that there is something different about Sula Peace. It is the initial indication and ever-present reminder to her hometown, the Bottom, that the young girl is, like the Son of Adam, perhaps completely irredeemable. It alone is not enough to classify her as an example of the archetype, but there is additional evidence. To many of her neighbors, she is, like the Biblical antecedent, the embodiment of evil; as Jones contends, eventually "the community, indicting the evil Sula for every accident that befalls it, recognizes the mark as the sign of the murderer."⁷⁰ Two specific incidents serve to implicate the protagonist is just this way. First, a young boy trips down her front steps, and Sula, seen trying to help him up after his fall, is accused of knocking him down in the first place; the boy suffers a broken bone but is otherwise uninjured. A second accident proves further damning to her reputation: "Mr. Finley sat on his porch sucking chicken bones, as he had done for thirteen years, looked up, saw Sula, choked on a bone and died on the spot."⁷¹

The events, despite their accidental nature, reveal the dark and dangerous power that the community attributes to Sula; they appear more inauspicious because of the ominous birthmark of the only person involved in both episodes. However, this alleged, intangible effect, strengthened by the presence of the flower, or snake, imprinted on her face, is still only anecdotal evidence of her identity as a Cainian figure.

Nevertheless, she exhibits additional attributes of the Biblical antecedent, including anger, jealousy, and a violent streak or, perhaps more accurately, an indifference to the physical suffering and loss of life that she causes or that occurs directly around her. Her negative traits stem, at least in part, from her unusually violent and warped upbringing. Sula's home life is less than ideal; she lives with her grandmother, Eva, the one-legged matriarch of the Peace family, her mother, Hannah, and an odd assortment of relatives, boarders, and orphaned children for whom the eldest woman takes charge. The grandparent, who does provide for everyone in her home, also displays, at times, a disturbing brutality that in one case leads her to set fire to her only son, Plum, murdering him in his own bed because he is suffering from the effects of a heroine addiction. The girl's mother sets an equally unhealthy example for her daughter, engaging in a number of illicit, sexual affairs in the home and thus exposing the girl to infidelity and betrayal at a young age.⁷² At one point, Hannah expresses the fact that though she loves her daughter, she does not "like her."⁷³ This pronouncement angers the youngster and drives her to the creek on the day that Chicken Little accidentally drowns. The rejection she experiences is reminiscent of the feeling Cain has when God accept his brother's offering instead of his own. Her mother's words also instill a wrath within the young girl, a cold hate that results in another death. When Hannah catches fire while working outside, Sula, it is later revealed, stands on the porch watching the scene with a scathing indifference. Eva, who jumps from an upper-story

window in an attempt to save her daughter, believes that “Sula had watched Hannah burn not because she was paralyzed” with fear, as some conjecture, “but because she was interested.”⁷⁴ Later, on her deathbed, Sula admits to herself that she intentionally offered no assistance to her dying mother: “I stood there watching her burn and was thrilled. I wanted her to keep on jerking like that, to keep on dancing.”⁷⁵ Beyond the drowning of the little boy in the river, it is another in a series of lives lost in the novel that involves the titular character in some way; the refusal to assist her mother in a time of need, though she has the opportunity, suggests her Cainian role.

As a result, violence and death come to typify Sula’s existence. She again displays a tendency for physical brutality in dealing with some immigrant boys who have bothered her and Nel. When confronted by the bullies again, she “reached into her coat pocket and pulled out Eva’s paring knife,” a response that only incites the boys further. Her next act, however, terrifies them:

Holding the knife in her right hand, she pulled the slate toward her and pressed her left forefinger down hard on its edge. Her aim was determined but inaccurate. She slashed off only the tip of her finger. The four boys stared open-mouthed at the wound and the scrap of flesh, like a button-mushroom, curling in the cherry blood that ran into the corners of the slate.

Sula raised her eyes to them. Her voice was quiet. “If I can do that to myself, what you suppose I’ll do to you?”⁷⁶

The calculated and unsettling means of defense again reveals her nature; though her eventual action is not originally intended, it displays her capacity to perform unthinkable and gruesome feats in order to preserve her way of life and to achieve those things she wants.

