

Discourse, Irony and Representation in Jose Saramago's *Cain*

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Abstract:

Jose Saramago's novel *Cain* presents interesting possibilities of reading the use of discourse and irony in the course of its representation. This is evident in the way the narrative makes use of these forms or placement to articulate the layers of engaging with the story of the Old Testament. This paper analyses the modes of this engagement by looking at the ways in which Saramago goes about this process of representation.

Keywords: Discourse, irony, representation, Bible, Saramago

Jose Saramago's *Cain* can be read as an interesting repository of re-readings of settled Biblical episodes and events, but the spin is not merely in the presentation of a different 'version', but more so in the way irony is used to represent an orientation which questions the authoritative reading. Saramago here opens up the Biblical text to the process of reading and uses Cain as the one who engages in looking at the ambiguities that exist in the narrative. The discourses that pertain to the episodes that are taken up for enunciation thus become sites of reading in *Cain*. More than the veracity of a given version, it is the mode of reading that Saramago brings into play in the novel. Cain's situation as a subject therefore opens up the possibilities of the reading process where, irrespective of his position as subject, witness or participant, he serves to scrutinize the *mode* of reading. Whether it is his own status as a subject, and how he presents himself to the world, or his function as agency in the scheme of things as they unfold, Cain's situation as a reader is embedded in the narrative. Such an orientation opens up the process of looking at the textuality of the Biblical narrative, where the reading of the faultlines evident in the gaps and silences make his readings one among many. Such a positioning of the narrative process as being dependent on the representational agency, which is Cain himself in most cases, the focus in Saramago's novel shifts from the 'subject' to the manner of reception and telling. What this implies is that the *manner* of representation is as important as the *matter* being taken up for representation. Cain's situation as an instrument and as a participant provides Saramago the scope to navigate and move across multiple planes to articulate alternatives to stated positions by referring to the terms of reception. That is why the *play* of timelines and planes in the narrative take recourse to irony as one of the strategic devices in the process of representation.

The employment of this narrative process where Cain's subject position and his situations as witness and commentator are made use of by Saramago can be seen in different episodes in the novel. The scene where Cain comes across an old man and interacts with him is emblematic of the way the question of identity is configured through both perception and the process of reading. The reader's

placement as a witness and the structuring of the narrative through a series of slippages that remain unaccounted show how fluidity works to the narrator's advantage. In seeking to flesh out the gaps and silences in the story of Cain, Saramago looks forward to the reader's anticipation and response, making it a built-in marker in the narrative. This encounter, seemingly insignificant in terms of its bearing on the subsequent turn of events, reflects one of the important dimensions of the narratorial process: the play between expectation and mode of representation. Queried on his situation, Cain misleads the old man by saying that he *is* Abel, a shift of identities, which he does not think much about. This is not merely inventive, it is also a sign of the way Saramago draws in the reader into the scheme of emplotment. Saramago takes in the presumptive reader, assuming that there is that reader who is likely to contest the situation that is narrated—thereby placing the scene into the ambit of ambiguity. This is done by showing the gap between the actual and the contemporary world of the reader, which remains unbridged. What he presents is garnered to amplify the logic of *coherence*, which if found to be valid in the twenty-first century, would have been workable through a mode that may not be intelligible in the present time. Yet, interaction would be *coherent* and valid in that world, worked out through its own set of parameters, which there is no way of deciphering now. This is what Saramago focuses on, arguing that the idiomatic transfer from one age to another, a cultural translation of the terms of existence, does not invalidate the rendering of the experience that is narrated. The passage requires to be cited for the point of argument to be elaborated further:

While the false abel is walking towards the square where, according to the old man, his destiny awaits him, let us attend to the extremely pertinent observation made by a few of our more vigilant and attentive readers, who consider that the dialogue we have just set down would be historically and culturally impossible, that a farmer with little and now no land and an old man with no apparent means of support would never think or speak like that. They are quite right, of course, however, it's not so much a question of them having or not having the ideas and the necessary vocabulary to express those ideas, but of our own capacity to accept, even if only out of simple human empathy and intellectual generosity, that a peasant from the very earliest times and an old man leading two sheep along by a piece of rope, with only a limited knowledge and a language that is still only taking its first tentative steps, were driven by the need to try out ways of expressing premonitions and intuitions apparently beyond their reach. Obviously, they didn't say those actual words, but the doubts, suspicions, perplexities, argumentative advances and retreats were nevertheless there. All we did was put into a modern idiom the twofold and, for us, insoluble mystery of the language and thought of the time. If the result is coherent now, it would have been then, given that we're all of us muleteers travelling down the same road. All of us, both the learned and the ignorant. (Cain 34-35)

