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# Intertextuality, Shared Language, and the Many Transformations of Cain: A Comparative Analysis of Byron's *Cain* and Ransmayr's *Der fliegende Berg*

**Abstract:** The article concentrates on two paraphrases of the archetypical Cain and Abel story: Lord Byron's *Cain* and Christoph Ransmayr's *Der fliegende Berg* [The Flying Mountain]. In both cases, language has a central role in the protagonist's relationship to his brother, and this is also intertwined with an extreme existential situation in which the protagonist is disconnected from his usual sociocultural (and linguistic) environment. Byron's Cain is alienated from his brother, which has linguistic reflexes: the two use different languages. However, Cain's killing of his brother is an act against God. The narrator of Ransmayr's verse novel is partially alienated from his brother Liam: yet Liam, once their late father's favourite, seems to be less at peace with himself and the world than the narrator, and thus takes on attributes of Cain. The brothers' shared journey to the Tibetan mountains reconnects them, however. They are either by themselves or among a local tribe, and their experiences on the border between life and death recreate a shared language between them. The presence/absence of a shared language thus results in different outcomes in the two texts.

**Keywords:** alienation, Byronic hero, intertextuality, narrator, paraphrase, verse novel, Lord Byron, Christoph Ransmayr

## 1 Introduction

As pointed out by Quinones (2014, 3), the biblical story of Cain and Abel is an archetypal story which has often been rewritten in literature. The description of the murder and its cause is very brief in the Bible. It is said that Cain sacrifices fruits of the ground, while Abel sacrifices an animal; God accepts Abel's offerings but not those of Cain, but there is no explicit explanation why. The story continues as follows:

> And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell. And the LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire,

and thou shalt rule over him. And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him. And the LORD said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper? And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground. (King James Bible, Gen. 4.5–12)

God then curses Cain to be a fugitive and a vagabond.

There are some important features that need to be highlighted here. First, there are only three characters, God, Cain, and Abel; however, Abel has no linguistic presence of his own. Second, there is a conflict between two events: God's acceptance of Abel's sacrifice and God's rejection of Cain's sacrifice. In other words, there is no direct conflict between Cain and Abel, or between Cain and God. In this way, the conflict between Cain and Abel is generated by Cain's metonymic substitution of the conflict between the events with the participants in the events (more precisely, with Abel and Cain, since God is a constant participant in both cases). Furthermore, this metonymic substitution is a two-step process, as God's reaction in each case targets the sacrifice itself, and the person making the sacrifice is affected only indirectly. Third, the only dialogue takes place between Cain and God: there is a direct connection between the two.

The adaptations of the Cain story do not necessarily differ considerably regarding these points; this is especially true for mystery plays. One example of this is in the *Chester Cycle* from the Middle English period, where the story is extended only as much as necessary, adding the characters of Adam and Eve (*The Chester Mystery Cycle* 1992, second play, lines 425–705). There are altogether more dialogues, but Abel is still only minimally present in terms of speech.

In adaptations, the conflict between the two brothers is naturally a central issue, and, as Quinones (2014, 19) notes, in the Byronic and post-Byronic era, the slaying of the brother is part of the process of Cain's coming to selfhood, thereby constituting an instance of regeneration. In the present article, I am going to examine two adaptations in this light. The first one is, logically, Lord Byron's *Cain*: this is a famous instance of foregrounding the negative hero (see Butler 1990, 65, 76). Importantly, the subtitle calls the text a "mystery"; however, it is altogether different from a traditional mystery play (this includes an explicit breakaway from the biblical worldview; see Michaels 1969, 72; Bostetter 1960). The second one is Christoph Ransmayr's *Der fliegende Berg* [The Flying Mountain]: this novel written in verse uses the archetypal story of Cain and Abel (see Lütkehaus 2006), and, just like Byron's text, it arrives at a regeneration. However, as this text is not a strict adaptation of the Cain story, there is no factual slaying and the conclusion regarding the two brothers' relationship differs as well. I will argue that the difference between Byron and Ransmayr is closely intertwined with how language functions in both cases. Both texts show an extreme existential situation, in

which the protagonist is disconnected from his usual sociocultural (and hence linguistic) environment. In *Cain*, the journey to regeneration is taken by Cain without his brother, which causes further alienation between the two: this alienation is reflected by their linguistic differences. In *Der fliegende Berg*, the journey is taken together by the brothers, resulting in reconnection, which is made possible and expressed through shared language.

