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## “CAN THE LIVING EVER SPEAK FOR THE DEAD”: THE WHITE HOTEL AND FICTIONALIZING THE HOLOCAUST

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### Abstract

This article explores the possibility of representing collective violence such as the Holocaust within the context of D. M. Thomas's novel *The White Hotel* (1981). It argues that *The White Hotel* lays bare the complicated relationship both between history and fiction and the burden of traumatic representation. By giving us a fictionalized story of a Holocaust victim, Thomas, offers the immediacy of the personal experiences one sees in eyewitness accounts; but, at the same time, by resisting a realist mode of narrative, the novel offers the possibility of remaining faithful to the resistance of collective trauma to representation. Ultimately, *The White Hotel* urges the reader to ask some fundamental ethical, narratological, and political questions about the representation of collective trauma. By representing the Holocaust in fiction, D.M. Thomas challenges the wildly-held belief both in Holocaust survivors and the intellectuals studying the Holocaust that Holocaust is considered beyond representability.

**Key Words:** *The White Hotel*, D. M. Thomas, traumatic representation, Holocaust in literature.

## “YAŞAYANLAR ÖLÜLER ADINA KONUŞABİLİR Mİ?” BEYAZ OTEL VE HOLOCAUST’UN KURGUSALLAŞTIRILMASI

### Özet

Bu makale, Holocaust gibi toplu kıyım deneyimlerini temsil edebilmenin imkânlarını D.M. Thomas'ın *Beyaz Otel* (1981) romanı çerçevesinde tartışmaktadır. Çalışma, *Beyaz Otel* romanının tarihsel ve kurgusal olan ile travmatik temsilin zorlukları arasındaki çetrefilli ilişkiyi açığa çıkardığını iddia etmektedir. Romanda, bir Holocaust kurbanının kurgusal öyküsünü yazan Thomas, bizlere görgü tanığı anlatılarındaki kişisel deneyimden doğan doğrudanlığı sunar; ancak, aynı zamanda, realist bir anlatımı da ret ederek travmanın temsiliyet zorluklarını da yansıtır. Sonuç olarak, *Beyaz Otel* okuyucuyu travmanın temsil olanakları hakkında etik, anlatısal, ve politik bazı temel sorular sormak zorunda bırakır. Thomas, Holocaust'u kurgu formunda temsil ederek Holocaust'dan kurtulanlar ve Holocaust'u çalışanlar arasında yaygın bir görüş olan, Holocaust'un temsil edilemez oluşu fikrine de karşı çıkar.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Beyaz Otel*, D.M. Thomas, travmanın temsili, edebiyatta Holocaust.

In *Memories and Hallucinations*, British writer D.M. Thomas refers to a question that he is asked frequently: “Why are you obsessed with violence?” Thomas's answer is revealing: “But that's the story of the twentieth century” (1989: 56). Twentieth century, indeed, is the century of violence, suffering, and trauma. Thomas's third novel, shortlisted for the Booker Prize, *The White Hotel* (1981) can be read as a fictional inquiry into the memory of the Holocaust. This study is an inquiry to the problem of representation in Holocaust narratives, in particular in *The White Hotel*. It explores some essential questions raised by what can be categorized as the Holocaust fiction: How can the “unspeakable” crimes such as the Holocaust be represented? Is it even possible to represent them?

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How can one access a truth or a past that is essentially inaccessible in its scope and implications, that is, a truth like that of the Holocaust? The problem of finding appropriate ways to frame and discuss “unspeakable” events, the problem of inserting the personal into frameworks of the historical are at the center of *The White Hotel*. *The White Hotel* achieves to find an effective way of capturing the liminal space of the personal and collective traumatic experiences of the Holocaust through its narrative structure, which drives the reader backward and forward both in historical and narrative time frame.

