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# LA SHO'AH

## TRA INTERPRETAZIONE E MEMORIA

*a cura di*

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DERRIDA'S YERUSHALMI, YERUSHALMI'S FREUD:  
HISTORY, MEMORY AND HOPE  
IN A POST-HOLOCAUST AGE

Rarely have I found more compelling the truism that you can't tell a book by its cover than in the case of Jacques Derrida's recent *Mal d'archive: une impression freudienne* (translated into English as *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*). Drawn to the title by intellectual curiosity and professional duty (I am an historian), I soon discovered from the jacket cover that Derrida's book was "a major statement on the pervasive impact of electronic media, particularly email, which threaten to transform the entire public and private space of humanity."<sup>1</sup> A blurb by the editor of the series in which the English version of the book appeared seemed to affirm this direction, noting that Derrida offered in *Archive Fever* "a patient and rigorous reading of the presuppositions and implications of infomatic culture."

The first hint of dissonance between these characterizations and the main concerns of the book surfaced when my eyes darted over the title of the above-mentioned series: Religion and Postmodernism. While I could easily imagine a book about the dizzying expansion of "informativ culture" fitting into the latter category, it wasn't immediately evident to me how such a book might connect to the former. At once, my head filled with Straussian thoughts: was there here an intentional attempt to disguise

<sup>1</sup> JACQUES DERRIDA, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, translated by Eric Prenowitz (Chicago, 1996), inside back jacket cover.

the esoteric, and perhaps subversive, content of the book? Rather than hold on to this "hermeneutic of suspicion," I plunged into the book, forgetting my erstwhile concerns only to reconnect with them later in the reading.

In so doing, I enacted what Derrida understands, I think, as the enterprise of "archiving." The shift from cognizance to oblivion to re-cognizance entails a recovery of repressed memory or, as Derrida might formulate it, of an archive that both holds and reshapes memory. Derrida's archive is the site of remembering and forgetting which begets remembering; it is both "institutive and conservative," "(r)evolutionary and traditional."<sup>2</sup> Thus, in addition to its preservative function, it also violently exorcises and transforms memory, which will never appear again as "spontaneous, alive and internal experience."<sup>3</sup> Our recourse to such archives is constant, reflecting, at one level, an ongoing quest for self-knowledge and, at another level, an unchecked, self-destructive instinct. Derrida is especially intrigued by the obsessive quality of our efforts to access personal archives, especially in the current age of informational inundation. Indeed, we are "en mal d'archive" — a phrase whose double meaning connotes a desperate need of the archive, as well as being caught in the throes of archive fever. Archive fever, the malady that occupies Derrida's attention, is an addiction, a "compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement."<sup>4</sup>

This sobering vision of archival memory summons the specter of Freud. Freudian psychoanalysis, Derrida reminds, is an archival science, perhaps *the* archival science, excavating and arranging those "most private documents" that reveal our emotional histories.<sup>5</sup> It is a science not only in its intense drive to

excavate, but also in its ability to arrange, to process, to order the documentary shards of memory.

But Derrida warns us that "(o)rder is no longer assured." That which has served to guide in the past, "the limits, the borders, and the distinctions have been shaken by an earthquake from which no classificational concept and no implementation of the archive can be sheltered."<sup>6</sup> The seismic image calls to mind Jean-François Lyotard's memorable assertion that the very standards of historical measurement were destroyed in the upheaval that was Auschwitz.<sup>7</sup> By extension, might we not assume that Derrida attributes the current state of disorder in archival classification to the historical, moral, and epistemological ruptures borne of the *Sho'ah*? While I am not prepared to assert here the utter uniqueness of the *Sho'ah* as an historical phenomenon, it surely can be argued that the magnitude of human suffering in it so violated moral, aesthetic, and scientific conventions as to dissolve consensus on basic notions such as historical (or other) truth — not unlike the impact of the First World War in inducing a profound intellectual and spiritual crisis.<sup>8</sup> Jacques Derrida may well be acknowledging such an historical consequence when he connects the present state of archive "disorder" with "the great holocaustic tragedies of our modern history and historiography."<sup>9</sup>

But Derrida's remarks on this association are somewhat elliptical. More explicit is his discussion of the transformative effect of new communications media, especially E-mail, on the very idea of the archive. E-mail, for Derrida, is more than a technical innovation designed to hasten communication. It bears the potential to revise the content of the archive, to produce "radical and interminable turbulences" that transform "the en-

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>7</sup> JEAN-FRANÇOIS LYOTARD, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis, 1988), 57-58.

