



The sons of Caim: the race of outcasts and disinherited in Walter Benjamin and Charles Baudelaire

Ricardo André Ferreira Martins

Universidade Estadual do Centro-Oeste, PR-153, km 7, 84500-000, Irati, Paraná, Brazil. E-mail: ricardoafmartins@gmail.com

ABSTRACT. This article aims to develop a reflection essay about the philosophical and literary representation concerning the marginalized and oppressed in history, inside the works of Charles Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin. This is to ascertain and analyze how these two authors, from their respective works, allowed the proletariat gradually took the shape of an object and productive character for social and lyrical reflection, thus, in the wake of works as *Flowers of Evil*, the assumption of themes drawn from a tradition historically long, connected, in turn, by the recent historiographical perspective from below.

Keywords: literature, modernity, bohemia, marginality, oppression.

Os filhos de Caim: a raça dos proscritos e deserdados em Walter Benjamin e Charles Baudelaire

RESUMO. Este artigo tem por objetivo realizar uma reflexão ensaística a respeito da representação literária e filosófica, nas obras de Charles Baudelaire e Walter Benjamin, dos marginalizados e oprimidos da história. Trata-se de averiguar e analisar como estes dois autores, a partir de suas respectivas obras, permitiram que o proletariado aos poucos tomasse a forma de um objeto e personagem fecundo para a reflexão de cunho social e lírico, permitindo assim, no rastro de obras como *Flores do Mal*, a assunção de temas extraídos de toda uma tradição historicamente longa, conectada, por sua vez, à recente perspectiva historiográfica a partir dos 'de baixo'.

Palavras-chave: literatura, modernidade, boêmia, marginalidade, opressão.

Introduction

The dense and seminal essay *The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire* by Walter Benjamin (2006) is one of the most elucidatory and revealing texts about a diversified set of topics: modernity, bohemia, literature, *flanêrie*, among others. However, one of the most fruitful approaches to Benjamin's text is the possibility of using it as a research source on the incorporation of one of the most praised themes to modern literature: the perspective of the proletarians, workers, bohemians, *flâneurs*, bums, ragpickers, innkeepers, wine dealers, conspirators, in short, a particular 'sphere of life' from the nineteenth-century Paris. In this scenario, a set of characters that our most current understanding could read as the great class of excluded, marginalized, and oppressed from that time, or more specifically 'from below' (SHARPE, 1992, p. 40-41) revolved. All this, naturally, organized around a central character, whose work, both theoretical and literary, became the mirror of this huge gallery of amazing characters, against the backdrop of the Second Empire: the poet Charles Baudelaire, author of *Les Fleurs du mal*, a book that revolutionized modern art.

The effort of Benjamin's text, of course, meets the reconstruction of the turbulent scenario of intense social disruption and reproached the advance of modernity and capitalism in nineteenth-century Paris, which was also a stage for insurrections, transformations, and upheavals that reflected the growing process of modernization in the French metropolis. In the beginning of his essay, Benjamin is specially concerned with the controversial figure of the conspirator, heavily inspired by the writings of Marx, thus, commenting on how the proletarian conspiracies contributed to the sharp division of labor and also the conspirators themselves distinguished as: casual and professional. Particularly in the text of Marx, according to Benjamin, it is possible to read the curious and unexpected relationship established between the living conditions of the professional conspirators, whose daily schedule was completely absorbed by the conspiracy, but under the routine of a 'riotous life' subordinated more to the tune of chance than the activity itself. It was therefore a wanton 'activity' by nature, whose offices or headquarters were the taverns of wine merchants: an extremely erratic and

undisciplined scenario frequented by all sorts of people, particularly by those with highly disputable characters, constituting, thus, the Parisian setting around which the atmosphere referred to as 'bohemian' was outlined.

Thereby, the so-called *bohème* consisted of "[...] the whole indeterminate, disintegrated, fluctuating mass [...]" (MARX apud BENJAMIN, 2006, p. 47), in which it was possible to find licentious and insubordinate people of any kind. "Occupying themselves with such projects, they have no other aim but the immediate one of overthrowing the existing government [...]" (MARX apud BENJAMIN, 2006, p. 48), their main characteristic, according to Marx, was the complete lack of rationality. This class of conspirators was not concerned with the clarification and theoretical depth of the workers and their class interests. They merely aspired to revolution; a desire that was planted in the social classes 'from below' since the French Revolution, empowered by the revolutionary discourse of many hues, all with the same purpose: to organize the conspiracy, to create barricades, to produce firebombs and machines for destruction, to cause riots, to incite the rebellion of the citizens, and to install social disruption. This group of insubordinate and professional conspirators understood that the conspiracy would reach more efficient and definitive results considering how low their intellectual and rational bases were. Thus, a major feature of this whole 'indeterminate mass' was the rage, whose origins were more popular than proletarian, which communed against the established order, the governmental power, and the *habits noirs* (black coats who were the most cultured representatives of the conspiracy). Either way, the professional conspirators were attracted, apart from the anger, by a common purpose: rebellion. It was not a mere rebellion nourished by pure and simple hatred. It was a rebellion aimed at achieving the very stability and permanence of power that would eventually destroy it.

At this point, Benjamin's essay performs the transition to the controversial figure of Charles Baudelaire, a poet who is situated at the conflicting crossroads between reactionarism and insubordination. Paradoxically, Baudelaire himself expressed, in his writings and actions, the same anger and insubordination of the professional conspirators' class pointed out by Marx, in spite of his tendencies to turn to a black humor permeated by implicit fascist contours. There is a quote by Flaubert which Benjamin considered perfectly suitable to the angry and provocative mentality of Baudelaire: "Of all of politics, I understand only one

thing: revolt" (FLAUBERT apud BENJAMIN, 2006, p. 48). Actually, although the French poet had only perpetuated, early in his intellectual activity, 'political insights' that did not exceed the conjuring and insurrections of the professional conspirators, the fact is that his reactionary tendencies gradually became visible through his aesthetic positions and contradictory ideologies. One way to understand this phenomenon is from the quote used by Benjamin, taken from *Oeuvres* (Works), volume published in 1932, in order to illustrate this ideological emptiness in which Baudelaire found himself, moved by the same irrational fury that drove the 'indeterminate mass' in their conspiratory rebellions:

I say 'Long live the revolution!' as I would say 'Long live destruction! Long live penance! Long live chastisement! Long live death!' I would be happy not only as a victim; it would not displease me to play the hangman as well - so as to feel the revolution from both sides! All of us have the republican spirit in our blood, just as we have syphilis in our bones. We have a democratic and syphilitic infection (BAUDELAIRE apud BENJAMIN, 2006, p. 48, author's emphasis).