Nel's life is the final one taken by her good friend and corresponds to the fratricide, though the loss that occurs is more complex than one person murdering another. As Jones maintains, Nel Wright plays Abel to Sula's Cain, the evil figure refusing "to acknowledge the need for and the importance of the 'other.'" ⁷⁷ The Cainian woman returns to the Bottom after a ten-year absence, and her arrival is marked with a plague of robins, another symbolic event that the community attributes to the woman who they are convinced is evil. ⁷⁸ Both women have offered their lives as offerings to Fate, but Peace does not experience the peace and satisfaction that Nel does. It is at this point that the existence that Nel has established for herself, one of contentment, is taken away; her husband, Jude, has an affair with the more experienced, traveled women. The betrayal, clearly, is both significant and tragic, and, in the aftermath, the abandoned wife thinks back to Chicken Little's death and funeral, equating the sad occurrence she has just endured with that earlier moment of death and loss. ⁷⁹ Later, after her spouse has left town and the two old acquaintances attempt some form of reconciliation, Nel speaks of the infidelity in terms of a murder, an insinuation that her friend hears but is unwilling to acknowledge:

"And you didn't love me enough to leave him alone. To let him love me. You had to take him away."

"What you mean take him away? I didn't kill him, I just fucked him. If we were such good friends, how come you couldn't get over it." ⁸⁰

Despite Sula's unsympathetic response, it is clear that the wronged woman recognizes the influence this person has had on her experience. Life as she had known it has ended; it is not Jude that has been killed but rather Nel. The Cain figure of Morrison's novel has, like Cal Trask, indirectly brought about the loss of her double's life; as Judge Pyncheon steals Clifford's existence, so too does Sula choke the breath from her friend.

Though Nel will forgive Sula in the end and eventually realize that she is inherently connected to her betrayer, her life has been altered irrevocably; there will be no return to the way things were between the spouses or the two friends. Her husband now gone, she takes cleaning jobs and attempts to carve out a new life for herself, though it is a mere shadow of the existence she had known. She regrets that the grief over the loss of her marriage and the existence she knew subsides with time, because she wants to retain the physical anguish she initially feels in order to remind herself of the psychological and emotional pain she is experiencing. She equates her new situation with eternal suffering; as she tells herself, “ ‘Hell ain’t things lasting forever. Hell is change.’ ”⁸¹ Following the “fratricide,” the life of the Cainian figure, on the other hand, changes in only one way; she is ostracized from the life of the community even more than she was before the affair occurred. She eventually becomes a complete outcast in her own hometown or, as she realizes, assumes the role of “pariah.”⁸² In arrogance and selfishness, she refuses to believe that her existence is somehow intertwined with her childhood friend: “She had clung to Nel as the closest thing to both an other and a self, only to discover that she and Nel were not one and the same thing.”⁸³ In other words, though she held on to her friend in hopes of better understanding her own identity, in the end she declares that she is not her sister’s keeper. Despite the betrayed woman’s attempts at reconciliation, the embodiment of evil in the novel denies any wrongdoing on her part and remains separated from society as a whole and from any individual relationships as well. When she dies four years later the town silently rejoices, thinking that they are free of her influence.⁸⁴ But, in a strange twist of fate, even Sula’s death results in further tragedy. A group, freed of the concern of the evildoer, joins Shadrack’s annual National Suicide Day parade and is accidentally killed when a tunnel collapses. It is a final

result of the woman's power over the people of the Bottom, a disaster and loss of life that the Cain of the novel perpetrates indirectly on innocent victims.

The attributes and actions of the protagonist, first suggested by her strange birthmark and the death of Chicken Little, suggest a Cainian nature, but it is her attitudes toward her own experience and the pursuit of very specific desires that designate her as an American version of the archetype. Though she displays anger and violence at times, Sula's life is more consistently characterized by the hope that the next object or opportunity will fulfill her needs and provide a better life, a version of the American Dream. Unfortunately, she is never satisfied and continues to take advantage of the options before her, whether they are people, places, or merely a new venture, even though these actions result in tragedy and loss for others. The narrator explains that as children, both girls have a "quality" of "adventuresomeness" as well as "a mean determination to explore every thing that interested them."⁸⁵ Nel loses these Adamic, and childlike, traits when she marries, but they remain with her friend, who is "distinctly different" from everyone else around her and is, finally, an image of R. W. B. Lewis' icon:

Eva's arrogance and Hannah's self-indulgence merged in her and, with a twist that was all her own imagination, she lived out her days exploring her own thoughts and emotions, giving them full reign, feeling no obligation to please anybody unless their pleasure pleased her. As willing to feel pain as to give pain, to feel pleasure as to give pleasure, hers was an experimental life—ever since her mother's remarks sent her flying up those stairs, ever since her one major feeling of responsibility had been exorcised on the bank of a river with a closed place in the idle.⁸⁶

In other words, the protagonist embodies qualities reminiscent of the first national archetype: self-confidence, a pioneering spirit, and an existence marked by the pursuit of personal desire. Like Lewis' Adam, she begins life as "a young innocent . . . advancing hopefully into a complex world" and "radically affecting that world and radically affected by it."⁸⁷ However, her indulgence of those personality traits and a passionate hope for satisfaction without thought to the consequences result in a sacrifice of lives; thus, she is an American Cain. She dreams of and eventually attempts a life of independence, expressiveness, mobility, and experience and seeks the opportunity to remain undefined, but these desires lead to the death of others and her own eventual station as an outcast from society. Her mother's rejection and her failure to protect or rescue Chicken Little, the two defining events of her life, always draw her back to the Cain-likeness inherent within her despite her attempts to be free of them. No amount of innate Adamness or American pursuits can alter the part she is to play; instead, as with other examples of the archetype, her grasping after a version of the national dream ends in murder, betrayal, punishment, marking, and exile.

Toni Morrison has explained, as Jones notes, that the two protagonists of the novel "make up one whole person," each serving as one half.⁸⁸ Jones details that "Sula is ship, the 'New World Black Woman,' and Nel safe harbor, 'the Traditional Black Woman.'" As such, they comprise the double required of a tale utilizing the Cain and Abel story, as well as the American version of archetype. Nel, who represents convention and normalcy, appears innocent, though, as the ramblings of Eva suggest, she should share in the guilt of the murder of Chicken Little. Despite that implication, she is able to rise above in the end and experience a freedom from the past and the loss she has known by admitting her inherent connection with her childhood friend; in the novel, the Cain of the United States assumes the regenerative role that Ricardo Quinones

argues the Biblical figure eventually attains in literature.⁸⁹ In other words, the betrayed woman admits that she has a little bit of Sula in her, welcoming the liberty that such a confession provides her.⁹⁰ The concession is one that Sula could never make; ever pursuant of her independence and self-reliance, she remains outcast from society, a figure of derision and isolation. Containing the potential of a progressive black woman who could create a path to the future for others to follow, her endeavors instead prove destructive to those around her because she is selfish and unrepentant. It is Sula's pursuit of the aspects of the American Dream, including personal independence and unlimited options for her own future, that results in the loss of life and her own exile. The novelist, using an American Cain, provides clarification on that ideology of the nation, exposing the potential for an alternative experience, violent and otherwise, to the hopefulness and idealism modeled by Lewis' Adamic archetype.

IV. A Necessary Alternative

Despite numerous cases of the American Cain, no one character has yet emerged who provides a quintessential image of the second national icon; in other words, there is no Natty Bumppo to hold up as the ultimate example by which others might be compared. However, this fact does not limit the prevalence of that model; there are, instead, individual cases that when taken together provide a definition of the archetype. Each example reenacts the signature experiences of the first murderer but also raises questions about the national dream and, thus, by association, implies some measure of doubt about the supremacy of Adam as a representative figure. The cases of McTeague, Rion Outlaw, and Cal Trask, as well as Thomas Morton, Judge Pyncheon, Hazel Motes, and Sula Peace, each, in their own way, help define the figure; all

appearances of the icon in the literature of the country suggest its specific function and add to its profound significance. They are all instances of a representative character who, as a result of the failure to achieve a better life or in pursuit of promised opportunity, displays anger towards and jealousy of a close relation, eventually takes the life of that person, is punished, and then exiled or abandoned as a result. The protagonists' display of Cainian traits and their replaying of that antecedent's actions, because they occur in connection with inherently American endeavors and are under-girded by foundational, national ideals, provide perspective on the consistent relevance of the dream of the country and cast aspersion on the overt idealism of that concept. Though the American Adam provides hope that the "good life" is available to all, the archetype based on his son exemplifies the alternative experience of many Americans who know the failure, suffering, and disillusionment that is just as common for citizens of the United States. The icon of the party of Hope, as identified by R. W. B. Lewis, does exist, but there is evidence of a second national protagonist in the literature of the United States as well.

