# The Ethics of Storytelling in *The White Hotel*

Hana Wirth-Nesher
Associate Professor
Lafayette College
Easton, Pa. 18042

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Fulbright Lecturer in
American Literature
English Dept.
Tel Aviv University
Ramat Aviv, Israel 69978

Publication of The White Hotel by D.M. Thomas has been the cause of celebration and scandal, the book hailed as one of the great innovative fictions of the last few decades and condemned as a shoddy work, the product of a failed imagination resorting to plagiarism; praised for seriously dealing with the subject of the holocaust in fiction and castigated for fictionalizing real, that is historically documented, horrors.

The White Hotel is the story of Elizabeth Erdman, a Russian opera singer in Vienna who turns to psychoanalysis with Sigmund Freud to relieve her of excruciating pain in her breast and groin. Her therapy completed, she progresses in her career, marries, and returns to Russia where she is eventually killed at Babi Yar. The book is divided into six chapters. The first chapter, actually entitled the Prologue, is a series of letters by Freud and his followers, beginning with an account by Sandor Ferenczi of Freud and Jung's celebrated visit to America in 1909. The chapter introduces the heroine, as yet unnamed, as one of Freud's patients suffering from severe sexual hysteria and as the author of a document which Freud submits for publication in the interests of the medical community. Chapter I, entitled Don Giovanni, is the patient's

document, a first person sexual fantasy--erotic, even pornographic at times, in which the patient imagines a sexual adventure with Freud's son. This long revery, for which the setting is a white hotel, was originally published by Thomas as an individual poem in 1979.[1]

The Gastein journal, Chapter II, is a third person narrative written by the patient at Freud's request and is an elaboration of the Don Giovanni fantasy. It is dreamlike, full of erotic and surrealistic images, indeed, at times an archetypal Freudian dream in that the images from Freud's Interpretation of Dreams seem to have infiltrated the patient's mind. In both the Don Giovanni poem and the Gatstein journal, the lovemaking of the young couple takes place simultaneously with Catastrophe at the resort, a fire destroying one whole wing causing many deaths. Other hotel guests, during the course of a few days, drown during a storm that floods the hotel or are buried under an avalanche while burying their dead from the earlier disasters. Chapter III, entitled Frau Anna, is the story of the patient as told by Freud in the form of a case history, similar to Freud's famous case histories of Dora or of the Wolf Man. It is an impeccable imitation of Freud's logic and style. In Chapter III, Freud concludes, primarily from analysing her dreams, that Anna's symptoms, severe pain in her left breast and groin, are the result of a repressed childhood memory of her mother and her uncle, naked, in the guest house. "The Health Resort," Chapter IV, is a third person omniscient account in the tradition of the nineteenth century novel, of Lisa Erdman's life beyond therapy, that is her gradual success as an opera singer and her marriage to the widower of her career idol and friend

who died in childbirth. This chapter ends with her sense of fulfillment, personal and professional, evident in a letter which she sends to an aunt in America, dated 1936. "The Sleeping Carriage," Chapter V, is the account of Lisa's and her adopted son Kolya's last day of life, from their foreboding at dawn to their death among the thousands of bodies at Babi Yar. A large portion of this chapter, about one third in fact, is borrowed directly from the testimony of an eyewitness at Babi Yar, Dina Pronicheva, which appeared in Anatoli Kuznetzov's documentary novel, Babi Yar, published in 1970.[2] The author acknowledges his debt to Kuznetzov's book on the acknowledgement page and to draw further attention to the use of actual testimony for the brutality experienced by his heroine as one of the victims of Babi Yar, he introduces Dina Pronicheva as a character into Chapter II, scrambling up the ravine after dark. The final chapter, "The Camp," takes place presumably after death, where Lisa is reunited with her mother in an Eden that looks suspiciously like Palestine. Freud is there too.

Whatever one's judgement ultimately of the success of Thomas's work, one's first and lasting impression is that it is an ambitious book--ambitious in three respects:

1) Artistically as innovative fiction. Each of the six chapters is written in an entirely different narrative mode and each style, representing a different convention in the history of narration, is a comment on its own validity and appropriateness with regard to its subject. The fiction is sufficiently self-aware to call into question the realities created by particular literary styles, but so engaged in the subject as never to be

fashionably self-reflexive or a mere display of the author's virtuosity.

2) Intellectually as psychoanalytic fiction. Freud is one of the major characters of the book and the Freudian account of human development, "That great and beautiful modern myth of psychoanalysis" as Thomas calls it in the "Author's Note", is the informing principle of the work. In this respect, Thomas is examining the claims made for psychoanalysis as one of the reigning ideologies in this century.