Most critical studies on *The White Hotel* analyze it as an example of postmodern historiographic metafiction. Postmodern theory’s critique of “master narratives” and its concern with unknowability of the past and truth; the ambiguous ending of the novel are seen as essential features of the novel that place it under postmodern fiction. For instance, Patricia Waugh discusses *The White Hotel* as a borderline example of metafiction: “*It is thus possible to read The White Hotel, . . . , as a text which foregrounds uncertainty about our perception of the world; or to read it perhaps as a postmodernist text which foregrounds uncertainty about its ‘reality’ status through a flouting of its condition of textuality and its ostentatious construction of ‘alternative worlds’*” (1984:103). Similarly, Linda Hutcheon sees the novel as an example of “*historiographic metafiction,*” “*a novel about how we produce meaning in history and fiction*” (1999: 166). However, the novel’s postmodern approach towards the Holocaust has also been criticized. As Alexander puts it, “*Thomas was guilty of sensationalizing Jewish experience*” (1990: 97). Another such critique of the novel’s portrayal of historical reality has been made by Emma Tennant, one of the letter writers to the *Times Literary Supplement* during the controversy around the novel, which I discuss in detail in the later sections of the article. Tennant questions the way Thomas represents the historical Holocaust witness, Dina Pronicheva, and her testimony as follows: “*the witness was Dina Pronicheva, a real human being and sufferer of these monstrosities. The words given to Thomas’s fictional heroine are hers, and no writer has the moral right to take the experience of a real human being and attach it ... to a made-up character... Fact and fiction, reality and unreality, do not blend in this way*” (1982: 412). Criticism towards *The White Hotel*’s postmodern treatment of the Holocaust centre around two major arguments: a) postmodern fiction’s slippery and fluid approach towards the world that it represents presents problems in its attitude towards a historical trauma such as the Holocaust; b) Holocaust is seen as an event that resists representation.

Below, I will first discuss the arguments about the (un)representability of the Holocaust and their underlying reasons. Then, I will make the argument why literature, in fact, may be the exact medium of capturing the unrepresentability of the Holocaust as well as the ethics of bearing witness to such trauma. Therefore, what *The White Hotel* asserts in a smaller scale is the idea that literature can be a more effective and accurate means of representing traumatic experiences like the Holocaust since it can provide knowledge in affective terms or history written through personal narratives as opposed to “History” as a grand narrative.

### **(Un)Representability of the Holocaust**

Writing on the relationship between the factual and the fictional in Holocaust narrative, Lars Ole Sauerberg states that:

The survivors, who have written about the Holocaust have, as a rule, preferred the report or memoir to communicate their experience, so that their testimonies function as historical, not literary, accounts. Their purpose has been unambiguous: To bear lasting witness to a unique complex of suffering. Such accounts present the apparently most direct way to the facts of the atrocities, and their often low-keyed and subdued tone enhances their efficiency. (1991: 102)

Since the majority of the witnesses cannot speak anymore, the survivors bear the responsibility to testify on not only their own experiences but also for those who cannot speak for themselves anymore. However, this responsibility and the need to speak for others is not easy (both for ethical and other reasons); perhaps the only possible way to speak for others is imagining what they must have experienced and felt; in other words, it requires reaching to a kind of knowledge and perception that one does not have a direct access to.

Another common feature of most Holocaust testimonies is the urgency to tell the stories of those who were silenced; who cannot speak for themselves anymore. Therefore, by telling the stories of others; those who did not survive, survivors take the responsibility of bearing the collective memory, passing on a story other than their own. For instance, perhaps one of the most well-known survivors of the Holocaust, Primo Levi, often repeats his impulse to survive to tell the stories of others and to bear witness to the atrocities that he had seen. But, simultaneously, he also adds that “*we, the survivors, are not the true witnesses*” (1988: 83), which again refers

to the need to testify for those who are silenced but also implies an awareness of the fact that his account is not representative of the whole. In fact, most Holocaust testimonies carry this tension of the need to speak for those who are silenced while at the same time being aware that this cannot be done. For instance, Elie Wiesel says that “*a novel about Auschwitz is not a novel, or it is not about Auschwitz*” (1978: 198). It is this tension between the factual and the fictional that Thomas’s novel addresses when it depicts the story of a fictional Holocaust victim.

