

Freud and Judaism: mourning, trauma, and transmission

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Abstract: This article aims to discuss the relationship between the concept of transmission in psychoanalysis and the position of Judaism in Freud's desire. We are interested in understanding the subjective operation through which it is possible to become an *heir*, based on the assumption that the Freudian work itself bears witness to how its author was able to appropriate the *heritage* both of the Jewish culture and his family genealogy. To this end, we will examine the writing of three of his texts in contrast to his personal experiences, suggesting that the relationship between trauma, mourning, and transmission provides a key to comprehend the constitution of a psychoanalytic theory of history.

Keywords: trauma, work of mourning, transmission, Judaism.

I heard it said, there is
a stone in the water and a circle
and over the water a word
that lays around the stone.
Paul Celan

The positive and negative experiences with Jewish religion had a profound impact on Freud's personal life, and also influenced – albeit not always explicitly – the paths that led him to his greatest creation: psychoanalysis. If, on the one hand, he put much effort into not letting psychoanalysis associated with the image of a Jewish science – when trying to, for example, entrust Jung with his succession –, then on the other hand, he himself confesses in some letters certain pride in regards to the fact that it stemmed from the spirit of a Jew (Gay, 2002). This ambivalence, far from providing simplistic reductions about a defensive denial in regards to his ancestors' heritage, seems to demonstrate the space of alterity that Judaism occupies in Freud's own desire.

This article aims to discuss the connection between the development of the concept of transmission in psychoanalysis and Freud's relationship with Judaism. We are interested, specifically, in understanding the subjective operation through which it becomes possible to *inherit* something, based on the assumption that Freud's own work bears witness to how its author was able to – in his time and considering the events of his time – *become heir* to both the culture of his people and his family genealogy.

Accordingly, we will try to demonstrate how some of Freud's writings have a strong connection with his traumatic experiences and those of loss, which was a constitutive part of the construction time for certain conceptual operators. According to Peter Gay (2002), for example: "The death of his father [Jacob Freud] . . .

was a profound personal experience from which Freud drew universal implications; it functioned as a pebble thrown into a tranquil lake, causing successive circles of unsuspected radius" (p. 96). The continuities and discontinuities of Freud's work, such as in the example of the provocation of Paul Celan (2004), invite us to recover the act of throwing this rock, in an attempt to recover the freshness of the emergence of certain Freudian concepts. In fact, we will not recover the stone, since it lies at the bottom of the lake, lost in the history of each subject and the culture. Nevertheless, its circles on the surface are like sheet music to be read *a posteriori* as words, whose reading effect presupposes its inscription¹.

Methodologically, we propose to explore some nuances between Freud's work and life through two complementary perspectives: (1) based on *Mourning and melancholia*, which demonstrate the asymmetry between the metapsychological formulations about the work of mourning and Freud's own experiences of loss observed in his letters; (2) based on the rereading of his socioanthropological texts, where we read the development of his condition of heir in two moments: the writing of *Totem and taboo* – when Freud develops an origin myth of culture based on his father's murder – and of *The man Moses and the monotheistic religion* – when the biblical narrative of the liberation of the Jewish people is examined in light of trauma theory. Finally, we also suggest that the relationship between trauma, mourning and transmission provides an essential key to comprehend the constitution of a psychoanalytic theory of history.

Work of mourning in Freud

The notion of work of mourning (*trauerarbeit*) was theorized only once along the entire collection of

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¹ We thank Edson de Sousa for the generous offer of this image.

Freudian work; nevertheless, it was hugely disseminated both among Freud's successors and other disciplines. In the famous text of 1915, *Mourning and melancholia*, we read that after a period of narcissistic retraction – which may vary from case to case – the subject can elect surrogate objects for the loss, thus finding a fair development to the suffering (Freud, 1915/2011). However, as Freud explains, even if reality points to the nonexistence of the object and, also, a possible surrogate, then the Ego stands up against reality, “in an understandable rebellion,” and does not abandon so easily that which once brought satisfaction. If this substitution is not possible, according to Freud, everything indicates that, when faced with the difficulty of “starting over again,” the subject enters a pathological mourning or a melancholy.