3) Morally as holocaust fiction. Definitions of "holocaust fiction" range from extreme minimalism, eyewitness accounts written during the war only, to extreme maximalism, in which a "post-holocaust consciousness" seems to pervade much of the literature of the West.[3] My reason for including the White Hotel in this category of fictions is that the Babi Yar massacre is not historical backdrop here to provide a context for a private drama, but it is rather a central subject. Thomas, in a very deliberate and compelling manner, is asking what connection exists between collective tragedy and personal desire.

The book's ambition lies in the manner in which Thomas has braided together the three elements--the artistic, intellectual, and moral--so that no one element can be discussed independently of the other two. Human suffering, the book seems to argue, is communicated to others in narratives. While all narratives are imaginative reconstructions, when it comes to those of mass suffering, we should be particularly vigilant about honoring the line between fact and fiction. As the development of one individual psyche is also a narrative, is it parallel to or in contrast to the history of civilization? How can we narrate events of mass brutality meaningfully and how do we record,

shape, and appropriate such accounts without violating truth, that is, the pain of the victim? Is there an aesthetics of atrocity?[4] These are among the questions raised by Thomas in his disturbing White Hotel.

In keeping within the tradition of the novel as the genre most concerned with the exploration of unique individual characters, D.M. Thomas creates a unique heroine in such a way that we, the readers, may come to some understanding of her life, may attribute to it some meaning and, having traced a pattern in it, wrest from it insight that transcends the life of the individual character and tells us something about ourselves; our experience with other novel heroines--our passionate acquaintance with Emma Bovary, Anna Karenina, Isabel Archer, Caddy Compson, Tess D'Urberville and others raises in us expectations about the accessibility of the lives of others andthe authority of omniscient or quasi-omniscient authors to direct our perceptions. If every choice of a specific point of view is a stylistic expression of a concept of authority, what is the authority for arriving at a meaningful understanding of the life of Lisa Erdman? Thomas does not have one answer to this question. This we know because he does not narrate her life in only one style. Moreover, the different styles do not all narrate the same stage of her life, so that it is not a question of six different views of presumably the same slippery reality. In this case, multiple perspectives do not hold out any promise of reconstituting some kind of omniscience. In The White Hotel, each style is matched with different segments of the narrative; both story and mode of discourse change as we move from chapter to chapter, without any pretense of an overview.

What, then, are Thomas's models of authority? Let us examine each of the chapters beginning with the Prologue. By its position as the book's beginning, our tendency is to read this chapter as establishing a frame of reference for what is to come, as prefiguring perhaps, or, as is the case in any temporal ordering, we often assume the beginning to be the origin of what follows. The prologue is in an epistolary mode, the exchange of fictional letters by historically "real" individuals. By calling this the Prologue, Thomas removes it from the narrative itself, and by using historical characters, identities inhabiting the real social world, he calls attention to it as a framing device that links the fictional novel to documented reality. In using a prologue to authenticate the historical or social reality of what follows, Thomas draws on a convention of the novel from Cervantes to Hawthorne, that is, the explanation of the origin of the story that denies its purely fictional nature. In this case, we have imaginary letters attributed to real cultural figures. Since the development and contributions of Freud's and Jung's careers are public knowledge, we can detect what some of Thomas's concerns are by what events he selects for his letter writers.

While establishing a clinical context for the journal which is to follow, the letters leave us with a character sketch of the originator of that clinical approach, Freud. A self-declared "profoundly irreligious man," Freud is seen as deeply sensitive, fainting when Jung nonchalantly tells a tale about exhuming bodies from a prehistoric mass grave, lamenting the ill treatment of war neurotics in German hospitals, and developing a theory of a death wish, claiming that we have "ignored the extreme of morbidity."[5] The pre-historic

mass grave, the result of a natural disaster according to Jung, prefigures the mass grave resulting from murder in the Babi Yar section. Thomas has also imitated Freud's characteristic affirmation of the nonjudgemental, objective nature of "The realm of science," as he does in the Dora case history whenever he anticipates criticism of offensive subjects or language. Yet, in an earlier lapse of clinical objectivity, Freud decorously assures a colleague to whom he sent the manuscript that his patient is a "A young woman of most respectable character." In short, Freud the moralist is solidly present in the letters of the prologue.