The existence of an American Cain does not do away with his archetypal predecessor; rather, the national Cain relies heavily on the identity and characteristics of Lewis' Adam for his own definition, even while his presence weakens the prescriptive ideal and general mythology to which that idyllic character corresponds. In fact, the experience that the American Cain represents begins within the Adamic endeavor and mindset; clearly, there can be no son without the father and, relatedly, there can be no disappointment and disillusionment, and thus the ensuing murder, without at least the possibility of success. Those figures that eventually become the alternative icon first pursue some version of the lifestyle and internalize some of the attributes of the first archetype, just as Cain, despite his parents' failure to obey the mandates of God, follows in his father's footsteps.⁹¹ Reminiscent of the national Adam, his progeny is

endowed with impressive physical abilities and is seemingly gifted with a proclivity toward success despite the inheritance of certain genetic limitations. Additionally, the Cain of the United States initially seeks liberty, opportunity, and personal achievement to separate himself from an inauspicious past, desiring to establish a better life than his ancestors have known. He also, at the outset, attempts an avoidance of familial responsibility and willingly surrenders or simply rejects the past with its traditions, rituals, and expectations in order to create an example that others can model.

McTeague, Rion Outlaw, and Cal Trask each exhibit some combination of these American Adamic characteristics and display a commitment to the ideology of the United States early in their respective works; in other words, they initially model the archetype Lewis identified. The dentist, the idea of America's dream instilled within him by his mother, realizes his own version of that belief, one marked by personal freedom and self-indulgence. His Sunday afternoons, a gross display of leisure and laziness that seem to satisfy the giant of a man, are times of personal enjoyment without thought to those around him or regard to his past; in those moments he is unfettered, independent, and comfortable, the aspects, for him, of an idyllic life. Once he finds his Eve, he improves his situation and, with Trina's help, develops additional aspirations, envisioning a rewarding life for his future family enabled by his own personal success. Orion, with Daniel Boone as his mentor, is consumed initially by a longing to venture west and find new lands in Kentucky, an urge he satisfies when he leads the Dawsons and the Wagners to that uncharted place. He seeks the life of a pioneer, characterized by the freedom to range and explore, devoid of any sense of previous expectations, and unrestricted by outdated traditions or arbitrary laws. Cal desires an existence removed from the inherited traits and parental influence that limit him, those things that define his identity in ways he wants to reject

or forget. He too hopes for a life free of restraints, whether they are fiscal, social, or psychological; to this end, he develops a path of economic opportunity that others can follow, attempting to move beyond the failures of his father. The Adam-like attitudes and actions of these protagonists are not a ruse or a mistake; they merely display the innate connection between the archetypal father and son as well as prove that the American Dream retains a central place in the national mindset. Even the national Cain, at least at first, desires those opportunities and internalizes the hopes that his predecessor models for any who follow.

In the end, however, the experience of the archetypal son will differ from his father's; the failure of those ideals and that prescription for success will result in the reenactment of the first fratricide, as these American Cains react to the failure of their personal aspirations and efforts. Despite the inspiration and motivation that the idealism of the Adamic figure produces, the obstacles to those efforts prove equally formidable. The dream, with all of its components, is not always realized and many in the country are not able to maintain the existence they have carved out for themselves or achieve the goals they believed their accomplishments should effect. Some abandon their aspirations altogether and accept failure or whatever condition they find themselves in when the barriers present themselves; they are examples of a failed Adam. Many change their goals or accept failure as a natural end. Others, however, such as Norris's dentist, Gordon's pioneer-turned-farmer, and Steinbeck's "Everyman," instead choose to take violent means to ensure that their pursuits can continue or in reaction to their unrealized dreams.⁹² These national Cains exhibit jealousy and anger at others' successes; their difficulties lead not to indifference or acceptance but rather to murder, an act they believe will allow them to continue their original endeavors or in the least provide a release point for the emotions they feel in the face of their struggles. As these efforts give way to Cainian acts, the consequences provide

perspective on the national concept and its alleged opportunities, portraying one possible end, however dramatic, of the disappointing experience many people have. As an alternative to Lewis' figure, the Cain of the United States illustrates the tragic end of unrealized aspirations, what can happen when hopefulness and blind optimism gives way to real experience that is less than ideal.