<sup>8</sup> See, for instance, PAUL FUSSELL, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York, 1975).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>2</sup> *Archive Fever*, 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Archive Fever*, 11.

<sup>4</sup> *Archive Fever*, 91.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

tire public and private space of humanity."<sup>10</sup> In other words, a huge electronic tidal wave is gathering force, bearing the potential to reshape our mental landscape and alter fundamentally the means of production and reproduction of memories.

Such a development is surely worthy of note, not to mention detailed analysis. And yet, it is not this subject which engaged Jacques Derrida throughout the body of *Archive Fever*. Derrida's remarks on the emergence and excesses of our "infomatic culture" served as a prelude to a more consuming task (barely mentioned on the book jacket): that is, an extended commentary on Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi's 1991 book, *Moses: Judaism Terminable and Interminable*.<sup>11</sup> To the extent that this is Derrida's central mission — a proposition reinforced by Derrida's dedication of his book to Yerushalmi — *Archive Fever* is both more and less than its marketers suggest. For while limited to a close, ingenious, and sometimes confounding reading of a single text, it opens vistas on a set of rather sweeping questions. On a most basic level, I must confess that Derrida's reading impelled me to re-examine a book that, unlike others of the same author, did not initially compel or convince. The payoff for such a reexamination is not a vindication of Yerushalmi's thesis. Rather, it lies in illuminating the complicated relationship among Jewish identity, history, and hope in a post-Shoah age. It is toward this end that I propose now to revisit Derrida's agitated reading of Yerushalmi's agitated reading of Freud.

### I. *Into the Covenant*

At the juncture of Derrida's interest in Yerushalmi and Yerushalmi's in Freud are two literary testaments relating to

Freud, archives containing highly personal, albeit diverse, references to Freud's own conception of Jewishness. The first, and less well-known, of these sources is the bilingual (German-Hebrew) Philipsohn Bible which Jakob Freud gave to his son Sigmund on the occasion of the latter's thirty-fifth birthday. Jakob was actually returning to Sigmund a volume which the son had received, and perhaps studied, as a youth — but with an important addition: the Bible now bore a florid Hebrew inscription from father to son describing the gift "as a memorial and as a reminder of love" (*zikaron u-mizkeret ahavah*).<sup>12</sup> Yerushalmi understands Jakob's presentation as a "dramatic call to return to the Bible" which would not have been issued were it likely to fall on deaf ears.<sup>13</sup> In fact, Yerushalmi works back from the 1891 inscription to uncover a much richer Jewish world for the young Freud than most previous scholars had, or could hope to, reveal.

Now let us briefly recall Derrida's framing of the Jakob Freud text. Accompanied by a new inscription and a fresh leather binding (referred to by Jakob Freud as "a cover of new skin"), the Philipsohn Bible is a gift of circumcision. According to Derrida, Jakob Freud, in returning the Bible to its erstwhile owner, is attempting "(t)o bind anew," to re-enter his son into the covenant of Abraham, and, in so doing, to reach back into an archive of Jewish memory.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, Derrida maintains that Yosef Yerushalmi's "decipherment" of the Hebrew inscription repeats "the gesture of the father," the act of circumcision, the re-entry into the covenant. Yerushalmi's aim, in this view, is "to give back to Freud his own competence, his own capacity to receive and thus to read the Hebrew inscription."<sup>15</sup> Yerushalmi would not entirely disagree. He declares that his

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-18.

<sup>11</sup> Derrida himself allows that Yerushalmi's book "has accompanied the preparation of this lecture" however, the subsequent discussion points to a more central role for the book than Derrida's admission implies. *Archive Fever*, 21.

<sup>12</sup> See the text of the inscription in YOSEF HAYIM YERUSHALMI, *Freud's Moses: Judaism Terminable and Interminable* (New Haven, 1991), 104.

<sup>13</sup> *Freud's Moses*, 74.

<sup>14</sup> *Archive Fever*, 21.

<sup>15</sup> *Archive Fever*, 38.

three-fold aim is to demonstrate: first, that Freud received more than a meager Jewish education as a youth; second, that there was a wider range of Jewish rituals observed in his home than he admitted; and third, that he possessed more knowledge of Yiddish and, essential for the inscription, Hebrew than he let on.<sup>16</sup>

These propositions are central to Yerushalmi's task of saving Freud from those, including himself, who seek to deny him his Jewishness. To proceed with this (we might say) fatherly task, Yerushalmi is not content to rely on the seventeen-line Hebrew dedication of Jakob Freud to his son. Rather, he makes recourse to a second text, a more renowned and notorious archive of Freud's Jewish identity, *Moses and Monotheism*. Yerushalmi does so armed with the tools of his historical trade, and yet committed to excavating a Jewish genus, the *Judaens Psychologisches*, that contains deep personal resonances for him.

