

Mitteilungen

חֲשֹׁנָה as Interpolative Gloss
A Solution to Gen 4,7

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»[O]ne of the most difficult and obscure biblical sentences.«¹»Every attempt to extract a meaning from the v[erse] is more or less a *tour de force*, and it is nearly certain that the obscurity is due to deep-seated textual corruption ... the textual confusion is probably irremedial.«²»Der ganze Vers ist im Text unsicher« ... »Es muß eine erhebliche Textverderbnis angenommen werden.«³

So declare three of the many commentators who have attempted to make sense of Gen 4,7. The difficulties posed by the verse reveal themselves in the variety of translations suggested by scholars and commentators, as well as in the tendency of these translations to be accompanied by scholarly paraphrases aiming to convey in more coherent language what the interpreter believes the text to be saying. In this note I would like to suggest that the verse is not as hopeless as it at first seems, nor the text as corrupt as commentators have concluded. It can be rendered comprehensible with the simple removal of the term חֲשֹׁנָה, understanding its appearance as a later exegetical gloss or interpolation, and the interpretation of the remaining רִבִּי as the subject of a nominal clause.

As a phenomenon, glosses and their textual relatives – interpolations, corrections and others – are difficult to identify with certainty. Part of the difficulty, as Emmanuel Tov has rightly noted, is that commentators are rarely rigorous in their definition or usage of terms such as »gloss« or »interpolation«.⁴ As these are the two terms most pertinent here, a brief discussion is worthwhile. A gloss, strictly speaking, is nothing more than a note on the meaning of an obscure term – in function, merely a definition.⁵ A gloss is not intended to change the meaning of the text, only to clarify it. The textual witnesses make it impossible to identify such definitions with certainty, but a likely example near to the text under scrutiny is the glossing of the rare לִטַּשׁ with the more common חָרַשׁ in Gen 4,22. Another possible instance,

¹ U. Cassuto, *From Adam to Noah: Genesis I–VI 8. A Commentary on the Book of Genesis I*, 1978, 208.

² J. Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, ICC, ²1963, 107.

³ C. Westermann, *Genesis 1–11, BKAT I/1*, 1974, 385.407.

⁴ E. Tov, *Glosses, Interpolations, and Other Types of Scribal Additions in the Text of the Hebrew Bible*, in: S. E. Balentine / J. Barton (eds.), *Language, Theology, and the Bible. Essays in Honour of James Barr*, 1994.

⁵ Tov, *Glosses*, 41.

suggested by H. G. M. Williamson, is the explanation of the phrase **וּמִדּוֹן יֵשָׁא** with **וַיְהִי רִיב** in Hab 1,3.⁶ An interpolation, on the other hand, has an exegetical function: it is an interpretive addition intended to affect the way in which the text is read.⁷ These can be very brief, as in the case of **מִשְׁפָּט** in Isa 40,14, which is specified in this context as comprising **דָּעַת**; the specification in Hab 1,7 that **שֹׁאֲתוֹ** is meant in the sense of **מִשְׁפָּטוֹ**; or the interpolation of **כֵּן** in the Qumran witness to Isa 44,3, specifying the precise relationship of the verse's phrases to one another.⁸ Grammatically, Tov distinguishes the gloss as being meant to remain outside the text and its syntax, whereas the interpolation is meant to be integrated into it. Such strict separation, while helpful in theory and definition, is too severe in practice; that an addition can interpret (interpolate) through definition (glossing) is clear from the Isaiah passage just cited. A gloss in the sense of definition may thus, as in the Isaiah case, be interpretive and meant to be incorporated into the text; conversely, it is possible to conceive of an interpretation achieved through a limiting definition which, as a definition, is not intended to be incorporated into the syntax of the passage. It is this latter possibility which is suggested as a solution to the difficulties of Gen 4,7, and which will here be called an interpolative gloss. That **הַטָּאָה** could be such an interpolative gloss, meant to be read as a specifying interpretation of the text without disrupting its syntax, is not a possibility to be dismissed out of hand. That it is a possibility worth consideration is indicated by, most importantly, the fact that the verse makes good sense after the removal of **הַטָּאָה**.

