# UNCLAIMED EXPERIENCE

Cathy Caruth

*Trauma, Narrative, and History*

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# 1 UNCLAIMED EXPERIENCE: TRAUMA AND THE POSSIBILITY OF HISTORY

## (Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*)

*It took the war to teach it, that you were as responsible for everything you saw as you were for everything you did. The problem was that you didn't always know what you were seeing until later, maybe years later, that a lot of it never made it in at all, it just stayed stored there in your eyes.*

Michael Herr, *Dispatches*

Recent literary criticism has shown an increasing concern that the epistemological problems raised by poststructuralist criticism necessarily lead to political and ethical paralysis. The possibility that reference is indirect, and that consequently we may not have direct access to others', or even our own, histories, seems to imply the impossibility of access to other cultures and hence of any means of making political or ethical judgments.[1]



To such an argument I would like to contrast a phenomenon that not only arises in the reading of literary or philosophical texts but emerges most prominently within the wider historical and political realms, that is, the peculiar and paradoxical experience of trauma. In its most general definition, trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena.[2] The experience of the soldier faced with sudden and massive death around him, for example, who suffers this sight in a numbed state, only to relive it later on in repeated nightmares, is a central and recurring image of trauma in our century. As a consequence of the increasing occurrence of such perplexing war experiences and other catastrophic responses during the last twenty years, physicians and psychiatrists have begun to reshape their thinking about physical and mental experience, including most recently the responses to a wide variety of other experiences, such as rape, child abuse, auto and industrial accidents, and so on, that are now often understood in terms of the effects of *post-traumatic stress disorder*. I would propose that it is here, in the equally widespread and bewildering encounter with trauma—both in its occurrence and in the attempt to understand it—that we can begin to recognize the possibility of a history that is no longer straightforwardly referential (that is, no longer based on simple models of experience and reference). Through the notion of trauma, I will argue, we can understand that a rethinking of reference is aimed not at eliminating history but at resituating it in our understanding, that is, at precisely permitting *history* to arise where *immediate understanding* may not.

The question of history is raised most urgently in one of the first works of trauma in this century, Sigmund Freud's history of the Jews entitled *Moses and Monotheism*. Because of its seeming fictionalization of the Jewish past, this work has raised on-

going questions about its historical and political status, yet its confrontation with trauma seems, nonetheless, to be deeply tied to our own historical realities. I have chosen this text as a focus of analysis, therefore, because I believe it can help us understand our own catastrophic era, as well as the difficulties of writing a history from within it. I will suggest that it is in the notion of history that Freud offers in this work, as well as in the way his writing itself confronts historical events, that we may need to rethink the possibility of history, as well as our ethical and political relation to it.

## EXODUS, OR THE HISTORY OF A DEPARTURE

The entanglement of Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* with its own urgent historical context is evident in a letter written to Arnold Zweig in 1934, while Freud is working on the book, and while Nazi persecutions of the Jews are progressing at rapid speed. Freud says:

> Faced with the new persecutions, one asks oneself again how the Jews have come to be what they are and why they have attracted this undying hatred. I soon discovered the formula: Moses created the Jews.[3]

The project of *Moses and Monotheism* is clearly linked, in these lines, to the attempt to explain the Nazi persecution of the Jews. But this can apparently be done, according to Freud, only through reference to a past, and in particular to the past represented by Moses. By placing the weight of his history on the naming of Moses, moreover, the liberator of the Hebrews who led them out of Egypt, Freud implicitly and paradoxically connects the explanation of the Jews' persecution to their very liberation, the return from captivity to freedom. In the centrality of Moses thus lies the centrality of a return: the return of the Hebrews to Canaan, where they had lived prior to their settlement, and bondage, in Egypt. *Moses and Monotheism*'s most direct reference to, and explanation of, its present historical context will consist in Freud's new understanding of the story of captivity, or exile, and return.[4]



The notion of Jewish history as a history of return might seem unsurprising in the perspective of a psychoanalyst, whose works repeatedly focus on the necessity of various kinds of return—on the return to origins in memory and on the "return of the repressed." But in the description of his discovery, in the concise little formula jotted down for Zweig, "Moses created the Jews," Freud suggests that the history of the Jews surpasses any simple notion of return. For if Moses indeed "created" the Jews,[5] in his act of liberation—if the exodus from Egypt, that is, transforms the history of the *Hebrews*, who had previously lived in Canaan, into the history of the *Jews*, who become a true nation only in their act of leaving captivity—then the moment of beginning, the exodus from Egypt, is no longer simply a return but is rather, more truly, a departure. The question with which Freud frames his text, and which will explain both the Jews' historical situation and his own participation, as a Jewish writer, within it, is thus: In what way is the history of a culture, and its relation to a politics, inextricably bound up with the notion of departure?[6]

