The Talking Cure

Freud Revisited: The White Hotel

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Long may poetry and psychoanalysis continue to highlight, from their different perspectives, the human face in all its nobility and sorrow.

"Sigmund Freud," *The White Hotel*[1]

Reading D. M. Thomas' *The White Hotel* (1981) is like discovering a lost Shakespeare play: It is as if "Fräu Anna G.," the fictional Freudian case study that serves as the centerpiece of the novel, has existed since the turn of the century, no less real or vivid than *Dora,* the *Rat Man,* or the *Wolf Man*—stories whose enduring literary interest transcends the narrow confines of psychiatric literature. The reader is stunned by the authenticity and power of Thomas' novel. Within its structure lies an exquisitely complex and elegantly written case study that comes eerily close to a study that the historical Freud might have written had he created a sixth major case history. Thomas' fictional Freud is, without question, the most majestic portrait of the analyst that has yet appeared in imaginative literature. Never before, not even in Roth's *My Life as a Man,* has a novelist so brilliantly captured the psychoanalytic process, including Freud's audacious exploration of the psyche, the relentless tracing back of symptoms to their distant childhood aetiology, and the magical nature of the talking cure. Yet, "Fräu Anna G." is only one section of *The White Hotel.* The neurotic illness that besets Lisa Erdman reflects a larger force assaulting modern civilization. Thomas

ambitiously presents us with a case history of the twentieth century—an analysis of hysteria and World War, a biography of a self-tormented young woman and a war-ravaged century, a story of the age-old battle between love and death.

The White Hotel consists of seven parts, including a prologue. Each part is tightly connected to the others and must be analyzed in depth. The reader must decipher the bewildering chronology of events and compare the ways in which Lisa transforms external events—including apocalyptic fires, sexual violations, and catastrophic falls—into her poetry and prose. Thomas' heroine begins psychoanalysis with Freud in the fall of 1919 at about the time when the historical analyst is working on die manuscript of his controversial *Beyond the Pleasure Principle.* Lisa has been suffering for years from what appear to be hysterical symptoms—breathlessness that has been mistakenly diagnosed as asthma, pains in her left breast and ovary, and morbid hallucinations of fire. A few months into treatment, Freud's daughter unexpectedly dies, and he temporarily suspends die analysis. With her aunt, Lisa travels to a health resort in the Austrian Alps, Bad Gastein, where she writes a long erotic poem based upon a transference fantasy of making love to Freud's son Martin, whose photograph she has seen in the analyst's office. She later writes a longer prose narrative in the form of a journal based on the same fantasy. Freud analyzes the two remarkable documents and succeeds in tracing back Lisa's hysterical symptoms to several traumatic events in her

early childhood, including the death of her mother and uncle in a hotel fire. Lisa's analysis with Freud ends in 1920 with the remission of her symptoms. But *The White Hotel* does not end here. Remarrying late in life after a disastrous early marriage, Lisa experiences happiness for the first time, but the joy is cut short when she and her husband are separated by the turbulent events of World War II. Along with tens of thousands of other Jews, she and her stepson are murdered at the infamous ravine in Babi Yar. In a breath-taking coda to the novel, she is resurrected and reunited with her dead friends and relatives in an other-worldly Palestinian refugee camp after the war.

The prologue of *The White Hotel* opens with an exchange of letters among Freud, Sandor Ferenczi, and Hanns Sachs. Although these letters, along with all case studies in the novel, are fictional, Thomas' Freud abides by the generally known facts of his historical counterpart's life. We overhear Ferenczi writing in 1909 to his future wife Gisela about the whirlwind Your of America he, Freud, and Jung have embarked upon. One detail in the letter stands out, a dream Ferenczi recalls concerning Gisela's anxiety over divorcing her first husband to marry the Hungarian psychoanalyst. Later, in "Fräu Anna G.," Lisa narrates a dream to Freud in which she telepathically intuits the death of Gisela's husband. Like so many of the details in *The White Hotel,* this is based upon historical fact. Gisela's first husband committed suicide on the day she married Ferenczi; the suicide was hushed up by the

psychoanalytic community.[2] This is one of the numerous uncanny premonitions and telepathic experiences that come true in the novel.

The other letters of the prologue heighten the reader's interest in Freud's patient. In a letter to Ferenczi on February 9, 1920, Freud grieves over the tragic death of his daughter, Sophie Halberstadt, who died on January 25 at the age of 26. She left behind two young children, one of whom, Heinz, was to die three years later—an event Lisa also predicts. Quoting from Schiller and Goethe, Thomas' Freud refers to the "deep narcissistic hurt" that is not to be healed. The letter has the ring of authenticity to it, and no wonder. The novelist has used one of the actual letters written by the historical Freud.[3] Thomas' analyst then refers to his new manuscript, Beyond the Pleasure Principle, wherein he posits a "death instinct, as powerful in its own way (though more hidden) as the libido." In the same paragraph, he mentions for the first time a young female patient who has just "given birth" to some writings which lend support to his new theory. The prologue concludes with three other brief letters, one in which Freud tells Sachs about his patient's remarkable writings, a "genuine pseudocyesis"; a postcard from Sachs to Freud in which he interprets the patient's fantasy as "like Eden before the Fall"; and a third in which Freud forwards "Fräu Anna G." along with the patient's own writings to the Goethe Centenary Committee in 1931 for publication in a special volume honoring the psychoanalyst's contributions to literature.

Part I of The White Hotel, entitled "Don Giovanni," is a 375-line poem consisting of irregularly rhyming couplets. An erotic fantasy written in the first person, the poem celebrates the terrible beauty of sensual love. The imagery dramatizes the clash between Eros and Thanatos. The poem, we learn later, is written in a three-day period at the end of January and beginning of February 1920 while Lisa is awaiting resumption of her analysis with Freud. In the poem, which is written between the staves of a score of Don Giovanni, she imagines Martin Freud as a Don Juan who makes love to her on a train and then takes her to a white lakeside hotel where they spend a week of shameless passion. Their orgiastic lovemaking is shattered by catastrophes befalling the white hotel. The roof of a summer-house pagoda comes crashing down in a storm. Several people drown on the lake. Engaged in frenzied intercourse while sailing on the lake, Lisa witnesses a blaze coming from die hotel. She screams in delight from being sexually impaled by Martin, but no one hears her cries, for they are lost in the horrified wailings of people plunging to their death from the upper stories of the hotel. She dreams of a whale moaning a lullaby to her corset, a breast sheared away, the birth of a wooden embryo. She awakens in relief to discover her body still intact. Like the spirit of the white hotel, her body has a restorative effect on the other guests. Her breasts supply endless milk for the men who gratefully drink from them, including a kindly old priest and the hotel's chef. Despite the disasters occurring to the guests, "no one was selfish in the white hotel" (p. 28). The

endless penetration of Lisa's body only intensifies her desire; nothing seems out of place in the white hotel, not even the marriage of Eros and Thanatos. In its Chagall-like surrealism and Lawrencium eroticism, Lisa's poem leaves the reader confused but transfixed.

How do we judge Lisa's wildly original verse? Are her writings an example of psychopathological ruminations or visionary art? Are her "brain storms" symptomatic of a neurotic disorder or a manifestation of a singular poetic sensibility able to intuit a hidden reality glimpsed only by the mystic poet? In short, are we dealing with hysteria or history? The nightmarish quality of her experience points to a bad dream or private horror, but the historical events that frame the poet's life lend objectivity to her vision. The wild storm battering the hotel is not simply one woman's mental agony but an entire century's monstrous upheaval, just as the hotel fire prefigures the conflagration of world war. Not even the idyllic seclusion of the hotel can protect it from menacing reality. Although Freud elaborates upon the rich symbolism of the white hotel in his case study, it is apparent from the beginning of the novel that it represents the maternal body, a garden of earthly delights miraculously able to survive the harshest environment. The fantasied lover who ravishes the poet's body symbolizes not only the Oedipal father but the boundless reservoir of libidinal instinct and autoeroticism Lisa draws upon in pleasure and solace. For Thomas, "narcissism" is as affirmative as life itself.

Yet not even the pleasure principle can deflect the dreamer's compulsion to repeat terrifying reality. The disasters to which the poet bears witness testify to the dualistic power of nature to create and to destroy. In its ability to conjure up the child's image of prelapsarian Eden, the inevitable movement toward darkness and death, and the incantatory rhythms and hallucinatory imager)', "Don Giovanni" evokes Dylan Thomas' poetry. Surprisingly, there is little mention of human cruelty in Lisa's poem. The embattled guests are united in their communal resolve to withstand the harsh elements. Only later in the novel does violence take on a recognizably human form. Yet there are disturbing hints of sadism in the poem, along with the most vexing question in *The White Hotel:* the meaning of Lisa's psychic powers. The description of sexual impalement amidst the screams of the falling bodies from the fiery hotel foreshadows the Russian soldier's bayonet at Babi Yar, which is used to rape and murder Lisa. And the line of mourners in the gloom anticipates the image of thousands of Jewish victims cast into the deep pits by the conscripted Russians. This too is described in gruesome detail in a later section of the story.

