



## COMPARATIVE SEMIOTIC OBSERVATION TO BIBLICAL NARRATION AND THE TRAGEDY "ABEL" BY ETEHEM HAXHIADEMI

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### **Abstract:**

This paper aims to highlight the global coherence of the dramatic text of Haxhiadem, through an important aspect of isotopic organization. In the dramatic text of Haxhiadem and the biblical myth "Old Testament", some semiotic words, phrases and the global coherence that they create will be examined. During the examination, the first general isotopy will be highlighted in the biblical text and a second general isotopy in drama, pointing out some aspects of the dramatic imposture in the text in which specific images or topics play the role of the isotopic or in other words the crossing point of two or more isotopies. This drama remains to be an open text which offers multiple interpretations.

**Keywords:** global coherence, seme, semantic hoaxes, isotopic crossing

### **1. Introduction**

Several abstract and concrete semes have been considered in both Haxhiademi's dramatic text and the biblical narration of the Old Testament, all creating the alteration of the biblical myth in the tragedy "Abel". In terms of the comparative semiotic observation, primary inclusive isotopies have been observed in the biblical text, alongside secondary inclusive isotopies observed in the dramatic text in which certain subjects take the function of "isotopic crossings" – the point in which two or more isotopies are encountered. It is also observed that the dramatic playwright has recreated the drama subject artistically.

Tragedy "Abel" is the simplest work ever written by Etëhem Haxhiademi in terms of both its subject and dramatic action as it is sublime and complicated in terms of

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psychological analysis. The biblical symbolics in Haxhiademi's text increases the readers' interest into further investigating the father-son, child-parent and brother-brother rapports.

Being oriented by our purpose regarding this issue, the object of the literary analysis has been made the biblical text of the Old Testament, the first book of Moses as well as "Abel" - the Etëhem Haxhiademi's dramatic text. In both the Haxhiademi's dramatic text as well as the in the biblical narration in the Old Testament certain abstract and concrete semes have been considered, the ones creating the text global coherence as well as the artistically recreation of the biblical myth in tragedy. Primary inclusive isotopies have been observed in the biblical text whereas in the dramatic text are revealed secondary inclusive isotopies playing the role of the isotopic crossing, that is the point in which two or more isotopies are encountered.

## 2. Comparative Semiotic Observation

The term *Global Coherence* stands for the semantic thread uniting text from the beginning to the end. Certain semantic elements in the text are organized among them both in phrase level and even higher levels. Some semantic elements play in logical terms, an interlinking role between phrases. Overuse of certain concrete and abstract semes creates the semantic coherence. The timely repetition of some words or other units of speech is not enough to have *semantic coherence*. Thus, for instance, there may be an access of semes which, by definition, do not create isotopies at all but the so called semiotic coherence.

The term isotopy in semantics mean constancy or the excess of certain abstract and concrete semes in the text as a whole, whereas semes are semantic units of the signified. Depending on excessive semes, be they of abstract or concrete trait, there is thematic isotopy or figurative isotopy. According to Greimas, in his *Semantica strutturale*, (Greimas, 1996) semes have been classified as concrete, abstract and timico-passional. According to Greimas' classification, semes are divided according to the ways they represent human nature of processing the signified. By means of this triple division he distincts the following in three great fields of human beings; the outside world as it is has been given through senses, (figurative semes), abstract categorizations by means of which human beings generalize or classify the perception data, processing cultural units, in the general meaning of the word, (abstract semes) as well as the field of affective sense experience, (timico-passional semes)<sup>ii</sup>.

Francois Rastier (Rastier, Cavazza, Abeille, 1994) thinks that it is the context that decides about the semes hierarchy. Rastier's formulation is important because it considers semantic organization of the units as utterly dependent on the context. This formulation

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<sup>ii</sup> Maria Pia Pozzato, *The text semiotics*, Tiranë, 2001, p. 89.

goes towards contextual semantics, according to which the texts, with their full range of meaning, determine the semic composition and the hierarchy of the smaller units<sup>iii</sup>.