### “*The Obscenity of Understanding*”

Most scholars working on Holocaust narratives refer to a narrative impossibility, where representing the Holocaust resists both representation and understanding. Perhaps, the most famous of these arguments is made by the French film-maker, Claude Lanzmann (1995), who thinks that the Holocaust is beyond understanding, and it is even “*obscene*” to understand it. Both in his documentary film *Shoah* (1985), which is made up of interviews with victims, tormentors, and bystanders, and in his essays and interviews, he refuses a framework of comprehensibility in Holocaust narratives. *Hier ist kein Warum* (“Here there is no why”) is the guiding sensibility for Claude Lanzmann’s approach to the Holocaust. He approaches the Holocaust having accepted the impossibility of understanding as a common touchstone. Lanzmann’s concept of “*obscurity of understanding*” well articulates his position that in the face of the Holocaust and its implications, generalizations lose their meaning. To articulate “*why*” becomes obscene because of the huge “*gap*” between causal factors—historical and material conditions of Europe (in the pre-war years)—and the scale of destruction it engendered. So Lanzmann obsesses with the minute details of what exactly happened. Like survivors of trauma, he is unable to comprehend the meaning of the event and yet remember minute details of his quest. Pre-existing knowledge of the facts does not really help him understand the enormity or the great illogic of the Holocaust (Lanzmann, 1990: 279).

Another scholar, whose works on the Holocaust narratives have been seminal is Lawrence Langer. Langer in his chapter “*Unheroic Memory*,” attacks the language of recent Holocaust writing, as it attempts to recast Holocaust victims in a heroic light. His argument extends Lanzmann’s belief that the Holocaust was outside the scope of our moral universe and to attempt to capture it in language that enables a false closure is to do a disservice to the memory of the Holocaust and its victims. While Lanzmann speaks of the “*impossibility of understanding*,” Langer posits that “*Understanding here is somehow bound up with the idea of reconciliation, though if the testimony of former victims teaches us anything, it is the permanent impossibility of that expectation*” (1991: 168). He advocates a new way of articulating this permanent disjunction which takes into account the testimonial narratives that ensue from people who lacked any moral agency in this situation, where the words “*future*” and “*past*” and “*survival*” had different connotations than the pre-Holocaust years (Langer, 1991: 172). A language contained in a moral universe that is fundamentally located in a faith in human agency and free will is incapable of explaining or articulating a horror of the scope and dimension of the Holocaust. And yet, much like Lanzmann closes doors on other points of reference (in the discussion of the Dutch film on the Nazi doctor Wirth where he provides his own perspective on why the film is inadequate, creating his own framework of preexisting knowledge for an audience that is strongly discouraged from seeing it) insisting that other ways of comprehension—or even generalizing about evil—is not possible (Lanzmann, 1995: 205-209), Langer refuses to allow for the possibility of any human agency existing at that time. So every self is diminished, every meaning distorted beyond significance. Every act becomes survival. Both Lanzmann and Langer provide a framework that denies any use of pre-existing knowledge or language, which taken to an extreme and given the limitations of our imaginations, serve only to bring us to an impasse. If we cannot hope to understand the Holocaust, (or any other collective trauma, for that sake), or even articulate it in the language that we possess, how do we move on, how do we represent it, where do we even start? Is transmission enough?

Perhaps, one needs to start with the difficulties in conceiving of traumatic memory, testimony, history, witnessing and truth presented by authors. Speaking of trauma’s relationship to directly referential or transparent means of understanding, Caruth argues that “*we can understand that a rethinking of reference is aimed not at eliminating history but at resituating it in our understanding*” (1996: 11). This resituation of history involves a more fluid conception of both historical truth and the meaning of traumatic events, for individuals as well as for cultures and communities at large. Since trauma raptures the mind’s seamless perception of temporal and spatial reality, since it can be understood only after the passage of time and from a distance, and even then not fully, it resists integration into existing conceptual frameworks. Further, the testimony to trauma, as Shoshana Felman puts it, is not so much a “*statement of, but rather . . . a mode of access to, that truth*” (1992: 16). As Dori Laub’s example of the woman whose memory exaggerated the number of exploding towers during an uprising at Auschwitz attests, it is the underlying meaning and impact of a situation to which testimony offers us a glimpse

rather than the accuracy of its details that are important (1992: 59-62). For the traumatized, the understanding of traumatic events is incongruent with their experiences of them; for those who would interpret such occurrences and stand as witnesses to their narratives, there is a gap between the traumatic events themselves and their comprehensibility.

All of this raises several immediate questions. If the traumatic event inscribes a “*history that has no place*,” to borrow Caruth’s phrase (1996: 153), then how might we begin to contextualize and situate it, without eliding its particulars? How can the gaps between the experience of trauma and its understanding be foregrounded and possibly fruitfully articulated? How can we understand the imbrications of history and the memory and understanding of trauma? How can we begin to position ourselves responsibly as witnesses?