Although we have been prepared to accept Chapter II as the notebook of a severely ill patient, we are not prepared for the power of the poem, its erotic and morbid images, and its self-conscious commentary-- "For nothing in the white hotel but love is offered at a price we can afford." In psychoanalytic terms, the poem is an expression of "transference," the patient's transferring onto the physician feelings which did not originate in the analysis, but which, having surfaced as a result of analysis, are now directed to the analyst. In this case, the patient has further transferred her feelings onto the analyst's son, perhaps to avoid the expression of forbidden love and desire between patient and physician but also, as a form of resistance to therapy, redirecting her hostility and attraction to her doctor in the form of seducing his son. The as yet unnamed patient seems to comment on her own desires by recording her fantasy between the staves of a score of Don Giovanni, thereby identifying with a mythic rake and libertine, punished in hell for his sexual appetites. Anna, as Freud will call her in the case history, is a

stern moralist. In Anna's fantasy, lovemaking is always connected with death and disaster, the imagining simultaneously of extreme libidinous desire and extreme morbidity. Thus, Anna's fantasy is a vivid expression of Freud's theory of a death instinct.

When Anna expands and transforms her poem into a prose version, the conventions of prose fiction bring added dimensions to the account of her inner life. First, this third person omniscient narrative begins with a more detailed account, as novels do, of how the heroine came to have her adventure, the exposition leading to the affair with the young man. It opens with her nightmare which she dreams while sharing a train compartment with Freud's son. The nightmare acts as uncanny foreshadowing, for her dreamt flight into a forest to escape pursuing soldiers and her stumbling over a boy, bleeding from cuts incurred in his flight, is exactly the account of Dina Pronicheva's escape from Babi Yar in the fifth chapter. Her dream is, then, a prefiguring of history. Second, the prose fiction account introduces minor characters who provide varied responses to the disasters that occur there, mainly through a series of postcards from the white hotel. As in a novel of manners, stock characters reveal their social class and aspirations in their messages. There are callous professionals, concerned only about interrupting their vacation, a narcissistic honeymoon couple, an altruistic nurse, a social climbing secretary, a botanist concerned only about his specimens, a priest casting all suffering in religious terms, a comic maid, and a reactionary army major measuring every event against life before the war (which is always incomparably better). The indifference to disaster

displayed by the guests at the resort intent on preserving a genteel way of life calls to mind Mann's Magic Mountain or Appelfeld's Badenheim 1939-- slow erosion of privileged isolation.

The matter-of-fact tone of the Gastein journal is in contrast to the bizarre surrealistic images. Here wombs and breasts fly through the air along with orange groves, one's hair can be on fire without being hurt, and it can rain on one side of a train only. It is a world where Freud's paradigm seems to have replaced the laws of physics, where all explanations of the supernatural are psychological or medical, flying wombs the projection of repressed anxiety about hysterectomies, a petrified foetus floating above the lake the guilt of a woman having underone an abortion. Everyone's neuroses are objectified into the landscape; they constitute the social environment. Even conversations operate in Freudian code-- "Shall I open a window?" says the young man in the stifling train compartment. "If you like," she murmured, "only I can't afford to become pregnant." No train is merely a means of transport, no tunnel merely a road through a mountain. Almost a textbook illustration of Freud's Interpretation of Dreams, the Gastein journal ends in a haunting near repetition of its beginning, not a dream about Babi Yar but an "unspeakably offensive remark," an Anti-Semitic declaration by one of the guests. The lovers, ever more dedicated to their passion as the catastrophes intensify, include others in the White Hotel, such as the priest, in their lovemaking until, Anna writes, "she could not tell which of them was making love to her... The spirit of the white hotel was against selfishness." (p.86).

"Frau AnnaG.", the title of the case history which constitutes chapter III of the book, is a masterful imitation of Freud's case histories in its organization, rhetoric, and tone. Freud was an accomplished story teller and his case

