Wandering through Guilt

Wandering through Guilt: The Cain Archetype in the Twentieth-Century Novel

By

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Slums, years, have buried you. I would not dare
Console you if I could. What can be said,
Except that suffering is exact, but where
Desire takes charge, readings will grow erratic?
—Philip Larkin, *Deceptions*, 1950

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INTRODUCTION

Verses 4:1-26 of the Book of Genesis engendered the Western tradition of a figure that would undergo, in the following millennia, the most varied literary interpretations: Cain. Sentenced by Yahweh to be "a fugitive and a wanderer in the earth" to atone for the murder of his brother Abel, Cain would become, paradoxically and controversially, the founder of the first city in the history of man. His image in the Bible – the book considered by Auerbach, together with Homer's epics, the model of all future literary productions of the West[1] – is ambiguous and polysemic. Cain is the remorseless killer of Abel, who, interrogated by God about the disappearance of his brother, merely replies: "Am I my brother's keeper?". Cain is the symbol of the division between the two main agricultural tasks and of a father's unjust discrimination: Abel keeps flocks while Cain tills the earth and, for reasons that are not explained, God prefers Abel's offering. Cain is also the derelict wanderer in a hostile world, condemned by Yahweh: "Now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand", to which Cain replies: "My punishment is greater than I can bear… from thy face I shall be hidden… whoever finds me shall slay me". Consequently, Cain is destined to bear a mark on his forehead, a mark which should protect him but also brands him in the eyes of the world. Finally, Cain is the founder of the "civic" human *consortium*, as he goes on to found the first city, which he calls Enoch after the name of his firstborn son.

It is a mysterious and fascinating story, which carries within it many of our fundamental myths. In the history of literature, Cain is represented as the fratricide, the rebel, the wanderer, and the founder of civilization. The poetic potentialities of this character seem to be infinite, and the themes and paradigms associated with his story are portrayed differently according to personal and historical contingencies. A relatively short passage in a book – albeit "the model" book – has originated, mainly through its metaphoric and allusive concision, numerous evocative patterns in the collective memory of many societies. When we move the analysis of these patterns out of the Western tradition, we can find a common set of *topoi* shared by cultures distant in time and space, even in the literary productions of countries built on a non-Christian tradition. It does not seem too far-fetched, therefore, to propose the notion that the

Bible gives just one of the representations of what can be considered an archetype: the story of a wanderer who, marked with guilt – or a sense of guilt – makes a journey of atonement in physical or psychological wastelands, with greater or lesser success.

This book explores how this archetypal myth – the pattern of guilt and atonement through wandering that is embodied in the Bible by the figure of Cain – appears also in a non-Western context such as postwar Japan and the literature of that time. Following the critical studies of Northrop Frye on archetypal poetics but also other critical approaches, this paradigm is seen to recur in postwar Japan not only in a common myth already present in the public imagination, but also in the influence of Christianity.

The starting point of this study and its prerequisite condition is that the pattern of wandering as an expiation of a guilt must have no functional purpose within the narrative; that is, the wandering of the characters must be practically aimless in relation to the plot. One of the few possible ways to carry out an analysis that overcomes the contingency of the plot in order to retrace a transcendental paradigm, while taking into account the historical meaning of the work and its socio-cultural background, is to approach the text from a critical framework based on belief in common myths and archetypes. This is the framework developed by Northrop Frye.

A comparative methodology that goes beyond the borders of countries which share a common cultural heritage is often seen as hazardous, if not presumptuous. Dealing with contemporary literature allows more freedom in this respect, when we consider the more intense – or global, to use a popular word – cultural influences that nowadays pervade most countries; nonetheless, comparative criticism must move cautiously and adopt tools that focus on what can be considered a common sharing of attitudes and motives. Archetypal criticism can offer a good starting point from which to consider how common patterns are represented in different cultures and literary productions. Having its roots in social anthropology and depth psychology, this approach is particularly interesting if we consider the fact that Cain's pattern of wandering implies elements – such as guilt – which are evidently related to these disciplines as well.

In 1957, Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* sanctioned the emergence of archetypal critical theory, based on an idea Frye had outlined in a previous article, "The Archetypes of Literature" (1951). He drew on what had been previously done on ritual by contemporary anthropology and on dreams in psychoanalysis;[2] specifically, Frye incorporated James Frazer's *Golden Bough* (1890-1915), a study of cultural mythologies, and Jung's theories on the collective unconscious. According to Jung, beneath the "personal unconscious" there is a "collective unconscious" that is universal in that it

is inherited and not created by individual experience. As a consequence, it is possible to assume a commonality of "stories" – the literal meaning of the word *mythos* is in fact "story", "narrative" – which are shared by distant cultures. Myth comes to be seen as a psychological model, something intrinsic in our brain structure but which is so bound up with society that the limits between what is "original" and what is culturally constructed become indistinct.

