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Walter C. Bouzard

Geshurites

1. East of the Jordan

The Geshurites (MT *Gĕšûrî*) are the Aramaeans of Geshur, east of the Jordan, whose boundaries are Gilead to the south, Mount Hermon to the north, and Bashan to the east (Josh 13 : 11). Though, according to the book of Joshua, their land was given to the half-tribe of Manasseh as well as to the Reubenites and the Gadites, it appears that the Israelites did not dislodge them nor the Maacathites "so that Geshur and Maacath survive in the midst of Israel to this day" (Josh 13 : 13). David's wife Maacah was the daughter of Talmai king of Geshur (2 Sam 3 : 3). And Absolom, who was born of that union, found refuge with the Geshurites when he killed his brother Amnon (2 Sam 13 : 37–39).

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2. Southeast of Philistia

These Geshurites are the inhabitants of a region called Geshur, located Southeast of Philistia, verging on the Sinai Desert. When the land had not yet been apportioned to the nine tribes and the half-tribe of Manasseh, the land still to be conquered along the coast and to the South was their area with all the districts of the Philistines up to Lebanon (Josh 13 : 2). David raided among them when he fled from Saul and found refuge with Achish king of Gath (1 Sam 27 : 8–9).

Stéphanie Anthonioz

Gessner, Salomon

Salomon Gessner (1730–1788), a Swiss poet of the Age of Sentiment, is mostly known for his idylls – small pieces in lyrical prose – which were widely read and had a considerable influence on authors of early Romanticism. One of these texts, *Der Tod des Abels* (1758, *The Death of Abel*), a short epos on the story of Gen 4, is paradigmatic for the reception of biblical texts in late Enlightenment. The text narrates how Cain is seduced by the devil Anamelech, and how he murders his brother and finally repents for his deeds. The text belongs to a group of contemporary attempts (prompted by the German reception of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*) to use the biblical stories of the patriarchs to renew classical epos, as Johann J. Bodmer's *Noah* (1752), Christoph M. Wieland's *Der geprüfte Abraham* (1752, *Abraham Justified*), and Friedrich G. Klopstock's *Der Tod Abrahams* (1753, *Abraham's Death*). Formally, Gessner is particularly influential because he uses features of biblical poetry as parallelism to create a prose that is poetic without following a strict meter (cf. Hibberd).

Gessner's work obviously stands in the tradition of the Christian pastoral. The action is set in a *locus amoenus*: in the "beautiful nature" of the "garden" which Adam's family inhabits and which they continually improve to make it resemble the paradise they have lost. Moreover, the protagonists also act according to the conventions of the bucolic genre and of the Age of Sentiment: they continually express strong feelings and passions, namely paternal love, youthful rebellion, and strong compassion. Again and again they console each other, and even after the death of their son, Adam and Eve still look forward to the future: "The sanctifying time and the victorious reason will ease our pain" (Gessner: 173). Thus Gessner's text seems to draw a picture of an idyllic world and is part of a typically positive Enlightenment view on the human condition and its founding narratives, which replace the brutal picture of sin and death by softer conceptions of sleep and more optimistic ideas of progress and brotherhood (cf. Quinones).

However, the text also reflects this very idyllic stance. For it is precisely the soft and somewhat feminine character of Abel that provokes the anger of Cain, who complains that he has to work hard whereas his younger brother sings and composes songs, and that he is manly and strict, whereas his brother is tender and always close to tears: "At him, the entire nature smiles, it is only I who eat his bread tired in the sweat of my face" (Gessner: 145). Moreover, it is this difference which finally motivates his aggression: in a devilish vision he sees how the people of Abel, living in leisure, decide to enslave the sons of Cain to do the dirty work: "It is painful to crop the fields for a Hand that is used to touch the strings of the harp" (Gessner: 151). Full of rage, Cain kills his brother, and ironically renders this vision true: his people will be expelled to dwell in the desert (Gen 4 : 12). Thus, Cain actually reveals the exploitation implied in any culture (cf. Böschenstein-Schäfer).

Gessner's Cain thus is not only a stranger in this idyllic world as he is to his sentimental audience. He represents the strangeness of the biblical world that resists the simple idyllic rewriting and prefigures the daemonic heroes that will become prominent in Romanticism as in Byron's Cain (cf. Quinones). Moreover, given the metapoetic nature of the bucolic genre, with Abel being the singer and poet, Gessner's text also contains a self-criticism of poetry which will lead to a more reflexive Romantic mode. In both respects, the reference to the biblical text