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Lemekh's Song: Narrative Context and the Poetry of Violence

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> *Adah and Tzilah, hear my voice*
> *wives of Lemech, listen to my saying.*
> *For a man I killed for my wound (by my wound?)*
> *and a boy for my bruising (by my bruising?).*
> *For sevenfold will Cayin be avenged/(or punished?)*
> *and Lemech seventy and seven.* (Gen. 4:23-24)*

Commentators ask about the meaning of Lemekh's enigmatic poem and about its connection to its context. Perhaps one question answers the other if its literary import is only in giving meaning to the narrative, in being the poetry in a narrative about poetry and violence, in opposition of creativity and destruction. Perhaps, pointedly, the questions have no answer. What is clear, however, is that Lemekh's song of violence follows the narrative that establishes that he is father of the creators of weaponry and music.

What is the poem about and what does it mean? Is it a boast, confession, justification, elegy, lament, dirge, defense or protestation of innocence? (It is interpreted variously as all of these.) Is it a statement or a question? What about the genitive ambiguity of "my wound/my bruising"—has *he* wounded or has he *been* wounded? Do the opposites correspond: is a *man* synonymous with a *boy*, or did he kill a man *and* a boy, or does it refer to someone who is killed *both*? Who is the man or boy he killed—if he did kill him? Is this meant as a threat? (This, too, is one interpretation.) And what do his wives or Kayin have to do with it?

The more crucial question has been asked: more than what does this poem mean, what does this poem matter?[1] To which we might ask after interpreting the narrative: does it have to mean anything or matter at all? That is, if the nar-

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* Translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

1 Murray H. Lichtenstein, "Biblical Poetry," *Back to the Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Texts,* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), p. 105.

rative describes the degeneration of the industries of civilization and urban collectivity[2] established by Lemekh and his sons into crafts of destruction, then the poem can reflect that process. It might have meaning as boast, justification, lament, defense, or threat, but perhaps significantly, if it is all of these—boast, justification, lament, defense, threat—it is consequently less. Though described as a poem that "follows the parallelistic pattern of Biblical verse with exemplary rigor,"[3] it may have little meaning other than being virtuosic incoherence, pure form its only substance. Lemekh's poem may be emblematic of the narrative itself, expressing its degeneration as he, as the poet of destruction, celebrates chaos in pure form and no content. It may be enigmatic precisely because it says nothing and does so artfully, expressing little but the celebration of chaos as it conveys aggressive dominance as its true metaphor of art as cultural dominance and aggression. It is thus instructive to contrast the poem with the imbedded poem of his cousin Lemekh II (5:28), the relatively minor poet of Shet's line that celebrates life and affirmation.

The poetics of the context may be clarified by examining the poem's technical virtuosity. We could examine its form to seek its meaning (perhaps its form is its only meaning) in its stylistic devices, "horizontal" movement[4] (development within each line) and "vertical" movement (from line to line), and diachronic and synchronic structure and its ambiguities. Lemekh says to his wives, Adah and Tzilah:

עדה וצלה שמען קולי/נשי למך האזנה אמרתי//

כי איש הרגתי לפצעי/וילד לחבורתי//

כי שבעתים יקם קין/ולמך שבעים ושבעה//

"Adah and Tzilah, listen to my voice/wives of Lemekh, hear my saying//
For a man I killed for my wound (by my wound?)/and a boy for my
bruising (by my bruising?)//
For sevenfold will be Kayin avenged (؟or punished؟)/
and Lemekh seventy and seven"//

PARALLELISM AND SYMMETRY

It is a poem of three parts:

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[2] Malbim M.L., (*Mikr'aei Kodesh,* Warsaw, 1874), Gen. 4:23, Umberto Cassuto, *From Adam to Noah* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1978) p. 130.
[3] R. Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1997) p. 20.
[4] R. Alter, "The Characteristics of Ancient Hebrew Poetry" in (R. Alter, F. Kermode, eds.) *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (Cambridge: Harvard Press, 1987) p. 611, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985) Chapter III, "Structures of Intensification," 62-84.

A) ABAB: עדה וצלה שמען קולי//נשי למך האזנה אמרתי
B) ABAB: כי איש הרגתי לפצעי//וילד לחבורתי
C) and as a coda: ABBA: כי שבעתים יקם קין//ולמך שבעים ושבעה

For a poem about killing and bruising, it has grace and balance, as well as sym-metric resolution of semantic sense and sounds. In contrast to its subject, it resolves its consonantal tension (כי שבעתים יקם קין) as if a fist gently unfolding, with open assonantal release and understatement (ולמך שבעים ושבעה). It is noted that "this poem follows the parallelistic pattern of biblical verse with exemplary rigor. Each term in each initial verset has its semantic counterpart in the second. The first pair has four accented syllables in each; every subsequent verset has three accented syllables. The last pair with its numbers is a paradigm case for poetic parallelism in the Bible. There is a pronounced tendency to intensify semantic material in approximate synonymity."[5]

There is, in fact, much to add about its parallelism. In the intensification[6] in A: **עדה וצילה\\נשי למך** עדה וצילה are specific individuals and נשי למך is a general unspecified group who have a relationship with him. (If they are *his* property in which they lose their specific identities, "wives of Lemekh" intensifies the imper-ative to heed him.)

שמען\\האזנה שמען is general, "to hear," while האזנה is more specific and closer:[7] "to give ear,"[8] "to listen more intently," or "to hear speaking in the ear."

קולי\\אמרתי קולי is general and metonymic, and אמרתי is specific and literal.

In B (four words//two words, three stresses//three stresses): the three sylla-bles of **הרגתי**, the double-duty verb for both versets, alliteratively and assonanti-cally intensifies in the five syllables of (לחבורתי):

איש\\וילד *descend* in intensity: a boy is younger than a man and is easier to kill (though it is more brazenly cruel). **פצעי\\לחבורתי** also descend: לפצעי, a wound,[9] is more intense (though a shorter word) than לחבורתי, a stripe.[10] This would be a form of escalation: I killed (or can or will kill) a man for wounding me, *or even* a boy for merely bruising me, creating the connection with extreme intensifica-tion in the next line.