We gain a deeper insight into the writer's mind in the next chapter of the novel, "The Gastein Journal," a 55-page prose narrative that elaborates upon the erotic fantasy of "Don Giovanni." The lyrical first person poem gives way to the evocative journal in which Lisa creates a host of characters residing in the white hotel. Both the poem and journal open with a similar

dream in which the young woman finds herself running through a woods. In the poem she is running to escape a wild storm, while in the journal she is fleeing from soldiers. Unable to disappear through a trap door or to make herself invisible by merging into the trees, she prepares for her death. She looks into the frightened face of a small boy who reassures her: "Don't be frightened, lady . . . I'm alive too" (p. 32). As she crawls through the woods with the boy trailing her, she feels bullets "pumping into her right shoulder, quite gently" (p. 32). With that, she awakens to find herself on a train traveling to Bad Gastein. Her premonition of death is not averted, only postponed.

In "The Gastein Journal" Lisa meets a Viennese soldier, Martin Freud, who is returning home from the Great War. The two engage in shameless lovemaking, oblivious to the startled ticket collector who gazes at them. A train carries them to a remote hotel in the mountains where they spend a passionate interlude. Once again Eros leads to Thanatos as the plot repeats the catastrophic events described in "Don Giovanni." It is as if the soldier's frenzied assault on the young woman's body leads to the devastation of the white hotel. At once violent and tender, selfish and generous, the sexual storm never abates. Inexplicable events astound the guests: falling stars large as maple leaves, a livid stroke of lightning, a school of whales. A mysterious force animates the world of the white hotel, a force that is at once ominous and magical. The guests testify to weird sightings and phantasmagoric

happenings. A statesman conjectures that the presence of the whales may be explained by the appearance of Madame Cot-tin, a corsetiere whose corset, made of dead whale, has "called" the whales. A flying breast, petrified embryo, and gliding womb elicit statements from various female guests who have undergone surgery for removal of parts of their bodies.

Despite these and other tragic events, life returns to normal, and the two lovers deepen their relationship to each other and to the guests. "My father says there are four people present whenever lovemaking takes place," Martin tells Lisa. "They are here now, of course. My parents" (p. 62). The allusion is to a letter the historical Freud writes to Fliess in 1899 affirming the role of bisexuality.[4] In a curious transubstantiation, Lisa's breasts begin to give out milk. Her ample body and generosity of spirit revive the passion of the ailing guests, especially a kindly old Catholic priest whose religious certainties symbolize her feelings toward Freud, who holds out the promise of psychoanalytic healing. "The Gastein Journal" ends with a celebration of the beauty and generosity of the white hotel, its miraculous regenerative power, and its ability to withstand the most devastating assaults on the human spirit.

No plot summary of Lisa's writings can reproduce their startling eroticism and incandescent glow. The artist conveys a sensitivity that never becomes solipsistic or sentimental. She strikes us as neither sick nor self-absorbed. She remains the antithesis of the hypochondriacal patient: She is

always aware of the suffering of others. Just as the white hotel symbolizes the fecundity of the maternal body, so does it evoke the creative mystery of art. Despite Freud's successful reconstruction of his patient's childhood in the next section of *The White Hotel,* "Fräu Anna G.," Lisa's art remains, in the final analysis, a miracle. The themes of her art may arise from her neurotic obsessions, but the form and technique affirm artistic control. She succeeds in suspending our disbelief, in making us see the wondrous world of the white hotel, with all its logical improbabilities. On nearly every page of the journal a delight awaits us, as in this description of the sky: "And every few moments a star would slide diagonally through the black sky, like a maple leaf drifting from the branch or the way lovers rearrange themselves with gentle movements while they sleep" (p. 43). The comparison of a shooting star to a drifting leaf and sleeping lovers suggests a literary sensibility of the first order, able to unify contradictions and intuit new truths. Nothing in Lisa's biography accounts for the vision of lovers rearranging themselves with gentle movement while they sleep; terms such as sublimation cannot explain her gift for language or her reverence for life.

Readers of *The White Hotel* may feel torn between two contradictory approaches to the novel, the desire to analyze (and psychoanalyze) the patient's multilayered accounts of reality, decoding her symbolism and unpacking her language, versus the equally strong inclination to accept the mystery of her art, to remain content with half-knowledge, to affirm in Keats's

words the *"Negative Capability"* of art: "That is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason."[5] Lisa's mastery of lyrical poetry and prose fiction, haunting aural and visual imagery, and evocation of the Woolfian "moment" *(The White Hotel* points in the direction of *To the Lighthouse)* identify her as a major artist, able to transmute personal suffering into enduring literature. The only unbelievable detail about her writings is that they could have been created so quickly and effortlessly, without the laborious revision that usually accompanies serious art. "The Gastein Journal" ends with an image of swans soaring between mountain peaks, an image less sexual than transcendent.

Like his historical counterpart, one of the supreme rationalists of his age, Thomas' Freud is relentlessly analytical. Devoid of the lyricism and mysticism of "Don Giovanni" and "The Gastein Journal," "Fräu Anna G." reflects the psychoanalyst's herculean efforts to discover the root causes of his patient's suffering and to reconstruct her shadowy past. Thomas' Freud embodies the diverse roles of the analyst: historian, lawyer, detective, biographer, novelist, therapist, confessor. He exists as a real person to Lisa, listening to her complaints, eliciting her fantasies and fears, offering sympathy and understanding. He also exists as a projection figure of her imagination, which transforms him through the phenomenon of transference into a multitude of roles: insatiable Don Juan, father confessor, trusted friend.

In the "Author's Note" to *The White Hotel,* Thomas refers readers to the historical Freud's case studies, which the novelist calls "masterly works of literature, apart from everything else." It is equally clear that he has created his own masterly work of literature in "Fräu Anna G." Following Thomas' clue, we may turn to Freud's actual case studies to discover the novelist's indebtedness to the psychoanalyst. It is no disparagement of Thomas' achievement to learn that he has taken many passages from *Studies on Hysteria* (1893-1895), the starting point of psychoanalysis. Lisa's reluctance to reveal the "storms in her head" (p. 90) echoes "Fräu Emmy von R.[6] In fact, the opening paragraphs of "Fräu Anna G." repeat, at times word for word, the opening descriptions of Freud's "Fräulein Elisabeth von R." in *Studies on Hysteria*.[7] In particular, they describe how Freud came to treat his patient, her symptomatology, the details of the first interview, and the theoretical discussion of hysteria. Many of the sentences in Thomas' fictional psychiatric case study come straight from *Studies on Hysteria:* "What she had in her consciousness was only a secret and not a foreign body" (*The White Hotel,* p. 99).[8] A long description near the end of "Fräu Anna G." pertaining to the patient's resistance is taken almost verbatim from "Fräulein Elisabeth von R." In both the fictional and historical case study, the analyst offers identical consolation. "The degree of suffering, and the intensity of her struggle, did not slacken until I offered her my two pieces of consolation—that we are not responsible for our feelings; and that her behavior, the fact that she had fallen

ill in these circumstances, was sufficient evidence of her moral character" (*The White Hotel,* pp. 135136).[9] The fictional Freud's reassurance to Lisa —"much will be gained if we succeed in turning your hysterical misery into common unhappiness" (p. 127)—echoes Freud's famous conclusion to *Studies on Hysteria*[10] In the same way, the ending of "Fräu Anna G." recalls the conclusion of "Miss Lucy R." in which Freud talks about meeting his former patient by chance in a summer resort.[11]

Nor does Thomas limit his borrowings to Freud's celebrated case studies; the novelist has also been reading the analyst's less well known technical papers. The fictional Freud's discussion of the limits of memory—"I have my doubts if we ever deal with a memory *from* childhood; memories *relating* to childhood may be all that we possess" *(The White Hotel,* p. 109)—comes verbatim from Freud's essay "Screen Memories" (1899).[12] And the fictional analyst's discussion of the breast as the first love object *(The White Hotel,* p. 116) comes directly from the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905).[13] Quite literally, then, the illnesses of Freud's patients have served as a major inspiration for *The White Hotel.*

Thomas also captures the historical analyst's instinctive gift for narration. Freud could not recite a case history without transforming it into a story. In *Studies on Hysteria,* he apologized for the fact that although he was trained as a neuropathologist, his case histories "read like short stories" and,

he was afraid, lack the "serious stamp of science.[14] He disingenuously suggests that it is the nature of the subject rather than his own artistry that is responsible for his affinity to imaginative writers. The truth is, of course, that Freud was a consummate storyteller whose case histories read like novels.[15] Thomas' Freud begins "Fräu Anna G." by summarizing his patient's symptoms, recording the opening interviews, and evoking her character in a few strokes of dialogue. Like a novelist, he remains interested in character for its own sake, and he reveals an extraordinary ability to enter into another point of view. Quoting Charcot, he remarks that "Theory is good but it doesn't prevent the facts from existing." Thomas captures the one-step-forward-two-steps-backward rhythm of psychoanalysis in which insight produces resistance and retreat. The analyst's method of narration anticipates the impressionistic novelist. Because Lisa is always retracting or modifying her story, we are continually thrown off balance, as her doctor is, and forced to read backwards as well as forwards.