# 2 Cain as a Byronic hero

Byron's Cain is a prototypical "Byronic hero" (Michaels 1969, 71): among other features, this involves a revolt transgressing certain conventions (see Steffan 1968, 39–41; Butler 1990, 66; Beatty 1990, 131; McGann 2002, 158). This trait was largely responsible for the negative reception of the work by its contemporary audiences (Steffan 1968, 9–18; Barton 1990; Knight 1957; McGann 2002).

Byron introduces various new characters (compared to the Bible): apart from Adam and Eve (who are partial towards Abel), Lucifer and the wives of Cain and Abel appear in the play. Crucially, God does not appear. This has the consequence that the most important dialogues take place between Cain and Lucifer, and there are no dialogues between God and Cain. As God is not present, there are naturally no dialogues in the text, but the point is that there is no un-narrated dialogue either: it is evident that God is not accessible.

Cain's questions throughout the play are essentially existential in nature. Thus, he cannot receive (satisfying) answers from his family (his parents and Abel are essentially dogmatic; see Steffan [1968, 29–34] for a detailed analysis) or from God (since no immediate dialogue is possible with God). In this way, the only possible source of answers is Lucifer, who is naturally willing to approach him as he thinks that he can use Cain in his fight against God. Lucifer takes Cain on an extraterrestrial journey, whereby Cain must confront his own insignificance[1] and is thus further alienated from God. On the other hand, his questions essentially remain unanswered by Lucifer as well, who tries to use Cain for his own purposes (see Steffan 1968, 37, 53) and who mostly replies by asking other questions (see Michaels 1969, 73). Hence, Cain ultimately rejects Lucifer too. In this sense, the journey makes Cain more isolated than he was before.

On returning to earth, Cain is even more alienated from his family; essentially no dialogue is possible at this point. This is evident from Cain's words to Abel, as an answer to the question of what he saw on his journey:

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**1** As pointed out by Steffan (1968, 9), this was highlighted by Byron himself in a letter to Murray.

> The dead,
> The immortal, the unbounded, the omnipotent,
> The overpowering mysteries of space –
> The innumerable worlds that were and are –
> A whirlwind of such overwhelming things,
> Suns, moons, and earths, upon their loud-voiced spheres
> Singing in thunder round me, as have made me
> Unfit for mortal converse: leave me, Abel.
> 
> (Byron 1986 [1821], 3.177–184)

Cain at this point tries to avoid a dialogue, not least because he does not want to hurt Abel. Abel registers the change in his brother and says the following:

> Thine eyes are flashing with unnatural light –
> Thy cheek is flushed with an unnatural hue –
> Thy words are fraught with an unnatural sound –
> What may this mean?
> 
> (Byron 1986 [1821], 3.184–187)

Even so, Abel does not want to accept his brother's reservations and insists on making a sacrifice to God. Cain essentially respects Abel and tries to avoid the situation, in an act of love towards Abel; but in the end, he does not resist any more. The differences between the two brothers are especially clear when it comes to the sacrifices, and the contrast is expressed linguistically as well.

Abel kneels when performing his sacrifice, and he uses a language of devotion and identification. Consider the beginning of his monologue:

> Oh God!
> Who made us, and who breathed the breath of life
> Within our nostrils, who hath blessed us,
> And spared, despite our father's sin, to make
> His children all lost, as they might have been,
> Had not thy justice been so temper'd with
> The mercy which is thy delight, as to
> Accord a pardon like a Paradise,
> Compared with our great crimes: – Sole Lord of light!
> 
> (Byron 1986 [1821], 3.223–231)

By contrast, Cain stands upright during his sacrifice, and he uses a language of alienation and scepticism. His monologue begins as follows:

> Spirit! whate'er or whosoe'er thou art,
> Omnipotent, it may be – and, if good,
> Shown in the exemption of thy deeds from evil;
> Jehovah upon earth! and God in heaven!

> And it may be with other names, because
> Thine attributes seem many, as thy works: –
> If thou must be propitiated with prayers,
> Take them! If thou must be induced with altars,
> And soften'd with a sacrifice, receive them!
> Two beings here erect them unto thee.
> > (Byron 1986 [1821], 3.245–254)

Cain's speech questions all elements of Abel's speech, even though his primary addressee is not Abel but God. He does not acknowledge the authority of God, which is evident already from the way he addresses him: he refers to him as "Spirit," and the notion "God" occurs only indirectly, that is, as a name that God uses in heaven. In addition, Cain also questions the omnipotence and the goodness of God, without denying either of them.