In the last pair (C) **שבעתים\\שבעים ושבעה** שבעתים *intensifies* exponentially to שבעים ושבעה. (In a coda of intensification C with its *sevens* is the only unit con-

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5   Alter, *Genesis,* p. 20.
6   For intensification in parallelism, Malbim, Isa. 1, R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry,* Chapter III, "Structures of Intensification," 62-84, James L. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and its History,* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 32.
7   Malbim, Deut. 31:1.
8   BDB: אזן.
9   Malbim, Ex. 21:25, Isa. 1:2., Prov. 20:30, BDB: פצע.
10 Malbim, Ex. 21:25, Isa. 1:2., Prov. 20:30, BDB: פצע, חבורה.

taining *seven* words.) Seventy-seven-fold is *eleven* times seven, much more than seven-fold of seven, which is forty-nine. It is a literary figure, an exaggeration, not a mathematical one; seven-fold, meaning "much, manifold,"[11] is exponented to "very much more manifold." Being avenged or punished sevenfold is very disproportional retribution (the murder it avenged was literally overkill); *seventy-seven-fold* is very, very, extreme.

קין\\ולמך: descends from forbear to descendant, a specific relationship of ancestor and descendant summing up *seven* generations from the first progenitor and killer of the line to the last progenitor and killer of the line. In the Midrash[12] as we will see, they are the ancestor who killed and the descendant who kills him.

The two double-duty words in B and C, הרגתי, "I killed" and יקם "will be avenged," both modify their respective lines horizontally, as C results vertically from B. It is even possible that in poetic form הרגתי ("I killed") here means "I *will* kill"[13] and יקם ("will be avenged") means "*was* avenged" (thus contrasting with the implied "and Lemekh [*will be avenged*] seventy-seven").

We can see a structural pattern contrasted this way in A:

עדה וצילה = specific (specified)

שמען קולי = general (hearing/my voice)//

נשי למך = general (unspecified)//

האזנה אמרתי = specific (pay attention/my saying)

Then a *specific* application in B (איש **הרגתי** לפצעי\\וילד לחבורתי) is juxtaposed to a *general* truth in C (שבעתים **יקם** קין\\ולמך שבעים ושבעה),[14] where **הרגתי** is *specific* and **יקם** is *general* (unspecified), with movement between a generalized relationship (**איש**\\וילד) in B, and a specific relationship[15] of ancestor (*Kayin*) and descendant (*Lemekh*) in C. In C, שבעתים\\שבעים ושבעה a *specific* idiomatic numeric relationship is contrasted with a *general* arbitrarily exaggerated sound multiplicity not numerically significant, multiplied by a non-meaningful eleven.[16]

"B and C are conceptually related and also formally coordinated, introduced by כי"[17] Thus A-B are connected in form (*ABAB*) and B-C are connected by being introduced by כי And A, the introduction, is *stylistically* connected with C, the coda, as we will see below.

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[11] מזוקק שבעתים (Ps. 12:7) ונמצא ישלם שבעתים (Prov. 6:31); שבעה יפול צדיק (Prov. 24:16); ואור החמה יהיה שבעתים (Isa. 30:26), שבעתים אל חיקם (ibid 79:12).

[12] *Tanhuma* 11.

[13] Ibn Ezra, R. David Kimhi (*RaDaK*), 4:23.

[14] Lichtenstein, "Biblical Poetry," p. 105

[15] ibid.

[16] Alter, *Genesis,* p. 20, notes here the "paradigm case for poetic parallelism in the Bible, when a number occurs in the first half of a line, it must be increased, by one, by a decimal, or by a decimal added to the original number, as here in the second half of the line." True, but while it might have a *literary* logic it isn't a rational guideline for sentencing.

[17] Lichtenstein, "Biblical Poetry" ibid.

Stylistic Elements and Content

Alliteration and chiastic sound pairs[18] connect the parts. Besides the rhyme throughout A-B of עדה וצילה, the first pair (A): קולי\\אמרתי\\הרגתי\\לפצעי\\לחבורתי, **שמען קולי\\נשי למך האזנה אמרתי** connects alliteratively with the last pair (C), **כי שבעתים יקם קין**, *most* of the letters in the opening impera-tive **שמען קולי** in the first half of A are repeated and reversed in the second half, נשי למך האזנה אמרתי, and *all* of them are reversed alliteratively in C: עדה\\וצילה, כי שבעתים יקם קין\\ולמך שבעים ושבעה, just as the opening rhyme is echoed in the closing שבעים ושבעה. (The first pair has *two* rhymes: עדה\\וצילה (which rhyme with: קולי\\האזנה אמרתי), and שמען קולי\\האזנה (which rhyme with: לפצעי\\לחבורתי in B.)

In the first pair, (A) is a chiastic sound pair reversal שמען קולי\\נשי למך and in the last (C): כי שבעתים יקם קין. C's semantic *ABBA* pattern is echoed in its *sound* chiasmus: כי שבעתים יקם קין\\ולמך שבעים ושבעה. A larger chiasmus is created as שמען קולי\\נשי למך אמרתי in the first pair (A) is reversed in the last (C): שבעתים, as קולי\\ולמך in A connects with and is reversed in קין\\ולמך at the end in C.

In this way, the two women in the first verse are opposed to the two men in the last, so that **נשי** in the first becomes opposed to **איש** (itself opposed to ילד) in the second. A relationship with two women in a group is contrasted with a rela-tionship of destruction with two separate men (in a chiastic series: A1=two *named ladies*, A2=two *unnamed ladies*, B1-2=two *unnamed men*, C1-2=two *named men*.) Lemekh mentions his own name in the end of the first pair (נשי **למך**) and the end of the last pair (**ולמך** שבעים ושבעה) as the first rhyme (עדה וצילה) repeats itself in the last (שבעים ושבעה). The concluding phrase, **ולמך שבעים ושבעה**, in terse reversal of form (*ABBA*) and (unstated) syntax (**יקם** קין\\ולמך [**יקם**]) implying *yuqtol*-x//*we*-x[*yuqtol*] (verb/subject followed by its inversion, subject/verb) signals the *stylistic* end of the poem[19] as its *content* is about intensified reversal and retribution.

