A NARRATOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF D. M. THOMAS'S *THE WHITE HOTEL* (1981)

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Dissertação de Mestrado
em Cultura e Literatura Anglo-Americanas
apresentada à Universidade da Madeira

Orientadora: Professora Doutora Dominique Costa

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Agradecimentos

Em primeiro lugar gostaria de prestar os meus agradecimentos à Universidade da Madeira, enquanto instituição de ensino onde concluí a minha formação superior e que foi responsável pela germinação do meu interesse pela investigação, particularmente na área dos estudos anglo-americanos. Em segundo lugar, não posso deixar de expressar o meu sincero obrigado à Professora Doutora Maria Zina Gonçalves de Abreu por ter organizado o Curso de Mestrado em Cultura e Literatura Anglo-Americanas e a todo o corpo docente, cujo saber científico contribuiu para o meu crescimento enquanto investigador.

A este respeito, a contribuição da Professora Doutora Dominique Costa, orientadora desta dissertação, revelou-se, como não poderia deixar de ser, decisiva. O Seminário por si leccionado – "Postmodernist British Fiction: A Narratological Approach" – constituiu indubitavelmente um estímulo que resultou na decisão de desenvolver um estudo mais aprofundado nesta área dos estudos literários. Os seus juízos críticos, aliados ao profissionalismo com que sempre encarou o compromisso de orientar esta dissertação e à forma extremamente humana com que conduziu todas as fases do processo, fizeram com que esta pesquisa tenha chegado a (espero) bom porto.

Finalmente, visto que um trabalho desta natureza é necessariamente dialógico, gostaria ainda de reconhecer o contributo de todos aqueles que me ouviram e me deram apoio nas diferentes fases da minha pesquisa. Os seus comentários críticos e palavras de alento contribuíram para o resultado final deste trabalho.

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Resumo

A dissertação de Mestrado que aqui se apresenta insere-se no âmbito do primeiro curso de Mestrado em Cultura e Literaturas Anglo-Americanas organizado pelo Departamento de Estudos Anglísticos e Germanísticos da Universidade da Madeira. Este trabalho de investigação, sob o título "A Narratological Analysis of D. M. Thomas's *The White Hotel* (1981)", surgiu ainda de forma embrionária no decurso de um seminário no âmbito da Literatura Britânica Pós-Modernista – "Postmodernist British Fiction: A Narratological Approach" –, período literário no qual se inclui *The White Hotel*.

Procuro ao longo da dissertação apresentar uma análise narratológica deste romance cujas características experimentais, nomeadamente digressões metaficcionais, heterogeneidade estrutural (proliferação de vozes narrativas e de múltiplas perspectivas, combinação de diferentes géneros literários e tipos de texto, sobreposição de níveis narrativos) e abordagem de *topoi* essencialmente pós-modernos (a inter-relação verdade/mentira e história/ficção, o questionamento da noção de originalidade em literatura, a instabilidade do signo linguístico, o papel do autor e leitor no processo narrativo, a natureza da representação estética, a relação entre mundo e arte, a responsabilidade moral do autor para com a sua obra) o tornam num produto literário paradigmático relativamente à ficção narrativa britânica das últimas três décadas. Deste modo, torna-se evidente que *The White Hotel* (tradução portuguesa, *O Hotel Branco*, datada de 1999 de Maria Isabel Veríssimo para a Editorial Notícias) procura intencionalmente resistir a sistemas rígidos de classificação. De facto, o que a análise narratológica revela é que o romance de D. M. Thomas, tal como a maioria da sua produção novelística, constitui um esforço no sentido de desafiar a teleologia inerente à

narrativa, visto que nesta obra a progressão narrativa em direcção a um final reconfortante é seriamente posta em causa.

No decurso desta dissertação procuro, num primeiro momento, contextualizar o romance em análise na tradição literária no qual este se inclui. Por isso, no capítulo inicial – "What is Postmodernism?" – foi minha intenção abordar não só os estudos seminais mas também os mais recentes trabalhos no campo da teoria do pós-modernismo. No segundo capítulo – "Postmodernist British Fiction" – faço uma apresentação da ficção britânica pós-modernista, salientando os romances que considero fundamentais para a periodização deste movimento literário. Considerei pertinente incluir neste capítulo um sub-capítulo – "D. M. Thomas as a Postmodernist Novelist" – dedicado ao autor de *The White Hotel* e à sua restante produção ficcional. Por fim, no terceiro capítulo – "A Narratological Analysis of *The White Hotel*" – elaboro uma análise detalhada do romance segundo uma perspectiva narratológica, adoptando em particular o modelo narratológico do teórico francês Gérard Genette.

O estudo que aqui se propõe constitui, deste modo, uma aproximação a um texto que não só fundamenta a noção de contingência do discurso como também se organiza em função desta, de acordo com os preceitos pós-modernistas de abertura e de subversão das narrativas que se auto-denominam de verdadeiras, globalizantes e inclusivas.

Abstract

"A Narratological Analysis of D. M. Thomas's *The White Hotel* (1981)" originated within a seminar on British Postmodernist Literature during the first Master's Degree in "British and North-American Culture and Literature" (2001-04) at the Universidade da Madeira set up by the Department of English and German Studies. This dissertation seeks to present a narratological analysis of Thomas's novel. *The White Hotel* stands as a paradigmatic example of the kind of literature that has dominated the British literary scene in the past three decades, commonly referred to as postmodernist fiction, owing to its formal craftsmanship (multiplicity of narrative voices and perspectives, mixing of differing genres and text types, inclusion of embedded narratives) alongside the handling of what are deemed as postmodernist *topoi* (the distinction between truth and lies, history and fantasy, fact and fiction, the questioning of the nature of aesthetic representation, the role the author and the reader hold in the narrative process, the instability of the linguistic sign, the notion of originality and the moral responsibility the author has towards his/her work),

The narratological approach carried out in this research reveals that Thomas's text constitutes an aesthetic endeavour to challenge the teleological drive that is inherent in any narrative, i. e., the inevitable progression towards a reassuring end. Hence, the subversion of narrative telling, which is a recurrent feature in Thomas's remaining literary output, mirrors the contemporary distrust in totalising, hierarchised and all-encompassing narratives. In its handling of historical events, namely of the Holocaust, *The White Hotel* invites us to reassess the most profound beliefs we were taught to take for granted: progress, reality and truth. In their place the novel proposes a more flexible conception of both the world and art, especially of literary fiction. In other terms, the

world appears as a brutal chaotic place the subject is forced to adjust to. Accordingly, the literary work is deemed hybrid, fragmented and open.

So as to put forth the above-mentioned issues, this research work is structured in three main chapters. The initial chapter – "What is Postmodernism?" – advances a scrutiny not only of the seminal but also of more recent studies on postmodernist literary criticism. Following this, in Chapter II – "Postmodernist British Fiction" – a brief overview of postmodernist British fiction is carried out, focusing on the fictional works that, in my opinion, are fundamental for the periodising of British postmodernism. In addition, I felt the need to include a section – "D. M. Thomas as a Postmodernist Novelist" – in which the author's remaining literary output is briefly examined. Finally, Chapter III – "A Narratological Analysis of *The White Hotel*" – proposes a narratological analysis of the novel according to the particular Genettian analytical model.

To conclude, my dissertation constitutes an approach to D. M. Thomas's *The White Hotel* as a text whose very existence is substantiated in the foregrounding of the contingency of all discourses, meeting the postmodernist precepts of openness and subversion of any narrative that claims to be true, globalising and all-inclusive.

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Introduction

This dissertation aims at providing a detailed analysis of a particular work of fiction – D. M. Thomas's *The White Hotel* – without overlooking the literary period this novel belongs to – postmodernism – nor its author's remaining literary output. The fascination I have always held for British culture and, especially, British literature evinced during my undergraduate years was only heightened when, as a Master's student in a Literature Seminar, I was offered the opportunity to study postmodernist British fiction. The conscious interplay postmodernist authors engender with previous literary periods, texts and authors enhances the fictiveness of most contemporary novels and, simultaneously, compels the researcher to unearth the web of references inscribed in these narratives.