Hence, the contrast between the brothers is expressed linguistically: they are using different languages while naturally still capable of understanding each other. This is important because the conflict is not only reflected by language: it is also caused by language. Namely, language reveals their inherent differences: Abel abhors Cain's speech and Cain rejects Abel's language. While Abel uses a language that acknowledges God's authority, Cain questions the legitimacy of such a language and the authority of God. Apart from this, he also poses a question, for he includes a choice for God in his speech:

> If thou lov'st blood, the shepherd's shrine, which smokes
> On my right hand, hath shed it for thy service
> In the first of his flock, whose limbs now reek
> In sanguinary incense to thy skies;
> Or if the sweet and blooming fruits of earth,
> And milder seasons, which the unstain'd turf
> I spread them on now offers in the face
> Of the broad sun which ripen'd them, may seem
> Good to thee, inasmuch as they have not
> Suffer'd in limb or life, and rather form
> A sample of thy works, than supplication
> To look on ours! If a shrine without victim,
> And altar without gore, may win thy favour,
> Look on it! and for him who dresseth it,
> He is – such as thou mad'st him; and seeks nothing
> Which must be won by kneeling: if he's evil,
> Strike him! thou art omnipotent, and may'st –
> For what can he oppose? If he be good,
> Strike him, or spare him, as thou wilt! since all
> Rests upon thee! and good and evil seem
> To have no power themselves, save in thy will;
> And whether that be good or ill I know not,

> Not being omnipotent, nor fit to judge
> Omnipotence, but merely to endure
> Its mandate; which thus far I have endured.
> (Byron 1986 [1821], 3.255–279)

Strictly speaking, the question is whether God prefers a bloody sacrifice or mild fruits. Importantly, Cain's question is ambiguous. In one reading, the question can refer to the specific sacrifices (the sacrifice of Cain and that of Abel). On the other hand, it may refer to whether God generally requires blood as a sacrifice, which is related to Cain's fundamental preoccupation with mortality and thus also to a more general question of human existence. In addition, he explicitly says that God's choices regarding what is good or evil are arbitrary, and hence even if God chooses one of the sacrifices, it does not necessarily mean that he approves of the underlying concept and that the underlying concept is good.

As a result, God's answer is ambiguous too. In principle, God could accept both sacrifices, yet he accepts the sacrifice of Abel but not that of Cain. In one reading, his choice has to do with the sacrifices and perhaps with the way Cain spoke: Abel's sacrifice is acceptable, Cain's is not. In the alternative reading, his choice is an answer to Cain's existential question and indicates that he prefers blood. Crucially, God's answer uses a non-linguistic code: Abel's sacrifice is consumed by fire, while Cain's is scattered down from the altar by a whirlwind. The lack of linguistic presence from God thus contributes to the ambiguity.

Slaying Abel is an answer to God on Cain's part, and this time not just on a linguistic level. Initially, Cain wants to destroy Abel's altar, but Abel intervenes, saying:

> Thou shalt not: – add not impious works to impious
> Words! let that altar stand – 'tis hallow'd now
> By the immortal pleasure of Jehovah,
> In his acceptance of the victims.
> (Byron 1986 [1821], 3.294–297)

Abel warns Cain against turning language into action; at the same time, he intervenes not only linguistically but also physically (he stands between Cain and the altar), thus establishing the connection between action and language that Cain was merely trying to achieve. By killing Abel, Cain makes this connection irreversible, providing an answer to a concern that is central to Byron's *Cain* (see Callaghan 2010). In this way, Cain destroys the source of devotional language preferred by a supposedly bloodthirsty God. Naturally, this leads to a paradox: Cain abhors death and mortality (see Steffan 1968, 44), and yet he is the first human to cause death (whereby Abel is the first human to die). As Michaels (1969, 74) puts it, he "simultaneously creates and discovers death" (whereby Abel's slaughtering

of animals does not count as creating death). In other words, he is the first human to transform the linguistic concept of death into action (see Callaghan 2010, 125). In addition, his refusal to proffer blood as a sacrifice or to acknowledge the authority of God stems from his inherent resistance to offering blood to God (thus including the slaughter of animals), but by slaying Abel he is apparently satisfying the supposed request of a God who requires blood (see Steffan 1968, 48; Michaels 1969, 75).