As we have previously sought to explore (Indursky & Oliveira, 2016), in 1915 the normal mourning in Freud can be defined through three main axes: (1) a situation in which an adult subject loses one of his/her relatives, avoiding to think about the vicissitudes of a genealogical inversion; (2) a psychological and individual work (you should conduct *your own* mourning!), in which the social aspect is forgotten or neglected as a constitutive part in developing the passage from life to death; (3) a work that seeks to provide psychological conditions so that the subject can find a surrogate for the lost object, thus returning to the “previous status.” An operation that is similar to the obsessive mechanism of action reparation through the return to a previous situation. If it is true that Freud indicates the “incorporation” of the lost object in the Ego, the mourning, in 1915, still remains an operation without rest (*restloos*), in which the surrogate object would attest the excellence of the symbolic work of the individual mourning.

As already demonstrated by Jean Allouch (2004), this individualizing and romantic notion of mourning in Freud seems to have brought together a series of generalizations about its later understanding and appropriation. It might be relevant to remember here that in his 1915 text Freud sought, first of all, to solve the enigma of melancholia, whose absence of surrogate was very disconcerting to Western psychiatry. Freud, founded on a normal notion of mourning, proposes, as a counterpoint, that melancholia would consist in the association of the narcissistic libido to the lost object. When lost, “its shadow would fall upon the ego,” which would experience it as a loss of a part of the self. However, once he defined this concept, Freud did not return to the basic notion of normal mourning in order to observe whether such assumptions coincided with his clinical experience. We do not have to go far to note that there is an inaccuracy, if not an omission. We should merely think about the experience of losing a child (inversion of genealogical anteriority) to conclude that it is impossible that there are no narcissistic connections between genitor and offspring, between the mourner and “mournerer.” If mourning is often so difficult to develop, it is precisely because there is something irreplaceable in

the loss (a child, for example) that cannot – and perhaps should not – be replaced.

It is possible, however, that Freud himself had no words to thematize such an inversion. Among the aspects that support the definition of 1915, maybe the non-transformation of the mourner through the election of a surrogate object is the greatest gap in this Freudian study, even if it remains consistent with his theory of object disinvestment, narcissistic investment, and object reinvestment. The work of mourning, whose main objective is to make the subject once again free and without inhibitions for new pulsional investments, leaves unexplored the whole development of a theory of identification and its relationship with the status of transmission in psychoanalysis.

Freud appears to fall into contradiction with clinical observations regarding the psychological and social changes of all those who undergo mourning. We do not need to address this matter in greater detail here: it is no mere coincidence that there are names used socially to refer to those that become orphans, widows, etc. The loss of a relative requires a working-through of the subject's position before their family genealogy; a fact that will unavoidably mark their choices of object and their symbolic identifications. In short, every mourning process flows into a subjectivation of the loss inflicted, transforming the choices of object, the narcissistic supports, and the genealogical position of the mourner. Concerning these aspects of mourning, Freud tells us nothing, but that the subject can “restart from zero,” free and without inhibitions.

It is not without surprise, therefore, that the exhaustive work he himself underwent when he lost his firstborn, Sophie, contradicts this claim. In a letter from April 11, 1929, Freud (1929) writes to Binswanger responding to his letter: “It is known that the acute mourning caused by such loss will find an end, but we will remain inconsolable, without ever finding a surrogate” (p. 431). Indeed, the postulation of a surrogate object is not as evident as Freud intended. Jean Allouch (2004) points out a possible reason: before writing this letter, Freud confesses to Binswanger that he had effectively asked his sister-in-law, Mina, to send Binswanger a letter asking him to rewrite the first one sent, because his handwriting was illegible. Well, Binswanger had a reason for trembling! The letter communicated the loss of his son on the same day that the deceased firstborn, Sophie, would celebrate her 36th birthday. Everything brings us to believe that Binswanger's letter had evoked the loss of his daughter in Freud. Thus, he would make return – contrary to his will – a letter that would reopen a wound from nine years ago, “without ever finding a surrogate.”

In other words, it is possible that there is something traumatic in the loss, whose working-through would not be limited to becoming aware of the *transience* of life or to finding a surrogate. A hypothesis that stirs our curiosity, especially when we juxtapose it with another

letter, this time from Sandor Ferenczi, who confesses to Freud: “Dear Professor, I abreacted the mourning of my brother, completely, during the course of his disease” (Freud & Ferenczi, 1992, p. 365). Three years before *Mourning and melancholia*, Ferenczi employs an old vernacular of the Charcotian traumatology repertoire to describe the mourning operation. It is precisely the disciple who will insist in returning to the “traumatogenous event,” specially the exogenous aspects of its etiology, that draws our attention: trauma and mourning can come in pairs; one following the other. The trace of a traumatic loss could only be symbolized through an operation of mourning, whose destiny would not necessarily entail a surrogate. There is no object to fill the remaining hole: as suggested by Lacan, the loss evokes all symbolic, real, and imaginary frameworks to reposition the subject (Lacan, 1959-1960/2016).

