

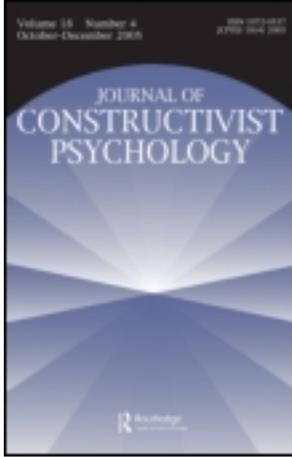
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THE USE OF QUALITATIVE GRIDS TO EXAMINE THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONSTRUCT *GOOD AND EVIL* IN BYRON'S PLAY "CAIN: A MYSTERY"

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This article grows out of a workshop conducted at the XVI International Congress on PCP, Columbus, Ohio, in July 2005. Its intention is to show how qualitative repertory grids (Procter, 2002) are useful in mapping construing in a family. Three types of grid are illustrated: the Perceiver Element Grid, the Event Perceiver Grid, and the Perceiver Construct Grid. Byron's play, "Cain: A Mystery" (1821), is used as a case example.

There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.

—*Hamlet*

Do not think of good and bad.

—*Dogen*

Personal construct psychology (PCP) has been used to throw light on literature for a long time, particularly for studying Shakespeare (Moss, 1974a, 1974b; Lee, 2000); indeed, Kelly himself discussed Hamlet in some detail (Kelly 1955, vol. 2, p. 1061). In this article we use qualitative grids, tools that are useful in working with families, teams, and other groups (Procter, 2002, 2005, 2007) to examine a play by Byron (1821), "Cain: A Mystery." These innovative grids, which may contain words or pictures rather than numbers, are conceptually straightforward but surprisingly rich in their ability to capture interpersonal situations. They illustrate the interpersonal construing and positions of each of the family members based on what they actually say. They give a blow-by-blow account of the way the conflict between the two brothers escalates, and they show how the different versions of the construct *good*

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versus *evil* underlie the tragic progression of the drama to its violent conclusion.

We chose this play because it resonates with the debate about “good” and “evil” in our current historical predicament, because of its powerful illustration of family dynamics, and because it is particularly suited to our purpose of illustrating the methodology. The story of the Garden of Eden is interesting in being a core myth in all the three theistic religions whose interactions are so current in the conflicts in the Middle East. It appears in both the Bible (Genesis 2–4) and the Koran (Al-Ma’ida and Al-A’raf) and also appears in many isolated cultures in the world (Cromwell, 2003). Kelly discussed it at length in two of his later articles (1962, 1963), calling it a “remarkably insightful story.” Byron wrote the play in 1821. Five years previously he had fled London, leaving England for the last time, amid a scandal involving an incestuous relationship with his half-sister, Augusta. He may have written the play in order to explore the theme of incest. Cain’s lover Adah, also his twin sister, is horrified when Lucifer announces that their love, although not a sin in their generation, will constitute one in future generations.

Byron’s play is gripping and provocative. It is psychologically convincing and quite moving. There is little detail in fact in the original sources, and this allows room for his poetic imagination. The names of Cain and Abel’s wives (also, of course, their sisters) are not provided in the Bible. Byron calls them Adah and Zillah, the earliest female names to appear in the book of Genesis. The text of the play is available on the Internet (see References).

The play begins with the whole family at prayer outside the walls of paradise. There is tension from the start, with Cain refusing to participate in the prayers:

ADAM: Son Cain! my first-born—wherefore art thou silent?

CAIN: Why should I speak?

ADAM: To pray.

CAIN: Have ye not prayed?

ADAM: We have, most fervently.

CAIN: And loudly: I Have heard you . . .

CAIN: And wherefore plucked ye not the tree of life?
Ye might have then defied him.

ADAM: Oh! my son, Blaspheme not: these are Serpent's words.

CAIN: Why not?
The snake spoke truth; it was the Tree of Knowledge;
It was the Tree of Life: knowledge is good,
And Life is good; and how can both be evil?

EVE: My boy! thou speakest as I spoke in sin . . .
Behold thy father cheerful and resigned—
And do as he doth. [Exeunt ADAM and EVE.]

ZILLAH: Wilt thou not, my brother?

ABEL: Why wilt thou wear this gloom upon thy brow,
Which can avail thee nothing, save to rouse
The Eternal anger?