The foremost issue with the existing text is the lack of agreement between the feminine singular **הַטָּאָה** and the three masculine singulars which follow: **רִבֵּץ** (whether read as a verb or as a noun) and the two suffixes in the latter half of the verse. Commentators have gone to great lengths in their attempts to rectify this incongruity.

Claus Westermann proposed one of the more extreme explanations, having identified the issue of the suffixes as particularly problematic.⁹ He rendered the text in a fairly traditional fashion as »Nicht wahr: Wenn du gut machst, ist Erheben, und wenn du nicht gut machst, zur Tür hin lagert die Sünde, und auf dich geht ihre Gier, du aber sollst über sie herrschen.«¹⁰ He then attempted to account for the grammatical and sense difficulties by contending that »die Erzählung nicht in ihrer ursprünglichen Gestalt erhalten ist.«¹¹ First, he

⁶ Personal communication.

⁷ Tov, *Glosses*, 42. Later: »interpolations are (exegetical) elements added to the text, explaining the base text or changing its implication ... an interpolation (exegetical addition) is meant to be part of the running text, while a gloss is not« (Tov, *Glosses*, 47).

⁸ The first two of these are suggested by H. G. M. Williamson (personal communication); the last is one of the cases in the Qumran texts which Tov identifies as possibly attesting to interpolative additions to the Hebrew texts (*Glosses*, 50). It is worth to note that, despite the lack of decisive evidence from Qumran or other textual witness for glosses or interpolations, Tov nonetheless emphasises that the possibility of such is not precluded (*Glosses*, 45.49.50).

⁹ Westermann, *Genesis* 1–11, 407.

¹⁰ Westermann, *Genesis* 1–11, 384.

¹¹ Westermann, *Genesis* 1–11, 391. Ilse von Loewenclau also argues that the verses are a Yahwistic expansion, on very similar grounds: the inappropriateness of the form and content for an ancient narrative; the better sequence if 4,8 follows on from 4,5; the lack of response by Cain; the unexpectedness of Yahweh's appearance prior to the action in question; and the indication from analogous texts that Yahweh normally speaks after an action (Gen iv 6–7 – eine jahwistische Erweiterung?, in: *Congress Volume*, 1977, VT.S 29, 1978, 182).

suggested that 4,6–7 is not strictly necessary to the narrative, but »wirkt im Zusammenhang der Erzählung wie ein Fremdkörper.«¹² Combined with the fact that much of these two verses are resumed material and that 4,7b in particular is a »mechanische[s] Zitat« of 3,16, he concluded that the phrase **לפתח רבץ** represents the remnants of a text which has otherwise been completely displaced by the newer content of 4,6–7.¹³ In further support of his proposal of a heavily modified text, he also objected to the personification of sin as a demonic character (specifically because the passage is supposed to be early, though also, and more convincingly, on the basis of the lack of parallel elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible) and to the idea that the text contains a moral warning; this he considers »in der alten Erzählung unwahrscheinlich.«¹⁴ Rather, he suggests, the original text contained a warning to Cain from the ghost of the murdered. As this was later deemed unacceptable, it was (mostly) replaced by a divine address ascribing full responsibility to Cain for his subsequent actions. The result is the previously cited conclusion that »[d]er ganze Vers ist im Text unsicher« and »Es muß eine erhebliche Textverderbnis angenommen werden.«¹⁵ Ironically, it is this admission that highlights the principle difficulty with this interpretation, despite its creativity: namely, that it relies on a remarkably inept editor who, on the one hand, was willing to significantly modify the text while, on the other hand, apparently wished to preserve some fragment of what he originally had before him in **לפתח רבץ**, despite the garble of a text in which this resulted – the aforementioned incongruent suffixes being merely one of the difficulties with which the text was carelessly left.

