

"Infantile theories on death"
(their origin in childhood, and their destiny in adolescence
and in adulthood)

Dr. María del R. Sánchez Grillo*

"We must also be struck with the fact that the life-drives have much more to do with our inner perception, since they make their appearance as disturbers... while the death-drives seem to fulfil their function unostentatiously."

(S. Freud, 1920, Beyond the pleasure principle)

"Fear of a name only increases fear of the thing itself."

(JK Rowling, 2000, Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone ")

Birth and death of human beings constitute situations of a peculiar substantial reality. As a discipline of that which is human, psychoanalysis has considered from the beginning the importance of the first of these milestones when considering the origin and the etiology of neurosis in the past of children, when reflecting conceptually very strong ideas related to the experience of satisfaction and the first dependence (1895-1900), with the trauma of birth, with the recognition of some tension between the self-preservation and sex drives (1905,1915): the birth stopped being a merely material event, it acquired importance as momentum of the psychic life, and the infantile sexuality with the metamorphosis of puberty commanded a structuring movement, responsible for the subjective integration.¹ From another perspective, the birth of a sibling at an early age (as later a son, a nephew, a grandson) produces an effect, always more or less disturbing (uncanny).

* msanchezg@fibertel.com.ar / [CV](#)

¹ In 1895, when Freud wrote the Project for a Scientific Psychology and described the "experience of satisfaction," his oldest daughter, Mathilde, was 8, and Anna, the youngest of his six children, was a newborn. Prospectively, when he wrote Three Essays on the Theory of sexuality, the oldest was 18 and the youngest was a latent of ten. I want to suggest that the emotional life of the Freud family in Bergasse 19 of Vienna - infancy, childhood, latency, puberty and adolescence of his six children- must have influenced his ideas, his self-analysis and the clinical cases of his practice.

In the little Hans case, as a result of the birth of Hans sister, Hanna, Freud enunciates the concept of the infantile sexuality theories² (1907, 1908, 1909), which arise as attempts of response in front of certain perceptions - (anatomical sexual differences between sexes and the birth of a sibling) - that acquire the quality of traumatic in the complicated passage from the pleasure principle to the reality principle. The IST constitute the "scientific" aspect, together with the fantasies inherent to drama, within the argument of Oedipus complex since -unlike the fantasies or the daydreams with which it shares the "mestizo" aspect (quirky relationship between primary and secondary processes)- in the child is evident a concern about contrasting, through them, the desired, the felt and the observed with reality data³, even confronting with the "reality principle" of some significant adults ("little children are brought by the stork"). Therefore, they have the status of "theories", unlike fantasies. Like dreams, screen memories and delusions, the IST are underpinned in a hallucinatory model ("I saw it") and they are constituted by a figurability⁴ work: hence the strength of conviction that accompanies them.

As in this period Freud's ideas have focused on the conflict between the ego drives (self-preservation) and sexual impulses and, in another dimension, between self-love (narcissism) and love objects, the World War confronted him with the horror of destruction and death, giving the latter the status of motion of what is human and conceptually causing a reorganization of the theory of drives where the opposites in conflict will be Eros (life drives -self-preservation and the sexual ones-) and Thanatos (death drives- destruction-).

"Beyond the Pleasure Principle"⁵ (1920) stands at the center of this proposal, among several articles: "Thoughts for the Times of War and Death," (1915b), "Mourning and Melancholia", "The uncanny" (1919), "Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego"(1921)," The Ego and the Id "(1923)," Civilization and Its Discontents "(1924)," Moses and Monotheism "(1938). All together they express very different aspects: some of them, the impact that the reality of the death of others (usually a loved one) or the

² The three basic IST enunciated by Freud are: 1) the phallic premise; 2) the drainage theory and 3) the sadistic intercourse between parents.

³ This subject was developed extensively in Chapter 3 of "*El niño de las hormigas*" (The Child of the ants)

⁴ See in this regard, Cesar and Sara Botella "*Más allá de la representación*" (Beyond representation)

⁵ In this sense, it is interesting to note that Freud's three male sons, Oliver, Martin and Ernst, enlisted and participated in the war. His son-in-law, Max Halberstadt, who had married to his daughter Sophie, did the same. Max suffered a war injury and a traumatic neurosis of difficult recovery. Both were parents of Ernst in 1914 (the grandson of the fort/da, after IPA psychoanalyst (International Psychoanalytical Association) (London)) and of Heinz (Heinele) in 1918. His daughter Sophie died in January 1920, and while Freud insisted on clarifying that "Beyond the..." was ready since 1919, it is also true that this work, in the words of Strachey, was modified by Freud in the third edition of 1922, almost as it is known today, adding about 30 pages to the 64 original. Other significant details of his history around this article: his grandson Heinele died in June 1923, just shortly after his grandfather's carcinoma was discovered.

threat of the own death (traumatic neurosis) cause in the self; the importance of sorrow and its sickness (melancholia); the repetition compulsion as psychic mechanism; the game as the processing of the loss situations; other articles express the consequences that the reality of death provoked in prehistoric times (primitive man), and in history, leading to myths, rites, beliefs, taboos and religions.