ADAH: My beloved Cain
Wilt thou frown even on me?

The Perceiver Element Grid

The first type of qualitative grid, the Perceiver Element Grid (PEG), is used to capture the interpersonal construing in the family as it appears in the first act of the play. The characters as *perceivers* are listed on the left-hand side of the grid; as *elements*, construed by the others, they are listed along the top (see Figure 1). For example, Adam describes Cain as *silent* and says that he talks *serpent's words* (see the top row of the grid). The text is scanned for all instances of constructs (in the form of adjectives or phrases) that each character applies to self and to the others. It is important, of course, not to be selective in any way in carrying out this process, so that the grid reflects the text independent of any hypotheses the rater already holds.

		ELEMENTS				
		ADAM	EVE	CAIN	ABEL	ADAH
PERCEIVERS	ADAM			SILENT SERPENT'S WORDS		
	EVE	CHEERFUL AND RESIGNED	I SPOKE IN SIN I HAVE REPENTED	SPEAKS IN SIN BE LIKE FATHER: CHEERFUL AND RESIGNED		
	CAIN	YOU MIGHT HAVE DEFIED GOD. COULD NOT KEEP HIS PLACE IN EDEN YIELDED TO SERPENT AND TO WOMAN FOLLY – DEADLY ERROR TAMED DOWN	MY MOTHER HAS FORGOT THE MIND WHICH MADE HER THIRST FOR KNOWLEDGE AT THE RISK OF AN ETERNAL CURSE MY MOTHER'S HASTE	NAUGHT TO ASK (NOR THANK FOR) SICK AT HEART DIDN'T CHOOSE TO BE BORN NOT MY FAULT MOTHER ATE THE FRUIT I DESPISE MYSELF – WOULD I NEVER HAVE LIVED UNHAPPY AND WRETCHED	A WATCHING SHEPERD BOY – OFFERS FIRSTLINGS TO OF THE FLOCK (VS FRUITS OF THE GROUND)	FAIR MY OWN BELOVED UNDERSTANDS NOT THE MIND THAT OVERWHELMS ME
	ABEL			GLOOM UPON THY BROW		
	ADAH	SAITH HE HAS BEHELD GOD ADORES THE INVISIBLE ONLY GOD'S OWN IMAGE		MY BELOVED FROWNS EVEN ON ME		ALONE I COULD NOT NOR WOULD BE HAPPY

FIGURE 1 Perceiver Element Grid in the Eden family, showing the construing in the family drawn from Act 1.

The PEG is designed to select the most crucial material in the family’s discourse—the way they construe each other, which is so central in determining their relationships. The method is useful in working with families. It allows emotionally laden material to be viewed dispassionately and similarities and comparisons to be made. There is something particularly powerful about putting the contemporaneous construing of people in relation side by side. It

emphasizes to the family that these are views and not “objective reality.” The method is flexible and can include many different possibilities. We could have included the *family as a whole*, *God*, and *Lucifer* as elements.

Scanning the grid suggests that Cain has the most to say, and that the most is said of him. This is typical of problematic situations—one voice becomes dominant and central, and constructing becomes most elaborated around a single member. Cain is critical of his parents, and his jealousy of Abel, “a watching shepherd boy,” is apparent. The family is exercised by Cain’s mood and appearance. Looking at the self-concepts, the cells lying on the diagonal, shows both Cain and his mother to be preoccupied with negative aspects of themselves and their lives. But for Eve, this lies in the past, as she says she has repented her sins and made a *contrast reconstruction* or “slot-movement” (Kelly, 1955, p. 938). She expects Cain to do the same, exhorting him to “be like father, cheerful and resigned.” Of course, things are not this easy; and if they are, the change is likely to be superficial.

Cain reflects on life with a despair reminiscent of a modern existentialist. He clearly has a capacity for compassion and love for his fellow human beings and for nature, but he is angry with his parents, particularly with his mother, because she did not carry through her project to gain knowledge. He blames his father for being “tamed down” and for losing their place in the paradise of Eden. He is angry with God for setting the whole situation up to go so badly wrong. He is searching for meaning and coherence in his life. It seems he identifies with his mother’s yearning for meaning, which led to her tasting the fruit. But he is laboring under the contradiction that his mother has now repented and given up that quest, leaving him isolated in his own project.