Freud does not seem to apply his model of mourning to his experience of personal loss. Between 1915 – the time of his writing *Mourning and melancholia* – and 1929 – the time of Binswanger’s letter – would he have changed his opinion, after losing Sophie and his grandson, Heinz, between 1920 and 1923, respectively? And, yet, would it be possible that in the prior mourning there was a rest to be updated by the new loss? In this case, we could think that the loss of Binswanger’s son reanimates the loss of his daughter Sophie, which calls the position of Freud as a father into question, who was once also a son.

Far from intending to exhaust the issue, we propose that the concept of the surrogate object is not only insufficient to describe the status of the loss in metapsychological terms, but also that it hides or omits the dimension of transmission, namely, the operation of *becoming heir*. The structure of Freud’s sentence in the letter to Binswanger leaves us in no doubt: before the weight of the loss of a person “without a surrogate,” the setting of the disavowal (*verleugnung*) points to the destinies of the object investment. It is impossible not to hear in “it is known that, but...”, of the mourning Freud, an echo of the elegant equation of Octave Mannoni (1969), “I know well, but still...”, characterizing the perverse imposture of refusing the truth of castration. Well, it is because the object is irreplaceable that mourning may prove so acute and inconsolable, especially when there is a genealogical inversion. Nothing and no one can presume to replace the loss, if not under the rubric of the disavowal: “I know that he is irreplaceable, but still I try to replace him.” It seems clear that we should abandon this prejudice that hangs around psychoanalytical discussions, in which the end of mourning would be in the romantic reunion with an object that would provide as much or even more satisfaction than the object of yore; less to indicate in Freud’s writing a perverse imposture than to demonstrate (1) that the work of libidinal disinvestment of the lost object can undergo a moment of refusal, whose temporality is not chronological but subject to the position of heir that the loss entails; (2) that the loss of

his children may have updated the task of thematizing his old mourning in Freud. In other words, that the operation of mourning implies the relationship of the subject and their finitude that does not cease to update itself in its historicity.

The mourning of the father and Judaism: a movement in après-coup

In order to comprehend this position taken in 1915, we should remember that the loss of his own father caused “a very surprising reaction on the part of a son close to fifty years of age” (Gay, 2002, p. 176). In fact, in Peter Gay’s bibliography we read that the death of Freud’s father (October 23, 1896) causes a tendency marked by the feeling of guilt in the son. We know that Freud himself had an ambivalent relationship with his father and the religion of his ancestors. The memory that emerges in his self-analysis (in which his father tells him about an incident on the streets of Vienna, when a Christian throws his hat in manure, shouting “Jew, off the sidewalk”), shortly after Jacob’s death, he seems to illustrate the figure of his father as fragile and heroic at the same time (Gay, 2002, p. 28). Before the submission from the young Jacob, who merely takes the hat back and continues on his way, in his imagination Freud compares himself to the Semite hero Hannibal, who would later come to avenge him at another time.

In the wake of this movement, historian Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi (1993) – in his book *Freud’s Moses: Judaism terminable and interminable* – describes an episode that is little explored in Freud’s biography, in which Jacob gives him a bible as a gift for his 35th birthday. This, however, was not just any bible; this was the same one he had offered to his son at the age of seven, when he began his studies on Judaism. On the back cover, there was a dedication written by him entirely in *melitzhá*; which means it was composed of a mosaic of passages from the bible and rabbinic literature². This is an interesting fact, since Freud could no longer read Hebrew. Why, in his gift, did Jacob employ a code that was unknown to his son?

In his research, Yerushalmi (1993) finds in Jacob’s phrase (“Since then the Book has been kept as the fragments of the Tablets in a chest with me³”) the same structure used in Deuteronomy (32,34), which tells of Moses’ position after descending from Sinai with the

2 Noteworthy, this procedure was widely employed in Medieval Hebrew poetry and prose and was appropriated by the Jewish Enlightenment (Haskalá); which suggests, therefore, that Jacob identified himself with a nonorthodox lineage of Judaism.

