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KANT AND BYRON: THE DYNAMIC AND MATHEMATICAL SUBLIME IN CAIN

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Abstract

Byron's Cain was first published in 1821. It retells the biblical story from the perspective of the first murderer. Byron's play scandalized nineteenth-century English society due to the author's divergent ideas about religion and tyranny. As a result, Byron's drama has generated much discussion based upon its controversial religious and political themes. However, little has been said about the sublime aspects of the play. This paper analyzes Byron's closet drama Cain utilizing Immanuel Kant's theories of the sublime. Kant delineates two types of sublime classifications. These were called the dynamic and mathematical sublime. The dynamic sublime occurs when an individual is able to triumph over forces of nature by virtue of relying on his function of human rationality. The mathematical sublime occurs when an individual derives pleasure from witnessing stimuli which reaches near infinity. Byron's play lends itself to discussions of the sublime due to its unusual themes of space travel, spiritual entities and death.

Keywords: Byron, Cain, Kant, Dynamic Sublime, Mathematical Sublime.

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1. Background

Byron's closet drama Cain was published in 1821. The play retells the tale of the world's first human death—from the perspective of Cain, the widely reviled first murderer. The biblical story appears in the first book of the bible as follows.

And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the Lord.[2] And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.[3] And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord.[4] And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering:[5] But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.[6] And the Lord said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen?[7] 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.[8] 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.[9] And the Lord said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper?[10] And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground.[11] And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand;[12] When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth. (Gen. 4 1-12)

Byron uses this story as the basis for his play with many of the same characters and the same general outline of events. However, Byron augments the biblical account with several new characters and some surprising turn of events. Perhaps the most interesting feature of the play occurs in Act II, where Cain is taken on a guided tour through the cosmos, time and the underworld—led by none other than Lucifer himself. Although political and religious interpretations of this drama abound, this paper will focus on the sublime attributes of the play.[1] The apprehension of the sublime was a de rigueur topic of conversation in Europe during the early part of the nineteenth century—and the romantics' poetry was infused with ideas from several different theories. The theory of the sublime developed by Irish statesman Edmund Burke in his book, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* was perhaps the most prominent, but other theorists such as Longinus, Coleridge and Kant also contributed much to the public discourse surrounding the topic. This discussion will focus on Kant's version of the sublime.

2. Kant and the Sublime

Kant's ideas about the Sublime were developed to apply to forces of nature. Other theorist such as Burke and Longinus developed ideas about the sublime that could be applied to works of art. It seems logical that Kant's ideas about the sublime could also be applied to works of art and religious experiences. However, when one tries to apply Kantian ideas to these types of experiences, he trespasses the limits of Kant's theory and runs the risk of engaging in the same fallacies that German Idealists such as Fichte and Schelling do as they attempt to bring metaphysical conceptions of God under the purview of Kantian thought. The primary

[1]Peter Schock makes the argument that Byron's motivation for writing his sacrilegious work was mostly political, stating: "The speeches Byron gives Lucifer, like the attacks of Regency blasphemers on the 'Christian mythology' and its political power, subvert Christian theodicy and the authoritarian myth which reinforces it" (186). Other critics, such as Marilyn Butler, also take this view. She argues that "…*Cain* and other second-generation Romantic deployments of myth are consistently political and polemical, as opposed to having more private, spiritual functions…" (7). Conversely, Paul Cantor states: The Romantic Poets set out to subvert the religious tradition from within. In recreating inherited myths, the Romantics inverted the orthodox values, portraying the traditionally divine figures in a sinister and sometimes even demonic light, (Blake's Urizen for example) while recasting the traditional evil figures as potentially heroic saviors of mankind (Blake's Orc). … Byron's mystery drama *Cain*, makes the boldest attempt at a frontal assault… In short, Byron brings Jehovah himself under scrutiny… (50)

difficulty with the application of Kant's theory to supernatural experiences is the fact that Kant believed that an individual cannot truly comprehend what one cannot observe. As a result of this maxim, he dismisses all the supernatural aspects of Christianity—which is somewhat problematic when it comes to Byron's *Cain* due to the fact that the source material comes from the Old Testament. However, Kant's dismissal of Christianity is not as simple as it might seem at first blush, because he does maintain that it is impossible to disprove the existence of God. He furthermore views God as a moral necessity. Kant uses the religious concept of the fear of God as an example to articulate his theory of the Dynamically Sublime. In his book, *A Critique of Judgement*, he says:

> We can…consider an object as fearful without being afraid of it, if, namely, we judge it in such a way that we merely think of the case in which we might wish to resist it and think that in that case all resistance would be completely futile. Thus, the virtuous man fears God without being afraid of him, because he does not think of the case of wishing to resist God and his commands as anything that is worrisome for him. But since he does not think of such a case as impossible in itself, he recognizes God as fearful. (144)

This quote is useful in understanding one of the key components of the dynamic sublime. Here Kant outlines the difference between experiencing fear and recognizing the fear-inducing qualities of sublime stimuli, but it may also suggest that Kant was willing to entertain the notion that the sublime may be apprehended within supernatural/religious contexts.

There is also debate over whether or not it is appropriate to apply Kant's theory to works of art, with authors such as Uygar Abaci arguing that, "…although there may be various senses in which sublimity can be attributed of works of art, none of these attributions can be understood as genuine instances of a judgement of sublimity" (237). This is again problematic for Byron's *Cain* due to the double prohibition of utilizing Kant's theory within religious and artistic contexts. However, even though there is a large body of literature that supports this notion.[2] There is of course, an opposing view represented by authors such Jerome Bump who explicitly utilizes Kant's theories of the sublime to analyze Gerard Hopkins' poem *The Wreck of The Deutschland*, while mentioning the sublime aspects of other works of art—including Byron—along the way. He says:

> Hopkins transforms his response to the snowstorm in which the Deutschland perished into a general response to the seemingly infinite power of the forces of God and nature, what Kant called the dynamic sublime. … Similarly, the use of sweep and hurl, the "horror of height" and "Hurtle of hell" phrases in the second and third stanzas bring in a related complex of conventions, expanding the speaker's response to include what Kant called the mathematical sublime, the sense of infinite space. (3)

Here Bump blithely uses Kant's theories of the Dynamic and Mathematical sublime to discuss works of art *and* acts of God—albeit only insofar as those acts are related to the supernatural aspects of *natural* events such as extreme weather. In keeping with Bump's example, and hopefully in a stricter adherence to Kant's original intent, for the purposes of this discussion most encounters with the *supernatural* within *Cain*—such as the titular character's encounter with Lucifer, angels and other beings—will be discussed in terms of their effects on the *natural* world. For instance, one could apply this type of approach to the biblical account of Peter

[2]For further reading on the subject see, Kirk Pillow, Sublime Understanding: Aesthetic Reflection in Kant and Hegel (MIT Press, 2000); Paul Crowther, The Kantian Sublime: From Morality to Art (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); Robert Wicks, "Kant on Fine Art: Artistic Sublimity Shaped by Beauty," The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 53 (1995): 189-193; James Kirwan, The Aesthetic in Kant: A Critique (London and New York: Continuum, 2004); Eva Schaper, "Taste, Sublimity, and Genius: The Aesthetics of Nature and Art," in The Cambridge Companion to Kant, ed. Paul Guyer (Cambridge University Press, 1992). (qtd. in Abaci)