The veils are constantly lifted and dropped. As in a detective story, the reader must circle back to recover the clues necessary for forward movement. In the actual case histories, Freud invents a new type of narration to imitate the general rule of inverse chronological order that is characteristic of psychoanalysis. The patient begins with the most recent and least important impressions; only at the end does he usually reach the primary impression which has die greatest causal significance.[16] The longer analysis proceeds, the

farther back into time the patient travels until he has overcome infantile amnesia. This is Freud's narrative strategy in the case studies and the fictional analyst's technique in "Fräu Anna G." The doctor's narrative power never falters in The White Hotel. He deciphers a confusing and contradictory story, imposing order to his patient's disjointed statements. When he is wrong, it is because of a brilliant inference based upon misleading evidence the patient has conveyed to him.

It would be hard to imagine a better listener than Thomas' Freud. Like his historical counterpart, he has a photographic memory and nothing escapes his attention. He subtly encodes clues into the early pages of the narrative and decodes them at the end. He tells us, for example, that Lisa was forced to abandon her dancing career because "she was becoming a woman, and gaining flesh which she could not lose, even though she was eating next to nothing" (p. 95). Only later does he reveal that his normally anorexic patient had become secretly pregnant and that the pregnancy was aborted in a fall. In recounting the improbable events of her life, he apologizes for imposing upon the reader's belief. "Were I a writer of novellas instead of a man of science," he says, echoing Freud's prefatory remarks in Dora, "I should hesitate to offend against my readers' artistic sensibilities . . ." (pp. 111-112). And like a good storyteller, he is always aware of his audience.

Thomas presents us with an immensely appealing portrait of Freud. He

is a Promethean figure, unwilling to allow anything, including his own personal suffering, to interfere with his efforts to uncover the mysteries of the psyche. We see courage amidst adversity, the refusal to indulge in self-pity even when he suffers the devastating loss of his daughter in 1920 and his grandson in 1923. Thomas captures Freud's imagery and irony, stoicism and compassion. Invoking literature, mythology, and philosophy, the narrator of "Fräu Anna G." compares his patient to Medusa, Cassandra, Ceres. Like the master prose stylist who received the Goethe Award for Literature, Thomas' Freud enriches his case study with allusions to *A Midsummer Night's Dream, The Possessed,* Goethe's "Wanderer's Song at Night," and G. von Strassburg's *Tristan.* The allusions are made effortlessly, reflecting Freud's vast humanistic learning.

Significantly, Thomas' Freud is not guilty of the serious technical and empathic failures the real analyst committed in his only major case study of a woman, *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria.* Freud's treatment of Dora has been justifiably criticized by psychoanalysts and feminists alike for his surprising belligerence toward the troubled adolescent, and his premature and intrusive interpretations. The story of Dora betrays an aggressive and vindictive Freud who seems offended by his patient's vanity and annoyed by her resistance.[17] By contrast, Thomas' Freud coaxes and guides his patient toward difficult truths without becoming overly confrontative. He does become impatient with her on occasion, but Thomas

softens these moments by the candor of the analyst's admissions. He remains deeply human throughout "Fräu Anna G." He has no trouble in maintaining a proper distance from her, neither encouraging nor discouraging her Oedipal fantasies. There is remarkably little countertransference, apart from the curious decision to name his patient after his last daughter who, in 1931 (when the fictional analyst completes the manuscript of "Fräu Anna G."), was serving as his nurse during the painful years he was suffering from cancer of the jaw.

Lisa is very aware of Freud's greatness, and, perhaps because of her premonitions of the lurking tragedies in his life, she is extraordinarily sensitive to his feelings and apparently free of any unconscious hostility toward him.[18] The actual case studies, however, are filled with aggressive statements directed toward the analyst. Anna O. was abusive to Breuer. Fräu Emmy von N. shouted at Freud, "Keep still! Don't say anything!—Don't touch me!"[19] The Rat Man hurled violent anal execrations at the analyst. In his first interview, the Wolf Man offered to defecate on Freud's head and engage in anal intercourse with him.[20] Thomas omits these stormy negative transference elements from "Fräu Anna G.," presenting us instead with an admiring account of the patient-analyst relationship. Psychoanalysis proves to be a noble humanistic endeavor, with the patient and analyst collaborating in a single-minded pursuit of truth. Anyone who underestimates the complexity of psychoanalysis will appreciate the enormity of the analyst's

task in "Fräu Anna G.," and Thomas compels the reader to follow in Freud's footsteps as he investigates the sources of Lisa's hysteria. Yet "Fräu Anna G." occupies only about a fifth of *The White Hotel,* and Freud's point of view is not omniscient.

Freud first meets Lisa in 1919. Her presenting symptoms are severe pains in the left breast and pelvic region, and a chronic respiratory condition. She is 29-years old, married but separated from her husband and living with her aunt. Illness has cut short a promising musical career. Freud interviews her and is alarmed by the extent of her physical suffering and her extreme thinness. She seems to be literally starving herself to death and, like Anna O., subsisting entirely on oranges.[21] Unlike most hysterics she describes her pains precisely, betraying no erotic pleasure when Freud examines her.[22] Convinced her symptoms are organic, she confesses to suffering from frightful visual hallucinations for which she fears she will be locked away. After reassuring her that she is not mad, Freud begins a summary of her life to us. The second child and only daughter of moderately wealthy parents, she is born in the Ukraine in 1890. She has an older brother who never figures into the story. Her father is a Russian Jew and her mother a Polish Catholic. In marrying across racial and religious barriers, the parents incur the opposition of other family members. Only one relative, the mother's identical twin, remains close to them. The mother's sister is married to a Viennese teacher of languages. Shortly after her birth, Lisa and her family move to Odessa where

her father is able to indulge his only relaxation, sailing on his splendid yacht.

The central loss in Lisa's life occurs at the age of five when her mother dies in a Budapest hotel fire. In analysis, she recalls a storm raging outside when she is told the news of the death. Freud links the storm to the tempest raging in her head. He connects two of her recurrent hallucinations in later life, a storm at sea and a fire in a hotel, to the tragic events surrounding maternal loss. Toward the end of analysis, Lisa retrieves another crucial memory with Freud's help. She discovers that her uncle had not died of a heart attack, as she was told, but had perished in the same hotel fire as her mother. Lisa's mother and uncle, it turns out, had been engaging in an illicit love affair. The revelation brings to the surface two other long-repressed incidents from early childhood. In 1893 she had wandered on to her father's yacht and witnessed a dreadful sight—her mother, aunt, and uncle performing intercourse *a tergo.* One or two years later, she sees her mother and uncle making love while her aunt lies asleep on the beach.

Freud reconstructs these dim childhood events on the basis of the symbolism of the white hotel in Lisa's writings. The white hotel, he observes, is the body of the mother, a place without sin or remorse. Interpreting the hotel as the wholehearted commitment to orality—"sucking, biting, eating, gorging, taking in, with all the blissful narcissism of a baby at the breast" (p. 116)—he views her art as evidence of a profound identification with the

mother, preceding the Oedipus stage. Her writings indicate the attempt to be reunited with the long-dead mother, "to return to the time when oral erotism reigned supreme, and the bond between mother and child was unbroken." The good side of the white hotel represents the mother's nourishment and warmth, the lifelong pleasure she lovingly bequeathed to her child. The bad side of the hotel, the shadow of death, reflects the other side of the mother's character, the lust, deception, and selfishness surrounding the clandestine relationship to her sister's husband. Lisa cannot integrate the good and bad mother. Only at the end of therapy does she acknowledge for the first time her rage toward the mother. She admits that as a child she had wished her mother would die, a wish that comes true, to her horror. Through the omnipotence of thought, she comes to believe she has actually killed her. For her entire life, Lisa has remained oppressed by guilt and grief.

