HUMANITIES IN SOCIETY

Psychoanalysis and Interpretation

CINEMA 464
MARSHA KINDER

Volume 4 • Numbers 2 & 3 • Spring & Summer 1981

THE SPIRIT OF THE WHITE HOTEL

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> *Sometimes the "voices" are distinct, but more often they blend, melt into each other; "the spirit of the white hotel was against self-ishness." With moderate help from the physician, Frau Anna's journal moved her towards psychological health, through acceptance of her mother's mysterious individuality.*
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> From Freud's case study of Frau Anna G. in *The White Hotel*

With a brevity that almost encourages an obsessive nonstop reading, *The White Hotel* exposes us to the intensely pleasurable performances of protagonist Lisa Erdman's wildly erotic imagination and her analyst Sigmund Freud's dazzling intellectuality, invites us to savor the delicious wit and ambiguity that play at the flimsy borders between history and fiction, then painfully confronts us with a minutely detailed account of the historic massacre of a quarter of a million individuals at Babi Yar, before carrying us to a mysterious realm that lies somewhere between the creative imagination, Israel, and Heaven and that is steeped in both domestic humor and spiritual transcendence. Like so many other ingenious post-modernist works, *The White Hotel* forces us to become aware of the reading process, with all of its hermeneutic pleasures and ironies, and of the temporal and cultural context in which our own reading is situated, with all of its inescapable limitations. Yet this extraordinary novel also demands a full emotional engagement with the characters and events and a full test of our openness to spiritual and other forms of nonrational experience.

It is this acceptance of spiritual experience demanded by the ending that has evoked most of the negative commentary, even from critics who have otherwise praised the novel very highly. I cite merely two instances—David Press writing in *The American Book Review* and then George Levine in *The New York Review of Books*.

> But it is in the final section, 'The Camp', that mythunderstanding degenerates into misunderstanding, salvation is akin to emigration, and Eros smacks of Zionism. . . . His novel takes us on an orchestrated train ride to the holocaust at the end of the tunnel, but then offers cliché rather than catharsis. Beyond the holocaust he envisions a holy land, which though not perfect, is redeemable only because he says so. Perhaps his intentions, as noble as they are, have overreached

his abilities; perhaps his publishers insisted on a palatable ending; perhaps he has tried to resolve the unresolvable.[1]

But in the last sentence, the images of the fantasies return, now beyond Freudian interpretation, beyond any interpretation, but full of hope, sensuous and real as "the scent of the pine tree."

I wonder about this hope. . . . In its extrasensory moments, *The White Hotel* sometimes seems guilty of the very evasions of history that destroy its characters. We have to consider how much of its supernatural machinery we need to accept, how much the sensuous hope of that post-Freudian pine tree has been earned.[2]

In this essay I intend to explore the narrative strategies of *The White Hotel* and the essential role of the final chapter, paying particular attention to how the text defines the spirit in which it is to be read. With Lisa Erdman as female subject and Freud as authoritative male reader, this book focuses our attention on interpretation—how we assign meaning to the most intense personal and public events, to dreams, letters, poems, lives, and other texts, against the background of both historic and mythic time.

A Description of the Multiple Texts

The White Hotel contains multiple texts, which, like habitable rooms, are occupied by successive waves of guests who experience parallel emotions and events within their boundaries. More specifically, the novel is comprised of a prologue of five letters—about, from, and to Sigmund Freud—and six main parts, which, like a series of recurring dreams or a cycle of related myths, offer different versions of the same basic material: the life and death of Lisa Erdman. Part one, "Don Giovanni," is an erotic poem with morbid undertones written by Lisa at the European resort of Bad Gastein. "The Gastein Journal," part two, is Lisa's expanded account of the same events covered by the poem but now retold in a lush poetic prose and with increased emphasis on four catastrophes—a group drowning, a fire, a landslide, and a falling cable car—that occur amidst all the voluptuous sucking and thrusting. "Frau Anna G," the third part, is Freud's case study of his hysterical patient (with a change of name to protect her identity), focusing on her symptoms (intense pains in the left breast and pelvic region), the poem and journal, and a pivotal dream containing related imagery. He attempts to interpret these mysterious texts in light of her earlier history, particularly Lisa's relationship to her mother, who died in a hotel fire with her lover. Part four, a novelistic treatment of Lisa's later life entitled "The Health Resort," begins with Lisa on her way to La Scala at the highpoint of her singing career and ends with her return to her

birthplace in Kiev, where she is safely ensconced in a second marriage. It contains an inset poem and letters, including correspondence between Lisa and Freud concerning the publication of his case study and her corrections of previous lies and omissions. Despite the prevailing tone of peace and happiness accentuated by the title and events, this section contains many disturbing undercurrents: a terrifying nightmare about a trench filled with coffins, the death of a friend in childbirth, an obsession with the Düsseldorf mass murderer, and news of Freud's cancer.

Throughout these four parts the story becomes richer in detail and the images more resonant. Love and death have always been present as primary forces, but as we proceed in the narrative the presence of the latter is felt more strongly. Part five, "The Sleeping Carriage," contains a brief, intensely realistic description of the Babi Yar massacre based on the eyewitness account of Dina Pronicheva. As Lisa lies amidst the "sea of corpses" in the deep ravine, she is kicked in the left side of her breast and bayonetted in the groin. These grisly details force us to look back and reinterpret the previous sections as if they have all been leading ineluctably to this grim moment. Then Thomas suddenly pulls us forward to a contemporary perspective on this historic catastrophe, to record later lesser disasters and the disturbing, pointedly anti-mythic process of normalization:

> When the war was over, the effort to annihilate the dead went on, in other hands. After a while Dina Pronicheva stopped admitting she had escaped from Babi Yar. Engineers constructed a dam across the mouth of the ravine, and pumped water and mud in from neighbouring quarries, creating a green, stagnant and putrid lake. The dam burst; a huge area of Kiev was buried in mud. Frozen in their last postures, as at Pompeii, people were still being dug out two years later.
>
> No one, however, saw fit to placate the ravine with a memorial. It was filled in with concrete, and above it were built a main road, a television centre, and a high-rise block of flats. The corpses had been buried, burned, drowned, and reburied under concrete and steel.[3]

Where does one turn for redemption in the face of such horror—when there is no relief in the fate of the individual or the mass, in the past or the future, in remembering or forgetting? As in Alain Resnais's moving documentary *Night and Fog* (1955)—one of the few other artistic works dealing with the holocaust without minimizing, exploiting, or being overwhelmed by its horrors—the prime resources seem to be time, consciousness, and primordial images.

Thomas first turns back to the individual in history—to Dina Pronicheva and the young boy Motya, who actually climbed out of the ravine whispering, "Don't be scared, lady! I'm alive too," as if to reassure her

that some other human consciousness had shared the experience. This connection is a variation on the final bonding between Kolya and his stepmother, Lisa Erdman, who heard Motya's words in a dream long ago and who realizes just before dying that her earlier determination never to give birth was not just a neurotic symptom, as Freud had assumed, but was a sensible choice based on a subliminal awareness of this moment in history. Though it costs her her life, she now acknowledges the Jewishness she has spent years denying; she freely *chooses* to spend her last moments giving comfort to her stepson, an act which grants her dignity in the midst of an humiliating death. Both versions of the sustaining relationship between woman and child in this confrontation with death evoke other images and echo other voices—Lisa's obsession with her own mother's death; the closely timed deaths of Freud's daughter and grandson, which Lisa has foreseen; the Christian icon of Madonna and Child in the Pietà; and ultimately the oceanic feeling which Freud perceives at the center of Lisa's white hotel.

