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EVER SINCE ITS emergence at the turn of the century in the work of Freud and Pierre Janet, the notion of trauma has confronted us not only with a simple pathology, but with a fundamental enigma concerning the psyche's relation to reality. In its general definition, trauma is described as the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena. Traumatic experience, beyond the psychological dimension of suffering, suggests a certain paradox: that the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it, that immediacy, paradoxically, may take the form of belatedness. The repetitions of the traumatic event—unavailable to consciousness, but intruding repeatedly on sight—thus suggest a larger relation to the event that extends beyond what can simply be seen or what can be known, and that is inextricably tied up with the belatedness and incomprehensibility that remain at the heart of this repetitive seeing.

I am going to look in what follows at the problem of seeing and knowing as it appears in a dream told by Freud—the dream of a father who has lost his child—and in the reinterpretation of this dream by Jacques Lacan in his seminar "Tuché and Automaton." While Freud

TRAUMATIC AWAKENINGS

Les désirs entretiennent les rêves. Mais la mort, elle, est du côté du réveil.

—Jacques Lacan¹

introduces the dream in *The Interpretation of Dreams* as an exemplary (if enigmatic) explanation of why we sleep—how we do not adequately face the death outside of us—Lacan suggests that already at the heart of this example is the core of what would later become, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud's notion of traumatic repetition, and especially the traumatic nightmares that, as Freud says, "wake the dreamer up in another fright." In Lacan's analysis, Freud's dream is no longer about a father sleeping in the face of an external death, but about the way in which, in his traumatic awakening, the very identity of the father, as subject, is bound up with, or founded in, the death that he survives. What the father cannot grasp in the death of his child, that is, becomes the foundation of his very identity as father. In thus relating trauma to the identity of the self and to one's relation to another, Lacan's reading shows us, I will suggest, that the shock of traumatic sight reveals at the heart of human subjectivity not so much an epistemological but, rather, what can be defined as an *ethical* relation to the real.

THE STORY OF A DREAM

At the beginning of the seventh chapter of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud introduces a surprising dream that links his theory of the dream to the question of external reality, and specifically to a reality of violence and loss. Freud narrates the dream as follows:

A father had been watching beside his child's sick-bed for days and nights on end. After the child had died, he went into the next room to lie down, but left the door open so that he could see from his bedroom into the room in which his child's body was laid out, with tall candles standing round it. An old man had been engaged to keep watch over it, and sat beside the body murmuring prayers. After a few hours' sleep, the father had a dream that his child was standing beside his bed, caught him by the arm and whispered to him reproachfully: "Father, don't you see I'm burning?" He woke up, noticed a bright glare of light from the next room, hurried into it and found that the old watchman had dropped off to sleep and that the wrappings and one of the arms of his beloved child's dead body had been burned by a lighted candle that had fallen on them.

The explanation of this moving dream is simple enough. . . . The glare of light shone through the open door into the sleeping man's eyes and led him to the conclusion which he would have arrived at if he had been awake, namely that a candle had fallen over and set something alight in the neighbourhood of the body. It is even possible that he had felt some concern when he went to sleep as to whether the old man might not be incompetent to carry out his task. . . .

[T]he words spoken by the child must have been made up of words which he had actually spoken in his lifetime. . . . For instance, "I'm burning" may have been spoken during the fever of the child's last illness, and "Father, don't you see?" may have been derived from some other highly emotional situation. . . .

But, having recognized that the dream was a process with a meaning, and that it can be inserted into the chain of the dreamer's psychological experiences, we may still wonder why it was that a dream occurred at all in such circumstances, when the most rapid possible awakening was called for.¹

Unlike other dreams, Freud remarks, what is striking in this dream is not its relation to inner wishes, but its direct relation to a catastrophic reality outside: the dream takes its "moving" power, it would seem, from the very simplicity and directness of its reference—the burning of his child's body that the father sees through his sleep. Seeing the light through his closed eyes, the father comes to the conclusion that he would have come to if he were awake: that the candle has fallen on the body of his child. Yet the very directness of this dream, Freud remarks, does not, surprisingly, wake the father and permit him to rush to save the burning corpse, but precisely *delays* his response to the waking reality. If the meaning and reference of the dream are indeed clear, Freud suggests, then it is not apparent why they should appear at all *in* a dream, that is, in a form that delays the father's response—a response that is urgently called for—to the reality to which it points. Precisely because the dream is so direct—and because the reality it refers to is so urgent in its demand for attention—this dream poses the question: in the context of a violent reality, *why dream rather than wake up?*

Freud first attempts to answer this question by referring the dream to the theory of wish fulfillment, in spite of its direct representation of the child's unwished-for death. For while the dream points to the

horrible reality of the child's burning, it does so, Freud points out, precisely by transforming the dead child into a living one. The dream fulfills, therefore, the father's wish that the child be still alive:

Here we shall observe that this dream, too, contained the fulfillment of a wish. The dead child behaved in the dream like a living one; he himself warned his father, came to his bed, and caught him by the arm, just as he had probably done on the occasion from the memory of which the first part of the child's words in the dream were derived. For the sake of the fulfillment of this wish the father prolonged his sleep by one moment. The dream was preferred to a waking reflection because it was able to show the child as once more alive. If the father had woken up first and then made the inference that led him to go into the next room, he would, as it were, have shortened his child's life by that moment of time.