The Event Perceiver Grid

We can use a second form of qualitative grid to look at the process between the two brothers as they escalate into the crisis in Act 3. In the Event Perceiver Grid (EPG) or Narrative Grid events, or episodes, are listed down the left-hand side; the members as perceivers are listed along the top. The text is scanned for examples of constructs referring to self and other, and these are placed in the cells under the relevant perceiver (see Figure 2).

		PERCEIVERS	
		CAIN	ABEL
EVENTS	1. ABEL QUESTIONS CAIN ON HIS RETURN FROM HADES	OVERWHELMING THINGS HAVE MADE ME UNFIT FOR MORTAL CONVERSE	THINE EYES ARE FLASHING WITH UNNATURAL LIGHT THY CHEEK IS FLUSHED WITH AN UNNATURAL HUE THY WORDS ARE FRAUGHT WITH UNNATURAL SOUND
	2. ABEL URGES PRAYER	THOU ART FITTER FOR WORSHIP THAN ME	AS MY ELDER I REVERE THEE THY SOUL SEEMS LABOURING IN SOME STRONG DELUSION
	3. CAIN DESCRIBES HIS FEELINGS	NOTHING CAN CALM ME NEVER KNEW CALM WAS IN THE SOUL THY PIOUS PURPOSE	
	4. ABEL PRESSES CAIN TO CHOOSE AN ALTAR AND HE QUIESCES	I HAVE NO FLOCKS I AM A TILLER OF THE GROUND I AM NEW TO THIS	BEHOLD A SHEPHERD'S HUMBLE OFFERING
	5. THEY PRAY	(ABEL'S OFFERING REEKS OF BLOOD) (I WON'T) KNEEL	GOD MADE US (WITHOUT HIM WE) ARE EVIL (WITH HIM) NOTHING CAN ERR
	6. WHIRLWIND SCATTERS CAIN'S ALTAR. ABEL SAYS 'MAKE ANOTHER OFFERING' – CAIN ATTACKS ABEL'S ALTAR	I WILL BUILD NO MORE ALTARS NOR SUFFER ANY	JEHOVAH'S WROTH IS WITH THEE ADD NOT IMPIOUS WORKS TO IMPIOUS WORDS
	7. ABEL DEFENDS HIS ALTAR. CAIN TURNS ON ABEL AND STRIKES HIM WITH A BURNING BRAND	THY GOD LOVES BLOOD! IF THOU LOV'ST THYSELF STAND BACK	I LOVE GOD FAR MORE THAN LIFE
	8. ABEL DIES	I AM THY MURDERER	FORGIVE THIS SLAYER FOR HE KNEW NOT WHAT HE DID

FIGURE 2 Event Perceiver Grid showing the steps escalating to the murder of Abel by Cain.

This kind of grid is used to look at construing between people. It is similar to the Bowtie, previously described by the first author (Procter, 1985, 2005), but allows one to examine the development of situations over time. For example, it is useful in individual therapy, when examining several different episodes in

childhood. It encourages the client to consider things from the different points of view of family members in the situations. In this case we are using it in a much smaller time frame to examine how the escalation to the murder took place in a series of steps of increasing tension and anger.

Through this sequence, as Abel urges his brother to participate in a sacrifice, a number of pieces of validation evidence for Cain's position mount up and finally break his choice to maintain a compliant stance. It begins with Cain saying that he is unfit for conversation after his journey, during which he has had such overwhelming experiences (1); he then asks Abel to leave him. However Abel persists. He comments on Cain's "unnatural" appearance and voice tone and says that he must be suffering from a "strong delusion" (2). This is a loaded, pathologizing term, indicating Abel's disapproval and disconfirmation of Cain's position. At the same time Abel says that he *reveres* Cain, although this seems to arise more from his religious beliefs, and he says that as the elder brother, Cain should precede him in the act of sacrifice. This is a classic double bind (Bateson et al., 1956), in which Abel defers to his brother while simultaneously issuing a disapproving message. This is compounded by Abel urging Cain to pray and saying that this will calm him, even though this is an example of the very act that is giving Cain such discomfiture. Cain says that nothing can calm him and that he has never experienced calm in the soul (3). He feels inferior to Abel in being a tiller rather than a shepherd, who receives more divine and family approval for his sacrifices (4).