The poem connects Lemekh's past, present, and future,[20] all seven genera-tions of his line from Kayin to his children.[21] But we could discern more of its internal relationships if we could only figure out some of the unresolved seman-

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18 For Biblical sound chiasmus and phonological parallelism see J.S. Kselman, "Seman-tic-Sonant Chiasmus in Biblical Poetry," *Biblica* 58 (1977), 219-33 and A. Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985) chapter 6, "The Phonological Aspect: Sound Pairs," 103-126.

19 On this phenomenon: A. Mirsky, "Stylistic Devices for Conclusion in Hebrew," *Semi-tics* 5 (1977) 9-23, H.V.D. Payanuk, "Oral Typesetting: Some Uses of Biblical Struc-ture," *Biblica* 62 (1981) 153-168.

20 Lichtenstein, "Biblical Poetry."

21 Yehudah Kiel, *Sefer Bereishit* in *Daat Mikra* (Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook 1997) p. 129.

tic questions. Is the *man* synonymous with the *boy*[22] or did Lemekh kill a man *and* a boy? And who is the man or boy he killed, and did he kill him or them? What about the genitive ambiguity[23] of "my wound/my bruising": has he wounded or been wounded? Here are some technical possibilities:

Some commentators take Lemekh at his word; he has killed a man *and* a boy[24] and thus will be punished *even more* severely[25] than Kayin who killed one person, the connection between B and C. Two Midrashim provide other solutions. In *Tanhuma* 11, Lemekh's wives separated from relations with him because he accidentally killed Kayin, his *ancestor,* and Tuval Kayin, his *son.* Lemekh was blind; when hunting, his son pulled the bow for him and accidentally shot Kayin. Clapping his hands in anguish, Lemekh killed Tuval Kayin, as well. Lemekh argued: *was* a *man* (Kayin) killed with *my* (intentional) wounding or a *boy* (Tuval Kayin) with *my* (intentional) bruising? It is not *my* murderous wounding or bruising that could be ascribed to me. If Kayin's *punishment* for intentional murder was suspended for *seven generations,*[26] mine will be suspended for seventy-seven. (J. Kugel[27] suggests the identification of àéù as Kayin is because only he is called this so far: ותלד את **קין** ותאמר קניתי **איש** את ה׳ (4:1.) Alternatively, *Genesis Rabbah* 23:4: Lemekh killed no one; his wives separated from him because of the decree of the flood, punishment of Kayin's *seventh generation.* Lemekh argued, "Did *I* kill[28] Hevel, a *man* in stature, a *boy* in years? Kayin did; if his *punishment* was suspended for *seven generations,* I who did not kill will be spared for seventy-seven." In both Midrashim instead of A being the introduction and B-C the body of the poem, A is the main petition and B-C the argument.

In the first Midrash's parallelism the *man* and *boy* are *Kayin* and *Tuval Kayin* respectively, Lemekh's *ancestor* and his *son*; in the second Midrash the *man/boy*

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[22] *Genesis Rabbah* 23:4: "If a man why a boy; if a boy why a man?", Stanley Gevirtz, *Patterns in the Early Poetry of Israel,* "Lamech's Song to his Wives": Additional Note on ילד, "Boy" in the Parallelism ילד\\איש (Chicago:University of Chicago, 1963) p. 25.

[23] J. Kugel, *In Potiphar's House: The Interpretive Life of Biblical Texts,* (San Francisco: Harper, 1990), RaDaK, *Commentary on Genesis.*

[24] Ibn Ezra, Malbim.

[25] R. Saadiah Gaon, *Sefer HaGilui* (*Kitab AlKashaf*) in Y.Kafah, *Pirushei R. Sa'adia Gaon al ha-Torah* (Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 1963), p. 18 note 11.

[26] Similarly Onkelos, *Genesis Rabbah* 23:4, Rashi, Ibn Ezra.

[27] *In Potiphar's House.* In *Midrash HaBiur* (M.M. Kasher, *Torah Shilemah* Jerusalem: Beth Torah Shelemah, 1926) Lemekh meets *Kayin* and his (servant) *boy* in the field [(4:8) place of the first murder] and blasphemes them; when they *bruise and wound* him he kills them in self-defense.

[28] Kugel argues that **כי** איש הרגתי as a negative rhetorical question: "*Did I kill* a man?," is Mishnaic form. However R. Sa'adia Gaon in *Sefer HaGilui* (*Kitab AlKashaf*) cites Job 6:22 (הכי אמרתי) for "כי"as negation and so interprets here in his translation of the Torah (as do the Targumim.). Similarly Ibn Ezra cites כי האדם עץ השדה (Deut. 20:19). Ibn Janah reads כי as "even though."

is *Hevel*. The first Midrash has a parallelism between the first person ever born, the first killer, and the last born killer in his line of seven, the *ancestor* who killed and his *descendant* who kills him. The first murderer is killed by the last of his line, the first creator of weaponry who perfects his ancestor's craft.[29] In the second Midrash, *man/boy* in B is the first killed person contrasted with the first murderer in C, as the first beginning of a line (Kayin) is contrasted with the first end of a line (Hevel).

In both Midrashic readings *"my* wound" means the wound meted out, though James Kugel[30] suggests that the motif of Lemekh's *blindness* is embedded in *"my* wound," a wound *he received*. If so the ambiguity's two syntactic possibilities are incorporated. However *Genesis Rabbah* 23:4 read it as "Did I kill a man *that wounds should come upon me* because of him, or a boy that *bruises should come upon me*?" R. David Kimhi notes the genitive ambiguity explicitly in his *Commentary* here. He suggests the poem might be a threat *to Lemekh's wives*[31] and offers two readings: I can or will kill a man or boy *with my* wound or bruise, or: *for wounding or bruising me:* an extreme reaction like the sevenfold and seventy-sevenfold vengeance. It can be read as boast about the past or threat for the future (I have killed/or will kill a man and *even* a boy) or as vindication: "Did I kill a man or *even* a boy, did I wound *or even* bruise?," where the intensification is of innocence.

His reading yields interesting results. The threat to force violence upon the same receivers who receive his words makes the poem self-referential. Having forced the receiving of his *killing, wounding, bruising* (חבורתי\לפצעי\הרגתי) on their *receivers* (וילד\\איש) Lemekh now forces *receiving* (האזנה\\שמען) his *voice* and *saying* (אמרתי\\קולי) on *their* receivers (למך נשי\\וצילה עדה) (Roman Jakobson's communications model[32] [context+sender+message+receiver+contact+code] perhaps used *very* literally.) This connects the rhymes קולי\אמרתי\הרגתי\לפצעי\לחבורתי which are all what Lemekh gives his receivers: poetry and violence in a poem about violence in a narrative about poetry and violence.