While the dream seems to show the reality of the burning outside, it in fact hides, Freud suggests, the reality of the child's death. The dream thus transforms death into life and does this, paradoxically, with the very words that refer to the reality of the burning. It is in order to fulfill the father's wish to see the child alive, in other words, that the knowledge of the child's burning is turned into a dream. If the father dreams rather than wakes up, it is because he cannot face the knowledge of the child's death while he is awake. It is thus not so much that the father simply does not see the burning corpse ("father, don't you see")—he does see it—but rather that he cannot see it and be awake at the same time. For the father, Freud seems to imply, the knowledge of the death of his child can perhaps only appear in the form of a fiction or a dream.² The dream thus tells the story of a father's grief as the very relation of the psyche to reality: the dream, as a delay, reveals the ineradicable gap between the reality of a death and the desire that cannot overcome it except in the fiction of a dream.

After completing his original analysis, however, Freud remains unsatisfied with the explanation and returns to the dream again at a later point in the chapter, where the problem of the dream's delay of awakening comes back to take on new meaning. For the interpretation of the dream as the fulfillment of the father's wish leads to a deeper question that con-

cerns not only this singular instance of dreaming, but the way in which the father may represent the very nature of consciousness itself:

Let me recall the dream dreamt by the man who was led to infer from the glare of light coming out of the next room that his child's body might be on fire. The father drew this inference in a dream instead of allowing himself to be woken up by the glare; and we have suggested that one of the psychical forces responsible for this result was a wish which prolonged by that one moment the life of the child whom he pictured in the dream. . . . We may assume that a further motive force in the production of the dream was the father's sleep; his sleep, like the child's life, was prolonged by one moment by the dream. "Let the dream go on"—such was his motive—"or I shall have to wake up." In every other dream, just as in this one, the wish to sleep lends its support to the unconscious wish. (610)

The wish in the father's dream to keep the child alive—the first reason Freud gives for the father's dream—is inextricably bound up, it turns out, with a more profound and enigmatic wish, the father's wish to sleep. This wish is enigmatic because, as Freud suggests, it does not come only from the body but from consciousness itself, which desires, somehow, its own suspension. And this wish, moreover, is not limited to this single father, exhausted by his task of watching over the child, but indeed refers to a desire common to all sleepers. The dream of the burning child does not simply represent, therefore, the wish fulfillment of a single father, tired and wishing to see his child alive once again, but more profoundly and more enigmatically, the wish fulfillment of consciousness itself:

All dreams . . . serve the purpose of prolonging sleep instead of waking up. The dream is the GUARDIAN of sleep and not its disturber. . . . Thus the wish to sleep (which the conscious ego is concentrated upon . . .) must in every case be reckoned as one of the motivations for the formation of dreams, and every successful dream is a fulfillment of that wish. (267–268, translation modified)

The specific wish behind the dream of the burning child, Freud suggests, as the wish behind any dream, is tied to a more basic desire, the desire of consciousness as such *not to wake up*. It is not the father alone

who dreams to avoid his child's death, but *consciousness itself* that, in its sleep, is tied to a death from which it turns away. The dream is thus no longer simply linked to a wish within the unconscious fantasy world of the psyche; it is rather *something in reality itself*, Freud seems to suggest, *that makes us sleep*. The question concerning the father, *why dream rather than wake up?* thus ultimately becomes, in Freud, a more profound and mysterious question concerning consciousness itself: *What does it mean to sleep? And what does it mean to wish to sleep?*

THE STORY OF AN AWAKENING

Freud's analysis of the dream, and its implicit question in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, seems to leave us with the sense of a consciousness both tied up with, but also blinded to, a violent reality outside. But when Lacan turns to the dream in his seminar, he suggests that the question of sleep and Freud's analysis of it contain within them, implicitly, another question, a question discovered not through the story of the father's sleep, but rather through the story of how he wakes up:

You will remember the unfortunate father who went to rest in the room next to the one in which his dead child lay—leaving the child in the care, we are told, of another old man—and who is awoken by something. By what? It is not only the reality, the shock, the knocking, a noise made to recall him to the real, but this expresses, in his dream, the quasi-identity of what is happening, the very reality of an overturned candle setting light to the bed in which his child lies.