## II. Der Mann Moses and Freud's Moses

In 1939, Freud published *Der Mann Moses* (or *Moses and Monotheism*). Continuing in the line of *Totem and Taboo*, *Civilization and its Discontents*, and *The Future of an Illusion*, this last major work in Freud's corpus provides yet another opportunity to extend his analysis of individual neurosis to the collective sphere. As is well known, the subject of his case history in *Moses and Monotheism* was Judaism. Freud commences with the claim that monotheism was not, contrary to widespread perception, a Jewish invention. Nor, for that matter, was the founding father of Israelite monotheism, Moses, an Israelite, but rather an Egyptian nobleman. Even more provocatively, Freud's Moses imposed a rigorous form of monotheism upon the Israelites for which he was killed in a revolt. The burden of remembering this patricidal act proved oner-

ous for the Israelite tribe, which repressed its memory, all the while incorporating the original monotheistic ideal into the new religious system of Judaism.<sup>17</sup>

Both the timing and the central argument of the book disconcerted a host of contemporaneous readers of this book. In the midst of the increasingly brutal repression of European Jewry, was it not an act of cowardice, if not outright betrayal, to snatch from one's own people its greatest contribution to world civilization or, as Freud himself put it in the opening line of *Moses and Monotheism*, "(t)o deny a people the man whom it praises as the greatest of its sons"?<sup>18</sup> In the face of the Nazi terror, was Freud deliberately attempting to efface the mark of Jewishness, the sign of the covenant into which he was born?

On the contrary argues Yosef Yerushalmi. Not only was Freud uninterested in renouncing his Jewish identity; he was actually intent on demonstrating, and proudly so, that Jewishness was ineradicable. In his close reading of *Moses and Monotheism*, Yerushalmi happens onto "a singular vision of history as essentially a story of remembering and forgetting." Far from being alien to the Jewish historical experience, this cyclical pattern, Yerushalmi argues, is "strangely analogous...to the biblical conception of history" in which Israel regularly forgets and then is reminded of its God.<sup>19</sup>

Jewish history becomes, for Yerushalmi's Freud, an arena for the recurrent return of the repressed whereby "the Chain of Tradition is replaced by the chain of unconscious repetition" — what Jacques Derrida might well call an archive.<sup>20</sup> Yerushalmi's Freud understands the history of Jewish collective memory as a dynamic process of reformulation and modification. Informing

<sup>17</sup> See DAVID N. MYERS, "Of Marranos and Memory: Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi and the Writing of Jewish History," forthcoming in the *Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi Festschrift*, 26.

<sup>18</sup> SIGMUND FREUD, *Moses and Monotheism* (New York, 1935; 1939), 3.

<sup>19</sup> *Freud's Moses*, 34.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>16</sup> *Freud's Moses*, 64.

this understanding, Yerushalmi provocatively suggests, was a certain Lamarckian instinct in Freud, a belief that Jewish group traits were passed on from generation to generation even as those traits were outwardly modified in response to shifting circumstance. In particular, Yerushalmi attributes a "psycho-Lamarckism" to the Jewish people according to which it "represses the memory of profound events experienced early in its history and transmits them phylogenetically through the unconscious..." It was a Lamarckian paradigm, only slightly less outlandish in his day than in ours, that validated Freud's belief in the ineradicability of Jewishness.<sup>21</sup>

That which is transmitted, memory, gives shape to the character traits of Jews which are "constant, immutable...indelible," although their outward shell changes over time.<sup>22</sup> At one time, the repository for those memories and experiences was Judaism the religion. But in an age in which science had exposed the illusory nature of religion, Judaism was no longer a viable receptacle.<sup>23</sup> Judaism had indeed expired, and yet *Jewishness* continues, sustained by a set of deeply ingrained "ethical, spiritual, and intellectual qualities" even in the most trying of circumstances.<sup>24</sup> Freud's irreverence toward Jewish religious tradition, thus, should not be confused with a desire to abandon Jewishness. According to Yerushalmi, Freud manifests neither "ambivalence nor hostility towards (his) own Jewish identity."<sup>25</sup>