In our study, isotopies have been introduced in both biblical and dramatic texts, in which different aspects of the semantic hoax have been noticed. In these texts, certain topics play the role of the "semantic crossing" that is the place two or more isotopies have been encountered. Let us consider two texts which have been based on the isotopic ambiguity.

According to Bible, the Old Testament, chapter IV of the First Book of Moses, narrates about the Eve and Adam's boys; "*Adam got to know his wife, Eve, and she conceived pregnancy and gave birth to Cain and said; I got a male boy, by the will of God.*" She went on this way and gave birth to Abel, his brother. Abel became a shepherd whereas Cain became a farmer. But, it happened that, according to the customs of that time, Cain sacrificed the plot of his land trees to God whereas Abel sacrificed lambs from his flock as well as their dairy. God considered Abel's sacrifice as a good thing whereas Cain's sacrifice was not considered as the proper one. Cain was angry and all frowns. Then, God spoke to Cain: "*Why do you get angry? Why do you get all frowns? If you do not believe, fault lays with you and awaits to you, but you have to rule over it*". Then, Cain spoke to his brother, Abel. But, when it occurred for the two brothers to be working on the land, Cain rose against his brother and killed him. Then god, spoke to Cain again; "*Where is your brother Abel?: Cain answered; "I do not know. Is my duty to watch over my brother?" But God spoke again: "What did you do? The blood of your brother calls from beneath the soil!"*".

According to the Bible, in Adam and Eve's just formed family, the malediction of the "forbidden apple" sin should fall. This heavenly fatal will was realized by the two brothers who sacrificed the products of their toil to God. But, God did not accept Cain's vegetarian sacrifice. Envy entered between the two brothers; Cain kills Abel and was cursed by the God so that his arable land yields less production.

In both texts, there is inclusive isotopy running through the text as a whole. In the biblical text there are inclusive biblical isotopy, (in divine terms), in the dramatic text has inclusive isotopy in terrestrial terms.

Also, certain figures and topics play the role of *isotopies' interconnection*. In the texts under consideration, isotopies are alternative.

In the second dramatic text the alteration process occurs. Events descend from divine level to the terrestrial level. This way of setting up narration gives a hand to the author to transmit significant messages in the familiar, social national and international plans.

Isotopic parallelism makes it easier for the readers to find similarities with Biblical pre-history regarding ideas as well as problems characterizing the reality of that time.

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<sup>iii</sup> Idem, p. 91.

The second dramatic text has been set up on the so-called semantic hoaxes. We tried to understand on what semes this semantic hoax, intentionally made up by the author, has been set up as well as on what parts of the text the isotopic swapping has taken place

The intentional and strict analyses of these relatively long texts would require whole written pages, consequently this writing highlights some aspects of the ways it has been set up which have previously nominated semantic hoax. In the following observation, the expression units (lexemes) have been introduced in italics whereas the semantic units in normal writing. Expressions coming perfectly close to both isotopes have been highlighted in both texts.

### 3. The First Inclusive Isotopy in the Biblical Text

*Adam and Eve* → the first people on the Earth created by God by the dust of the soil. Masters of all miracles, created by Providence, the first parents of divine family. First sinners of life on Earth, (their greed was shown by eating fruit from the "tree foretelling evil and good, after being cunningly tempted and deceived by the snake –tool of Satan")

*Human beings* → God gave people reason. Reason ranks people over animals. *Adam*, the first human creature made by God, (he belonged to the Earth but was still connected to the sky). *Eve*, mother of all people alive. A fine personification of human beings and the most perfect creature of divine life.

*Abel and Cain* → First descendants of the prime divine family. Abel is a shepherd whereas Cain is a peasant. Inequality in dividing everyday chores incited a great variety of human feelings. Abel was oriented to positive feelings whereas Cain, on the contrary, to negative feelings.

*Sacrifice* → Gifts bestowed to God by the two brothers. God did not accept Cain's sacrifice and was pleased by Abel's sacrifice. Abel's gift was more appreciated because of its quantity - sign of devotion, love and veneration to God. Divine inequality in affection's inadequate proportion between two brothers.

*Envy and jealousy* → sentiments prone to negativity - consequence of differentiated divine affection between two brothers.