Myths are continually rethought, rewritten, revisited. It is moving from this assumption that Frye transferred his theory of archetypes to literature. He considered the archetypes to be centripetal structures of meaning, and in myth he found "the structural principles of literature isolated". Frye's theory is closely associated with the basic patterns of literary genres, but at the same time it transcends them. Myth provides the basis for a typological classification of literature which both maintains a mythical frame and reflects the indigenous structures of literature itself.[3] According to Frye, truth and falsehood are concerns of history; the truth of poetry lies in its structure.

The starting point of Frye's conjectures is the idea of myths as both culturally and psychologically inherited and socially adapted:

> Man lives, not directly or nakedly in nature like the animals, but within a mythological universe, a body of assumptions and beliefs developed from his existential concerns. Most of this is held unconsciously, which means that our imaginations may recognize elements of it, when presented in art or literature, without consciously understanding what it is that we recognize. Practically all that we can see of this body of concern is socially conditioned and culturally inherited. Below the cultural inheritance there must be a common psychological inheritance, otherwise forms of culture and imagination outside our own traditions would not be intelligible to us. But I doubt if we can reach this common inheritance directly, by-passing the distinctive qualities in our specific culture. One of the practical functions of criticism, by which I mean the conscious organizing of a cultural tradition, is, I think, to make us more aware of our mythological conditioning.[4]

The role of literature is to eternalize the patterns and the power of myths in recreating the "metaphorical use of language". Literature is not seen by Frye as a contamination of myth; on the contrary, it is a vital and unavoidable part of myth's development.[5] Myths are employed in art in order to express what is "universal in the event", to give an example of "the kind of thing that is always happening". A myth is a particularly significant literary *tropos*, whose meaning is wider and deeper because it

is "designed not to describe a specific situation but to contain it in a way that does not restrict its significance to that one situation."[6]

By basing the legitimacy of critical analysis on universal but also contingent elements, *Anatomy of Criticism* laid the groundwork for archetypal criticism. Yet Frye went on to write another work which is essential to this study. In 1982, *The Great Code* linked the mythological aspects of the Bible to the production of later literature, analyzing how elements of the Bible had created an imaginative framework, a "mythological universe", from which literature has drawn its images as water from a well. The Bible can therefore be considered as a cluster of myths which, originating from a common understanding of the world by men of every country, found form in the West in one major book that was codified over a thousand years. Literature assimilates these patterns, and creates something that is somehow more disturbing than the original in that it has more layers of signification and less clarity of meaning:

> What we usually think of as acceptance or rejection of belief does not in either case involve any disturbance in our habitual mental processes. It seems to me that trying to think within categories of myth, metaphor, and typology – all of them exceedingly "primitive" categories from most points of view – does involve a good deal of such disturbance. The result, however, I hope and have reason to think, is an increased lucidity, an instinct for cutting through a jungle of rationalizing verbiage to the cleared area of insight.[7]

Frye's archetypal criticism can account for structures which recur in many different literary traditions, and, although this approach has been seen as an outcome of an "obvious romanticism",[8] it is a good framework within which significance can be uncovered. As William Righter points out, though, it is not enough just to assume the existence of mythical correspondences, ritual repetitions, and archetypal figures and relationships. We should also move on and analyze what the existence of the myth beneath the surface tells us, how much more we "understand of a work through seeing the presumed skeleton beneath the skin", and whether mythic tales "underlying a particular fiction have a meaning that the fiction itself does not".[9] To reduce the underlying meaning of a text to a monomyth, as a fundamental paradigm on which infinite literary variations can be performed,[10] would imply a simplicity that modern works seldom carry. If Cain's story, like Ulysses' and Faust's, is the key to the understanding of hidden aspects of great novels, it is because it gives them unity in complexity, "divine quality" in historical humdrum.

A connection is established, therefore, between the original myth and the social conflicts under which it has developed into new forms. In this study we do not merely propose a close reading (at least not only), because the mythical and social substructures will also be considered, nor a distant reading, as Franco Moretti suggests,[11] although we do draw on his methodology in order to find a pattern that can acquire a deeper meaning only involving a wider perspective. I intend to pursue a kind of "middle-distance reading", following Frye in rejecting barriers between different methods of analysis and fostering the cooperation of meticulous examination and reminiscent comparison.