Therefore, Baudelaire was shaken by what Benjamin calls 'grim rage - *la rogne*' (BENJAMIN, 2006, p. 49). That is, it is a certain disposition of temperament, a mental and emotional attitude born from the same feeling of anger and irrational rage of the Parisian professional conspirators over the course of all the insurrections, lasting more than half a century. This promoted the famous fights and riots in barricades. Accordingly, the texts of Baudelaire may be taken as a provocation to rebellion, anger, fury, just as done by the professional conspirators with all that 'indeterminate mass' composed by people with diverse backgrounds and temperaments. As a matter of fact, Baudelaire's literary project was inspired by this 'grim rage', along with his rare black humor in order to establish the scandal, polemic, outrage, and anger of the literary authorities.

If I ever regain the vigor and energy which I had on a few occasions [...] I will vent my anger in terrifying books. I want to turn the whole human race against me. The delight this would give me would console me for everything (BENJAMIN, 2006, p. 49).

More than a suicidal desire to be hated, it is possible to see in Baudelaire's the recognition of a behavior attributed to the masses of rebels and professional conspirators, plucked by 'terrorist pipe-dream' (BENJAMIN, 2006, p. 49) mentioned by Marx. An equivalent to this is found throughout the

work of the French poet: "It is they [...]", writes Marx about these conspirators, "[...] who erect the first barricades and commande them" (BENJAMIN, 2006, p. 49).

Consequently, it can be noticed in Baudelaire a distinct and contradictory appreciation of all this 'indeterminate mass' of conspirators, bastards, excluded, and marginalized people 'from below' who reconciled through the *flânerie* and the bohemia. Just as the casual and subordinate conspirator was at ease in the taverns mentioned disparagingly by Marx, Baudelaire also fraternized with the drunken atmosphere of this world to the edge of the 'civilized' and 'enlightened' world, more precisely located in the old outskirts of the French capital, its more feared, ignored, and distant suburbs and peripheries. It is precisely in this atmosphere that Baudelaire wrote a considerable portion of the poems contained in *The Flowers of Evil* (published in 1857) such as the famous *The Wine of the Ragpickers*, quoted by Benjamin throughout his essay. The ragpickers (*chiffonniers*) are the nineteenth-century ancestors of the contemporary waste pickers. The increasing number of ragpickers in the large urban centers, like the nineteenth century Paris, was mainly due to the increase and renewal of industrial methods, which caused a progressive increase in the value of waste and trash resulting from the increasing production.

However, the interest in the ragpickers, especially Baudelaire's, lied in the fact that they were considered fascinating figures at his time. The early investigators of poverty viewed them as an interesting object for a wide range of questions, especially about the possible limits of misery in the industrial context. In a statement, Benjamin quoted the work of Frédéric Le Play, *Les ouvriers européens* (European workers), from 1855, in particular an excerpt on the budget of a Parisian rag-picker and his closest dependents in order to size the exiguous capacity that these workers had in supporting their most basic needs. Le Play's financial framework covered the years 1849 to 1850, probably the period when Baudelaire's poem on the ragpickers was composed (BENJAMIN, 2006).

During this period, it is essential to highlight, according Benjamin's reasoning, the context in relation to the wine tax, which burdened and reduced the product consumption, taxing the table wine with the same tax burden of the fine wine. All cities with over four thousand inhabitants had exclusive customs for collection of this tax, a cause for various social tensions in the nineteenth-century France, since both the provincials and townspeople were forced to pay for it. The townspeople were the

ones most hampered since they were obliged to go to the taverns in the suburbs and outskirts, where wine was cheaper, exempt from tax, the reknown 'wine of the *barrières*', handmade. This movement caused unusual shifts, since people who lived in central parts of important cities such as Paris were forced to become patrons of the suburb inns, where they certainly meet, as Baudelaire himself, all that amorphous mass of people, evenly composed by bohemians and professional conspirators. The recording of the citizens' behavior on their way to the suburbs and during their return home is quite elucidatory, and evidences accurately the insolent urge for challenge of the ordinary man, in search of fun and drunkenness, shouting and making a fuss. This is what the head of the central section of the police of Paris, HA Frégier, does:

There are women who do not hesitate to follow their husbands to the barriere [town gate] with their children who are old enough to work. Afterward they start their way home half-drunk and act more drunk than they are, so that everyone may notice that they have drunk quite a bit (FRÉGIER apud BENJAMIN, 2006, p. 53).

Indifferently, the fact is that contemporary observers to Frégier ascertained that, by the end, "[...] the wine of the barieres has saved the governmental structure from quite a few blows [...]" (FRÉGIER apud BENJAMIN, 2006, p. 53) with common people, avoiding this way confrontation, riots, and tensions derived from the wine tax, relieved by frequent movements to the suburbs. Benjamin inclusively warned about the incredible cathartic power of the wine. A liquor with high nutritional values and also therapeutic that in addition to anesthetize the conscience of the poor and distressed, also transmitted to these people, conceived as a sort of 'disinherited', a series of aspirations and relief from the burden of their existence, since they drank in it "[...] dreams of future revenge and future glory". (FRÉGIER apud BENJAMIN, 2006, p. 53). Baudelaire's poem is quite elucidatory regarding the perception of this social phenomenon:

[...]
In the mired labyrinth of some old slum
Where crawling multitudes ferment their scum —

With judge-like nods, a rag-picker comes reeling,
Bumping on walls, like poets, without feeling,
And scorning cops, now vassals of his state,
Begins on glorious subjects to dilate,

Takes royal oaths, dictates his laws sublime,
Exalts the injured, and chastises crime,
And, spreading his own dais on the sky,
Is dazzled by his virtues, starred on high.