She recalls other distressing events in her life through free association. Imperfectly remembered details assume new clarity as she penetrates more deeply into her unconscious self. In the beginning of treatment, she relates a terrible incident that occurred to her when she was 15 years old. She and two other girls had improvidently ventured into the docks area of the city, only to be threatened by a group of insurgents. By the end of analysis she remembers, incorrectly, as it turns out, that the sailors had also made obscene remarks about her mother, saying that they knew she had died with a lover. Only several years after analysis does Lisa confide in a letter to Freud that the

dock episode had been more terrifying than she previously admitted. A group of sailors from a merchant-marine ship carrying grain for her father had seized her, reviled her for being Jewish, and then forced her to perform oral sex with them. Her lifelong symptom of breathlessness originates from the act of fellatio. She never tells Freud about another event from which arises an additional symptom, her seduction on a train by a young officer (the "Martin Freud" of her poem and journal). The 17-year-old young woman's first act of sexual intercourse coincides with her first experience of hallucination. Soon after, she forms an attachment with a young student, "A" ("Alexei"). She tells Freud it was a "white" relationship, but he correctly deduces over her energetic protests that she had had an affair with him. Her use of the English word "fall" allows the analyst to reach one of his most intuitive insights, that she had become pregnant by Alexei and lost the baby in a fall. Freud does not pursue another suspicion, that she had unconsciously sought to abort the unwanted fetus.

Around this time, Lisa becomes friendly with a woman destined to play a major role in her life and art. Called "Madame R." in Freud's case study and "Madame Cottin" in Lisa's journal, Ludmila Kedrova is her ballet teacher and friend. A widow, she invites Lisa to live with her. The two women remain close friends even after Ludmila decides to marry a retired naval officer. Freud asks Lisa why she has transformed her friend into a corsetiere in her writings. "Because she always stressed discipline, if we wanted to succeed in

the ballet. Self-discipline to the point of pain" (p. 122). On the basis of Lisa's writings, Freud suspects a latent homosexual relationship between the women. He argues that, in Ludmila's home, Lisa's self-esteem is restored; Lisa transforms the older woman into an idealized mother with whom she fantasizes sexual intercourse in the poem and journal. This is the only part of Freud's interpretation that Lisa rejects.

Lisa's marriage to an Austrian lawyer proves to be painful when he turns out to be violently anti-Semitic. She is forced to conceal her half-Jewish-ness from him, just as she withholds from Freud her resentment and guilt over her Jewish heritage. In analysis, she reveals the details of her disastrous marriage, including the hallucinations that inevitably accompany her sexual life. The pretense of being transported into ecstasies of happiness disguises the terrifying hallucinations she later describes in her art: the hotel fire, flood, fall, and burial. Freud suggests that her hysterical illness originates as a pretense to justify separation from her dreaded husband. She neither confirms nor denies this interpretation, but, in a letter to the analyst in 1931, she confesses that she ended the marriage to her husband during the Great War because his anti-Semitism was literally making her ill. "He said he loved me; but if he had known I had Jewish blood he would have hated me. Whenever he said 'I love you' I understood it as 'I hate you' " (p. 190).

These are only the highlights of "Fräu Anna G." Just as a summary of

"Don Giovanni" and "The Gastein Journal" fails to capture their power to startle and delight the reader, so does a synopsis of Freud's psychiatric case study omit the unfolding intellectual drama. The analyst approaches his patient's symptoms as a literary critic approaches symbolism, as a revelation of inner reality. There is nothing reductive or farfetched in Freud's elucidation; he warns against rigid classification of sexual symbolism, preferring suggestive or evocative meanings. Fie wisely disobeys Lisa's request to destroy her manuscripts, which she has come to despise. He encourages her to analyze each passage of her art for clues into her past. He even enlists the help of his published case study, *From the History of an Infantile Neurosis* (1918), which he has given Lisa to read. It is one of the many fascinating intersections of history and fiction in *The White Hotel*. She eagerly questions Freud on the meaning of the Wolf Man's obsession with coitus *more ferarum*, and the analyst cannot help being reminded of a similar incident in her journal. He succeeds in deciphering an argument with Alexei during a weekend cruising holiday as a screen memory of the earlier yachting incident when the three-year-old child had witnessed her mother, aunt, and uncle performing intercourse a tergo.

Freud's analysis of Lisa's art is also impressive. Although he approaches her writings from a psychopathological point of view, with all the limitations of the theory that art is a substitute gratification, he admires her work and accords it the seriousness it deserves. He does not respond, admittedly, to the

aesthetic quality of her writings, viewing her art instead as a revelation of the artist's unconscious mind. To this extent Thomas has accurately reproduced the historical Freud's approach to art. Moreover, the fictional analyst is at first shocked by the explicitness of his patient's sexual descriptions. Nevertheless, Freud's analysis illuminates the ways in which his patient weaves autobiography into art, including the hotel fire, the two yachting incidents in 1903 and 1910, the summer-house experience, the dock episode, and so on. He sees in her art the workings of both the pleasure principle and the repetition-compulsion principle. The lover in "Don Giovanni" and "The Gastein Journal" is a product of the transference fantasy toward Freud, the idealized father. The fantasy of marrying Freud's son suggests the need to heal the terrible loss created by the premature death of the analyst's daughter. In Kohutian terms, the merger with Martin Freud allows Lisa to create an idealized self-object who will heal the profound wound engendered by the neglect from her actual father. Through the creative process, she discovers the healthy mirroring and idealizing responses which strengthen her fragmented self. Art serves multiple needs: insight into reality, escape from an intolerable environment, and a new recreation of life in which the artist achieves reparation from a narcissistic injury and restitution for the loss of an object. Lisa's writings move toward catastrophe and rebirth, loss and recovery. Although Lisa's art repeats itself, it never becomes repetitive. Like the soaring swans at the end of "The Gastein Journal," the artist's

imagination expands in ever-widening circles.

Before proceeding to the next section of *The White Hotel,* we may inquire into the authenticity of Thomas' psychiatric case study. As students of Freud know, he was constantly revising his theories. He was not averse to repudiate an earlier thesis or to contradict himself on a major point, as he did with the dual instinct theory and the theory of narcissism. In reading the 23 volumes of writings in the *Standard Edition,* one must know the date of a particular work—the early years of the libido theory *(The Interpretation of Dreams,* 1900, or the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality,* 1905), the middle years of ego psychology *(The Ego and the Id,* 1923), or the final years of his most far-reaching speculative writings *(Civilization and Its Discontents,* 1930). It would be anachronistic to come across the structural theory of the mind prior to 1923, or the death instinct before 1920. Insofar as the "Fräu Anna G." section of *The White Hotel* aims to be mimetic, we may reasonably expect that Thomas' fictional analyst should have the same theoretical understanding of hysteria that the historical Freud had in the autumn of 1919, when the fictional Elisabeth Erdman begins treatment. Freud began working on a first draft of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in March 1919, completing the manuscript in May 1920. Thomas once again perfectly intersects the fictional and historical analysts. Freud connects his patient's illness to the two major ideas he is advancing in his book, the repetition-compulsion principle, in which Lisa relives the night of the storm when she

learns of her mother's death in a hotel fire, and the death instinct, the tendency of all living organisms to return to an inorganic state.

Ironically, in constructing "Fräu Anna G." on *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* Thomas grounds his fictional case study on one of Freud's shakiest foundations. With the exception of the supporters of Melanie Klein, the English school of psychoanalysis, nearly all contemporary analysts have abandoned Freud's death instinct.[23] The importance of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* lies not in the highly speculative death instinct, lacking as it does biological or psychological inevitability, but in the repetition-compulsion principle, which has empirical foundation. Freud used this idea to explain the tendency to repeat traumatic situations for the purpose of mastery, thus making possible the adaptive and integrative functions of the ego. Art serves a counterphobic purpose by allowing the artist to recreate distressing experiences to gain control over them. The artist converts a passive situation into an active one, transforming defeat into victory. Artistic control, Lionel Trilling has pointed out, is antithetical to neurosis.[24] There is no reason to assert, as Freud does in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* that the repetition-compulsion principle is grounded in a previously undiscovered human instinct or that aggression arises from a tendency of all living organisms to return to an inorganic state. Freud's profound exploration of the dynamics of aggression—the relationship between masochism and sadism, the destructive consequences of repression, and the ego's failure to mediate between the

claims of the id and superego—does not require the metaphysical postulation of a death instinct.