In the Midrashic versions Lemekh forces birth on them so that שמען (the apposite of האזנה: to listen to his words and poem) means *submitting to rela-*

29 *Genesis Rabbah* 23:3, Rashi and Ramban to 4:22.

30 *In Potiphar's House*. R. Obadiah Seforno in his commentary to 4:24 reads Lemekh's poem as lament for his wounding *himself* by killing his father and and son. R. David Z. Hoffman reads it as Lamech's claim that he only meant to *wound* him ("with *my wound*"). Or Lemekh fought back and killed *when he was wounded* (as the Septuagint).

31 Similarly *Hizkuni,* (R. Hezekiah b. Manoah, early 13th cent.) in (C.D. Chavel ed., *Commentary on the Torah,* Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 1980) here.

32 *Selected Writings* (Hague: Mouton 1967) 3:23. In the schema שמען\\האזנה=*receiving*, הרגתי=*given*, קולי\אמרתי\פצעי\חבורתי=*given/giving*. "Adah and Tzilah" and *"wives of Lemekh"* (A), *"man"* and *"boy"* (B), and *"Kayin"* and *"Lemekh"* (C) are all passive *receivers* (or will be or have been) while *"I"* (=הרגתי, "*I* killed) (B) is the only one who has conferred an active transitive verb.

tions[33] (as in "ולא **שמע** אליה לשכב אצלה", Gen. 39:10), in this reading the message itself. To *hear* him means to listen and *submit, obey*. So שמע, accepting relations and *birth,* the equivalent of האזנה, accepting his poetry in A, counterpoints *killing* in B. Reading שמע as submitting gives האזנה the sense of *obeying* his word besides hearing it. Conquest of women counterpoints his conquest of men. In fact Malbim sees **עדה וצילה\\נשי למך** as intensification of aggression: *Adah and Tzilah* should submit; as women and as *his women* (**נשי למך**) they must *certainly* submit. (This implies the inherent message of art/song as cultural domination and possible polarity of male/female arts, discussed below. Read literally: if *men* have submitted to his killing and wounding certainly *his women* must submit to his art.)

שמען\\האזנה may themselves be connected with **עדה\\וצילה**, the distributed imperative to *hear* and *heed warning. Tzilah*, it is noted[34], plays on צליל "ringing" or צלצלים, cymbals (with כנור ועוגב as here[35]). צלצלים connects with שמע צליל with *hearing* ("הללוהו בנבל . . . **ועוגב** הללוהו בצלצלי שמע", Ps. 150:4-6) as כל **שמעה תצלנה** שתי אזניו, I Sam. 3:11, כל **שמעה תצלינה** שתי אזניו, II Kgs 21:12, כל **שמעה תצלנה** אזניו, Jer. 19:3). *Adi* (as in "קום בלק ושמע**האזינה עדי** בנו צפר", Num. 23:18, "**אזין עד** תבונתיכם", Job 32:11) is translated as hearing "*testimony*" (Septuagint, Peshitta) or based on its Akkadian meaning ("oath," "covenant') as hearing "*warning,*"[36] as in Gen. 43:3 **העד העד** and Ex. 19:21, **העד בעם**. So **עדה\\וצילה** should *hear* and *heed* (**שמען\\האזנה**) *warning.*

Thus **קולי** שמען at the poem's beginning may connect to its end in its threat. The two double-duty words (B-C), **הרגתי**="I killed" and **יקם**="will be avenged" quote the aftermath of Kayin's killing, "לכן כל **הרג** קין שבעתים **יקם**" (4:15), playing on the murder itself, "**ויקם** קין אל הבל אחיו **ויהרגהו**", as **יקם**="will be *avenged*" (4:15) is retribution for **ויקם**="and Kayin *got up*"[37] to murder[38] (4:8). The poem echoes elements of Kayin's killing ("**ויקם קין ויהרגהו** . . .") (4:8) and its aftermath, imbedded poetry about its avenging ("והיה כל מצאי **יהרגני**") (4:13-15) and **הרג קין שבעתים יקם** (כל), an imbedded poetic fragment in inverted syntax and poetic language. There is a framing symmetry between the poetic speeches about Kayin's killing in the narrative's beginning and Lemekh's poem at its close. Thus **קולי**, here connected with conquest and aggression, can echo its last

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[33] *Genesis Rabbah* 23:4: **נשמע** לך **ונהיה פרות ורבות** למארה . . . אמרו לו, Rashi to 4:23, based on this: **להשמע** לי לתשמיש. As a Midrashic idiom: *Bavli Sanhedrin* 82a: נשמעות ללגיונותי, TJ *Sukah:* רצונך שאשמע לך, *Sifrei Num.* 131: השמעי לי.

[34] M. Garsiel, *Biblical Names:A Literary Study of Midrashic Derivations and Puns* (Ramat Gan:Bar Ilan University Press, 1991) p. 95

[35] II Sam 6:5, Ps 105:3, 5; Neh. 12:27; 1 Chr. 15:16, 25:1.

[36] S. Morag, "Archaic Strata: Linguistic Studies in the Oracles of Balaam" [Hebrew], *Tarbitz* 50 (1981) 1-24.

[37] As in Deut 22:26: **יקום** איש על רעהו ורצחו.

[38] As in Ex. 21:18-21: וכי יכה איש את עבדו . . . **נקם ינקם**. אם יום או יומים **יעמד** לא **יקם**, Onkelos:**יתקיים**] ימים והתהלך/אם **יקום** רעהו את והכה.

use in God's (poetic) confronting of Kayin's archetypal conquest and murder, קול דמי אחיך צועקים אלי (4:10). Until then, and until *here*, קול was used only in reference to sin and confrontation: the first sin and its confrontation (וישמעו את קול ה׳ אלהים מתהלך בגן, 3:8) (the *man and woman* hear the sound of God after the sin) and Adam's response, "Because *Your voice I heard* (את קלך שמעתי בגן) (3:10)" to which God counters, "You *listened* to the *voice* of your wife," כי שמעת לקול אשתך (3:17), the *man* listened to the *woman's voice* to sin and not to His. Now in the threat Lemekh's wives must listen to him as he refers to the killing.