> By the time I had put down the notebook I was convinced that it might teach us everything, if we were only in a position to make everything out. . . . All who have hitherto, in a learning capacity, had the opportunity to read Frau Anna's journal have had that feeling: the 'white hotel' is known to them, it is the body of their mother. . . . The overall feeling of the white hotel [is] its whole-hearted commitment to orality—sucking, biting, eating, gorging, taking in, with all the blissful narcissism of a baby at the breast. Here is the oceanic oneness of the child's first years, the autoerotic paradise, the map of our first country of love. [P. 116]

This "map," so palpably connected with birth, defines the redemptive spirit of the white hotel—not only as the prototype for all other forms of love but also as the path to an acceptance of death.

In the last sentence of "The Sleeping Carriage," Thomas boldly announces his intention of allowing his fictional protagonist to escape the material reality of history: "But all this had nothing to do with the guest, the soul, the lovesick bride, the daughter of Jerusalem" (p. 253). She survives in the last section, another imaginative reconstruction that selects and recombines images and characters from personal and cultural memories. It could be Lisa's vision before dying, her final dream, or last resort. Part six, ironically entitled "The Camp," evokes not only the health resort of Bad Gastein but also, with historical hindsight, the death camps throughout Europe where millions of Jews were gassed—an association that may enable us to discover in the name of that fashionable spa a grave prophetic pun previously overlooked. The setting also evokes Israel, not because Thomas is a Zionist as some of his critics imply but because so many of the victims at Babi Yar had fan-

tasized Palestine as their destination in order to deny the grim fate that actually awaited them. The setting also suggests the Christian Heaven and Hell, particularly as envisioned by Dante, when Lisa's mother reassures her that her present condition in the settlement is "not the lowest circle" (p. 266). The setting is also shaped by primordial images that have recurred throughout the novel—the mistiness that begins to clear, the successive waves of guests patiently waiting, the comforting reunion with her mother by the lake, and the reaffirming scent of the pine. By the end of the novel we are closer to being "in a position to make everything out" because we now see how the interpretations of Freud and the structural choices of Thomas validate the survival power of primordial images.

An Overview of the Basic Structure: The Tension Between Freud and Jung

The White Hotel presents a dialogue between historical and psychoanalytical discourse and their competing modes of interpretation which leads to a complex view, not only of protagonist Lisa Erdman, but also of Freud. What makes Thomas's achievement so impressive (particularly to critics like Press and Levine) is that this highly poetic novel so seriously engages the primary theoretical issues of our time. The novel implies that Freud's work is somewhat limited because he ignored or at least minimized its historical context; yet the full magnitude of his contribution is appreciated only when seen in terms of its impact on twentieth-century thought.[4] One of the primary post-structuralist projects has been the reconciliation of Freud and Marx precisely on these grounds, an attempt that was initiated in the thirties by some of Freud's own renegade students, particularly Wilhelm Reich. Yet Thomas identifies the critique with the more mystical Carl Jung—a decision which helps to reveal that both sides of the historical-psychoanalytic opposition lie within the realm of the rational human sciences, which fail to explore the more mysterious regions of spirit and soul.[5] This is exactly the dimension of *The White Hotel* that has been attacked; yet it's right at the center of the novel and is present from the opening page.

The White Hotel mythologizes history and poeticizes psychoanalysis. Thomas explicitly identifies these goals in his opening "Author's Note":

> Freud becomes one of the dramatis personae, in fact, as discoverer of the great and beautiful modern myth of psychoanalysis. By myth, I mean a poetic, dramatic expression of a hidden truth; and in placing this emphasis, I do not intend to put into question the scientific validity of psychoanalysis. [P. v]

As a final footnote to his analysis of Lisa's hysteria, Freud writes: "Long may poetry and psychoanalysis continue to highlight, from their different perspectives, the human face in all its nobility and sorrow" (p. 14). In his authorial commentary on the Babi Yar massacre, Thomas concludes that history and psychoanalysis alone are insufficient for an understanding of such horror; that's why the full resources of myth and poetry are essential:

> The soul of a man is a far country, which cannot be approached or explored. Most of the dead were poor and illiterate. But every single one of them had dreamed dreams, seen visions and had amazing experiences, even the babes in arms (perhaps especially the babes in arms). Though most of them had never lived outside the Podol slum, their lives and histories were as rich and complex as Lisa Erdman-Berenstein's. If a Sigmund Freud had been listening and taking notes from the time of Adam, he would still not fully have explored even a single group, even a single person.
>
> And this was only the first day. . . . The thrity thousand became a quarter of a million. A quarter of a million white hotels in Babi Yar. [Pp. 250–51]

Through an imaginative reconstruction of one white hotel, Thomas creates a myth that, like the Fall of Adam and the Passion of Christ, seeks to redeem all who have fallen.

This double opposition between history and psychoanalysis, on the one hand, and both set against the more mystical regions of myth, poetry, and religion, on the other, is central to the conflict between Freud and Jung, which is introduced in the prologue in the opening letter from Sandor Ferenczi to his fiancée. In describing the historic 1909 voyage of the psychoanalytic circle to America, Ferenczi notes the "tension between Jung and Freud," which is expressed in their reactions to two incidents: a "depressing . . . great midsummer mist" that engulfs the ship and prevents them from seeing anything; and the discovery in North Germany of mummified corpses of prehistoric men, which Jung describes on the eve of their departure. The mist evokes rival interpretations: Jung sees it as a "prehistoric monster wallowing through the daylight-darkness toward its objective" and prophesying that "we were slipping back into the primeval past," while Freud focuses on "the mating cry of the foghorns" and teases his colleague "for being a Christian, and therefore mystical (a fate he regards the Jews as having escaped)" (p. 4). Their reactions to the mummies are reversed: this time Jung is "high-spirited" and Freud disturbed. After bursting out several times, "Why are you so concerned with these corpses?" Freud slips off his chair in a faint and, when revived, accuses Jung "of wanting him out of the way" (p. 5).

Like every other incident in the novel, we are encouraged to read this conflict on several levels. In human terms, it is a professional rivalry between two ambitious men. Theoretically, it opposes two ways of interpreting dreams: the Freudian focus on sexuality (the mating cry), aggression (the accusation), and repressed infantile wishes (by trying to usurp Freud's authority, Jung may be acting out his unresolved Oedipal conflict) versus the Jungian reading of images as collective archetypes of a prehistoric past with spiritual and evolutionary powers of prophesying and shaping the future. In religious terms, it contrasts a Christian and a Jew, evoking, as Freud observes, the opposing traditions of mysticism and rationalism. But in the historical context of the holocaust, it also foreshadows their emblematic identification with the killers and victims, respectively: Jung was to be accused of supporting Hitler, and four of Freud's sisters were to die at Babi Yar.[6]

Both theorists succeed in using these images to foresee future events, both in the novel and in history. Jung's mode of prophecy is explicit and is corroborated by Thomas's structure. Jung focuses on the archetypes of mist and corpses, which recur throughout *The White Hotel*—especially in the dreams, fantasies, and brutal death of Lisa Erdman—and become emblematic of a "slipping back into the primeval past" of darkness and mass murder.