Consequently, in analyzing Lisa Erdman's life as a struggle between Eros and Thanatos, Thomas' Freud remains faithful to the author of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* but unaware of the potentially more significant social and cultural implications of her dilemma. Her brother is conspicuously not mentioned in the case study, nor is her father, who is mentioned only briefly despite the fact that his daughter lived with him until the age of 17. Freud never questions Lisa's saddened acceptance of her brother's privileged position in the male-dominated family. Given her anger toward the cold rejecting father, and her troubled relations with the other men in her life, including Alexei and her husband, it is surprising that she does not experience a turbulent transference relationship with her analyst. After all, it is likely that she would attempt to reject Freud just as she has rejected the other men in her life. Curiously, the opposite is true. She remains solicitous of Freud, as if afraid that her inner rage (in the form of premonitions of death) will destroy him. It is also puzzling that the analyst does not explore in depth the castration imagery in his patient's art. In "The Gastein Journal" a young woman has her womb surgically removed, a prostitute has undergone a mastectomy, and the lawyer's wife has received an abortion. One is struck by Lisa's fear of bodily mutilation. During a stressful period of analysis, her symptoms worsen as she pleads with Freud to arrange for an operation to

remove her breast and ovary. She also wishes him to destroy her writings, which for the artist may symbolize castration or death. These are all crucial issues for analysis and Touch upon areas of greater consequence than a biological death wish, such as female sexuality, masochism, repression, and narcissism.[25]

In the next section of The White Hotel, "The Health Resort," Thomas continues his account of Lisa's story from 1929, when we see her traveling by train between Vienna and Milan, to 1936. Within this 70-page section, narrated in the third person, are several letters exchanged between Lisa and Freud, who writes to her requesting permission to publish "Fräu Anna G." 'The Health Resort" opens with Lisa, a professional opera singer, traveling to La Scala to replace one of die world's leading sopranos, Vera Serebryakova, who has injured herself in a fall. She meets Vera's companion and leading man, Victor Berenstein, a white-haired gentleman in his fifties who is singing the role of Eugene Onegin. She mistakes Vera and Victor for secret lovers, not realizing until later that they are married. Lisa experiences an attack of breathlessness upon learning of her friend's pregnancy, and at night she dreams of standing over a deep trench filled with many coffins and the naked body of Vera. Is the breathlessness an hysterical symptom, perhaps suggestive of her tangled feelings toward Vera? Lisa is horrified to discover several months later that Vera has died in childbirth, presumably the result of the earlier fall. Vera's death recalls Lisa's fall several years before, resulting in

the aborted fetus. History does not precisely repeat itself, however, since Vera dies giving birth to her son Kolya. At about this time, there is an exchange of letters between Lisa and Freud. She fills in the missing details of her case study and reconfirms his analytic interpretation. The correspondence concludes with their warm feelings for each other. The remaining pages of "The Health Resort" document Victor's marriage to Lisa in 1934 and their passionate honeymoon. For the first time in her life, Lisa experiences no hallucinations during sexual intercourse. They return to the city of her youth where she places flowers on the grave of her mother and visits the crematorium housing the ashes of her father.

Crematorium imagery gives way to the Holocaust in the penultimate section of *The White Hotel,* "The Sleeping Carriage." Along with millions of other Jews, Lisa travels inexorably to her death as the Nazis execute their perverse death wish upon the victims. Separated from her husband, who has been put to death earlier by Stalinist terrorists, Lisa and Kolya are rounded up by the Nazi invaders of Kiev and deluded into thinking they are being sent to Palestine. Instead, they are marched to Babi Yar. She has the opportunity to save herself when she flashes an out-of-date identity card, claiming she is not Jewish, to a Cossack soldier, but when she realizes she cannot save Kolya from extermination, she affirms her Jewishness to the bemused guard. Forced to strip, she watches in speechless horror as person after person is shot or clubbed to death and then thrown into a steep ravine. She hears a Ukrainian

officer tell a former actress at the Kiev puppet theatre, Dina Pronicheva, that they will shoot the Jews first and then let her out. Lisa and Kolya are among the last of the group to be shot; but as she plunges into the pit, she is horrified by the discovery she is not yet dead. Climbing into the pit to retrieve the valuables of the slain victims, an SS guard notices Lisa is still alive. "He drew his leg back and sent his jackboot crashing into her left breast. She moved position from the force of the blow, but uttered no sound. Still not satisfied, he swung his boot again and sent it cracking into her pelvis" (p. 248). It is as if Lisa has endured a lifetime of "hysterical" symptoms—pains in her left breast and ovary—in anticipation of appalling reality. A soldier tries futilely to rape the almost cold body, then inserts his bayonet into her genital opening. She is impaled, her screams drowned out by the other lingering screams from the bodies plunging into the ravine. The description uncannily recalls the poem Lisa had written more than two decades earlier in which she had fantasized the sensation of being impaled by Martin Freud (pp. 1920). "The Sleeping Carriage" concludes with Lisa's merciful death and the account of Dina Pronicheva's miraculous escape from Babi Yar. Scrambling up the ravine, she confronts a little boy who whispers to her: "Don't be scared, lady! I'm alive too" (p. 250)—the identical words Lisa had once dreamed and used for the beginning of "The Gastein Journal" (p. 32).

This raises the most troubling question in *The White Hotel,* the meaning of Lisa's premonitions and telepathic gifts. How do we interpret the heroine's

occult powers in a novel that faithfully captures the spirit of psychoanalysis, with its fiercely antireligious and anti-supernatural assumptions? Mysticism, telepathy, and the occult are often present in imaginative literature, but do they have a legitimate place in a psychiatric case study? Would the rationalistic Freud, arch foe of illusions, assent to the existence of his patient's psychic powers, as Thomas' analyst does? Freud tells Lisa that not only have her dreams convinced him of her telepathic powers, but that his own clinical experience has demonstrated to him the presence of these inexplicable forces. Would the real Freud actually assert that "If I had my life to go over again, I should devote it to the study of this factor [telepathy]" (p. 196)?

Surprisingly, yes. Freud was unpredictably fascinated by occult phenomena. "If I had my life to live over again I should devote myself to psychical research rather than to psychoanalysis," he wrote to the editor of a periodical specializing in occultism.[26] His belief in the occult perplexed his students and biographers. Ernest Jones offers a lively discussion of Freud's interest in telepathy, a subject D. M. Thomas has carefully researched. Although Freud did not believe in the "less respectable" areas of the occult such as levitation, palmistry, or astrology, he displayed surprising interest in areas that few psychoanalysts take seriously. Jones relates Freud's longstanding belief in premonitions and superstitions: the magical actions he enacted to ward off disaster, the fear that his engagement ring he had accidentally broken presaged marital disaster, and the idea (originating from

1900) that he was destined to die at the age of 61 or 62. Jones reports how in the years prior to World War I he had several talks with Freud on the subject of occultism and related topics:

> He was fond, especially after midnight, of regaling me with strange or uncanny experiences with patients, characteristically about misfortunes or deaths supervening many years after a wish or prediction. He had a particular relish for such stories and was evidently impressed by their more mysterious aspects. When I would protest at some of the taller stories Freud was wont to reply with his favorite quotation: "There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in your philosophy" (Jones, Vol. Ill, p. 381).

Reading this statement in light of *The White Hotel,* we wonder whether Lisa, with her telepathic powers, was one of the patients Freud was talking about to the incredulous Jones.

Freud's interest in the occult spanned three decades of writings. His attitude, Jones remarks, always seemed to be wavering between skepticism and open belief. As early as *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901), Freud denied he was a superstitious person or that he had ever experienced anything of a remotely superstitious nature, such as presentiments that later came true. Yet in a sentence added in 1924 to the same work, he enigmatically admits to having had in the last few years "a few remarkable experiences which might easily have been explained on the hypothesis of telepathic thought-transference.[27] In "The Occult Significance of Dreams" (1925), originally intended for a late edition of *The Interpretation of Dreams* but

published elsewhere so that its dubious subject matter would not weaken the credibility of his most famous work, Freud discusses two categories of dreams which claim to be reckoned as occult phenomena: prophetic and telepathic dreams. He rejects the former but remains more receptive to the latter. "One arrives at a provisional opinion that it may well be that telepathy really exists and that it provides the kernel of truth in many other hypotheses that would otherwise be incredible."[28] In Lecture 30 of *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (1933), "Dreams and Occultism," he returns to the subject. After expressing the fear that interest in occultism may be motivated by the belief in religion and thus, to him, alien to the spirit of scientific inquiry, Freud once again suggests the probability of telepathy and speculates that it was the original archaic method of human communication.[29]

Thomas has unerringly recreated the historical Freud's abiding interest in the occult, his fascination with the bizarre, irrational, and unknown. In his fictional portrait of Freud, Thomas reveals an intriguing aspect of the analyst's personality that has not been apparent from the actual case studies, once again affirming, paradoxically, the truth of fiction. In fact, the portrait of Freud in "Fräu Anna G." is so faithful to the details of its subject's life that we are hardly surprised to learn that the historical Freud wrote the first of several short essays on occult phenomena, "Psycho-Analysis and Telepathy," in August 1921 at Bad Gastein, the health resort he loved to visit. The essay is written only a few months after Lisa Erdman has terminated therapy,

implying that Thomas' fictional character has influenced the history of psychoanalysis. Although Freud acknowledges in "Psycho-Analysis and Telepathy" that his attitude toward the subject remains "unenthusiastic and ambivalent," he attempts to reconcile the analyst's allegiance to exact science with the mysterious and perhaps occult workings of the unconscious mind. He claims an uneasy alliance between the analyst and occultist in their investigation of the material and spiritual worlds, respectively, since the unconscious may consist of both realities.[30] In his next paper, "Dreams and Telepathy" (1922), he displays the same ambivalence. The essay poses a minor problem to readers of *The White Hotel.* "During some twenty-seven years of work as an analyst I have never been in a position to observe a truly telepathic dream in any of my patients."[31] He does not rule out the existence of telepathic dreams, however, and he continues to hope that psychoanalysis may one day contribute to an understanding of the mystery.