**Lexemes:** "envy", "greed", "jealousy", "hatred" →/ sentiment/, /lower/, /uncertainty/, /discouraging/, /negativity/.

"affection" → /sentiment/, /higher/, /euphoric/, /positivity/

Lexemes have been placed between double comas whereas semes have been placed between slashes.

*Malediction of the Creator* → this malediction came because of the sin of the first two dwellers of the Earth, Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. God's warning for the reign of the sin in the life of mankind as a whole. First descendants will be the heirs of the initial sin. Incited by jealousy, envy, anger and hatred Cain kills Abel.

*Death* → The act of death is presented as a totally human phenomenon that should be experienced. In divine point of view, in biblical narration, death has been presented as general loss whereas in terrestrial plan, in the tragedy it has been represented as a solution. Therefore, this is the descent from divine to terrestrial plan.<sup>iv</sup>

*Injustice*

- The unequal proportion of affection between two brothers.
- Unequal division of chores.

*In divine plan*, breaking balances in divine life brought fratricidal. Cain, the primary murderer paid dearly what he did. His brother's blood, still laying wet and warm on his hands. Cain, the heir and the primary sinner and sufferer of the initial sin. Abel – primary hero because of his belief. *Divine malediction* brought tragedy to divine society.

#### 4. Second Inclusive Isotopy in Tragedy

*Adam and Eve* → The first parents of human family

*The sin* → the first living people on earth sinned. All mankind suffered because of them.

Adam:

*"Our God allowed us to be alive*

*While hostility is tearing our children apart,*

*A conviction is life for humans".*

*Human beings* → perfection of humans compared to animals as well as human reason to master negative impulses of any kind. Adam's warning in terrestrial, family, national and international plan.

Adam:

*"Humans who cannot refrain from mastering their spite are likely to commit homicide"*

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<sup>iv</sup> Sabri Hamiti, *Albanian Modern Literature*, Tiranë, 2000

*Abel and Cain* → the two brothers' gifts have firstly been offered to their parents, (in terrestrial, family plan), Abel's personal trait is the love for his parents whereas, Cain's prevailing trait is the hatred for his parents.

*Envy, Jealousy and Hatred* → contemptuous sentiments prevailing relations between brothers stems from the differentiation of parental love. The unequal division of parental love between children, the love for Abel, (having a sweet disposition both in his work and word of mouth), incited Cain's hatred.

*Gifts* → Gifts showing the gratitude of children for their parents. Parents appreciated Abel's gifts as more appropriate than Cain's. (p.52). Abel blames parents for differentiating their love for their sons. (p. 50)

*Malediction* → In terrestrial plan, Adam's paternal curse for Cain brought the drama of terrestrial human society

*Death* → The act of death in terrestrial plan should be understood as a solution in the tragedy.

*Injustice*

- The unequal proportion of affection between two brothers.
- Unequal division of chores.

*In terrestrial, family and national plan*

Breaking balances in terrestrial life brought *fratricidal* in family level and *civil and interstate wars* in national and international plan.

## 5. Alteration of myth in tragedy

The subject of the tragedy has been taken from the biblical mythology. Its main topics are based on motives from the Old Testament. The story has been inspired by legends on the biblical figures. The approach of the drama plot with the biblical myth reveals various crossing points and essential differentiations. Biblical data have been changed by the author according to his personal style of writing. Therefore, biblical subject has been changed considerably.

Biblical myth on which Haxhiademi has been based for his tragedy "Abel" was changed and further processed by the author. The advantage of the mythological subject lays on the fact that it serves to treat important ethic-moral, social and political problems. The author narrates about the myth while creating an artistic work with characters and conflicts by means of which he transmits important ideas to future generations.

The subject of this tragedy as well as protagonists are the first people on earth; Adam and Eve, who keep discussing about the perish harmony between people, for the broken peace in Act I, Scene I. The stage is shocking since it is the dawn of human history when

biblical God had just started to realize his ideal world. At this moment, something tragic occurs; people lost their God. The first man and the first woman have failed to realize their potentials and the sinful story will go on for further generations.