Freud's surprising account of Jewish history can be understood, indeed, as a reinterpretation of the nature, as well as the significance, of the Hebrews' return from captivity. In the biblical account, Moses was one of the captive Hebrews, who eventually arose as their leader and led them out of Egypt back to Canaan. Freud, on the other hand, announces at the beginning of his account that Moses, though the liberator of the Hebrew people, was not in fact himself a Hebrew, but an Egyptian, a fervent follower of an Egyptian pharaoh and his sun-centered monotheism. After the pharaoh's murder, according to Freud, Moses became a leader of the Hebrews and brought them out of Egypt in order to preserve the waning monotheistic religion.

Freud thus begins his story by changing the very reason for the return: it is no longer primarily the preservation of Hebrew freedom, but of the monotheistic god; that is, it is not so much the return to a freedom of the past as a departure into a newly established future—the future of monotheism.[7] In this rethinking of Jewish beginnings, then, the future is no longer continuous with the past but is united with it through a profound discontinuity. The exodus from Egypt, which shapes the meaning of the Jewish past, is a departure that is both a radical break and the establishment of a history.

The second part of Freud's account extends, and redoubles, this rethinking of the return. For after the Egyptian Moses led the Hebrews from Egypt, Freud claims, they murdered him in a rebellion; repressed the deed; and in the passing of two generations assimilated his god to a volcano god named Yahweh, and assimilated the liberating acts of Moses to the acts of another man, the priest of Yahweh (also named Moses), who was separated from the first in time and place. The most significant moment in Jewish history is thus, according to Freud, not the literal return to freedom, but the repression of a murder and its effects:

> The god Jahve attained undeserved honour when . . . Moses' deed of liberation was put down to his account; but he had to pay dear for this usurpation. The shadow of the god whose place he had taken became stronger than himself; at the end of the historical development there arose beyond his being that of the forgotten Mosaic god. None can doubt that it was only the idea of this other god that enabled the people of Israel to surmount all their hardships and to survive until our time. (62; 50–51)[8]

If the return to freedom is the literal starting point of the history of the Jews, what constitutes the essence of their history is the repression, and return, of the deeds of Moses. The nature of literal return is thus displaced by the nature of another kind of reappearance:



> To the well-known *duality* of [Jewish] history . . . we add two new ones: the founding of *two* new religions, the first one ousted by the second and yet reappearing victorious, *two* founders of religion, who are both called by the same name, Moses, and whose personalities we have to separate from each other. And all these dualities are necessary consequences of the first: one section of the people passed through what may properly be termed a traumatic experience which the other was spared. (64–65; 52)

The captivity and return, while the beginning of the history of the Jews, is precisely available to them only through the experience of a trauma. It is the trauma, the forgetting (and return) of the deeds of Moses, that constitutes the link uniting the old with the new god, the people that leave Egypt with the people that ultimately make up the nation of the Jews. Centering his story in the nature of the leaving, and returning, constituted by trauma, Freud resituates the very possibility of history in the nature of a traumatic departure. We might say, then, that the central question, by which Freud finally inquires into the relation between history and its political outcome, is: What does it mean, precisely, for history to be the history of a trauma?

For many readers, Freud's questioning of history—his displacement of the story of a liberating return by the story of a trauma—has seemed to be a tacit denial of history. By replacing factual history with the curious dynamics of trauma, Freud would seem to have doubly denied the possibility of historical reference: first, by himself actually replacing historical fact with his own speculations, and second, by suggesting that historical memory, or Jewish historical memory at least, is always a matter of distortion, a filtering of the original event through the fictions of traumatic repression, which makes the event available

at best indirectly. Indeed, when Freud goes on, later in his work, to compare the Hebrews' traumatic experience to the traumas of the Oedipal boy, repressing his desire for the mother through the threat of castration, this leads many readers to assume that the only possible referential truth contained in Freud's text can be its own unconscious life, a kind of self-referential history that many have read as the story of Freud's "unresolved father complex."[9] And this analysis has itself reinterpreted the figure of departure and return in a very straightforward fashion, as Freud's departure from his father, or his departure from Judaism. For many critics the cost of Freud's apparently making history unconscious, or of his depriving history of its referential literality, is finally the fact that the text remains at best a predictable drama of Freud's unconscious, and, moreover, a drama that tells the story of political and cultural disengagement.[10]