When it comes to actually praying (5), Cain refuses to bow and spells out his complaints to God. His altar is scattered by a divine whirlwind, whereas Abel's altar burns with a column of bright flame (6). Abel appeals to Cain to repeat his sacrifice, "Before it is too late." However, at this point Cain has had enough and suddenly erupts in anger. A "flip" or step-change occurs. Until now Cain has been maintaining a position of reluctantly going along with the sacrifice ritual, saying to Abel, "Lead thou the way and I will follow—as I may." He now moves from the one-down position into a symmetrical escalation and the brothers fight. Cain attacks Abel's altar, attempting to "strew the turf along its native soil" (6, 7). When Abel tries to prevent him from doing so, Cain turns his aggression on his brother. He grabs a burning brand and

strikes Abel fatally. After a moving speech in which he tries to deny his own presence, his act, and the fatality, Cain defines himself as his brother's murderer. Even with his dying breath, Abel asks that his brother be forgiven.

We can look at anger as an internal, individual phenomenon, but the path of violence is better understood as an interpersonal process (Procter & Dallos, 2006) in which the construing positions and resultant actions interact in a mounting spiral of anger. Of course, conducting such an analysis is controversial; and it is important, in looking at circular sequences like this, that it does not obscure the fact that each participant is still making choices between alternatives and that each has responsibility for these choices. The tricky issue of taking a credulous approach to the construing of murderers and other violent offenders is discussed in a recent article by David Winter (2007).

The Perceiver Construct Grid

We can draw up a third type of qualitative grid (see Figure 3), the Perceiver Construct Grid (PCG), to examine how members are using three alternative versions of the construct *good vs. bad*. This was derived by scanning the text for examples of what each member values positively and negatively. The grid clarifies how there is a major difference in core values in the family between Cain and his parents and brother, which is nicely teased out by looking at their different versions of what constitutes good and bad. There is an ideological clash between a position of religious faith and obedience versus a valuing of knowledge and defiance.

In human groups, from families to the relations between nations and cultures, there is the tendency to form polarized camps in which each side defines itself in opposition to the other. The first author has called this actual polarization a *family construct* or, more generally, a *group construct* (Procter, 1985). Here a family construct is polarizing the family members into two groups (a) Cain versus (b) Adam, Eve, Abel, and Zillah (see Figure 4). Cain sees the others as following their faith blindly, as being pious and unwilling to use their reason to question what he sees as contradictions in their belief system. He values knowledge, questioning, doubt, and evidence. In their turn, the others see him as disloyal, impious, gloomy, sinful, and even evil.

		CONSTRUCT	
		GOOD	BAD
PERCEIVERS	1 CAIN	THIRST FOR KNOWLEDGE KNOWLEDGE IS GOOD LIFE IS GOOD DEFIANCE	PIOUS PURPOSE FOLLY, ERROR SUFFERING, PAIN BLOOD SACRIFICE YIELDING, BEING HUMBLER OR TAMED
	2 ADAM EVE ABEL	LOVE OF GOD MORE THAN LIFE CALM, CHEERFUL, RESIGNED FORGIVENESS REPENTANCE WITH GOD NOTHING CAN ERR	ETERNAL ANGER SERPENT'S WORDS SIN WITHOUT GOOD AND GLORY AND ETERNITY ALL ARE EVIL
	3 ADAH	MUTUAL LOVE (LOVE BETWEEN SIBLINGS) PARENTAL PLEASURE IN CHILDREN SPREADING JOY (WE CAN MAKE ANOTHER PARADISE)	TO ME MY SOLITUDE SEEMS SIN STEPPING BETWEEN HEART AND HEART (of Lucifer splitting lovers) KNOWLEDGE BRINGS ETERNAL SORROW SERPENT'S LIES

FIGURE 3 Perceiver Construct Grid showing three versions of the construct good versus bad.