So *intensified aggressive* dominion moves horizontally *within* each line, developing vertically down from line to line to intensified crescendo. Adah and Tzilah, women, should listen to his voice; *all the more so* as *his* women, nameless "wives of Lemekh", the imperative is intensified to heed and give ear to what he says, all the more so *because* he has killed a *man* for just wounding him (or with just his wound) and *even* a boy just for bruising him (or with just a bruise) *because* Kayin who only killed *once* is to be avenged *sevenfold, but Lemekh* is to be avenged *seventy-sevenfold*. So, do not mess with Lemekh. As his poetry conveys aggressive dominance it conveys the true metaphor of cultural dominance and aggression.

Birth and Lemekh's Family: Names and Occupations in The Narrative

What is obvious is that Lemekh's *song of violence* immediately follows the narrative which establishes that he, father of the seventh generation of Kayin, is father of the creators ("*fathers*") of the crafts of *music* and *weaponry*. The names of his sons foreshadow (proleptically) his resultant *song* and also refer backwards (analeptically) to the names of the protagonists and issues of the murder of which he sings.

While the narrative begins with killing and ends with killing[39] it also begins and ends with birth. After Kayin killed Hevel, and God confronted him telling of *sevenfold* retribution, Kayin started a line of descendants described in a verse or so without detail or description until his *seventh* generation.

And then (19-25):

> And Lemekh took two wives, the name of one was Adah and the name of the second was Tzilah. And Adah gave birth to Yaval (יבל) he was the father of those who dwell in tents with livestock (הוא היה אבי ישב אהל ומקנה), and the name of his brother was Yuval (יובל) he was the father of all who take the lyre and flute

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39 Y. Kiel, *Sefer Bereishit*, p. 163.

(היה אבי כל תפש כנור ועוגב). And Tzilah, she, too, bore Tuval Kayin (תובל קין), father of all who forge tools of copper and iron (לטש כל חרש נחשת וברזל) and Tuval Kayin's sister was Na'amah.

And Lemekh said to his wives: "Adah and Tzilah, listen to my voice/ wives of Lemekh, hear my saying for a man I killed for my wounding and a boy for my bruising.

For sevenfold will be Kayin avenged and Lemekh seventy and seven.

The names of *Yaval* (יבל), *Yuval,* (יובל) and *Tuval Kayin* (תובל קין), seventh generation of Kayin, Hevel's killer, all echo the names of *Hevel* (הבל) and *Kayin* (קין).[40] Yaval's trade reflects Hevel's, shepherding, yet the word for livestock here, ומקנה, in its first Biblical usage, plays off Kayin's name, קין, and its stated etymology: *acquisition* (4:1: ותלד את **קין** ותאמר **קניתי** איש את ה') much like *cattle* from *chattel. Yovel* is a *ram*[41] and, by extension, also a musical *wind* instrument, a ram's horn (Ex. 19:13, Josh. 6:4-5), reflecting Hevel's craft and *name* (=*breath*) as in Yuval's musical craft. Tuval Kayin plays markedly on both names and the craft of the killer. Not only does his craft of sharpening metalwork reflect Kayin's craft of killing, in some interpretations raising it to craft and industry[42] but *Kayin* in Akkadian is a metal smith. Later associations of this root with the word for a smith occur in Southern Arabic and other Semitic languages.[43] *Kayin* may itself be the Hebrew translation of '*Tuval*,' Sumerian for 'ironsmith'.[44] Y. Kiel cites משקל **קינו** (II Sam. 21:16) in reference to creating weaponry.[45] *K'nh* also has the sense of *making,* creating.[46]

The presentation of their crafts (יבל **הוא היה** אבי . . . יובל **הוא היה** אבי) at the end of the unit (and of Kayin's seventh generation) syntactically echoes the presentation of Kayin's craft (**וקין היה** עבד אדמה) at its beginning. Similarly וצלה **גם הוא** ילדה (4:22) parallels: והבל הביא **גם הוא** (4:4), as the same-verb

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[40] Noted by Benno Jacob, *Das Erste Buch der Tora: Genesis,* (Berlin, 1934).

[41] See *Bavli Rosh ha-Shanah* 26a, *Yerushalmi Berachot* 9:2.

[42] *Genesis Rabbah* 23:3, Rashi and Ramban to 4:22.

[43] Richard S. Hess, "A Comparison of the Omnastica in Genealogical and Narrative Texts of Genesis 1-11," *Proceedings of the Tenth World Congress of Jewish Studies,* (Jerusalem 1970); G. Ryckmans, *Les Noms Propres Sud Semitiques* (Louvain: Bureaus du *Museon,* 1934) Vol. I, p. 190, and W.M. Muller "Al Sudarabische Beitrage zum Hebraischen Lexicon, *ZAW* 75 (1963) p. 314.

[44] Y.M Greenitz, יחודו וקדמותו של ספר בראשית, 1983, p. 5, note 21.

[45] *Sefer Bereishit im Pirush Da'at Mikra.* For Aramaic he cites Targum Jonathan translating צורף, a metal craftsman, in Jud. 17:4 as: קינאה and in Jer. 10:9,14, as: קיני, Isa 40:19, 41:7, 46:6 and similarly the Targum to Ps. 66:10, as well as *Yerushalmi Bava Batra* 2:2, כגון **קיני** או נפח, "such as a *metal craftsman* or blacksmith" (*Pnei Moshe* there: קיני=צורף. See also *Yerushalmi Sanhedrin* 9, *Bavli Sanhedrin* 81a.