Saramago's qualification of the terms of placement whereby he situates the reader of his own time ("our capacity to accept") connects the narrative with the

condition of perception. How does the reader perceive Cain through the lens of the contemporary? It is not this question as such, but the drawing in of the reader as a co-participant in the narrative process that makes the parodic element for strongly evident. The questioning of the terms through which human language's potential to deliver complex responses becomes important here. The narrator concedes that the language of the narrative need not necessarily have been of the age of Cain. Yet, such recognition of the potential of language in its evolved state as we find in the present world does not close the possibility of Cain's conversation with the old man being incoherent. "Obviously, they didn't say those actual words, but the doubts, suspicions, perplexities, argumentative advances and retreats were nevertheless there." (35)—this 'obviously' is ironic in more than one sense. At one level, the narrator looks back at the world of which there is hardly any record or evidence; at another, there is the logic of coherence, without which there would have been no exchange between the old man and Cain. This narrative being historically and culturally removed from reality is one aspect that enables the reader to take stock of the feasibility question. The narrator invites attention to the fact that Cain's world and time cannot be accessed from a later period. The narrator enhances it by shifting it to the reader who *doubts* the narrative. There is considerable play in the manner of narrative arrangement as the points of reference fluctuate continuously. This shifts the centre from a thematic focus to the *points of view* through which Saramago reads the events. Narration and occurrence thus couple up in an interesting process of versions engaged in play.

Crucial to what takes place here, it is the nature of 'representation' that makes the play of versions feasible. The accommodative design is orchestrated by the argumentative force which comes from the manner in which the different dimensions of representation are brought to bear on the narrative. When Saramago marks out Cain's viewpoint as a contrarian position from what the Biblical presentation situates as, there is conflation of the 'individual' and the 'shared' worldviews. Javier Kalhat points out how the varieties of representation are brought about by the situations in which the narrative is made to operate. There is thus the question of intentionality which plays its role in the determination of focus and orientation in the presentation of events. For Cain, it is not incumbent upon him to carry forward or further the 'shared' worldview that governs the faithful subject, for he is not situated as one whose actions would represent the logic of faith. Saramago takes his expulsion as the route through which alternatives to the existing narrative schemes are organized. Playfully situated, Cain's position as a non-conformist places him at a distance from the shared intentionality which determines the 'order' of the faithful. Kalhat argues that what forms the cultural heritage for others cannot have bearing on an individual like Cain as he operates singly and not as part of a larger social matrix.

Depending on the kind of representation, the stance may be that of an individual or of a group of individuals or a whole society. In the latter case, such 'shared intentionality' is typically embodied in conventions, practices, and institutions, which then operate with various degrees of autonomy from individual or explicit acts of taking one thing to represent

another thing. Much representation around us is indeed a matter of shared intentionality. (Kalhat 20)

It is through the very process of exclusion that he is kept out of the collective cultural inheritance. Such a positioning of Cain marks him *out* of the response mechanism, where the expectation from him to conform, is kept out of bounds. Cain does not 'share' or follow the logic that applies to others in the worlds he moves about, and his lack of adherence to the governing representational scheme is, in fact, considered to be *in character*. As Kalhat points out, Cain gains an autonomy of sorts by moving out of the determined world of those who follow the cultural and social arrangements in relation to responses expected of them.