### Considering Trauma as a Mode

“*This is not a story to pass on*” (1987: 275). These lines are from the final page of Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, which address the paradox of trauma; i.e., the destruction of language, and yet, at the same time, the urgency to narrate. What Dori Laub terms a “*collapse of witnessing*” (“*Truth and Testimony*,” 1995: 65) has made the traumatic story impossible to “*pass on*,” or transmit, and yet the sheer horrific nature of such trauma has made it essential that the story not “*pass on*,” or die. This burden of traumatic representation is not an easy task. Writing on the problematic nature of traumatic memory, Langer writes that: “*Memory’s encounters with a disintegrating time is one of the seminal themes of these [Holocaust] testimonies*” (1991: 173). Langer discusses the “*two clocks*” found within testimonies of Holocaust survivors. There is a “*time clock*” and “*space clock*” — “*consciously remembering*” versus “*being possessed*” (1991: 174). The time clock is chronological. It fits within our normal sphere of understanding time. The space clock, however, seems to be a moment or moments outside of time or perhaps frozen in time. The survivor is haunted by these memories and cannot seem to fit them into a usual time-oriented framework.

It is within this context of (im)possibility of representing collective trauma I would like to discuss *The White Hotel*. I argue, in the following section of the article, that the novel lays bare the complicated relationship both between history and fiction and the burden of traumatic representation. By giving us a fictionalized story of a Holocaust victim, Thomas, offers the immediacy of the personal experiences one sees in eyewitness accounts; but, at the same time, by resisting a realist mode of narrative, the novel offers the possibility of remaining faithful to the resistance of collective trauma to representation. Rather than being representative, Lawrence Langer argues that Holocaust narratives must “*remain disruptive*” (1991: xi). In this sense, as Tanner marks, “*Thomas’s novel offers a radical critique of conventional forms of understanding violence*” (1991: 131).

### The White Hotel and Representability of the Holocaust

Before I go onto discuss the novel itself, I would like to refer to the controversy around Thomas’s depiction of the Holocaust, which has been criticized by some. Thomas has been criticized for not treating the Holocaust respectfully and responsibly and has been accused of appropriating the accounts of a Holocaust survivor.<sup>1</sup>

When writing the events that took place in Babi Yar, Thomas used Anatoly Kuznetsov’s documentary novel *Babi Yar* (1967/1970), which is based on the testimony of Dina Pronicheva, one of the survivors of the historical Babi Yar events. According to Clowes, Babi Yar was “*the central symbol of the Nazi ‘final solution’ on Soviet soil . . . , where more than 30,000 Jewish residents of the Ukrainian capital were massacred over two days, September 29-30, 1941*” (2005: 154). The controversy around Thomas’s use of Kuznetsov’s *Babi Yar* emerged and developed in the letters section of the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1982. In a letter sent to the editor of the *Times Literary Supplement* on March 26, 1982, D.A. Kenrick argued that the fifth chapter of *The White Hotel* was “*in fact a superficially reworked version of the historical accounts in Babi Yar*” (1982: 355). The novelist Martin Amis thought that the Babi Yar chapter was “*the best bit—and Thomas didn’t write it*” (1983: 124).<sup>2</sup> Thomas; however, explains his use of Kuznetsov’s transcription of Pronicheva’s testimony in *Babi Yar*, by saying that “*It would have seemed immoral had I, a comfortable Briton, fictionalised the holocaust*” (1989: 47). Here, it is important to note that I am not interested in the plagiarism controversy per se, but rather in the implications of the arguments made during the controversy. Interestingly, in defending himself against the plagiarism charges made, Thomas appealed to an unexpected argument: that is, the argument about the authenticity of the eyewitness accounts.

1 D.M. Thomas has faced plagiarism accusations because of this. For the details of this discussion, see Lynn Felder, and the letters sent to *Times Literary Supplement*.

2 For the debate around Thomas’s use of Kuznetsov’s *Babi Yar*, see James E. Young (1988). *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 53-58.