histories read like novels. Thomas has given us the Freudian strategy--from the patient's story as he or she presented it to Freud through the process of guiding, manipulating, and teasing out of the patient the hidden, repressed aspects of that story that are , Freud would argue, responsible for the neuroses, Freud's case histories are detective stories, his method based on the belief of the power of the past, the tyranny of the repressed primal event that determines future behavior. Always aware, as Thomas's Freud points out, that "the unconscious is a precise and even pedantic symbolist," ( 99 ) Freud relentlessly digs deeper, to use his own archaeological metaphor, for what the patient is intent on keeping from the analyst and from him or herself as well. Usually the climactic moment is the report of a dream that Freud can successfully decode so that the primal event can be reconstructed, or, as may often be the case, the memory of the event, itself a reconstruction, can be recalled. That is, the primal event is as likely to be a narrative construct which the patient creates, indeed, even a fiction which has been repressed.[6] Thus, the patient constructs tales about his life that make him guilty enough to "forget" them. Freud attempts to reconstruct that narrative which may itself be a reconstruction. Taking notes after the patient's visit and writing his case histories after the completion of therapy, all of the narratives that are evidence for Freud's job of reconstruction are themselves constructs. In explaining his method of writing up case histories, Freud claims that "I have not omitted to mention in each case where the authentic facts end and my constructions begin,"[7] yet he admits to having abridged, edited, and synthesized, despite his disavowal of any artistic inventiveness. "If I were a writer of novellas instead of a man of science," writes Thomas's

Freud, just as Freud himself sets the record straight in the preface to Dora by denying that he wrote a roman a clef. While Freud repeatedly makes scientific claims for his method, he is a man so sensitive to artistic method that he criticizes other analysts for the poor way in which they write up "the stories" of their patients; he even goes so far as to criticize his patients for being poor storytellers. Freud implies that a coherent story, the definition of which is no doubt gleaned from the aesthetic of the late nineteenth century novel, is in some manner connected with mental health. In discussing ailments, Freud characterizes them by the various types of narrative insufficiency that he commonly finds. The aim of treatment he writes, is to repair damage to the patient's memory, so that he or she can come "into possession of one's own story."[8]

Thomas misses none of Freud's characteristics, such as his sense of all results being somewhat incomplete, most evident in Dora's case history. When Freud cannot explain why Anna's left breast and ovary are always the site of pain, he concludes "perhaps left-sidedness arose from a memory that was never brought to the surface. No analysis is ever complete; the hysterias have more roots than a tree."[9] Thomas also gives us the Freud impatient of his subject's evasiveness, forcing what he believes to be the truth out of her by threats, as well as Freud the proud professional, offended by resistance to his theories. In the case of Dora, Freud blames her for leaving analysis, not so much because she needed the therapy but because it prevented him from achieving a thorough investigation of hysteria. But most noticeable is Freud's ingenious singlemindedness, his unwillingness to consider evidence extraneous to the nuclear family drama. In the case of Dora, he blames a young woman for

being inhibited sexually because she won't admit enjoying the advances of a man as old as her father and the husband of her father's lover. That the girl may just not have been attracted to a man Freud considered handsome and virile is out of the question as is the possibility that the girl may have considered such a liason improper under the circumstances.[10] Freud's case histories are fascinating for their dazzling singlemindedness and this is nowhere more apparent than in his analysis of Lisa's case as Thomas invents it in The White Hotel.

Thomas's Freud concludes that Lisa's symptoms, severe pain in the left breast and ovary, anorexia and asthma are the result of a childhood trauma: repressing recognition of her mother when she came upon her uncle and a half naked woman in the guest house. That repressed knowledge, combined with the news that her mother died in a hotel fire shortly thereafter, Freud argues, were the cause of her asthma attacks and her hallucinations of fire and disaster during sexual relations with her husband.

During the course of her therapy she realizes that her aunt's habit of wearing a crucifix is clear evidence that the baren-necked woman in the guest house was really her mother. Her pain in the breast and ovary, then, are the expression of her unconscious hatred of her distorted femininity as a result of hating her mother and bearing her shame.

According to Freud, now that she knew for the first time that her mother and uncle had perished together in that hotel fire during one of their clandestine meetings, she should be freed of the tyranny of this repressed knowledge of her mother's sin. Except for not being able to explain why the pain occurs on the left side, it is a tidy explanation, particularly Freud's account of the white hotel in her fantasy as the body of the mother, the place

without sin and remorse, and her desire for reconciliation with her mother, for the return to the "oceanic oneness of one's first years." The White Hotel, with its "wholehearted commitment to orality," is Lisa's longing for her mother's unconditional love. "Frau Anna's document expressed her yearning to return to the haven of security, the original white hotel--we have all stayed there--the mother's womb."(146) For Freud, Lisa becomes the symbol of the universal struggle between a life instinct and a death instinct.