Importantly, God does not appear even after the murder, but an Angel does. The dialogue between Cain and the Angel is essentially the same as that in the Bible (between Cain and God), and hence Cain's question ("Am I then / my brother's keeper?"; Byron 1986 [1821], 3.468–469) is also directed at the Angel,[2] and it is the Angel who utters the curse on Cain. The curse is slightly different from standard interpretations in the Bible. The most obvious consequence of the curse for Cain is the loss of his brother, whom he killed by his accident and in rage. In addition, he becomes an outcast and is cursed by his family, except for his wife (and sister) Adah. However, it is also evident from Byron's text that he had a marginal position in his family anyway and was largely isolated from his environment (see Michaels 1969, 74, 77; Steffan 1968, 39–40), and that his parents loved Abel more. Life becomes impossible in his original home, and, crucially, the experience of an extreme existential situation (the extraterrestrial journey) does not bring answers to his questions. Instead, it contributes to the ultimate disaster.

## 3 Cain and reunification

Where adaptations of the Cain and Abel story are concerned, Byron's *Cain* had a central role in shifting the focus on the conflict between the two brothers in such a way that Abel's death constituted a regeneration for Cain, and this aspect is

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**2** As pointed out by Michaels (1969, 71), Byron's sentence contains an additional "then" compared to the Bible, which indicates that Cain identifies himself as Cain the biblical murderer. According to Michaels (1969, 71), this addition "to the notorious question suggests that Cain has read the Bible" and that the form of the question "reveals the curious way in which Byron has conceived this particular hero – as reliving rather than living the Biblical myth," ultimately resulting in the effect that he plays Cain until, by actually murdering his brother, he discovers he *is* Cain. This claim is in line with the strongly reflective character of Cain and his questions that seem to be trying to interpret the world around him as if it were a text; indeed, Cain acts like an enlightened philologist who tries to arrive at his own interpretation using a critical mind (see also Steffan 1968, 38) rather than accepting received knowledge as the rest of his family does (see Michaels 1969, 71, quoting Bostetter 1960).

present in post-Byronic adaptations too (see Quinones 2014). Ultimately, killing Abel is an extreme way for Cain to differentiate his self from that of his brother; moreover, as pointed out in the previous section, Cain in many ways stands in the shadow of Abel (at least for God and for their parents). In this respect, Christoph Ransmayr's *Der fliegende Berg* is particularly interesting, as this text in many ways depicts exactly the opposite development between the two brothers, which I will show to be related to the possibility of a shared language. Nevertheless, the making of the self in the case of the brother who stays alive is similarly related to differentiation and loss. Ransmayr's text is also particularly interesting because, while the basic conflict of Cain and Abel is clearly recognizable, the roles are not neatly separated but instead distributed between the two brothers: this postmodern version of the archetypal story blurs the boundaries between the two figures.

The text features two brothers from Ireland, the narrator (Pad) and his elder brother Liam. Both are trained mountain climbers, and Liam used to be the favourite of their father. The brothers were raised by their father since the mother had left the family for another man; the father was a member of the IRA and had strict opinions about manhood, which he included in the boys' upbringing. In the novel, the two brothers take a journey together to Nepal; their lives between their childhood and this journey have been different, as is their fate during the journey. The narrator, a seafarer, has lived in several places, and he finds his love (Nyema) in the nomadic mountain tribe that the brothers travel with in the mountains. Liam stayed in Ireland all his life; he is single (and secretly gay). The journey is their first shared experience since their childhood and is therefore particularly important.

While various elements of the story of Cain and Abel can be detected in the novel, there are some crucial differences as well. Importantly, the properties of Cain and Abel are distributed between the brothers. Liam is the elder brother and, just like Byron's Cain, more melancholic. He is also more dissatisfied with the world and rebels against authority: in this novel, that is not the authority of God but rather that of nature, which Liam, a programmer, wants to dominate, while the narrator is more in harmony with it, just like the tribe (see Grimm-Hamen 2013, 124–125). On the other hand, the narrator has more reason for jealousy (due to their childhood, when Liam was the favourite son). Also, it is ultimately not the narrator but Liam who dies (though the narrator does not kill him), and the narrator eventually utters Cain's sentence ("Am I my brother's keeper?"), directing it at the Chinese authorities.

