

## The Cain Complex

The articulation of the subject and the group has undoubtedly been the common thread in my work since *Manger le livre* (1984). It has gradually appeared to me, and this since the distant time of my analysis with Lacan, that the classical Freudian schema needed a serious renewal which would at the same time testify to the vitality of our discipline, that it was necessary to dust off a certain vulgate. I therefore took seriously Lacan's assertion that psychoanalysis suffered from an original sin that hinders its development.

To go quickly, what gradually appeared to me is that the Oedipus, this concept, this famous Oedipus complex, if it is essential to understand the subjective construction of each one, of the subject's progress towards his desire, is no longer operative for the understanding of group phenomena, such as fanaticism, terrorism and more generally political phenomena. The Freudian postulate formulated in *Totem and Taboo* according to which the group is based on an original parricide seems to me obsolete and false. This is my answer to the problem posed by Lacan on the existence of an original sin of psychoanalysis. This original sin lies in this essay which Freud held so dear.

I have come to this conclusion gradually, without looking for it particularly, important things come to us from this great Other of the unconscious, often in unexpected but compelling forms, and our function is to welcome what comes thus. My talent, if I have one, is to welcome these things at any cost.

The break that could be described as epistemological occurred with the question of fanaticism. It was during frequent stays in Tunisia, a country with which I live in a certain symbiosis, that the question of fanaticism arose, with the correlate of terrorism,

a question that psychoanalysis had strangely neglected. It was during this reflection that emerged irresistibly, and with much reluctance on my part, what I called, but I am not the first to have done so, the Cain complex, referring to me in chapter 4 of the book of Genesis.

I therefore reject the Freudian thesis, stated in *Totem and Taboo*, that any foundation of an "ethnic" group rests on a parricide. I think, conversely, that parricide does not found anything. Parricide is destructive and all literature, from Sophocles to Shakespeare, a reference dear to psychoanalysts, testifies that after a parricide there is nothing, there is only destruction and chaos. After Oedipus kills his father, the entire Oedipal family disappears. Ditto with Hamlet.

What is foundational, it seems to me, is the rivalry of the brothers. Cain's crime, the fratricide, is indeed the founder. We see in the biblical myth that one of Cain's sons invented music, another the technique, a last the city. What this biblical passage teaches us is that the constitution of human society is the consequence of fratricide, with the insurmountable guilt that accompanies it, as our national (own?) Victor Hugo understood so well in his great poem *La Conscience*.

I think the whole psychoanalytic institution, to this day, has been based on the repression of the Cain complex. This explains the warm atmosphere that reigns in our circles: everyone says bad things about everyone, and for all this to hold, it is necessary to have, according to Camus' expression, a cesarean organization governed by a guru who can go by various names.

I have tried to sketch the deep interactions between the two complexes, that of Cain and that of Oedipus, by relying in particular on the wonderful article by Freud *In-*

*roduction to Narcissism* in which he defends with vigor, against Jung , the thesis of the two libidos.

Could I defend these theses in the existing post-Lacanian associations? I have sincerely tried this at least twice. But it turned out to be impossible, precisely because of the energy of repression of the Cain complex in these institutions.

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The choice of references, at least during the period of the formation of the analyst, which is very long in our discipline, determines a destiny. If you choose Freud or Jung as a reference, it will lead you on quite different existential adventures.

I have a huge debt to Jacques Lacan. At the beginning of my analysis he gave me this sharp remark at the end of a session: "You choose your references very badly!" Which resulted in: Choose them better. At the time, the references dominating the Parisian scene were those of post 68. Could we not adhere to them without excluding ourselves from intellectual exchanges? I think that simple sentence was a turning point in my analysis. It has helped to detach me from all the Germanopratin<sup>1</sup> fascinations which cause great harm to French society.

Psychoanalysis has always been nourished by movements, references foreign to its discipline, that is to say to its clinic. Thus Freud had recourse to the Greek theater to name the Oedipus complex. For *Totem and Taboo*, he relied on the ethnology of his time, on the doctrine of James George Frazer on totemism, some advances of which no longer apply today, as Claude Lévi-Strauss underlined in his work *Le totémisme au-*

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<sup>1</sup> Referring to Saint-Germain-des-Prés; Left Bank—ed.

*jourd'hui* (2002). And the analytic institution continues to function as if the theoretical collapse brought about by this death certificate did not exist. It is to plug this breach and to build another theory of groups that I wrote *Eating The Book* which received (in its form of my psychiatric diploma) the imprimatur of my old master before illness imposed on him a final silence.

Among the references that I introduced in my theoretical constructions as far as I can, in a progressive way, there was Hebrew literature, that is to say not only the Bible - in which I took up the myth of Cain - but also something from the Talmud and the Midrash. Lacan was already thinking about it. Then there was the importance of the texts relating to the concentration camp phenomenon, to totalitarianism: What Nazism did to all of humanity, at least to all of Western humanity. This led me to nourish myself on texts by Hannah Arendt, Primo Levi and others. It was an essential moment of my labor, very laborious, which culminates in my book *Light Of The Extinct Stars*.

During this confinement, important events and subjective experiences have happened for each of us. During this long period of forced unemployment, I read and discovered a book that I should have known a long time ago *L'homme révolté*, by Albert Camus.

Why *L'homme révolté*? By some sort of chance. I remember one of the founding encounters of my life, that of Yeshayahou Leibowitz. And Leibowitz had a high regard for Camus and a fierce hatred for Sartre.

So I wondered why this deeply believing, religious man could be so interested in someone claiming to be rather agnostic. But for Leibowitz, Camus was a saint, a secu-

lar saint, as he himself defines it in *La peste*. So I got down to it, opened this book and took it for a test.