[46] 122 Y. Kiel, *Sefer Bereishit,* p. 102 citing. Ex. 15:16, Deut. 32:6, Ps.139:13. See also R. S. Hess, "A Comparison of the Omnastica."

wayy-iqtol/qatal pattern:[47] וצלה גם הוא **ילדה** את**ותלד** עדה את יבל (20-22) paral-
lels 4:2-6: "**וקין היה** עבד אדמה . . . **ויהי הבל** רעה צאן**ויבא קין** מפרי האדמה" \\
והבל הביא גם הוא

As Tuval Kayin's craft completes Kayin's in his seventh generation Yaval's craft of shepherding completes Hevel's.[48] Lemekh's *song* counterpoints curiously the strange *silence* of Kayin's killing: "And Kayin *said to* Hevel his brother/ and it was as they were in the field and Kayin rose on Hevel his brother and he killed him" (**ויאמר** קין אל הבל אחיו\\ויהי בהיותם בשדה ויקם קין אל הבל אחיו ויהרגהו). The only *sound* associated with the murder was: **קול** דמי אחיך **צעקים** אלי (4:10) as the earth silently opened its mouth: מן האדמה אשר **פצתה את פיה**.

As Kayin and Hevel's crafts are paralleled in Tuval/Kayin's and Yaval's, the silence that preceded the murder is counterpointed by the musical craft of Yuval and the violent song of Lemekh. It has been suggested that the sense of Kayin's name *k'nh* as smith could also be the root for '*song*' or '*dirge*'=**קינה**[49] a *song* of lament about *death*, connecting the names of Kayin and Tuval Kayin with the craft of Yuval. (See also Jer. 9:9: **קינה** על ההרים אשא בכי ונהי ועל נאות מדבר\\ **מקנה** קול שמעו ולא עובר איש מבלי נצתו כי). Similarly Tuval Kayin's sister *Na'amah's* name reflects the Ugaritic *n'mh*='musician.' In *Targum Yonatan* she is described as מרת **קינין וזמרין**, mistress of *dirges* and *songs,* as Tuval Kayin is father and master of the crafts of weaponry.[50] Here **קינין** (Aramaic for **קינות**) combines Kayin and Tuval Kayin's killing and weaponry with Yuval's music. In the Midrash she plays music (מנעמת), playing the drum for idol worship,[51] which uses the sense of *Naam* as to play music, as in: "**נעים** זמירות ישראל" (II Sam 23:1) and שאו זמרה ותנו תף כנור **נעים** עם נבל (Ps. 81:3). Tuval Kayin's sister is Na'amah, his twin.[52] Music is the sister of violence.

Additionally, M. Garsiel[53] notes that their mother's name *Tzilah* (צילה) plays on *Tzlil,* (צליל) "ringing" or מצלתים or צלילים (cymbals) mentioned often in connection with the כנור ועוגב (II Sam 6:5, Ps 105:3, 5; Neh. 12:27; 1 Chr. 15:16, 25:1) as here in connection with Yaval's craft. And as Yaval, Yuval, and Tuval Kayin's names echo Hevel's and Kayin's, with the association of the כינור with

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[47] That is, where a finite verb (*wayyiqtol*) *before* the subject is followed by its inverted form (*qatal*) *after* its subject.

[48] Ralbag, *Commentary to Genesis*: "With this was filled for the human race what Kayin removed in killing Hevel as that craft was lost in his loss as he died without sons."

[49] Hess, "A Comparison of the Omnastica in Genealogical and Narrative Texts of Genesis 1-11."

[50] In *Zohar Hadash* 19b: "She was also expert in the craft of iron-forging like Tuval Kayin her brother."

[51] *Genesis Rabbah* 23:3. The motif of women playing on the drum: Ex. 15:20, Jud. 11:30, Jer. 31:3, Ps. 68:24.

[52] Hizkuni, Ramban, since it does not say Tzilah *continued to give birth*, as by Adah.

[53] *Biblical Names,* p. 95.

the נבל[54] (and Onkelos here translates כינור as "נבלא") there is perhaps unspoken wordplay with *nevel* playing on *Hevel* (Garsiel[55] and Y. Zakovitch[56] note the phenomenon of tacit wordplay of a name suggested by the other word of an idiomatic word pair.) Additionally, *Hevel* means *'breath'*: Onkelos translates עוגב as אבובא, flute, a wind instrument as *Genesis Rabbah* 23:21 interprets כנור ועוגב as ערדבלין וכרבלין, טδρανλης and χορανλης: in Greek: organ and flute, as both being wind instruments.[57] (Hevel's name הבל, underscores his fate, 'vanity' and the shortness of life[58] (ימיו כצל עובר\\דמה להבל אדם, *Ps.* 144:34) or 'breath' cut off in its prime.[59]) It is argued that onomastic associations of the feminine names of Kayin's line are all connected with art or music.[60] Similarly, *Adah* (עדה) could be associated with *Adi* (עדי) *jewelry*, ornamental *metalwork*,[61] as if connected with Tuval Kayin's craft.[62]

There is the narrative sense that the industries of civilization become the crafts of destruction,[63] as Kayin the first murderer and his sons establish the crafts of civilization and urban collectivity: shepherding, agriculture, building cities, technology, and the arts, without an ethical base as calling on the name of God is profaned (4:26). Tuval Kayin's craft (לטש כל חרש נחשת וברזל) is ambiguous, connoting either sharpening metal tools for agriculture (I Sam. 13:19-20: or (וחרש לא ימצא בכל ארץ ישראל . . . וירדו . . . ללטוש איש את מחרשתו ואת אתו for weaponry (Ps. 7:13 חרבו ילטש, 52:4: כתער מלטש), as if the potential for industry were perverted, plowshares beaten into swords. In the same sense of breakdown the Midrash[64] reads Yaval's being אבי ישב אהל ומקנה to mean he built houses for idol worship, citing (Ez. 8:3) סמל הקנאה המקנה. The association of מקנה with idolatry is based on הם קנאוני בלא אל (Deut. 32:21), "They made Me *jealous* with non-gods," following the interpretation of אז הוחל לקרא בשם ה' (4:26) as the calling on the name of God then profaned. In the Midrash, Yuval, too, plays his כנור ועוגב for idolatry, as Na'amah plays the drum for idol worship. Here is underscored the unspoken obvious association of Kayin,

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54 I Sam. 10:5, II Sam. 6:5, I Kgs 10:12, Ps. 33:2, 57:9, 92:4, 108:3, 150:3, I Chr. 13:8, 25:1,6 II Chr. 5:12, 9:11, 20:28, 29:25, et al.

55 Garsiel, 102-110.

56 The Status of the Synonymous Word or Name in Creating Name Wordplay", [Hebrew] 1977, 100-15, "Explicit and Implicit Name-Derivations," *Hebrew Annual Annual Review* 4, 167-181.