In this paper, I postulate that -within the framework of the second theory of drives and from clinical cases of children at different ages, before the surprise and the sorrow over the loss of a loved one, as well as the fear of his death and of the end of his own life, in an analogous manner to the infantile sexuality theories- children tend to articulate different theories about death: 1) the existence of a timeless dimension in which the dead are still alive; 2) the possibility of resurrection and 3) reincarnation in another beings.

1) The first of these theories implies the acceptance of death -"we are all going to die"- but, at the same time, maintains its denial -"the dead are still alive, but in another place."- As in the myths of origin in different religions the birth is associated with a terrestrial place, an "Eden" or Paradise -comparable to a territory without lacks, where abundance, well-being and happiness reign -, the fate of the dead is a remote place: Olympus, sky, cloud, star, a materiality perceived from a distance, which is not so easily accessed -we don't know it-. Topos governed by a peculiar cronos inhabited by gods, angels and saints, that reward, make miracles and to whom loyalty and gratitude are professed, this topos usually contrasts with another, also distant, associated with the underground, the sinister and terrifying underworld, hell or darkness, the place of punishment, of the devil and the demons. Representatives of the good and evil spirits both refer respectively to the human feelings of love and hatred towards the others and, also, with the possibility to address to his own self. Therefore it is necessary to keep them apart: in the first one, Life, protection, reparation are projected; in the other, Death, hurt, destruction. At the time of a loved one's death, these symbolic places help to tolerate so much pain for the loss of love ties with the dead, as well as to reduce the feeling of guilt for those moments of irritation, anger or aggression (a kind of mini imaginary murders corresponding to different stages of pulsional life). As a function, it is no less important to create a transitional space in which the links with the dead come alive: One can talk to them internally, they can be "consulted", and they may advocate before the gods, in short, they will continue "alive", from their dwelling, with a protective function. In a pathological dimension, they may be at the service of a denial of reality, waiting for magic solutions or at the mercy of a sadistic, tyrannical and punishing Superego.

Within a context of play action, some games or children's expressions take these same representations: in hopscotch, there is a long and complicated path that, if

things are well done, one can get to HEAVEN; when due to a major offense the desire for a child is the destruction of a friend, he can, before hitting or beating him, cut his friendly relationship while he states: "Bring the knife, ring the bell, when you die, you shall go to hell"^{*}. The literature, aimed at different ages, has also dealt with them at all times: Greek mythology with Hades and his dwelling, the underworld; the Divine Comedy, with its horrific creations of heaven and hell; gods, devils and demons, Batman and Joker, Professor Dumbledore and Lord Voldemort (Harry Potter).

Clinical vignette: Jorge (seven years), was brought to consultation due to school symptoms (learning difficulties -he refused to work-, and behavior problems -aggression toward his peers and "playing dead" in class or during the break-), while his teenage sister had cancer with a poor prognosis as a result of which she died a few months later. When he began to improve, he built, with creative meticulousness, spacecrafts with Legos; he used them for interstellar travels in which he "communicated" with interplanetary "siblings".

2) In this second theory, the resurrection of the dead theory, death is accepted, but in front of it one answers with a reparative response with manic features: some traditional tales like Sleeping Beauty (rescued from death by the Prince), and Little Red Riding Hood (which is reborn as by caesarean from the Wolf's tummy⁶), are an example. Recently (2012), Walt Disney Studios⁷ took care of the production of Frankenweenie, which revolves around a boy's obsession, Victor Frankenstein, of getting back to life his pet, the dog Sparky, who had been hit by a car. Its creator and director, Tim Burton, said the entire film and its atmosphere (it is in black and white) were born of his vivid childhood memories. The most magical omnipotence of thought and action in a literary work and for children, latent and adolescents, maybe could be embodied in the works of JK Rowling who, in the first volume of her hit saga, "Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone", suggests that, after all, "to the well-organized mind, death is but the next great adventure." However, the search for immortality is a serious matter in this school of witchcraft and wizardry over its six volumes, in the last of which, "Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows", she describes the three elements capable to overcome or neutralize death: the elder wand, the resurrection stone ... and the cloak of invisibility. Most of the virtual games (as the Power Rangers, the Kamen Rider), are populated by characters who, to his great power and difficult destructiveness, the possibility of receiving very different type of powers -external or internal, material or immaterial- is added, that are capable to revive the characters in

* T.N. In the Spanish original: "*corto mano, corto fierro, cuando te mueras te vas al INFIERNO*".