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walking on the water (Matthew 14:22-33). This event was certainly a sublime experience for Peter—and even though there are paranormal elements to the story, it is the supernatural manipulation of nature which assuredly causes him to experience the sublime. From Peter's perspective—a man who is briefly able to walk on water, with only his faith in the divinity of Christ to protect him from destruction —the experience of the sublime has occurred. For the purpose of this analysis, it will be helpful to view the world in the same way—only through the eyes Byron's protagonist Cain instead of Peter. In *Cain's* universe, the God of Christianity remains *supernatural* to the extent that He is an unknowable certainly, while Lucifer and other spirits are observable, powerful and tangible and thus should be considered to be forces of nature. In order to avoid the controversy that accompanies the application of Kant's theory of the sublime to art and the supernatural rather than nature, this paper will focus specifically on the aspects of Byron's play that deal with natural phenomena; namely cosmic travel, the persons of Lucifer and the pre-Adamites and finally death. In this way, Kant's theory will not be used as a means to analyze Byron's work as whole, but rather as a framework to analyze the experiences of the characters within the drama—whether or not Byron's drama evokes the sublime within the readers of his drama remains outside of the purview of this discussion. The application of this criterion allows for the wider application of Kant's theory of the sublime.

Kant developed two categories of the sublime—he defined them as the Dynamic Sublime and the Mathematical Sublime. The common link between these two types of experiences is the ability of an individual's power of reason to triumph over nature. There are examples of both types of the sublime within Byron's *Cain*. However, it seems that Byron's play *Cain* lends itself more strongly to the application of Kant's theory of the mathematical sublime. As a result, the majority of this discussion will focus on this theory, with only a brief foray into the dynamic sublime.

3. The Dynamic Sublime

The dynamic sublime can occur when an individual experiences pleasure while witnessing the pure might of powerful and destructive forces in nature, but does so with the knowledge that these forces will not harm the observer. This membrane of safety can take many forms (like Peter's faith for instance) but the feeling that these awesome forces of nature have "no dominion over us" is a critical part of the dynamically sublime experience. Kant says:

> The irresistibility of [nature's] power certainly makes us, considered as natural beings, recognize our physical powerlessness, but at the same time it reveals a capacity for judging ourselves as independent of nature and a superiority over nature…whereby the humanity in our person remains undemeaned even though the human being must submit to that dominion (261–262).

Here Kant outlines the two conditions for the Dynamic Sublime to occur: first, an individual must experience the irresistible power of nature, and secondly, the individual must somehow realize that he is safe from destruction. It is important to stress the idea that in order for an experience to be considered sublime, one must not experience mindless fear, because that would negate the subject's ability to make a judgment about

the appropriateness of being afraid, and since the experience of the sublime is a function of reason, the subject's ability to make an assessment about his safety is of paramount importance. Kant explains the distinction between abject fear and the type of fear associated with Dynamically Sublime experiences by contrasting the idea of *fearing* God to the idea of being *afraid* of God.[3] Kant posits that virtuous people have a *fear* of God, but they have no reason to be *afraid* of him unless they intend to rebel against God's will (120). In Kant's example, the individual recognizes the irresistible power of God, but the individual's righteousness acts as a type of barrier between himself and God's wrath—rendering abject fear unnecessary. In the same way, in order for a person to experience the Dynamic Sublime, he or she must recognize the irresistible force which is being witnessed—while all the while also understanding that, he or she is being protected from the full consequences of the phenomenon being witnessed.

4. Cain and The Dynamic Sublime

This psychological containment is most usually conceptualized as physical distance; and Byron acknowledges this when his protagonist exclaims, "Distance can but diminish glory they / When nearer must be more ineffable" however, temporal distance or other mechanisms can also serve the purpose of making a potentially terrifying experience more sublime (2.2. 220-1). In the case of Cain—and in a perverse parody of Kant's example of how virtue can prevent a righteous man from being afraid of God—it is his faith in Lucifer that provides this containment. Throughout *Cain* readers find the protagonist in situations where he could be killed (or driven insane) by the destructive forces to which he is exposed. This is especially true in the second act of the play when Lucifer takes Cain on a guided tour through the cosmos. The experience of the forces that are present in interstellar space—such as radiation, lack of oxygen and gravity, incredible masses and distances—could all be considered as being sublime due to their vastness and destructive potential. However, in each of these cases, the presence of Lucifer serves as a physical and psychological guardian to keep Cain safe—and sane. It is Cain's trust in Lucifer that provides the assurance he needs in order to keep from descending into terror. This relationship is most explicitly stated at the beginning of Act II, where the following conversation between the two main characters takes place: [4]

> ***Cain***
> I tread on air and sink not—yet I fear
> To sink.
> ***Lucifer***
> Have faith in me and, and thou shalt be
> Borne on the air, of which I am the Prince.[5]
> ***Cain***
> can I do so without impiety?
> ***Lucifer***
> Believe—and sink not! doubt and perish! (2.1.1-6).