It is evident that there is no one-to-one correspondence between the biblical story and Ransmayr's novel. Indeed, in a later essay Ransmayr (2014, 79–80) claims that the story of two brothers as such is an archetypal story, and he says

that he adopted the free-verse form (*Flattersatz, fliegender Satz*, literally "flying sentence"; see also Ransmayr's "Notiz am Rand" [Aside] in *Der fliegende Berg*) precisely because it is also an archaic form, primarily due to its closeness to speech.[3]

In the novel, the two brothers climb various mountains which are more and more difficult: the last one is a mysterious mountain that is not directly accessible as it appears and then disappears from time to time. It is referred to as the "flying mountain." The way in which the two brothers leave the ordinary world behind is partly reminiscent of the extraterrestrial journey in Byron's *Cain*: the participants not only emerge beyond the ordinary world but are also isolated from it. While most of the mountains have a direct connection to the ordinary world, the flying mountain is an extraordinary phenomenon which has its own rules.

The first death that occurs in the novel, described right at the beginning of the text, is that of the narrator:

> Ich starb
> 6840 Meter über dem Meeresspiegel
> Am vierten Mai im Jahr des Pferdes.
> (Ransmayr 2007, 9)

> [I died
> six thousand, eight hundred and forty metres above sea level
> on the fourth of May in the Year of the Horse.]
> (Ransmayr, trans. Pare 2018, 1)

While narrating about his own death might at first seem a paradox (see Lütkehaus 2006), chapter 1 describes how the narrator is brought back to life by Liam (and later by Nyema). Bringing him back to life is made possible by language: Liam tells him repeatedly "Steh auf!" [Get up!] (first occurrence Ransmayr 2007, 11–18; trans. Pare 2018, 3–10), whereby his call is reminiscent of Jesus resurrecting Lazarus.[4] In addition to this command, the narrator is gradually brought back to life by his brother's speech:

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**3** The text is broken into verse lines (of varying length) and into strophes, and while there is clearly no strict form of versification underlying it, rhythm plays an important role (see Lütkehaus 2006; Schröder 2006; Nüchtern 2006); as pointed out by Mangold (2006) and Neumann (2006), it can be thought of as rhythmic prose. A longer narrative written in verse evokes the epic (see Lütkehaus 2006; Schröder 2006; Grimm-Hamen 2013) even though the text is considerably more subjective than epics are (see Mangold 2006). While the epic is indeed markedly different in several respects, Ransmayr's text can be related to the contemporary verse novel (see Bacskai-Atkari 2017, 397, 404–405).

**4** In addition, as pointed out by Mangold (2006), the *pietà* is also evoked by the fact that Liam holds his brother in his arms, similarly to the Virgin Mary holding the dead Jesus.

Vielleicht sah mein Bruder an meinen Augen,
daß es vor allem sein atemloses Reden war,
das meine Aufmerksamkeit gefangennahm
und mich Satz für Satz in unser Leben zurückzog.

Er sprach so eindringlich und hastig,
als wären seine Worte die letzte Möglichkeit,
mich zu erreichen,
und ich müßte für immer verschwinden,
wenn er verstummte.
                              (Ransmayr 2007, 16–17)

[Perhaps my brother read in my eyes
that it was above all his breathless speech
that captured my attention and
pulled me, phrase by phrase, back into our life.

He spoke so insistently, with such urgency,
as if his words were his last hope
of reaching me
and I would disappear for ever
were he to fall silent.]
                        (Ransmayr, trans. Pare 2018, 8–9)

The narrator is thus brought back to life and kept alive by the speech of his brother. Liam is at first at a loss regarding what exactly he should do, but as soon as the narrator discovers the power of speech, Liam keeps talking, mostly listing names that the narrator can remember:

Nyema ... Es war Nyema, die gesagt hat,
daß mein Bruder mich im Windschatten
meiner letzten Zuflucht wohl aus dem Tod
ins Leben zurück*erzählte*,
indem er mit seiner Litanei von Namen eine gemeinsame Erinnerung beschwor,
so unauslöslich,
daß sie die Vergangenheit in Gegenwart verwandeln
und mich selbst aus einer Ferne zurückrufen konnte,
in der ich schon verschwunden war.
                              (Ransmayr 2007, 18; emphasis in original)

[Nyema ... It was Nyema who said
that, in the shelter of my final refuge,
my brother had *talked* me back from death
to life,
evoking with his litany of names
a shared memory

so indelible
that it could turn the past into the present
and call me back from the distant horizon
beyond which I'd already vanished.]
　　(Ransmayr, trans. Pare 2018, 10; emphasis
　　　　　　　　　　　　in original)

In this interpretation, the narrator was resurrected by language – moreover, by the poetic use of language, whereby poetry is not tied to any particular genre but appears in its archetypal form (see also Ransmayr 2014, 79–80). Apart from Liam saving the narrator's life, it is true of the journey more generally that the extreme existential situation (see Mangold 2006) is shared by the brothers: they are alone in the mountains, and even if they are among the tribe, they are in a foreign environment, isolated linguistically. They are brought closer to each other by their shared experience, resulting in the dissolution of any conflict between them. This contrasts with Byron's *Cain*, where the two brothers speak mutually intelligible but different languages, resulting in the escalation of the conflict between them. In addition, after Cain kills Abel, he speaks to him, yet he cannot resurrect his brother through language.