⁶ It can also be interpreted here a child sexual theory.

⁷ It is said that Walt Disney was cryogenically frozen (introduced in a chamber at low temperatures) so that with the progress of the science, he could be "resurrected". Although the version is now disproved, to quote it within this context it's worth, as fantasy and held belief.

the case of being defeated. Although both Good and Evil are embodied in these characters, quantitatively, the good ones are those who usually succeed and have more power against the malignancy, whose greatest exponent is the Death itself: in the superheroes stories (Superman, Batman, Spiderman), the good ones always triumph over the evil ones, protected by stones (green kryptonite), other elements (cars, belts, helmets) and, very often, a cape that allows, due to its powers, overcoming barriers of time and space. This last element takes a central place in Rowling's work, whose characters highlight an important characteristic of Death: its invisible work (see epigraph).

Clinical vignette: Santos, aged six, was hospitalized twice in pediatric intensive care during his first year because of bronchiolitis. Her mother had suffered significant losses before and after these episodes. In the first hour of play, while setting up a war, he says: "He who does something wrong, dies", just to start with a serious expression on his face and in a tone that he rises: "He who dies, afterwards recovers, did you hear? And it also rhymes a little, look, who di-es after recov-ers *

3) The third theory about death is the reincarnation of certain features of the dead in another being. This theory, supported as a strong belief in Eastern religions (Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism), is also evident in various literary versions, whereby death by migration of certain features is denied, to a different materiality that ensures survival: as in the children's classic tale where the prince, through the work of a spell turns into a frog, and only by a previous spell he can regain nature. Some mythological animals, centaurs, minotaurs and mermaids also allude, in a more literal way, to this idea: both features in a new creature, a sort of combined object. Other animals, such as Cerberus dogs, owls, wolves and snakes have been elected in literature or in folklore to be especially inhabited by evil spirits. A current digital version links this theory with that of the evolution, as happens with the Pokemon series, in which each one of the characters undergoes various transformations, from receiving new energies and powers. This theory, symbolically, is very akin to the psychoanalytic concept of identification that strengthens itself when considering the commitment of the transgenerational in the creation of some symptoms.

Clinical vignette: Benicio, which is named after his father, grandfather and great-grandfather, is a pubescent that consults for his anxieties, fears, and depressive feelings. From his dreams and from a very intense and persistent cephalgia, we built on the analysis the intensity of his transgenerational identification with a paternal uncle, died when he was a child following an accidental blow to the head and with whom he shared a

* T.N: In Spanish "el que mu-era, después se recup-era" The author emphasizes the "ERA" that in Spanish is the past of the verb "to be".

great physical resemblance and chronological coincidences. From the family desire, it seemed to have settled the conviction that the child was a reincarnation of the dead uncle, which became a kind of unconscious mandate.

Conclusions

Clinical work and cultural productions at different times and civilizations (humanity prehistory and history), express these arising theories about death, individually, in an analogous way to the infantile sexual theories, but following the disappearance of a sibling or other close relative. In this sense, I think that they confront us with the disturbing effect of the "double", noted by Freud in "The uncanny" since while all human beings have a record or representation of the birth, we have no experience about death, and what brings us to figure out its possibility, as in a mirror, and connects us with it as an inescapable threat, it is the grief over the loss of another person.

Also, the durability of the ITD in the structure of taboos, myths, rites and religions, as in the individual adolescence and adulthood, express the void to be filled as a result of its subsequent repression and the search of paths of return of the repressed.

Bibliography

Agamben, Giorgio (2011) *Infancia e historia*, Adriana Hidalgo editora, Buenos Aires, 5° edición.

Botella, César y Sara (2001) *La figurabilidad psíquica*. Amorrortu editores, Buenos Aires, 1° edición, 2003.

Dolto, Françoise (1986) *Unpublished texts*. Alianza editorial, 1° edición, Buenos Aires, 1998.

Freud, Sigmund (2012), *Cartas a sus hijos*, Paidós, Buenos Aires 1° edición, 2012

Freud, Sigmund (1919), *Lo ominoso*. O.C. T.XVII. Amorrortu. Buenos Aires. 1996

Freud, Sigmund (1920), *Más allá del principio de placer*. O.C. T.XVIII. Amorrortu. Buenos Aires. 1996

Sánchez Grillo, María del R. (2010). *El Niño de las hormigas*. Ed. Biebel Buenos Aires, 1° ed. 2010.