Freud's mode of prophecy is far more complicated. Although he identifies himself as a rationalist, he intuits the dangers that are coming. Thomas's Freud possesses "second sight," which helps to explain his brilliance as an analyst and his acknowledgment of Lisa's special powers: "My experience of psychoanalysis has convinced me that telepathy exists. If I had my life to go over again, I should devote it to the study of this factor. It is clear that you are especially sensitive" (p. 196). From Thomas's perspective, such a study would have strengthened Freud's awareness of history and his powers as a theorist. He implies that Freud's resistance to mysticism (which is so rich in Jewish tradition, despite Freud's disclaimer) was largely responsible for the limitations in his writings and for keeping him in Vienna until it was almost too late to escape from Hitler. While considering Lisa's telepathic powers, Freud observes: "Were one given to mysticism, one might well ask what secret trauma in the mind of the Creator had been converted to the symptoms of pain everywhere around us" (p. 110). Thomas suggests it was this line of thought that led Freud to perceive the connection between Lisa and the World War I victims, which in turn enabled him to formulate his theory of the death instinct:

> I have said that at certain moments Frau Anna's expression reminded me of the faces of the victims of war neuroses. It is still not clear to us why these poor vic-

tims of the battlefield force themselves again and again to relive in dreams the original traumatic events. Yet it is also the case that everyone, not only neurotics, shows signs of an irrational compulsion to repeat. . . . I began to see Frau Anna, not as a woman separated from the rest of us by her illness, but as someone in whom an hysteria exaggerated and highlighted a *universal* struggle between the life instinct and the death instinct. [Pp. 128–29]

The White Hotel encourages us to read its various texts like a series of recurring dreams, not only in the Freudian manner of tracing multiple associations to key recurring images in the manifest content in order to decode the repressed infantile wishes from the dreamer's personal history that control the dream's deep structure, but also in the Jungian manner of tracing the mythical resonance of archetypal images both to the prehistoric past and to the future and of converting them into germinal images for the active imagination—a process Lisa dramatizes in creating her poem and journal (which Freud admits "moved her towards psychological health"). Despite (or perhaps because of) its mysticism, Jung's approach launches the evolutionary perspective that has been more fully developed by dream research over the past thirty years[7] and also provides a model (though far less explicitly than Freud's) for Thomas's artistic strategy and mode of engagement in social-political issues:

Whoever speaks in primordial images speaks with a thousand voices; he enthralls and overpowers. . . . He transmutes our personal destiny into the destiny of mankind, enabl[ing] humanity to find a refuge from every peril and to outlive the longest night. That is the secret of great art, and its effect upon us. The creative process . . . consists in the unconscious activation of an archetypal image, and in elaborating and shaping this image into the finished work. By giving it shape, the artist translates it into the language of the present, and so makes it possible for us to find our way back to the deepest springs of life. Therein lies the social significance of art.[8]

In the "spirit of the White Hotel [which] was against selfishness," this novel guides our interpretation primarily through four narrative strategies, which lead us beyond the boundaries of Lisa's life and Thomas's text: (1) the placement of fragmented, historical time against a cyclical mythopoetic framework; (2) a dense intertextuality, both within and beyond the novel; (3) a patterned oscillation between the first and third person, to achieve a blending of distinct voices; and (4) a rich tapestry of recurring primordial imagery that perpetually changes meaning while simultaneously revealing the deep structure of the multiple texts.

Time for Meaning: History and Myth

Her phantasy strikes me as like Eden before the Fall—not that love and death did not happen there, but there was no time in which they could have meaning. [P. 10]

This statement from Sachs's letter to Freud unequivocally asserts that meaning is dependent on time, but in *The White Hotel* there are two temporal realms which continually shape our interpretation of any individual passage or section. The dialectic between historical and mythic time is established in the "Author's Note," which promises to make a myth out of the historical Freud. The poem, journal, and final imaginative vision (sections one, two, and six) are all set in a timeless mythic realm, one which reemerges in the intervening sections, particularly through the recurrence of key images, and is explicitly identified with altered states of consciousness—sexual ecstasy, trance, dream, sleep, and death.

"The Sleeping Carriage," which locates the Babi Yar massacre so precisely at "eight o'clock on the morning of Monday, 29 September 1941," opens with Kolya awakening out of this timeless realm into history: "The strange thing about sleeping was that you had no idea what time it was" (p. 222). As mother and stepson near the moment of death, she retreats, as if in a trance, into this same timeless zone:

In spite of the shouts, the screams, and the patter of machine guns, Lisa heard nothing. As in a silent film, with the white cumulus drifting across the blue sky. . . . She passed into a trance, in which everything that was being enacted before her happened slowly and without sound. . . . The afternoon, that was no conceivable part of time, wore on, and it started to get dark. [Pp. 245–46]

These lines recall an earlier passage from her poem, where she was also drawn away from a moment of peak intensity to silence and darkness:

> they bore the bodies from the flood and fire
> on carts, we heard them rumbling through the pines
> and fade to silence. . . .
> The echo died away, I shan't forget
> the silence as it fell, a cataract
> of darkness, for that night the white lake drank
> the sunlight swiftly and there was no moon.
>
> [P. 24]

As in any text, the interpretation of every word must look both backward and forward in time. What is unusual about *The White Hotel* is

that its structure demands that we be aware of the complexity of this ever-shifting temporal context. The "Author's Note" establishes the present context of 1981, which is tied to the specific publication date and recedes into the past with each successive reading. The prefatory letters span the period from 1909 to 1931, with obvious gaps (for example, 1909 to 1920) that cause us to speculate about what happened in between (for example, World War I) and perhaps to identify the future as another of these inevitable ellipses. The case study opens "in the autumn of 1919," when Freud first saw Anna G., though it is written and published in 1931; then it moves back even further to 1890 at the beginning of her life history before leaping forward to 1920, when he meets her again. In addition, it contains footnotes offering Freud's afterthoughts from 1931 and post-1933 observations from an unidentified editor. The novelistic account also opens with a date, "in the spring of 1929," which jumps ahead of Lisa's life but backward in contrast to the preceding section, then moves forward to 1936 from the diegetic perspective beyond Freud's case study but backward from the reader's temporal context while filling in events that occurred in the gaps within earlier stages of Lisa's biography. The temporal range of "The Sleeping Carriage" is the most expansive of all, beginning and ending in the timeless realm of sleep, death, and myth which frames the historical massacre in 1941 and the present of 1981, in which Thomas is writing with historical hindsight.

In case the reader does not perceive these structural cues, Thomas makes the temporal point explicit in the case study (a model of interpretation) by having Freud quote Lisa as she responds to images from her own poem and journal: "It's a mixture of the past and present, like I am" (p. 118). We are reminded that any reading of the text must look backward in several senses: to earlier events in Lisa's life (particularly to the death of her mother and to the primal scene where she saw her mother, aunt, and uncle engaged in three-way sex); to earlier experiences of the reader (the editor's footnote on page 142 claims, "Freud's unusual emphasis on the mother's role may have owed something to the recent death of his own mother, on 12 September 1930"); to earlier parts of the text (not only Lisa's journal and poem but also the letters in the prologue and, extending even further back, the acknowledgments, in which Thomas identifies his historical source as Anatoli Kuznetsov's *Babi Yar*); and to earlier events in history (like World War I, which preceded the primary events in the diegetic time, but also any incident that precedes the time of the particular reading).

By being so aware of the historical context of his own writing, Thomas makes us similarly conscious of the temporal framework of our own reading—a double realization that is extended to Freud and Lisa

as both writers and readers. Freud observes: "The more convinced I grew that the 'Gastein journal' was a remarkably courageous document, the more ashamed Anna became of having written so disgusting a work" (p. 117). Freud's analysis of Lisa's various texts evolves slowly through time and is affected, not only by events in his personal life, but also by the development of his own theoretical writings (he is "half way through 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' ") and by its historical context. Freud speculates that the postwar setting may have slowed the progress of the analysis: "Partly the circumstances in which we worked were to blame: it was difficult to create an atmosphere of confidence, in an unheated room in winter, with patient and physician dressed in coats, mufflers and gloves" (p. 99). Yet this setting also enabled him to link his patient to the war victims, which in turn affected his conceptualization of the death instinct, and it ultimately led to the burning of his books by the National Socialists in Berlin in 1933—a fact recorded in a footnote (p. 130). Again, it is Lisa who comments on this evolving process of interpretation, this time in a letter to Freud: "I think it is remarkable the way your understanding of it seems to have deepened in the intervening years" (p. 184). Still, Freud refuses to update his case study in light of Lisa's new revelations, not only out of pride, but also out of the acceptance that both his writing and her reading will always be limited by their temporal context. To acknowledge this limitation, he turns backward for a quotation from Heraclitus, a philosopher who defined reality as constant flux: "The soul of man is a far country, which cannot be approached or explored" (p. 195). As we move forward in the novel, we hear echoes of this quotation in Lisa's poetic reply to Victor's marriage proposal ("love is a foreign word./A word from a far country" [p. 206]) and in Thomas's response to the horrors of Babi Yar (already quoted above). Despite the constant flux in context, these same words are able to speak to the extremes of happiness and despair, of love and death.