[3]Giving more weight to the idea that his theory can be applied within religious contexts.

[4]An interaction that obviously parallels—and perverts Matthew 14:22-33

[5]Ephesians 2:2 refers to Lucifer as "The Prince of the air." It says: "Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience."

Within this interaction readers can see that all of the requirements for experiencing Kant's Dynamic Sublime are met. Cain witnesses the awesome and destructive power of interstellar space—he is aware of the danger—and yet he responds with wonder and awe (albeit mixed with slight trepidation) instead of abject fear due to the psychological awareness that he is removed from actual danger because of his trust in Lucifer. Cain's experiences with the sublime initially cause wonder, but as we will discuss later, these events ultimately result in the despair that motivates the primary dramatic action within Byron's play.

5. The Mathematic Sublime

Kant's second—and perhaps more interesting—category of the sublime is called the Mathematical Sublime. This occurs when an observer becomes aware that he is observing a phenomenon which approaches the infinite—not merely a greater quantity of a known experience, but something which is qualitatively different due to its greatness or limitlessness. He says:

> Just because there is in our imagination a striving to advance to the infinite, while in our reason there lies a claim to absolute totality, as to a real idea, the very inadequacy of our faculty for estimating the magnitude of the things in the sensible world [viz., imagination] awakens the feeling of a supersensible faculty in us (250).

In other words, the mathematical sublime occurs when an individual witnesses something that is so vast that it approaches the infinite—something that is beyond a person's ability to imagine. When the imagination breaks down, the person is forced to utilize functions of reason in order to comprehend the event. For instance, if an observer compares a housecat to a tiger, he quickly realizes that a tiger is essentially a larger and more ferocious version of the familiar pet—different in size, but still comprehensible. However, one begins to ascertain the Mathematical Sublime when one calculates the magnitude of sun—which is enormous, yet finite—and then begins to contemplate the seemingly infinite vastness of all the stars in all the galaxies in the entire universe. Kant defines the mathematical sublime as the feeling of exhilaration that one experiences when he realizes that the most enormous reference point within his experience is actually miniscule beyond true comprehension when compared to some other novel experience—as in the case of the almost infinite number of giant suns scattered across unimaginable distances. When one begins to ponder this, the imagination breaks down—and the subject must rely on reason, logic or scientific calculation in order to come to any kind of understanding.

6. Cain and The Mathematical Sublime

One of the unique features of Cain is the interstellar journey that Lucifer provides for the protagonist in the second act of the play. Cain observes, "…As we move/ Like sunbeams onward, it [the earth] grows small and smaller/And as it waxes little, and then less… (2.1. 40-1). Or as Paul Cantor notes "Cain watches the earth dwindle before his eyes" (57). Cantor, goes on to say that this represents a brand-new approach within poetry. *Cain* is one of the first works that depicts earth within its proper context on the periphery of the cosmos—small and insignificant. This disconcerting scene where the earth ceases to occupy its axial place within the universe, sets up a scenario where the protagonist is likely to have mathematically sublime experience. "Lucifer gives [Cain] a direct vision of the

nature of the universe, making it impossible for Cain to continue the life he has been leading (Cantor 60)." Sublime experiences have the propensity to affect profound psychological metamorphosis within individuals, and as we will see, Cain's enlightenment changes him. Byron intensifies Cain's epiphany when Lucifer revels to Cain that there is more than one vast and unmeasurable universe. Lucifer says, "And world by world/ And star by star, and universe by universe/ Shall tremble in the balance" (2. 2. 457-8). The possibility of multiple universes is unimaginable to Cain and forces him to surrender the task of trying to imagine the vastness required for this to be true, instead forcing him to rely on functions of reason and empirical observation to reach a rational understanding of this idea. Cain must use his physical senses to comprehend the vastness of the universe—he must see to believe—and in this way, Cain tries to organize the sublime stimuli that he is observing into a comprehensible gestalt. The following conversation demonstrates this:

> ***Cain.***
> Oh, god, or demon, or whate'er thou art,
> Is yon our Earth?
> ***Lucifer.***
> Dost thou not recognize
> The dust which form'd your father?
> Can it be?
> Yon small blue circle, swinging in far ether,
> With an inferior circlet near it still,
> Which looks like that which lit our earthly night?
> Is this our Paradise? Where are its walls,
> And they who guard them? (2.1.27-36)

According to author Hannah Ginsborg, the experience of the sublime can cause both pleasure and displeasure. She says: "The feeling associated with the sublime is a feeling of pleasure in the superiority of our reason over nature, but it also involves displeasure. In the case of the mathematically sublime, the displeasure comes from the awareness of the inadequacy of our imagination" (sec. 2.7)[.] ??In essence, the sense of pleasure associated with Kant's mathematical sublime is akin to awe, while the displeasure stems from the realization that imagination is insufficient to comprehend the phenomena being witnessed. In the case of the character Cain's reaction to Lucifer's grand tour—and in keeping with the drama's overall milieu of melancholy—this displeasure takes the form of depression—which in turn, culminates with the murder of Abel in the third act. In a letter to his friend John Murray, Byron says:

> Cain is a proud man: if Lucifer promised him kingdoms, etc., it would have elated him: the object of the Demon is to *depress* him still further in his own estimation than he was before, by showing him infinite things and his own abasement, till he falls into the frame of mind that leads to the Catastrophe, from mere *internal* irritation, *not* premeditation or envy of *Abel* (that would have made him contemptable), but from the rage and fury against the inadequacy of his state to his conceptions, and which discharges itself rather against Life, and the Author of life, than the mere living. (470)

Here Byron outlines the effect that Lucifer's guided tour has on Cain. His experience of the vastness of the universe and the, "multitude of worlds within it makes Cain feel that the earth is small and insignificant, and makes him as a dweller on earth feel like nothing at all" (Cantor 57).

This is a prime example of the functioning of Kant's mathematical sublime. Cain's novel exposure to the hugeness of the universe is beyond his ability to truly comprehend, and as a result his imagination falters—initially leading to

exhilaration, "proud of thought/ which knew such things"—and ultimately depression (2.1. 56-7).

It is not just Cain's journey through the cosmos that evokes Kant's mathematical sublime within the pages of *Cain*—the drama elicits the sublime in other ways as well. As mentioned before, the mathematically sublime occurs when an object is judged to possess infinite magnitude. Some of the characters within (in) the drama—such as Lucifer and the angel are spirits, and as such, are described as beings unimaginably powerful and also as possessing power and knowledge that are beyond Cain's imagination. When Cain and his family contemplate the existence of these beings their imaginations(?) fail. They are unable to conceptualize the vast difference between the power and experience of their human experience and the power and experience of these spiritual beings. The spirits are, in fact, almost infinitely more powerful than humans; and their experience of existence is almost infinitely different than the humans that inhabit the new earth. Cain has a sublime experience when he meets Lucifer for the first time in the first scene of Act I.