In one of his letters sent to the *Times Literary Supplement* during the plagiarism controversy, Thomas marked that “the only appropriate voice [to narrate the events in *Babi Yar* chapter] becomes ... the voice of one who was there” (April 2, 1982). It is remarkable to see that Thomas himself, the novelist, sees the use of eyewitness accounts as the most respectful approach to represent the Holocaust. In other words, he acknowledges that using the accounts of a real Holocaust survivor gives a certain authority to the text. Similarly, in 1983, Thomas explained his use of Pronicheva’s account as follows: “I felt that the only way I could do it would be not to play around with the Holocaust, but to accept the physical descriptions of the eye-witness, of Dina Pronicheva, as reported by Kuznetsov . . . I dealt with the Holocaust in fiction by, at the last moment, letting history take over” (1984: 73). Indirectly, in a way, he reminds us the argument that Holocaust should not/could not be represented in imaginative literature (the unspeakability of the event/atrocities). However, in writing about the Holocaust in the novel format, Thomas is facing the challenge expected from writers depicting the Holocaust; i.e., the problem of credibility and ethical responsibility. In other words, part of the criticism towards Thomas’s use of a Holocaust survivor’s account in fiction lies in the debate about fiction’s right and potential to represent certain brutal events in history such as the Holocaust. Literary license is questioned when the issue at hand is the Holocaust. In contrast to this widely-held belief in Holocaust studies, especially among the historians of the Holocaust,<sup>3</sup> I would like to make the argument that literature has the potential to reach and represent a larger truth that is beyond the mere historical facts. Of course, Thomas’s borrowing from Kuznetsov’s *Babi Yar* is more complicated as it is a secondhand account of what actually happened there. As Young marks, the source from which Thomas borrows is itself not a testimony of the victim but a fictional account “based upon the verbatim transcription of yet another testimonial source” (1988: 55). At this point, I would like to move on to my discussion of the novel with reference to literature’s capacity to write about collective suffering, in particular, about the representation of the Holocaust in *The White Hotel*.

*The White Hotel* is made up of a Prologue and six chapters, in which different narrative styles are layered on top of each other, where each narrative mode undermines the other. The novel is introduced with the “Author’s Note,” where Thomas calls psychoanalysis the “great and beautiful myth;” a “poetic, dramatic expression of a hidden truth” (1981: vii). Sigmund Freud is one of the major fictional characters, and the novel opens with a series of letters among Sigmund Freud and his psychoanalytic circle. In one of these letters dated 1920, we learn that Freud is treating a young woman named Lisa Erdman for “sexual hysteria.” The novel narrates Lisa Erdman’s life from the period she starts analysis with fictional Sigmund Freud in Vienna until her murder at Babi Yar by the Nazis. In the final chapter entitled “The Camp,” narrated in the fantastic mode, readers witness Lisa and other characters in the novel, including Freud, survive their deaths.

*The White Hotel* includes four narrative realities that challenge and subvert each other throughout the novel. For the sake of clarification, narrative layers of the novel can be summarized as follows:

- a) depiction of Lisa’s psyche and psycho-sexual experience;
- b) fictional Freud’s analysis of this world, depicted with close-to-real-life narrative style of historical Freud’s case studies, thus, parodying the psychoanalytic method;
- c) a fictionalized account of the historically real Babi Yar event based on eyewitness accounts;
- d) an ambiguous reconciliation of history and imagination as depicted in the final section of the novel, “The Camp,” which is a magic realist representation of an imaginary camp, possibly in Palestine/Israel, where previously murdered Holocaust victims stay for healing and recuperation.

In this sense, *The White Hotel* can be seen as a fictional attempt to capture the inaccessibility of the Holocaust experience. In plot and narrative structure, *The White Hotel* is about ways of discovering truth. By directing the reader through various revisions, it traces the traumatic resonance of what it means to be Jewish before and after World War II. In this context, it is important to see the link between Lisa’s hysteria and her being a Jew in an anti-semitic environment. Although brought up as a Catholic, Lisa is half-Jewish by descent and her asthmatic attacks began only after suffering anti-semitic insults as well as physical abuse from a group of sailors in Odessa when she was a child. The hysterical pains go back to her first marriage to a man of fervently anti-semitic beliefs who was unaware of her Jewish ancestry. And as readers, tragically, find out in “The Sleeping Carriage” section, Lisa’s acute pains in her left breast and abdomen, (from which she had suffered in all her adult life and for

<sup>3</sup> For a critical approach towards historical representation of the Holocaust, see Dominick LaCapra (2014). *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore.

which she sought the treatment of Freud), are unexplainable intuitions of the Nazi soldier cracking into her breast and pelvis as she lies in the ravine of Babi Yar. It is the presentiment of a future trauma that brings Lisa's sufferings, which might signal for a new understanding of trauma where one can be affected from it without actually experiencing it personally, different from the traditional understanding of trauma where the victim's reaction to a past psychic or physical wound, a reaction that s/he may not be aware of is under concern.