### THE TRAIN COLLISION, OR HISTORY AS ACCIDENT

When we attend closely, however, to Freud's own attempt to explain the trauma, we find a somewhat different understanding of what it means to leave and to return. While the analogy with the Oedipal individual constitutes much of his explanation, Freud opens this discussion with another example that is strangely unlikely as a comparison for a human history and yet resonates curiously with the particular history he has told. It is the example of an accident:

> It may happen that someone gets away, apparently unharmed, from the spot where he has suffered a shocking accident, for instance a train collision. In the course of the following weeks, however, he develops a series of grave psychical and motor symptoms, which can be ascribed only to his shock or whatever else happened at the time of the accident. He has developed a "traumatic neurosis." This appears quite incomprehensible and is therefore a novel fact. The time that elapsed between the accident and the first appearance of the symptoms is called the "incubation period," a transparent allusion to the pathology of infectious disease. As an afterthought, it must strike us that—in spite of the fundamental difference in the two cases, the problem of the traumatic neurosis and that of Jewish monotheism—there is a correspondence in one point. It is the feature which one might term *latency*. There are the best grounds for thinking that in the history of the Jewish religion there is a long period, after the breaking away from the Moses religion, during which no trace is to be found of the monotheistic idea. . . . Thus . . . the solution of our problem is to be sought in a special psychological situation. (84; 67–68, translation modified)



In his use of the term *latency*, the period during which the effects of the experience are not apparent, Freud seems to compare the accident to the successive movement in Jewish history from the event to its repression to its return. Yet what is truly striking about the accident victim's experience of the event, and what in fact constitutes the central enigma revealed by Freud's example, is not so much the period of forgetting that occurs after the accident, but rather the fact that the victim of the crash was never fully conscious during the accident itself: the person gets away, Freud says, "apparently unharmed." The experience of trauma, the fact of latency, would thus seem to consist, not in the forgetting of a reality that can hence never be fully known, but in an inherent latency within the experience itself.[11] The historical power of the trauma is not just that the experience is repeated after its forgetting, but that it is only in and through its inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all. And it is this inherent latency of the event that paradoxically explains the peculiar, temporal structure, the belatedness, of the Jews' historical experience: since the murder is not experienced as it occurs, it is fully evident only in connection with another place, and in another time. If return is displaced by trauma, then, this is significant insofar as its leaving—the space of unconsciousness—is, paradoxically, precisely what preserves the event in its

literality. For history to be a history of trauma means that it is referential precisely to the extent that it is not fully perceived as it occurs; or to put it somewhat differently, that a history can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence.

The indirect referentiality of history is also, I would argue, at the core of Freud's understanding of the political shape of Jewish culture, in its repeated confrontation with anti-Semitism. For the murder of Moses, as Freud argues, is in fact a repetition of an earlier murder in the history of mankind, the murder of the primal father by his rebellious sons, which occurred in primeval history; and it is the unconscious repetition and acknowledgment of this fact that explains both Judaism and its Christian antagonists. Indeed, Freud says, when Paul interprets the death of Christ as the atonement for an original sin, he is belatedly and unconsciously remembering the murder of Moses, which still, in the history of the Jews, remains buried in unconsciousness. In belatedly atoning, as sons, for the father's murder, Christians feel Oedipal rivalry with their Jewish older brothers; a lingering castration anxiety, brought out by Jewish circumcision; and finally a complaint that the Jews will not admit the guilt that the Christians, in their recognition of Christ's death, have admitted. By appearing only belatedly, then, the historical effect of trauma, in Freud's text, is ultimately its inscription of the Jews in a history always bound to the history of the Christians. The Hebrews' departure, that is, or their arrival as a Jewish nation, is also an arrival within a history no longer simply their own. It is therefore, I would like to suggest, precisely in the very constitutive function of latency, in history, that Freud discovers the indissoluble, political bond to other histories. To put it somewhat differently, we could say that the traumatic nature of history means that events are only historical to the extent that they implicate others. And it is thus that Jewish history has also been the suffering of others' traumas.[12]