[...]
Come home, vat-scented, trailing clouds of glory,
Followed by veteran comrades, battle-hoary,
Whose whiskers stream like banners as each
marches.

— Flags, torches, flowers, and steep triumphal arches

Rise up for them in magic hues and burn,
Since through this dazzling orgy they return,
While drums and clarions daze the sun above,
With glory to a nation drunk with love!
[...] (BAUDELAIRE, 1952, p. 398)¹.

The sons of Cain: outcasts and disinherited

At this point, Benjamin established a bright analogy to the myth of Cain – the great biblical ancestor of all disinherited, revolved, and punished by the Judeo-Christian god – when he analyzed the litany of Baudelaire entitled *Abel and Cain*, in which Cain is quoted as the founder of an entire race, who, as the German-Jewish thinker affirmed, “[...] can be none other than the proletariat” (BENJAMIN, 2006, p. 55). From the allegorical perspective, the myth of Cain has, at the same time, a high suggestive and explanatory power. According to the biblical narrative, Cain was the eldest son of Adam and Eve, and his name in Hebrew (*qayin*) means ‘blacksmith’, a typical manual, rude and plebeian profession, ‘from below’, despite the Bible’s relation of this name with the verb ‘acquire’ (*qahan*): “I acquired a man with the help of Yahvé” (CANGLOIS, 1998, p. 52)².

The fable of Cain, one of the best known biblical myths, is very simple, though. In the Bible, Cain is presented as a farmer, another simple laborer who plucks his food by force from the ground, offering the product of his crops to Yahweh – the Hebrew god. However, Yahweh prefers the offerings from Cain’s younger brother, Abel, who is a shepherd, another manual activity, but much less strenuous, and perhaps with more leisure time than the activity performed by Cain. Consumed by jealousy, Cain decides to kill his own brother, becoming, thus, the first murderer and fratricide of the human race.

¹ “[...] Au coeur d'un vieux faubourg, labyrinthe fangeux/ Où l'humanité grouille en ferments orangeux./

On voit un chiffonnier qui vient, hochant la tête, / Butant, et se cognant aux murs comme un poète./ Et, sans prendre souci des mouchards, ses sujets, / Epanche tout son coeur en glorieux projets.

Il prête des serments, dicte des lois sublimes, / Errasse les méchants, relève les victimes./ Et sous le firmament comme un dais suspend/ S'enivre des splendeurs de sa propre vertu.

[...] Reviennent, parfumés d'une odeur de futilités/ Suivis de compagnons, blanchis dans les batailles,

Dont la moustache pend comme les vieux drapeaux./ Les bannières, les fleurs et les arcs triomphaux

Se dressent devant eux, solennelle magie! / Et dans l'étourdissante et lumineuse orgie

Des clairons, du soleil, des cris et du tambour./ Ils apportent la gloire au peuple ivre d'amour!” (BAUDELAIRE, 1861, p. 248).

² “Free translated from: “Adquiri um homem com a ajuda de Yahvé” (CANGLOIS, 1998, p. 52).

Omniscient, Yahweh becomes aware of the fact and condemns Cain to wander the earth without finding shelter among good men, while protecting his life from the fury of others with a sign, preventing, thus, his killing in case he was seen:

But the LORD said to him, ‘Not so! Whoever kills Cain will suffer a sevenfold vengeance.’ And the LORD put a mark on Cain, so that no one who came upon him would kill him (GENESIS, 4, 15 – emphasis ours).

Nevertheless, the hermeneutic unfolding of Cain’s fable is far from simple. The biblical narrative itself is permeated with interpretive possibilities, especially when it mentions that Cain would have become a builder of cities, according to the theological tradition on the subject: “Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch; and he built a city, and named it Enoch after his son Enoch” (GENESIS, 4, 17).

Thereafter, the long literary tradition linked to the myth of Cain presented a series of transformations and reinterpretations. Until the nineteenth century, his image as a murderer and culprit is predominant, opposed to the image of Abel, the pure and innocent, the favorite son of Yahweh. At the end of the Middle Ages, in the Twelfth century, the figure of Cain is associated with the greedy peasant who had refused to pay the due tithe, which results in his being dragged to hell after his assassination. In the seventeenth century, in the play of d’Aubigné, *Tragic*, Cain is associated with the Huguenots (French Protestants, Calvinists in their majority). In the eighteenth century, the image of Cain undergoes another transformation with the tragedy of the German poet Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock (1724-1803), *The Death of Adam* (1757), whose dubiety about the biblical myth influences Victor Hugo (1802-1885) in his epic poem *The Legend of the Ages* (1859-1883), in which Cain personifies the culprit corroded by remorse: “He feared everything, everything feared him” (CANGLOIS, 1998, p. 53)³.

In the nineteenth century, however, Byron precedes Baudelaire, in the poem *Cain* (1821), and treats the biblical myth as an allusion to a race of rebellious people, those who rebel against the established order of the world, whose privileges they consider unfair. Leconte de Lisle also carries the same approach in his work *Barbaric Poems* (1862), in the poem *Cain*. In the twentieth century, it is possible to find Michel Tournier’s short story ‘The Adam Family’, in his book *The Rooster of Heather* (1978),

³ Free translated from: Ele tinha medo de tudo, tudo tinha medo dele (CANGLOIS, 1998, p. 53).

in which the conflict between Cain and Abel is presented as an allegory of a class struggle, a conflict and opposition between shepherds and farmers, nomads and sedentary, and their values and beliefs. In Tournier's book, however, this opposition ends with the glory of Cain, and the defeat of the shepherds allegorized by the biblical myth of Abel.