Indeed, one of the aspects that have drawn me to studying postmodernist fiction was that these texts frequently turn the role of the reader/researcher into the subject matter of the narration. By means of metafictional digressions, novels like *The White Hotel* play upon readers'/researchers' search for meaning alongside the unravelling of the story. Therefore, in their self-conscious foregrounding of both fiction and theory, postmodernist novels constitute paradigmatic examples of the contemporary tendency towards self-reflexivity and draw the reader into their fictional world, thus making him/her an active participant in the process of creating meaning.

Choosing the corpus of analysis, that is, a narrative which embodied the main characteristic features of postmodernist fiction, proved to be a more complex undertaking given that in my search I came across a good number of texts that met the above-mentioned criteria. Nevertheless, *The White Hotel* stood out as a fictional work that combined structural innovation and audacity with disturbing, though profound,

humane themes. Upon my first reading, Thomas's novel struck me as a suitable text to approach postmodernist British fiction owing to its structural heterogeneity (multiplication of narrative voices and perspectives, mixing of various genres, inclusion of embedded narratives) as well as to the skilful manner by which this narrative diversity mirrored postmodernist *topoi*, namely the distinction between truth and lies, fact and fiction, history and fantasy; the new emphasis on the role unknown individuals perform in historical change; the nature of aesthetic representation, i. e., the relationship between the world and art; the role of the author and the reader in the writing process (production and reception); the instability of language; the notion of originality; and the moral responsibility the author holds for his/her work. In addition, the fact that *The White Hotel* is frequently mentioned in most theoretical approaches to postmodernist British fiction as a novel that gained both critical and public acclaim, encouraged me to select it among a number of other fictional works. Even though D. M. Thomas is not considered a major voice in contemporary British fiction, *The White Hotel* emerged as a novel likely to fit the kind of research I wanted to carry out.

I shall approach the above-referred issues using Genettian and, to a lesser extent, post-Genettian narratological models[1], inasmuch as they constitute significant corpora of analysis of how narrative texts are constructed. Hence, my analysis of *The White Hotel* will focus on uncovering the narratological processes underlying the unfolding of events so as to comprehend the manner this postmodernist fictional work subverts conventional narrative telling and inscribes itself in the postmodernist literary paradigm. Therefore, narratology is applied as a tool to elicit the narrative's meaning potential, that is, it is used not as an unyielding model the text must fit into, but as a flexible theoretical framework that does not impose meaning on the text. Even though postmodernist novels often show disregard for rigid systems of classification, the narratological analysis implemented in this research will attempt to ascertain the extent

to which this novel constitutes an endeavour to rewrite and rethink the conventions that have regulated narrative fiction in western civilisations; hence, only the aspects of narratology I deem relevant to attain this end will be employed in my analysis of *The White Hotel*.

On these grounds, this dissertation is divided into three main chapters. Chapter I – "What is Postmodernism?" – attempts at presenting the problematic surrounding the term 'postmodernism' and at pinpointing the main characteristics displayed in postmodernist texts which allow us to distinguish them from previous fictional works. For the attainment of this end, I have drawn on the scholars who in the past three decades have approached postmodernist theory, particularly in the field of literary studies, and furnished it with the conceptual tools that enabled postmodernism to stand out as a periodising concept.

Therefore, in the course of this chapter I have offered the main tenets of scholars such as Jean-François Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard, Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson, Linda Hutcheon, Malcolm Bradbury, Randall Stevenson, Brian MacHale and Ansgar Nünning[2]. Furthermore, since this research is comprised within the broader field of inquiry "Literary Studies", I have also felt compelled to foreground my dissertation with the contributions of such theorists as Mikhail Bakhtin, Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Tzvetan Todorov[3] whose studies, in spite of having supplied crucial theoretical formulations for the debate on postmodernist philosophy and literature, have a reach that goes well beyond this particular area of research. This chapter, however, is not intended as a thorough survey of postmodernism and postmodernist fiction but, rather, as an overview on the main theorists, controversies and representative features of both this literary period and the literary production it gave rise to.

In Chapter II – "Postmodernist British Fiction" – I turn first to presenting a concise scrutiny of postmodernist British fiction, from late 1930s to early 1990s, in

order to better place *The White Hotel* in the literary continuum it is embedded. Rather than being a comprehensive survey of postmodernist British fiction, this chapter is concerned with the authors and fictional works I believe to be crucial for the history of this literary period. The section that follows – "D. M. Thomas as a Postmodernist Novelist" – deals with Thomas's remaining literary output, which, as I shall demonstrate further on, can overall, be encompassed in the postmodernist paradigm. Within this section, Thomas's novel *Pictures at an Exhibition* is given prominence owing to the fact that I consider it to be the author's most important literary accomplishment since the publication of *The White Hotel* and also the narrative that bears more similarities, both in content and form, with his widely acclaimed novel. In this section it is my purpose to show that D. M. Thomas is not a 'one-book author', i. e., that several of his other fictional works are also artistic achievements and therefore likely to constitute relevant texts for the study of postmodernist British fiction.

It is in Chapter III – "A Narratological Analysis of *The White Hotel*" – that the narratological analysis of *The White Hotel* is carried out. By applying Gérard Genette's narratological model, I intend to provide a more comprehensive study on Thomas's novel, given that although it has been subject to considerable research over the past two decades, this research has essentially focused on the thematic elements the text suggests, rarely going deep in explaining the narrative units underlying the novel. It is this latter purpose that models this chapter: rather than merely gathering the plethora of readings *The White Hotel* has originated since its publication in 1981, Chapter III is meant to unearth the basic narratological structures that allow the text to signify and give rise to a multiplicity of readings.

In the course of this dissertation, I shall endeavour to demonstrate that *The White Hotel* installs itself within the system it tries to subvert. In other terms, it enters our most reassuring artistic, political, philosophical and moral certainties only to force us to

acknowledge that they are not flawless and universal. Accordingly, it is my purpose to show how this anti-establishment stance, one of the novel's guiding principles, is meant to make us realise that we must reassess the most profound beliefs we were taught to take for granted, such as the subject, the real and the truth.

Finally, I shall seek to show how in this postmodernist novel form and content are deeply interconnected and create a consistent whole. *The White Hotel* is not a case in which formal craftsmanship supersedes any attempt to say something important about the world and/or about ourselves. Similarly, the structural analysis that will be implemented in this study will not discard the ideas, themes and unanswered questions Thomas's novel puts forth.

Chapter Endnotes

[1] For Genettian narratological model I have drawn on the following works: *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1983), *The Architext: An Introduction* (1992), *Fiction and Diction* (1993) and *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1997). On the other hand, for post-Genettian narratology I have drawn chiefly on Mieke Bal's *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (1985) and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan's *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (2002).

[2] For this purpose, the following studies were cited: Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1986), Baudrillard's "From *The Orders of Simulacra*" (1994), Eagleton's *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (1997), Jameson's "From *Periodising the Sixties*" (1994), Hutcheon's *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (1984) and *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (1999), Bradbury's *The Modern British Novel* (1994), Stevenson's *The British Novel since the Thirties: An Introduction* (1987), MacHale's *Postmodern Fiction* (1987) and Nünning's "Crossing Borders and Blurring Genres: Towards a Typology and Poetics of Postmodernist Historical Fiction in England since the 1960s" (1997).

[3] The works I resorted to were: Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (1998), Kristeva's "Intertextuality and Literary Interpretation" (1996), Barthes's "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives" (1977a), "The Death of the Author" (1977b), "From Work to Text" (1977c) and *The Pleasure of the Text* (1994), Foucault's "What Is an Author?" (1980) and Todorov's "The Origin of Genres" (2000).

Chapter I

What Is Postmodernism?

1.1. – Postmodernity and Postmodernism

1.2. – Modernism and Postmodernism

1.3. – Characteristic Postmodernist Elements in Narrative Fiction

1.4. – Chapter Endnotes

1. - Chapter I – What is Postmodernism?