An interesting example of this process can be found in a confessional moment when Cain re-introduces the issues of responsibility and action. He is with Lilith when he addresses her as he revisits the moment of his tryst with God. The passage is remarkable in that Saramago *plays* with the question of agency, shifting the moral centre from Cain to God whose judgment is made part of this version. The element of the ludic comes to the fore here as Cain disturbs the hierarchy of situations as he trivializes his condition as a fugitive. What Saramago does is to make an argument for Cain proposing that his ability to move across spatial planes and temporal structures is connected to the will of God. What in the Biblical convention forms the bedrock of faith is here marked with a playful shifting of positions. The action of Cain being punished is not taken out of the equation. Yet, it is the same action which becomes a license for him to move about like a time traveller irrespective of the situation he comes across. This process of overturning the context is also an act of misreading of the already settled argument of faith. When Cain shifts the onus of his status as a fugitive and his liaison with Lilith, placing them in the same plane of responsibility, the role of 'play' as a determinant agent becomes evident:

I'm cain, remember, the one who killed his brother and was punished for his crime, Fairly leniently, it must be said, remarked lilith, Yes, you're right, I would be the first to admit that, but god, the one we call lord, was still the main person responsible, You wouldn't be here if you hadn't killed abel, in fact, from a selfish point of view, you could say that one thing led to the other, No, I just did what I had to do, killing my brother and sleeping with you in this bed are all effects of the same cause. (111)

Cain's narrative representation of the conditions under which he is placed—his status as a fugitive and his relationship with Lilith—is part of a design that Saramago locates in the plot of the novel. It is imperative to see how the functional dimension of representation is situated by Cain to work the argument in his favour. Such an exercise is reflective of the ways in which discourse is made use of to suggest alternative signifying possibilities. The 'discourse' that Cain presents is one which is fraught with its own rhetorical focus as he deliberately draws in the ironical counterpoint of the whole exercise of his banishment. Rather than go with the narrative orientation where his criminality is the source of his fugitive status, Cain tweaks the mode of representation suggest that the responsibility is not his, but that of God. What such an

orientation does is to open up the markers involved in the whole process by making it a dialogic one: for Cain to be nomadic, the agency is not of his willing – he is the perpetrator of the action, the consequence is determined by God. This interface between God's purpose and his criminality is made out by Cain to be one where he is merely the pawn in a larger scheme of things. What he tries to draw attention to is the irony of the whole process, whereby he reads his own situation as that which is not independent, but subject to God's will. Saramago's representation makes Cain an interpreter of events where he does not quite offer a *different* sequence, but reads the entire sequence *differently*. As Roland Barthes says, "A narrative is never made up of anything other than functions: in differing degrees, everything in signifies." (Barthes 240) What is remarkable here is that the process through which the narrative is worked out in *Cain*, the interplay between the 'reality' of representation and the settled Biblical version of events is constantly in evidence. There are questions which are placed through a rhetorical emphasis on differing possibilities, as Lilith points out to Cain, so that the consolidation of action and subsequent response is not just a question of hierarchy. When Cain is made to project a possibility that his state of affairs and his being a fugitive is a responsibility God owns, the onus is no longer on Cain alone. There is a play of the question of 'will', which becomes, in Cain's placement of events, a process that God worked on. The very idea that God's will can be open to interpretation in ways other than the settled version of events makes of Cain more than a 'character', and embeds in him layers that mark him as both witness and commentator. When he reminds Lilith of his own status as a murderer, he is using that identity to work out another layer through which his condition of being a witness to the changes in time and history acquires validity. This comes from his argument that the responsibility for his placement in such a situation is as much his, as it is God's, which he presents as being part of the scheme of things.

Saramago builds his discourse on Cain through a reference to the functionality of language and narrative, whereby the settled aspects of Biblical reality are re-examined in the context of the gaps that persist in story. In effect, Cain's representation becomes one version placed beside the narrative where God's will the determinant course of action. This is a form of unsettling of the course of events because the shift from the settled idea of 'reality', canonized through the Bible, becomes one in a range of possibilities. Saramago does not posit Cain's version as an alternative to the settled or more recognizable one in the Biblical tradition; rather it is the possibility of reading the material of the source text in ways other than that which finds place in the canon that makes the exercise so open-ended. The process of selection is brought to bear in the course of the representation whereby the world of Cain, in his visualization, is embedded with a viewpoint that places him in an interesting position as an analyst and commentator. The classic Biblical episode of Job and his travails is a case in point. Once he meets the two angels who arrive on the scene to carry out God's diktat regarding Job—their role being that of observes ensuring that Satan does not cross the limits of the agreement—Cain puts the whole matter in a critical perspective:

If I've understood you rightly, the lord and satan made a wager, but this man job isn't to know that he is the object of that gamblers' agreement between god and the devil, Exactly, exclaimed the angels as one, That doesn't seem very fair of the lord, said cain, if it's true, as I've heard, that job, for all his wealth, is also a good and upright man, and very religious too, he has committed no crime, and yet, for no reason, he is about to be punished with the loss of all his money and possessions. (115)

The situation with which the angels are dealing here is one that has occupied Christian theology in different ways. Recent studies of the God-Satan-Job equation have explored the dimensions of power and faith embedded in the figure of Job. He epitomizes, for God, the testament of faith, which no Satanic manoeuvre can overcome. The argument that Job is the fleshing out of the faith God is distinguished by is one of the key episodes in the Bible. The wager that Cain and the angels argue about is one where the steadfastness of Job is taken for granted. The configuration of Satan is marked by his recognition that Job is the test case for him to be felled in the challenge to faith. When Job becomes the subject of examination, he is backed by God because of the faith he possesses, but also because his very identity is defined as that of the faithful. Job's situation, then, is one where his faith defines and circumscribes him in the scheme of things. It can be argued that the test is not for Job to endure, rather, it is Satan who is being tested. Mark Glouberman places the significance of the issue in context thus:

The Book of Job begins dramatically. God's intelligence agents have assembled for their periodic debriefing. In answer to God's inquiry, Satan, the one angel mentioned by name, reports that he has come '[f]rom going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it' (1:6). Has Satan, God asks, observed Job, 'a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil'? Although, on a first pass, this reads innocently enough, prolonged exposure suggests a derisive undertone. 'To and fro on the earth, you say. Up and down too, eh? Very assiduous indeed, my feathered friend. Even if you were to add in and out and up and down to your detective protocol, you'd still be wasting your time in the case of Job.' (Glouberman 1)

Glouberman's placement of the onus on Satan invites us to consider how the tables have been turned on the perpetrator of evil. In the Biblical representation, Satan must demonstrate his capacity for evil by dislodging Job from his position of faith. In the representation of Saramago, however, there is a shift in orientation. Cain examines the purpose with which Job is marked, and how his situation is one where he has no *say*. In effect, Cain offers an alternative of looking at the Job episode: not as a matter of faith, but as an act where all those who are involved are not taken into confidence. This is not merely a process of questioning of God's 'will', it is the application of a logic which to Cain seems to be contradicted by the chain of events. Cain invokes the logic of 'fairness' whereby he places the scales of deed and punishment, arguing that Job is being subjected to a situation for which he is not directly responsible. What in the Biblical tradition is a matter of faith, an assertion of the value of faith in a world

where questions about sincerity are in abandon, is transformed in Cain's examination to a matter of principle. What Saramago does is to transfer the question of Job from the framework of faith to that of justice and fairness. 'Fairness' is one of the most contested terms in legal discourse. John Rawls argues that "those who are at the same level of talent and ability, and have the same willingness to use them, should have the same prospects of success regardless of their initial place in the social system." (Rawls 73) The point that Rawls makes is that the consequence of an action is to be approached and determined only with reference to 'fairness' insofar as it relates the acceptability of the terms under which it is administered. If the argument of Cain is examined in this context, it is seen that Job is not kept in the picture in the scheme between God and Satan. As such, he is a mere instrument in a larger game of which he has no inkling. The point Cain makes has another implication: Job is taken for granted as the best specimen for the execution of God's faith. In effect, he becomes a test case for God, by means of which faith will stand proven before Satan. In presenting this argument, Cain marks out not the purpose, but the process through which Job is selected and subjected to. Cain calls into question the very principle that is used in working out the scheme of things. What emerges thus, in this episode, is that Job's instrumentality is assumed because he is a faithful man, a conformist who would not go against God. Cain's examination of the terms under which the two angels are engaged to carry out their task is consistently present throughout the novel. The undercutting of the terms of reference by means of which the deeds are done and processed, invoke an intertextual dimension in the text.