Such an example hardly seems to confirm Freud's thesis in the *Traumdeutung*—that the dream is the realization of a desire.

What we see emerging here, almost for the first time, in the *Traumdeutung*, is a function of the dream of an apparently secondary kind—in this case, the dream satisfies only the need to prolong sleep. What, then, does Freud mean by placing, at this point, this particular dream, stressing that it is in itself full confirmation of his thesis regarding dreams?

If the function of the dream is to prolong sleep, if the dream, after all, may come so near to the reality that causes it, can we not say that it might correspond to this reality without emerging from sleep? After all, there is such a thing as

somnambulistic activity. The question that arises, and which indeed all Freud's previous indications allow us here to produce is—*What is it that wakes the sleeper?* Is it not, in the dream, another reality?—the reality that Freud describes thus—*Das das Kind an seinem Bette steht*, that the child is near his bed, *ihn am Arme fasst*, takes him by the arm and whispers to him reproachfully, *und ihm vorwurfsvoll zuraunt: Vater, siehst du denn nicht*, Father don't you see, *dass ich verbrenne*, that I am burning?

Is there not more reality in this message than in the noise by which the father also identifies the strange reality of what is happening in the room next door? (57–58)³

In explaining the dream as fulfilling the wish to sleep, Lacan suggests, Freud implicitly points towards the fact that this wish is enigmatically defied in waking up; for if consciousness is what desires as such not to wake up, the waking is in conflict with the conscious wish. But what is particularly striking for Lacan is that this contradiction of the wish to sleep does not simply come from the outside, from the noise or light of the falling candle, but from the way in which the words of the child bear precisely upon sleeping and waking: they do not indeed simply represent the burning without, but rather *address* the father from within, and appeal to him as a complaint about the very fact of his own sleep. It is *the dream itself*, that is, *that wakes the sleeper*, and it is in this paradoxical awakening—an awakening not to, but against the very wishes of consciousness—that the dreamer confronts the reality of a death from which he cannot turn away. If Freud suggests that the dream keeps the father asleep, that is, Lacan suggests that it is because the father dreams, paradoxically enough, that he precisely wakes up. The focus of the dream thus becomes, in Lacan's analysis, no longer a function of sleep, but rather a function of awakening. If Freud asks, *what does it mean to sleep?* Lacan discovers at the heart of this question another one, perhaps even more urgent: *what does it mean to awaken?*

It might seem, in his focus on awakening, that Lacan moves from the fictional dream world of Freud—the fictional world of the child once again alive—to the simple reality of the external world, the accident of the candle falling on the body, which is also the reality of the child's death. But what can it mean that the father is not awoken simply by the sound of the candle's fall, but rather by the words of the

child *within* the dream, the dream that should have been, in its fulfillment of the wish to sleep, also the resuscitation of the child? Indeed, to the extent that the father is awakened by the dream itself, his awakening to death is not a simple movement of knowledge or perception, but rather, Lacan suggests, a paradoxical attempt *to respond, in awakening, to a call that can only be heard within sleep*. I would propose that it is in this paradoxical awakening by the dream itself that Lacan discovers and extends the specific meaning of the confrontation with death that is contained within Freud's notion of trauma, which, in Freud's texts, is described as the response to a sudden or unexpected threat of death that happens too soon to be fully known, and is then endlessly repeated in reenactments and nightmares that attempt to relive, but in fact only miss again, the original event. For if the dreamer's awakening can be seen as a response to the words, to the address of the child within the dream, then the awakening represents a paradox about the necessity and impossibility of confronting death. As a response to the request, the plea, by the child to be seen, the father's awakening represents not only a responding, that is, but a missing, a bond with the child that is built upon the impossibility of a proper response. Waking up in order to see, the father discovers that he has once again *seen too late* to prevent the burning. The relation between the burning within and the burning without is thus neither a fiction (as in Freud's interpretation), nor a direct representation, but a *repetition* that, in its temporal contradiction, shows how the very bond of the father with the child—his responsiveness to the child's words—is linked to the missing of the child's death. To awaken is thus precisely to awaken only to one's repetition of a previous failure to see in time. The force of the trauma is not the death alone, that is, but the fact that, in his very attachment to the child, the father was unable to witness the child's dying as it occurred. *Awakening*, in Lacan's reading of the dream, *is itself the site of a trauma*, the trauma of the necessity and impossibility of responding to another's death.⁴