Another author who presents a new and unusual interpretation of the myth of Cain is Herman Hesse in his novel *Demian* (1917). In this work, Hesse builds a very interesting retelling of the biblical myth through the protagonist in the story, Emil Sinclair, who meets a new world of crimes, friendship, and typical uncertainties of adolescent life with the enigmatic character Max Demian, precocious and engaging. The narrative rises in a dense fog of mysteries, and biblical and pagan references. Emil Sinclair is a character created by Christian and pious parents, split between two worlds, the ideal and the real, with their respective ramifications: the clear and protector world of the parental home, associated with the interior of his residence and the beliefs and ideas of his parents, and the dangerous and shadowy world, associated with the exterior of his residence, hostile to the beliefs and ideas of his family. Torn between these two worldviews, Sinclair will experience both worlds in search of his true personality and his own subjectivity. Sinclair's doubts about the world around him in his parental home start, however, when Max Demian reveals to him the existence of the 'sons of Cain', capable of practicing both good and evil, and that the biblical myth was curious by its very nature:

Yes, well, I think this story of Cain can be interpreted in a totally different way. Most of the things they teach us are no doubt perfectly true and right, but you can see them differently from how the teachers do, and they usually make much more sense when you do that. This Cain with the mark on his forehead, for example, they haven't really explained him to us in a satisfactory way, don't you agree? Someone kills his brother in an argument, that could happen, and then he gets scared and acts innocent, that's plausible too. But for him to be rewarded for his cowardice with a special distinction that protects him and frightens everyone else, that really is very strange (HESSE, 2013, p. 774).

The mistrust of Demian regarding the signal whereby Yahweh spotted a fratricide is the reason why the character starts to question the entire social order established between weak and strong people, to the style of Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals* reflection, giving the biblical myth a new series of interpretive possibilities. For Demian (perhaps an

alter-ego of Hesse himself), the issue lays in the fact that the myth points to the special race of fearless men and capable of instilling fear to others, because this human species had the knowledge of good and evil, ignored by the race of shepherds, always blissful, illustrated by Abel. Therefore, a gap was created, a hermeneutic fracture of the biblical text. Demian evidences the fact with remarkable accuracy despite his youth:

There once was a mem with something in his face that frightened people. They were afraid to lay a hand on him, or his children; they were awed. But maybe – in fact, I'm sure of it – there wasn't literally a sign on his forehead like a postmark [...]. No, it must have been something uncanny, almost imperceptible: a little more spirit, a little more daring in his look than people were used to. This man had power, and others was afraid of that power. He was 'marked'. [...] They were scared of Cain's children, so the children had 'marks' too. In other words, they explained the mark not as what it really was – a special distinction – but as the opposite. They said that the people with this mark were sinister and unnerving – and so they were. Anyone with courage and character always seems unnerving to others. They felt very uncomfortable having this tribe of fearless, sinister people running around, and so they put a label on them, hung a story around their necks, to get back at them and get some compensation for all the times they had been scared. – You understand? (HESSE, 2013, p. 782, author's emphasis).

In sum, the version presented by Demian was that Cain was 'a real man', or more specifically 'a stronger man killed a weaker man', and the biblical myth was just a pretext for the weak to learn to fear the strong. In the perspective offered by Hesse, the myth of Cain and Abel is firstly and foremost a parable about the eternal conflict between the weak and the strong, evidencing the clear and decisive influence of Nietzsche's ideas on the character Demian who sees the Judeo-Christian myths the same herd and slave moral criticized by the German thinker. In this perspective, the oppressed and disinherited of the world are mainly those who are persecuted and hated because they have the size and strength needed to defeat those who subjugate them, the courage to face and overcome their weaknesses. However, for this to happen, it is necessary that a leader rises among the oppressed, stronger and angrier than the others, able to lead them to rebellion and overcome their oppressors.

Returning to Baudelaire, however, it is interesting how this theme of the biblical myth of Cain and Abel also undertakes new interpretive possibilities in the work of the French poet. In the

litany 'Cain and Abel', Baudelaire ironically and daringly demonstrates the comprehensive and broad point of view of the excluded and marginalized of the world, identifying them to the biblical myth of the conflict between family members, however pointing to completely opposite races, 'eternally irreconcilable' in everything (BENJAMIN, 2006, p. 55):

I
Race of Abel, sleep, eat and drink;
God smiles on you complacently.

Race of Cain, crawl on your belly,
Die in the mire wretchedly.

[...]

Race of Cain, will there ever be
An ending to your punishment?

Race of Abel, see your sowing
And your cattle thrive and flourish;

Race of Cain, your bowels
Howl with hunger like an old dog. [...]

II

Ah! race of Abel, your carcass
Will fertilize the steaming soil!

Race of Cain, your appointed task
Has not been adequately done;

Race of Abel, your disgrace is:
The sword is conquered by the pike!

Race of Cain, ascend to heaven,
And cast God down upon the earth!
(BAUDELAIRE, 1954, p. 473)⁴.

The 16 couplets, alternated by the parallelism with the names of Abel and Cain, form the structure of a litany. So, at the same time appropriate and paradoxical, the litany is a kind of poetic form derived from a genre of prayer, with the same name in English, very common in the Roman Christian worship. Its structure in the form of parallelism, consisting of a series of repetitions that comes from its responsive layout, this set of prayers allowed the creation of a poetic genre based on the same scheme. The word *litany* has its roots in Latin, derived from the Greek *lite*, meaning supplication, prayer. Applied in Baudelaire's poem, this structure allows the secular and profane purpose to be achieved with precision and irony, in which Cain is glorified as the

first major disinherited, primeval ancestor of an entire race, whose characteristics are very familiar in the history of humankind: while the race of Abel is fortunate, supported in all the possible divine blessings, even for their most basic efforts, always showered with happiness, abundance and protection, the race of Cain is miserable, unfortunate, starved, persecuted, and hated, victim of all kinds of misfortune, prejudice, and disgrace, whose descendants are cursed by fear and shame. At least, that is what can be read in perfect opposition in the first 12 couplets.

Nevertheless, in the remaining 4 couplets, the poem takes different paths. In this second instance of the poem, the roles suffer a very interesting reversal. The first question to be raised is that the biblical hermeneutic tradition of Roman origin does not mention Abel's descendants, since he did not leave any. Cain, the fratricide, was the one who could have left descendants and was protected by Yahweh so that he could do so, and not Abel, who was murdered by the jealousy of his brother. In this sense, it would be impossible to imagine a race originated by Abel, since it does not exist. Everyone would be descendants of Cain and Seth, considering the biblical myth. With this observation, the first couplet of the second instance is completely coherent: 'Ah! race of Abel, your carcass / Will Fertilize the steaming soil!'. That is, the corpse of Abel became food for the ground cultivated by Cain, a farmer and later a city builder, and therefore food for his offspring and his numerous descendants.