We angels have excellent memories, your name is cain and you were in sodom when the city was destroyed, Yes, that's true, I remember now, As you know, my colleague and I are angels of the lord, And what have I done to merit two angels of the lord helping me in my time of need, You were kind to abraham, you helped to ensure that no harm befell us in lot's house, and that deserves a reward, How can I thank you, We are angels, if we don't do good, who will, asked one. (114)

It is not just that Cain is putting the discourse of God under a critical lens, he himself is being observed and is subjected to scrutiny. In the brief exchange, Cain is recognized as the one whose role as witness and participant in earlier situations is marked as a candidate for a 'reward'. Saramago marks the time-flow by referring to events which have the value of recall for the angels. It appears to Cain to be a surprise that he is seen as one who was involved in an act of *kindness*, because to him the saving of Isaac was an expediency he felt necessary to address and not because it would give him merit in the eyes of the Divine disposition. The identification of angels as agents of goodness is interestingly placed in the context of the submission made by Cain, where he questions the very idea of fairness in the subjection of Job. Saramago makes this distinction between the ideas of *goodness* and *fairness* in the context of this episode. Goodness pertains to the moral order while fairness is a matter of principle and has the bearing on the concept of equality. Faith is not brought into the picture by Saramago here as Cain looks at the situation of Job through

the critical lens of fairness, irrespective of whether he is faithful or not. Fairness, as Rawls points out, is to be part of every individual expectation and part of a placement in particular scheme of things. In that context, Saramago traces an interesting line of argument where the contest of values is also marked as a contest of positions of seeing. Such a focus on the variation in point of view can be seen in the context of the 'sacred', whose determination is subject to the situation it is placed in. It is pertinent to place the views of Salman Rushdie here, whose examination of the idea of 'sacred' opens up the field:

No, nothing is sacred in and of itself...Ideas, texts, even people can be made sacred—the word is from the Latin *sacrare*, 'to set apart as holy'—but even though such entities, once their sacredness is established, seek to proclaim and preserve their own absoluteness, their inviolability, the act of making sacred is in truth an event in history. It is the product of the many and complex pressures of the time in which the act occurs. And events in history must always be subject to questioning, deconstruction, even to declarations of their obsolescence. To respect the sacred is to be paralysed by it. The idea of the sacred is quite simply one of the most conservative notions in any culture, because it seeks to turn other ideas—Uncertainty, Progress, Change—into crimes. (416)

This opening up of the range of possibilities through which the idea of the 'sacred' can be contextualized, enables Saramago to demystify the angelic authority in the passage quoted above. Cain's perspective thus does not become a sacrilege but a questioning of the terms under which Job is made the subject of a 'wager' between God and Satan. This is also a process in the making of a discourse where Cain's parameters of evaluation are placed within the concepts of 'fairness' and 'justice'. As Michel Foucault points out:

...discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines it and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. (Foucault 1978: 100-101)

As Cain takes the idea of envisaged action to the angels, and through them to the divine authority, he is capitalizing on the mode of power transmission whereby he is making the execution of the Job plan appear 'fragile'. When the angels present themselves as representatives of God, they do so with the 'power' of divinity behind them. This power comes from discourse and the understanding that it is being subscribed to by everyone, including Cain. What Cain does is to offer an alternative way of seeing the entire exercise, not by challenging its operative structure. The way discourse can pave for a reading other than what the angels take for granted is embedded in orientation of Job, and his subject position entails. In effect, Cain is not presenting another story, but drawing attention to how the purpose of the action can have other implications. These implications, once seen from the perspective he places before the angels, undercut the nature of 'power' that comes from the exercise. Job's suitability is

marked, not by what he can endure, but the force of Satan to overcome Job. When Cain looks at it as an exercise in power and authority, the structured arrangement involving all three – God, Job and Satan – it brings out another aspect which the angels' representation does not accommodate, that of irony.