From this perspective, the trauma that the dream (as an awakening) reenacts is not only the missed encounter with the child's death, but the way in which that missing also constitutes the very survival of the father, a survival that can no longer be understood merely as an accidental liv-

ing beyond the child, but rather as a mode of existence determined by the impossible structure of the response. By shifting the cause of the awakening from the accident of the candle falling outside the dream to the words of the child inside the dream, that is, Lacan suggests that the awakening itself is not a simple accident, but engages a larger question of responsibility. In rethinking the meaning of the accident and linking it to this question about the nature of survival, Lacan is drawing here, I would propose, on Freud's central emphasis in his later work on trauma, on the example of the train accident, which is meant to show how the traumatic confrontation with death is sudden and unexpected, too soon to be grasped fully by consciousness.⁵ In Lacan's text, this peculiar accidentality at the heart of trauma in Freud is linked to the larger philosophical significance of traumatic repetition:

Is it not remarkable that, at the origin of the analytic experience, the real should have presented itself in the form of that which is unassimilable in it—in the form of the trauma, determining all that follows, and imposing on it an apparently accidental origin? (55)

Likewise, in the awakening of the father from the dream, the gap between the accident of the burning outside and the words of the child in the dream produces a significance greater than any chance awakening out of sleep, a significance that must be read in the relation between the chance event and the words it calls up:

Between what occurs as if by chance, when everybody is asleep—the candle that overturns and the sheets that catch fire, the meaningless event, the accident, the piece of bad luck—and the poignancy, however veiled, in the words, *Father, don't you see I'm burning*—there is the same relation to what we were dealing with in repetition. It is what, for us, is represented in the term neurosis of destiny or neurosis of failure. (69)

If the awakening reenacts the father's survival of his son's death, then it is no longer simply the effect of an accident, but carries within it, and is defined by, its response to the words of the dead child that lie at its root.

It is this determining link between the child's death and the father's survival, I would propose, that is Lacan's true discovery in the dream and in its analysis by Freud: if Freud reads in the dream of the burning child the story of a sleeping consciousness figured by a father unable to face the accidental death of his child, Lacan reads, in the awakening, the story of the way father *and* child are inextricably bound together through the story of a trauma.⁶ Lacan, in other words, reads the story of the father as a survival inherently and constitutively bound up with the address of a dead child. The father's story of survival, in other words, is no longer simply his own, but tells, as a mode of response, the story of the dead child. This story itself has a double dimension. Depending on whether the child's words are read as referring to the burning within or to the burning without, the father's survival can be understood, as we shall see, in terms of two inextricably bound, though incompatible, responses to the child's address. In thus implicitly exploring consciousness as figured by the survivor whose life is inextricably linked to the death he witnesses, Lacan resituates the psyche's relation to the real not as a simple matter of seeing or of knowing the nature of empirical events, not as what can be known or what cannot be known about reality, but as the story of an urgent responsibility, or what Lacan defines, in this conjunction, as an *ethical* relation to the real.⁷

A FAILED ADDRESS

If the words of the child ("Father, don't you see I'm burning?") can be read, in this light, as a plea by the child to see the burning *within* the dream, then the response of the father in this awakening dramatizes the story of a repeated *failure* to respond adequately, a failure to see the child in its death. From this perspective the dream would appear to reveal a reality beyond the accident of a single empirical event, the chance death of a child by fever. For showing, in its repetition, the failure of the father to see even when he tries to see, the dream reveals how the very consciousness of the father as father—as the one who wishes to see his child alive again so much that he sleeps in spite of the burning corpse—

is linked inextricably to the impossibility of responding adequately to the plea of the child in its death. The bond to the child, the sense of responsibility, is tied to the impossibility of recognizing the child in its potential death. And it is this bond that is revealed, exemplarily, as the real by the dream, as an encounter with a real established around an inherent impossibility:

What encounter can there be henceforth with that forever inert being—even now being devoured by the flames—if not the encounter that occurs precisely at the moment when, by accident, as if by chance, the flames come to meet him? Where is the reality in this accident, if not that it repeats something actually more fatal by means of reality, a reality in which the person who was supposed to be watching over the body still remains asleep, even when the father reemerges after having woken up? (58–59)

In awakening, the father's response repeats in one act a double failure of seeing—a failure to see adequately inside, and a failure to see adequately outside.

Indeed, Lacan's interpretive movement, from the accident of the candle falling, to the dream as what repeats something "more fatal" by means of reality, could be said to represent a parable implied by the movement from Chapter Four to Chapter Five of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*: from the speculation on consciousness that explains trauma as an interruption of consciousness by something—such as an accident—that comes too soon to be expected, to Freud's explanation of the origins of life itself as an "awakening" out of death that establishes the foundation of the drive and of consciousness.⁸ Freud's peculiar movement—from trauma as an exception, an accident that takes consciousness by surprise and thus disrupts it, to trauma as the very origin of consciousness and all of life itself—is, Lacan suggests, a way of showing how the accidental in trauma is also a revelation of a basic, ethical dilemma at the heart of consciousness itself, insofar as it is essentially related to death, and particularly, to the death of others.⁹ Ultimately, then, the story of father and child, for Lacan, is the story of an

impossible responsibility of consciousness in its own originating relation to others, and specifically the deaths of others. As an awakening, the ethical relation to the real is the revelation of this impossible demand at the heart of human consciousness.¹⁰