In the novels analyzed, the social conflicts that feed into the structural and archetypal principles are those of the years of the Second World War and its aftermath, from 1940 to 1960. In England, and to some extent in Europe as a whole, these conflicts tended to be more personal than social, although mixed with the attempt to universalize guilt. In this sense, guilt becomes existential, and adds intensity and tragedy to individual lives. Germany had different conflicts: in fact, in addition to archetypal guilt, it had to deal with the postwar guilt related to Nazism and war horror. In postwar Japan, there are two further conflicts, both particularly important in relation to the legacy of Cain: Christianity and survivor guilt.

This book is divided into three parts. The first part is dedicated to a socio-cultural, religious, mythical, and psychoanalytical survey of the main elements of the pattern under scrutiny: guilt and wandering. The second part forms the core of the study, with the analysis of two English novels published between 1940 and 1950: *The Power and the Glory* (1940) by Graham Greene and Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano* (1947). Both are characterized by the incarnation of historical but also universal guilt in the protagonists, both of whom are drunkards, outcasts, burdened by metaphysical and existential guilt, and destined for tragedy. The third and last part is centred on novels produced in the two countries that were perhaps most "marked" by the war: *Der Tod in Rom* (*Death in Rome*, 1954) by the German Wolfgang Koeppen, and *Nobi* (*Fires on the Plain*, 1951) by the Japanese Ōoka Shōhei.

These novels were chosen because each portrays some of the most relevant aspects of the paradigm I aim analyzing as it appeared in the years under examination. All the works that in one way or another could fall under the generalizing definition of "Holocaust literature", "Atomic Bomb literature", or literature about the Returning Soldier, have been excluded; firstly, because it would have implied a different kind of approach; secondly, and more importantly, because in those cases the theme of wandering follows different patterns and is more concretely related to

more specific historical contingencies. The novels analyzed here represent history in its archetypical expressions, its fundamental dynamics: they often claim to grasp it through reference to mythologies and the use of mythic methods. In these works guilt is taken for granted and amplified by the horror of the Second World War and the uncertainties of the postwar period; wandering is one of its consequences, atonements, and perditions.

PART I

CAIN'S CHRONOTOPE: GUILT AND WANDERING

CHAPTER ONE

THE ANALYSIS OF GUILT: PSYCHOLOGY, MYTH, RELIGION

In depth we feel guilty, not of sin but of "dust".
This is the unconditional "badness",
ontological, not moral, of the afflicted ego.
—Malcolm France, *The Paradox of Guilt*

1.1 Guilt and Psychology

The symbiotic relation between literature and life has always been controversial: biography and literary production, socio-historical context and text, geopolitical background and reception are some of the polyvalent interactions which criticism has bravely – although sometimes diffidently – pursued in its investigations. As stated in the introduction to this work, the examination of this relationship is not the main aim of this study; rather, all these elements are the fibres of its plot. However, we now have to pay some attention to one of these elements and the role it bears in this textual analysis: we are referring to the specific domain of psychoanalysis. Although it is not my intention to pursue an exclusively psychoanalytic critical approach, it is necessary to clarify what we are dealing with when we talk about "guilt", and how it relates to our being human, our social behaviour, and our position in history.

We shall examine the idea of guilt starting from the most influential psychoanalytical theories to have developed over the last century – Freud's, Jung's, Klein's. This rapid preliminary overview simply aims to outline the phenomenon of guilt from a psychological perspective, with an awareness of the cultural implications that defined it while being defined by it. Subsequently, guilt is presented in its relationship with myths and religions, in order to see how mankind has faced up to the inescapable guilt feelings creating placebo structures or self-punishing devices – providing literature with rich materials for its models. In the next chapter of this first part we will concentrate on mankind's need to annihilate or at least cope with these guilt feelings, and the means it has developed to do

so. The next step will be a survey of some of the mythical and literary images which reproduce atoning patterns, wandering in particular, and the figures that embody its essence: pilgrims, scapegoats and the Wandering Jew.

Other important aspects of guilt in relation to our recent history will be examined in the following chapters: war guilt, collective guilt, and also survivor guilt provide the background for the novels we will be dealing with especially in the third part of this study, in which we analyze the literary production of those countries which most were "marked" by war-related traumas. This is one of the main points to consider when investigating literature produced in the aftermath of the Second World War, in particular works which overtly anatomize the burden of responsibility or historical oppression lurking inside the individual. We attempt to link psychoanalysis, history and literature to uncover the underlying systems of literary works which share and reproduce general patterns in a particular historical moment.