The question confronting us in *The White Hotel* is not whether the historical Freud would have accepted or rejected his patient's telepathic powers—his attitude was contradictory enough to befuddle any researcher—but whether Thomas maintains the delicate balance between psychiatric realism and imaginative belief. The inconclusive findings of psychic research suggest that it might have been better for the novelist to leave the question unresolved rather than to strip away the ambiguities of telepathic and prophetic dreams. Since the occult and supernatural are enveloped in

ambiguity, there is no compelling aesthetic reason to resolve these issues, one way or the other. We have no trouble accepting the metaphorical truth of Lisa's art; it does not strain credibility that her 1920 poem could have predicted the impending catastrophe of World War II. But it does strain credibility to suggest that "Don Giovanni" could have predicted the exact details of her murder at Babi Yar. Similarly, although there is a possible explanation of Lisa's premonition of the death of Freud's daughter, there is no rational interpretation of the premonitory dream opening "The Gastein Journal," in which Lisa's flight from the soldiers foreshadows the events surrounding Dina Pronicheva's escape from Babi Yar. We are now in the realm of the supernatural, as Thomas authorially confirms. "Lisa had once dreamt those words, when she was taking the thermal springs at Gastein with Aunt Magda. But it is not really surprising, for she had clairvoyant gifts and naturally a part of her went on living with these survivors . . (p. 250). *The White Hotel* leaves us with the feeling of being transported to another world, a universe populated with the spirits of the living and dead. It is a place where the laws of time and space have given way to animistic belief and where the bizarre and uncanny reign supreme.

Freud has explored the feelings described above in "The 'Uncanny' " (1919), and it is worth reading the essay because of its relevance to *The White Hotel.* Indeed, Thomas has surely read Freud's paper. Discussing the resemblance between the white hotel and the maternal body, the fictional

analyst writes in "Fräu Anna G.": 'There is a joke saying that 'Love is a homesickness'; and whenever a man dreams of a place or a country and says to himself, while he is still dreaming: 'This place is familiar to me, I've been here before,' we may interpret the place as being his mother's genitals or her body" *(The White Hotel,* p. 115). The statement comes verbatim from "The 'Uncanny.' "[32] Freud discusses in the essay the aesthetic and psychological implications of the uncanny and relates it to that which is frightening. He defines the uncanny as that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar. Freud associates the uncanny with two psychoanalytic ideas, the repetition-compulsion principle and the omnipotence of thought. After discussing several writers, including E. T. A. Hoffmann, Freud inquires into the distinctions between the depiction of the uncanny in literature and in life. He argues that, although the imaginative writer is not constrained by the need to test reality, the creative artist can evoke the uncanny only if he pretends to move in the world of common reality. The uncanny does not exist in fairy tales because the reader knows that the world of reality is left behind. Anything is possible in an animistic world. By contrast, the uncanny can exist only in a world in which the laws of reality are mysteriously and temporarily suspended. The artist has the freedom to contrive a story in such a way as to create a sense of the uncanny that cannot possibly occur within life. However, there is a danger here, Freud says:

> In doing this he is in a sense betraying us to the superstitiousness which we have ostensibly surmounted; he deceives us by promising to give us the sober truth, and then after all overstepping it. We react to his inventions as we would have reacted to real experiences; by the time we have seen through his trick it is already too late and the author has achieved his object. But it must be added that his success is not unalloyed. We retain a feeling of dissatisfaction, a kind of grudge against the attempted deceit *(Standard Edition,* Vol. XVII, pp. 250-251).

These are stern words coming from a man who elsewhere embarrassed his students by speculating in print on the probability of psychic phenomena. Yet, readers of *The White Hotel* may also feel that the novelist has overstepped the boundary of the probable.

There is, however, a more serious objection to the heavy reliance upon telepathic and premonitory dreams in *The White Hotel.* The existence of psychic phenomena calls into question the validity of the psychoanalytic approach to symptomatology Thomas has reproduced in "Fräu Anna G." Is he suggesting that Lisa Erdman's hysterical symptoms ultimately have an organic basis, originating from the gruesome rape and murder at Babi Yar? But if so, how can the future influence the past? The only way in which one can argue that Lisa's lifelong pains in her left breast and ovary determine the precise details of her death is through a self-fulfilling prophecy, which does not apply here. If we accept Thomas' premise, any therapeutic treatment, psychoanalytic or otherwise, would have been futile. Why go to a therapist for treatment of a neurosis when the patient is suffering from the nightmare of

history? Individual neurosis and social history are undoubtedly interrelated and, like the proverbial chicken-egg argument, it may not be possible to determine which comes first. Nevertheless, to view Lisa's hysterical symptoms as inseparable from a worldwide illness is to embrace a more deterministic and fatalistic position than the historical Freud would ever allow. It is ironic, then, that, while the fictional Freud attempts to demystify his patient's illness in "Fräu Anna," Thomas undercuts the analyst's rationalism elsewhere in the novel. Like Doris Lessing (though without her shrillness), Thomas finally affirms not psychoanalysis but spiritual transcendence.

This is what occurs in the final section of The White Hotel, "The Camp," where the novelist magically returns all the dead characters to life. The setting shifts from the Babi Yar ravine to a Palestinian refugee camp after the war. Unlike the problematic emphasis upon the occult, we are not troubled by Thomas' bold coda, for it is an imaginary universe, a metaphor of the mind's capacity for regenerative illusions. Here, Lisa is reunited with her relatives and friends. The past is reborn into the present: the transit camp is another version of the white hotel. Even Freud shows up in the camp, ailing but alive. Lisa desires to comfort him, but she rejects the idea because she would have to cast doubts on the accuracy of his diagnosis. Yet, when she hears her mother's confessions, we realize that Freud has accurately reconstructed her past. Nothing is permanently lost in the final section of The White Hotel. The

funereal tone of the wintry Holocaust yields to the joyous return of spring. Suffering and death are exposed as illusions, and the imagination proves stronger than history. Lisa's crucifixion and resurrection incarnate her half-Jewish, half-Christian identity. Victimized for being a Jew and martyred like Christ for affirming religious faith, she is reborn into the refugee camp where she plays the same restorative role she had created in the white hotel. Although Thomas steers clear of any single religious point of view, a current of mysticism and Messianism flows through The White Hotel. The coda affirms the eternal spirit of human nature and the power of the imagination to overcome the forces of death.

Whether viewed in religious, supernatural, or mythic terms, the impulse toward transcendence points to a major distinction between the psychiatric case study and imaginative literature. True to *Studies on Hysteria* and the other historical case studies, Thomas' "Fräu Anna G." backs off from visionary metaphors. Both the historical and fictional Freud limit their aspirations to the modest goals of psychological insight and therapeutic relief. The goal Freud announced in *Studies on Hysteria* remained his credo for 45 years. "One works to the best of one's power, as an elucidator (where ignorance has given rise to fear), as a teacher, as the representative of a freer or superior view of the world, as a father confessor who gives absolution, as it were, by a continuance of his sympathy and respect after the confession has been made" *(Standard Edition,* II, p. 282). There is, admittedly, more than a hint of

religious imagery in this testament, and it is true that Freud never overcame the Promethean elements of his character. His belief in knowledge as power remained an act of faith. Yet his focus was on this world, not the next, and the antireligious spirit of psychoanalysis has changed little in 80 years.[33] By contrast, Thomas' allegiance at the close of *The White Hotel* is to the visionary imagination. Using emigration as a metaphor of resurrection, the novelist affirms through his heroine's life that wherever there is love in the heart, there is hope of salvation.

With *The White Hotel,* we have come full circle to *Studies on Hysteria* and Anna O.'s celebrated talking cure. The symbiotic relationship between literature and psychoanalysis remains healthy despite the inevitable antagonisms the artist and psychoanalyst bring to each other's field. As long as artists explore the intricacies of the psyche and analysts encourage the gift of verbal expression, the talking cure will remain the unique intersection of these two parallel paths to human enlightenment. *The White Hotel* will certainly not be the last novel to employ the medium of psychiatric case studies to probe the mystery of human life—Judith Rossner's *August* (1983) is the latest example—but it is difficult to conceive of a more powerful and authentic work of art. And it is astonishing to believe that Thomas' knowledge of psychoanalysis is merely that of the "interested layperson," as reported in an interview.[34] Yet, this is precisely how Freud would have evaluated his own novelistic powers.