57 For כנור as wind instrument: *Bavli Berakhot* 3b

58 Cassuto, p. 136, Garsiel, p. 92 notes the reversed alliteration of והבל הביא גם הוא מבכרות צאנו ומחלבהן.

59 Hess, "A Comparison of the Omnastica."

60 Hess, ibid.

61 Hess, ibid, Kiel, p.121.

62 It could also be connected with *Adah,* conception in Aramaic.

63 Malbim,Gen. 4:23, Cassuto, p. 130.

64 *Genesis Rabbah* 23:3.

playing on *kinah,* "jealousy."[65] This may be the wordplay in Deut. 32:21: הם **קנאוני** בלא אל\\כעסוני בהבליהם, playing on the *jealousy* and their names as in Eccl. 4:4: **הבל** קנאת איש מרעהו\\וגם זה **הבל**. (R.Y.Z. Mecklenberg, *ha-Ketav ve-ha-Kabalah,* Gen. 4:1 conjectures that קנאה, *jealousy,* is related to desiring *acquisition,* **קנה**, the etymology of Kayin's name in Gen. 4:1.) Destruction emerges in the crafts of the seventh generation of Kayin, first killer, and first builder (4:17).

Beyond sevenfold punishment in the seventh generation is the motif of birth and potential for craft and civilization or destruction. Lemekh's family of seven is the largest family recorded so far in the text, the only one with two wives and multiple births, four children, both sons and daughters. The preceding line of individual sons is passed over in one verse without comment. In this *seventh* generation of Kayin (*murderer* of Hevel who died *childless*) are *seven* people in the creative Lemekh family (Lemekh, his two wives, two sons from one, and a son and a daughter from the other).[66] They are 'fathers' of their crafts and of all who will practice them, אבי as both *first* practitioner and *master* of the craft. In fact the word for father, אבי, appears here for the first time in the Bible. Nachmanides writes (Gen. 4:22): "In my opinion, Lemekh was a man who was very wise in every creative craft, and he taught his eldest son the matter of shepherding, and the second the science of music, and the third to sharpen and produce swords and spears and all weaponry."

Yet in the creation of their destructive crafts they will actually *not* be fathers; they are the end of the line of Kayin, destroyed in the Flood. Lemekh's being the first to take two women (**ויקח לו** למך שתי **נשים**, 4:19) foreshadows the breakdown of **ויקחו להם נשים** מכל אשר בחרו, "and they took themselves women from all they chose" (6:2) before the flood.[67] He is the first whose sons and daughters are listed but they develop crafts which will be used, as the poem implies, to dominate over men and over women. The fathers of the crafts will die, leaving over only the crafts and songs of death. Their line ends with them.

Cousin Lemekh, the Relatively Minor Poet of Birth and Hope

Lemekh forms a clear opposed pair across the two ante-Diluvian genealogies[68] with his cousin Lemekh II, the minor poet of Seth's line in 5:28. Each interrupts his genealogy with a largely enigmatic poem, Lemekh I who sings of killing and

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[65] Play on *jealousy* is spelled out in *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* 21.

[66] In *Genesis Rabbah* 22:2, the *first* family had *seven* people: Kayin was born with a twin sister and Hevel with two; Kayin was jealous.

[67] Kiel, *Sefer Bereishit,* p. 136. In *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer* 21 and *Zohar* I 37a it is the sons of *Kayin* who take them.

[68] For the genealogies' literary structure, see J. Fokkelman, "Genesis" in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, p. 36. In the commentary of Hizkuni: the wives, astrologically predicting the Flood, mistook "Lemekh" (I) for Lemekh (II).

receiving sevenfold and seventy-seven fold vengeance and Lemekh II who sings of birth and reprieve and lives to *seven hundred and seventy-seven* (5:31):

ויחי למך שתים ושמונה שנה ומאת שנה ויולד בן
ויקרא את שמו נח לאמר זה ינחמנו ממעשנו ומעצבון ידינו מן האדמה אשר אררה ה׳ . . .
ויהי כל ימי למך שבע ושבעים שנה ושבעה מאות שנה וימת

While not reported as if Lemekh II *said* a poem[69] but only as if the לאמר were meant to be an etiological explanation of the name Noah, it is a poem or poetic fragment and is indisputably poetic:

זה ינחמנו
ממעשנו ומעצבון ידינו
מן האדמה\אשר אררה ה׳

Kiel[70] notes how the contexts and poems contrast. Lemekh II's poem is prayer and prophecy; he mentions God's name and sovereignty; Lemekh I in his words and certainly his actions shows he has little interest in God.[71] While Kayin appealed to God for protection from the vengeance of which Lemekh sings, Lemekh asks God for nothing; the poem implies he can take his vengeance himself. Self-sufficient with his crafts and those of his sons, he emulates Kayin who was told to wander but instead settled, feeling no longer in need of God's protection because he built a city and registered it under his son's name (4:17-18). The line of Lemekh I ends with the sinful generation destroyed by the Flood; Lemekh II fathers a son who is a "perfect righteous man" who "finds favor in God's eyes" (6:7-8), who alone is worthy of surviving the Flood.

We add that the poems' style and content are also markedly different. Lemekh I's was about killing a man/boy, Lemekh II's is about a son's *birth*. Lemekh I's song is about himself and boasts or threats to the multiplicity of wives he took. Lemekh II's extends beyond himself *and his* wife who just had this son to all people, with whom he identifies. Lemekh killed a boy for the affront of a bruise; Lemekh II gives birth to a son who will comfort the world. His poem, like Lemekh I's sums up his past, present, and future, his son born now (זה) *will* be comfort for the curse of the *past*. Stylistically, Lemekh I's *rhymes* are about himself and dominance over individuals (קו**לי**\אמר**תי**\הרג**תי**\לפצע**י**\לחבור**תי**); Lemekh II's are about compassion, comfort and empathy with the communal lot and industriousness of all his generation: ינחמ**נו**\ממעש**נו**\ומעצבון יד**ינו**.