According to the *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology*, edited by James M. Baldwin and published in 1925, "Guilt is the state of having committed a crime, or consciously offended against moral law". Here the more modern meaning of guilt, as it was to be developed later by psychoanalytical studies and as it is often perceived in our time, is completely absent. Guilt is the infraction of a law, the breaking of a rule, something visible and objectively provable. But this is just one of the possible senses of guilt, known as "objective guilt"; "subjective guilt" had in fact already been referred to (although only in a draft) by Sigmund Freud in 1895, as a "pure sense of guilt without content".[1]

Freud used the term "sense of guilt" (*Schuldgefühl*) for the first time in 1906 in *Psychoanalysis and the Establishment of Facts in Legal Proceedings*. When considering the methods to be used to determine the guilt of the accused, he wrote: "In your investigation you could be led astray by the neurotic, who reacts as if he were guilty, although he is innocent, because a sense of guilt which already existed and lay hidden in him takes over the specific accusation made against him".[2]

Freud never dedicated a systematic work to guilt, but often mentioned the topic.[3] It is in 1907 that the modern concept of guilt first appears significantly in his work. In *Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices* he writes about a "sense of guilt about which we know nothing":

> an awareness of guilt […] which we must define as unconscious, although this is an apparent contradiction in terms. It has its source in certain remote psychic processes, but is constantly revived in the temptation that is renewed at every relevant occasion, and on the other hand gives rise to a

> lurking, waiting anxiety, an expectation of disaster, connected through the idea of punishment to the internal perception of temptation.[4]

The use of the word "lurking" makes it evident that guilt is originally considered as something hidden, ready to burst out, probably caused by a "temptation", and somehow related to an undisclosed desire to be punished.

In 1913, in *Totem and Taboo*, Freud connected guilt to a primeval family situation, and to the notorious Oedipus complex, the incestuous desire of the band of brothers that triggers the murder of the father.[5] A primeval tribal situation related to this complex is at the origin of guilt: a violent and strong male individual, father of the offspring, has banished all adult males, challengers to his monopoly on sexual relations with the horde's females. As a consequence, the young males grow up loving and admiring the ruler, their father, but hating and fearing him as well. Having reached adulthood away from the horde, the offspring share a wish to get rid of their father: they band together, return to their original home, kill him and eat him. After the murder, their love for the man resurfaces, and they start experiencing guilt and remorse, both individually and collectively. It is in expiation of this act that they later establish their father, in the guise of a totem, as a deity and institute prohibitions – taboos – against killing and incest, in order to avoid the repetition of a similar action. According to Freud, it is from this act that evil entered humanity, together with religion and morality, based partly on the needs of society and partly on the expiation that this sense of guilt requires.[6] Guilt becomes an inherited baggage, an experience through which every child has to pass; any fixation during this period leads to a sense of guilt which can become unconscious guilt when repressed.

However, it was with the advent of World War I that the psychoanalyst elaborated his first full theory about guilt. In *Mourning and Melancholia* (1915), melancholia – today we would call it depression – is characterized, together with a physical dejection, by the reduction of interest in the outside world, in a loss of the capacity to love and a general apathy, and, finally, by a "feeling of despondency about self which expressed itself in self-reproach and self-berating, culminating in the delusional expectation of punishment".[7] The depressed person moves against himself or herself the self-reproaches that were once destined to a love object (both Freud and Klein agree that guilt is unavoidable once an individual realizes that the object of love is also object of anger). This theory was later abandoned in psychoanalysis, but it was nonetheless very important in its development with regard to guilt, in introducing the idea that guilt feelings originate from an inner conflict.

The following stage was the essay *Some Character-Types Met with in Psycho-Analytic Work*, published in 1916, in which Freud identified "criminals from a sense of guilt", "very respectable" patients who had committed "forbidden actions". The interesting aspect of these cases is that these patients experience "mental relief" after having suffered from an "oppressive feeling of guilt", mitigated because this sense of guilt was "at least attached to something", the forbidden act. The vicious circle in which sense of guilt gives rise to an even deeper sense of guilt – as will be evident in the novels we are going to analyze – has its psychoanalytical basis in this statement.

At one point Freud's study of guilt gets closer to literature. In the same 1916 work he analyzes several literary characters, ranging from Shakespeare to Ibsen, as well as actual criminals, and tries to demonstrate that guilt feelings arise from unconscious creations rather than from real actions. He goes so far as to consider crimes as the consequence, and not the cause, of guilt feelings.