Historically, psychoanalysis has often been criticized for not taking into account of the larger historical context in which the patient lives, when it deals with personal trauma. Similarly, the Holocaust study has generally focused on the larger truth of the trauma and did not pay equal attention to the individual circumstances in dealing with such trauma. By doing so, it has emphasized the universality of the Holocaust but at the expense of reducing the individual to the "representative victim" status. By choosing a heroine who is both a patient of Freud and a victim of the Holocaust, Thomas juxtaposes psychoanalysis with history. The novel also blurs the boundaries between fiction and history by doing so. Lisa becomes a representative Holocaust victim, for the thousands who died at Babi Yar, but at the same time, emerges as an individual whose life and complicated inner psychology have been presented to the reader from the beginning of the novel. This tension between the personal and the historical also corresponds to the confrontation between psychoanalysis and history. While psychoanalysis focuses on the individual, history aims to understand larger events and groups. Therefore the underlying methodologies of the two disciplines in dealing with a trauma such as the Holocaust is questioned.

Lisa's case study reveals the limitations of Freudian approach as he ignores the implications of the larger context that the patient is influenced from, that is, her being sexually abused for being a Jew. The novel itself questions the potential of psychoanalysis in reaching to the ultimate truth of an individual's past, by quoting the following from Heraclitus twice in the novel. The first reference is in one of the letters of Freud to Lisa. "*The soul of man is a far country, which cannot be approached or explored*" (1981: 195-6). The second one is before the massacre at Babi Yar. It is followed by an often-quoted text that discredits the authority of psychoanalysis:

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). Though most of them had never lived outside the Podul slum, their lives and histories were as rich and complex as Lisa Erdman-Berenstein's. If a Sigmund Freud had been listening and taking notes from the time of Adam, he would still not fully have explored even a single group, even a single person. (1981: 250)

Reminding us that every single one of the victims had a rich psyche just like Lisa's, the novel refuses to single her out, but at the same time she becomes a representative for the suffering of all who died at Babi Yar. While the earlier sections of the novel focus on Lisa's psyche, the Babi Yar section looks at her trauma from the distant lens of history and brings her personal trauma closer to those of thousands. After Lisa's murder, the narrator states that "*Dina survived to be the only witness, the sole authority for what Lisa saw and felt. Yet it had happened thirty thousand times; always in the same way and always differently. Nor can the living ever speak for the dead*" (1981: 251). Here, Lisa is explicitly identified as the representative of those who cannot speak/represent themselves any more. Lisa's story continues in Dina, because, "naturally a part of her went on living with these survivors" (1981: 250).

"*The banality of evil*"<sup>4</sup> that we, readers, witness in "The Sleeping Carriage" section is followed with the more promising, hopeful tone of "The Camp" narrated in the magic realist mode. The last section undermines both the psychoanalytic and the historical approaches through its fantastic mode. Ending with a dream-like section, the novel finishes with an ambiguous end that refuses any coherent representation of the Holocaust. By not concluding the novel with the historical account of the Babi Yar, Thomas prevents readings that favor teleological linear endings, where everything becomes clear by the end of the novel. Overall, by the end of the novel, Lisa is given a historical and magic realist depth that the psychoanalysis does not provide. The Holocaust as a historical trauma gains a much more tangible personal dimension that bare historical facts may not have given.

Ultimately, *The White Hotel* urges the reader to ask some fundamental ethical, narratological, and political questions such as the following about the representation of collective trauma: What are the possibilities of imagining and representing collective suffering/trauma? How does one ethically/responsibly represent the pain and the suffering of others? By representing the Holocaust in fiction, D.M. Thomas challenges the wildly-held

<sup>4</sup> The phrase belongs to Hannah Arendt (2006) in her report on the trial of Adolf Eichmann — one of the chief responsible men of the Holocaust, see *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. Penguin, New York.

belief both in Holocaust survivors and their relatives and the intellectuals studying the Holocaust that Holocaust is considered beyond representability.

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