A family construct is different from a personal construct in that it is not merely a distinction held in the mind of a person that is used to anticipate events and govern choices. It is a shared dimension, a predicament, an interactional or structural pattern at the level of the group. Valeria Ugazio (1999), in a more social

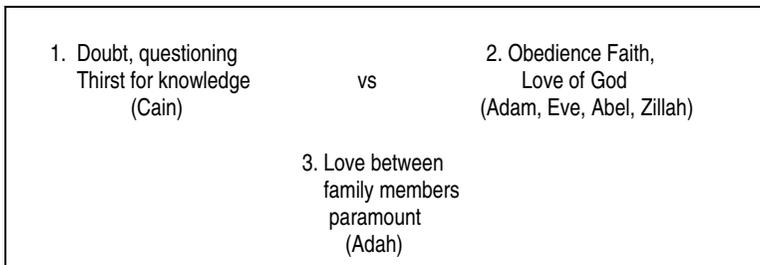


FIGURE 4 Superordinate family construct or semantic polarity.

constructionist account, called such a dimension a *family semantic polarity*. She clarified the difference well:

Semantic polarities (are located) at the level of the conversation. According to this view, the polar structure of meaning provides a matrix within which interdependent subjectivities are constructed and maintained. Duality ... is an attribute of the conversational matrix within which individual identities take form ... it antecedes thought. ... Family semantic polarities contribute in a determinant way to the organization of subjective processes and orient the subject's (mental) representations, but they are not themselves representations. (Ugazio, 1999, Chapter 2, section 2.3, translated by J. Jennings)

The overall group polarity is maintained and shaped by the actions and constructs of the individual members, but it itself structures, constrains, and provides a context for individual constructions and actions. Ugazio explained that semantic polarities (or family constructs) are not learned by the child, who rather learns to position her- or himself in the semantic context of the perpetual jockeying of fellow family members (Ugazio, 1999, section 2.6).

Ugazio also argued that any polarity contains intrinsically a third position, not aligned with either pole. This is well illustrated in Byron's play by Adah (see Figure 4), who seems to occupy such a position throughout. Adah resists getting drawn into the major polarization. In a long conversation with Lucifer in Act 1, she defies him by choosing love over knowledge. The PCG shows how she has elaborated a third position associated with her role as mediator between the two major camps. She consistently values family love and companionship over all else, contrasting it to solitude, which she identifies as a sin. She attempts to conciliate between the two factions and to soften their mutual criticism, appealing to her mother not to judge Cain too quickly. She describes Cain in Act 3 as a "gentle and contrite spirit." She insists that her young family stay together after Cain's banishment by Adam. Unlike Cain, she is not haunted by death or regretful for the loss of paradise, but is much more concerned with the current situation.

Conclusion

We have illustrated the use here of three forms of qualitative grid. Others include the Event Element Grid, the Perceiver Dyad Grid (Procter, 2002), and the Event Dyad Grid. They are a powerful means of summarizing construing in a situation and may be used in individual, family, or group research and intervention. They have the advantage of being very user friendly and, with sensitive use, can contribute significantly to psychotherapeutic and consultation situations. We believe they flow directly from Kelly's original theorizing and spirit of experimentation, in which the different (or new) forms are devised in the moment to reflect the purpose of the work at hand.

Here we have introduced the methods as a tool for literary criticism and see them as potentially useful in analyzing plays, novels, or perhaps historical situations; they could be particularly useful as educational tools. In Byron's play the techniques have, we hope, allowed us to tease out the dramatic core of the drama.

The construct of good versus evil (and similar evaluative constructs such as right versus wrong and true versus false) is pervasive in most human societies and no doubt serves a vital functioning in regulating codes of behavior, ethics, and justice. The young child may be told his or her actions are good or naughty and thereby will learn the rules and values local to the culture. It can become problematic if the child is told that he or she is good or bad as a person. However, it becomes even more problematic when it is used to discriminate *us* versus *them*, and to define an in-group in contrast to outsiders who are construed with disapproval. The identity of those at the "good" pole is actually shored up by labeling the others as evil, bad, or wrong. The members are evaluating themselves versus the others with the identical verbal labels of "good" and "bad," but in a totally reversed way. Communication and interaction then becomes deeply befuddling and problematic, and the conditions may be set for dangerous escalation and conflict, as seen so tragically in the Eden story.

PCP can provide a powerful and detailed way of analyzing and mapping complex interpersonal dilemmas and conflicts. It can be applied to small groups such as families but also to large political situations. PCP provides a framework that is simultaneously compassionate and accepting of alternative constructions

of reality, and dispassionate in providing a set of methods for mapping and analyzing interpersonal problems and group polarizations. Qualitative grids may be added to the list of useful PCP tools that have been devised.

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