Freud took further steps towards the definition of guilt first in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), in which he tried to explain the origins of the sense of guilt by referring it to the death wish – the destructive drive of the psyche to reduce tensions completely and restore all living things to the inorganic state – and then in *The Ego and the Id* and *The Economic Problem of Masochism* (1923-1924), where he spoke again about an unconscious sense of guilt (*unbewusstes Schuldgefühl*, as opposed to *Schuldbewusstsein*, consciousness of guilt), although he seems to replace it with "need for punishment", a "'moral masochism' complemented by the sadism of the 'superego'".[8]

Without ever abandoning the starting point of the Oedipus complex, the definition of the superego marked an important stage in the definition of the sense of guilt. As Kalu Singh observes, "the resolution of the Oedipus complex is the establishment of the Superego", that he defines as "the guardian of the line of guilt".[9] As a matter of fact, in Freud both the accuser and the accused are internal, as the former is the superego and the latter is the ego. All senses of guilt depend on the relationship between these two, the "directors" of our inborn aggressiveness which is taken restrained by our inner "controller", the superego, or, as John McKenzie calls it, the "infantile or negative conscience".[10] The origin of guilt feelings depends upon our aggressive instincts; the repression of instinctual trends causes its emergence. The more we renounce our instinct, the more we deny our true nature, the more we feel guilt, the result of our unconscious temptation. Theodor Reik gives a powerful metaphor in this regard:

> [The superego] is omniscient as God. Exactly as He it tortures just those people who are virtuous. Like God, the superego is more severe toward those who renounce many instinctual gratifications than toward those who are lenient and allow themselves some satisfaction of this kind.[11]

Freud himself explained why "saints" are right to call themselves sinners: they are exposed to temptations, to instinctual satisfaction in a particularly high degree, since temptations are merely increased by constant frustration, while occasional satisfaction of them would cause them to diminish, at least momentarily.[12]

This concept is further developed in what is perhaps Freud's most significant work on guilt: *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930). In this study he reaffirms guilt feeling as a reaction to the unconscious appearance of aggressive drives, and the anxiety that results from the temptation of aggressive acts. The sense of guilt is the need for punishment arousing from the tension between the harsh super-ego and the ego that is subjected to it: "Civilization, therefore, obtains mastery over the individual's dangerous desire for aggression by weakening and disarming it and by setting up an agency within him to watch over it, like a garrison in a conquered city".[13]

Men can feel guilty – or sinful if devout – not only when they admit to having done something they think to be "bad", but even when they just think of doing it:

> We may reject the existence of an original, as it were natural, capacity to distinguish good from bad. What is bad is often not all what is injurious or dangerous to the ego; on the contrary, it may be something which is desirable and enjoyable to the ego. […] At the beginning, therefore, what is bad is whatever causes one to be threatened with loss of love […]. This state of mind is called a "bad conscience"; but actually it does not deserve this name, for at this stage the sense of guilt is clearly only a fear of loss of love, "social" anxiety […]. A great change takes place only when the authority is internalized through the establishment of a super-ego. The phenomena of conscience then reach a higher stage. Actually, it is not until now that we should speak of conscience or a sense of guilt. At this point, too, the fear of being found out comes to an end; the distinction, moreover, between doing something bad and wishing to do it disappears entirely, since nothing can be hidden from the super-ego, not even thoughts.[14]

Therefore there are two origins of the sense of guilt, according to Freud: one arising from the fear of authority, and the other from the fear of the superego. Both civilization and each individual have been marked by the onset of these two sources.

In the same work, Freud makes one of the most famous assertions about guilt and the burden that it has brought to humanity: he explains how the sense of guilt is the most important problem in the development of civilization, and how the price we pay for progress is the loss of happiness due to its heightening. Twentieth-century civilization knows this only too well. The World Wars, the Holocaust and all the genocides we have witnessed, as well the traumas they have generated, have been transformed, in the novels we are going to analyze, into an underlying unhappiness which becomes almost cosmic.

When considering the whole of Freud's studies on the topic, therefore, different kinds of guilt emerge, among which we can find the already mentioned guilt of the unresolved Oedipus complex, the guilt caused by the impulse of hate, the longing of the melancholic, and also the idea of collective guilt, that we will discuss later. In all cases some constant elements emerge which tend to mark all men and women, and also their literary counterparts. Firstly, guilt appears as something inescapable, because it is connected with an ancestral crime and an "inherited mental force". Furthermore, guilt is not necessarily felt when we are "objectively" guilty. As we have already seen, it is paradoxically experienced more often when we are perfectly innocent. On the contrary, actual responsibility can be completely detached from any sense of guilt, as is seen in those criminals who are unable to feel any remorse, either for personal causes or because the culture in which they grew up exculpates them.[15]