Interestingly, in *Cain*, the question of knowledge is foreclosed by the position in which the Cain is placed — a witness to developments that do not have the quest motif imprinted on his intervention. There is curiosity, however, in the way Cain approaches the train of sequences. This curiosity takes an interesting turn when he finds himself in different planes of space and time and the ordering of events are challenged by his appearance. Cain is not embarking on a knowledge quest as he journeys forward but there is the element of the tourist in him which surfaces at multiple points in the narrative. Saramago's narrative orientation places the question of representation within the frame of a logic which is not necessarily sustained by faith. Cain is situated in a manner where it is not obligatory on his part to follow the argument forwarded by the angels. It is because he is positioned differently that he is able to look at the circumstances from a perspective that appears ironical. The question of irony makes itself evident not only because of the way Saramago places alternative readings of familiar episodes and events, but also due to the placement of Cain in a position where his vision is not affected by the structured mode that marks the Biblical narrative. In effect, he is positioned in such a manner that facilitates his viewpoint, which appears both contrarian and non-conformist in the context of how he goes against the grain. This is what makes his representation of events appear ironic, granting to the whole discourse other centres than those defining the events in question. Because Cain's position as a commentator is not determined by one specific principle, it is his fluidity which provides the scope for the development of irony as a representational principle in the novel. J. Hillis Miller cogently frames the function of irony in narrative, which is one of the keys through which the discursive orientation in *Cain* may be examined.

Irony is the suspension of both line and any centre or centres of meaning, even at infinity. Irony cannot be expressed by any geometric figure. Both subjectivity and intersubjectivity are abolished by irony. Irony belongs to no voice or voices, neither to two nor to one. Ironic language functions mechanically in detachment from any controlling centre or centres, just as indirect discourse, which is irony as an operative principle of narration, can no longer be certainly identified as spoken or written by anyone in particular. Irony suspends any possible ordering according to some sequence controlled by a governing principle of meaning. (Hillis Miller 175)

Cain's interventions, be it in the case of Abraham, or his reading of the circumstances through which Job is subjected to scrutiny, opens up the field in such a manner that the 'ordering' principle of the Biblical narrative is wrested of its *centre*. This exercise is played out through a series of narrative enunciations that draws attention to the fictional dimension as well. Cain's ironic counterpoints mark the text with richness that is one of the most remarkable properties of literature. Hillis Miller puts this point succinctly: "Literature depends on the possibility of detaching language from its firm embeddedness in a

social or biographical context and allowing it to play freely as fiction.” (Hills Miller 172-173) In locating the circumstances of *play* within the frame of the storyline, Saramago makes Cain a reader of events which he encounters as he moves along. In the passage with the angels where Job’s predicament is made the subject of the conversation, Saramago places Cain’s representation in a way that examines the context of purpose. Job’s situation as subject thus becomes the site of contestation between two modes of viewing: the one presented by the angels and the other by Cain. The condition of play comes in because of the way in which the agency and objective are marked out, and Job’s position as subject is placed on the margins. Cain’s examination of the terms thus bring into focus the representation of the anticipated sequence of events where his reading seeks to place Job at the centre, not merely as the subject of a contest between God and Satan. In the Biblical scheme, Job’s endurance is marked as the epitomization of faith, Job being one of the primary exemplars of belief that is unswerving and true. What Saramago offers here is an insistence on looking at the nature of Job’s placement, where Job becomes the *object of play*. As Hillis Miller points out, Saramago wrests the subject position of Job from its inherited faith-based situation to make the entire exercise a part of the process of representation. When Cain looks at the situation of Job, he asks whether Job can be approached as a human subject, as an individual whose position is authoritatively predetermined in the contest of faith. What Cain does therefore brings into focus two important issues: the first is that of orientation, and the second is that of the discourse which exerts its power in the scheme of things. In the first place, the angels are oriented in a particular way, and are, to a considerable extent, flat and functional. The implication is that they are not more than functions and are expected to carry out the tasks assigned to them. That is why they are unable to respond to Cain’s query, for their vision is not determined to move beyond the axis of faith. When Cain locates Job as an individual he draws him out of the frame of belief and situates him both as a subject and as the subject of discourse. Saramago’s distancing of Cain from the purpose through which he looks at the representation made by the angels brings in the issue of language. Language and discourse are tied up in one bind as it is through the mode of representation that the point is emphasized. Cain takes advantage of his position as a bystander who is not bound by the way the angels look at the situation. What is opened up here is related to the issue of ‘reality’. On the one hand, there is the *reality* of Job, whose steadfast nature bears the signature of faith. This is the reality which the angels assert upon as they arrive on the scene. Yet, when Cain questions this representation of events, he goes against their idea of reality, which is actually part of the language-discourse structure he does not subscribe to. The relation between language and discourse is inseparable insofar as it is connected to the question of representation. Behind what the angels project as ‘obvious’, there exists a whole heritage of culture which serves to legitimize their representation as the one which is credible. Cain’s entry into the scene opens up the issue of discourse, making him an interpreter where he offers another way of looking at reality. In Saramago’s representation, *reality* ceases to be just one thing, but becomes operational at multiple planes. Language is not merely a ‘mirror’ for reality to be evaluated and presented, it is an encoding process which enables people to function in accordance with the code that is applied. The angels carry a