3 “My dear son, Shelomoh, on the seventh of the days of the years of your life the Spirit of the Lord began to animate you and said in you: Go, read my Book that I wrote and in it shall spring for you the fountains of comprehension, knowledge, and wisdom. Since then, the Book has been kept as the fragments of the Tablets in a chest with me. For the day when your years reach five plus thirty I put in it a new skin cover and called it: ‘It springs, ‘tis a fountain! Chant it Canticles!’” (Yerushalmi, 1993, p. 164)

tablets of the law and finding his people worshipping the golden calf (p. 117). Read through Moses' voice, the gift seems to represent the father's wish to incite the little Sigismund into reconciling with Judaism, as the Jewish people did. A request to which Freud does not seem to obey orthodoxally, but psychoanalytically, so to speak! Not irrespectively, the figure of Moses remains enigmatic to him. In 1913, in his essay on the Moses of Michelangelo, Freud (1973) proposes – in contrast to current critical readings – a new aesthetic understanding of the Moses statue in the chapel of San Pietro in Vicoli. In lieu of the angry reaction from the father of Judaism, seconds before breaking the tablets of the law that are in his right hand, Freud sees the act of suspending the destruction as a psychological effort against the most primitive pulsions in favor of the cause to which he, Moses, was dedicated. Would that be the procedure he had employed to understand the message – whose code was strangely familiar – of his own father, when offering his old bible? As we know, this essay would not suffice to exorcise the enigmatic image of Moses from the Freudian spirit.

It was while constructing of *The interpretation of dreams* that Freud (1900/1996) started to realize the “subjective” meaning that writing and mourning had for him. Writing this book was “part of my own self-analysis, my reaction to my father's death — that is, to the most important event, the most poignant loss of a man's life” (p. 32). He returns to the conqueror metaphor, whose goal is to take Rome, through his work – a testimonial par excellence – about the oneiric life. In one of his own dreams, we find again the scene of the father, this time on his deathbed, during which he wakes up without knowing he had died. A thought that Freud (1950/1974) interprets as: he did not know that his son had once desired his death. “The dream, obviously, shows the realization of my desire to find a father who is the cause of the neurosis and, thus, put an end to the doubts that still persist in me on this subject” (p. 350). Freud seems to oscillate between the first trauma theory (in which the real father occupied a decisive place in the exogenous etiology of the traumatic factor) and the writing of the concept of phantasy; his unconscious leads him to seek – through dream analysis – the rests of the father's desire; unburied rests that “resurrect” a debt of reconciliation of the son in relation to the genitor.

If Freud's ambivalence concerning the father figure and the son's desire for death appear in the writing of *The interpretation of dreams*, then it will continue to develop in *Totem and taboo*. The genesis of Freud's social studies came from two anthropological concepts– the “taboo” and the “totem” – and the way they enable the establishment of a series of “correspondences between the psychological life of savages and neurotics.” Unlike most anthropological studies mentioned as inspiration, Freud saw the originary structure of the Oedipal relationships of the neurotics in the taboos of endogamy and incest.

These would be, according to his hypothesis, phylogenetic internalizations that would be updated in the ontogeny of the subject. To handle this originary scene, Freud sets a scientific myth, divided into three moments, in order to explain how the structure of culture produces the unconscious subject. First moment: a primitive horde is dominated by a tyrannical father who controls the possession of all women and applies violence as a means of control over the children. Second moment: the insurrection led by the union of these leads to parricide and a devouring of the father in a celebratory cannibal feast. Third moment: driven by anguish and guilt, the ensuing phratry — in order to prevent any of the brothers from occupying the place of the father – establishes sexual prohibitions to stipulate the access limitations to the tribe's women.

Freud (1913/1971) explains, then, the key of reading that allows the brother' mourning operation: “The dead become . . . stronger than he had been when alive; . . . What he had once prevented through his existence, [the siblings] prohibited themselves now in the psychological situation of *après-coup* obedience” (our italics) (p. 363). In 1913, it is through a sort of *après-coup* obedience to parental commandment, caused by the guilt of their death, that Freud inscribes the temporality – fundamental, at least to himself – to comprehend the working-through of the subject's position before their family genealogy: only through his death can the father's desire be internalized as a heritage. However, it is worth remembering that this obedience does not occur passively. In chapter IV of the same study, by quoting Goethe's *Faust I*, he stipulates the form of transmission in psychoanalysis: “That which you inherited from your parents, conquer it to make it yours” (Freud, 1913/1971, p. 160).