Another of the founding fathers of psychoanalysis, Wilhelm Stekel, also focuses on guilt in his studies, although he diverges from Freud's ideas. In *Conditions of Anxiety and Their Cure* (1908) neurosis is the disease of a bad conscience, and the "internal system of authority" of an individual is regarded as necessary for a human person to be considered as such, but "the price he pays is to be inflicted, by the excessive development of authority, with feelings which are described as guilt, anxiety and despair".[16] Also for Donald Winnicott guilt is an "anxiety with a special quality", clarifying with Freud that it involves longing for the loved object; he also seems to agree that anxiety needs a certain degree of sophistication and self-consciousness in order to become a sense of guilt. As a consequence, in his opinion guilt feelings are not something inculcated but "an aspect of the development of the human individual".[17]

Jung's psychological approach – defined by Martin Buber a psychological type of solipsism[18] – adds a different perspective to the question of guilt. The centrality of the self and its projections on the external world, which are characteristic of his method, are also evident

when considering his idea of the "seat" of evil in an individual, whose process of individualization and realization is indeed brought out by the "integration of evil as the unification of opposites in the psyche". As a consequence, Buber affirms, Jung's pan-psychism (like Freud's materialism) implies no ontological sense in guilt, no "reality in the relation between the human person and the world entrusted to him in his life".[19] Nietzsche had said quite the opposite in *On the Genealogy of Morals* in 1887. He highlighted the fact that in German the word guilt (*Schuld*) has its origin in a very material concept, *Schulden*, "debts". Nietzsche wonders if any guilt can be "expiated" by suffering, considering that everything can be paid for. The solution he finds implies a radical, seemingly paradoxical resolution: the complete abandonment of Christian faith:

> The advent of the Christian God, as the maximum god attained so far, was therefore accompanied by the maximum feeling of guilty indebtedness on earth. Presuming we have gradually entered upon the *reverse* course, there is no small probability that with the irresistible decline of faith in the Christian God there is now also a considerable decline of faith in mankind's feeling of guilt; indeed, the prospect cannot be dismissed that the complete and definitive victory of atheism might free mankind of this whole feeling of guilty indebtedness toward its origin, its *causa prima*. Atheism and a kind of *second innocence* belong together.[20]

We will investigate the relationship between guilt and religion and their interactions more deeply in the following chapters, and we also see how religion can enhance the sense of guilt in the characters of our novels, especially in the Japanese case. Here the "imported" sense of guilt related to an alien faith acts as an even stronger external superego which confounds more than a culturally inherited creed, somehow engendering the same development pattern that Freud identified in the growth of a man; that is, the change from social anxiety into internalized guilt.

Melanie Klein, possibly the major psychoanalyst to have paid attention to guilt after Freud, also connects the sense of guilt to aggressiveness, as Freud did. We feel guilty whenever we feel a real or supposed aggressiveness inside us (and this idea of the sense of guilt resulting from the repression of natural aggressiveness is not dissimilar from the philosophical tradition stemming from Leibniz, whereby the limitation of creatures – the limitation that contradicts human nature itself – is the origin of moral evil). However, whereas Freud posits the birth of the superego around the age of five, when the Oedipus complex declines, Klein attributes it to an earlier stage.[21] In addition, according to Klein, the

sense of guilt emerges within the relationship between mother and child, and not in the three-party situation described by Freud.

Melanie Klein gave her most significant definition of guilt in 1935: guilt feelings originate from a depressive position, which she called "depressive guilt". In her opinion, only a sufficiently integrated personality can experience guilt, because it emerges only if the individual is capable of representing a person who suffers for what he/she has done as an inner projection. As a consequence, in this perspective guilt feelings do not arise in a primitive human status, but, on the contrary, they can happen only if the person has reached a certain maturity.

An interesting stage in the onset of guilt is explained in *Envy and Gratitude* (1957). In this study Klein asserts that if guilt appears prematurely in a person who is not ready to bear it, it is experienced as a persecutory feeling: the subject feels persecuted by the object which has caused guilt. This second kind of guilt is called "persecutory guilt". It originates during the early life of an individual, and its effects continue to haunt the person even in adulthood, like depressive guilt, coexisting with it.[22] Persecutory guilt can cause other symptoms such as insomnia, somatic reactions, and obsessive rituals, as well as apparently opposite behaviour patterns like excessive or manic lack of inhibition, or sadism, as an attempt to identify with the aggressor, and the sadomasochistic tendency to engage in such relationships. Interestingly enough, as Roberto Speziale-Bagliacca suggests, "[w]hen we live in the world of persecutory guilt, we are so to speak victims of guilt, a guilt that can be handed down from father to son, even down to the fifth generation, as the Bible has it".[23] The same kind of guilt can be found in Kierkegaard, and in literature; for example, Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, while, for Speziale-Bagliacca, the Erinyes could exemplify the persecutory sense of guilt in classical mythology.[24]

The internalization of guilt – so important in the definition of its deepest feelings – is explicit in some of the behaviour patterns described by Klein, as it was in Freud. In "On Criminality" (1934), Klein describes how disobedient children "would feel compelled to be naughty and to get punished, because the real punishment, however severe, was reassuring in comparison with the murderous attacks which they were continually expecting from fantastically cruel parents".[25] As naughty children look for punishment, so do our characters. And as our deepest hatred is directed against the hatred within ourselves – as exposed by Klein in *Guilt and Reparation* (1937) – so will our characters direct their need of punishment against themselves, turning into outcasts, wanderers among strangers isolated from the ones they love, or should love.