AN UNAVOIDABLE IMPERATIVE

But the words of the child, “Father, don’t you see I’m burning?” can be read another way, as well: not only as the plea to see the child burning in the dream, but as the command to see the child burning without, as the imperative, that is, to awaken. While Lacan does not explicitly articulate this reading, he does suggest that the missing of the trauma is also an encounter:

For what we have in the discovery of psychoanalysis is an encounter, an essential encounter—an appointment to which we are always called with a real that eludes us. (53)

From this perspective, the awakening embodies an appointment with the real. The awakening, in other words, occurs not merely as a failure to respond, but as an enactment of the inevitability of responding—of awakening to the survival of the child that is now only a corpse. The pathos and significance of this awakening derive not simply from the repeated loss of the child, in the father’s attempt to see, but rather from the fact that it is precisely the child, the child whom the father has not seen in time, the child he has let die unwitnessed, the child whom the dream (in the father’s desperation to make the child live again) shows as once again alive—it is this very child who, from within the failure of the father’s seeing, commands the father to awaken and to live, and to live precisely as the seeing of another, a different burning. The father, who would have stayed inside the dream to see his child alive once more, is commanded, by this child, to see not from the inside—the inside of the dream, and the inside of the death, which is the only place the child could now be truly seen—but to see from the outside, to leave the child in the dream so as to awaken elsewhere. It is precisely the dead child,

the child in its irreducible inaccessibility and otherness, who says to the father: *wake up, leave me, survive, survive to tell the story of my burning.*

To awaken is thus to bear the imperative to survive: to survive no longer simply as the father of a child, but as the one who must tell *what it means not to see*, which is also what it means to hear the unthinkable words of the dying child:

Is not the dream essentially, one might say, an act of homage to the missed reality—the reality that can no longer produce itself except by repeating itself endlessly in some never attained awakening? (58)

Only a rite, an endlessly repeated act, can commemorate this not very memorable encounter—for no one can say what the death of a child is, except the father qua father, that is to say, no conscious being. (59)

The father must receive the dead child’s words. But the only way truly to hear is now precisely not by seeing and listening as a living father listens to a living child, but as the one who receives the very gap between the other’s death and his own life, the one who, in awakening, does not see but enacts the impact of the very difference between death and life. The awakening, in its very inability to see, is thus the true *reception of an address* that, precisely in its crossing from the burning within to the burning without, changes and reforms the nature of the addressee around the blindness of the imperative itself. For in awakening, in responding to the address of the dead child, “Father, don’t you see I’m burning?” the father is no longer the father of a living child but precisely now *the one who can say* what the death of a child is. The response is not a knowing, that is, but the performance of a speaking, and as such, in the very seeming passivity and lack of agency and mastery in the repetition of the response, precisely carries with it and transmits the child’s otherness, the father’s encounter with the otherness of the dead child.

Such an awakening, if it is in some sense still a repetition of the trauma (a redramatization of the child’s dying), is however not a simple repetition of the *same* failure and loss—of the story of the father alone—but a new act that repeats precisely a departure and a difference: the

departure of the father at the command of his burning child, and the difference, the intolerable difference, between the burning within and the burning without.

As an act, the awakening is thus not an understanding but a transmission, the performance of an act of awakening that contains within it its own difference—"Repetition," Lacan says in the third part of the seminar, "demands the new." This newness is enacted in the fact, precisely, that the words are no longer mastered or possessed by the one who says them—by the child who has died and for whom it is eternally too late to speak, or by the father who receives the words as coming from the place of the child, the self that was asleep. Neither the possession of the father nor the possession of the child, the words are passed on as an act that does not precisely awaken the self but *passes the awakening on to others*.

The accident is thus not a reality that can simply be known but an encounter that must take place each time anew in the accident of where the words happen to fall:

But what, then, was this accident? When everybody is asleep, including the person who wished to take a little rest, the person who was unable to maintain his vigil and the person of whom some well intentioned individual, standing at his bedside, must have said, *He looks just as if he is asleep*, when we know only one thing about him, and that is that, in this entirely sleeping world, only the voice is heard, *Father, don't you see I'm burning?* This sentence is itself a firebrand—of itself it brings fire where it falls—and one cannot see what is burning, for the flames blind us to the fact that the fire bears on the *Unterlegt*, on the *Untertragen*, on the real. (59)

The accident, the force of the falling of the candle, is no longer confinable simply to a real that consists in the empirical fact of burning, or the fever, the accident by which the child caught fever or by which the candle fell while the father slept. The force of the fall is precisely the accident of the way in which the child's words transmit a burning that turns between the death of the child and the imperative of the father's survival, a burning that, precisely, like the candle, falls to awaken, anew, those who hear the words.