When trying to define postmodernism, most scholars agree that the term is dubious, somewhat vague and slippery, inasmuch as the prefix *post*[1] suggests that postmodernism comes after modernism. However, the prefix does not shed light on whether postmodernism has overturned modernist aesthetic conventions or simply, albeit with some degree of reshaping, carried on with the modernist ethos.

Reflecting upon the problematic nature of the term, Brian McHale asserts that

> the term does not even make sense. For if "modern" means "pertaining to the present", then "post-modern" can only mean "pertaining to the future", and in that case what could postmodernist fiction be except fiction that has not yet been written? Either the term is a solecism, or this "post" does not mean what the dictionary tells us it ought to mean, but only functions as a kind of intensifier (1987: 4).

In fact, McHale points out how misleading the term can be. A similar stance is put forth in Linda Hutcheon's utterance that "postmodernism cannot simply be used as a synonym for the contemporary" (1999: 4). Postmodernism, then, is not "post modern … but post modern*ism*" (McHale, 1987: 5) which is the same as saying that it comes after the modernist movement, thus being "a periodizing category" (Jameson, 1994: 141) of the cultural and aesthetic productions that have emerged after that literary period[2].

As a result of the term's "snake-like" nature (Woods, 1999: 6), some scholars proposed a different terminology to account for the artistic alterations that appeared after modernism. Frank Kermode, advances Edmund Smyth (1991a: 10), preferred the expression *Neo-Modernism*, hence subscribing to the theory that conceives postmodernism as a continuation and reworking of modernism. However, this expression has been supplanted by the term postmodernism to the extent that it is nowadays commonplace to say that there is postmodernist architecture, art, film, music,

photography, literature, etc. In spite of all the controversy, one is led to agree with Fredric Jameson when he asserts that postmodernism is "one significant framework in which to describe what happened to culture in the 60s" (1994: 140) and, one should add, in the following decades.

Owing to its problematic nature, an all-inclusive definition of postmodernism is utopian. Therefore, both McHale and Hutcheon noted that each scholar has his/her own postmodernism. McHale's scrutiny allowed him to single-out:

> John Barth's postmodernism, the literature of replenishment; Charles Newman's postmodernism, the literature of an inflationary economy; Jean-François Lyotard's postmodernism, a general condition of knowledge in the contemporary informational regime; Ihab Hassan's postmodernism, a stage on the road to the spiritual unification of humankind; and so on. There is even Kermode's construction of postmodernism, which in effect constructs it right out of existence (1987: 4).

Hutcheon also adds to these postmodernisms McHale's, "with its ontological dominant"; Jameson's, "the cultural logic of late capitalism"; Jean Baudrillard's "in which the simulacrum gloats over the body of the deceased referent"; Arthur Kroker and David Cook's "hyperreal dark side of postmodernism"; Peter Slotedijk's "postmodernism of cynicism or 'enlightened false consciousness'"; Alan Wilde's "literary 'middle grounds' of the postmodern", and she also self-consciously includes her own postmodernism defined as one of "complicity and critique, of reflexivity and historicity" (1991: 11). Despite such a comprehensive list, one should not forget Terry Eagleton's postmodernism, which seeks to unmask its illusory nature

1.1. - Postmodernity and Postmodernism

Postmodernism, in my view, cannot be understood without first defining postmodernity. Whereas postmodernity is used to describe "our socio-economic, political and cultural condition", postmodernism "describes the broad aesthetic and intellectual projects in our society, on the plane of theory" (Woods, 1999: 10), i.e., the first concerns the whole cultural situation we are in, while the second concerns mainly the aesthetics that emerged out of that situation[3]. Nevertheless, as Smyth reports, the term postmodernism is often used instead of postmodernity when, for example, it is said to designate "the contemporary cultural condition as a whole in all its complexity" and to refer to the "set of textual characteristics" that can be seen in "literary, dramatic or cinematographic works" (1991a: 9).

Broadly speaking, postmodernity is characterised by an ever-growing scepticism towards the notion of progress as well as a disbelief in grand narratives, a phrase first coined by Jean-François Lyotard in his much debated *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979). The French philosopher set himself the task of demonstrating that

> we no longer have recourse to the grand narratives – we can resort neither to the dialectic of Spirit nor even to the emancipation of humanity as a validation for postmodern scientific discourse. But as we have just seen, the little narrative [*petit récit*] remains the quintessential form of imaginative invention, most particularly in science (1986: 60).

Grand narratives or metanarratives are theoretical frameworks that attempt to explain the world. According to Lyotard, knowledge is conveyed via narrative but narrative knowledge is "customary, embedded in culture" (Easthope, 2001: 19). Therefore, the two main metanarratives that have guided western politics, ethics and art, namely eighteenth-century rationalism and the Enlightenment, have lost both their credibility and their authority and are being questioned by micronarratives – explanations that are "local, partial, fragmented and incomplete" (Woods, 1999: 21). Indeed, "the rhetoric of liberation", to borrow Jameson's phrase (1986: xix), has

become obsolete, especially in the light of such traumatic events as World War II, the Holocaust and the Atomic Bomb. On this basis, the authoritarian regimes that appeared in the twentieth century and the ensuing events they provoked are looked upon as the result of having tried to realise the utopian dream of continuous progress.

If Lyotard places the emphasis on the collapse of metanarratives, Jean Baudrillard centres his discussion on the notions of simulation and hyperreality. In his line of thinking, postmodernity is described as an age where the distinction between reality and simulation is no longer unquestionable, owing to the fact that the real constitutes "*that of which it is possible to give an equivalent reproduction*"[4] (Baudrillard, 1994: 186). Drawing on twentieth-century developments in electronic media, Baudrillard concludes that postmodernity is governed by images, that is, simulacra, that contribute to the blurring of boundaries between simulation and reality. The result is the dissolution of the difference between objects and their representations, which, in Baudrillard's terminology, is hyperreality – "*more real than real*"[5] (Woods, 1999: 27).

Although operating within dissimilar approaches, both Lyotard and Baudrillard challenged the grounds upon which the Enlightenment project was built, namely the belief that reason could set mankind free from the shackles of superstition and even religion; the use of reason to the welfare of society; the feeling that science and technology were working for the benefit of human beings and that nature could be mastered; and, finally, the faith in progress. In the postmodern age, these assumptions appear to be exhausted and neither knowledge nor technology seem capable of sustaining the Enlightenment project of truth, justice and freedom. The shattering of any system of belief is named antifoundationalism and, in the light of postmodernist antifoundationalism, it becomes important to question, paraphrasing Stuart Sim (2001: 3), whether the truth of one's foundation is guaranteed.

It is worth mentioning that the disbelief in universal progress is one of the most contested postmodernist theories. One of its opponents is Eagleton whose *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (1996) attempts to present both postmodernism's "strengths and failings" (1997: viii). Eagleton contends that although "the doctrine of universal progress" was discredited by Lyotard, some "particular kinds of historical progress", such as the end of Apartheid in South Africa, are still possible and no one would regard them as not being "a worthy goal" (43-4). This controversy proceeds from the inference that Lyotard's mistrust in master narratives is an utter denial of progress. However, Lyotard does not deny the notion of progress but rather states that in the postmodern age we can only resort to "petit récits" for the validation of scientific knowledge from where the idea of progress derives.

From this stems the assumption that postmodernism operates within an intellectual landscape in which plurality, decentring, indeterminacy and heterogeneity stand not at the centre, for postmodernism calls this notion into question, but in its essence. Knowledge that used to be regarded as homogeneous is now heterogeneous, to the extent that it is nowadays more seemly to talk about *knowledges* rather than persisting in using its singular form.

Eagleton's *The Illusions of Postmodernism* constitutes often a severe criticism to postmodernism as a periodising concept for, as it claims to comprise everything from punk rock to the demise of grand narratives while asserting its indebtedness to the Foucauldian theoretical system, postmodernism runs the risk of not fitting in any "explanation scheme" (1997: 27) that includes its heterogeneity. Postmodern cultural relativism brought about a "paralysing scepticism" and displaced the "sovereignty of Western Man" (1997: 27). There were, nevertheless, other negative opinions as to what the postmodern era represents. The American scholar Leslie Fiedler, for instance,

deemed these new times as "apocalyptic, antirational, blatantly romantic and sentimental … dedicated to joyous misology and prophetic irresponsibility" (1994: 33).