But Freud's case history, with its clear delight in reconstructing Anna's narrative and its confident tone about her recovery is seen to be severely flawed in light of the rest of the novel. In "The Health Resort," the next chapter narrated in a third person omniscient manner and in the style of a realistic novel, we discover that Lisa Erdman, the "real" Anna G., withheld important information. "you saw what I allowed you to see...It was not your fault that I seemed to be incapable of telling the truth," she writes to Freud. (182) She never told him about an earlier scene than that of the guest house--that at the age of three she toddled on to her father's yacht to observe her mother, aunt, and bare-necked. In her account of her first lover, the revolutionary student who left her because marriage, bourgeois domesticity, would have taken him away from his mission, she fabricated his brutality to her. But her grossest lie and violation of trust between patient and analyst was in her account of being harrassed by sailors on a merchant ship who claimed to have read newspaper accounts of her mother's death by fire and to have known about her loose reputation. They knew nothing about her mother, she writes Freud. They abused her sexually because she was Jewish. "Eventually they let me go," she writes to Freud, "but from that time I haven't found it easy to admit to my Jewish blood." Because she knew that Freud was Jewish, "it seemed

shameful to be ashamed" of her own Jewishness and she hid the true nature of the incident from him. Her hatred of her father, she believed, stemmed from his being her Jewish parent, the source of her hateful identity. In keeping with her reticence about her Jewishness, she failed to tell Freud that the reason she left her husband was her realization that he was a zealous anti-Semite and, having deceived him about her Jewishness, she felt his hatred and revulsion for her true identity.

In short, what she kept from Freud was the trauma of her Jewishness. Given Freud's method of excluding any life experience outside the family drama, such information would probably not have altered Freud's diagnosis based on his reconstruction of what he considered to be the crucial elements of every person's life history. Collective identity was negligible to Freud in his theories. Indeed, his very theories sometimes seem to be the intellectual response of a Jewish doctor in unstable, anti-Semitic fin-de-siecle Vienna, i.e., to his deliberate exclusion from the medical establishment.[11] Freud's paradigm of human history dissolves the distinctions between races that were causing him so much misery. His rationalism supports all the ideas of the Enlightenment that deny validity to myth or religion.[12] For Freud, ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny, the life of the individual regardless of religion or race, recapitulates the history of the entire species. In his singleminded determination to keep social identity out of his paradigm, Freud was unable to fully explain Lisa's anxiety. More to the point, later chapters will show that two of her repeated hallucinations during sexual relations with her anti-Semitic husband, falling from a great height and mourners buried by a landslide, both inexplicable to Freud, are premonitions of her death at Babi Yar as a Jew. And her pain in her ovary

and breast, far from being the result of nuclear family drama, are premonitions of her suffering as part of a collective identity, as a Jew, the victim of history, social hatred, the brutality of fellowmen. That which Freud so systematically denied in his life and in his scientific methods is the very thing that is mysteriously associated with Lisa the Jewish victim, not Lisa the hysterical female. "What torments me," writes Lisa to Freud, the man of science who claims not to judge his patients morally, "is whether life is good or evil." Lisa's life, as we see it in the next section, the Babi Yar chapter, is part of a moral universe, not a psychological one.

The penultimate chapter, "The Sleeping Carriage," has been the source of most of the controversy about the book. Objections to this chapter are moral and generally focus on one of two related areas: plagiarism or the deliberate fictionalizing of factual accounts of atrocity which Thomas himself implies is indecent. For his liberal borrowing from Kuznetsov's documentary account of Babi Yar, Thomas is accused of plagiarism; indeed the Times Literary Supplement responded by conducting a symposium on that subject. Irate readers accused him of failed imagination at the most critical moment of his novel. "Should the author of a fiction choose as his proper subject events which are not only outside his own experience, but also evidently beyond his own resources of imaginative recreation?" writes one such reader. "The words given to Thomas's fictional heroine are hers (Dina Pronicheva's), writes another, "and no writer has the moral right to take the experience of a real human being and attach it, for his or her own ends, to a made-up character... Fact and fiction, reality and unreality, do not blend this way."[13] Thomas's reply to charges of artistic weakness and the use of actual testimony in fiction is sharp

and to the point. "I could have changed the order of the words, but that would have been untruthful. The only person who could speak was the witness."[14] But "Mr. Thomas's high-sounded defences," another letter writer puts it, does not excuse what he calls "plagiarism admitted in advance,which insults literature and makes mugs of publishers and reviewers."[15]