Because the past in *The White Hotel* is so pluralistic and complex, the novel implies that any interpretation is bound to be limited and partial. This inevitability is even stronger when texts are read in relation to the future. Every incident and image in the novel must be reinterpreted as the reader looks forward to future events in Lisa's life, especially her death; to future sections of the novel that extend even beyond her death; to later events in history, some of which have not yet occurred; and to later works of art, some of which have not yet been created.

The reader can directly experience this temporal relativity of interpretation by reading *The White Hotel* a second time—an act that is almost demanded by the novel's structure. The first time we read Lisa's

poem we are almost totally absorbed by the eroticism, despite the prefatory letters of Freud and Sachs that acknowledge the central polarity of love and death. As we move forward in our first reading, we realize how similar this poem is to a dream in that it contains the greatest degree of condensation, displacement, and concrete representability and provides the reservoir of germinal images out of which, with a little help from secondary revision, the rest of the texts are generated. But in the second reading, it's impossible to read the poem in the same way a second time because of our intervening experience and the new network of associations we have acquired. This time the death instinct takes over, a pattern that reflects the historical sequence of Freud's evolving theory and also the developmental pattern programmed into every human being.

No matter how many times we may read *The White Hotel*, there will always be subsequent events in history and subsequent works of art that will change its meaning. This awareness can be traced back to T. S. Eliot's pivotal essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent," which provides a powerful rationale for Thomas's fusion of the temporal and timeless.

> The historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. The historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity.[9]

Intertextuality

Intertextuality is one means of manifesting the "historical sense," for it implies that all writing is made out of other writing. On the acknowledgment page and in the "Author's Note," Thomas is extremely specific about his psychoanalytic, poetic, and historical sources. These references decenter the novel, demanding that it be read against the background of other texts. As in Eliot's "The Waste Land," the intertextuality transmits the full resonance of the other works while extending the conception of what it means to read a text and its codes of signification within the cultural framework.

The case of Frau Anna G. is to be read against Freud's actual case studies, which Thomas calls "masterly works of literature" (p. viii).

Thomas, Freud, and Lisa all refer specifically to the case of the Wolf Man, a copy of which Freud gives to Lisa. Like the murderer of Düsseldorf, the Wolf Man obsesses her; she fuses the two in a nightmare that is a variation of Little Red Riding Hood—a text also adapted in the Wolf Man's dreams. Freud claims the primary connection between these two patients is the childhood trauma of viewing a primal scene of "coitus more ferarum," then elaborates in a footnote: "Unknown to Frau Anna, there were a surprising number of similarities in their backgrounds. On one occasion, also, she must have passed that particular patient on the stairs, after spending much time in discussion with me of aspects of his case" (p. 125).

When we actually turn to the source, we gain a better understanding, not of Lisa's hysteria, but of Thomas's creative process—especially if we consult *The Wolf-Man by the Wolf-Man*, a fascinating collection of texts, including the patient's own memoirs, Freud's original case study, a supplement by his student Ruth Mack Brunswick, a foreword by his daughter Anna Freud, with introduction and notes by editor Muriel Gardiner.[10] Of course, Freud's case study of the Wolf Man offers some parallels to the case of Anna G: the patient is born in Russia, remembers his childhood summer home, his sister is named Anna, his wife is once referred to as "the German Tatiana" (p. 103), and the color white is central to his recurring wolf dreams. But far more significant are the similarities of structure: the use of multiple texts that enrich the interpretation of the patient's life; the consideration of the historical context which Freud, according to the Wolf Man, had seriously deemphasized;[11] Freud's frank acknowledgment that he was using this case to refute Jung in their continuing argument about the primacy of infantile versus ancestral prehistory;[12] and further echoes of Freud's quotation from Heraclitus in phrases by the Wolf Man ("I perceived at once that Freud had succeeded in discovering an unexplored region of the human soul, and that if I could follow him along this path, a new world would open to me" [p. 138]) and by Anna Freud ("an experienced explorer setting out to study a new, recently discovered land").

Though never mentioned in *The White Hotel*, the case of Dora provides more insights into the characters of Lisa and Freud and a closer biographical model for the specific study of Frau Anna G. than the case of the Wolf Man does.[13] Both hysterics with severe physical symptoms, Dora and Anna recall traumata that can be traced back to an erotic scene by a lake at a summer home and to a strong love for an adulterous parent (though the roles of mother and father are reversed). Both have an older brother from whom they are detached and a close female friend who arouses both jealousy and homosexual desire—a

passion Freud accentuates despite his two patients' sustained resistance. Lisa's symptoms of the lost voice come from Dora, the shortness of breath from Dora's father, and the abdominal pains from Dora's mother; the picture postcards from her Gastein journal may be variations of the ones sent from Herr K. to Dora; some of the fantasies and dreams of the two patients share common imagery; and both women have an unresolved erotic transference for Dr. Freud. Both case studies include allusions to Goethe's poetry, footnotes representing a later perspective, and a postscript about a meeting with the patient more than a year after the analysis had been terminated. The case of Dora enables us better to understand why Freud refused to emend the case of Anna G. in light of her later disclosures because it reveals both the pride he takes in his own powers of analysis ("If the work had been continued, we should no doubt have obtained the fullest possible enlightenment upon every particular of the case" [p. 19]) and the acknowledgment (in a footnote added in 1923) that every case history is limited by its temporal context:

> It is not to be expected that after more than twenty years of uninterrupted work I should see nothing to alter in my view of such a case and in my presentment of it; but it would obviously be absurd to bring the case history 'up to date' by means of emendation and additions. In all essentials, therefore, I have left it as it was.

Lisa relies as heavily on intertextuality as Thomas, particularly in writing her poem "Don Giovanni," which is recorded between the staves of a score of Mozart's opera, evoking not only her operatic career but also the mythic roots of her erotic fantasies. Later, in a letter to Freud, Lisa alludes to Oedipus—a text he has already used to reveal the similarities between poetry and psychoanalysis as two modes of capturing the deep structure of human desire:

> And didn't I feel better when you'd helped me 'dig out' my mother's affair simply because I felt excited at the way it cleared up mysteries? Clarification! Anagnorisis! I've just sung in a new oratorio called Oedipus Rex—can you tell?! I like the idea of clarification. 'More light! More light! More light—and more love!' [P. 200]

The decentering power of this intertextuality is extended by the chain of allusions to Shakespeare, Dostoevski, Pushkin, Heine, Rabelais, Yeats, Goethe, Heraclitus, and others—whether chosen by Thomas, Freud, or Lisa. One revealing example is Lisa's network of references to Dante. In the course of free-associating to a dream about death, Lisa describes the parting with her brother when he was leaving Vienna for

America: "When we were saying goodbye at the staion, my brother covered the awkwardness by taking his time in choosing books for the journey. I recall thinking that Dante's *A New Life* would be appropriate; except that my brother is not interested in the classics, he's a very practical person" (p. 105). Later, when her brother returns to persuade her and her Aunt Magda to leave Europe for the safety of America, Lisa again alludes to Dante:

> He and I have nothing in common, not even memories. We seemed to occupy different landscapes. How did we come from the same womb? I couldn't bring myself to kiss his morning-shadowed cheek at the station, so we shook hands. *Mein Bruder*! I'm reading the *Inferno* to cheer me up. . . . After two weeks of the infernal visit, it became clear to Lisa why they had come. His children gone from the nest, George was feeling barren; high-and-dry on his menopause. He wanted Lisa and his aunt to come back to the United States with them. [Pp. 201–2]

Lisa's projection of her own barrenness onto her brother, her denial of their bond, and her refusal to see the reality of the danger in Europe are all undermined by the allusions to Dante, whose titles clearly enunciate the two choices: a new life that awaits them in the USA, and the inferno that awaits her at Babi Yar. Her rejection of her brother's offer validates Freud's interpretation of her dream as suicidal; the final allusions to Dante identified with her mother in Lisa's last vision at "The Camp" also reaffirm that she and her brother do come from the same womb, landscape, and culture. Even when her own personal rivalries make her block out reality, her "second sight" still comes through in the voices of others.