The final two couplets, however, have an extremely interesting outcome. The first one points to the race of Abel failure, always victorious in the first instance. The second verse in the first couplet makes this point very clear, particularly in its original version, in French: '*Le fer est vaincu par l'épieu*'. In a literal translation to Portuguese, 'the iron is won by the spear'⁵. The translation of Ivan Junqueira does not stray far from the original meaning: 'Do ferro o chuço ganha a guerra!'. However, the word 'chuço' hinders interpretation, because it is a sharp object, usually handcrafted in prison by the inmates, who used it in their riots and fights as a cold weapon. It can be made with any kind of durable material, as metal (rebar, wire spoons, metallic objects) and even plastic and wood. The word *épieu*, however, corresponds to *lança* (spear) in Portuguese. It is necessarily a large wooden stick, garnished with a broad sharp iron tip, which is thrown as a cold weapon. If the word 'ferro' (iron) is taken (fer) in its ordinary and literal

⁴ "I Race d'Abel, dors, bois et mange;/ Dieu te sourit complaisamment./Race de Cain, dans la fange/ Rampe et meurs misérablement. [...] Race de Cain, ton supplice/ Aura-t-il jamais une fin?/ Race d'Abel, vois tes semailles/ Et ton bétail venir à bien;/ Race de Cain, tes entrailles/ Hurlent la faim comme un vieux chien.
II Ah! race d'Abel, ta charogne/ Engraissera le sol fumant!/ Race de Cain, ta besogne/ N'est pas faite suffisamment;/ Race d'Abel, voici ta honte;/ Le fer est vaincu par l'épieu!/ Race de Cain, au ciel monte;/ Et sur la terre jette Dieu!" (BAUDELAIRE, 1861, p. 285-288).

⁵ Note translation: "o ferro é vencido pela lança."

meaning, the irony is established both in Portuguese and in French. The image would correspond to the defeat of the strong, heavy and hard, by the weak, flexible, and agile. However, considering that the word 'ferro' can also designate a firearm as a cannon or a musket. Perhaps the irony still has, from an allegorical and metaphorical point of view, a wider semantic field. One way or another, what matters here is that, in this poem, Baudelaire requires a reversal in the tradition that crosses the biblical myth of Cain, turning him into a kind of winner of a race of indolent and weak fortunate who were accommodated on the affluence and the worldly and earthly bliss. In the last couplet, this reversal takes a form of supreme rebellion, which become clearer in the original in French *Race de Caïn, au ciel monte, / Et sur la terre jette Dieu!*. Literally translated: 'Race of Cain, elevate into heaven/And darts God on earth'. Thus, Baudelaire concludes his poem with a blasphemous and daring provocation, suggesting that the descendants of Cain, his equals in race and impetus, with peculiar strength and defiance, could reach heaven and overthrow the Judeo-Christian god himself, throwing this god upon earth as an outcast.

At this point, it is important to turn to a constant in Benjamin's essay about the work of a famous Bonapartist 'intellectual', Granier de Cassagnac (1806-1880), who in 1838 published his book entitled *History of the working and burgher classes*. Cassagnac was a journalist and a politician and proclaimed himself a vehement defender and an obstinate attorney of the French Empire in 1851. Next year, he was elected the official candidate of the National Assembly of the Second Republic. The polemical and controversial Cassagnac developed, as a journalist and deputy, the activity of absolutism guardian, demanding the restoration of Roman Catholicism as the state religion, creating laws that muzzled the press, going as far as to accuse of liberalism deputies who allegedly received money from William I of Prussia to be opponents of Bonaparte in 1868. He did so taking as evidence trivial and even false documents. His book, a sort of pamphlet in favor of the Bonapartism with the sole purpose of distracting the conspirators and the working class, is a collection of arguments riddled with prejudice, with the obscure aim of proving the historical origin of the proletarians. Basically, his reasoning is supported by the argument that the proletariat is composed of laborers, beggars, thieves, and prostitutes. In short, the proletariat was a race of inferior people, whose origin occurs in the end of slavery and the emancipation of the slaves. He went on to say that, before the slavery abolition, there

were no workers, beggars, thieves, or prostitutes in any nation. It is convenient to reproduce Cassagnac's own words to have the exact dimensions of his tortuous ideas:

The first general, universal, absolute cause, the original source of pauperism is the 'emancipation of slaves'. Pauperism and its four subdivisions 'hirelings, (that is to say, those who work for wages,) mendicants, thieves, and prostitutes' cannot exist in a slave country, unless emancipation has been there already begun. It is not difficult to comprehend how the want of food and clothing the necessity of living, in a word 'being the motive that impels the hireling to work, the mendicant to beg, the thief to steal, and girls of the town to prostitution all to do what they do with a view to a necessary gain'. These four conditions could not exist under the slave system, under which all have naturally the necessities of life; the master because he is master, and the slave because he is a slave. Thus there are neither hirelings, nor mendicants, nor thieves, nor prostitutes among the Arab tribes who inhabit the desert, because slavery is there almost in its primitive entirety (CASSAGNAC, 1871, p. 106, author's emphasis)⁶.

It is not possible to infer, however, that Baudelaire took direct knowledge of Cassagnac's theses, which were full of false truisms and true scams, the grossest anthropological errors and easy generalizations, with the taste and style of an incendiary pamphlet, and strong elitism and ideological background. The same cannot be said of Marx, who found in Cassagnac the 'thinker' of Bonapartism. Benjamin's text points out that Marx, while he was establishing the concept of 'a race of peculiar property owners', is dismantling the arguments of the racial theory built by reactionary 'thinkers' such as Cassagnac, whose theses are not difficult to deconstruct. However, when Marx conceives the proletariat as a specific race of men, Baudelaire assumes the accordance of the coming race of Cain, the great outcast. If Cassagnac cannot define it without appealing to the biblical myth, Marx defines it as "[...] the race of those who possess no commodity but their labor power [...]" (BENJAMIN, 2006, p. 56).