code, this is the code of faith. This process of encoding is so rooted that any alternative proposal is considered feasible. It is in this context that the situation of Cain as a witness and interpreter opens up the narrative space. For Cain, it becomes a matter of interpretation as to how far the exercise is worthwhile and to what extent Job's individuality is kept out of the equation. The focus on the question of 'reality' is thus tied up with the nature of representation, and this is marked by the way language is used and assessed. For the angels, their representation carries the mark of truth, and divine reality is the one they know. For Cain, however, such an orientation does not hold much here. He interprets the situation of Job as a form of representation, and deals with it in terms of the language in which he receives it. The relation between language and the represented 'subject' is one of fluidity and cannot be seen in absolute terms. Among the many factors involved in the way language and representation works to situate 'reality', one is the condition of encoding through which it is framed and structured. Looking at the context of discourse and representation and its role in framing *reality*, David Lee opines: "Given that language is an instrument for the assignment of the phenomena of human experience to conceptual categories it is clearly not simply a mirror that reflects reality. Rather it functions to impose structure on our perceptions of the world. Language is...highly selective, and the process of linguistic encoding involves a significant degree of abstraction from 'reality'." (Lee 8) Viewed from this enunciation of representation, the angels' representation becomes a *selective* presentation of the Job episode.

At the same time, the process of questioning of God's authority is not just a matter of critical examination of Job's engagement in the divine scheme. It involves, among other things, the examination of the nature of God's situation and the implications of such an exercise through which Job is made the subject of the exercise Cain refers to. Stanislas Breton's placement of the argument regarding God's situation is relevant in this context. Breton points out that God's situation, by the very means through which divine authority is envisaged, is not subject to scrutiny in the way it would apply to other subjects. This is something that entails a larger scheme of things than the mere questioning of Job's placement in the divine order. Breton thus looks at the nature of God's authority and how it involves the condition of 'non-contradiction' in the way divinity is understood and envisaged:

Would not God then be, on account of the nomination that keeps him enclosed in himself, the sovereign guarantor of the principle of identity, and, indirectly, of the "principle of non-contradiction"? God cannot contradict himself. On close examination, we find that at heart this God falls under the general condition. He is what he is. (Breton 205)

What Cain raises as a problem in the situation of Job is, in effect, a matter of ironic underpinning of the terms through which the authority of God is looked into. As God and the question of authority are inseparable, the ordering principle too has a bearing on how actions are placed and evaluated. In this context, the matter of Job can be spinned in both directions. On the one hand, as Cain questions, there is the role of the subject (Job) whose instrumentality is taken for

granted, and on the other, there is the principle of 'non-contradiction' which entails that God's sovereignty is all pervasive. Cain draws on the possibility of ambiguity which takes Job's acquiescence as a matter of course. As God's position is that which is represented by the angels, for Cain that provides him the scope to question the very terms of engagement. It is also interesting to see how the question of representation is brought into play here. Cain looks at the way irony is embedded in the purpose-driven exercise, which enables him to look at the whole issue as an example of play. This also makes it possible for him to situate Job's engagement within the field of discourse, which opens up his situation as a subject. What should be a closed and determined situation, by the very fact that it is seen and projected as such, makes room for the alternative interpretations to which Cain subjects it. The representation of Job as a part of the scheme that God envisages for the fulfilment of a larger moral principle does not appear to Cain to be sustainable by itself. This is not presented by Saramago as a violation of the principle of divinity by Cain, but as an examination of the representational process which opens up the subject for scrutiny. What this also entails is that there is a shift for the moral argumentative design that operates in the Biblical narrative to a discursive process in the novel. Without presenting things in any binary format that would situate one version against another, Cain's readings of specific situations where he is present and which he refers to offers Saramago to look at the discursive potential that forms part of the subject.

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