To reiterate, Yerushalmi's Freud was embarked in *Moses and Monotheism* upon an important excavation of the Jewish past intended to prove that Jewishness, in contrast to Judaism, was interminable. Far from being a callous self-hater, Freud was an historian with deep bonds of empathy for his object of in-

quiry, writing in a time of deep anxiety. It strikes me that this image is a projection of Yerushalmi's own perspective, especially in light of his testimony that "my own preoccupation with *Moses and Monotheism* arises out of a profound interest in the various modalities of modern Jewish historicism, of that quest for the meaning of Judaism and Jewish identity through an unprecedented reexamination of the Jewish past..."<sup>26</sup>

Acknowledging that history can advance the quest for meaning would not seem so remarkable had it not come from Yosef Yerushalmi, who authored one of the most probing meditations on the limits of history in recent decades, the slim 1982 volume *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*. At the outset of *Zakhor*, Yerushalmi does declare that the ancient Jews were "the fathers of meaning in history." And yet, the distinctive forms of Biblical historiography, so pregnant with Divine meaning, did not survive the destruction of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem in the year 70 C.E. (A.D.). That is not to say that post-Biblical Jews ceased to remember the past; throughout the Middle Ages, they embedded historical themes into their ritual and liturgical practices out of which they stitched together a rich fabric of collective memory. But this fabric began to unravel with the advance of modernity, no better symbolized than by a critical and dispassionate historicism. For Yosef Yerushalmi, critical history dissolved the holism of the Jewish past, prompting a profound inversion: history now became the standard according to which "Judaism...must prove its validity."<sup>27</sup> The deficiencies of such an order, while rooted in the project of mod-

<sup>26</sup> *Freud's Moses*, 3.

<sup>27</sup> YOSEF HAYIM YERUSHALMI, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, 84. The emblem of Yerushalmi's despair at this condition is Ireneo Funes, the protagonist of a Jorge Luis Borges short story, who suffers from a most frightening malady: a stunning inability to forget. Funes becomes a vast storehouse of utterly trivial data and his plight serves, for Yerushalmi, as a "demonic dénouement to modern historiography as a whole," indeed, as a latter-day victim of the excesses of history diagnosed more than a century ago by Friedrich Nietzsche. *Zakhor*, 102.

<sup>21</sup> *Freud's Moses*, 31.

<sup>22</sup> *Freud's Moses*, 52.

<sup>23</sup> See Freud's earlier discussions in *Future of an Illusion* (1928) and *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930).

<sup>24</sup> *Freud's Moses*, 52.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

ernity itself, nonetheless become especially evident in the wake of the *Sho'ah*. For it is in this period, in which Yerushalmi himself came of intellectual age, that historical knowledge has proved so unsatisfactory, so limited in its explanatory power — a theme that echoes throughout the final chapter of *Zakhor*.

On the surface, the dolorous tenor of the final chapter of *Zakhor* stands in contrast to the more spirited tone of *Freud's Moses*. The aimless modern scholar of the former makes a striking foil to Yerushalmi's Freud, who digs through a mass of psycho-historical data in order to discover meaning in Jewish identity. In the latter case, history serves not to obfuscate nor to relativize, but to clarify the contours of identity, individual and collective. What is surprising is that Yerushalmi may actually be hinting at such a mission already in *Zakhor*. In fact, we might suggest that the later *Freud's Moses* represented Yerushalmi's attempt at validating a particular function for history that he was working out in *Zakhor*. And whom better to turn to for validation than the revered father figure of Sigmund Freud? How better to overcome one's own malaise than to recall the inspired response of an earlier sage cast about by the turbulence of the time?

The sense of a shared mission is reinforced when we remember not only that *Zakhor* surveys the changing forms of Jewish historical memory from antiquity to the modern age, but that this is precisely how Yerushalmi understands Freud's task in *Moses and Monotheism*. According to Yerushalmi, Freud aimed to analyze the genesis of Judaism and its subsequent transformation into Jewishness whose modern incarnation was the Psychological Jew (distinguished by "intellectuality and independence of mind," if not religious devotion).<sup>28</sup> On close inspection, this seems to be Yerushalmi's goal as well, with one important difference. In *Zakhor* and other works, Yerushalmi endeavored to trace the outlines of a spiritual kin of Freud's Psychological Jew, what we might call the Historical Jew (*u-*

*da'us Historicus*). Like Freud and the Psychological Jew, Yerushalmi both exemplifies and analyzes this Historical Jew: he is an historian mindful of the incapability of viewing the world in historical terms; at the same time, he is aware that history has become the "faith of fallen Jews" of which he may well be one.<sup>29</sup> Yerushalmi regards the modern practice of history much like his Freud regards psychoanalysis — as an ersatz and desacralized creed, perhaps a shadow of its former religious form, but still the best or only faith around. Its adherent recognize the serious limitations of history, but also its potential to shape a narrative that provides texture, if not absolute meaning, to life. These fallen Jews belong to the genus of the *Judaicus Historicus*.