⁶ Translated from: La cause première, générale, universelle, absolue, la source originelle du prolétariat dans tous les pays, c'est l'ÉMANCIPATION DES ESCLAVES; c'est là ce qui fait que le prolétariat et ses quatre subdivisions, les ouvriers (c'est-à-dire les ouvriers mercenaires), les mendiants, les voleurs et les filles publiques n'existent pas dans les pays à esclaves, s'il n'y a eu déjà un commencement d'émancipation. Il n'est pas difficile de comprendre, en effet, que le besoin de se nourrir et de se vêtir, que le besoin de vivre, en un mot, étant le mobile qui détermine le mercenaire à travailler, le pauvre à mendier, le voleur à dérober, la fille de joie à se prostituer, les uns et les autres à faire ce qu'ils font dans la vue d'un gain nécessaire, ces quatre conditions ne sauraient exister sous le régime de l'esclavage, dans lequel tout le monde a naturellement le nécessaire; le maître, par cela seul qu'il est maître; l'esclave, par cela seul qu'il est esclave. Il n'y a ainsi ni mercenaires, ni mendiants, ni voleurs, ni filles publiques chez les Arabes des tribus qui habitent le désert, parce que l'esclavage y est à peu près dans toute son intégrité primitive (CASSAGNAC, 1838, p. 37-38).

Either way, in Baudelaire, the personification of the great outcasts of history, all of them marginalized and oppressed by rulers who hold and monopolize the goods for production and labor, is a hot issue in the work of the French poet, where rebellion arises as an index of the release. Moreover, the poem *Cain* is tied in a section of *the Flowers of evil* whose title is 'Revolt'. It is a very suggestive section since it was divided into three parts combining the most blasphemous and theological in Baudelaire's poetry, whose Satanism is not rather more an irony, a mockery, and an allegory than a profession of faith. In this sense, this set of poems testifies the nonconformity of the French poet, particularly evidenced in the last poem of the section, 'The litanies of Satan', whose parallelistic structure mimics the Christian *miserere*, but putting in the place of Christ his opposite, Satan, the outcast angel. In this poem, the figure of Satan comes not only as the most beautiful angel and also the wisest of all, but rather as the 'prince of exile', the highest patron, 'adoptive father' and protector of all those who were unrepentant, angry, miserable, sick, addicted, drunkards, outcast, defendants, convicted, weak, stubborn, steadfast, exiles, and proscribed. He is the one who invented hope and teaches both resistance to the defeated and at the same time, transmit the hidden secrets, the Promethean key to freedom and knowledge in order to bring to men the treasures, the 'gems' of truth, hidden by the 'jealous God':

[...] You give to the doomed man that calm,
unbaffled

Gaze that rebukes the mob around the scaffold,

Satan have pity on my long despair!

You know in what closed corners of the earth
A jealous God has hidden gems of worth.

Satan have pity on my long despair!⁷
(BAUDELAIRE, 1952, p. 479).

The image of Satan built by Baudelaire evidently differs from that perpetuated by tradition, in which the enemy of the Judeo-Christian god appears wrapped in a cloak of ambiguity: Satan is sometimes the traitor, the enemy, the source of all evil, and, other times, he is presented as the great defeated, the rebel, the first major victim of the divine jealousy. In the hermeneutic tradition of the Old Testament, the word Satan, which from Hebrew *satan* means 'to disturb', designates the opponent, in a general sense,

particularly the role played by the accuser in front of a court or a prosecutor. In this sense, the term *satan* can be applied to anyone who may oppose another one in any circumstance. This occurrence can be found throughout several books of the Old Testament. Nevertheless, the most accepted meaning, along with the original Christian tradition of Jewish tradition, is that of a superhuman being, whose role is to accuse, counter, and unsay, mercilessly, human beings in front of the divine tribunal. The question, however, lies in the fact that the concept of Satan and his roles were gradually established throughout the Old Testament to the notion that they would later be released in the New Testament. Thereafter, the name itself is avoided by the tradition of the New Testament, and Satan is designated by various names: the prince of this world, the accuser, the evil, the enemy, etc. However, there are two aspects in the characterization of Satan in the New Testament that deserve mention: according to the interpretation of the apostles Peter and Judas, Satan is the apostate angel, that is, the great opponent of the Judeo-Christian God and, therefore, the lord of the earthly world. For this reason, he is the one who not only has the role of making men sin through material temptations, but also of making them his slaves, instigating them to wrongdoings and misbehavior under the divine eyes (BORN et al., 1992).

Either way, another possible interpretation of Satan derives from one of his best known names from the Middle Ages: his Latin version, Lucifer. The Latin origin of the name derives from the word *lux* (light) combined to *ferre* (bring), and literally means 'bringer of light'. Throughout history, Lucifer was one of the names of the planet Venus, or 'the morning star', in its translations more widespread by the *Vulgate* - Latin version of the Holy Bible. This allusion is due to the fact that Venus appears in the morning, going closely along with the sun before its appearance on the horizon. In this sense, an ancient tradition of Christian origin points Christ as the 'the one who brings the light' of the last day, as in the biblical books by Peter and the Revelation of St. John, relating Christ to the myth of Lucifer as the bringer of the light to the world. As the star also follows the twilight, the medieval tradition took it in the sense of falling, associating the name of Lucifer to the prince of demons, the fallen and outcast angel (CANGLOIS, 1998).

However, in Baudelaire, Satan acquires a revolutionary meaning: he is the prince of the insubordinates, the inducer of rebellion and anger against the rulers. Unlike the role of infernal intriguer attributed to Satan throughout the Judeo-

⁷ "Toi qui fais au proscrit ce regard calme et haut/ Qui damne tout un peuple autour d'un échafaud.

Ô Satan, prends pitié de ma longue misère!

Toi qui sais en quels coins des terres envieuses/Le Dieu jaloux cacha les pierres précieuses,

Ô Satan, prends pitié de ma longue misère!" (BAUDELAIRE, 1861, p. 288-291).

Christian tradition, his role in the poem is to be "[...] of hanged men, and of plotters the confessor, / [...]" (BAUDELAIRE, 1952, p. 479)⁸. Thus, Baudelaire's Satanism is actually an effort to give theological forums to his sympathy for the dispossessed of the world and the hatred of the rulers of history. His question is, in effect, the oppressed'.