JÜrgen Habermas, another influential theorist of postmodern theory, believed that it is premature to dismiss the project of modernity as an unsuccessful one insofar as it is yet to be fulfilled both socially and politically[6]. Fredric Jameson, on the other hand, understands the postmodern era as the cultural discourse of late capitalist society, which was characterised by a "hegemonic aesthetic of consumer society" (1994: 141) coupled with a kind of depthlessness in cultural productions.

Nevertheless, the debate over the definition of postmodernism is far from reaching an end. Hutcheon in *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (1988), has also contributed for the clarification of the term. In her opinion, postmodernism is basically a cultural activity that revolves around a set of pivotal points, namely that it is a critical reworking, not a nostalgic return to the past and that it installs itself within the conventions it tries to subvert. It is inimical to order, hierarchies and systems and, ultimately, strives to prove that, because these categories were created by human beings, they cannot be fixed or universal but provisional[7]. Her analysis of the poetics of the postmodern age allows her to conclude that postmodernism:

> challenge[s] our beliefs in origins and ends, unity, and totalization, logic and reason, consciousness and human nature, progress and fate, representation and truth, not to mention the notion of causality and temporal homogeneity, linearity, and continuity (1999: 87).

The point at issue is that by installing within the conventions it endeavours to undermine, postmodernism "questions the basis of our certainties" (1999: 57). Postmodernism undermines our faith in empiricism, rationalism and humanism and is, therefore, an "ongoing cultural process or activity" whose delimitation depends more on a poetics, i. e., "an open, ever-changing theoretical structure by which to order both our

cultural knowledge and our critical procedures", rather than on "a fixed and fixing definition" (14).

1.2. - Modernism and Postmodernism

What, in my opinion, seems to be unquestionable is postmodernism's indebtedness to modernism. In Jameson's view, postmodernism emerged as a reaction against "modernist categories of irony, complexity, dense temporality, and particularly, aesthetic and utopian monumentality" (1994: 140), thus achieving a combination of high and mass culture. In other words, while modernism widened the gap between popular and high art, postmodernism sought to bridge that same gap. In Malcolm Bradbury's words, modernism represented

> a breaking of reticences, a freeing of forms, a poetic opening out of the inwardness of narrative, a new voyage into consciousness …, it was also a dismayed reaction to the fragmentation of culture, to catastrophic history, to the pervasive sense of psychic crisis, to modern violence and dislocation (1994: 143-44).

It was indeed a period of change both because it was widely felt that Edwardian and Georgian England had come to an end and that new cultural forms were emerging. Broadly speaking, modernism was characterised by *i*. "a faith in the unconscious and the libido"; *ii*. a shift in "sexual mores" together with "a new independence for women"; *iii*. "a disenchantment with history" and an urge to live "for the instant" (145).

Furthermore, modernism owes much to Einstein's perception of time as a category likely to be perceived, felt and measured differently by individuals. This new view of time, namely that it amounted to more than a series of chronological moments

the novelist could present in sequence, resulted in an endeavour to create a mode of writing that would mirror this complexity. The aim was to show the confrontation between "mechanized, standardized public time with the unpredictable, non-linear meanderings of private temporality" (Heise, 1997: 37).

Challenging realist omniscient narration and linear presentation of time, modernist literature strove to present human beings' inner world by means of the stream of consciousness technique, i.e., the effort to display in narrative fiction "the myriad associations, reflections, and movements of [the character's] mind in response to external stimuli" (Stevenson, 1987: 18). For the reader, it is as if he/she were "wearing earphones plugged into someone's brain, and monitoring an endless tape-recording of the subject's impressions, reflections, questions, memories and fantasies, as they are triggered either by physical sensations or the association of ideas" (Lodge, 1992: 47). Drawing on Sigmund Freud's and Carl Jung's studies in the field of the human psyche, novelists tried to render in narrative form the multiple levels of consciousness, thus plunging into their characters' minds.

Rather striking is the fact that as the novel pried into the characters' consciousness several significant aspects arose: *i*. the psychology of the human individual acquired more relevance than the psychology of the social being; *ii*. the conventional chronology of the novel could be more easily manipulated and subverted; *iii*. the novel's subject matter could be one day of the hero's life; and *iv*. a more subjective point of view replaced the God-like knowledge of the omniscient narrator[8]. The above-mentioned transformations were accompanied by stylistic ones, for example, a disdain of punctuation, as in the "Penelope" section of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), along with the employment of free indirect discourse.

Aesthetic self-reflexivity constitutes also a feature often deployed in modernist texts, in which narrators comment on the processes that lie behind the making of the

novel itself. Consequently, "the relationship between writer, novel, and reader" changed and the latter was asked to adopt a more active participation in the "fictional world envisaged" (Stevenson, 1987: 25).

1.3. - Characteristic Postmodernist Elements in Narrative Fiction

As will be later discussed, postmodernist literature does not embody a major rupture with the modernist conception of literature in spite of its preference for, as John Mepham puts it, "low art forms" (1991: 142), among which the scholar points out the thriller, the detective story and fantasy. To put the point another way, "postmodernism does what modernism does, only in a celebratory rather than repentant way" and as an alternative to "lamenting the loss of the past, the fragmentation of existence and the collapse of selfhood" it adopts these characteristics "as a new form of social existence and behaviour" (Woods, 1999: 8-9). An identical stance is offered by Hutcheon who claims that postmodernism "marks neither a simple and radical break from it [modernism] nor a straightforward continuity with it" (1999: 18).

To account for the multiplicity of traits deployed in postmodernist texts academics have turned to catalogues. Such is the case of Smyth's list of recurrent postmodernist features, which includes "fragmentation, discontinuity, indeterminacy, plurality, metafictionality, heterogeneity, intertextuality, decentring, dislocation, ludism" (1991a: 9). Although the usefulness of catalogues of this kind is undeniable, they offer, however, a partial view of postmodernist poetics. Having realised this lacuna, McHale suggests that in order to explain "the mechanism of historical change"

(1987: 7), in this case from modernism to postmodernism, one had to pin down the dominant[9] that underlies the disparate characteristics of postmodernist fiction.

Starting, therefore, from the premises that a shift of dominant explained the transition from modernism to postmodernism, McHale states that whereas modernist fiction was foregrounded by the epistemological dominant, postmodernist fiction is foregrounded by the ontological one. To identify which dominant a literary text belongs to, one has to interrogate the text. Consequently, the questions a modernist text calls for – "What is there to be known?; Who knows it?; How do they know it, and with what degree of certainty?" (9) among others – imply the belief that there is some kind of reality to be known. A postmodernist text, on the contrary, evokes questions that ponder the very existence of reality – "What is a world?; What kinds of world are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ?" (10). In other words, postmodernist fiction raises post-cognitive questions, those that *deal with* (-logy) *being* (onto), and make one challenge the existence of both the real and the self. In Hutcheon's terms, postmodernist fiction seeks not to deny "the existence of [the] experiential world" but to challenge "its availability to us" (1999: 154).

The postmodern conception of time constitutes a fundamental point in the study of postmodernist fiction. According to Ursula Heise, the postmodern sense of time evinces a paradox for, in spite of knowing more about "the overall functioning of time in our universe than ever before", the contemporary man has realised that "temporal coherence increasingly eludes [him]" (1997: 46). Postmodernist fiction, then, mirrors this frustration by subverting linear coherence of narrative and thus presenting time in its labyrinthine dimension. Even though postmodernist writers were not the first to imbue their narratives with temporal disorder, the fact is that postmodernist treatment of time – flashbacks and differing versions – does not depend on a unifying voice (either the narrator's or the characters') that would allow the reader to infer a coherent story.