Freud seems to inscribe in his theory the key that would enable he himself to conduct his mourning. In 1913, the three moments of the Culture/Symbolic Law establishment are only possible through *après-coup* obedience, whose transmission is carried out through an appropriation of heritage. That is, there is not a simple passive assimilation of heritage, but an appropriation, whose effects of transformation and creation presuppose the transmission. However, we do not read a single mention of this operation of mourning in 1915. Thus, we support the hypothesis that he needed two moments for that: first *Totem and taboo* (1913), then *Moses and monotheism* (1938).

In his last week in Vienna, before leaving for exile, Freud writes to his son Ernst: “I sometimes compare myself to the old Jacob⁴ who was taken from Egypt by his children, already at a very advanced age. Let us hope that the Exodus from Egypt is not repeated as in times of yore. It is time Ahasver finds repose somewhere” (Freud & Freud, 1966). His comparison to the mythical figure of the “wandering Jew,” whose

4 The change in the spelling of the name of Freud's father corresponds to the differences of the references used.

name is homonymous to that of his father, suggests that the writing of *The man Moses and the monotheistic religion* – a sort of “historical novel” about the origin of Judaism – also had a function of working through his death by means of returning to Judaism, from which Freud had previously turned away.

Moses and the writing of the trauma

The man Moses and the monotheistic religion is considered to be one of the most strange and obscure texts from Freud’s bibliography, both because of its revolutionary and unorthodox content – which crosses different disciplines without being reduced to any of them – and its tangled structure. The work is divided into three essays of considerably different extensions, published separately over a period of four years, with the first and second essays being preceded by one preface and the third by two. This last essay is also divided into two large sections, interspersed by a sort of recapitulation.

Although it was only fully published in 1939, Freud had already prepared a first draft in 1934, since it was that same year that he sent a long letter to his friend Arnold Zweig describing his main hypotheses. The urgency of the historical context, namely the rapid rise of Nazism and the persecution of Jews, accompanied his writing and is also evidenced in this letter. Freud says:

The starting point of my work is a subject that is familiar to you. . . . Considering the new persecutions, I once again ask myself how the Jews were born and the reason why they attract this unquenchable hatred towards themselves. I rapidly found a formula. The Jews were created by Moses. (Freud & Zweig, 1974, p. 99)

The immersion into one of the most important biblical texts to Judaism, not irrespectively, happens precisely when Freud sees himself in danger as a result of the rise of Nazism, which was a threat not only to his physical existence as a Jew, but also a profound questioning in regards to the foundations of his own identity. In advocating the idea that Moses was an Egyptian and, consequently, that the Jewish people had been created by someone who at first did not belong to it, Freud sought to show precisely – and paradoxically – that the very condition of alterity occupies the core of the Jewish identity. The inexorable Otherness had led his people to embody the character of “stranger” to other cultures many times, a screen on which they had projected what they most feared in themselves and that thusly often made the Jews a target of hatred and violence. More broadly, Freud resumed his theorizations initiated in *Group Psychology and The Analysis of The Ego* (1921/2013) to reaffirm that “even for the most definable, the most identifiable, the more obstinate communal identities . . . there are inherent limits, which

prevent them from being fully incorporated into one, and only one, identity” (Said, 2004, p. 81).

Clearly, Freud also broke with the traditional forms of reading the biblical text, according to which the Exodus of the Jews – their liberation from slavery in Egypt – would reproduce a set of dynamics based on the opposition between exile and redemption; the diaspora and the return to the promised land (Friedländer, 1994). Moses, accordingly, is usually defined as a hero who frees his people and leads them back to their rightful land, Canaan. Nevertheless, if Freud’s Moses *created* the Jews, then – at least from the psychoanalytic point of view – we could not properly speak of a *return to the origins*, but of a *departure* towards alterity. The history of the Hebrew people becomes the history of the Jewish nation precisely through the act of *departing* (Caruth, 1996).

It should be noted that Freud was also *departing*: in 1938, after the annexation of Austria by the Third Reich in 1938, he heads – after much reluctance – towards recessed British territories. Shaken by the forced exile and the deterioration of his health, Freud was once again concerned with the issue of disseminating the discipline that he had developed throughout his life. Such concern would be reflected in the writing of the third essay of *Moses*, which constitutes an investigation into the ways through which the monotheistic tradition would have been *transmitted*, from generation to generation, since the departure from Egypt until his then current time. The look directed to the past of his people is concomitant to his concern with the future of psychoanalysis. Accordingly, one can say that becoming an *heir*, – this operation of two hands in the course of time – was necessary so that he himself could *depart*.