Less dramatic is Arnold B. Ehrlich's early attempt to address the masculine-feminine incongruities. The disjunct between the feminine singular noun **חטאת** and masculine singular verb **רבץ** he resolved by redividing **חטאת רבץ** to **חטא חרבץ**; in this he was followed by numerous subsequent commentators, including Gerhard von Rad.¹⁶ Those who adopted the redivision, however, were left with the two masculine singular suffixes in the latter half of the verse; this has prompted two types of subsidiary proposals. The first is that **חטא(ח)** is effectively masculine due to its personification; as already noted, there is no parallel for such a phenomenon.¹⁷ The second is that the masculine singular whom Cain is instructed to master is his brother, Abel. The passage then becomes a discussion of the order of dominance be-

¹² Westermann, Genesis 1–11, 407.

¹³ Westermann, Genesis 1–11, 408. The citation of 3,16b in 4,7b, interestingly, is Westermann's »sicherste[s] Anzeichen« that 4,6–7 must be a subsequent addition or modification (Genesis 1–11, 408). Alan J. Hauser, however, has argued for a much more extensive series of links between Gen 2–3 and 4,1–16, indicating that the reference to 3,16 is not an isolated oddity but part of an underlying trend within the chapter (Linguistic and Thematic Links between Gen 4:1–16 and Gen 2–3, JETS 23 [1980], 297–305).

¹⁴ Westermann, Genesis 1–11, 408. On the issue of the moral content of the verse, see further below.

¹⁵ Westermann, Genesis 1–11, 385.407.

¹⁶ A. B. Ehrlich, Genesis und Exodus. Randglossen zur hebräischen Bibel I, 1908, 20; so also G. von Rad, Das erste Buch Mose: Genesis, ATD 2–4, 1976; M. Ben Yashar, Zu Gen 47, ZAW 94 (1982), 635–637; U. Wöller, Zu Gen 4,7, ZAW 91 (1979), 436; U. Wöller, Zu Gen 4,7, ZAW 96 (1984), 271–272; Westermann, Genesis 1–11; Loewenclau, Gen iv 6–7.

¹⁷ Westermann, Genesis 1–11, 408.

tween the brothers and the rights of the first born.¹⁸ More recently this suggestion has been taken up by Ulrich Wöller and Menahem Ben Yashar.¹⁹

Ehrlich's proposal is initially appealing in that it only requires one outright change to the consonantal text. However, in addition to the emendation of **חַטָּאת רִבִּץ** to **חַטָּאת רִבִּץ** on the presumption of a careless scribe it also relies, implicitly or explicitly, on other textual changes or reinterpretations in order to make sense of the whole. First, it entails a sloppy author/editor, who borrowed the phrase from 3,16b but failed to correct one or both suffixes to match the new antecedent, despite being sufficiently grammatically aware to remember to alter the form of the verb to suit its new context. Second, it entails the re-pointing of **לִפְתָּח** to **לִפְתָּח** and its reinterpretation as a reference to the (first) opening of the womb; and third, it requires the interpretation of sin as a personified entity which will pursue Cain if he does not do well – an interpretation frequently presented as a possible explanation for the subsequent masculine singulars but, as Westermann noted, without biblical parallel and unnecessary if the masculine singulars can be otherwise explained. Individually these each might be plausible enough, but the compound result is rather precarious.²⁰

Given the difficulties with these attempts to resolve the incongruity between the feminine **חַטָּאת** and the subsequent masculine features of the text by reference to careless editors and more or less drastic reinterpretations of the referents of the existing text, we turn now to the line of interpretation which suggests that **רִבִּץ** is not a verb but rather a noun, related to the Akkadian term and concept of the *rabiṣu*.

The principle issue with most such interpretations is that commentators tend to want to both have their cake and eat it; that is, there is a tendency to want to include the idea that **רִבִּץ** is related to the Akkadian *rabiṣu*, and that accordingly the text is referring to a demonic creature of some sort, while retaining the apparent personification of **חַטָּאת** as the thing which is crouching or lurking at the door – an interpretation which requires reading **רִבִּץ** as a verb, as it appears in the Masoretic pointing.