The full implications of such a transmission will only be fully grasped, I think, when we come to understand how, through the act of survival, the repeated failure to have seen in time—in itself a pure repetition compulsion, a repeated nightmare—can be transformed by, and transmuted into, the imperative of a speaking that awakens others. For now, however, I will simply point to the imperative of awakening that underlies Lacan's own text, the theoretical text of psychoanalysis. For it is in the language of theory itself, Lacan suggests, that psychoanalysis transmits, as he puts it, the "fever" of Freud, the burning of Freud's driving question, "What is the first encounter, the real, that lies behind the fantasy?" (54). And it is to this burning question, and to this fever he senses in Freud's text, that Lacan's own text precisely responds:

The function of . . . the real as encounter—the encounter insofar as it may be missed, insofar as it is essentially the missed encounter—first presented itself in the history of psychoanalysis in a form that was in itself already enough to awaken our attention, that of the trauma. (55, emphasis added)

Lacan suggests that the inspiration of his own text is awakened by the theory of trauma at the center of Freud's text, and that the Freudian theory of trauma speaks already (in this story of the burning dream and of the burning child) from within the very theory of wish fulfillment. The passing on of psychoanalytic theory, Lacan suggests, is an imperative to awaken that turns between a traumatic repetition and the ethical burden of a survival.¹¹ It is indeed not simply Freud's perception and analysis of a reality outside or inside (a reality of empirical events or of internal "fantasies") that Lacan transmits, but rather, most importantly, what Lacan refers to as the "ethical witness" of Freud.¹² The transmission of the psychoanalytic theory of trauma, the story of dreams and of dying children, cannot be reduced, that is, to a simple mastery of facts, and cannot be located in a simple knowledge or cognition.

Indeed, the event of the trauma of the dream and the story of the child's death in the texts of Freud and of Lacan resonate uncannily

with the unexpected stories of their own losses: Freud's text is inadvertently shadowed by the death of Freud's own daughter Sophie from a fever, and Lacan's text gains prophetic resonance from the death of his own daughter, Caroline, in a car accident, a few years after the delivery of the seminar on the dream of the burning child.¹³

In Lacan's text, as in Freud's, it is rather the words of the child that are ultimately passed on, passed on not in the meaning of the words alone, but in their repeated utterance, in their performance: a performance that, in Lacan's text, takes place in the movement of the repetition and the gap between the German from which these words address the future, and the French in which they are heard and received, and in which they are endlessly echoed:

Qu'est-ce qui réveille? N'est-ce pas, dans le rêve, une autre réalité?—cette réalité que Freud nous décrit ainsi—Dass das Kind an seinem Bette steht, que l'enfant est près de son lit, ihm am Arme fasst, le prend par le bras, et lui murmure sur un ton de reproche, und ihm vorwurfsvoll zuraunt: Vater, siehst du denn nicht, Père, ne voit-tu pas, dass ich verbrenne? que je brûle? (57)

The passing on of the child's words does not simply refer to a reality that can be grasped in these words' representation, but transmits the ethical imperative of an awakening that has yet to occur.

NOTES

1. Quotations from Freud are taken from *The Standard Edition of The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. James Strachey, Vol. V (London, 1953).
2. On the relation between the dream of the burning child and Freud's dream of his own father, see Jane Gallop, *Reading Lacan* (New York, 1985).
3. Quotations from the English texts are taken from Jacques Lacan, "Tuché and Automaton," in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, 1973). Quotations from the French text are taken from Jacques Lacan, "Tuché et automaton," in *Le séminaire, livre XI: Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse* (Paris, 1973).
4. Leonard Shengold provides a reading of the burning as highly symbolic and linked to desire in "Father, Don't You See I'm Burning?" *Reflections on Sex, Narcissism, Symbolism, and Murder: From Everything to Nothing* (New Haven, 1991). Lacan's text resists an

oversymbolic reading, I believe, but he does link the burning to desire in Chapter Four of the seminar, and in his final comments in the fifth chapter. It would be necessary to rethink the drive through the curious resistance to symbolism of trauma, rather than reading the traumatic nightmare through the established repression and Oedipal theories of received psychoanalysis. One notion that such a rethinking would have to engage would be that of ambivalence, and specifically the possibility of the father's ambivalence toward the child that Freud allows when he suggests in his interpretation that the father may feel some guilt at having left a man to watch over the child who was not up to his task (see the complete Freud passage). Rather than addressing this ambivalence in terms of the individual father in a father-son antagonism, Freud seems to incorporate it into a larger problem of consciousness as such when he says that it is consciousness itself that does not wish to wake up: for in this case the wish to keep the child alive that Freud originally says motivates the dream indeed becomes secondary to the wish of consciousness to sleep, and may only serve the wish of consciousness, even in the face of the death of a child, to protect its own sleep.