The relationship between guilt and need for expiation is one of the most interesting aspects related to guilt, especially for this study. Whereas for objective guilt the act of reconciliation with society takes place through the law structure and its penitentiary system, for subjective guilt the question is more complex. When considering the difference between realistic and unrealistic guilt, McKenzie says that all guilt feelings are subjective, making psychoanalysis necessary for the resulting symptoms of anxiety-feelings, obsessions, phobias, compulsions and depression.[26] Nonetheless, as we well know, psychoanalysis is not the only means that humanity has developed to fight guilt; on the contrary, it is the last in order of appearance. Subjective guilt does not pertain to the sphere of law but to that of ethics and theology, although the two are obviously connected; morality and religion are strictly linked to the way men try to confront the sense of guilt.

If we first consider how, from a psychological point of view, people react to guilt, and the consequences of these feelings on one's mind, we can better follow how the major systems created by men – in particular religions – have worked to build structures and substructures to tackle it. A sense of guilt can be avoided by many different mechanisms, many of which may interact at the same time. It can be displaced from one object to another, for example, although in this case the root of the problem is just moved to something else – probably, even deeply repressed. Guilt can also be exploited as a means to obtain masochistic pleasure in exercising sadistic control over people and making them feeling guilty for something. Sometimes we try (just like the characters of our novels) to provoke others into accusing us unjustly, in order to defend ourselves properly, having failed painfully on a previous occasion. Complex techniques like these are evident in sadomasochistic relationships, in which we create events in order to render other people guilty, or when we try to share with others the unfortunate acts we alone have committed. More often, these mechanisms are not used against other people, but against our inner world, in order to attack ourselves.[27] This is evident in the characters we will meet later in this study, where masochistic impulses very often dominate the scene. Masochism and self-reproach are also generated by what one often calls "ill-luck", that is, according to Freud, external frustration which

> so greatly enhances the power of the conscience in the super-ego. As long as things go well with a man, his conscience is lenient and lets the ego do all sorts of things; but when misfortune befalls him, he searches his soul, acknowledges his sinfulness, heightens the demands of his conscience, imposes abstinences on himself and punishes himself with penances. […] Fate is regarded as a substitute for the parental agency. If a man is

> unfortunate it means that he is no longer loved by this highest power […]. This becomes especially clear where fate is looked upon in the strictly religious sense of being nothing else than an expression of the Divine Will. […] If he has met with misfortune, he does not throw the blame on himself but on his fetish, which has obviously not done its duty, and he gives it a thrashing instead of punishing himself.[28]

Defined by Speziale-Bagliacca as a common psychological "habit", the attempt to reduce the pain of self-accusations can also give rise to a desire to believe in fantasies which make us feel justified, or at least less culpable.[29] Needless to say, this mechanism is not always successful in the novels presented here.

Our civilization seems destined to feel guilty and to find no proper means to avoid this feeling. Man is the "moral climber",[30] but on his way he experiences some moments when guilt seems to be heavier than at other times. The characters we are going to meet are of this species, in one of those historical moments.

1.2 Psyche and Myth: Patterns of Guilt

We have seen how the sense of guilt is installed in our inner self – mind, soul, psyche – intrinsically and unavoidably, forging our relationship with the outer world. The cultural responses to this "presence" within us have been various and have taken many forms in the history of mankind; they are easily recognizable in the extensive occurrence of guilt-related topics in myths, literatures, and religions.

From this point of view, psychoanalysis and mythology aim at the same result: to free people from the burden of their guilt, and doing so in the most explicit way possible. In *Myth and Guilt* (1957) Theodor Reik investigated the ways in which guilt has always been interpolated in myths, traditions, and religions, arguing that religious and moral laws have aggravated the consequences of guilt.