Thus, for example, J. Alberto Soggin renders the verse as »Falls du richtig gehandelt hast, solltest du dein Antlitz nicht erheben? Und falls du nicht richtig gehandelt hast, so steht die Sünde im Hinterhalt vor der Türe, und zu dir wendet sich ihr Wille; aber du mußt sie beherrschen!«²¹ The sense of this, he explains, is that »Gott sieht, daß du im Begriff bist, etwas Böses zu vollbringen, und warnt dich: wenn du gut handelst, wirst du erhobenen Hauptes gehen können; handelst du aber böse, wendet sich die Sünde gegen dich wie ein böser Geist, den du aber beherrschen sollst.«²² According to the translation, the action which sin is doing

¹⁸ Ehrlich, Genesis, 20–21.

¹⁹ Wöller, Zu Gen 4 7, ZAW 91; Wöller, Zu Gen 4,7, ZAW 96; Ben Yashar, Zu Gen 4,7; cf. also K. A. Deurloo, **חֲשׂוּקָה** »dependency«, Gen 4,7, ZAW 99 (1987), 405–406. Particularly interesting is Ben Yashar's suggestion that the reason for the rejection of the offering made by firstborn Cain was that his offering, unlike Abel's, was not from his first fruits/first born (Zu Gen 4,7, 636).

²⁰ For further critique of Ben Yashar, see G. J. Wenham, Genesis 1–15, WBC 1, 1987, 104–105.

²¹ J. A. Soggin, Das Buch Genesis. Kommentar, 1997, 97. The German translation, interestingly, masks the incongruity between the feminine **חַטָּאת** and the masculine suffixes (by translating them as feminine), an issue which Soggin himself does not address.

²² Soggin, Genesis, 101.

is specified by reading רבץ as a verb, but the explanation of the significance of personifying sin in such a way depends on interpreting רבץ as a reference to the *rabiṣu*.²³

Similar contradiction besets U. Cassuto. He translates the verse as »*Surely, if you do well, / you shall be upstanding; but if you do not do well, / sin shall be a rōbhēs at your door; its desire shall be for you, / but you will be able to master it.*«²⁴ His interpretation is based on the contention that the term שׂאָה should contain a contrast with the phrase לַפְתַּח חַטָּאת רַבֵּץ, and he rejects the possibility that it refers either to Cain's offering or to the tenor of his expression.²⁵ He then adduces Gen 44,9 and Num 23,24 in order to argue that רַבֵּץ and נִשְׂאָה are antitheses, resulting in an interpretation of the verse as »If you do well, that is, if you behave well and perform good deeds, you will be able to rise up and stand firmly on your feet, but if you do not do well ... the opposite will befall you: not upstanding but couching on the ground.«²⁶ This interpretation is rather far removed from the actual translation he gives, and one is obliged to wonder whether it is justifiable. Again, רַבֵּץ is taken as both noun and verb: noun in the translation, verb in the interpretation. In fact, Cassuto takes the commentators' desire to include the Akkadian cognate in the interpretation to something of an extreme, suggesting that the use of רַבֵּץ is a dual allusion to the demonic figure as well as to an official figure titled with the same term, and whom Cassuto claims was hated in their attempts to impose his authority over the people.²⁷ Also problematic is that the translation renders רַבֵּץ as related to חַטָּאת, while the interpretation makes it refer to Cain – with the grammatical difficulty of the latter reflected in the awkward syntax. The masculine singular suffixes in the latter half of the verse also continue to plague the situation: even if sin (feminine singular) is a רַבֵּץ (masculine singular), the subsequent suffixes should agree with חַטָּאת, as it is the subject of the preceding clause and the antecedent to which the suffixes refer.²⁸

The obvious solution, it seems, is to eliminate the feminine singular חַטָּאת and leave the verse dominated by masculine singulars. Aside from the failure of any existing proposal to convincingly explain both the presence of חַטָּאת at its present location and the three subsequent masculine singulars, it is both easier and less problematic to solve one problem than to solve three. Occam's razor prevails: given that the text contains three masculine singular components against one feminine singular, it is most probable that there is a single problem with the feminine singular rather than three separate problems with the masculine singulars. Two options on how to eliminate the conflicting feminine singular present themselves: move חַטָּאת, or remove it.