Unfortunately, the troubles that these characters experience, and thus their reactions, are not isolated incidents. It is not just personal issues, an individual's lack of effort, or a specific situation that leads to unrealized dreams. As history suggests, times of discord and suffering, as well as instances of failure, are ubiquitous in the nation, and they, like the contention that sparked the Biblical antecedent's violent act, also help produce the actions of the American Cain. In addition to particular events that undermine attempts to seize the opportunity alluded to in the American Dream, the shifting of ideologies also creates rifts and debates that surface alongside, and sometimes merge with, the issues that produce more tangible losses and limit the potential of citizens' efforts at a better life. The idealism and optimism of the country is constantly being thrown into doubt by tragic incidents that occur, resulting in increased examples of disappointed Americans seeking the promises that seem inherently theirs. The past is spotted with unfortunate circumstances, the Civil War, industrialization, and the systematic displacement of Native Americans among others, that have brought about negative consequences such as economic disparity, violent crime, and racial inequality; these and many other issues prove to be obstacles to the promises of a better life and also serve as the catalysts for the emergence of the Cain of the United States.

McTeague, Orion Outlaw, and Cal Trask each appear in novels written during or about such periods of great change or turmoil within the nation, examples of conflict that relate to the

discord at work in the Cain and Abel story that, as Leon Kass asserts, presents “the source of human troubles”; these moments in history help birth the appearances of the literary archetype.⁹³ Frank Norris lived during one of the most transitional eras in American history, a period of increased immigration, widespread industrialization, and intense economic disparity. In addition, his writing appeared amid the debate between the accepted, conventional mores and religious doctrines of the past and the scientific progressivism and unchecked development of the fast-approaching twentieth century. Gordon, who was born near the end of Norris’s very short life, was also affected by these same underlying conflicts; however, the effects of the first World War and the gruesome evidence that humanity could inflict such suffering and violence further complicated the dispute that Norris knew and expanded the original issue to a more general clash between progress and tradition. The writer's Southern roots heightened her attention to this dispute, as she witnessed the aftershocks of Reconstruction in her region some fifty years after the Civil War had ended, a contention between two very different parts of the United States and their particular ways of life that also corresponds to the tale of the first fratricide. Steinbeck wrote *East of Eden* in the wake of the World War II and after a series of personal difficulties, hardships that caused the novelist to return to an examination of the ancient struggle between good and evil, the root conflict at work in the fourth chapter of Genesis. These dramatic moments in the history of the country, events that complicated the idealized image of humanity, also sparked significant doubts about the foundational beliefs of America. In each case, there were suddenly questions to be asked about the possibility and sustainability of a hopeful future for the United States in a world where such atrocities were possible and ideological struggles persisted.

The American Adam's portrayal of unfettered freedom, self-reliance, and possibility tells only part of the story of the nation. Those who know a different experience are represented by the Cain of the United States, a figure whose appearance proves that the opportunities associated with the national dream are equally possible and inflated, whether the obstacles to such an effort are individual or international conflicts. In fact, the emergence of the national Cain archetype is an extreme example of what those pursuits can create, a dramatic depiction of the potential tragedy such endeavors, however innocuous, can cause. And yet, the American Dream is ubiquitous; it remains a core ideology in the collective mindset of the country. The continued presence of that belief assures the place of Lewis' Adam as an archetype in the mythology of the country. However, the prevalence of individual troubles, as well as ideological and physical conflict that obstruct the pursuit of that ideology, produce a place for the American Cain in the story of the nation as well. Where the father appears, there is the possibility of the son; they are inherently connected. Just as Lewis's model was identified in the early writing of the states, so too the representative son emerges in the fiction of the country, as authors portray an alternative, negative experience to the prescribed idealism and optimism of the Adamic icon and depict the potential violence and tragedy that a hopeless existence can engender. The examples of McTeague, Rion Outlaw, and Caleb Trask help define the figure who is found throughout the literary history of America, but they are only the beginning, glaring cases of what can happen. Every time a Holgrave emerges, there is the potential for a McTeague. For every Edgar Huntly there is the possibility of a Cal Trask. Every instance of a Natty Bumppo could produce a Rion Outlaw. If history is any indication, more examples of both are yet to come.