> ***Cain.***
> Spirit, who art thou?
> ***Lucifer.***
> Master of spirits.
> ***Cain.***
> And being so, canst thou Leave them, and walk with dust?
> ***Lucifer.***
> I know the thoughts
> Of dust, and feel for it, and with you.
> ***Cain.***
> How! You know my thoughts? (1. 1. 118-25)

Here Cain is amazed by Lucifer and his ability to inhabit both the spiritual and physical realms. He wonders if Lucifer is, like God, omnipresent. And although Byron is consistent with biblical accounts of Lucifer's powers, by depicting Lucifer as being unable to be everywhere simultaneously, his ability to travel over vast distances across both the spiritual and physical realms highlights the unimaginable difference between the power of Lucifer and the power of Cain.[6]

He is also dumbfounded by Lucifer's seeming ability to read his thoughts—and although most theologians agree (as does Byron apparently) that Lucifer cannot read the thoughts of humanity, this exchange between Cain and Lucifer does highlight the vast difference between the experience and intellectual capacities that exist between Cain and Lucifer—touching on the idea of omnipotence (or in Lucifer's case, near-omnipotence) which a mathematically sublime concept.[7]

Cain's wife/sister Adah, has a similar experience upon her initial encounter with Lucifer. She says: "I cannot answer this immortal thing/ Which stands before me; I cannot abhor him;/ I look upon him with pleasing fear" (1. 1. 514-16). She cannot understand what (or who) she has encountered. She understands that

[6]Job 1:6, Matthew 4:11 both describe how Lucifer moves within the physical and spiritual realms.

[7]C. S. Lewis' book, *The Screwtape Letters*, provides a fascinating exploration of this topic.

he is an immortal being—which is mathematically sublime due to the fact that the very concept of immortality defeats the imagination with its limitlessness. However, it is her response to her initial introduction to Lucifer that is most indicative of the sublime. Her mixture of fear and pleasure is precisely what one would expect from an encounter with the sublime.

Lucifer also provides Cain with an education about the history of the earth—which in turn, affords the protagonist yet another opportunity to encounter the mathematical sublime. In *Cain* Byron decides to incorporate some of the then current—and highly controversial, if not outright blasphemous—discourse surrounding the idea that the biblical account of creation did not represent the literal first incarnation of earth. Byron seizes this argument and depicts the earth as not being brand new at all, but rather as having been created and recreated many times. We see this in the following lines:

> ***CAIN.***
> Ah me! and did they perish?
> ***LUCIFER.***
> Yes, from their Earth, as thou wilt fade from thine.
> ***CAIN.***
> But was mine theirs?
> ***LUCIFER.***
> It was.
> ***CAIN.***
> But not as now
> It is too little and too lowly to
> Sustain such creatures.
> ***LUCIFER.***
> True, it was more glorious.
> *CAIN,*
> And wherefore did it fall?
> ***LUCIFER.***
> Ask him who fells.
> ***CAIN.***
> But how?
> ***LUCIFER.***
> By a most crushing and inexorable
> Destruction and disorder of the elements,
> Which struck a world to chaos, as a chaos
> Subsiding has struck out a world: such things,
> Though rare in time, are frequent in eternity.
> Pass on, and gaze upon the past.
> ***CAIN.***
> 'Tis awful! (2.2. 92-103)

Here Byron puts forth the idea that the earth is not new and has in fact been created and recreated many times—each time destroyed and repopulated by God who possess destructive and creative power that is unfathomable to Cain. Byron takes it one step further by insisting that the current iteration of life on earth is not even the most advanced. This causes Cain much consternation, but according to Cantor it is another revelation which has the most sublime impact on Cain's psyche. This happens when Lucifer reveals to Cain that he and his family were not the first—nor the greatest inhabitants of earth. Fueled by the theories of writers like Lord Kames and Charles White, it is here that Byron introduces his readers and his protagonist to the concept of pre-

Adamite rational beings.[8]

> ***CAIN***
> What are these mighty phantoms which I see
> Floating around me?—they wear not the form
> Of the intelligences I have seen
> Round our regretted and unenter'd Eden,
> Nor wear the form of man as I have view'd it
> In Adam's and in Abel's, and in mine,
> Nor in my sister-bride's, nor in my children's:
> And yet they have an aspect, which, though not
> Of men nor angels, looks like something, which,
> If not the last, rose higher than the first,
> Haughty, and high, and beautiful, and full
> Of seeming strength, but of inexplicable
> Shape; for I never saw such. They bear not
> The wing of seraph, nor the face of man,
> Nor form of mightiest brute, nor ought that is
> Now breathing; mighty yet and beautiful
> As the most beautiful and mighty which
> Live, and yet so unlike them, that I scarce
> Can call them living (2.2. 52-70).