²³ Similarly, Westermann marks in a footnote that רַבֵּץ may be taken as a substantival participle but does not translate it as though it were, opting to note that the phrase literally reads »An der Tür (eigentlich: zur Tür hin) ein Lagernder, (die) Sünde« while actually translating רַבֵּץ as though it were a straightforward verb (presumably he meant »An der Tür [eigentlich: zur Tür hin] [die] Sünde, ein Lagernder«) (Genesis 1–11, 385, 407).

²⁴ Italics in original. Cassuto, *From Adam to Noah*, 205.

²⁵ Cassuto, *From Adam to Noah*, 209–210.

²⁶ Cassuto, *From Adam to Noah*, 210.

²⁷ Cassuto, *From Adam to Noah*, 210–211.

²⁸ In favour of חַטָּאת as effectively masculine due to personification, see G. R. Castellino, *Genesis iv 7*, VT 10 (1960), 442–445, and L. Ramaroson, *A propos de Gn 4:7*, Bib 49 (1968), 233–237.

The option of moving **הַטָּאָה** was suggested by Léonard Ramoroson, who, on the basis of a poetic and syllabic interpretation of the verse, shifts **הַטָּאָה** from its present location to the first part of the verse, reading it as the object of **שָׂאָה**.²⁹ While appealing, the interpretation presumes that the text is poetic and should be composed of even lines; if it is not, there is no particular reason to prefer moving **הַטָּאָה** rather than eliminating it. If anything, the appearance of **הַטָּאָה** as an interpolative gloss is practically more explicable than its disappearance and reappearance four words later than originally intended. Less crucially, the interpretation presumes that the cause of God's rejection of Cain's offering was Cain's state of sin, as well as that **שָׂאָה** is in need of an immediate object rather than ably functioning as a second verb attached to **פָּנִים** as object.³⁰

This leads us to the option to remove **הַטָּאָה**. The suggestion that **הַטָּאָה** be removed as a gloss on the text is hardly new, having been put forth by Hans Duhm in his 1904 catalogue of *Die bösen Geister im Alten Testament*.³¹ He wrote: »Gewöhnlich fasst man **הַטָּאָה** als Subjekt. Das geht aber nicht an, da sowohl das Partizip **רָבֵץ** wie die folgenden Suffixe maskulinisch sind. Vielmehr ist offenbar **רָבֵץ** das Subjekt und **הַטָּאָה** als erklärende Glosse hinzugefügt.«³² The masculine singular suffixes are the driving force behind this explanation; more sensible to retain them and eliminate **הַטָּאָה** than to try to change two suffixes and a verb to coordinate with it. Here, however, is where my agreement with Duhm ends. Though he refers to the Mesopotamian concept of the *rabiṣu*, he contends that the Genesis text dramatically modifies the idea, seeing the **רָבֵץ** in 4,7 as threatening to impose its murderous instinct on Cain: »Der Dämon ist ein Mörder, folglich wird es auch der von ihm beherrschte, besessene Mensch.«³³ Yahweh's interjection at this point in the narrative is meant to be a warning to Cain, aimed at saving him from sin.³⁴ Aside from the surprising decision to interpret the **רָבֵץ** as an entity which actually possesses its victim rather than one which is malevolent yet independent, it is notable that even an interpretation which ostensibly views **הַטָּאָה** as a gloss rather than integral to the text was unable to interpret the passage without reference to the concept. Accordingly, I would like to suggest that we maintain Duhm's assessment of **הַטָּאָה** as an intrusive gloss and the contention that the text makes better sense when it is removed, but part ways in the interpretation of what remains, attempting an interpretation which avoids the term's influence altogether.

²⁹ Ramaroson, A propos, 235.

³⁰ On this, see Castellino, Gen iv 7, 443.

³¹ H. Duhm, *Die bösen Geister im Alten Testament*, 1904.

³² Duhm, *Geister*, 9. Duhm offered no explanation for the appearance of **הַטָּאָה**; whether he meant to identify it as an interpolation or as a gloss in the limited sense is accordingly unknown. Heinrich Kaupel is also frequently cited by commentators as considering **הַטָּאָה** a gloss, but this seems to reflect a misunderstanding of his argument, which is in fact opposed to Duhm's suggestion in preference for sin being effectively masculine through personification (*Die Dämonen im Alten Testament*, 1930, 77).