Indeed, reconstituting the chain of events into a chronological order is often a difficult or even impossible undertaking. Together with temporal disorder, the postmodernist novel usually turns to multiple endings or simply to an utter denial of closure. This alternative way of dealing with the structuring of narrative echoes the postmodern distrust in wholeness and completion in favour of the inconclusive and the open. In this respect, one can argue that postmodernist narrative fiction celebrates openness and plurality so as to emphasise the elusiveness of meaning and to assert the anti-representational nature of narrative.

By virtue of the climate of fear that prevailed during the Cold War period, some writers explored the "paranoid anxieties" (Lewis, 2001: 124) ordinary people felt, thus creating protagonists who were convinced that society was conspiring against them. Novels that dealt with individual or social paranoia, of which Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* (1955) is a paradigmatic example, used irony to show the discrepancy between actions and their results. In spite of the playful unmasking of people's fears, one should not be misled into believing that postmodernist irony is inconsequential for it is one of the many tools postmodernist texts use to distance from and challenge that which they try to subvert.

1.3.1. - Intertextuality

In "The Literature of Exhaustion" (1967) John Barth stressed how writers had apparently used up the conventions of realism, given that, in his view, Jorge Luis Borges, Samuel Beckett, Vladimir Nabokov and Alain Robbe-Grillet (to name but some of the authors Barth claims to embody the new literary expression) "attempt to represent

not life directly but a representation of life" (1995: 169). From then on, the idea that it would be impossible to write a truly original work gained widespread prominence. In this respect, Mikhail Bakhtin's body of theoretical studies on the novel might be considered a turning point in the study of writing as reformulation and rethinking of already existent material. For Bakhtin, the novel was a "dynamic", "multi-layered genre" (1998: 8-9). This Russian formalist claimed that

> authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speeches of characters are merely those fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia [raznorečie] can enter the novel; each of them permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships (321)

The scholar's definition of heteroglossia as the multiplicity of voices or languages within a novel stems from the assumption that the origin of language is multiple and diverse. As a result, the text is a polyphonic construct, in that it emerges from the dialogic intersection of various voices.

Drawing on Bakhtin's theories, Julia Kristeva also considered the text as "not simply the intersection of two voices" but as "the result of the intersection of a number of voices, of a number of textual interventions" (1996: 189). The interdependence of texts or intertextuality, to use the term coined by Kristeva, "assumes … that the one who reads, the reader, participates" in the process and that he/she is "capable of identifying with the different types of texts, voices, and semantic, syntactic and phonic systems at play in a given text" (190). Thus, the reader acquires a new and far more challenging status in the creative, but not entirely original, act of writing.

The French structuralist Roland Barthes has also given a fundamental contribution to the study of intertextuality. To begin with, the word 'text' derives from the Latin verb *texere*, meaning 'to weave' and from the noun *textus*, meaning 'tissue', 'web'. Bearing the etymology of the word in mind, Barthes contends that a text is

> woven entirely with citations, references, echoes, cultural languages …, antecedent or contemporary, which cut across it through and through in a vast stereophony. The intertextual in which every text is held, it itself being the text-between of another text, is not to be confused with some origin of the text: to try to find the 'sources', the 'influences' of a work, is to fall in with the myth of filiation; the citations which go to make up a text are anonymous, untraceable, and yet *already read*: they are quotations without inverted commas" (1977c: 160).

Drawing on the Bakhtinian premise that utterances are to be understood in their relationship with other utterances – dialogism – , intertextuality, for both Kristeva and Barthes, regards the text as an assembly of previous texts rather than as an individual, self-sufficient and complete object. Consequently, "the theory of the text … involves a theory of intertextuality, since the text not only sets going a plurality of meanings but is also woven out of numerous discourses and spun from already existent meaning" (Allen, 2002: 67).

A convergence of both competing and complementary texts from the past, the literary work can only be understood in a comparative way, i. e., in its intertextual relationship with the plurality of, in Barthesian terminology, inter-texts out of which it is born. A consequence that springs from this interconnectedness is the suspicion over the filiation of a work of art: if a literary text is already written, then it is not the product of an author's original thoughts. The figurative death of the author and the birth of the scriptor, announced Barthes in a famous essay[10], mark the awareness that "the origin of the text is not a unified authorial consciousness but a plurality of voices, of other words, other utterances and other texts" (Allen, 2002: 72). The scriptor gathers and arranges pre-existent material and in doing so challenges the notions of "originality, uniqueness, singularity and autonomy" (6) in literature.

Furthermore, Barthes refused to envisage the text as "a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but [as] a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash" (1977b: 146). The Barthesian 'death of the author' proceeds from the conviction

that to ascribe an author to a text "is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing" (147), which would contradict Barthes's notion of literature as an on-going process of rewriting and rereading previous texts. Finally, with Edward Said, one can say that

> the best way to consider originality is to look not for first instances of a phenomenon, but rather to see duplication, parallelism, symmetry, parody, repetition, echoes of it – the way for example, literature has made itself into a topos of writing (1983: 135).

One of the most productive characteristics of postmodernist fiction is undoubtedly parody, notwithstanding Elizabeth Ermarth's contention that "parody has a venerable history: in classical literature and rhetoric" and in "the great precursor of the Western novel, Cervantes' *Don Quixote*" (1999: 226). In general terms, parody is an intertextual allusion and, contrary to what is often accepted, it is inherent in the process of linguistic interaction insofar as "language is not one's own, but always comes to each speaker from another, to be imitated and transformed as that speaker in turn sends it onwards" (Dentith, 2000: 3). From this utterance proceed the assumptions that parody involves imitation and transformation and that literature is also intrinsically parodic. However, given the number of authors who, from the 1960s until the present day, have openly parodied previous authors, styles and genres[11], it is legitimate to consider parody as a characteristic feature of postmodernist fiction. For Hutcheon, it is "a postmodernist form" because it "paradoxically both incorporates and challenges that which it parodies" (1999: 11).

Detractors of postmodernism regard parody as the product of a frivolous culture. Against this negative notion of parody, Hutcheon claims that "it is also a necessary and creative process by which new forms appear to revitalize the tradition and open up new possibilities to the artist" (1984: 50). Parody, therefore, is neither a shallow, ridiculing imitation nor an uncritical, depthless rewriting of the source text. In "The Creative Role

of Parody in Transforming Literature and Culture: An Outline of a Functionalist Approach to Postmodern Parody" (1999) Ansgar Nünning seems to share Hutcheon's views on contemporary use of parody. Writing on the ways parody transforms literature and culture, the scholar points out the functions parody fulfils in contemporary fiction. First and foremost, parody serves to ridicule, to ironise, to criticise and/or to comment on the text, genre or events it relates to[12]. Besides these functions, Nünning identifies the capacity of parody to "transform literary genres" (1999: 130), thus acquiring creative functions. In his opinion, parody's reputation as a hollow imitative form has been overcome by the new and creative use postmodernist writers have given to it. Its contribution for the vitality of contemporary fiction is undeniable because, he insists,

> by engaging in an extratextual dialogue with the literary tradition and by commenting upon earlier works and outworn literary conventions, postmodern parody serves to shape aesthetic norms, to contribute to the renewal of forms and to generate new and, more often than not, hybrid genres (131).

In a different fashion, Simon Dentith deems parody as a device that

> throws some of the very fundamentals of writing into doubt. Following the French theorist Roland Barthes' notion of the 'death of the author', parody emerges as a formal practice in which the densely allusive intertextual nature of all writing is made especially transparent, so that its 'authorship' becomes problematic (2000: 15).

What Dentith clearly emphasises in this excerpt is the close relationship between parody and metafiction (where "the fundamentals of writing" are exposed) and the need to redefine the notions of both origin and originality in literature.