Lisa uses intertextuality again when she composes her answer to Victor's proposal of marriage "in the form of Tatiana's letter to Onegin." In order to draw strength from the primordial archetypes embedded in the opera, she is willing to renounce her creative autonomy and to decenter her authorial voice: "She told herself she would let the rhymes lead her to the correct decision. After writing, and crossing out, all day, it came out like this, just after midnight . . ." (p. 205). Her choice of text evokes and reverses the earlier incident in Milan, where she was singing the part of Tatiana with Victor as Onegin and had to draw on the personal experience of her first love.

> It was when she had to tell the remorseful Onegin that she still loved him, but his response had come too late: she could not betray her marriage vows. At the phrase 'Happiness was so possible, so close!' she remembered a student in Petersburg whom she had loved with all her ardent soul, as Tatiana loved Onegin. . . . Lisa, even while she sang, had been overwhelmed with unaccustomed memories.

For a moment they had threatened to get the better of her singing. She felt angry with herself. One wanted the audience to weep, but the singer must stay cold and dry-eyed. [P. 158]

This passage describes not only the basic strategy of method acting but also a leap of imagination that later enables Lisa to love and marry Victor. Thomas follows a similar strategy when he uses the text of Dina Pronicheva in order to give an impassioned firsthand description of Babi Yar without being overwhelmed by its horrors. In *The White Hotel* this ability to move so fluidly between personal and collective experience, to identify with and speak through the texts and voices of others, is essential to artistic creation, to love, and to an acceptance of death.

A Blending of Distinct Voices: The First and Third Person

The blending of voices is also accomplished through the oscillation between the first and third person. Three main voices shape the work —the voice of D. M. Thomas as implied author, which is first heard in the "Author's Note" and reappears in footnotes to Freud's case study and in selected passages throughout the last three novelistic sections; the voice of Sigmund Freud, who speaks both in letters (contained in the prologue and in the novelistic "Health Resort") and in his case study; and the voice of Lisa Erdman, who speaks in the first person in her poems, dreams, and letters but is also the consciousness through which most of the third-person sections are filtered.

As the two primary protagonists, Freud and Lisa represent many oppositions: history/fiction, male/female, analyst/analysand, reader/writer, narrator/narratee, scientist/artist, theorist/subject, rationalist/seer, etc. Yet in terms of point of view, they are treated very similarly. Both are first referred to in the third person in a text written by an inset author; yet their own authorial roles are acknowledged. Freud is first mentioned in the "Author's Note" by the implied author: "The role played by Freud in this narrative is entirely fictional. My imagined Freud does, however, abide by the generally known facts of the real Freud's life; and I have sometimes quoted from his works and letters, *passim*" (p. vii). In the letter from Ferenczi that follows, Freud is praised as an author who has composed and delivered five lectures that made a "deep impression" on his colleague. Lisa, in turn, is introduced in the second letter, from Freud to Ferenczi; she is described as a patient (one of Foucault's primary categories of subjecthood) who "has just 'given birth' to some writings which seem to lend support to [his] theory" (p. 8). Although, in contrast to the other letter writers, both

Freud and Lisa author multiple first-person texts, many of which are written to each other (for example, her erotic lyric is addressed to Freud, as if he as well as his son were her lover), they both revert to being objects referred to by others in the third person. Both have actual historical models (the real Freud, the real Dora, and Dina Pronicheva) as well as fictional dimensions. This strongly interactional mode leads us to consider them, not so much as opposites, but rather as complementary voices, both of which are absorbed by the implied author. This kind of merging is anti-auteurist; it defines authorial voice as a function of discourse rather than as an expression of personal identity.

Lisa's "Gastein Journal" introduces the limited third person at first filtered through a fictional persona for the author, which alternates with that of her young fantasy lover. Midway through the narrative, Lisa introduces a series of imaginary postcards sent by various hotel guests, who are all projections or inner figures. From this point in the narrative, the limited third person is extended to several characters, including the English Major (who is one of the many doubles for Freud), and the journal moves closer to becoming a novel—a mixed form with inset poems, letters, and allusions, all expressed in a rich mixture of tones. In his case study Freud astutely notes this shift in point of view, interpreting it both as condensation and as a challenge to the narrow boundaries of the self:

> The characters in her drama are interchangeable. Thus, the young man is from time to time (or even at the same time) Anna's father, brother, uncle, her lover A., her husband, and even the unimportant young man on the train from Odessa. Anna herself is (at times) the opera singer; but also the prostitute without a breast, the pale, thin invalid without a womb, the dead mistress in the common grave. Sometimes the "voices" are distinct, but more often they blend, melt into each other: "the spirit of the white hotel was against selfishness." [P. 142]

With hindsight, this reading proves far more accurate than Freud then knows—for the "unimportant young man on the train" turns out to represent Lisa's first sexual encounter, which she has thus far failed to reveal, and to prefigure the murderous stranger who thrusts the bayonet into her at Babi Yar; and all of her own various personae foreshadow the specific details of her death.

We are encouraged by Thomas to extend this kind of decentered reading to *all* of the fragmented texts that comprise *The White Hotel*. The work is both an intensive study of one character and a vision of human nature in which her distinct voice is merely one strand within the universal fabric. Freud reaches this conclusion quite explicitly in

the case study through a process of rational analysis; Lisa reaches it experientially through feeling and perception at the moment that she and her stepson face death at Babi Yar: "His scream was only one strand in a universal scream, mixed with the happy shouts of the soldiers and the barking of dogs, but it was the one that stood out, even above her own" (p. 240).

"The Health Resort," also in a limited third person, is to Freud's first-person case study what Lisa's journal was to her poem—an expanded version which introduces more characters, details, and perspectives on the same basic material. In one of her letters to Freud from this section, Lisa writes of her poem and journal: "When you asked for an interpretation I thought I'd turn it into the third person to see if that would help me make more sense of it. But it didn't" (pp. 183–84). No one version is any more definitive than any other; the gain in knowledge is cumulative and comes from the juxtaposition of *both* perspectives, like the combination of Lisa and Freud. Equally attentive to the issue of point of view, Freud notes in his reply a revealing error in pronoun reference in Lisa's letter, the substitution of "I" for "he" when she was referring to her father's guilt—a pattern of identification that was also operating with her mother and that arises in transference problems with Freud (for example, she conveniently forgets a passage in one of her dreams so that she can conclude that his interpretation is an indirect plea for her loving comfort, although she is actually projecting her own need onto Freud). Despite the fact that this free movement between the first and third person is so essential to psychoanalysis, transference, and dream interpretation, Freud still uses the first person in all of his inset texts. Despite his intellectual awareness of the universal aspects of the case, particularly for the development of his theory of the death instinct, he is still primarily committed to the analysis of the individual psyche and to the centrality of the ego.

Lisa is the one who is able to move more fluidly, both in perception and expression, between the first and third person in a variety of combinations throughout the various texts that comprise and are evoked by *The White Hotel*—an ability which is directly related to her powers of second sight. Closely connected is Lisa's ability to jump from a total immersion in an intense experience—frequently linked to an extreme form of identification with others and located in the timeless zone—to a concentration on daily banalities. This pattern first becomes noticeable during her obsession with the Düsseldorf murders:

> It was many weeks before she lived fully in her own body again, and before her severe pains began to fade into occasional aches. Long after the case had vanished from the headlines . . . she was haunted by the face of a small boy . . . ; by a shy, kind man in glasses. . . .