The second death is that of Liam, and this time there is no way back either: the narrator cannot find him on the "flying mountain" and his calls to him in the silent landscape remain unheard. Consequently, no dialogue is possible between the two any more and, hence, the narrator cannot bring his brother back to life. This is not a case of murder, but the narrator nevertheless feels responsibility. The story of Cain is indirectly evoked by his sense of guilt and directly evoked when he denies responsibility before the Chinese authorities, who question him about where his brother is. He gives Cain's response as an answer, which is ambiguous and partly ironic, as the Chinese authorities obviously do not understand the biblical reference. They understand the most superficial meaning of the sentence, namely that the narrator is not the keeper of his brother and cannot tell where his brother is: in this case, the question is a rhetorical question substituting for a statement. There is, however, a personal meaning, in which the question is interpreted literally as a question; this is in line with the narrator factually questioning himself whether he is or was the keeper of his brother – more precisely, whether he looked after his brother enough and whether he could have saved his life (see Neumann 2006). Note that chapter 12, in which Liam is lost, is entitled "Alleingänge: Ein Hüter seines Bruders" [Going It Alone: His Brother's Keeper].

In addition, there is a third meaning that arises from the reference to the Bible, in which the question is again a rhetorical question and the meaning can be decoded from the biblical text (that is, the speaker has killed his brother). As stated earlier, this meaning is not accurate, in the sense that the narrator is not a

murderer, but his inability to save his brother's life makes this reading salient nonetheless. The irony in this case, of course, stems from the superiority of the narrator over the Chinese authorities regarding biblical knowledge: if the authorities understood the relevant meaning, the narrator could be charged with murder. In this way, the narrator's life, or at least freedom, is put at risk by his own use of biblical language and at the same time saved by the lack of a common language with the authorities.

Where the Cain story is concerned, it is important to stress that there is no real curse of Cain for either of the brothers here. The narrator loses his brother, but Liam may have found peace; hence, Liam's death is not necessarily entirely negative. Prior to the journey, partial outcast roles were chosen by both brothers: Liam had a secluded life in Ireland and kept his occasional homosexual encounters secret, while the narrator chose to travel around the world and live away from his original home. After the journey, life becomes impossible for the narrator in his original home: he returns to Ireland only for a short while and plans to go back to Nyema. Thus, his previous life of travelling comes to an end as well. The journey, which counts as an experience in an extreme existential situation, brings not only failure (the death of Liam) but also reunification, both between the brothers and in the narrator's private life (see Mangold 2006; Schröder 2006). The lack of Cain's curse is naturally related to the fact that Ransmayr uses a peculiar way of rewriting the Cain and Abel story insofar as the properties of Cain and Abel are distributed between Liam and the narrator, and hence the differentiation between the two is also more complex. While in the Byronic and post-Byronic interpretations, as pointed out by Quinones (2014), the redefinition of Cain's self is tied to the event of murder, the blurring of the boundary between the two characters in Ransmayr's text results, instead, in there being two deaths, both of which contribute to the redefinition of the main character without either of them qualifying as a murder.

# 4 Conclusion

In this article, I have examined two adaptations of the archetypal story of Cain and Abel, concentrating on how the Byronic way of interpreting Cain's figure is related to the use of language and how this is modified in Ransmayr's work. Importantly, the original (biblical) story contains several gaps and includes direct communication with God. In Byron's *Cain*, the lack of direct communication with God and the lack of a shared language between the brothers result in disaster. In Ransmayr's *Der fliegende Berg*, dialogue functions best between the brothers in

their extreme existential situation; language is able to bring one of them back to life, but the lack of dialogue (when there is no opportunity for it) means that this poetic power cannot be exercised in the case of the other. The importance of both works in terms of the Cain story lies not only in their different ways of transforming the original story, but also in the fact that they indicate that the story is archetypal – not only in terms of brothers' relationships, but also in terms of language and the way language not only reflects, but also shapes human relations, either connecting or alienating the participants.

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