It is in this sense that Benjamin points out, in an enlightening way, the friendship that Baudelaire had for a famous social poet, Pierre Dupont. His proximity to Dupont made him want to become famous as a social poet as well, as a inciter to rebellion, insurgencies and insubordination. According to Benjamin, Baudelaire's sympathy by Dupont might be explained in terms of how Dupont was received by the critics. According to d'Aureville, whose work *Les oeuvres et les hommes* has its third volume dedicated to the poets, Dupont is a spontaneous representative of the race of rebellious people, those who sip "[...] the sediment of rancor [...]" (BENJAMIN, 2006, p. 58):

Et en effet, de génie spontané, d'impression première et même de nostalgie, de tête retourné vers les champs, M. Pierre Dupont se révèle bien de la double race, chaque jours plus effacée, et du laboureur et du pâtre. Seulement, si le Caïn n'a pas tué en lui tout à fait Abel, ce n'est point faute de l'avoir frappé. Le Caïn emporte sur le doux Abel dans ce talent et cette pensée; le Caïn grossier, affamé, envieux et farouche, qui s'en est allé dans les villes pour boire la lie des colères qui s'y accumulent et partager les idées fausses qui y triomphent! (D'AUREVILLY, 1862, p. 241-242).

At this point of the essay Benjamin points out one of the most crucial issues of his long reflection: the aesthetic and ethical crisis of the lyric poetry at the peak of modernity, one of the most acute consequences of gradual cultural breakdown between country and city. So far, the figures of Cain and Abel are also allegories to illustrate this aesthetic crisis, and Dupont was one of the first to sense it in his poetic activity. With the growing modernization process in the cities, there is no more room for the romantic conception of nature, where the scenery is always idyllic and idealized. Moreover, the taste of the bourgeois public, with the modernization of the editorial process itself, gradually prefers the descriptions and images related to excitement from large urban areas, where progress and modern civilization are rampant in the eyes of former peasants now turned into dealers, traders, and workers of all kinds. Dupont himself is one of the

first to recognize the end of the romantic idyll in the poetry and, just as Cain proceeded after killing Abel (the scientific technology of the modernity ending the bucolic innocence of antiquity), turned his eyes to the cities and its great hordes of proscribed and disinherited by the power. However, this did not mean a radical break with the past, because Dupont recognized that the poet "[...] lends his ear alternately to the forests and to the masses" (DUPONT apud BENJAMIN, 2006, p. 58). What is registered at that time, anyway, is the decline of a specific mode of sensibility, whose eulogy is created by the poetry of Baudelaire. There is not room for an aristocratic conception of poetry. The poet does not direct his chants to the elite of illustrated and sensitive people, who were delicately educated for a correct reception of the overwhelming force of the lyric genre. The poet has a different audience now.

With this impetus, poets like Baudelaire and Dupont turned to the experimentation a lyric poem impregnated with social content. The public are now the masses organized around the rebellion against the government, against the institutions. There is a consensus that, at least among lyrical poets as Baudelaire, it is no longer possible to imprison poetry in a delicate ivory tower, away from the mess of the urban and social upheavals that convulsed the nineteenth-century Paris. The lyricism could not, according to this new view of the role of the intellectual, artist and writer, alienate itself from its inescapable social function and the ethical commitment of solidarity and engagement with the injustice of this world. It is in this sense that Baudelaire writes an introduction to Dupont's fascicle *Chants et chansons* (Poetry and Music, 1851), which states moving away from the alienated conception of 'art for art's sake', "La puérile utopie de l'art pour l'art [highlighted by the author], en excluant la morale, et souvent même la passion, était nécessairement stérile" (DUPONT, 1855, p. 5). The same position is defended by Dupont in the preface of the same publication:

La poésie n'est pas simplement divertissement, ni vérité abstraite; elle ne peut pas s'isoler du bon et du vrai, n'être que le beau ou l'art pour l'art, ce qui ne se conçoit pas (DUPONT, 1855, p. 18).

This famous revolutionary function of art and its inextricable relationship with social life did not give Baudelaire the title of revolutionary. On the contrary; after his incipient stage of rebellion and social engagement, marked by catchphrases like "[...] l'art fut désormais inséparable de la morale et de l'utilité [...]" (DUPONT, 1855, p. 6), the French poet retreats in his convictions, especially when

⁸ "Confesseur des pendus et des conspirateurs / [...]" (BAUDELAIRE, 1861, p. 290).

Bonaparte finally reaches power through a *coup d'état*. The fact is that Baudelaire was split between two voices, two consciousnesses, like many other artists, and his interest for the oppressed did not go beyond the interest he felt for his causes as much for his idealizations. In effect, Baudelaire did not have beliefs rooted in his own sympathy for the dispossessed of the world, sons of Cain, which makes him deny afterwards "[...] the revolutionary activity which in those days carried almost everyone away [...]" (BENJAMIN, 2006, p. 59). The rupture of Baudelaire with *l'art pour l'art* was actually momentary and, according to Benjamin, it worked more as an intellectual position, corresponding to the effort of producing a place where he intended to occupy as man of letters. One cannot neglect or overlook, however, that the intentions of Baudelaire regarding lyric poetry were clear: his project, at least at that time, was to be read and understood. For this reason, the introductory poem of *The Flowers of evil* is dedicated to the public, the readers. However, the problem lies in the fact that Baudelaire's audience had difficulty in reading poetry, and their concentration and willpower soon vanished before the more mundane pleasures of the senses, besides being constantly numbed by what the French poet called *spleen* (melancholy, boredom) that quickly sapped any interest in a more demanding reading in terms of attention and intelligence. In short, the reader of Baudelaire was distracted, alienated:

[...]
 Serried, swarming, like a million maggots,
 A legion of Demons carouses in our brains,
 And when we breathe, Death, that unseen river,
 Descends into our lungs with muffled wails.

 If rape, poison, daggers, arson
 Have not yet embroidered with their pleasing
 designs
 The banal canvas of our pitiable lives,
 It is because our souls have not enough boldness.