It is interesting, therefore, to see how cultures with different backgrounds have reacted to an acquired burden of guilt, and how they put this into fiction. Eastern traditions, for example, have had a completely different relationship with guilt feelings; we will see how in the following chapters. Guilt, as psychoanalysts affirm, is not just related to a single culture but to a sort of "universal" common brain structure, as Jung believed. Reik accepts as true the idea of a "World Sense of Guilt", and considers it the "fatal flaw inherent within our civilization itself".[31] This has been shared by Freud and many philosophers, including Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard and Heidegger, and informs the creations of

Shakespeare, Goethe, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Kafka, Sartre, O'Neill, Faulkner, to mention just some of the major literary figures. Nonetheless, Reik continues, there is at least one other fictional product which portrays this universal feeling, "one kind of collective production that can be compared to those individual fantasies. They contain, distorted and transformed by changes during thousands of years, memories from an early phase of human evolution: I mean the myths";[32] myths open windows onto man's past like "fossils for archaeologists". To dig into myths is like digging into the fears and conflicts of mankind, and their fictional outcomes.

To begin with classical culture, Roberto Calasso, in his description of classical myths, makes an interesting consideration about the origin of guilt feelings as associated, in Western culture, with the myth of the original sin. Because of its relation with primitive necessities – or perhaps the other way around – guilt is, according to Calasso, unavoidable:

> The primordial crime is the action that makes something in existence disappear: the act of eating. Guilt is thus obligatory and inextinguishable. And, given that men cannot survive without eating, guilt is woven into their physiology and forever renews itself […]. The gods aren't content to foist guilt on man. That wouldn't be enough, since guilt is part of life always. What the gods demand is an awareness of guilt. And this can only be achieved through sacrifice.[33]

Guilt is something for which the gods, or society, or our psyche, require acknowledgement. Sacrifice, or self-sacrifice – as we will see in our novels – serves this purpose. As a consequence, when mankind is forced to sacrifice, as in the case of calamities and misfortunes, it tends to associate bad luck with its faults, and to see it as the just punishment for its misdeeds. Greek literature, for example, is full of examples of what Reik calls "unconscious communal sin": "Primitive civilizations as well as half-civilized peoples share the view that crime is committed by the community and that it has to bear the burden of penalty as long as it is polluted by the misdeeds of one of its members".[34] The classical scholar Lewis Farnell observes that in Greece and Babylon, and perhaps in the entire ancient Mediterranean society, the concept of collective responsibility, the idea that the tribe is one unit of life made of the same flesh, marks an early stage of social moral.[35]

Another perspective on the concept of guilt in Greek culture is offered again by Roberto Calasso. In *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony* (1988) he examines the role of guilt in the depiction of Homeric heroes, for whom, he believes, there was no guilty party, only an immense guilt.

There was no distinction between a possible abstract concept of evil in an individual and his deeds:

> With an intuition the moderns have jettisoned and have never recovered, the heroes did not distinguish between the evil of the mind and the evil of the deed, murder and death. Guilt for them is like a boulder blocking the road; it is palpable, it looms. Perhaps the guilty party is as much a sufferer as the victim. In confronting guilt, all we can do is make a ruthless computation of the forces involved.[36]

The forces involved obviously change according to variations in society. There are hypotheses that guilt feelings appeared in the life of man at a certain phase of his evolution, five or six hundred years before Christ, among the Greeks, the Hebrews, and other Mediterranean peoples; it was conceived as a reaction to an action or to a conduct that was considered wrong or evil.[37] *Hybris* and *Nemesis*, for example, are two intertwined concepts that reflect the Greek cultural attitude towards guilt. *Hybris* is the immoderate violence of those who cannot contain their actions, who, in their relationships with others, "coldly or angrily, overcome the limits of what is right, deliberately resulting in injustice", to use a definition by Carlo Del Grande;[38] against it, there is *Nemesis*, "an impersonal divine punishment that strikes the wicked one, or Zeus' female minister who materially punishes according to the god's orders".[39] Together, these two entities represent guilt and punishment, which, according to Del Grande, from Homer to the classics, would increasingly acquire the character of necessity. Under the influx of religious and heroic currents, characters were "assembled" by the principle that going back to the origins and the consequent pacific life or, on the contrary, violent death were determined by the gods as a prize or as a punishment, according to merits or faults.[40] However this principle entered literature from religion and established itself, it is a fact that guilt concepts were rationalized, in Western civilization, by the Greeks.

For early psychologists, myths were collective daydreams, whereas today psychologists tend to study them analytically. Joseph Campbell, for example, believed that myths have constant characteristics, although they have developed into different forms when separated from the original source, "as dialects of a single language".[41] Guilt, and the myths related to it, can thus be considered as two equally unavoidable features of human civilization: all men feel guilty for a "universal or ubiquitous crime, since it was committed before all history […]. More than this: if our assumption is correct, the very concept of crime began with it".[42] The possibility of the existence of a "mother mythology" from which different traditions