Now plagiarism, as Harold Bloom rightly pointed out in the symposium, is a legal matter rather than a literary one. In this definition of the term, Thomas is innocent for he has violated no copyright laws. But in another sense, legal borrowing with appropriate acknowledgement can still be morally suspect for it makes use of someone else's efforts and exertions. When Thomas is accused of plagiarism this must be what the accusers have in mind, coming, as we all do, from a culture that stresses individual uniqueness and originality and that believes in compensation and recognition commensurate with expenditure of labor. But whose efforts has Thomas exploited? Since Kuznetsov claims that his book is not a fiction but rather a compilation and reconstruction of documentary material, Thomas cannot be said to have turned to another's fictional invention in place of creating his own. He can be accused of using a historical document in a fiction in place of a recreative imagining of that event, but the immorality of creating fiction about human suffering for which historical documents already exists is Thomas's point--artistically and morally. One could accuse Thomas of naivete in his definition of history, given Kuznetsov's method of recording and reconstructing narratives after conversations with eyewitnesses, but that would not affect Thomas's statement about the just artistic response to what he calls "unimaginable suffering."

Behind the charge of plagiarism lies the assumption that our efforts and inventiveness belong to us, just as behind the charge of fictionalizing

the factual lies the assumption that our suffering and pain belong to us and should not be borrowed and used in another's imaginary invention. To put it another way, while pain can be imagined artistically, fictions about factual accounts of human suffering betray those who suffer, either by creating an object of beauty and enjoyment out of another's pain or through fictionalizing, calling into question the "reality" of the pain having ever occurred. To act upon the former argument, the creation of beauty based upon the suffering of others, would mean to erase most of the great literature of Western civilization. But most critics who condemn fiction writers for using holocaust materials do not say that documented suffering cannot be the subject of art. They rather single out this horror, the holocaust, as being forbidden territory for art because of its unprecedented scale of atrocities. There is a danger here as well, for it means to privilege and even to sanctify the holocaust among human tragedies; it suggests a perverse sense of being chosen and an insensitive ranking of victimization. More to the point is the argument against fictionalizing holocaust accounts because the recording of facts in this generation is still in progress, and in light of charges that the holocaust itself is a fabrication, fictionalized accounts cast doubt on the existence of the actual events. In this argument, Thomas is guilty of calling into question the validity of Dina Pronicheva's account by giving her documented experiences to a fictional character, to Lisa Erdman. The irony of Thomas's achievement is that in his desire to preserve the record of what actually occurred, ever a mediated and reconstructed version, he is accused of betraying that reality. Furthermore, it is his refusal to deny Dina her account of her own suffering by recreating her experience fictionally that caused him to borrow the textual

passages leading to the charge of plagiarism. In this case, Thomas is more vigilant about the possible indecency of using someone's else's pain for the sake of art than he is about using someone else's efforts, i.e. plagiarism. In his final reply to his critics in the Times Literary Supplement, Thomas writes,"

> (In Chapter V) my heroine, Lisa Erdman, changes from being Lisa an individual to Lisa in history--an anonymous victim. It is this transition, reflected in style as well as content, which has moved and disturbed many readers. From individual self-expression she moves to the common fate. From the infinitely varied world of narrative fiction we move to a world in which fiction is not only severely constrained but irrelevant.
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> At the outset of Part V, the narrative voice is still largely authorial (though affected by Pronicheva's tone) because there is still room for fiction; Lisa is still a person. But gradually her individuality is taken from her on that road to the ravine; and gradually the only appropriate voice becomes that voice which is like a recording camera; the voice of one who was there. It would have been perfectly easy for me to have avoided the possibility of such attacks as Kenricks's through some specious "imaginative recreation," but it would have been wrong. The witness's testimony was the true voice of the narrative at that point: "It started to get dark," etc. This is how it was--for all of the victims. It could not be altered. The time for imagination was before; and, in my novel, after. Imagination, at the point quoted by Kenrick, is exhausted in the effort to take in the unimaginable which happened." [16]

It should be apparent that I acquit Thomas of the first charge--he did not plagiarize by any stretch,or should I say contraction, of the imagination. He borrowed from acknowledged sources because he wanted to be acquitted of the more serious charge--fictionalizing the factual. Here Thomas demonstrates his profound desire to preserve factual truth by withdrawing as storyteller and fiction writer. The impulse to do so is commendable in light of the present urgency of recording what actually occurred. By insisting that

here the "recording camera" takes over, he expresses his desire to do away with constructs, while in practice he continues to depend on narrative constructs, because he has no choice other than silence. Dina Pronicheva's account, he implies, is as close as we can get to the truth, but it too falsifies in its narrative coherence, its sequence, and in its being shaped by Kuznetsov. What is worthy of respect in Thomas's approach to this problem is his awareness of it, visible in the deliberate rupture in the fictional text. He does not go so far as to declare a temporary moratorium on fictionalizing, as others have done, because he understands how difficult it would be to fix the border between fact and fiction. But he recognizes the moral imperative to seek such a boundary and then to use fiction to impress upon us the magnitude of the loss at Babi Yar by recreating imaginatively the lives of those who died, but not their deaths.