³³ Duhm, *Geister*, 9–10. It is not entirely clear where Duhm found the idea of the **רָבֵץ** being a homicidal demon, unless it was a combination of the early, and now traditional, emphasis on the *rabiṣu*'s negative aspects in Akkadian literature and the subsequent actions of Cain himself. A more recent compendium of references to and the nature of the *rabiṣu* in Akkadian material may be found in *The Assyrian Dictionary*, vol. 14, E. Reiner / M. T. Roth (eds.), 1999, 22–23 (hereafter CAD).

³⁴ Duhm, *Geister*, 9.

We begin with the proposed translation of the text as it stands after the removal of **הַטָּחָה**.

»Is it not (the case that) if you do well, (your face will)³⁵ lift, while if you do not do well, a רֶבֶץ will be at the door? Its desire is for you – but you must master it.«

This is to be understood as Yahweh giving Cain two options. The first option is for Cain to »do well.« The consequence of this choice will be the reversal of Cain's upset and anger (described as the lifting of his fallen face). The second option is for Cain to »not do well«. The consequence of this choice is the presence of the רֶבֶץ at the door.

The explanation of these two choices comes in the last half of the verse, syntactically subsequent but logically antecedent: »Its desire is for you – but you must master it«. In the Mesopotamian tradition in which it is attested, the רֶבֶץ does appear as a malevolent or demonic being, and it is with reference to this aspect of its character that previous interpretations of the verse with reference to the *rabiṣu* have proceeded. However, malevolence is not the sole characteristic of the *rabiṣu*. Rather, it can also be a protective entity (a »protective genius«, in the words of the editors of the Chicago Assyrian dictionary).³⁶ There is, accordingly, a certain ambiguity in the presence of the רֶבֶץ: it can be for evil, but it can also be for good. Whether the רֶבֶץ acts for good or for evil, however, Cain loses control over his own fate if he allows the רֶבֶץ to dominate him.

Accordingly, our interpretation of 4,7 revolves around the idea that the רֶבֶץ desires to control Cain, and that whether it succeeds in doing so is dependent on whether Cain succeeds in mastering it. If he masters the רֶבֶץ – i.e., if he does »do well« – then he will be free from the whims of the רֶבֶץ and may act in such a way as to further his own happiness. If he does not master the רֶבֶץ – if he does »not do well« – the רֶבֶץ will be present and will exercise its own will with regard to his protection or lack thereof. In this case Cain will relinquish control over his fate to the רֶבֶץ; for good or for evil, his future will be in the hands of the רֶבֶץ. The underlying issue of Cain's choice is his present and future ability to control his own fate.

Curiously, yet too strikingly to be coincidental, interpreting the choice offered to Cain in this way suggests that Cain is being given the choice of reversing the decision made by Eve in eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. As is frequently noted by commentators, 4,7b is a slightly modified quotation of 3,16b; in addition, Alan J. Hauser has noted that there are linguistic and thematic links between the verses' surrounding contexts.³⁷ Eve's choice was whether to know good and evil – that is, a choice about whether to assume moral responsibility for her actions. Cain, by contrast, is given the choice of surrendering the moral responsibility acquired by his parents by surrendering autonomy to the רֶבֶץ.³⁸

³⁵ Following Castellino in viewing **שָׂחָה** as referring backwards to **פָּנִים** (Gen iv 7).

³⁶ CAD, 22. On the use of רֶבֶץ in biblical Hebrew as neutral or positive, and not negative, see R. Gordon, »Couch« or »Crouch«?: Genesis 4:7 and the Temptation of Cain, in: J. Aitken / K. Dell / B. Mastin (eds.), *On Stone and Scroll*, BZAW, forthcoming.

³⁷ Hauser, *Linguistic and Thematic Links*.