Yerushalmi's affinity for Freud, manifested in the bond between the Historical and Psychological Jew, runs deep. Not only does the final chapter of *Zakhor* bear the Freudian subtitle "Historiography and its Discontents." More profoundly, Yerushalmi intimates that his and Freud's professional labors are inextricably linked; historicism, he writes, "has been a dominant characteristic of modern Jewish thought since the early nineteenth century, while the 'historical' bent of psychoanalysis itself is, theoretically and therapeutically, part of its very essence."<sup>30</sup> This close methodological link helps explain to Yerushalmi why both he and Freud seek to follow Jewish identity along its tortuous historical journey, from its soaring heights to its deepest abyss. It is this route that Yerushalmi sets out on in *Zakhor*, resulting in an Historical Jew whose presence defies interpretations of the book as a decisive self-renunciation by a practicing historian. It is a similar route followed in *Moses and Monotheism*, a text whose popular perception — as an exercise in Jewish self-negation — obscured, for Yerushalmi, Freud's sincere and courageous effort at Jewish self-clarification.

<sup>28</sup> *Freud's Moses*, 10.

<sup>29</sup> *Zakhor*, 86.

<sup>30</sup> *Freud's Moses*, 19.



### III. *Historical Novel(sy)*

In light of the above, Yosef Yerushalmi's book *Freud's Moses* can be seen as a work of three-fold reclamation: of Moses by Freud, of Freud by Yerushalmi, and, conversely, of Yerushalmi by Freud (in terms of validating the historical quest for Jewish identity). Jacques Derrida notes another intriguing link with consequences for historical thinking in a post-Holocaust world. This link revolves around a generic parallel: Yerushalmi demonstrates (though he was not the first) that Sigmund Freud first conceived of *Moses and Monotheism* as an historical novel, even entitling an early draft *Der Mann Moses. Ein historischer Roman*,<sup>31</sup> meanwhile, Derrida proposes that we read Yerushalmi's book *Freud's Moses* as an historical novel in its own right. On one hand, he notes, the bulk of Yerushalmi's book is dominated by "the classical norms of knowledge, of scholarship, and of epistemology which dominate in every scientific community."<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, the final chapter, the daring "Monologue with Freud," challenges those very norms. Yerushalmi not only addresses Freud in the second person in this final chapter; he takes for granted Freud's assent when speaking of their shared Jewish experience. At one point, Yerushalmi writes: "In what is at issue here, indeed has been so all along, we both have, as Jews, an equal stake. Therefore in speaking of the Jews I shall not say 'they.' I shall say 'we.'"<sup>33</sup>

For Derrida, the fictional quality of this one-sided conversation which Yerushalmi conducts with Freud signals Yerushalmi's willingness to cross a boundary not often transgressed by historians. It may also signal the attempt to empower the His-

torical Jew not merely to record, but to fashion a new form of historical representation, or as Derrida describes it, a new kind of historical truth — "a truth that scholarship, historiography, and perhaps philosophy have some difficulty thinking through."<sup>34</sup> Would we be extending too far afield, or mixing our metaphors too violently, to call this mix of genres a kind of "Marrano" history?<sup>35</sup> The obvious reason for doing so is that long before he published on Freud, Yosef Yerushalmi had written extensively about the condition of Iberian crypto-Jews and their descendants, most notably in *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto*. Moreover, he understood the Marrano predicament as emblematic of the conflicted loyalties that have defined his own and the modern Jewish condition at large.<sup>36</sup>

The very condition of hybridity that attracted Yerushalmi to crypto-Jews left an impression, forged, we might say, an archive from which he recurrently drew. We might even speculate that this "Marrano" archive inspired Yerushalmi to work with a novel form of historical writing, the historical novel. Again, Freud the father figure could serve as a source of validation. Not only was the first draft of *Moses and Monotheism* planned as an historical novel. Freud actually compared the genre of the historical novel to an experiment in hybridization which produces different progeny.<sup>37</sup> Derrida's suggestion that Yerushalmi was following in Freud's (Marrano) footsteps in producing an historical novel makes sense in light of Yerushalmi's own misgivings about critical historical scholarship. While avowedly laden with an historicist mindset, Yerushalmi could no longer bow to the idol of professional history. His "Monologue with Freud" marks a new

<sup>31</sup> *Archive Fever*, 41.