## THE WRITING OF DISASTER

The full impact of this notion of history can only be grasped, however, when we turn to the question of what it would mean, in this context, to consider Freud's own writing as a historical act. In the various prefaces that he appends to his work, Freud himself imposes this question upon us by drawing our attention to the history of the text's own writing and publication. The actual writing of the book took place between 1934 and 1938, during the period of Freud's last years in Vienna, and his first year in London, to which he moved in June 1938 because of Nazi persecution of his family and of psychoanalysis. The first two parts of the book, containing the history of Moses, were published in 1937, before he left Austria, while the third part, containing the more extensive analysis of religion in general, was withheld from publication until 1938, after Freud had moved to London. In the middle of this third part Freud inserts what he calls a "Summary and Recapitulation" (or *Wiederholung*, literally "repetition"), in which he tells the story of his book in his own way:

> The following part of this essay [the second section of part 3] cannot be sent forth into the world without lengthy explanations and apologies. For it is no other than a faithful, often literal repetition of the first part. . . . Why have I not avoided it? The answer to this question is . . . rather hard to admit. I have not been able to efface the traces of the unusual way in which this book came to be written.
>
> In truth it has been written twice over. The first time was a few years ago in Vienna, where I did not believe in the possibility of publishing it. I decided to put it away, but it haunted me like an unlaid ghost, and I compromised by publishing two parts of the book. . . . Then in March 1938 came the unexpected German invasion. It forced me to leave my home, but it also freed me of the fear lest my publishing the book might cause psychoanalysis to be forbidden in a country where its practice was still

> allowed. No sooner had I arrived in England than I found the temptation of making my withheld knowledge accessible to the world irresistible. . . . I could not make up my mind to relinquish the two former contributions altogether, and that is how the compromise came about of adding unaltered a whole piece of the first version to the second, a device which has the disadvantage of extensive repetition. (131–32; 103–4)

Reading this story Freud tells of his own work—of a history whose traces cannot be effaced, which haunts Freud like a ghost and finally emerges in several publications involving extensive repetition—it is difficult not to recognize the story of the Hebrews—of Moses's murder, its effacement, and its unconscious repetition. The book itself, Freud seems to be telling us, is the site of a trauma; a trauma that in this case, moreover, appears to be historically marked by the events that, Freud says, divide the book into two halves: first, the infiltration of Nazism into Austria, causing Freud to withhold or repress the third part, and then the invasion of Austria by Germany, causing Freud to leave, and ultimately to bring the third part to light. The structure and history of the book, in its traumatic form of repression and repetitive reappearance, thus mark it as the very bearer of a historical truth that is itself involved in the political entanglement of Jews and their persecutors.

But significantly, in spite of the temptation to lend an immediate referential meaning to Freud's trauma in the German invasion and Nazi persecution, it is not, in fact, precisely the *direct reference* to the German invasion that can be said to locate the actual trauma in Freud's passage. For the invasion is characterized, not in terms of its attendant persecution and threats, of which the Freud family did in fact have their share, but in terms of the somewhat different emphasis of a simple line: "It forced me to leave my home, but it also freed me" [(Sie) zwang mich, die Heimat zu verlassen, befreite mich aber].[13] The trauma in



Freud's text is first of all a trauma of leaving, the trauma of *verlassen*. Indeed, it is this word that actually ties this "Summary and Recapitulation" itself to the traumatic structuring of the book, in its implicit referral to two earlier prefaces, appended to the beginning of part 3. These two prefaces, subtitled "Before March 1938" (while Freud was still in Vienna) and "In June 1938" (after Freud had resettled in London), describe, respectively, his reasons for not publishing the book and his decision finally to let it come to light, announced as following in the second preface:

> The exceptionally great difficulties which have weighed on me during the composition of this essay dealing with Moses . . . are the reason why this third and final part comes to have two different prefaces which contradict—indeed, even cancel—each other. For in the short interval between writing the two prefaces the outer conditions of the author have radically changed. Formerly I lived under the protection of the Catholic Church and feared that by publishing the essay I should lose that protection. . . . Then, suddenly, the German invasion. . . . In the certainty of persecution . . . I left *[verliess ich]*, with many friends, the city which from early childhood, through seventy-eight years, had been a home to me. (69–70; 57)

The "interval" between the prefaces, which Freud explicitly notes, and which is also the literal space between "Before March 1938" and "In June 1938," also marks, implicitly, the space of a trauma, a trauma not simply *denoted* by the words "German invasion," but rather *borne* by the words *verliess ich*, "I left." Freud's writing preserves history precisely within this gap in his text; and within the words of his leaving, words that do not simply refer, but, through their repetition in the later "Summary and Recapitulation," convey the impact of a history precisely as what *cannot be grasped* about leaving.