But Aunt Magda had to be helped to dress and to bathe; the shopping had to be got; the Liebestod had to be sung; the dentist had to be seen. . . . [P. 179]

In the context of Babi Yar, this doubleness is experienced simultaneously, not only by Lisa, but also by the other victims who focus on triviality as a means of denying the horror—an alternative to Lisa's entry into the timeless realm of trance described earlier. Yet in all of these instances, there is a strong emphasis on concrete sensory perceptions:

What was odd was the occasional sound of machine-gun fire near by. It could not be anything to worry about, but the sound was troubling, all the same, and there was an undercurrent of panic around that expressed itself in a concentration upon trivial tasks. Sonia, for example, was reapplying her lipstick. . . . Others too, sitting on bundles, were eating. The scene had somehow split in two: heightened alarm and even panic; yet also the postures of picnic parties on a country excursion. [P. 238]

Thomas uses a similar defensive strategy in his most demanding task—describing the horrors of Babi Yar. Never before has his writing been so rooted in realistic detail. By at first alternating between Kolya's and Lisa's points of view, he offers a variation on her alteration between the lovers in her journal; then he broadens the perspective to include the other victims (just as she had extended it to the other guests). In the close focus on Lisa, the shift between internal and external perspective is sometimes so sudden that we are uncertain whether she is the one being referred to. This technique enables us to see how her murderers perceive her as a dehumanized object and also how this distinct fictive individual, whom the novel has scrutinized with such loving detail, has merged with the anonymous historical figures who were murdered at Babi Yar:

Then she heard people walking near her, actually on the bodies. They were Germans who had climbed down and were bending over and taking things from the dead and occasionally firing at those who showed signs of life.

An SS man bent over an old woman lying on her side, having seen a glint of something bright. His hand brushed her breast when he reached for the crucifix to pull it free, and he must have sensed a flicker of life. [P. 248]

The abruptness of such shifts in perspective calls attention to their function of coping with the horror. This strategy also applies to the final section, which, although it is still told from the third person, is filtered primarily through Lisa's consciousness—despite her apparent death. Life is extended—like the glint from the crucifix—primarily through concrete images.

The Power of Primordial Images

As an accomplished poet as well as a novelist, Thomas relies on the power of primordial images to create both an ironic ambiguity and a spiritual affirmation that can be associated with modernist poets like Eliot and Yeats. *The White Hotel* creates a rich tapestry of recurring images that perpetually change meaning while they simultaneously reveal the deep structure of the multiple texts; the connotations of virtually all the major images pulse between eroticism and death. The imagery establishes the novel's distinctive identity and at the same time places it in the tradition of Goethe, Heine, Shakespeare, and Dante.

In a recent interview Thomas acknowledged that he started by writing the erotic poem and then "suddenly realized I had the core of a novel." The fact that he still sees himself primarily as a poet rather than as a novelist is very illuminating: it reveals that the network of poetic imagery lays the basic foundation for *The White Hotel*:

> I write very much in an improvisational way. An idea comes and I write it only the way it presents itself, the way the images present themselves. It's very much like poetry presents itself. If I ever said I was going to set out to write a novel, I'm sure it would collapse like a house of cards.[14]

Because of limited space, I shall trace only three image patterns: trains, swans, and pines. Though my choices are in some ways arbitrary in that other images may be equally dense and generative, they are based on four factors: these images have privileged positions in the narrative that foreground their importance, they recur quite frequently, they have an especially rich mythic resonance, and each represents a larger figurative pattern. These more general configurations include the human realm of journeys comprised of train rides, sea voyages, chases, and guests; the instinctive animal kingdom, including swans, cats, and wolves; and the vegetable world of trees and woods, developed specifically through the pine, rose, fir, orange, and cedar. One could also readily explore images representing the mineral world of the city, embodied in the white hotel; the divine world of the spirit; and even the two supplemental categories of water and fire. Such an analysis would then cover the complete Biblical grammar of apocalyptic and demonic imagery outlined by Northrop Frye in his third essay in *Anatomy of Criticism* entitled "Archetypal Criticism: Theory of Myths,"[15] a taxonomy based essentially on a combination of Jung's approach to archetypes and Eliot's "historical sense." Repeatedly in *The White Hotel* these primordial images are associated with issues of identity—the link between the distinct one (Lisa Erdman) and the uni-

versal pattern. Their distinct meanings are always defined by the particular context in which the image appears, but these significations blend together to create an archetypal reverberation.

The journey image appears in virtually every section of the novel, from the opening sentence to the "Author's Note" ("One could not travel far in the landscape of hysteria . . ." [p. vii]), through the various echoes of the quotation from Heraclitus, to the penultimate paragraph of "The Camp," where "many thousands of immigrants were waiting, standing by their pathetic wooden suitcases" (p. 274). By mentioning several trips—by train, by ship, and by foot—taken by many travelers, the letters in the prologue sketch the range of how this image will function throughout the various sections, like stages in one grand narrative journey. There are the historic trips of the psychoanalytic circle to New York and of Sachs to Berlin. But even more significant are those associated with fiction: Sachs's reading of Lisa's journal on a train, foregrounding the narrative analogy: "It passed the train journey (again most apt) speedily and interestingly"; and Freud's use of travel imagery to describe the inner voyage of his psychoanalytic quest for knowledge and to establish the specific link to Eros and Thanatos—the forces that drive the human journey between birth and death: "It may be that we have studied the sexual impulses too exclusively, and that we are in the position of a mariner whose gaze is so concentrated on the lighthouse that he runs onto the rocks in the engulfing darkness" (p. 8).

Although there are many references to sea voyages, it is the train ride that dominates: it opens the poem, journal, and novelistic sections and is identified with the train of images that move through the consciousness of the narrator and narratee. The image is highly erotic in Lisa's poem: "I have started an affair with your son, on a train somewhere in a dark tunnel." The erotic associations acquire greater resonance later when we learn that her first sexual experience was with a stranger on a train and when she says to her mother in her final fantasy: "The excitement of travelling in a train to meet your lover, knowing he was travelling, just as excitedly towards *you*. I used to think quite a lot about that" (p. 271). Virtually every train ride has erotic consequences for Lisa. Yet the excitement is also generated by the risk: her mother's amorous journey leads to a fiery death, and Lisa's promised pilgrimage to Palestine leads to death in a putrid lake.

These personal and ancestral associations are given universal meaning by Freud when he interprets Lisa's nightmare about a train ride as belonging to a recognized dream genre: "Train journeys are themselves dreams of death; and in this case all the more so, since she had got off 'before her stop' and 'in the middle of nowhere' " (p. 103). Though this

interpretation is validated by later events in the novel, he at first concludes the dream is suicidal rather than prophetic. Ultimately he acknowledges that it prophesies the death of his own daughter; with hindsight, the reader realizes it also foreshadows the death of the dreamer.

"The Sleeping Carriage" is particularly important in transforming the train image. The title refers to the promised train ride to Palestine that was a cover for the actual journey to death. Though the victims of Babi Yar never boarded, we know that other death trains carried millions of Jews to concentration camps throughout Europe. Despite these devastating historical associations, the fictional train ride is also seen as potentially redemptive because it evokes the transforming power of the imagination. As Kolya awakens, his train of thought wanders:

> The only help to his imagination was the Bible stories his mother told him sometimes; but they weren't much help. They were also boring. It was better to fix his thoughts on the journey. He liked trains. . . . He imagined the sound of the train wheels taking them to Leningrad and back, and mixed it up with the rustling of the cockroaches in the wall. It made a strange tune. He liked listening to different sounds; and especially at night trying to hear sounds in the silence, or remembering sounds . . . he was going to be a composer when he grew up. [P. 223]

Lisa and Thomas demonstrate exactly the same kind of transforming train of associations in the final section, where the deceptive journey is converted into a bus ride that carries the souls to a "fair harbour," where they are able to "outlive the longest night."