As Cain struggles to put into words the magnificence of the creatures he has encountered he finally reaches a point where language fails him. These creatures simply exist outside the purview of linguistic signification. As Ian Balfour puts it, "This is classic testimony to the workings of the sublime, culminating in a verbal throwing up of the hands, as if the scene successfully resists translation into words" (13). This indescribable aspect is the most consistently remarked characteristic of the sublime, and it is Byron's acknowledgement that these beings are too spectacular to describe which most effectively instills a sense of the mathematical sublime within the reader. Cain can only comment upon what these beings are *not*—he cannot fathom what they *are*. In other words, Cain must rely on his powers of deductive reason in order to prevent his imagination form becoming overwhelmed. Byron gives the reader the sense that in order to truly comprehend the true nature of these beings, one would have to abandon the workings of the imagination and start to utilize some facility of reason such as logic or comparison.

Paul Cantor is also struck by Cain's reaction to his encounter with the pre-Adamite beings. He says: "Lucifer shows Cain that rational beings once existed on earth who would be to men in intelligence what dinosaurs would be to modern reptiles in size. This vision turns out to be more unsettling than Cain's view of the vastness of space" (58). Interestingly, both Byron and Cantor propose mathematical ratios in order to comprehend the vast difference in relative intelligence between the newly created family of Eden and the beings who once inhabited the earth. Byron writes:

> ***Cain***
> And what are they?
> ***Lucifer***
> Living, high

[8] Lord Kames defended racism by postulating that the creation of Adam was not a discrete event, but in reality, an event which occurred in many locations all over the world wherein God created racially appropriate pairs of original humans to propagate their relative races. He succeeded in establishing polygenism as a viable scientific account of racial development. His ideas were supported by English Surgeon Charles White; who after examining the skulls of humans from different eras and locales concluded that God's creation event was not limited to the Genesis account of Eden.

Intelligent, good great and intelligent things,
As much superior unto all thy sire
Adam could e'er have been in Eden, as
The sixty-thousandth generation shall be,
In its dull degeneracy, to
Thee and thy son,—and how weak they are, judge
By thy own flesh (2.2. 81-92)

Here Byron gives to his readers a formula by which an individual could estimate the degree to which these pre-Adamite beings were superior in intelligence to Cain and his offspring. However, in order to arrive at a suitable conclusion, one would have to know the rate of degradation in intelligence between successive generations and then calculate it sixty thousand times.

Cantor's calculations are somewhat more concrete and would go something like this: The largest modern reptile is the salt water crocodile which can reach a length of more than 23 feet and weigh as much as 2,200 pounds (Encyclopedia.com). In contrast, the largest dinosaur that ever lived (that has been discovered), the Patagotitan Mayorum (or Titanosaur) was one hundred and twenty-two feet long and weighed as much as one hundred and seventy thousand pounds (169,756) pounds (See Novas). This means that a Titanosaur was approximately five times longer than a modern crocodile and seventy-seven times heavier. If we use this same ratio to compare the intelligence of the average intelligence of a modern human (which according to the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale is around one hundred) to the intelligence of the pre-Adamite rational beings, then we would arrive with an understanding that they possess an IQ of at least five hundred (7,700 using weight as a point of comparison) (see Wechsler). As cumbersome—or even absurd as these calculations may seem; this is precisely what is required when confronted by mathematically sublime stimulations. The imagination is defeated and functions of reason must be relied upon in order to comprehend the situation with which an individual is confronted.