Thomas does fictionalize in "The Sleeping Carriage" for the purpose of his artistry. For example, because he wants to prepare the reader for the mystical, other worldly final chapter, he gives his Babi Yar victims the false hope of a rumor that they are to be transported to Palestine. There is no evidence that such a rumor ever existed. Indeed, there is evidence to the contrary.[17] Furthermore, the particular fictional circumstances of his character's death, the jackboot crashing into her left breast and left pelvis, becomes the final explanation of Lisa's mysterious symptoms--not neurotic manifestations of a traumatic event in her personal, familial past but mysterious prefigurings of her fate as part of the collective tragedy of the Jews. History supplants psychology.

As this depiction of the holocaust denies the privileged role of psychoanalysis as a way of knowing mankind, the narrative seems to move toward its end--Lisa at the bottom of a pile of corpses, "a quarter of a million white hotels in Babi Yar." "The soul of 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)...If 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." Psychoanalysis, that "great and beautiful modern myth," in its desire to transcend the boundaries dividing mankind, in its paradoxical romantic faith in self-discovery through reason, through sanctifying therapy, has no answer to organized evil. And the preoccupation with the self apart from collective identity finally appears, in this book, to be precious, both cherished but also overly refined and delinquent in social responsibility.

Thomas did not end the book with Lisa's death at Babi Yar (although many readers have wished that he had). Perhaps because he felt that it would be too dark altogether to leave her at the bottom of the ravine, or perhaps because he wanted to demonstrate our drive to give meaning to events even so horrible as that, our propensity to place such horror into a coherent narrative. It is our irrepressible desire for endings beyond the finality of the death of individuals that Thomas demonstrates for us fictionally in that last troubling chapter, when he steps beyond the territory of most novel writers, taking the risk of depicting life after death. The corpses in the ravine, according to Thomas, buried under the concrete and steel designed to erase their slaughter,

have "nothing" to do with what he calls "the guest, the soul, the lovesick bride, the daughter of Jerusalem."

In "The Camp," the final chapter, Lisa arrives in a cloud of dust at a settlement near a sparkling oasis in the desert where immigrants live in tents, learn Hebrew, and seek missing relatives. Lisa's death, then, has been a visa to a world beyond, to a heaven that not only is a messianic vision in the terms of Labor Zionism, but is a happy revision of history in that Richard Lyons (are we to read Lionhearted?), the English lieutenant, welcomes thousands of immigrants and directs the operation of erecting tents to house them. Reminiscing about the white hotel with Lyons, who remembers it as a beautiful place, Lisa glances at the dunes around her and sees it as equally beautiful. Palestine, then, is a return to the white hotel with scenes that echo the Gastein journal, but it is, of course, a collective return to the mother, the homeland as an answer to the homeless persecution that precedes it.

Yet "The Camp" is not only a Labor Zionist dream of redemption, life after death as a people. Thomas presents us with three possible conclusions to three of the many possible narratives of Lisa Erdman's life. One I have already mentioned--a narrative of Jewish history that sees the rebirth of nationhood as collective redemption, the holocaust as a tragic lesson about the failure of Emancipation, Rationalism, the so-called Englightenment to solve the "Jewish Problem." In this reading, the determining factor in Lisa Erdman's life is Jewish identity, the very experiences that she hid from Freud. But the Camp is also a mystical return to the white hotel in psychoanalytical terms. Despite the horrors of history and mass suffering, the belief in the possibility of fulfillment of desire, of uninhibited love, of a place where Lisa can be both

child at her mother's breast and can suckle her own mother--this belief redeems. In such a narrative of Lisa's life, as the psyche on a sacred voyage of self-discovery, psychoanalysis and its sanctification of the quest for self is the longed for beyond. Lisa realizes in retrospect that Freud was the kindly priest, the spiritual guide, in her journal account of the white hotel. Freud's theory, itself a product of the Jew's belief in reason and enlightenment, coexists with the Zionist alternative that calls it into question. And coexisting along with these is a camp in which virgin birth takes place, fishermen congregate near a lake, her mother claims that she is not in the lowest circle, and the sun sets forming the likeness of a rose--in short, Dante's Christian soul redeemed through faith and love. "Wherever there is love in the heart," declares Lisa, "there is hope of salvation."