In Lemech I's poem, יקם revenge, is retributive reaction to ויקם (4:8), killing;

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69 It is almost unclear if it was Lemekh who called him this name or the people of his generation. The ambiguity itself shows how he gives them a collective voice. The form ויקרא את שמו נח echoes the naming of Shet, the head of his line (ויקרא את שמו שת, 5:3).

70 *Sefer Bereishit*, p. 64.

71 Lemekh is 'priest' in Akkadian, and 'strong' in Arabic.

שבעתים יקם is intensified reaction and שבעה ושבעה is an extreme intensification of *that*. Here, זה ינחמנו reacts to the same resultant curse and reverses it. Comfort (ינחמנו) rather than revenge (יקם) will be the reaction and reversal of the earth's curse for Adam's sin (3:7) and Cain's murder (4:11-12). In fact נחמה can be the apposite of נקמה as in Isaiah 1:24: הוי **אנחם** מצרי**אנקמה** מאיבי, but here is comforting reversal. The poem (זה ינחמנו**ממעשנו** ומעצבון **ידינו**\\מן האדמה\\אשר **אררה ה׳** (מה **עשית**\\קול דמי אחיך צעקים אלי **מן האדמה** \\ reverses the murder's curse אשר פצתה את פיה לקחת את דמי אחיך **מידך**) ועתה **ארור** אתה **מן האדמה** אשר פצתה (4:10-11) that which it *says* it does. And מן האדמה echoes the way it was used chiastically to underscore the murder's reactive retributive punishment[72], where God had said:

A	מה עשית קול **דמי אחיך**
B	צעקים אלי **מן האדמה**
B	ועתה **ארור** אתה **מן האדמה**
A	אשר פצתה את פיה לקחת את דמי אחיך **מידך**

There the first **מן האדמה** refers to the crime and the second to retribution[73] (2:7, וייצר ה׳ אלקים את האדם\\עפר **מן האדמה** as *murder* reverses Man's *creation:*). Now comfort **מן האדמה** reverses those same curses (=**מן האדמה****מן האדמה(ה)**) while syntactically **ארור** אתה **מן האדמה** is reversed to ה׳ **אשר אררה מן האדמה**. The *crime* there (מה **עשית**\\דמי אחיך **מ-ידך**) stylistically reverses here to *punishment* (**מ-מעשנו** ומעצבון **ידינו**), now reversed by *comfort*. מעצבון paraphrases Adam's curse (3:7, ארורה האדמה בעבורך**בעצבון** תאכלנה) and Eve's, **עצבונך והרונך**\\בעצב תלדי בנים (3:16), counterpointed here in **וילד בן**, used only here and about the birth of Seth, first of Lemech II's line. Birth reverses death. Reactive reversal is alliterated in זה ינחמנו **מ**מעשנו **ו**מעצבון ידינו**מן** האדמה, in **מ** . . . **ומ** . . . **מן** The first two refer to *comfort* (*from* our hard work and *from* our suffering) *from* the third, the *curse* ("*from* the earth"). Alliteration (ינחמנו\\ממעשנו\\ומעצבון\\ידינו\\מן\\האדמה) ends as the ending *qatal*-x, אשר אררה ה׳ ממעשנו ומעצבון ידינו\\ reverses the opening x-*yiqtol,* זה ינחמנו. If all these (\\מן האדמה\\אשר אררה ה׳) paraphrase previous curses and poetic fragments only זה ינחמנו is new. From here זה ינחמנו foreshadows, with the reversal of Noah's name (6:8, ונח מצא **חן** בעיני ה׳), God's subsequent series of reversals and the wordplays connected with them: **וינחם** ה׳ כי עשה את האדם בארץ [**ויתעצב** אל לבו], **וימח** את כל היקום\\ (6:7), **אמחה** את האדם\\כי **נחמתי** כי עשיתם (6:6), וירח ה׳ את ריח **הניחח** ויאמר ה׳ אל לבו לא אסף לקלל עוד (8:4), **ותנח** התיבה (7:23), ולא מצאה היונה **מנוח** (8:9). (8:21) את האדמה as well as

　　If all these (ממעשנו ומעצבון ידינו\\מן האדמה\\אשר אררה ה׳) paraphrase previous curses and poetic fragments only זה ינחמנו is new. From here זה ינחמנו-

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72 Cassuto, p. 218.

73 Similarly in Gen. 9:6; שופך דם האדם\\באדם דמו ישפך.

foreshadows with the reversal of Noah's name (6:8) (**ונח** מצא **חן** בעיני ה׳)
God's subsequent series of reversals and the wordplays connected with them:
אמחה את האדם\\ (6:6), **וינחם** ה׳ כי עשה את האדם בארץ **[ויתעצב** אל לבו]
(8:4), **ותנח** התיבה (7:23), **וימח** את כל היקום**וימחו** מן הארץ (6:7), כי **נחמתי** כי עשיתם
(8:21) וירח ה׳ את ריח **הניחח** ויאמר ה׳ אל לבו לא אסף לקלל עוד את האדמה as well as
מנוח ולא מצאה היונה (8:9).

In the reversal, Noah becomes the איש האדמה (9:20), inheriting the trade of
Kayin the first "איש"(4:1), In *Tanhuma* 11 he was called Noah, זה ינחמנו,
because until he came along, they tilled the earth with their hands (מעצבון ידינו);
"and he prepared for them plows, scythes, and work tools." In this he becomes
the surviving redemptive sublimation of Tuval Kayin, who perfected Kayin's
murderous craft.

Conclusion

Perhaps Lemekh's poem means nothing and matters not at all. Perhaps only its
narrative context has meaning, the poem itself is unclear and remains so. Just as
the crafts of his children become destruction his song is only silence, there is
nothing there but the virtuosity of his eloquent incoherence, its form its only
substance.

Perhaps its only content is this: Lemekh, father of the fathers of the creative
arts, of civilization, of industry and of song, Lemekh the arms dealer and poet,[74]
father of weaponry whose brother and twin sister is music and poetry, at the
height of his creative and destructive powers uttered this poem of exemplary
pure form and no content, read simply and literally: You must listen to my voice
and heed my saying because I have killed, and will kill, a man and a boy with my
wounding and with my bruising because if Kayin will be avenged sevenfold
Lemekh will be avenged seventy-seven fold.

And then, shortly thereafter, the Flood came.

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74 Nachmanides, 4:23.