Pastiche, in spite of being also a playful intertextual allusion to the text it seeks to imitate, differs from parody in that it is an imitation rather than a transformation of its source. Further, it also denotes lack of critical distance from the latter, which is viewed as absence of originality and, sometimes, as sheer plagiarism. Barry Lewis regards pastiche as "a kind of permutation" that originates from "the frustration that everything has been done before" (2001: 125). According to him, postmodernist authors take

existing styles from previous literary periods and self-consciously force readers and literary critics to rethink the notion of originality. Moreover, Lewis explains the proliferation of genres like science fiction, the western and the detective tale in contemporary fiction by the fact that "these genres provide ready-made forms, ideal for postmodernist miscegenation" (126). For Jameson, pastiche is parody "amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction" constituting, therefore, "blank parody, a statue with blind eyes" (1991: 17-8)[13]. In my view, he not only considers pastiche as a symptom of the depthless culture of late capitalism but also fails to understand that it can be used as a respectful tribute to a previous author or literary period/style and thus acquire aesthetic value.

1.3.2. - Metafiction

David Lodge's essay "The Novel Now" (1990) begins with the statement that when the author started his career as both novelist and critic, "criticism was conceived of as a second-order discourse dependent on the first-order discourse of fiction. Novelists wrote novels and critics criticized them" (1995: 145). If this situation had not changed, Lodge would not have felt the need to draw our attention to what apparently is common practice. Since the 1960s, however, the proliferation of novels that display metafictional digressions has come to undermine the, until then, unproblematic relationship between the writer and the critic.

Despite the upsurge of novels that expose and reflect on their own construction, one should not think that metafiction is a postmodernist invention. As Patricia Waugh remarks, "the *term* 'metafiction' might be new, the *practice* is as old (if not older) than

the novel itself" (1993: 5). The term metafiction has indeed gained wide acceptance in academic circles but other terms have existed simultaneously with this one. In one of her initial studies on this phenomenon, Hutcheon used the term 'narcissistic narrative' and acknowledged other terminologies: 'self-reflexive'; 'self-reflective'; 'self-informing'; 'auto-referential'; and 'auto-representational' (1984: 1-2). Waugh's inventory includes the terms: 'self-begetting'; 'introverted'; 'anti-novel'; 'irrealism'; 'surfiction'; and 'fabulation' (1993: 13-4). More recently, Mark Currie has provided a valuable contribution to this problematic. In *Postmodern Narrative Theory* (1998), he chooses the terminology "theoretical fiction" to refer to the fictional works that enact "what [they] wish to say about narrative while being [themselves] a narrative" (1998: 52). In his opinion, these texts acquire "the weight of academic philosophy" and simultaneously avoid "the boredom of those discourses" (66).

Drawing on both Hutcheon and Waugh, metafiction is, therefore, the laying bare of both the fictional and linguistic systems upon which the novel is constructed; it results from the growing awareness that reality and history are provisional and that the world is no longer a place "of eternal verities but a series of constructions, artifices, impermanent structures" (Waugh, 1993: 7). In Hutcheon's terms

> the making of fictive worlds and the constructive, creative functioning of language itself are now self-consciously shared by author and reader. The latter is no longer asked merely to recognize that fictional objects are "like life"; he is asked to participate in the creation of worlds and of meaning, through language. He cannot avoid this call to action for he is caught in that paradoxical position of being forced by the text to acknowledge the fictionality of the world he too is creating, yet his very participation involves him intellectually, creatively, and perhaps even affectively in a human act that is, in fact, a kind of metaphor of his daily efforts to "make sense" of experience" (1984: 30).

In other words, although metafiction is mainly concerned with its own status as a construct, it is also reader-oriented in that the reader is drawn into the text as both a consumer and a producer and is given the chance to better understand the basic

structures of narrative functioning. While doing so, metafiction offers the reader "extremely accurate models for understanding the contemporary experience of the world as a construction, an artifice, a web of interdependent semiotic systems" (Waugh, 1993: 9). It helps the reader to realise that "history, politics, gender, race, nationality, the individual, reality … can be read as systems of signs, cultural constructs, or texts" (Ommundsen, 1993: 12). Another relevant issue that arises from Hutcheon's above-mentioned excerpt is that of mimesis – the world of fiction is "like life", but not life.

At this point it seems pertinent to quote Barthes, for whom writing could not "designate an operation of recording, notation, representation, 'depiction' (as the Classics would say)" but rather "a performative, a rare verbal form … in which the enunciation has no other content … than the act by which it is uttered" (1977b: 146). What is at stake here are the conventions of realism: fiction was thought to be able to imitate or reflect the world. However, drawing on Barthes's contention, rather than disclosing information about the world, writing discloses information about itself. Metafiction strives to demonstrate that "the mode of realism does not imitate reality any more or less than other fictional modes" (Ommundsen, 1993: 48). Instead of being a radical departure from realist writing, metafiction is a reworking of it and, consequently, "metafiction is still fiction" since "auto-representation is still representation" (Hutcheon, 1984: 39).

Both the traditional figure of the author and its transcendental status are questioned in metafiction as it shows that "*author* is a concept produced through previous and existent literary and social texts" (Waugh, 1993: 16). This hypothesis accords well with the Barthesian death of the author – the rejection of "the traditional view that the author is the origin of the text, the source of its meaning, and the only authority for interpretation" (Selden, 1997: 156). On these grounds, the reader acquires a new status and is free to take his/her pleasure of the text. Therefore, referring to

metafiction using such detracting expressions as “narcissistic”, “self-begetting”, “introverted”, “auto-representational” and “anti-novel” seems to me to deny the openness and outward dialectics that metafiction installs with the reader and the critic as well as with the “reality” it seeks to unsettle.

1.3.3. - Historiographic Metafiction

The fact that “history is, once again, an issue” (Hutcheon, 1999: 87) has been noticed by all the scholars who have written about postmodernist fiction. This postmodernist historical fiction, or historiographic metafiction, to use Hutcheon’s terminology, although indebted to classic historical fiction, strives to problematise the very notion of history. To a certain extent, historiographic metafiction subverts the constraints classic historical fiction complied with, namely, *i*. the official version of historical events should not be contradicted unless there was a “dark area” of history in which case improvisation was possible; *ii*. the whole “material culture and «Weltanschauung»” of the period in question should hold “an acceptable degree of faithfulness”; and *iii*. the fictional material should be realistic, i. e., “the logic and physics of the physical world” should be consistent with reality. Furthermore, whenever a transgression took place, efforts were made to render it “as unnoticeable as possible” (McHale, 1987: 87-8).

Nevertheless, “the paradigm shift” (Eagleton, 1997: 24) that emerged with the works of Foucault, Derrida and especially Lyotard[14] enacted a transformation in our perception of how knowledge is constructed. The latter’s discredit in grand narratives, meta-narratives, precipitated the contemporary historians’ distrust in “the validity of

what they describe as macrohistories" in favour of "microhistories" (Appleby, 1995: 228). A similar stance emerged from the foucauldian "interest in marginalized groups whose difference [kept] them excluded from political power" (Sim, 2001: 6). Further, Foucault's studies pointed to the fact that history cannot claim to be totalising or systematic for it is impossible for the historian to place himself/herself "outside power and make it the object of [his/her] critique" (Hamilton, 2001: 143). Finally, Derrida, whose theoretical principles pointed to the unpredictability of signs and, thus, to the instability of language, pronounced meaning as a "fleeting phenomenon, that evaporates almost as soon as it occurs in spoken or written language … rather than something fixed that holds over time for a series of different audiences" (Sim, 2001: 6).

The immediate consequence of these precepts was scepticism over historical objectivity and validity. Objectivity is utopian inasmuch as "historians cannot capture the fullness of past experience, any more than individual memories can"; they gain access to "the traces or residues of the past" and, therefore, "their accounts are necessarily partial" (Appleby, 1995: 234), because, as Hayden White observed, "there are always more facts in the record than the historian can possibly include in his narrative representation" (1985: 51).