Freud studies the biblical text in the same way he investigates the unconscious mechanisms of his clinical cases (Lemérier, 1999). Aware of the distortions (*entstellung*), of the processes of denial (*verneinung*) and disavowal (*verleugnung*) of its historical truth (*historische wahrheit*), he reads the text as the writing of a trauma that is heir to the origin myth of culture, which is updated in the exodus of the Jews and is repeated indefinitely throughout history — including in the creation of Christianity – to reach the persecution of Jews in the 20th century. “In the distortion of a text, the situation is similar to a murder. The difficulty is not in executing the act, but rather in leaving no trace of evidence” (Freud, 1939/2014, p. 76). Freud assumes, thus, that the biblical text would hide, through a distortion, that the Jews themselves would have revolted against the tyrannical leader and murdered him. This act would have been suppressed, disavowed, and smothered, but after two generations the characteristics of the single God of Moses would have been shifted to a volcanic God called Yahweh and the deeds of Moses would have been incorporated into his corresponding priest, who was also named Moses. This process of distortion

and displacement would thusly update the myth of the father's murder described 25 years previously in *Totem and taboo*, under the same temporality of *après-coup* obedience.

Freud (1939/2014) draws attention, however, to the fact that, between the murder of the first Moses and the return of his characteristics associated with a second Moses, there would have been a long period during which it is not possible to find any *trace* of the monotheistic faith. To explain this enigmatic gap, he resumes the theory of trauma with an example:

It may happen that someone gets away, apparently unharmed, from the spot where he has suffered a shocking accident— for instance, a collision of trains. But in the course of the following weeks, he develops a series of grave psychological and motor symptoms that can only be a result of his shock. . . . He has developed a “traumatic neurosis.” The time between the accident and the first manifestation of symptoms is called the “incubation period” A posteriori, despite the fundamental difference of the two cases, it will draw our attention that there is, between the problems of the traumatic neurosis and Jewish monotheism, a correspondence in one point. Namely, in the feature one might term latency. (p. 104)

The latency would explain both the period during which the subject simply “forgets” about the train accident and the two generations who lived without maintaining any relationship with the Mosaic religion. According to Cathy Caruth (1996), the most interesting point in this comparison relates to the fact that the traumatic experience – be it the train accident or the murder of Moses – is simply not lived consciously. “It may happen that someone gets away, apparently unharmed, from the spot where he has suffered a shocking accident” says Freud, as if the subject did not have the slightest idea of what he had just experienced. The historical dimension of the trauma would refer precisely to the fact that the subject – or the people – only has access to the traumatic experience in its repetitions – in the “grave psychological and motor symptoms” or in the very return of the characteristics of the single God and the figure of Moses. These repetitions, however, always take place in *another* time and *another* space; the historical experience is only accessible through its own distortion.

The testimonial character of the Freudian text is very clear. Everything takes place as if the confusing and recursive writing – pervaded by prefaces, repetitions, and theoretical resumptions – were also a reflection of the author's own condition in Nazi-occupied Europe. And yet, when Freud refers to the repetitions that will follow in the second part of the third essay, we find an apparently paradoxical phrase: “I was not capable of erasing the marks of the genetic, albeit unusual, history of this work” (Freud,

1939/2014, p. 101). Freud seems to want to reproduce the same distortions found and analyzed in the bible in his text. How do we understand this lamentation of the failed attempt to erase his traces? Well, as Freud himself had already taught, we can only erase what we have already identified and know.

As argued by Carina Basualdo (2015), we read in the failure to erase his tracks the intrinsic relationship between his mourning for the father and his writing. Let us here recall the metaphor of the ballerina used by Freud in describing the effort of appropriating the assassination of the first Moses, leaving it out of the holy scripture. The moving and erratic figure of the ballerina, which does not touch the ground except for the toes, seems to reflect the writing effort by imaginarily discerning the symbolic trace left by the Jewish people, by the father Jacob in the guidance of his interest. Thus, the metaphor of the ballerina seems to occupy the function of the concept of Real that is nonexistent in Freud. The ballerina's toes are the *topos* of inscription between the historic event – traumatic – and the non-self-identity of the unconscious subject, which can only be translated by the distortion of the mark left and that will serve as a trace of its transmission. First there is the inscription of the mark, and only then comes the trace, an issue that would be recovered by Lacan, after a few decades, in his seminar on Identification, in which the mark left by the object offers itself as support for the emergence of the signifier: “if it is from the object that the trace emerges, from something of the object that the trace retains, precisely its uniqueness, the erasure, the absolute destruction of all these other emergences” (Lacan, 1961-1962).