5. The passages I refer to are the examples of the accident nightmare in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, and the comparison of the trauma of the Jews with a train accident survivor in *Moses and Monotheism*, which I have discussed at length in "Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History," *Yale French Studies* 79 (1991), pp. 181–192.
6. Shoshana Felman evocatively reads the Lacan essay in terms of the "encounter between sleep and waking" in *La folie et la chose littenaire* (Paris, 1978). It should be noted that the relation between sleeping and waking, analyzed in my essay in terms of father and child, involves another character, the *Wächter*, who has fallen asleep next to the child and remains asleep even when the father awakens. Lacan describes the moment between sleeping and waking also in terms of this split between father and *Wächter*, and picks up on this notion of splitting in the third part of the seminar. He thus touches on another dimension of trauma that, in the history of psychiatry and psychoanalysis, goes alongside the temporal understanding of trauma as experiencing too late: the notion of dissociation of the psyche around the event—the splitting off of a "traumatic memory" from the rest of consciousness (and unconsciousness, for that matter). This notion had been developed at length by Pierre Janet, and in contemporary trauma theory there is a certain division around the Freudian understanding of trauma as repetition and reenactment (which, whether acknowledged or not, has a constitutively temporal basis,) and dissociation theories that are often identified with Janet (although Freud also wrote on splitting). (On Janet and Freud, see Bessel A. van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart, "The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Trauma and the Engraving of Memory," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth [Baltimore, 1995]). It is interesting to note (and may be behind Lacan's own reading) that the *Wächter* in the dream of the burning child

resonates with Freud's own general definition of the dream, in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, as the guardian of sleep, "der Wächter des Schlafens."

7. My reading of this seminar (Chapter Five in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*) can be, in part, understood as a reading of Lacan's comments in Chapter Three:

The status of the unconscious, which, as I have shown, is so fragile on the ontic plane, is ethical. In his thirst for truth, Freud says: "Whatever it is, I must go there, because, somewhere, this unconscious reveals itself." . . . Freud said: "There is the country where I shall take my people." . . . I am not being impressionistic when I say that Freud's approach here is ethical. . . . Freud shows that he is very well aware how fragile are the veils of the unconscious where this register is concerned, when he opens the last chapter of *The Interpretation of Dreams* with the dream which, of all those that are analyzed in the book, is in a category of its own—a dream suspended around the most anguishing mystery, that which links a father to the corpse of his son close by, of his dead son. . . . (pp. 32–33)

Slavoj Žižek suggests that the awakening in Lacan's reading of the dream is a precise reversal of the usual understanding of dream as fiction and awakening as reality: he argues that the awakening of the father, in Lacan's reading, is an "escape" from the real into ideology. Aside from the difficulty of accepting that awakening to a child's dead corpse could ever be understood as an escape, the force of Lacan's reading is clearly, I think, to suggest that the encounter with the real cannot be located simply inside or outside the dream but in the moment of the movement from one to the other, what he calls "the gap that constitutes awakening." See Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London, 1989).

8. One might also be able to understand Freud's description of the death drive in this context in terms of the very specific death in the burning child dream, the death that is of a child. For the death drive, the originating and repeated attempt by the organism to return to the inanimate, the awakening into life that immediately entails an attempt to return to death, could be seen generally as a sense that one has died too late. And what could it mean to die *too late*, except to die *after one's child*?

It is important to note here the shift that is not articulated in Freud but implied by Lacan's reading, from the notion of trauma as a relation to one's own death to the relation to another's death; Freud's own shift from *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* to *Moses and Monotheism* may suggest that the death of the other was always inseparable from his notion of one's "own" death. The peculiar temporality of trauma, and the sense that the past it foists upon one is not one's own, may perhaps, from this perspective, be understood in terms of a temporality of the other (or the other's potential death). (In emphasizing the potentiality in this temporality, I am taking issue with Ellie Ragland's interpretation of the burning child dream, in which she implies that the death drive means we have all been traumatized, as opposed to our

all being potentially traumatized, which I believe is closer to the paradoxical temporality of the death drive. See Ragland, "Lacan, the Death Drive and the Burning Child Dream," in Sarah Webster Goodwin and Elisabeth Bronfen, ed., *Death and Representation* [Baltimore, 1993]).