 But among the jackals, the panthers, the bitch
 hounds,
 The apes, the scorpions, the vultures, the serpents,
 The yelping, howling, growling, crawling monsters,
 In the filthy menagerie of our vices,

 There is one more ugly, more wicked, more filthy!
 Although he makes neither great gestures nor great
 cries,
 He would willingly make of the earth a shambles
 And, in a yawn, swallow the world;

 He is Ennui! — His eye watery as though with tears,
 He dreams of scaffolds as he smokes his hookah pipe.

You know him reader, that refined monster,
 — Hypocritical reader, — my fellow, — my brother!
 (BAUDELAIRE, 1954, p. 4)⁹.

According to Benjamin, the formula created by Baudelaire is very interesting, since the French poet was well aware that *The flowers of evil* was a work for a different audience, composed of readers who were overworked of the romantic lyrics and their metaphors and threadbare themes. Baudelaire knew that his book did not have many expectations to be an outstanding popular success. For this reason, the opening poem, *To the Reader*, while being a dedication or an epigraph, is also an index that the French poet could only have any effect if he created a lyric that acted as an antidote to the boredom of the readers of his time, who did not have patience to read rhetorical and pompous authors, oblivious to the events taking place during the period.

Modernity, whose natural speed suppression was Baudelaire's main reason for his becoming a theorist, created unfavorable conditions to the reception of the lyric poetry due to the accelerated pace of industrial and technological production. Benjamin proves this by presenting three specific factors, among others, that contributed to the reading public's progressive loss of interest. "First of all, the lyric poet has ceased to represent the poet *per se*" (BENJAMIN, 2006, p. 169). It is not the bard, the 'aedo' of other times, that whose poetic work reflects the collective spirit of the masses, the people, the cultural identity and nationality, as occurred during the romantic times. The poet does not have a space in society to aspire such roles, since other intellectual and social agents progressively occupy his old space: the journalist, the politician, the historian, the revolutionary. Secondly, there was not, after Baudelaire, a significant blockbuster of the lyric poetry anymore. The last major name from the French lyric was Victor Hugo, still in the full force of the romantic

⁹ "Serré, fourmillant, comme un million d'helminthes./ Dans nos cerveaux ribote un peuple de Démon./ Et, quand nous respirons, la Mort dans nos poumons/ Descend, fleuve invisible, avec de sourdes plaintes.

Si le viol, le poison, le poignard, l'incendie/ N'ont pas encor brodé de leurs plaisants dessins

Le canevas banal de nos piteux destins./ C'est que notre âme, hélas! n'est pas assez hardie.

Mais parmi les chacals, les panthères, les lices./ Les singes, les scorpions, les vautours, les serpents,

Les monstres glapissants, hurlants, grognants, rampants./ Dans la ménagerie infâme de nos vices,

Il en est un plus laid, plus méchant, plus immonde!/ Quoiqu'il ne pousse ni grands gestes ni grands cris,

Il ferait volontiers de la terre un débris/ Et dans un bâillement avalerait le monde;
 C'est l'Ennui! L'œil chargé d'un pleur involontaire./ Il rêve d'échafauds en fumant son houka.

Tu le connais, lecteur, ce monstre délicat./ — Hypocrite lecteur, — mon semblable, — mon frère!" (BAUDELAIRE, 1861, p. 1-3).

sensibility, since the audience of that time felt a need for a poet who leaked his concerns and own ideas on that historical moment in the form of verses of great rhetorical and rhythmic appeal. In Germany, Benjamin mentions the huge success of the book *Buch der Lieder* (The Book of Songs, 1839), by Heirinch Heine (1797-1856), one of the greatest literary and publishing successes of all time, edited twelve times before the author's death with many of his poems cast in compositions by Schubert, Schumann, Mendelssohn, Brahms, and Hugo Wolf. Finally, the third factor can be considered, according to Benjamin, a consequence of the previous ones: the public could not easily understand the poetry they had inherited, making it tough, 'quibble' to it, which is an index that the reception conditions had changed completely. The horizon of expectation regarding the works was no longer the same that conditioned the reading of romantic works and, therefore, the public demanded new releases. The period that marks such change, according to Benjamin, starts from the middle of the nineteenth century, curiously when Baudelaire publishes *The Flowers of Evil* (1857), almost in the same year that Heinrich Heine passes away. Since its publication, due to the aura of controversy that engulfed it, the interest in the work of Baudelaire has continued to grow with the public. Over the years, the brilliant book of the French poet, originally designed for a reader with no inclination to poetry reading, became a classic of French and international literature, knowing successive editions around the world, even having started his career with very few readers willing to read it and understand his revolutionary art.

Final consideration

The success of Baudelaire, however, is both denial and explanation for the rarefied readership of poetry in his time. The fact is that the French poet, unlike any other, knew how to shape the rich experience of his readers from that time in his lyricism, which certainly broadened the conditions for his work's reception, because of his split, bifrontal, double vision, Baudelaire shook in his texts even the most vanguardist and bold. The bohemia, the *flânerie*, combined with his peculiar sensibility, always oscillating between his sympathy for the oppressed and his tendency to a certain conservatism, made Baudelaire become the ideal poet who expressed through his verses, the *Geist* (spirit) of the modernity, in the middle of the tumultuous social and urban transformations which the Paris of his time underwent, researching

the current reader. Undoubtedly, the perception that the literary work cannot only be an aristocratic fun with words, a rhetorical construction of high complexity made Baudelaire's lyrics aware to the fact that ethics should be combined productively with aesthetics at the same time that it is combined to a specific form of world knowledge. Baudelaire managed to combine in his art the mental discipline of a rigid builder of verses with flawless technique with the 'dissolute' life of a worldly man who was willing to understand everything and, above all, a man who was living before writing. Undoubtedly, his poetry offers like no other an immense gallery of human types coming from the masses, the excluded, the oppressed, dispossessed, and marginalized of his day, which in his perspective was a particular 'race' of men and women, in no way inferior to lords who ruled the world and enslaved by work. Thus, the work of Baudelaire becomes the first in terms of lyrical, to draw a profile of the wretched of the modern world, to bring them to the literary text, to make them the characters of a lyricism that does not want to dispose of the history and the world.

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