

Salvatore F. Guido

Delivered on the occasion of an homage to Jacques Hassoun, New York City, October 21, 2000.

INTERPRETATION / EXILE / TRANSMISSION

In his presentations at *Après-Coup*, Jacques Hassoun returned again and again to the question of interpretation. Whether he was presenting on the problematic of science and truth, on melancholia, or the structure of hate, the subject of interpretation would inevitably emerge. He explored its temporal structure and its relation to constructions in analysis. He asked what interpretation had to do with transmission. The best way to approach such matters is to do what Jacques did. He provided examples that have the sticking power of a good joke, and are rich enough to sustain multiple interpretations themselves.

During a presentation he gave at *Après-Coup* at the end of October 1995, Jacques recounted something he said he had heard at a group supervision: a story about a patient who found, quite by chance, while browsing in a book store, an old book, a prayerbook, written in Hebrew, and published in Jerusalem. The book was apparently used by the Jewish population in the region of Champagne, before the expulsion of Jews from France in 1391. This patient began to complain to his analyst. He lamented the destruction of that French Jewish tradition. To him, that little book represented the last trace of that medieval culture. What the patient had discovered, the book and the devastating loss it represented for him, moved him to further research. Jacques went on to tell us that in Italy, in the three little towns of Asti, Posi and Moncalvo, a Jewish population used a prayer book whose liturgy remained unknown. Nobody knew the origin of the liturgy contained in that book. It was not Italian, Spanish or German. As the missing liturgy needed a name, it was called the APM liturgy, made up of the initial letters of Asti, Posi, and Moncalvo.

Let's return to our patient. He continued to lament over this last trace he had found of one of the great Talmudic centers of France, the Champagne region where the great Rashi was born in 1040 in its capitol Troyes and where he founded a school. Meanwhile, his analyst had an idea. Not really interested in Jewish history, but in love with Italy, the analyst made an intervention in the form of a construction that had occurred to him. He noted that the Jews were the wine growers of that region of Italy (Jacques added that apparently the analyst did have an interest in fine wines) and that it was possible that those who were expelled from Champagne set themselves up in Asti, and that this is how Asti-Spumante came about! The analyst was shocked. He pursued further research and discovered that, in the 50's, the APM liturgy was found in France and that it was in fact the same liturgy contained in the prayer book he had discovered. So, there was continuity, the construction by the analyst turned out to be true, and had the effect of an interpretation. Nothing had been lost of the great centers of learning. Though the old texts were no longer studied, transmission continued, but in another place and in a different way - via Asti-Spumante. During that interval of time, the passage of several years research from the time of that seemingly ridiculous construction offered by the analyst, the patient, according to Jacques, made a 45-degree turn, what Lacan calls a quarter-turn.

Elaborating further upon the continuity and discontinuity in play here, Jacques said that it's quite probable that the wine growers of Champagne contributed to the making of Asti-Spumante and that this constituted a spirit of the wine, an *esprit du vin*, that linked the two together. According to wine makers, at a certain point in the wine-making process, the spirit of the wine induces the crushed grapes to do the work. So, by introducing the cut, Champagne / Asti-Spumante, a continuity was also established between the two; the analyst had transmitted the spirit of the wine. It's not the same wine, but the wine-making is the same. On the other hand, the quarter-turn undergone by the patient represents a break in his discourse, a break introduced precisely by establishing a continuity where previously there had been only the discontinuity of destruction and loss. From now on, the patient's complaint, his lament over non-transmission and destruction could no longer function in the same way. The meaning of the words had changed. It was no longer the same destruction, exile or transmission once the effects of the interpretation had been worked through. Jacques went on to point out that at the moment of the cut, all the same elements are there, but not in the same order. What has changed is that there is no longer a relation of synonymy. Wine no longer equals wine. An efficacious interpretation, like a good joke, changes everything. It does not function at the

level of decoding the words of the analysand, searching there for a message hidden beneath them, but operates instead at the level of the signifier itself.

Did I mention that when Jacques introduced this story he said: 'Let's call the patient Moses'? As I'm sure you know, contrary to the biblical account, Freud's Moses was not a Hebrew. He was an Egyptian, like Jacques, and a political figure whose name remains inextricably linked to destruction, exile and transmission. In his last book, *The Man Moses and Monotheistic Religion*, Freud offers an interpretation of his own of the revelation at Sinai and the exodus from Egypt. While his subject remained the people of Israel, he no longer required the veracity of events as they are found in the biblical account. Like the interpretation by the analyst in Jacques' story, Freud's interpretation produces something new where previously only a text had stood.

In that same presentation, Jacques said that like interpretation, exile also introduces a jump or leap from which transmission is not missing. The effects produced by the interpretation of that book of Moses allowed him also to cross a boundary. In that crossing he would see for himself what was at stake in interpretation, allowing him to read what was revealed to him there. This would lead him to unfold the metaphor. Interpretation, Jacques said, is a matter of 'finding, of following up on the emergence of a kind of opacity of the other, of allowing this opacity to enter into the analysis'. In such a way, Moses was led to metonymy and the cause of desire through that passage opened up by interpretation. With that leap, he finally understood that one book will always be missing, must always be missing from his personal imaginary collection. Otherwise, there is nothing but a monument to the dead and not a collection at all.

This is what Jacques said.

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