How would the historical Freud have reacted to his fictional *Doppelgänger* in *The White Hotel?* Actually, we have a clue in an intriguing footnote buried in his essay "The 'Uncanny.' " Wondering aloud about one's reaction to meeting up with a mirror image, Freud narrates an amusing story that appropriately serves as a "premonition" of *The White Hotel.* One day, the analyst writes, he was sitting alone in his wagon-lit compartment when a sudden jolt of the train threw open the door of the adjourning washing cabinet. In walked an elderly gentleman in a dressing gown and traveling cap. Assuming the man had wandered into the wrong bathroom, Freud jumped up with the intention of scolding him. To his dismay he realized he was confronting his own reflection in the mirror. "I can still recollect that I thoroughly disliked his appearance" (Standard Edition, XVII, 248n). With the creation of Elisabeth Erdman's case history, Thomas' novel has miraculously caught up to Sigmund Freud's speeding train. Though the psychoanalyst might be jolted by the uncanny reflection greeting his eyes in "Fräu Anna G.," a reflection highlighting the human face in all its nobility and sorrow, grateful readers need not look beyond the pleasure principle to appreciate The White Hotel.

Notes

1 D. M. Thomas, *The White Hotel* (New York: Viking, 1981), 143m All references come from this edition. For representative reviews see *Commentary,* Vol. 72 (August 1981), pp. 56-60; *Encounter,* Vol. 57 (August 1981), pp. 53-57; *Maclean's,* Vol. 94 (4 May 1981), pp. 56-58; *The Nation,* Vol. 232 (2 May 1981), pp. 537-539; *New Leader,* Vol. 64 (20 April 1981), pp.

13-14; *New Republic,* Vol. 184 (28 March 1981), pp. 35-37; *New Statesman,* Vol. 101 (16 January 1981), p. 21; *Newsweek,* Vol. 97 (16 March 1981), p. 89; *New York,* Vol. 14 (16 March 1981), p. 50; *New York Review of Books,* Vol. 28 (28 May 1981), pp. 20-23; *New York Times Book Review,* Vol. 86 (15 March 1981); *Time,* Vol. 117 (16 March 1981), p. 88. Nearly all the reviews were highly enthusiastic, praising the book for its extraordinary power and beauty. *The Nation* called it "as stunning a work of fiction as has appeared in a long while."

2 See Paul Roazen, *Freud and His Followers* (New York: New York University Press, 1985), p. 358.

3 Freud's letter to Ferenczi, 4 February 1920. Ernst L. Freud, ed., *The Letters of Sigmund Freud* (New York: Basic Books,1960), p. 328.

4 See Freud's letter of 8 January 1899 to Fliess: "Now for bisexuality! I am sure you are right about it. And I am accustoming myself to the idea of regarding every sexual act as a process in which four persons are involved." Sigmund Freud, *The Origins of Psycho-Analysis* (New York: Basic Books, 1954), p. 289.

5 Carl Woodring, ed., *Prose of the Romantic Period* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961), p. 525.

6 In "Fräu Emmy von N." Freud writes: "Her chief complaint was of frequent states of confusion—'storms in her head' as she called them." *Studies on Hysteria, Standard Edition* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), Vol. II, p. 78.

7 To see how closely Thomas' language follows Freud's, compare the first two sentences of "Fräulein Elisabeth von R." with the opening of "Fräu Anna G.":

> In the autumn of 1892 I was asked by a doctor I knew to examine a young lady who had been suffering for more than two years from pains in her legs and who had difficulties in walking. When making this request he added that he thought the case was one of hysteria, though there was no trace of the usual indications of that neurosis *(Studies on Hysteria,* p. 135).

> In the autumn of 1919 I was asked by a doctor of my acquaintance to examine a young lady who had been suffering for the past four years from severe pains in her left breast and

> pelvic region, as well as a chronic respiratory condition. When making this request he added that he thought the case was one of hysteria, though there were certain counter-indications which had caused him to examine her very thoroughly indeed in order to rule out the possibility of some organic affection (*The White Hotel,* p. 89).

8 Sigmund Freud, "Fräulein Elisabeth von R.," *Studies on Hysteria, Standard Edition* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), Vol. II, p. 139. Interestingly, Fräulein Elisabeth von R. is advised by her doctor to travel to Gastein in the Austrian Alps to receive hydropathic treatment.

9 Ibid., p. 157.

10 Sigmund Freud, "the Psychotherapy of Hysteria," *Studies on Hysteria, Standard Edition* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), Vol. II, p. 305.

11 Sigmund Freud, "Miss Lucy R.," *Studies on Hysteria, Standard Edition* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), Vol. II, p. 121.

12 Sigmund Freud, "Screen Memories" (1899), *Standard Edition* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1962), Vol. Ill, p. 322. "It may indeed be questioned whether we have any memories at all *from* our childhood: memories *relating to* our childhood may be all that we possess."

13 ". . . a child sucking at his mother's breast has become the prototype of every relation of love. The finding of an object is in fact a refinding of it." Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), *Standard Edition* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1953), Vol. VII, p. 222.

14 Sigmund Freud, "Fräulein Elisabeth von R., *Studies on Hysteria, Standard Edition* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), Vol. II, p. 160.

15 For a discussion of the Freudian psychiatric case study as literary art, see Steven Marcus, "Freud and Dora: Story, History, Case History," in *Representations* (New York: Random House, 1975). Marcus demonstrates that *Dora* "is a great work of literature—that is to say, it is both an outstanding creative and imaginative performance and an intellectual and cognitive achievement of the highest order" (p. 248).

16 Sigmund Freud, "Fräu Emmy von N., *Studies On Hysteria, Standard Edition* (London: The Hogarth

Press, 1955), Vol. II, p. 75m

17 For a discussion of the technical mistakes and empathic failures in Freud's case of *Dora,* see the essays by Jules Glenn, Robert J. Langs, and Mark Kanzer in Mark Kanzer and Jules Glenn, eds., *Freud and His Patients* (New York: Jason Aronson, 1980).

18 It is possible, of course, that a patient's premonitions of death may reflect unconscious hostility. Curiously, Freud does not consider the possibility that Lisa's premonitions reveal a death wish toward him.

19 Sigmund Freud, "Fräu Emmy von N., *Studies on Hysteria, Standard Edition* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), Vol. II, p. 49.

20 Ernest Jones, *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud* (New York: Basic Books, 195$), Vol. II, p. 274.

21 Josef Breuer, "Fräulein Anna O.," *Studies on Hysteria, Standard Edition* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), Vol. II, p. 33.

22 This is one of the few questionable details in "Fräu Anna G." Freud warns against an analyst examining his patient, since the erotic component of a physical examination inevitably makes the transference relationship more troublesome.

23 Since its publication, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* has produced strong controversy among psychoanalysts. Otto Fenichel offers a persuasive critique of the death instinct in *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis* (New York: Norton, 1945). "Of course, the existence and importance of aggressive drives cannot be denied. However, there is not proof that they always and necessarily came into being by a turning outward of more primary' self-destructive drives. It seems rather as if aggressiveness were originally no instinctual aim of its own, characterizing one category of instincts in contradistinction to others, but rather a mode in which instinctual aims sometimes are striven for, in response to frustrations or even spontaneously" (p. 59). Significantly, in *Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Tear-Old Boy* Freud had earlier ruled out an aggressive instinct. "I cannot bring myself to assume the existence of a special aggressive instinct alongside of the familiar instincts of self-preservation and of sex, and on an equal footing with them" (*Standard Edition* [London: The Hogarth Press, 1955], Vol. X, p. 140). Bruno Bettelheim writes in the *New Yorker* (March 1, 1982, p. 89) that the mistranslation of the German word "Trieb" as "instinct" instead of the more accurate word "drive" or "impulse" has hopelessly

obscured die meaning of Freud's theory. "Freud never spoke of a death instinct—only of a mostly unconscious drive or impulse that provokes us to aggressive, destructive, and self-destructive actions."

By contrast, Freud's death instinct has fascinated literary theoreticians. Invoking Jacques Lacan's dialectical readings of Freud, Harold Bloom argues in "Freud and the Poetic Sublime," *Antaeus,* Vol. 30/31 (Spring 1978), that the death instinct leads to a catastrophe theory of creation. "The repressed rhetorical formula of Freud's discourse in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* can be stated thus: *Literal meaning equals anteriority equals an earlier state of meaning equals an earlier state of things equals death equals literal meaning.* Only one escape is possible from such a formula, and it is a simple formula: *Eros equals figurative meaning"* (p. 368).

24 Lionel Trilling, "Freud and Literature," *The Liberal Imagination* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1953).

25 The absence of any prolonged discussion of female sexuality in "Fräu Anna G." may be salutary, since Freud's most notorious statements about women were being formulated not long after Lisa Erdman leaves therapy. In "Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomic Distinction Between the Sexes" (1925), Freud writes: "I cannot evade the notion (though I hesitate to give it expression) that for women the level of what is ethically normal is different from what it is in men. Their super-ego is never so inexorable, so impersonal, so independent of its emotional origins as we require it to be in men" (*Standard Edition,* Vol. XIX, p. 257). Thomas' Freud is considerably more enlightened. However, Freud's Victorian bias does not invalidate the existence of castration fear and penis envy in personality development, although these processes become reinforced and distorted by social and cultural assumptions.