In Haxhiademi's tragedy, with an utterly mythical subject, biblical myth was changed; gifts have been bestowed to parents, differently from the biblical narration in which gifts and sacrifices have been bestowed to God. Consequently, the divine element has been avoided and the biblical tragedy becomes familiar. Lack of the presence of deities and their (non-) participation to action attest the fact that the literary work is not a mythological treatment but an historical and realist one<sup>v</sup>.

In the biblical narration Abel thought; "Thanks to God we have so many good things and this is why I want to show how grateful I am to God" So he chose to sacrifice the ram. Cain thought; "Since sacrificing is a custom I am sacrificing while not understanding why to be grateful to anyone for what I possess? Haven't I worked hard and sweated a lot to earn my living and everything I have?" On the altar he left some grain and fruits but did not bestow them wholeheartedly.

On the contrary, Abel spoke highly about the Heavenly Father whom he believed wholeheartedly. Cain also knelt and addressed to God but his heart was not so thankful, grateful and trustful. Cain has shaped his character to be sincere but rough.

The detail of the scornful gift and welcomed one becomes the cause of Cain's jealousy, for the differentiated parental love in tragedy as well as the differentiated divine love in the biblical narration<sup>vi</sup>.

## 6. Analysis

Some excessive concrete and abstract semes have been introduced in the following tables, all creating semantic coherence. One can notice some aspects of the semantic hoax in the text; certain topics play the role of "isotopic crossing" therefore, the crossing or two or more isotopies.

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<sup>v</sup> Matraxhiu, B: *Critics of Tragedy and the Tragedy of Critics*, magazine Nëntori, no. 7, 1991, p. 93-116.

<sup>vi</sup> Plasari, A.: *Ideology of love confronting the ideology of hatred*, magazine Nëntori, no.1, 1991, p. 79.

**The Primary Inclusive**

**Biblical Isotopy**

**The first people** on earth, **created** by God, by the dust of the earth. They were masters of all miracles bestowed by God.

**Adam and Eve**

**The first parents** of human family.

**Adam, Eve** their greed, quenching it by eating from the "tree of evil and good". (Deception of snake – Satan's instrument) **The suffering of the first inhabitants on the Earth.**

**The sin - the malediction of the Creator** because of the fault in Eden

**Suffering of mankind as a whole.**

Adam:

*"Our God allowed us to be alive, while hostility is tearing our children apart, A conviction is life for humans".*

**The privilege for people** to take pride of their animals. God gave people reason. **Adam** – the first human made by God. He belonged to the earth but still in touch with the sky.