<sup>32</sup> Derrida confesses not only that he first came to know Yerushalmi through his work on Marranos, but that he has "always secretly identified" with crypto-Jewish history. He does not, though, develop the theme of a "Marrano" history in Yerushalmi. *Archive Fever*, 69-70.

<sup>33</sup> See French *Zakhor* (Paris, 1984), 152.

<sup>34</sup> The text of Freud's introduction is translated into English in YERUSHALMI, *Freud's Moses*, 17.

<sup>35</sup> *Freud's Moses*, 16-18. Yerushalmi's argument rests on a draft of *Der Mann Moses* from 1934, which contains an introduction that elaborates on the idea of an "historical novel." Unbeknownst to Yerushalmi, this manuscript had been published by PIER CESARE BORI, "Una pagina inedita di Freud", *Rivista di storia contemporanea* 7 (1979), 1-16.

<sup>36</sup> *Archive Fever*, 51.

<sup>37</sup> *Freud's Moses*, 81.



turn, a literary creation that fills the gaps of historical scholarship — indeed, that answers, albeit tentatively, questions about Freud's Jewishness and the Jewishness of psychoanalysis that Freud had not. In so doing, I would argue that the "Monologue" sought to provide a measure of meaning and hope to the modern Historical Jew enmeshed in an historicist web. At the same time, it offered at least a partial remedy to the discontents of historiography aired in *Zakhor*.

#### IV. *History and Hope in a Postmodern World*

Before continuing, it might be helpful to retrace our steps along the tortuous path of exegesis which this paper has followed. After all, what I have attempted here is my own commentary on a super-commentary (Derrida's of Freud via Yerushalmi). Freud's quest to gain access to the historical origins of Israelite monotheism inspired Yerushalmi's exploration of the Freudian "archive" of Jewish identity. This, in turn, prompted Derrida to interrogate Yerushalmi's book, "to turn it over again and again" (as an ancient Jewish sage once mandated), in the hope of excavating old sources and creating new ones. Finally, it was Derrida's intriguing engagement, perhaps "monologue," with Yerushalmi on matters of Jewish identity and historical method that stimulated my own interest.

While common enough in pre-modern (notably Jewish) religious discourse, this practice of intertextual commentary grates against the modern historicist imperative to situate discrete actors or texts in their appropriate historical setting.<sup>38</sup> This tension seems appropriate here, since the very search for an interpretive voice that resists the corrosive effects of historicism is one that animates Freud, Yerushalmi, and Derrida. To be sure, none of the three attempted a return to a traditional religious mode of discourse. However, each sought, in his own work, to fashion a

new form of commentary that transcends the limitations of the modern historiographical medium.

The search for such an interpretive voice (what some have called the "middle voice"<sup>39</sup>) has assumed particular urgency in our current age, an era replete with declarations of imminent ends — of a century, of a millennium, of nationalism, of art, of meaning, of truth.<sup>40</sup> Such apocalyptic declarations echo throughout European and American history, especially at century's end. Without undertaking an exhaustive charting of this phenomenon, it suffices to say that events of the twentieth century, above all the Shoah, have induced a marked surge in this kind of apocalyptic expression. For some, it was nothing less than God that succumbed in the ashes of Auschwitz (and we might stress the recurrent nature of such thinking by recalling Nietzsche).<sup>41</sup> For others, it was the poetic voice that was silenced. For yet others, it was the very possibility of historical knowledge. Indeed, the *Sho'ah* forces us to confront, as Saul Friedländer has suggested, the limits of historical representation.<sup>42</sup> What descriptive apparatus — or, for that matter, moral standard — can we apply to a tragedy of this scale? Can we proceed as before with the task of evaluating and classifying competing historical ac-

<sup>38</sup> See Roland Barthes' use of this notion in "To Write: An Intransitive Verb?" in *Id., The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley, 1989), 18.