9. The description of the foundational moment of consciousness as a responsibility towards others in their deaths (or potential deaths), as indeed the response to a call from those (potential) deaths, resonates with the ethical thinking of Emmanuel Levinas. He has indeed written of the "éveil a partir de l'autre," which is linked to a foundational moment also associated with trauma in "La philosophie et l'éveil." The ethical resonances of the problematics of trauma were first brought to my attention by Jill Robbins, whose brilliant work on Levinas (especially "Visage, Figure: Speech and Murder in Levinas' *Totality and Infinity*," in Cathy Caruth and Deborah Esch, ed., *Critical Encounters: Reference and Responsibility in Deconstructive Writing* [New Brunswick, 1994], and her forthcoming book, *Ethics and the Literary Instance: Reading Levinas*), whose discussions with me about the intersection between the two fields, and whose reading and suggestions concerning various chapters in this book have been invaluable. (On the specific appearance of the notion of trauma in Levinas, see Elisabeth Weber, *Verfolgung und Trauma: Zu Emmanuel Levinas' autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence* [Vienna, 1990].)
10. This insight would indeed resurface in the history of trauma research, in the ongoing dilemma of "survivor guilt," most notably remarked by Robert Jay Lifton as a paradoxical guilt frequently attending survivor experience:

In all this, self-condemnation strikes us as quite unfair. . . . This guilt seems to subsume the individual victim-survivor rather harshly to the evolutionary function of guilt in rendering us accountable for our relationship to others' physical and psychological existence. This experience of guilt around one's own trauma suggests the moral dimension inherent in all conflict and suffering.

See Robert Jay Lifton, *The Broken Connection* (New York, 1979), p. 172.

11. Jacques Derrida suggests, in a reading of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, that the passing on of psychoanalysis must be understood through the survival of the father beyond his children. See Jacques Derrida, *La carte Postale: de Socrate à Freud et au-delà* (Paris, 1980). Derrida moves between the notion of trauma and the notion of responsibility in "Passages—du traumatisme à la promesse," in his interview with Elisabeth Weber in *Points de suspension: Entretiens* (Paris, 1992).

To take up the matter of survival in the seminar fully, one would want to include also a reading of the "knocking dream" with which Lacan introduces his discussion of the dream of the burning child. In a prospectus for a dissertation at Yale University, Department of Comparative Literature, entitled "Waking Dreams," which includes a proposed chapter on the dream of the burning child, Mary Quaintance discusses the allusion to *Macbeth* in the knocking dream, and points to

the text by de Quincey on this play. I was interested to find that de Quincey suggests that what the knocking signifies is not, as one might expect, death, but rather the return to life. The crisis, that is, is the survival. This makes a striking indirect introduction to the problem of survival and the death drive in the dream of the burning child. (See Thomas de Quincey, "On the Knocking at the Gate in *Macbeth*," in *Miscellaneous Essays* [Boston, 1857].) As Marjorie Garber has pointed out to me, the *Macbeth* resonances in the knocking dream might be read also in the dream of the burning child through the emphasis on the burning candle.

(An exploration of the the literary allusion in the Lacan text might open onto other questions concerning the literary dimension of the passages in both writers, and might consider the possible resonance in Freud's description of the child's words in the dream with the words of the child in Goethe's "Erlkönig.")

12. On the possibilities opened by the death drive, as dislocating an inside-outside opposition, for change (in a feminist context), see Jacqueline Rose, "Where Does the Misery Come From? Psychoanalysis, Feminism and the Event," in Richard Feldstein and Judith Roof, ed., *Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca, 1989), reprinted in Jacqueline Rose, *Why War?—Psychoanalysis, Politics, and the Return to Melanie Klein* (Oxford, 1993).
13. There is some evidence in the third part of the seminar that Lacan unwittingly inscribes the death of Sophie into his text (and thus also unwittingly anticipates Caroline's). In this part of the seminar he turns to a discussion of the fort-da game of the child that Freud describes in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, the game of his grandson that he interprets as a traumatic repetition of the temporary departures of his mother. As Jacques Derrida has pointed out (in *La carte postale*), this analysis reflects in an odd way what would soon be Freud's own permanent loss of this same woman, his daughter Sophie, who died towards the end of the writing of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, a death at which Freud was not able to be present. As Lacan describes the fort-da game, moreover, he shifts suddenly into an autobiographical voice that echoes with the language of seeing throughout his seminar: "I, too, have seen, seen with my own eyes, opened by maternal divination, the child, traumatized by the fact that I was going away despite the appeal, precociously adumbrated in its voice. . . ." (p. 63, translation modified). Lacan's "I, too, have seen" perhaps marks the transmission of Freud's own unwitting anticipatory writing of his daughter's death into the psychoanalytic text of Lacan, which also, in its way, anticipates the death of his own child. (On the relation between the perspective of the traumatized child, analyzed in the fort-da game, and the dream of the burning child, which appears to relate the perspective of the adult, see also pp. 34–35 of *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*). Elisabeth Roudinesco tells of the death of Lacan's daughter Caroline in *Jacques Lacan: Esquisse d'une vie, histoire d'un système de pensée* (Paris, 1993). I discuss this part of the seminar in an extended version of this essay; see my *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*.