7. Death And Cain

According to Geoffrey Hartman, one of the hallmarks of European Romanticism is the desire for the loss of self (553-65). This fascination with oblivion can be seen in numerous instances throughout the Romantic period, including Coleridge's addiction to opium and Keats' desire to be free from the constraints of human consciousness in the same way that a nightingale was free. Not to be outdone by his contemporaries, Byron's drama *Manfred* published in 1817, sees his protagonist on a quest for anti-self-consciousness that reaches an epic scale. Byron continues with his exploration of death in his drama *Cain*. But unlike the titular character from his previous work, Cain does not seek death as a means to experience oblivion; he sees it as a gateway to new experiences and a new state of consciousness—a means to gain understanding into the nature of God and Lucifer. This can be seen in the following lines:

LUCIFER.
Thy human mind hath scarcely grasp to gather
The little I have shewn thee into calm
And clear thought; and thou wouldst go on aspiring
To the great double Mysteries! the two Principles!

And gaze upon them on their secret thrones!
Dust! limit thy ambition; for to see
Either of these, would be for thee to perish!
CAIN.
And let me perish, so I see them! (2.2. 414-21)

Cain's desire to experience death is mathematically sublime because of the fact that for Cain and all other humans living in the vicinity of Eden, death was a concept which defied the imagination and forced them to rely upon reason in order to try to comprehend it. Readers can observe in the second scene of Act II, that the deaths of other animals were prevalent due to ritual sacrifice and predation. Cain says: "I lately saw /A lamb stung by a reptile; the poor suckling /Lay foaming on the earth, beneath the vain /And piteous bleating of its restless dam; (2.2. 265-8). These types of experiences make it likely that he would be able to extrapolate the meaning of death from these observations, however human death had not yet occurred before Cain murdered Abel. And as a result of its novel status, for Cain human death is, an even more difficult idea to comprehend than immortality. Eternal life is difficult enough to imagine and should also be considered as a mathematically sublime concept. However, since Cain has experienced both time and life, he only has to take on the daunting task of trying to imagine an infinite amount of each in order to begin to grasp the unimaginable possibility of eternal life. Additionally, by the time the action of the play occurs, Cain had garnered much experience with immortal beings, and as no human had ever actually died—Cain may have been more comfortable with the idea. Conversely, the concept of the first human death poses a greater challenge to Cain's imagination due to the fact that he has to wrestle with the concept of a total cessation of physical experience (see Mole).

CAIN.
Thoughts unspeakable
Crowd in my breast to burning, when I hear
Of this almighty Death, who is, it seems,
Inevitable. Could I wrestle with him?
I wrestled with the lion, when a boy,
In play, till he ran roaring from my gripe.
LUCIFER.
It has no shape; but will absorb all things
That bear the form of earth-born being (1.1. 309-14).

Cain is unable to articulate his thoughts as he struggles with the idea of human death. He is unsure of how to approach it. He does not know what death consists of, and as a result he is forced to give up trying to imagine and start utilizing functions of reason in order to grasp the magnitude of the entity of death.

Unlike the protagonist in Byron's earlier drama *Manfred,* Cain's goal is not oblivion, but instead to acquire knowledge about the spiritual realm. This is obviously difficult to imagine, because of the fact that Cain, had nothing upon which to base a comparison—human death (much less, a spiritual afterlife) had not yet occurred to anyone. Cain can form a rational basis for understanding death, but he can never truly imagine what death is like.

In conclusion, Byron's *Cain* lends itself to analysis utilizing Kant's conception of the sublime. By taking the notions of the dynamic and mathematical sublime which Kant formulated in his book *A Critique of Judgment* and applying them to Byron's text, the reader begins to get the full impact of Byron's descriptions of interstellar space travel, supernatural beings and death. These ideas about the sublime are also an excellent way of thinking

about eternity and death—a final demarcation, which once crossed might lead to enlightenment and spiritual knowledge. It is this search for knowledge—set in motion by Eve's fateful decision which Cain pursues with tragic results as one of his main objectives throughout the drama which bears his name.

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