Notes

¹ Stuart Babbage, *The Mark of Cain: Studies in Literature and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 46-47. Babbage quotes Oliver Quick, *The Gospel of the New World* (London: Nisbet, 1944), 40.

² Many questions surround the fourth chapter of Genesis, including those about the reasoning behind God's rejection of Cain's sacrifice, the purpose of the marking on the murderer, and the ambiguity about whether the surviving brother can have victory over his sin. See Babbage's *The Mark of Cain*; Leon R. Kass, "Farmers, Founders, and Fratricide: The Story of Cain and Abel," *First Things*, 62 (1996): 19-26, and Ruth Mellinkoff, *The Mark of Cain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981) for further discussion of these issues.

³ Ricardo J. Quinones, *The Changes of Cain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 10.

⁴ William Bradford, *Of Plimouth Plantation 1620-1647* (New York: Modern Library, 1981), 227.

⁵ Bradford, 231.

⁶ Bradford, 227.

⁷ Quinones, 10.

⁸ Interestingly, there is not a great deal of research on the American Cain figure. A search for the name in the MLA Bibliography database returns only two essays: Susan Spencer, "James Dickey's American Cain," *College Language Association Quarterly*, 36, No. 3 (1993): 291-306 and Barbara Heavilin, "Judge, Observer, Prophet: The American Cain and Steinbeck's

Shifting Perspective,” *The Critical Response to John Steinbeck’s The Grapes of Wrath*, ed. Barbara Heavilin (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2000), 233-46.

⁹ Patrick Shaw, “A Fugitive Upon the Earth: Tom Joad and the Myth of Cain,” *The Betrayal of Brotherhood in the Work of John Steinbeck: Cain Sign*, ed. Michael J. Meyer (Lewiston: Edwin Mellon Press, 2000), 243.

¹⁰ Mashkoo Ali Syed. “Dual Duality: Kino as Cain and Abel in *The Pearl*,” *Betrayal of Brotherhood*, 295.

¹¹ Susan Garland Mann, “*The Pastures of Heaven: Agrarianism and The Emergent Middle Class*,” *Betrayal of Brotherhood*, 153.

¹² Mann, 158.

¹³ Mann, 147-48.

¹⁴ Mann, 148-49.

¹⁵ Mann, 157.

¹⁶ Mann, 148.

¹⁷ Quinones, 6.

¹⁸ See Quinones, 135-52.

¹⁹ Robert Armour, “*Deliverance: Four Variations of the American Adam*,” *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 1 (1973): 280, qtd. in Spencer, 293.

²⁰ Spencer, 293.

²¹ Spencer, 296.

²² Spencer, 293, 294.

²³ Spencer, 294.

²⁴ Spencer, 304.

²⁵ Despite Spencer's assertion that all four characters as Adamic, the novel presents no such idea. From the beginning, Ed Gentry, Bobby Trippe, and Drew Ballinger are limited by their physical inadequacies and inherent fear and thus are ineffectual in nature, softened by the comfort they have attained in their real world existence; they are in no way American Adam-like beyond agreeing to take a weekend foray into the wilderness. A few days in the woods and on the river cannot establish them as representatives of R. W. B. Lewis' icon, but it can expose their failed attempt to realize that desire. Once Drew dies, Bobby is raped by one of the mountain men, and Lewis is injured, Ed is left as the only other compelling character, particularly as an archetypal figure.

²⁶ Spencer, 297. She writes that

what is needed, Dickey is telling us, is the evolution of a new hero,
or perhaps a dialectic: if the thesis is the romantic American hero,
who is then beset by the antithetic force of encroaching reality,
then the synthesis would be one who is able to see the values of
both.

²⁷ Spencer, 305.

²⁸ Spencer, 306.

²⁹ Spencer, 306.

³⁰ Spencer, 294.