<sup>40</sup> A number of scholarly works over the past decade have framed their inquiries in terms of an end to existing social or epistemological paradigms. Among them are MALCOLM BULL, *Apocalypse Theory and the End of the World* (Cambridge, 1995); ARTHUR C. DANTO, *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History* (Princeton, 1997); RICHARD DELLAMORA, ed., *Postmodern Apocalypse: Theory and Cultural Practice at the End* (Philadelphia, 1995); STEVE FULLER, *Philosophy, Rhetoric, and the End of Knowledge: The Coming of Science and Technology Studies* (Madison, Wisc., 1993); FRANCIS FUKUYAMA, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York, 1992); DIETER KAMPER and CHRISTOPH WOLFF, eds., *Looking Back on the End of the World* (New York, 1989), and STEIN H. OLSEN, *The End of Literary Theory* (Cambridge, NY, 1987).

<sup>41</sup> See, for instance, RICHARD L. RUBENSTEIN, *After Auschwitz: Radical Theology and Contemporary Judaism* (Indianapolis, 1966).

<sup>42</sup> SAUL FRIEDLÄNDER, ed., *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution"* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992).

<sup>38</sup> Leo Strauss labels a version of this practice the "sociology of philosophy." See *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Glencoe, Ill., 1952), 9.

counts (e.g., that of a perpetrator and that of a victim)? It is in such a state of uncertainty that Derrida writes that "(o)ther is no longer assured" in a world beset by "archive fever." Yerushalmi also worries about this state of orderless historical data. He laments the fact that the Holocaust has produced more historical research than any other event in Jewish history without filling the void of meaning, without creating a "new, meta-historical myth" for Jews.<sup>43</sup>

Yerushalmi and Derrida seem to reflect a certain post-Holocaust anxiety about history.<sup>44</sup> Undeniably, both are deeply troubled by features of the project of modernity itself. But the intellectual and historical context in which both operate, in which both ponder the absence of an Archimedean point of historical knowledge, is the post-*Sho'ah*, age. What is surprising in light of this is that neither surrenders to total disillusion. As a general matter, Derrida delights in probing and poking in order to expose new interpretive possibilities. And so he does with Yerushalmi, probing and poking and identifying a therapeutic, even salvific, function in his historical thought. His evidence lies in a typically one-sided exchange in the "Monologue with Freud" in which Yerushalmi contends that Freud is at his most un-Jewish when he entertains "the question of hope and hopelessness."<sup>45</sup> Freud may well have believed in the ineradicability of Jewishness, but he harbored, according to Yerushalmi, little optimism in or enthusiasm for the Jewish future. And such skepticism undercuts, for Yerushalmi, one of the very pillars of Jewishness. There can be no Jewishness, not to mention an interminable Jewishness, without hope. It is at this juncture of Jewishness and hope that Yerushalmi moves away from, or perhaps does away with, Freud.

<sup>43</sup> *Zakhor*, 98.

<sup>44</sup> The fact that neither has chosen to write extensively about this anxiety may well reflect their very apprehension of the difficulty of representation surrounding the *Sho'ah*. Among the texts in which DERRIDA has worked around the theme of the Holocaust is *Cinders* (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1991) and *Schibboleth. Pour Paul Celan* (Paris, 1986). See also ALLAN MCGILL, *Prophets of Exile* (Berkeley, 1985), 317.

<sup>45</sup> See *Archive Fever*, 73-74 (quoting *Freud's Moses*, 95).

Jacques Derrida's probing of this (and other) passages in *Freud's Moses* adds a curious wrinkle to Yerushalmi's labors. For Yerushalmi is transformed before our eyes from despairing anti-historicist to herald of hope. His version of hope is not a form of messianism.<sup>46</sup> That is, it is neither transcendent nor teleological; on the contrary, it is contingent, deeply entwined, as Derrida notes, with "historicity and with the obligation of memory, or better, with the obligation of the archive."<sup>47</sup>

But is it possible to hope after the rupture of modernity, indeed after the *Sho'ah*? Derrida seems to indicate that it is, at least for Yerushalmi. Yerushalmi, meanwhile, suggests that there may be no choice open to a Jew but to hope; indeed, hope may be one of the inherited characteristics of the Historical Jew. He addresses this theme in a text which Derrida remarkably did not cite, an address delivered at the Colloque des Intellectuels Juifs de Langue Française in 1984 in which the themes of history and hope are explicitly joined. Yerushalmi sets the tone for this essay by quoting the thirty-second chapter of Jeremiah, in which the prophet proceeds to buy a field even though Jerusalem is on the verge of destruction by the Babylonians. Notwithstanding Jeremiah's bewilderment, this passage comes to represent for Yerushalmi a basic Jewish sanguinity. The constancy of hope avoids the extremes of the lachrymose, on one hand, and of the messianic, on the other.<sup>48</sup> Forsaking grand teleologies, Jews have continuously sought what Yerushalmi calls "interim Jewish hopes, those for the times that still separate us from the end of Time."<sup>49</sup>

Yerushalmi urges us to consider this contingent, non-mes-

<sup>46</sup> In Gershon Scholem's authoritative description, messianism is the "real anti-existential idea." SCHOLEM, "Toward an Understanding of the Messianic Idea in Judaism," *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York, 1971), 35.