With this comment, Freud still seems to lament the impossibility of discerning the unity of the event from which the Jewish people originated, but this does not keep him from bearing witness to the uniqueness of his desire inscription in the text and in his ancestors' history.

We argue that one of the keys to understand Freud's *Moses* lies in the signature of this trace of transmission, in which the working-through of the loss of his father occurs *pari passu* with the appropriation – unorthodox, but psychoanalytic – of his Jewish heritage. There is no way to read *Moses* without *Totem and taboo*, one presupposes the other. Moreover, Freud “creates” the theoretical formula in order to apply it to his personal experience. Reconnecting with Judaism is not a religious movement, but its cultural re-appropriation before the out-rooting and, therefore, traumatic movement of exile.

Accordingly, let us add that, in 1935, having already begun writing *Moses*, he insists on inserting two sentences to correct his *Autobiography* of 1925, in which we can read: “The fact that I prematurely delved into biblical history, having then just learned the art of reading, determined persistently – as I recognized much later – the guidance of my interest” (our italics) (Freud, 1925/2001, p. 56). This late correction, ten years after writing his autobiography, seems to prove materially this *après-coup* obedience of the “guidance of his interest.”

The real of history: trauma, mourning, and writing

The problem of history is inscribed in the place of this subject who is, *per se*, dynamics of difference, historicity of the non-self-identity.
Michel de Certeau

Based on the reading of the Freudian texts *Totem and taboo* and *The man Moses and the monotheistic religion* through the concepts of trauma and mourning, and in contrast to some events that marked the life of their author, it is possible to highlight some elements to compose a psychoanalytic theory of history.

According to the concept of trauma, the past is no longer something finalized in itself – a raw object to be “discovered” and understood in its entirety – to become a living substance that returns and inhabits the present, inadvertently, whose inscription will always point to the insufficiency of the signifier and the dimension of half-telling the truth (Lacan, 1973-1974/1992). In his cross-reading between psychoanalysis and history, Michel de Certeau (2011) points out that the past repeats itself as a meaningless virtuality until, in conjunction with the present, analogously to the free associations of a patient under analysis, it reveals itself as “truth”; a temporality of the *après-coup*, whose senses we had previously elucidated. The metaphor of the Freudian ballerina would, accordingly, be the dimension of the impossible inscription of the Real that Freud seems to skim over with the tip of his pen. If the biblical history is written as an attempt to work through the traumatic assassination of Moses after the exodus, if the very text about Moses is written by Freud as a consequence of his exile, then one might say that it is from the assassination of the father to the edification of the Totem, from death to writing, that the trauma is converted into the very condition of history (Rabinovitch, 2000).

The relationship between trauma and history still evokes some ethical problems. According to Dominick LaCapra (2014), a North-American historian also interested in the dialogue with psychoanalysis, one of the main aporias of the field refers precisely to the possibilities and limits of the historiography of major catastrophes, such as the Holocaust. A documentary and self-sufficient historical research approach, whose extreme form is positivism, LaCapra says, would probably fall short of describing the traumatic dimension of these events, since there is no direct and conscious access to that content. A radically opposite approach would be “radical constructivism,” which emphasizes the importance of the performative, figurative, aesthetic, and ideological aspects, only through which sense and significance could be attributed to the facts. Cathy Caruth’s approach (1996), mentioned above, identifies, in one way, with this second model, since the author argues that traumatic experience is only possible through its own disfigurement. In historical-political terms, this model would also entail resistance; after all, if we can only “know” the trauma through its own distortion, how

could we respond, for example, to the theories that deny the major catastrophes without resorting to a supposed “reality of the facts”? According to LaCapra, this paradox highlights the importance of considering the ethical condition of historiography that, in psychoanalytic terms, the author defines as the transference relationship established between the historian and the object of study. It is only within the transference – considering the different places from which it studies and is studied, as well as the projective dynamics and political implications inherent in this process – that, in fact, writing history *as* trauma becomes possible.