In addition, and owing to this limitation, the past can only be known through "its textualized remains" (Hutcheon, 1999: 119), which need to be ordered, i. e., given plot configuration. Concurrently, history is a narrative with a beginning, a middle and an ending[15]. More important than this is the fact that ordering events implies both the mediation of a subject – with all his/her cultural, political and religious beliefs – and the selection of the events/people to be included or left out of the account. It is then legitimate to ask, as McHale does, whose history is official history?[16] Given that texts generate various and sometimes conflicting interpretations, postmodernist historicism proclaims the theory that the past is not fixed and in so doing makes way for

reinterpretations of historical events. Postcolonial and feminist writings have tried to demonstrate that "all sorts of historical narratives … have employed the full range of associated discriminations – race, colour, gender, religion, social practice, primitivism – to justify almost any behaviour of one group of people towards another" (Hamilton, 2001: 176). Once the bias inherent in history writing has been identified, both postcolonialist and feminist scholars could begin to rewrite history so as to give voice to those who had formerly been neglected.

Another assumption historians used to take for granted was the notion of progress. Confronted with wars, depressions, genocides and atomic power, postmodern historians began to question "not history but History – the idea that there is an entity called History possessed of an immanent meaning and purpose which is stealthily unfolding around us even as we speak" (Eagleton, 1997: 30). Alongside the shattering of the idea of progress was the theory that history did not necessarily develop following the principle of cause-effect. In fact, history

> did not unfold in linear fashion, revealing truth in the process of development over time, but rather moved through an arbitrary set of crises, disjunctures, and disruptions. Nothing necessarily followed what came before, so causation should be pitched out along with human agency and social structuring (Appleby, 1995: 211).

For a scholar like Eagleton, classical historicism differs from postmodernist historicism in that the former believes *i*. in the power of historical explanations; *ii*. that history can explain how and why an event came about; and *iii*. that an historical explanation of our beliefs and interests is possible. However, the scholar counters that such explanations are neither reliable nor neutral since our beliefs and interests are themselves intrinsic to the process of history writing which results in a "vicious epistemological circle" (1997: 35). In other words, postmodernist historicism does not deny the possibility of historical explanation but underlines its ontological constraints.

Faced with the postmodern relativism of history writing, novelists who aimed at reviving the genre made use of a series of strategies so as to illustrate through literature the significant changes historiography experienced in the second half of the twentieth century. According to Martha Rozett, postmodernist historical fiction differs from traditional or classic fiction, given that the former displays

> a resistance to old certainties about what happened and why; a recognition of the subjectivity, the uncertainty, the multiplicity of truths inherent in any account of past events; and a disjunctive, self-conscious narrative, frequently produced by eccentric and/or multiple narrating voices (1995: 146).

In McHale's view, apocryphal history, anachronism and historical fantasy constitute the novelists' creative way of dealing with the possibilities opened up by postmodernist questioning of historical truth. The first strategy comprises the inclusion of fictional events or characters to fill in the blanks of history or even to replace the official version with an alternative one. Within apocryphal history, McHale, points out "paranoiac conspiracy-theory" (1987: 91), as in some of Pynchon's novels. The second one, anachronism, is more common in the form of "world view and ideology" anachronism (93), that is, when a character, for example, is given the attitudes, thoughts or beliefs of someone from a totally different era. Finally, historical fantasy integrates history and fantasy to enhance the tension between fact and fiction. From McHale's exposition it is also worth mentioning the "ontological scandal" (85), when a real-world figure becomes a character and interacts with other fictional characters.

For Hutcheon, the genre par excellence of postmodernist fiction is historiographic metafiction: best-selling novels that are self-reflexive and resort to historical events and figures. Her work *A Poetics* of *Postmodernism* constitutes a thorough reflection on the controversial relationship between fact and fiction in contemporary fiction, starting from the premises that *i*. we know the past through its texts; *ii*. consequently, history and fiction are human constructs; *iii*. both history and

fiction have always been permeable genres; and *iv*. historiography is not exempt from cultural bias. Apparently, the distinction between history and fiction is not as clear-cut as one had been led to believe. This derives from the fact that fiction neither mirrors nor reproduces reality; it "is [only] offered as another of the discourses by which we construct our versions of reality" (1999: 40).

Historiographic metafiction, then, are hybrid novels that turn to the "discourses of history, sociology, theology, political science, economics, philosophy, semiotics, literature, literary criticism" (21) in order to confront the past with the present and, thus, give it new meaning. Its concerns are to fight the contemporary trend to value what is new to the detriment of past experiences and to lay bare historians' claims to objectivity, neutrality and impersonality. Yet, Hutcheon is eager to show and, in my opinion, does it successfully, that historiographic metafiction does not deny that the past really existed but that, given that we are "both spectators and actors in the historical process", our ability to apprehend the past is "epistemologically limited" (122).

Another highly significant aspect is that these novels accord with the postmodern privileging of plurality and difference; hence, "the ex-centrics, the marginalized, the peripheral figures of fictional history" (113-4) appear as the protagonists of historiographic metafiction. Taking as examples D. M. Thomas's *The White Hotel* (1981) and Graham Swift's *Waterland* (1983), Hutcheon demonstrates that, whether by making use of multiple points of view, the former, or a controlling narrator, the latter, both these novels put into question the notions of truth, totality, centre and authority and are, therefore, paradigmatic examples of this genre.

Other scholars, faced with the upsurge of the historical novel, proposed categorisations of the genre. In *History and the Contemporary Novel* (1989) David Cowart advances a model of postmodernist historical novels that comprises four categories: 'The Way It Was'; 'The Way It Will Be'; 'The Turning Point'; and 'The

Distant Mirror'. The first category includes novels that "recreate the past as vividly as possible, dramatizing a world whose values may diverge radically from those of the present age" (1989: 8). The second category refers to novels that rely on historical knowledge to reflect on the future. The third is, in Cowart's opinion, the most important one due to the quantity of novels in which a particular moment in the past is regarded as a crucial development for the present. 'The Distant Mirror' category incorporates novels where the present is projected into the past.[17]

In my view, the problem with Cowart's classification is that it seems too simplistic and, in fact, the playful use of intertextuality, parody and pastiche evinced in most contemporary historical fiction, coupled with its refusal to conform to a predetermined genre would make it difficult to classify these novels, given that they would surely fall into more than one category. It is my belief that the German scholar Ansgar Nünning in his essay "Crossing Borders and Blurring Genres: Towards a Typology and Poetics of Postmodernist Historical Fiction in England since the 1960s" (1997) provides a far more structured and useful classification of historiographic metafiction.

Distancing himself from both Hutcheon and McHale, Nünning states that, since contemporary historical fiction is so diverse in nature, "it does not make much sense to subsume all the novels in question under the one label, be it 'historiographic metafiction' or 'the postmodernist revisionist historical novel'" (1997: 219). In his line of thinking, proclaiming historiographic metafiction as the unique genre of postmodernist fiction results in an homogeneity that does not account for the diversity of contemporary fiction, be it historical or not. In what regards McHale, the scholar argues that the change of dominant theory is not flawless if one thinks of authors like Peter Ackroyd, Julian Barnes or A. S. Byatt, to name but a few, whose novels "are primarily concerned with the question of how much we can ever know about the past"

(237). Consequently, Nünning set himself to provide "a more systematic typology and a more finely nuanced poetics of the various modes for presenting history in fiction" (220).

According to him, postmodernist historical fiction falls into three categories: 'Revisionist Historical Novels', 'Metahistorical Novels' and 'Historiographic Metafiction'. The first category refers to those novels whose main goal is to give voice to those who were traditionally left out of historical accounts. By having ordinary people as protagonists these novels evidence a decentred view of history. 'Metahistorical Novels' aim at pushing the limits of conventional historical novels by showing the continuity between past and present. Novels that fall in this category deal with the appropriation, revision and transmission of history and emphasise the distortions the past is subject to. 'Historiographic Metafiction', Nünning writes, "thematizes and undermines the conventional borders between historiography and fiction" and also enquires "into the epistemological status of history, historical explanations and historiography" (226).

In this respect, he partakes of Hutcheon's thesis. Yet, Nünning subcategorises historiographic metafiction in explicit – when the epistemological, methodological, and linguistic problems of historiography are overtly handled - and implicit – when "metahistoriographic metafiction" (226) is incorporated in the structure of the novel[18]. As Nünning himself acknowledges, any categorisation of postmodernist genres runs the risk of finding resistance on the part of those novels that foreground the blurring of genres[19].