Though not recurring so frequently as the image of the train, the image of the swan merits attention because of its mythic resonance and its privileged position at the end of both of Lisa's erotic texts. The first passage establishes the dialectic associations to wildness and whiteness, passion and innocence:

> no one was selfish in the white hotel
> where waters of the lake could lap the screes
> of mountains that the wild swans soared between
> their down so snowy-white the peaks seemed grey,
> or glided down between them to the lake.

The association to wildness evokes the "wild storm" from the opening line, establishing the connection with erotic passion, which is strengthened by the sexual connotations of "lap" and "peaks." The repetition of "down" accentuates the vertical motion of sexuality that recurs

throughout the poem, reinforced by "soared" and "glided down." This chain of associations suggests the myth of Leda and the swan, particularly since Yeats has already appeared in the epigraph. The proximity and repetition of "lake" also recalls *Swan Lake*, a ballet with which Lisa is undoubtedly familiar (especially in light of her other musical allusions) and which introduces the chain of associations to innocence. Whiteness, of course, is probably the most highly charged adjective in the novel since it is identified with the hotel, the mother's body, and the soul, but in this particular context ("snowy-white") it is specifically linked with nature, with coldness, and with the heroine of the fairy tale who, like the princess in Swan Lake, is victimized by an evil parent figure and subjected to a magical metamorphosis.

The parallel passage in the "Gastein Journal" is more prosaic.

> But swans were soaring between the mountain peaks, whether gliding down to the lake or rising to leave it. Their feathers were so white, the dazzling peaks seemed grey in comparison. [P. 86]

The omission of "wild" and "lap" plays down the eroticism, while the retention of "soaring between" and "gliding down" (now converted to the more active present participle) and the addition of "or rising to leave it" accentuate the upward/downward motion, shifting the connotations to rest or escape, descent or ascension.

In "The Health Resort" the swan's association with decline, victimization, and death takes over. The image first appears almost invisibly in the phrase "swan song," which is mentioned in connection with Victor's age and declining career; it becomes noticeable only when repeated. Thus far, all references to the swan have been fairly unobtrusive. But the image soars to the foreground, reverberating with all of the earlier traces, when Lisa becomes obsessed with the case of Peter Kürten, the Düsseldorf child murderer, which "tormented her worse than grief" though it "had nothing to do with her personally." She is haunted by the image of "a white swan nesting at a lake's edge, lost in a sleep from which it would not awake" (p. 179)—a passage that echoes the previous versions but now evokes, not only *Swan Lake*, but also the "putrid lake" into which Babi Yar would be converted. That Lisa identifies the swan with both the victim and the killer brings to mind the fairy tale of the ugly duckling who is transformed into the beautiful swan. She is obsessed by the swan because of her own powers of identifying so totally with the Other, a talent that makes her peculiarly vulnerable to the kinds of metamorphosis that occur in *Swan Lake* and other fairy tales. This murder episode is so disturbing to her and to us because it foreshadows the atrocities of the Germans (like the exhuming of the

corpses in Northern Germany that so upset Freud in the prologue) and prefigures not only Lisa's death but also her potential complicity in the massacre. Within this episode, Thomas uses the image of the swan with great power to fuse transcendent beauty and grotesque horror:

> One night he [Kürten] had been in such a torture of frustration, not finding a victim, that he had cut off the head of a sleeping swan on the lake and drunk its blood. He was reported as expressing the hope that when the guillotine struck he would remain alive long enough to hear his own blood gush out.
>
> There were other horrible details. . . . But it was the image of the swan, and the man's longing to hear his own blood gush, which haunted Lisa for weeks, as a compulsive daylight nightmare. She would stop dead in the street—her head spinning with the thought of the sleeping swan, the falling blade.
>
> And with the thought that it was only by God's grace, or mere chance, that she was Elisabeth Erdman of Vienna and not Maria Hahn of Düsseldorf! . . . But even more unimaginably horrible, if she had been born as Peter Kürten. . . . But then again, the very thought that *someone* had to be Maria Hahn and Peter Kürten made it impossible to feel any happiness in being Lisa Erdman. [P. 178]

If the swan is the most disturbing image, it is the pine that is the most consoling. The general pattern of tree imagery, and more specifically the pine, may be the richest in the novel—accentuated by frequency, mythic resonance, structural positioning, protean versatility, and the most explicit connection to the issue of identity. Lisa's poem opens with the line, "I dreamt of falling trees in a wild storm." The context of the storm suggests erotic passion, the wild swans, and the political madness in which the holocaust took place. "Falling trees" immediately evokes original sin (and more specifically Sachs's allusion to "Eden before the Fall") and the fatal falls that recur throughout the novel: the fall that leads to Lisa's abortion, Vera's death preceded and partly caused by a fall, the hotel guests falling from the cable car, and the Jews falling into the ravine at Babi Yar.

Throughout the erotic poem, tree imagery is associated with merging in a variety of senses. Trees are the mediating term between the hotel and the sea: "The white hotel merged into trees. The trees merged into the horizon of green sea." They merge with the cat, whose "black fur/ had been almost lost against the dark-green fir" and who is associated with Lisa's life instincts of sex and survival. Merging gradually takes on two dominant chains of associations, both latent in the opening line of the poem: eroticism, specifically linked to birth (Lisa compares herself to a wooden "Magdalen figurehead" and later gives birth to a "wooden embryo"), and redemption after death (a priest leads mourners "through the trees" and "through the pines"). The restorative dimen-

sion is frequently associated with scent and the ability to fuse past, present, and future: "a breeze brought in a memory/of the scent of orange groves/and roses falling through/this universe of secrets." While staying at the resort, Lisa restricts her diet to oranges and water and is repeatedly referred to as the "Rose of Sharon." In its most compressed form, the tree image merges both contexts of sex and death: "charred bodies hung from trees,/he grew erect again."

"The Gastein Journal" expands the opening image of "falling trees" into a nightmare of Lisa running through the woods, being chased by soldiers who are trying to shoot her, a situation that again fuses sex and death. As a mode of escape, she turns to the primordial image of the tree, combining Christ's crucifixion on the Tree of Life with Ovid's witty metamorphosis:

> There was no escape except to become one of the trees. She would gladly give up her body, her rich life, to become a tree, frozen in humble existence, the home of spiders and ants . . . She, a tree, would be filled with joy, and her leaves would sing her gratitude to God, as the sun set through the trees around her.

According to Jung, when trees appear in dreams, they refer symbolically to the Self engaged in a process of conscious growth—with the root as the unconscious source, the boughs as the potential union between heaven and earth, and the crown as the transconscious aim of individuation. Lisa's version of the "Cosmic Tree" emphasizes the merging with nature and with others far more than the individuation of the self.[16]

In his case study Freud intuitively associates the tree with Lisa's mother. In describing her summers by the sea, he says: "Her mother positively spread her leaves with the arrival of her beloved sister and the sun, together" (p. 92). He also intuits that Lisa identifies her crucifix more with her mother (who would not wear it because of her guilt over her adulterous affair) than with Christ; and he reads her gesture of touching it more as an indication of her lying and her empathic guilt than as a move toward redemption. It is the natural tree, associated with the mother, that brings Lisa comfort, rather than wood converted into a crucifix as the central redemptive icon of patriarchal Christianity. Instead of saving her, the crucifix draws the attention of both SS man and the Russian officer who kill her, fulfilling the prophetic nightmare of the soldiers chasing her through the woods. Yet both the crucifix and trees regain their redemptive power in the final vision of the camp. Her reunion with her mother takes place in the shade of fig trees; recognizing the crucifix, her mother says: "It's mine, isn't it? I'm glad you've kept it." The line of comfort extends to the next generation

of mother and child: "Lisa and her son had a room all to themselves. It smelled sweetly of wood. The beams were of cedar and the rafters of fir" (p. 259).