So Thomas provides us with coexisting ideological, psychological, and theological endings to three ways of understanding the life and death of Lisa Erdman. Lisa's spirit has immigrated to the idyllic landscape of "The Song of Songs," a text that Thomas quotes liberally no doubt because its meaning is determined by frames of reference similar to those which he employs. It has been read as a personal quest, that is an erotic search for the loved one, as the love of God for the people of Israel, and as the love of God for the Church or for the Christian soul.

No one of Thomas's endings, however, is satisfactory. The Camp has not healed Freud, who appears as an old man with a bandaged jaw, alone and silent--a fallen hero, like the silent Achilles, proud and incommunicative even in death. The miracle of virgin birth is reserved for a pet mascot, and Israel's tents, shining in the moonlight are under the kindly eye of the British and untouched by any Arab opposition or wars of independence.

Each ending, each reminder of familiar narratives, is both seductive for its beauty and alienating for its parodying of that beauty. We give meaning to our lives, Thomas implies, through narratives, but the desire for coherent stories also keeps us from truth, as each of Thomas's narrative modes is subverted by the one that follows it. To see Lisa's death through the lenses of Zionism, psychoanalysis, or Christianity is to invest it with meaning that staves off the darkness of the Babi Yar ravine--and the inadequacy of these fictions to come to terms with mass suffering is conveyed in the White Hotel, a fiction that advertises its own inadequacy at each step and even questions its moral responsibility to the unstoried dead. In The White Hotel, aesthetic standards, the question of failed imagination and the use of another's efforts, plagiarism, are inextricably linked with moral codes, the question of the use of another's suffering. In its painful self-awareness, it disturbs, disorients, frustrates, moves and engages us--and in its tentativeness, it rings true.

Endnotes

[1]It was published in the magazine New Worlds.

[2]Anatoli Kuznetsov, Babi Yar: A Document in the Form of a Novel trans. by David Floyd. London: Jonathan Cape, 1970. Kuznetsov has asked that the English translation be considered the authoritative text because of the deletions and compromises that mar the Russian text published in the Soviet Union.

[3]For a summary of recent books on holocaust literature see David Roskies, "The Holocaust According to the Literary Critics," Prooftexts: A Journal of Jewish Literary History, Vol. 1, No. 2, May 1981.

[4]For a discussion of this subject, see Lawrence Langer, The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975); Alvin Rosenfeld, ADouble Dying: Reflections on Holocaust Literature (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980); Edward Alexander, The Resonance of Dust: Essays on Holocaust Literature and Jewish Fate (Columbia: Ohio State University Press, 1979); Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, By Words Alone: The Holocaust in Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

[5]All quotations are taken from D.M. Thomas, The White Hotel (New York: Viking Press, 1981).

[6]"...so far as my experience hitherto goes, these scenes from infancy are not reproduced during the treatment as recollections, they are the products of construction."
Sigmund Freud, "The Case of the Wolf-Man," trans. James Strachey, in The Wolf-Man ed. by Muriel Gardner (New York: Basic Books, 1971), p. 194.
In Freud's discussion of infantile neurosis in the case history of the Wolf-Man, he examines the entire question of primal scenes and their relation to fantasy.

[7]Sigmund Freud, Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria (New York: Macmillan, 1963), p. 27.

[8]For an analysis of Freud as a novelist see Steven Marcus, "Freud and Dora: Story, History, Case History," in Representations: Essays on Literature and Society (New York: Random House, 1976).

[9]Freud's tentativeness about his conclusions is examined by Marcus in his study of the Dora case history.

[10]Philip Rieff, Introduction to Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria, p. 16.

[11]For the effect of Austrian politics on Freud's professional life, see "Politics and Patricide in Freud's Interpretation of Dreams in Fin-de-Siecle Vienna: Politics and Culture by Carl E. Schorske (New York: Random House, 1979).

"By reducing his own political past and present to an epiphenomenal status in relation to the primal conflict between father and son, Freud gave his fellow liberals an a-historical theory of man and society that could make bearable a political world spun out of orbit and beyond control." (p. 203)

[12]Lionel Trilling, "Freud and Literature," The Liberal Imagination (New York: Viking, 1950), p. 39.

[13]First letter signed by D,A. Kenrick, Times Literary Supplement, March 26, 1982.

Second letter signed by Emma Tennant, TLS, April 9, 1982.

[14]Thomas's first reply, TLS, March 30, 1982.

[15]Letter signed by Geoffrey Grigson, TLS, April 16, 1982.

[16]April 2, 1982.