FROM CAPTIVITY TO FREEDOM, OR FREUD'S EXODUS

Indeed, in Freud's own theoretical explanation of trauma, in the example of the accident, it is, finally, *the act of leaving* that constitutes its central and enigmatic core:

> It may happen that someone gets away [*die Städte verlässt*, literally, "leaves the site"], apparently unharmed, from the spot where he has suffered a shocking accident, for instance a train collision.

The trauma of the accident, its very unconsciousness, is borne by an act of departure. It is a departure that, in the full force of its historicity, remains at the same time in some sense absolutely opaque, both to the one who leaves and also to the theoretician, linked to the sufferer in his attempt to bring the experience to light. Yet at the same time, this very opacity generates the surprising force of a knowledge, for it is the accident, in German, *Unfall*, that reverberates in Freud's own theoretical insight drawn from the example, which is laced in the German with other forms of *fallen*, "to fall":

> As an afterthought it must strike us [*es muss uns auffallen*] that—in spite of the fundamental difference in the two cases [*Fälle*], the problem of the traumatic neurosis and that of Jewish monotheism—there is a correspondence in one point. It is the feature which one might term *latency*. There are the best grounds for thinking that in the history of the Jewish religion there is a long period, after the breaking away [*Abfall*] from the Moses religion, during which no trace is to be found of the monotheistic idea.[14]

Between the *Unfall*, the accident, and the "striking" of the insight, its *auffallen*, is the force of a fall, a falling that is transmitted precisely in the unconscious act of leaving. It is this *unconsciousness of leaving* that bears the impact of history. And it is likewise first of all in the unconsciousness of Freud's reference



to his departure in his own text that, I would suggest, we first have access to its historical truth.

The full impact of this history occurs for us, however, in yet another aspect of the act of leaving, in what Freud calls "freedom." In the "Summary and Recapitulation" Freud says:

> It forced me to leave my home, but it also freed me of the fear lest my publishing the book might cause psychoanalysis to be forbidden in a country where its practice was still allowed.

Leaving home, for Freud, is also a kind of freedom, the freedom to bring forth his book in England, the freedom, that is, to bring his voice to another place. The meaning of this act is suggested in a letter that resonates with these lines from the "Summary," a letter written by Freud to his son Ernst in May 1938, while Freud was waiting for final arrangements to leave Vienna:

> Two prospects keep me going in these grim times: to rejoin you all and—to die in freedom.[15]

Freud's freedom to leave is, paradoxically, the freedom not to live but to die: to bring forth his voice to others in dying. Freud's voice emerges, that is, as a departure.[16] And it is this departure that, moreover, addresses us.

In the line he writes to his son, the last four words—"to die in freedom"—unlike the rest of the sentence, are not written in German, but rather in English. The announcement of his freedom, and of his dying, is given in a language that can be heard by those in the new place to which he brings his voice, to us, upon whom the legacy of psychoanalysis is bestowed. It is significant, moreover, that this message is conveyed not merely in the new language, English, but precisely in the movement between German and English, between the languages of the readers of his homeland and of his departure. I would like to suggest that it is here, in the movement from German to English, in the

rewriting of the departure within the languages of Freud's text, that we participate most fully in Freud's central insight, in *Moses and Monotheism*, that history, like trauma, is never simply one's own, that history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's traumas. For we—whether as German- or as English-speaking readers—cannot read this sentence without, ourselves, departing. In this departure, in the leave-taking of our hearing, we are first fully addressed by Freud's text, in ways we perhaps cannot yet fully understand. And, I would propose today, as we consider the possibilities of cultural and political analysis, that the impact of this not fully conscious address may be not only a valid but indeed a necessary point of departure.[17]

## 2 LITERATURE AND THE ENACTMENT OF MEMORY

### (Duras, Resnais, *Hiroshima mon amour*)

*And now each knows that in the act of survival he lived a dozen lives and saw more death than he ever thought he would see. At the same time, none of them knew anything.*