It is the novelistic version, "The Health Resort," that develops the full resonance of the tree imagery, particularly the nature of its redemptive power. When Lisa returns to her childhood summer home in Kiev, she discovers that the white house has been converted into a health resort and that the plants are *not* subtropical as she had remembered: only the trees remain unchanged; only they can provide the lines of continuity between the past, present, and future; only they can reaffirm her existence:

> She had the feeling that she was no more than a spectre . . . She was cut off from the past and therefore did not live in the present. But suddenly as she stood close against a pine tree and breathed in its sharp, bitter scent, a clear space opened to her childhood, as though a wind had sprung up from the sea, clearing a mist. It was not a memory from the past but the past itself, as alive, as real; and she knew that she and the child of forty years ago were the same person.
>
> That knowledge flooded her with happiness. . . . And when she looked in the opposite direction, towards the unknown future, death, the endless extent beyond death, she was there still. It all came from the scent of a pine tree. [Pp. 213–14]

After this epiphany, she puts flowers on her mother's grave and then resumes the banal routines of her life in this safe harbor. But the epiphany is not forgotten: it looks backward to "clear" the depressing mist that so troubled Jung in the prologue and forward to create the "clear space" for Lisa's final vision and for the last lines of Thomas's novel:

> She smelt the scent of a pine tree. She couldn't place it . . . It troubled her in some mysterious way, yet also made her happy.

The four narrative strategies I have described—the movements among multiple temporal contexts, among a rich variety of texts, among distinct but blended voices, and among a wide range of primordial images with diverse connotations—all strive toward the same decentering goal: the transcendence of the individual. They seek not only to individualize the anonymous mass but also to "transmute our personal destiny" (Jung) into the "universal struggle between the life instinct and the death instinct" (Freud). All four movements are "against selfishness." It is precisely this strategy of moving so fluidly between the intensely personal and the grand sweep of collective history and myth that makes the experience of reading this novel so deeply disturbing and yet at the same time so exhilarating. That is the spirit of *The White Hotel*.

NOTES

1. David P. Press, "The White Hotel," *The American Book Review* (September-October 1981), p. 16.
2. George Levine, "No Reservations," *The New York Review of Books* (28 May 1981), pp. 20–23.
3. D. M. Thomas, *The White Hotel* (New York: The Viking Press, 1981), pp. 252–53. All subsequent references to this work will be noted in the text.
4. Critics who have given totally negative reviews to *The White Hotel* are likely to be suspicious of any writer who dares criticize Freud. A good example of this kind of narrow reading is Frank Conroy's review, entitled "Freud into Fiction," that appeared in the *Partisan Review*. Although he accuses the novel of "promis[ing] a good deal more than it delivers," he sees it merely as a "clever" attempt to turn Freudian analysis into a "literary crossword puzzle" and offering the reader the glorious opportunity of functioning as an amateur analyst. Thus, any move that goes beyond or shows the limits of psychoanalysis is read as a terrably disappointing deviation: "Babi Yar is a non-sequitur, part of a game the author is playing, and the work the reader has done on Lisa has been a trick."
5. In a recent article Bruno Bettelheim has argued that the English translations of Freud's works have distorted our vision of him, making him seem more of an analytical scientist and denying that he was actually a humanistic philosopher exploring the human soul. "In his work and in his writings, Freud often spoke of the soul—of its nature and structure, its development, its attributes, how it reveals itself in all we do and dream. Unfortunately, nobody who reads him in English could guess this, because nearly all his many references to the soul, and to matters pertaining to the soul, have been excised in translation. . . . Psychoanalysis, Freud wrote in a letter to Jung in 1906, 'is in essence a cure through love.'" Nevertheless, Bettelheim still reaffirms the assumption that Freud was primarily a rationalist: "All of Freud's work to uncover the unconscious was intended to give us some degree of rational control over it, so that when acting in line with its pressures was not appropriate the releasing of these pressures could be postponed or neutralized, or—most desirable of all—the powers of the unconscious could be redirected through sublimation to serve higher and better purposes." "Freud and the Soul," *The New Yorker* (1 March 1982), pp. 52–93.
6. Although it was unknown to me at the time I wrote this essay, D. M. Thomas has subsequently published a review of *A Secret Symmetry: Sabina Spielrein between Jung and Freud* in the *New York Review of Books* (13 May 1982), an essay which supports my claim that the tension between Freud and Jung plays a central role in *The White Hotel*. Thomas writes:

> Her ideas were influenced both by Jung's theories and the experience of their passion for each other: so, through Sabina, Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* was linked with the aspostate Jung. In fact, she went on striving consciously to reconcile the views of the two men. . . . Her attempt at reconciling the two profound and complementary figures was noble and correct. But of course it was doomed to fail. [P. 3]

Thomas attributes the failure not only to Freud's stubbornness but also to the racial difference between them:

> Freud attempted to draw Spielrein into their shared Jewishness, against the blond Aryans: "We are and remain Jews. The others will not only exploit us and will never understand or appreciate us." That sounds racist—yet what verbs would Freud have used if he could have seen into the future? [P. 3]

Lest one surmise that Sabina Spielrein is another model for Lisa Erdman, Thomas includes the following footnote:

> Jung might also have been intrigued, as I was, by the many coincidences which link Sabina Spielrein's life with that of the fictional patient Lisa Erdman in my novel *The*

White Hotel, though the details of her life were unknown to me when I wrote the novel. [P. 3]

Yet Thomas uses the romantic affair between Jung and his patient to help support his claim (so powerfully dramatized in *The White Hotel*) that in his practice Freud, too, was fortunately a lot less scientific than he claimed and that this erotic dimension positively affected his treatment of Lisa Erdman:

It is a strength, not a weakness, of the early analyses that they are not at all as scientific as they claim, but crammed with deceits, confusions, weaknesses—the analyst's as well as the patient's. It makes them human; and perhaps, for that very reason, more therapeutic than the objective, unemotional analyses which Freud recommended and *believed* he practiced. It may be significant that although "Anna O." suffered relapses after her treatment by Breuer, she became later on a prominent social worker on behalf of Jews. [P. 6]

Thus, Thomas's view of Freud seems more compatible with that of Bruno Bettelheim than one would at first suspect.

7. For a fuller discussion of this evolutionary view of dreams and its relation to the Freudian and Jungian models, see my essay "Dream as Art: A Model for the Creative Interplay between Visual Image and Narrative," *Dreamworks* 2, no. 3 (Spring 1982).

8. C. G. Jung, "On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry" (1922), in *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, Bollingen Series XX, 1966), vol. 15, *The Spirit in Man, Art, and Literature*, trans. R. F. C. Hull, pp. 65–83.

9. T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," *Selected Essays, 1917–1932* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1932).

10. New York: Basic Books, 1971. All subsequent references to this work will be noted in the text.

11. "How little one then suspected that the assassination of the Archduke in Sarajevo would lead to World War I is clear from the remark of Professor Freud (who, to be sure, was a stranger to political life) that if Franz Ferdinand had come to power there would probably have been a war between Austria and Russia." Ibid., p. 91.

12. "I fully agree with Jung in recognizing the existence of this phylogenetic heritage; but I regard it as a methodological error to seize on a phylogenetic explanation before the ontogenetic possibilities have been exhausted. I cannot see any reason for obstinately disputing the importance of infantile prehistory while at the same time freely acknowledging the importance of ancestral prehistory." "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis," in *The Wolf-Man by the Wolf-Man*, ed. Muriel Gardiner (New York: Basic Books, 1971), p. 239.

13. "Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria" (1905), in *Sigmund Freud's Collected Papers*, trans. Alix and James Strachey, ed. Ernest Jones, vol. 3 (New York: Basic Books, 1959). Subsequent references to this work will be noted in the text.

14. Charles Champlin, "'Woe and Betide' the Serious Writer Turned Celebrity," Book Review Section, *Los Angeles Times* (14 February 1982), p. 3.

15. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 141.

16. For a fuller discussion of the symbolic resonance of tree imagery, see Roger Cook, *The Tree of Life: Image for the Cosmos* (New York: Avon, 1974).

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