<sup>47</sup> *Archive Fever*, 75.

<sup>48</sup> The two are collapsed when Yerushalmi describes messianic activism as "an expression of the most profound despair." YOSEF H. YERUSHALMI, "Vers une histoire de l'espoir juif," *Esprit* 104-105 (1985), 35.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 33. Yerushalmi might as well have appointed Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai, rather than Jeremiah, as the spokesman for this perspective. After all, it

sianic, we might add diasporist, version of hope.<sup>30</sup> It is a hope expressed in the quotidian rather than the eternal, the temporal rather than the spatial. Indeed, it is a hope born of and through history, working its curative powers by offering examples of tragedies averted or overcome. Reaching back into the extensive archive of Jewish hope consoles Yerushalmi. As an historian, this archive provides him with the implements to stitch together at least a partial explanation of the mystifying resilience of the Jews. In this respect, Yerushalmi follows the methodological path blazed by Freud in *Moses and Monotheism*. As a Jew, the archive provides access to the repressed memories of Jewish catastrophe and hope, and thereby offers up a measure of solace — and a rationale — for continuing after the *Sho'ah*.<sup>31</sup>

Yerushalmi's hope is that of a fallen Jew stepping away from the edge of darkness. It is manifestly a form of "weak thought," to borrow Gianni Vattimo's term.<sup>32</sup> It makes no grandiose claims to absolute Truth or Redemption. To the extent that it has no concrete end, such hope may suit what Vattimo has called the *posthistoire*, a condition in which progress begets more progress without arriving at "a final destination."<sup>33</sup> But it is different from some notions of the *posthistoire* that denote

was Rabbi Yohanan, the architect of Yavneh, who advised that if one were about to plant a seedling, and heard of the coming of the messiah, one should first plant the seedling and then greet the messiah.

<sup>30</sup> It is a similar idea which informs the nineteenth-century Hasidic scholar, R. MOSHE HAYIM EFFRAIM of Sudlykov, grandson of the Baal Shem Tov, in *Deget mahaneh Efrayim* (Jerusalem, 1963). In commenting on the verse from Exodus 31:13 exhorting the Israelites to keep the Sabbath, R. Moshe Hayim Effraim understands the Sabbath both as a substitute sanctuary and as a modified version of the World to Come. Here the temporal, this-worldly institution of Shabbat stands in place of the mission of transformative redemption.

<sup>31</sup> It also provides, I might add, an alternative to the "neo-lachrymose" view of Jewish history that has emerged in the wake of the *Sho'ah*.

<sup>32</sup> See the introduction by Jon R. Snyder to GIANNI VATTIMO, *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Post-modern Culture* (Cambridge, 1988), ix.

<sup>33</sup> VATTIMO, *The End of Modernity*, 8.

"not the end of the world but the end of meaning."<sup>34</sup> Chastened as he is by the Holocaust, Yerushalmi nonetheless continues the search for meaning. Perhaps he is sustained by his experimentation with new forms of historical writing. Perhaps too he draws strength from the historical example of the Marranos, the prototypical "fallen Jews" of the modern age who could set their sights on nothing other than "interim Jewish hopes." But what hope can be extracted from the Marranos? Does studying Isaac Cardoso or Sigmund Freud, for that matter, promise a clear recipe for Jewish survival? Does studying the history of hope fill the modern void of memory? The potential benefits are limited, but not negligible. The study of history, Yerushalmi advises, can serve:

(t)o assuage our solitude. To understand that we are not the first to whom despair was not alien, nor hope a gratuitous gift. To understand then that we are not necessarily the last.<sup>35</sup>

The fragments of empathy, meaning, and historical consciousness that issue from such study are perhaps not enough to hasten the end of days, but they might be enough to sustain "interim Jewish hopes," as well as inspire the quest for new forms of historical representation.

<sup>34</sup> LUTZ NIETHAMMER, *Posthistoire: Has History Come to an End?* (London, 1992), 3.

<sup>35</sup> "Vers une histoire," 38.