John Hersey, *Hiroshima*

The surprising opening sequence of the 1959 French film *Hiroshima mon amour* (by Alain Resnais and Marguerite Duras) begins, after title and credits, with two alternating shots we do not fully comprehend: in the first shot, two interlaced elbows, arms, and a hand, their sagging skin covered with ash, then sweat, move in a slow embrace—apparently victims of the first atomic bombing of Hiroshima. This is followed by two intact elbows,

ity of history. This touches on the difficult question whether the flashback or repetition, as long as it remains unassimilable to consciousness, can be considered truly historical. I would suggest that it might be possible to distinguish between the notion of referentiality and historicity in this case; the return of the event could then be considered referential but not historically experienced. The historical experience, which would involve the story of survival and thus the possibility of passing on to another (or memorializing), would perhaps have to engage, then, in addition, some notion of address or of the possibility of address. Thus the chapters on *Hiroshima mon amour* and Lacan's reading of the dream of the burning child try to grapple with what it means for a traumatic return not only to remain a flashback but to awaken the survivor and to awaken the survivor to an address.

The question of memorializing through one's death or one's life, or memorializing an event through the relation between death and life, is perhaps linked to another question, the question of what it is that one means to recall (a life or a death). On this question, see James Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven; Yale University Press, 1993); Geoffrey Hartman, "Learning from Survivors: The Yale Testimony Project," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 9, no. 2 (1995); and Nadine Fresco, "Remembering the Unknown," *International Review of Psychoanalysis* 11 (1984).

8. The impact of trauma, the Tasso example thus suggests, is transmitted in psychoanalytic theory not only because traumatic experience has there been explained or fully understood but also because the encounter with trauma has transformed and estranged the very language of psychoanalytic writing. Indeed, as I suggest, if the story of the wound offers a parable of traumatic experience, it also serves, in its staging of the figure of the wound, as a parable of the very term *trauma*, of the complexity of the very discourse, that is, of Freud's theoretical (or speculative) language. For the story of the movement from the original wounding of Clorinda to the wounding of the tree can also be read as the story of the emergence of the meaning of trauma from its bodily referent to its psychic extension (see n. 3 above, and Laplanche's work cited there). And as such, the Tasso example suggests that the language of trauma does not simply originate in a theoretical knowledge that stands outside of trauma but may emerge equally from within its very experience. Yet this inner link between the experience of trauma and its theory, or between the language of survivors and the language of theoretical description, need not imply a lack of objectivity or truth, but the very possibility of speaking from within a crisis that cannot simply be known or assimilated.



The relation between language and trauma is examined from a clinical perspective in numerous discussions of language and trauma that struggle with the role of language in the therapeutic treatment of trauma. Most of these discussions suggest that the treatment of trauma requires the incorporation of trauma into a meaningful (and thus sensible) story. This would presumably extend to the theorization of trauma stemming from the therapeutic work (see, for example, Jodie Wigren, "Narrative Completion in the Treatment of Trauma," *Psychotherapy* 31, no. 3 [1994]). I am suggesting here, and throughout this book, the possibility of another way of thinking, or rethinking, this relation between trauma and language.

An interesting perspective on the examination of the impact of trauma on language was offered at the Wellfleet seminar in 1993 (lead by Robert Jay Lifton), where it was suggested by the scholar Ashis Nandy that the problem of witnessing trauma as a professional is learning the difficult task of speaking of trauma in the terms offered by the survivor.

The implication of the theory of trauma in its own object, or the inextricability of the theory from what it describes, could be indirectly linked to the insistence of some writers on the fact that the history of trauma theory—its repeated emergences and disappearances—looks a lot like the phenomenon of traumatic recall itself. See, for example, Elizabeth A. Brett and Robert Ostroff, "Imagery and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: An Overview," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 142 (1985); and Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

## CHAPTER 1 UNCLAIMED EXPERIENCE

1. For a recent expression of this opinion, see S. P. Mohanty, "Us and Them," *Yale Journal of Criticism* 2, no. 2 (1989).

2. There is no firm definition for *trauma*, which has been given various descriptions at various times and under different names. For a good discussion of the history of the notion and for recent attempts to define it, see Charles R. Figley, ed., *Trauma and Its Wake*, 2 vols. (New York: Brunner-Mazel, 1985–86).