**Human being and its perfection.**

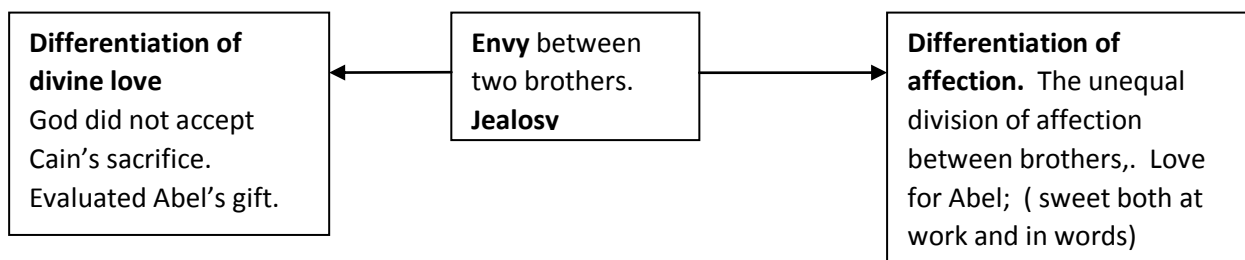
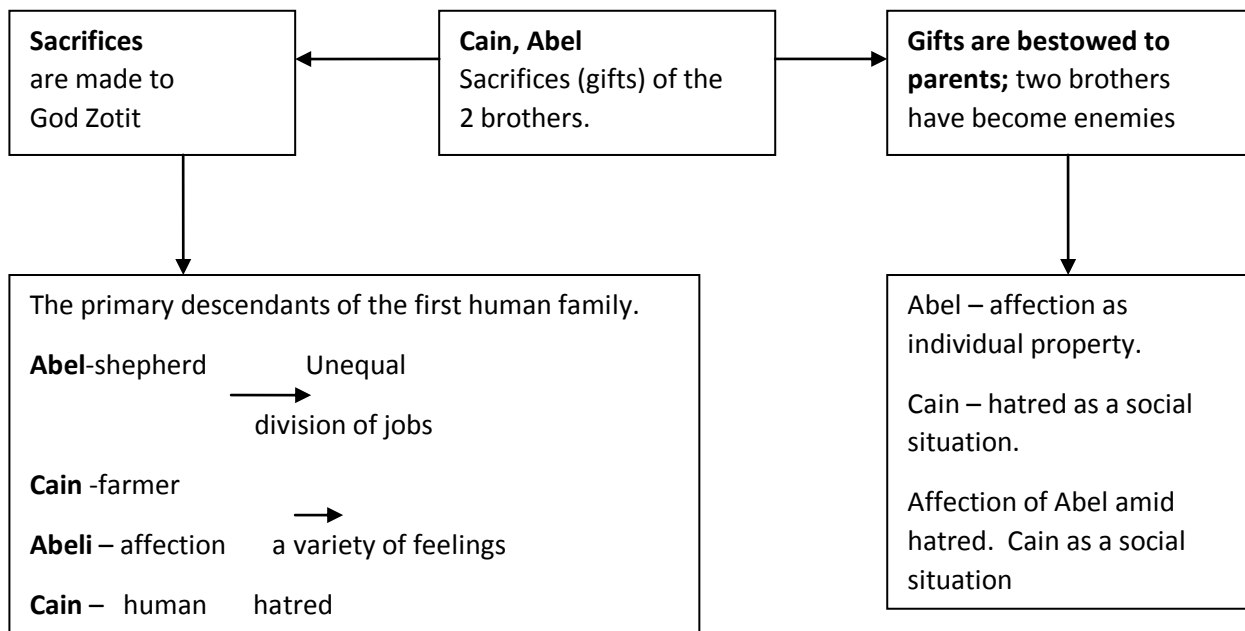
**Human reason** and the tendency to master negative impulses shown at any form or shape.

**Eve,** Mother of the whole human beings

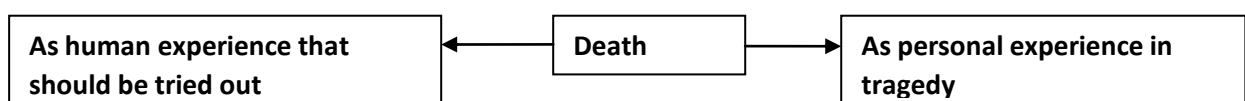
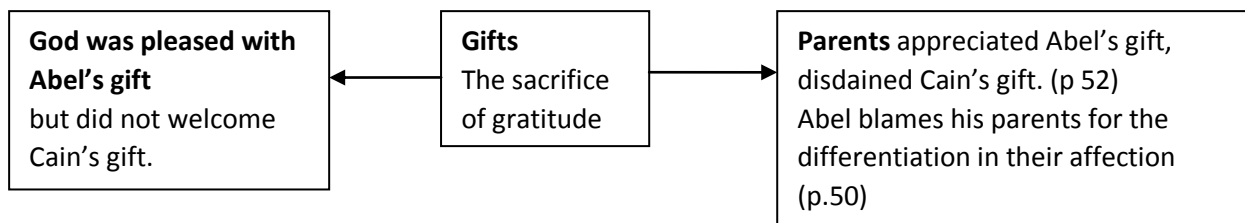
Adam: **His judgement:**

*Humans who cannot refrain from mastering their spite are likely to commit homicide*