In keeping with Freud, the condition of writing history comprises the mythical time, as an attempt to suppose, decipher, and finally write the truth present in the real of the origin of the subject/culture. If Freud had already conceptualized the notion of originary repression in his practice and abandoned his first trauma theory, in which the exogenous factor is determinant to understand the traumatic, in his socioanthropological writings the investigation and writing of the originary returns “in the same place,” that is, as an attempt to unravel the origin of culture and of monotheism. We argue that it is precisely here that Freud’s own operation of mourning lies, which takes place in two times: first the *Totem and taboo*, then *Moses*.

In this way, writing trauma presupposes working-through mourning, an operation of becoming heir, whose end is not the metonymic replacement of the lost object. In exploring why this operation became invisible in the writing of *Mourning and melancholia*, we propound the possibility that, during his metapsychological investigation, Freud had still not faced the genealogical inversion of the loss of his children. And, above all, that he needed a second moment, after *Totem and taboo*, to carry out the “parental commandment” of *après-coup* obedience with Judaism, through *Moses*. If in this second moment there is a structural repetition of the scientific myth, he does it, on the one hand, because what had been repressed in the death of his father returns, like a lost soul, in the figure of Moses. In the very writing of *Moses*, the signifier’s incompleteness and impossibility to symbolize the traumatic event seem to attest the Freudian insistence, turning into the signature of his desire in the body of the text. On the other hand, because, through the investigations about the real of the father of Judaism, Freud also carries out the writing of the structural place of the father in psychoanalysis. In other words, this process consists of no longer seeking an end to the operation of mourning in the figure of the surrogate object, but rather a symbolic place of inscription, in which the operation of becoming heir translates its symbolic place.

Freud’s lamenting in regards to the fact that he cannot erase his traces seems, thus, to establish – contrarily to his will – the destiny of all historiography to come. Henceforth, every event will be subordinated to its narrative, whose trace of origin is inscribed in this encounter between the impossibility of its total apprehension and the effort to name it.

Freud e judaísmo: luto, trauma e transmissão

Resumo: Este artigo almeja discutir a relação entre o conceito de transmissão na psicanálise e a posição do judaísmo no desejo de Freud. Interessa-nos compreender a operação subjetiva pela qual é possível tornar-se *herdeiro*, partindo do pressuposto de que a própria obra freudiana testemunha o modo como seu autor pôde apropriar-se da *herança*, tanto da cultura judaica quanto de sua genealogia familiar. Para isso, examinaremos a escritura de três de seus textos em contraponto a suas experiências pessoais, sugerindo que a articulação entre trauma, luto e transmissão fornece uma chave de leitura para a constituição de uma teoria psicanalítica da história.

Palavras-chave: trauma, trabalho de luto, transmissão, judaísmo.

Freud et Judaïsme: deuil, trauma et transmission

Résumé: Cet article veut discuter la relation entre le concept de transmission en psychanalyse et la position du judaïsme dans le désir de Freud. Il nous intéresse de comprendre l'opération subjective à partir de laquelle c'est possible devenir *héritier*, en assumant que l'œuvre freudienne elle-même témoigne la façon dont l'auteur a pu s'approprier de son *héritage*, autant de la culture judaïque que la généalogie familiale. Pour cela, nous exploitons l'écriture de trois de ses textes, tout en les opposant à ses expériences personnelles, afin de soutenir que l'articulation entre trauma, deuil et transmission fourni une clef de lecture pertinente à la constitution d'une théorie psychanalytique de l'histoire.

Mots-clés: trauma, deuil, transmission, judaïsme.

Freud y Judaísmo: duelo, trauma y transmisión

Resumen: Este artículo pretende discutir la relación entre el concepto de transmisión en el psicoanálisis y la posición del judaísmo en el deseo de Freud. Nos interesa comprender la operación subjetiva por la cual uno puede convertirse en *heredero*, a partir del presupuesto de que la propia obra freudiana atestigua el modo como su autor pudo apropiarse de la herencia, tanto de la cultura judía como de su genealogía familiar. Para ello, analizaremos la escritura de tres de sus textos en contrapunto con sus experiencias personales, sugiriendo que la articulación entre trauma, duelo y transmisión aporta una clave de lectura para la constitución de una teoría psicoanalítica de la historia.

Palabras clave: trauma, duelo, transmisión, judaísmo.

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