3. Freud to Zweig, 30 May 1934, in *The Letters of Sigmund Freud and*

*Arnold Zweig*, ed. Ernst L. Freud (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970).

4. While in the context of Jewish history the term *exile* refers, strictly speaking, to the exile in Babylon, the Egyptian captivity was considered paradigmatic of this later event. Thus *The Encyclopedia of Judaism* says, under the heading "exile," that "it is this 'prenatal' Egyptian servitude which becomes the paradigm of *Galut* [exile] in the rabbinic mind" (see Geoffrey Wigoder, *The Encyclopedia of Judaism* [New York: Macmillan, 1989]).

5. *Created* is an accurate translation of the German text, which reads, "hat . . . geschaffen."

6. Among the more interesting attempts to grapple with the political dimension of *Moses and Monotheism* are Jean-Joseph Goux, "Freud et la structure religieuse du nazisme," in his *Les Iconoclastes* (Paris: Seuil, 1978); and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe et Jean-Luc Nancy, "Le peuple juif ne rêve pas," and Jean-Pierre Winter, "Psychanalyse de l'antisémitisme," both in *La Psychanalyse est-elle une histoire juive?* ed. Adelie Rassiel et Jean-Jacques Rassiel (Paris: Seuil, 1981).

7. It is interesting to note that this future can also be thought of in terms of the divine offer of a "promised land," and thus can be understood in terms of the future-oriented temporality of the promise.

8. Quotations from *Moses and Monotheism* are followed by two sets of page numbers. The first set refers to Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, trans. Katherine Jones (New York: Vintage Books, 1939), which I use in this essay; the second set refers to James Strachey's translation of *Moses and Monotheism* in *SE*, vol. 23.

9. See Edwin R. Wallace, "The Psychodynamic Determinants of *Moses and Monotheism*," *Psychiatry* 40 (1977). There is a long history of psychoanalytic interpretations of Freud's writing on Moses. Among the more interesting are Marthe Robert, *D'Oedipe à Moïse: Freud et la conscience juive* (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1974), published in English as *From Oedipus to Moses: Freud's Jewish Identity*, trans. Ralph Manheim (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977); and Marie Balmary, *Psychoanalyzing Psychoanalysis*, trans. Ned Luckacher (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982). A review and critique of the applied psychoanalytic tradition in this context is to be found in Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi's excellent study of Moses and Monotheism, *Freud's Moses: Judaism Terminable and Interminable* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).



10. There are, of course, a number of exceptions to this standard interpretation. Among them are Goux, "Freud et la structure religieuse du nazisme"; Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, "Le peuple juif ne rêve pas"; Winter, "Psychanalyse de l'antisémitisme"; Yerushalmi, *Freud's Moses*, cited above, as well as Ritchie Robertson, "Freud's Testament: *Moses and Monotheism*," in *Freud in Exile*, ed. Edward Timms and Naomi Segal (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988); and Michel de Certeau's excellent essay "The Fiction of History: The Writing of *Moses and Monotheism*," in his *Writing of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988). Useful treatments of Freud and Judaism include Yerushalmi, *Freud's Moses;* Philip Rieff, *The Mind of the Moralist* (New York: Anchor Books, 1961); and Martin S. Bergmann, "Moses and the Evolution of Freud's Jewish Identity," *Israel Annals of Psychiatry and Related Disciplines* 14 (March 1976). A useful bibliography can be found in Peter Gay, *Freud: A Life for Our Time* (New York: Doubleday, 1988); Gay's own discussion in this work of Freud's Jewish identity and of the writing of *Moses and Monotheism* is highly illuminating.

11. It is also interesting that the two vehicles, coming together, seem to resemble the two men named Moses and the two people coming together, in a missing meeting, at Qadeš. Freud describes this event also as a kind of gap: "I think we are justified in separating the two people from each other and in assuming that the Egyptian Moses never was in Qadeš and had never heard the name of Jahve, whereas the Midianite Moses never set foot in Egypt and knew nothing of Aton. In order to make the two people into one, tradition or legend had to bring the Egyptian Moses to Midian; and we have seen that more than one explanation was given for it" (49; 41).

The significance of *Moses and Monotheism* as a renewal of some of Freud's earliest thinking on trauma is indicated by his use of the figure of the "incubation period" to describe traumatic latency; Freud had used this figure in his early writing in *Studies on Hysteria* (1895) (see *SE*, vol. 2).