26 In Ernest Jones, *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud* (New York: Basic Books, 1957), Vol. Ill, p. 392, this sentence is quoted from Freud's letter to Hereward Carrington. The full letter appears in *The Letters of Sigmund Freud,* Ernst L. Freud, ed., op. cit., p. 334: "I am not one of those who dismiss *a priori* the study of so-called occult psychic phenomena as unscientific, discreditable or even as dangerous. If I were at the beginning rather than at the end of a scientific career, as I am today, I might possibly choose just this field of research, in spite of all difficulties." The letter is dated 24 July 1921 from Bad Gastein. Freud later denied making this statement, but Jones located the letter.

27 Sigmund Freud, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901), *Standard Edition* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1960), Vol. VI, pp. 261-262.

28 Sigmund Freud, "The Occult Significance of Dreams" (1925), *Standard Edition* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1961), Vol. XIX, p. 136.

29 Sigmund Freud, "Dreams and Occultism," *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (1933), *Standard Edition* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1964), Vol. XXII, p. 55.

30 Sigmund Freud, "Psycho-Analysis and Telepathy" (1941 [1921]), *Standard Edition* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), Vol. XVIII, pp. 177-193.

31 Sigmund Freud, "Dreams and Telepathy" (1922), *Standard Edition* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), Vol. XVIII, p. 199.

32 Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny3 " (1919), *Standard Edition* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), Vol. XVII, p. 245. All references come from this edition.

33 A definite confirmation of this appears in a statement made by Reuben Fine in A. *History of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979). "No prominent analyst today could be said to believe that religion has any real value for mankind" (p. 449). In a review published in *Bulletin of the Menninger Clinic,* Vol. 45, No. 3 (May 1981), John J. Fitzpatrick takes issue with Fine's generalization. "Religion may have real importance to people as a source of healthy illusion, solace, or affiliation, and the understanding that it may also serve certain neurotic needs does not detract from its positive value" (pp. 271-272).

34*Publishers Weekly,* 27 March 1981, p. 6. In another interview *(The Charlotte Observer,* 18 April 1982), Thomas stated that he has never been in psychoanalysis, an observation that startled the analysts who attended his discussion of *The White Hotel* at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York in April 1982. But as one surprised psychiatrist later said, ". . . as I think about it, . . . it makes sense that he [Thomas] was able to do that because Freud himself. . . was able to tap into human imagination through the literary imagination."

Appendix

Chronology of Events in *The White Hotel*

The following chronology is based on the fictional Freud's "Fräu Anna G.," Lisa Erdman's subsequent account of her life as narrated in her letters to the analyst and the final sections of the novel. Information on the historical Freud not found in *The White Hotel* is bracketed.

1890: Birth of Elisabeth Morozova (Freud's "Fräu Anna G"), the second child and only daughter of moderately wealthy parents, in the Ukraine. Her father is a Russian Jew, her mother a Polish Catholic. Shortly after birth she and her family move to Odessa.

1893: Lisa wanders on to her father's yacht and sees her mother, Aunt Magda (the mother's identical twin), and Uncle Franz performing intercourse *a tergo.*

1894 or 1895: The summer-house incident in which Lisa sees her mother and uncle making love while her aunt lies on the beach.

1895: Death of Lisa's mother and uncle in a Budapest hotel fire. In Lisa's mind, fire symbolizes illicit passion and death.

1905: Incident on the dock. Lisa is threatened by a group of sailors,

reviled for being a Jew, and made to perform oral sex. Origin of her symptom of breathlessness.

1907: Lisa leaves Odessa for St. Petersburg. On the train she is seduced by a young officer. Her first experience with sexual intercourse coincides with her first hallucination. In St. Petersburg she has a ballet audition.

1907-1910: Affair with Alexei. They spend a weekend cruising on the Gulf of Finland, during which a bitter argument ensues. Lisa becomes pregnant but loses the ferns in a fall. Beginning of hallucination of falling through the air to her death. Friendship with Ludmila Kedrova. After Ludmila's marriage, Lisa is invited to live with her Aunt Magda in Vienna. She becomes a devout Roman Catholic at this time.

1913-1917: Lisa's new career as an opera singer. Marriage to Herr Erdman, an anti-Semitic Austrian barrister. Lisa conceals her half-Jewishness from him. Honeymoon in Switzerland. Recurrence of breathlessness in 1915 when her husband returns on his first home leave from army service. She also develops incapacitating pains in her left breast and ovary. Separation from husband and annulment of marriage. Lisa returns to live with her aunt.

Autumn 1919: Lisa begins analysis with Freud in Vienna. She has a telepathic dream of the suicide of the first husband of the woman who married Freud's colleague, Sandor Ferenczi, earlier that year [in March 1919].

Lisa dreams of the deaths of Freud's daughter and grandson. [Publication of Freud's essay, "The 'Uncanny.' "]

25 January 1920: Death of Freud's second daughter, Sophie Halberstadt, aged 26. The fictional Freud temporarily suspends treatment with Lisa, resuming therapy a couple of weeks later. She writes the poem "Don Giovanni" during a three-day period from the end of January to the beginning of February while vacationing at Bad Gastein, awaiting resumption of analysis with Freud. Immediately afterwards, she writes 'The Gastein Journal" at the request of Freud.

9 February 1920: Freud's letter to Ferenczi, thanking him for his condolences. [This letter is modeled on the actual letter Freud wrote to Ferenczi on 4 February 1920. See Ernst Freud, ed., *The Letters of Sigmund Freud* (New York: Basic Books, 1975), p. 328.] First mention of an hysterical patient whose writings lend support to Freud's new manuscript, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* [which the analyst started working on in March 1919 and completed in May 1920].

4 March 1920: Freud's letter to Hanns Sachs, to whom he sends a copy of "The Gastein Journal" along with his patient's poem. Freud's analysis of Lisa presumably ends during this year, although he does not complete the manuscript of the case study until 1931.

[August 1921: Freud writes "Psycho-Analysis and Telepathy" at Bad Gastein, the first of several essays on the subject. The essay is published posthumously in 1941.]

[19 June 1923: Death of Freud's beloved grandson Heinz (second child of the late Sophie Halberstadt), aged four and a half, of military tuberculosis. The loss of his favorite grandson has a devastating effect on Freud. Ernest Jones reports that Heinz's death was the only occasion in Freud's life when he was known to shed tears. "He told me afterward that this loss had affected him in a different way from any of the others he had suffered. They had brought about sheer pain, but this one had killed something in him for good." See Jones, *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud,* Vol. Ill, p. 92.]

Spring 1929: Lisa travels by train between Vienna and Milan, where she is to perform in *Eugene Onegin* at La Scala. She meets Vera Serebryakova and Victor Berenstein. In the winter Vera dies while giving birth to her son, Kolya. 1930 Freud is awarded the Goethe Prize for Literature [given by the city of Frankfurt to a "personality of established achievement whose creative work is worthy of an honour dedicated to Goethe's memory." The ailing Freud is unable to accept the award in person. His daughter Anna reads his "Address Delivered in the Goethe House at Frankfurt." See *Standard Edition,* Vol. XXI, pp. 206-212.]. The fictional Freud is invited by the Frankfurt City Council to write a psychoanalytic paper to be published in a limited edition in honor of

the centenary of Goethe's death in 1932, and the fortieth anniversary of *Studies m Hysteria* (Breuer and Freud). The publication of "Fräu Anna G." is delayed indefinitely when the centenary committee refuses to publish the patient's "pornographic" writings in an appendix to the case study. In the winter of 1930, Ludmila Kedrova dies of cancer at the age of 50.

March? 1931: Freud writes to Lisa, informing her that he has completed his case study of her, "Fräu Anna G." He encloses the manuscript along with her writings. At the end of March, Lisa writes back a long letter in which she grants him permission to publish the case study and fills in missing details of the story. She inquires about his grandsons, expressing the premonition she had during analysis that "one of them would not long survive his mother." Freud writes back in May to confirm that his grandson had died. "With him, my affectional life came to an end." In the next letter Freud acknowledges that he has known about her telepathic powers.

1932: Freud and Lisa accidentally meet at Bad Gastein, where he is on vacation with his sister-in-law, Minna Bernays.

1934: Marriage of Lisa and Victor Berenstein. Her hysterical symptoms disappear.

[23 September 1939: Death of Sigmund Freud at the age of 83.]

September 1941: Murder of Lisa Berenstein and her adopted-son Kolya at Babi Yar. (Her husband has already been murdered.) Their bodies are thrown into a ravine. One person escapes, Dina Pronicheva.

1945?: Resurrection and reunion of Lisa, friends, relatives, and Freud in a refugee camp in Palestine.

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