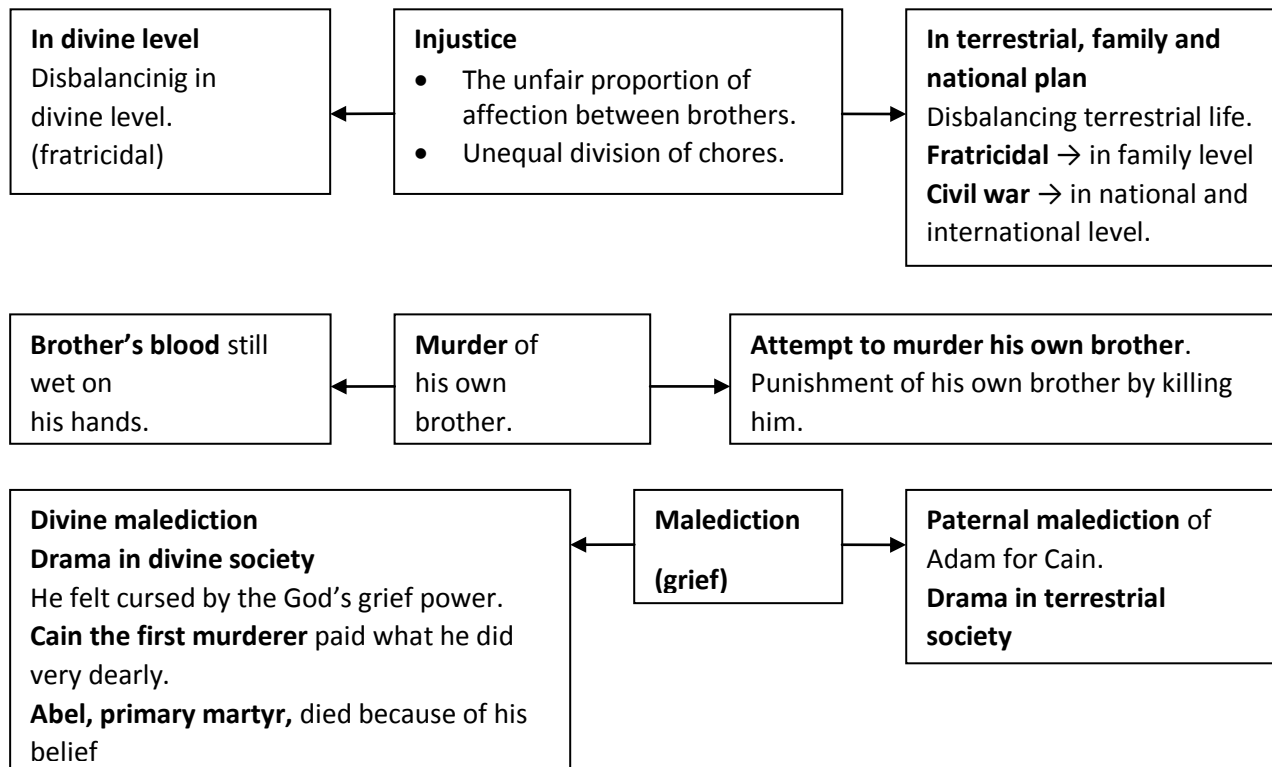
**Lexemes:** envy, greed, jealousy, hatred →/ sentiment /, /lower/, /insecurity/,/dysphonic/, /negativity love → /feeling/, /high/, /euphoric/, /positivity/



What is death?

Should it be considered as general loss or a solution?

In divine level, in biblical narration, death has been presented as general loss whereas in the terrestrial level it has been presented as a solution. This is the descent from divine level to the terrestrial level <sup>vii</sup>



## 7. Conclusion

The following are some conclusions regarding our findings from the consideration of this issue.

1. By making use of the biblical myth does not make the speech more awkward; instead, it makes it historical and more real. Creation of rapports with pass-through-time messages gives universality to the literary text.
2. Coherence of dramatic text consists in the link of speech in a logical order, by following the criteria of time running, space itinerary as well as the cause effect connection of interweaving the intrigue and the event as a whole.
3. Text coherence guarantees a semantic thread passing across the text as a whole, isotopy in the text.

<sup>vii</sup> Hamiti, Sabri: The Albanian Modern Literature, Tiranë, 2000.

4. Figures and certain topics play the role of crossing between two or more isotopies. Semantic manipulations give artistic value to the text. The artistic recreation of the narration in Haxhiademi's dramatic text, via semantic manipulations helps the reader to benefit from new meanings linked with the reality of time, making the text more realistic.

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