12. It is important to note that Freud does not imply the necessity of any particular kind of persecution; that is, while he insists on what appears to be a kind of universality of trauma, he does not suggest that the response to trauma must necessarily be the mistreatment of the

other. In fact, he distinguishes Christian hatred of the Jews from Nazi persecution, describing the former as determined by an Oedipal structure, while of the latter he says, "We must not forget that all the peoples who now excel in the practice of anti-Semitism became Christians only in relatively recent times, sometimes forced to it by bloody compulsion. One might say that they all are 'badly christened'; under the thin veneer of Christianity they have remained what their ancestors were, barbarically polytheistic. They have not yet overcome their grudge against the new religion which was forced on them, and they have projected it on the source from which Christianity came to them. . . . The hatred for Judaism is at bottom hatred for Christianity, and it is not surprising that in the German National Socialist revolution this close connection of the two monotheistic religions finds such clear expression in the hostile treatment of both" (117; 91–92). A brilliant exploration of the relation between Judaism and Christianity in the work of five authors, which takes off from the question of return in the story of Abraham, can be found in Jill Robbins, *Prodigal Son and Elder Brother: Augustine, Petrach, Kierkegaard, Kafka, Levinas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

13. German quotations of *Moses and Monotheism* are taken from Sigmund Freud, *Studienausgabe*, band 9 (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Wissenschaft, 1982).

14. What is translated here as "As an afterthought" is *nachträglich* in German, the word Freud uses elsewhere to describe the "deferred action" or retroactive meaning of traumatic events in psychic life; here what is *nachträglich* is Freud's theoretical insight, which thus also participates in the traumatic structure. An excellent discussion of the structure and temporality of trauma in early Freud can be found in Cynthia Chase, "Oedipal Textuality," in *Decomposing Figures: Rhetorical Readings in the Romantic Tradition* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); and in Jean Laplanche, "Sexuality and the Vital Order," in Laplanche, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis.*

15. Freud to Ernst Freud, 12 May 1938, in *Letters of Sigmund Freud*, ed. Ernst L. Freud, trans. Tania Stern and James Stern (New York: Basic Books, 1960).

16. The resonance of the letter to Ernst with *Moses and Monotheism* is also apparent in the lines that follow those quoted above: "I sometimes compare myself with the old Jacob who, when a very old man, was taken by this children to Egypt, as Thomas Mann is to describe in his next novel. Let us hope that it won't also be followed by an exodus from Egypt. It is high time that Ahasuerus came to rest somewhere." For the context of this writing see Peter Gay's excellent final chapter of *Freud: A Life for Our Time*, "To Die in Freedom," which first alerted me to the letter.



17. Robert Jay Lifton's marvelous treatment of trauma in Freud, in "Survivor Experience and Traumatic Syndrome," in his *Broken Connection: On Death and the Continuity of Life* (1979; New York: Basic Books, 1983), points to the relation between the later development of the notion of trauma and the occurrence of World War I. It would be interesting to explore how the notion of trauma inscribes the impact of war in Freud's theoretical work.

### CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE AND THE ENACTMENT OF MEMORY

1. This chapter draws on both the filmic and the textual version of *Hiroshima mon amour.* Quotations in English are from Marguerite Duras and Alain Resnais, *Hiroshima mon amour*, trans. Richard Seaver (New York: Grove Press, 1961); quotations in French are from *Hiroshima mon amour* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960).

2. See James Monaco, *Alain Resnais* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).

3. On the complex relation between the visual images of the film and the spoken words, see Anne-Marie Gronhovd and William C. Vanderwolk, "Memory as Ontological Disruption: *Hiroshima mon amour* as a Postmodern Work," in *In Language and in Love: Marguerite Duras: The Unspeakable, Essays for Marguerite Duras*, ed. Mechthild Cranston (Potomac, Md.: Scripta Humanistica, 1992); and Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier, "Film Reader of the Text," *Diacritics*, spring 1985.

4. In the context of the comments concerning the end of the war in *Hiroshima mon amour*, it is interesting to note the last line of *Nuit et brouillard:* "Et il y a nous qui regardons sincèrement ces ruines comme si le vieux monstre concentrationnaire était mort sous les décombres, qui feignons de reprendre espoir devant cette image qui s'éloigne, comme si on guérissait de la peste concentrationnaire, nous qui