³¹ Flannery O'Connor, *Wise Blood* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1952), rpt. in *Collected Works*, ed. Sally Fitzgerald (New York: Library of America, 1988), 59.

³² See the note to the text in O'Connor, 1246.

³³ O'Connor, 12.

³⁴ O'Connor, 12.

³⁵ R. W. B. Lewis, *The American Adam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), 7.

Lewis argues that Emerson's "party of Hope" was the main proponent of the American Adam and that the archetype had its genesis in the writings of the members of that unofficial group: Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman, James Fenimore Cooper, and others.

³⁶ O'Connor, 11.

³⁷ O'Connor, 35.

³⁸ O'Connor, 11, 12.

³⁹ O'Connor, 13.

⁴⁰ Lewis, 1.

⁴¹ O'Connor, 10, 14.

⁴² O'Connor, 5.

⁴³ O'Connor, 16.

⁴⁴ See O'Connor, 31-32.

⁴⁵ O'Connor, 38.

⁴⁶ O'Connor, 41.

⁴⁷ O'Connor, 105.

⁴⁸ O'Connor, 64.

⁴⁹ O'Connor, 31, 59.

⁵⁰ O'Connor, 93.

⁵¹ O'Connor, 6, 7.

⁵² O'Connor, 7.

⁵³ O'Connor, 56-57.

⁵⁴ O'Connor, 105-06.

⁵⁵ O'Connor, 100, 106.

⁵⁶ O'Connor, 106.

⁵⁷ O'Connor, 94.

⁵⁸ O'Connor, 95.

⁵⁹ O'Connor, 113.

⁶⁰ O'Connor, 115.

⁶¹ Genesis 4:10 Revised Standard Version.

⁶² O'Connor, 117.

⁶³ O'Connor, 118.

⁶⁴ O'Connor, 119.

⁶⁵ O'Connor, 131.

⁶⁶ Carolyn M. Jones, in "*Sula and Beloved: Images of Cain in the Novels of Toni Morrison*," *African American Review*, 27, No. 4 (1993): 615-26, argues that both novels introduce a Cain figure, though she does not suggest the idea that the Sula or Sethe are versions of a national archetype.

⁶⁷ Toni Morrison, *Sula* (New York: Plume, 1973), 52.

⁶⁸ Morrison, 53, 114.

⁶⁹ Jones, 620.

⁷⁰ Jones, 620.

⁷¹ Morrison, 114.

⁷² Morrison, 43-44.

⁷³ Morrison, 57.

⁷⁴ Morrison, 78.

⁷⁵ Morrison, 147.

⁷⁶ Morrison, 54-55.

⁷⁷ Jones, 624.

⁷⁸ Morrison, 89-90.

⁷⁹ Morrison, 107.

⁸⁰ Morrison, 145.

⁸¹ Morrison, 108.

⁸² Morrison, 122.

⁸³ Morrison, 119.

⁸⁴ Morrison, 150-51.

⁸⁵ Morrison, 55.

⁸⁶ Morrison, 118.

⁸⁷ Lewis, 127-28.

⁸⁸ Jones, 624. Jones references Bill Moyers' interview with Toni Morrison, collected in

World of Ideas II (New York: Doubleday, 1990): 54-63.

⁸⁹ Quinones, 95-108.

⁹⁰ Morrison, 174.

⁹¹ As Leon Kass asserts in “Farmers, Founders, and Fratricide,” the story of the first fratricide “is, in fact, not a separate tale but, rather, a continuation and conclusion of the story of the Garden of Eden. It completes the story of Adam and Eve (begun in Genesis 2:4), of whom we shall not hear again. [and] . . . shows us what natural or unregulated human life can be like” (1). In other words, Cain’s murderous act is the result of the scene at the Tree of Knowledge, when, according to Christian tradition, sin entered the world. Adam’s sons, of course, literally follow in the footsteps of their parents, and their father specifically, by adopting new means of subsistence to provide for the family after the expulsion from the Garden of Eden.

⁹² John Steinbeck, [Letter to Pat Covici, September 11, 1951], *Steinbeck: A Life in Letters*, ed. Elaine Steinbeck and Robert Wallsten (New York: Penguin, 1975), 429.

⁹³ Kass, 19.

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