³⁸ If the interpretation of 4,7 as originally referring to a רֶבֶץ is correct, it raises the possibility of allusions to the concept in subsequent verses. The question in 4,9, »Am I my brother's keeper?« may constitute a subtle play on the ambiguity of the idea of the רֶבֶץ as both potentially malevolent and containing protective aspects. Abel, the text would then be suggesting, gave up the protective aspects of the רֶבֶץ by doing well (i.e., mastering it), and while he did well by assuming responsibility for his own fate, that choice left him without protection. (This may tie in with the indications within the text that Cain

This may then explain the incursion of **הטאה** into the text. The interpretation thus far proposed does not depend on the concept of »sin«, either explicitly in **הטאה** or implicitly, unlike even the few other interpretations which have seen the word as secondary. Yet if Cain is faced with the possibility of reversing the consequences of Eve's earlier actions by surrendering himself to the **רביץ** – that is, the possibility of undoing the acquisition of moral responsibility – he is effectively given the option to absolve himself of moral responsibility entirely. Suitably horrified at the suggestion that the first murderer might thus escape punishment on the grounds of lack of responsibility, a scribe sought to limit the range of the characterisation of the **רביץ** to the negative possibilities only through the addition of a definitional **הטאה**, aiming to eliminate the suggestion that in surrendering to the **רביץ** Cain would be mastered to the point of total absolution of responsibility.³⁹ Rather than presenting a choice, Yahweh's words thus become a warning: the base meaning of »sin« being »to do wrong«, the revised text warns Cain that if he does »not do well«, »wrongdoing« awaits him. (4,7b, in other words, becomes logically as well as syntactically subsequent to 4,7aα, rather than logically antecedent to the entirety of 4,7a.) Redundant, perhaps, and certainly less multivalent in significance, but morally acceptable. Unfortunately for the comprehensibility of the text, what was meant to be a defining gloss – read outside the syntax of the text – was incorporated into the text. In combination with the misinterpretation of the unpointed **רביץ** as the more common verb rather than a noun, this gave rise to the interpretive and grammatical difficulties of the present text. Through the removal of the offending **הטאה**, the passage's original sense can now be revived.

This note suggests that Gen 4,7 can be rendered comprehensible by the removal of the term **הטאה**, understanding its appearance as an interpolative gloss, and the interpretation of the remaining **רביץ** as the subject of a nominal clause. This eliminates the lack of agreement between the feminine singular **הטאה** and the three masculine singulars which follow, and it allows an interpretation of the verse which sees Cain being offered the option of reversing the decision made by Eve when she ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Cette étude suggère que Gen 4,7 se comprend mieux avec l'émendation de **הטאה**, compris comme une glose interprétative, et en interprétant le **רביץ** restant comme sujet d'une proposition nominale. On élimine ainsi l'incohérence entre le fém. sg. **הטאה** et les trois masc. sg. qui suivent. On obtient ainsi une nouvelle compréhension du verset: Caïn peut inverser la décision d'Eve de manger le fruit de l'arbre de la connaissance du bien et du mal.

was at some point in the tradition more positively portrayed than he is now, e.g., the interpretation of his name compared to that of Abel.)

Cain, by contrast, does not do well, and the **רביץ** controls his fate accordingly. At first, the declaration of Yahweh that Cain is now cursed (4,11) would seem to emphasise the negative, malevolent aspect of Cain's retention of the **רביץ**. Cain, however, protests the severity of his fate: for Yahweh to restrict the actions of the **רביץ** to solely the negative end of the spectrum, Cain contends, will surely result in the ultimate negative fate, death (4,13). Yahweh relents (4,15); the declaration that there will be a »sign« for Cain, may then refer to the apparent tradition of the **רביץ**'s visibility, combined with the original for-good-or-for-evil potentiality of **רביצים** (CAD, 22–23).

³⁹ The specification of *rabiṣu* as either good or evil is known also in the Akkadian references (CAD, 23).

In dieser Mitteilung wird der Vorschlag unterbreitet, dass Gen 4,7 durch die Streichung der Glosse **הטאח** besser verstanden werden kann. Dies beseitigt zum einen die Inkongruenz zwischen dem femininen Singular **הטאח** und den drei nachfolgenden maskulinen Singularformen. Zum anderen wird damit ein neues Verständnis des Verses ermöglicht, nach dem Kain die Möglichkeit erhält, die von Eva getroffene Entscheidung, vom Baum der Erkenntnis von Gut und Böse zu essen, zurückzunehmen.