Immediately, I discovered a great book of philosophy, every paragraph of which is joyfully written. This silent son of a housekeeper was probably, for France in the second half of the 20th century, its best and most profound author! And for me, for psychoanalysis, it is now an important reference; and I am amazed at how little echo it has had in our circles so far.

Why give it this importance? Because he immediately poses, with incomparable depth, the question of the subject. His revolted man is the desiring subject and the avatars of that desire. It is the subject, in Lacan's sense, it is the one who says: "No!", No to the Master. So far, but no further! This means that from the outset, it poses the existence of a limit, of a transcendent law. But Camus adds: In the same movement where the rebellious man says: "No!", he says: "Yes"! This is the great thing. At the same time as he says no, he is saying yes. And he says yes to what? He says yes to the beauty of the world, it is explicitly written, and he says yes to his fellow human beings who are suffering. This double yes and no are constantly tied together, inseparable.

Camus is now in my theoretical space, a reference, if only because of the first pages of the book, of chapter 3, where he declares: we are all sons of Cain. The book starts from there, from this consideration of the problem of fraternal rivalry.

The other main girder of the work, which brilliantly joins and sheds light on this malaise in civilization of which Freud speaks and to which Camus gives its real name, nihilism, in the miasmas of which our civilization languishes and self-destructs, as an-

other major writer G. W. Sebald said. Our civilization is bathed in nihilism that the latest societal and pseudo-bioethical laws further strengthen.

One of the privileged figures of rebellious man, his incarnation, is for Camus that of the artist. This is, because both he is in a tradition, and at the same time he wants to break with that tradition, he tries to take it up in another way.

Another privileged figure for Camus of his rebellious man, is the psychoanalyst, the Freudian man, in that psychoanalysis escapes the discourse of the Master, of mastery. Alas! What has not been heard! And read!

The last privileged figure of the rebellious man, whom Leibowitz must have spotted, is the one we find in *La peste*, that of the lay saint. I recalled the times of our late Freudian School of Paris, that of Lacan. This one, in *Television* he had said, I quote from memory: The ideal of the psychoanalyst is the saint! The colleagues chuckled: "You realize! He becomes senile! Saints!". And he added: the saint does not do charity. He de-charites. In other words, he occupies the place of waste, of the *hors-discours* relative to the dominant discourse.

I am giving my definition of the saint, or rather, of the holy act. We don't have to be saints, but every now and then we do something holy. What if you don't do this once in a lifetime, was your life worth living? I believe that without holy acts our world would be unlivable. I think back to the Pentateuch which is all the same the founding text of all our civilization, Christianity and Islam included. The most important word of this text is in my eyes this — because it includes all the others — "Be holy, for I Am, Holy!". So what is a holy act? It is a gratuitous act of love towards our suffering human brothers.

The rebellious man of Camus, it is therefore this man who says No! By this no, he affirms, I said, the existence of a transcendent law, breaking with the dominant discourses, with all the fashionable things, with what is told on TVs, all this kind of falsehood in which we bathe, we even sink, and at the same time as he says this no, he says yes. He says yes to the beauty of the world, and he says yes to all of humanity.

I believe that the essence of man, after reading Camus, is this rebellious man. Anyone who is not in that position is an alienated being. This definition, this subjective position that Camus defines, appears to have the closest link, with what we name without really knowing what we mean, and that Lacan put forward like this: The subject of desire. The rebellious man is the subject of desire. It's a ridge line (edge?) that's almost impossible to hold, utterly uncomfortable.

In the 400 pages of this book, Camus accompanies us in the vicissitudes and missteps, sometimes extremely serious, that this position can cause.

He dwells at length on Hegel, who has marked the history of philosophy, on his dialectic of master and slave, so dear to Lacan, a constant reference in contemporary thought, with its Marxist relay. He attributes to this dialectic some of the greatest misfortunes in contemporary history. The problem Camus had at the time he was writing his book was his confrontation with Stalinist totalitarianism and the Gulag, which many of our intellectuals accepted, some with Nobel prizes, from Joliot-Curie to Langevin and . . . Sartre. The common thread of the book would be the critique of this dominant current of thought that is nihilism. Nihilism, which takes thousands of forms, is the relativization of all values. We can permit ourselves anything! It leads to cynicism, and we

have lived in this nihilism for 3 centuries. Since the West rejected its biblical underpinning, it has steadily moved closer to where it is now, namely a kind of agony.

This is a thesis, which he is not the only one to support. I think of this author for whom I have a particular affection, discovered late — one of the advantages of living old is the time you have to make discoveries — it is the writer, whom I mentioned in the beginning, namely W. G. Sebald, who wrote a masterful book *On Destruction*, in which he basically says: for 3 centuries Europe has been self-destructing. Did Sebald know the work of Camus? I do not know. What I do know is that when *L'homme revolté* appeared, Hannah Arendt wanted to meet Camus, she didn't want to meet Sartre. Their thoughts have indeed more than one point of intersection. This denunciation of nihilism remains more relevant than ever. But Camus maintains the hope of a start. A start that would be a kind of new rebirth.

This nihilism, for me, is rooted in the Cain complex. To overcome nihilism, to achieve the hoped-for rebirth, is to overcome this complex. There is a beautiful statue in Weimar that represents the two greatest German writers of the time, Goethe and Schiller, hugging each other amicably instead of being rivals. Image of Cain overcome. Our ethic is to be able, through analysis, to overcome this complex, our sibling rivalry. It's not easy, it's much more complicated than liquidating your Oedipus and being reconciled with your father. This reconciliation of brothers would put a brake on the ambient nihilism and would open the possibility of this rebirth that Camus hoped for. This is also my hope.

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Translated by Andrew Stein