1.3.4. – Genre Hybridisation

As has already been suggested, postmodernist fiction subverts, ruptures and challenges the establishment, be it in the political, social or literary spheres. Genre hybridisation, the flaunted disregard for instituted genres, has become a creative strategy for postmodernist writers. Writing back in 1978, Tzvetan Todorov noted that "it is even considered a sign of authentic modernity in a writer if he ceases to respect the separation of genres" (2000: 194). In the same line of thinking, David Duff asserts that "if the death of the author has been a familiar refrain of modern literary theory, so too has the dissolution of genres" (2000: 1).

The fact that modern genre theory is no longer prescriptive but descriptive, as René Wellek and Austin Warren remarked in their *Theory of Literature* (1942), might lie behind the reason why some postmodernist authors resort to the mixing of genres. They contend that modern genre theory "doesn't prescribe rules to authors"; on the contrary, "it supposes that traditional kinds may be 'mixed' and produce a new kind" (1984: 235). On the other hand, insistence on the topic of the death of the novel might have triggered fictional writers to pursue new ways for the novel to regain its status as the prevailing literary genre in western literature. Some postmodernist novels can, indeed, be understood as a reaction to this concern as well as an enactment of Bakhtin's contentions, namely that the novel is "plasticity itself" as well as an "ever questing, ever examining" literary form. (1998: 39).

Similarly, Foucault's definition of writing seems to have been taken up by some contemporary novelists who, I believe, regard writing as "a game that inevitably moves beyond its own rules and finally leaves them behind" (1980: 116). Nevertheless,

postmodernist genre hybridisation represents more than a mere sign of the natural evolution of genres. It is a fact that these are constantly changing and that each literary period favours a certain genre as the dominant literary form. Yet, the literary innovation carried out by contemporary authors, in what concerns genre theory, is part of a broader postmodern trend that self-consciously attempts to overthrow fixed literary categories; it is one of the many resources authors employ to foster their disdain for authority, in this case the literary canon, and fixed categories. With their mixing of genres, novels like D. M. Thomas's *The White Hotel* (1981) and A. S. Byatt's *Possession: A Romance* (1990), aim at displaying this trend in fictional terms. Among other things, novelists who turn to the device of genre hybridisation seek to frustrate the readers', critics' and scholars' "horizons of expectation" (Todorov, 2000: 199). Therefore, it is my belief that the blending of genres is yet another strategy to foreground the subversive nature of postmodernist fiction.

Although postmodernist writers did not create some of the above-mentioned strategies, such strategies are deemed postmodernist features given the number of novels that display them. For instance, novels such as Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (1604-15) and Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (1759-67) exhibit what one would nowadays call postmodernist traits. These canonical novels can surely be considered forerunners of postmodernist fiction due to their use of metafictional digressions and parodic rewriting – of chilvalric romance, the case of *Don Quixote*, and of the conventions of narrative construction, as with *Tristram Shandy*[20]. Moreover, Sterne's novel constantly frustrates narrative coherence by means of a digressive presentation of events and of a series of innovative resources – black pages, blank pages, missing chapters, breaking-off of sentences, footnotes, asterisks and

dashes, etc. – that not only draw attention to the text's fictiveness but also to the failure of language to faithfully represent the complexity of human experience.

Given that "postmodern literature obsessively revisits and rereads its own past" (Currie, 1998: 54), the experimental resources used by the precursors of postmodernism have been clearly taken up by contemporary writers to playfully and self-consciously foreground the discursive nature of both the world and art. A similar stance is put forth in Mepham's claim that

> Textual strategies of foregrounding and reframing and so on are calculated to engage the reader in a play of plural interpretations, so that the reader's sense of a stable, reliable (fictional) world is disturbed (1991: 150).

Analysed from this perspective, neither postmodernism nor postmodernist fiction can be accused, as Eagleton maintains, of installing a "paralysing scepticism" (1997: 27). On the contrary, postmodernist fiction has been making it clear that the novel is not a dying genre; it is as alive as it was in previous literary periods, finding new ways, both in form and content, to make sense of the world.

The disintegration of selfhood, the positioning of the self in relation to historical progress and the elusive nature of knowledge, which can be found, for example, in novels such as D. M. Thomas's *The White Hotel*, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) or John Fowles's *A Maggot* (1985), are transhistorical concerns and *topoi* that have acquired considerable weight in contemporary fiction. Therefore, the view that postmodernism and postmodernist fiction amount to the product of a frivolous culture, shared by scholars like Fredric Jameson, Jean Baudrillard and Terry Eagleton, seems to me inaccurate. The latter, for example, in spite of acknowledging that "postmodernist culture has produced … a rich, bold, exhilarating body of work", adds that "it has also generated more than its share of execrable kitsch" (1997: 27), as if all postmodernist works had forcibly to result in classic literary pieces and, consequently,

enter the canon. Another detrimental assessment of postmodernist culture is Baudrillard's, whose stress on "the cultural importance of consumption" seems to be an overstatement, insofar as "the pole of production has [not] disappeared" and "work [has not] given way to pleasure on a global scale" (Currie, 1998: 106).

Confronted with such derogatory judgments on both postmodernism as a periodising concept and on postmodernist fiction, I am compelled to agree with Hutcheon's conclusion in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* that points to the need for a new, non-normative poetics to embrace the variety of contemporary fiction[21], inasmuch as postmodernist fictional *oeuvres* seem to meet Barthes's prerequisites for what he terms "text of bliss": the text that "imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts …, unsettles the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language" (1994: 14). In addition, the devices that were discussed in this chapter - intertextuality, parody, pastiche, metafiction, historiographic metafiction, indeterminacy, openness, decentring, plurality and irony - mirror the ontological uncertainty widely felt in the contemporary world as well as the sense of belonging to a literary and cultural continuum that cannot be denied or forgotten but, rather, that is being constantly rethought and rewritten.

1.4. – Chapter Endnotes

[1] See Randolph Quirk and Sidney Greenbaum's *A University Grammar of English*, 1993, Longman, Harlow, which includes this prefix in the category of "Time and Order" prefixes, p. 434.

[2] Fredric Jameson draws this conclusion as he noted that high modernist traits became in the 60s a cultural dominant.

[3] Another significant contribution for the clarification of these two concepts is Terry Eagleton's opening statement in *The Illusions of Postmodernism*, which reads: "The word *postmodernism* generally refers to a form of contemporary culture, whereas the term *postmodernity* alludes to a specific historical period", p. vii.

[4] Italics from the original.

[5] Italics from the original.

[6] See Tim Woods's *Beginning Postmodernism* for further information on this matter, p. 34.

[7] See Linda Hutcheon's *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* for a more detailed characterisation of postmodernism, pp. 4 and 43.

[8] See Randall Stevenson's *The British Novel since the Thirties: An Introduction* where the author provides examples of writers and novels that employed these devices, pp. 11-29.

[9] Brian McHale derives his definition of 'dominant' from Roman Jakobson's and, although he does not agree with some of Jakobson's tenets, McHale seems to subscribe to the overall notion of 'dominant' as an organising system that structures a work of art. See *Postmodernist Fiction*, p. 6.

[10] See Roland Barthes's "The Death of the Author", first published in 1968 in *Mantéla*, which set going a debate over the relevance of both the author and the reader for criticism and for the interpretation of the work of art.

[11], In *Parody*, Simon Dentith lists John Barth, Malcolm Bradbury, A. S. Byatt, Peter Carey, Umberto Eco, John Fowles, Alasdair Gray and David Lodge, among the contemporary authors who have used parody in their novels, p. 164. In my opinion, the list could be more extensive.

[12] See Ansgar Nünning's "The Creative Role of Parody in Transforming Literature and Culture: An Outline of a Functionalist Approach to Postmodern Parody" for a more detailed characterisation of the functions the author ascribes to parody, pp. 127-30.

[13] Quoted in Graham Allen's *Intertextuality*, p. 184.

[14] Among the most influential works figure Foucault's *The Order of Things* (1966) and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), Derrida's *Of Grammatology* (1967) and Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979).

[15] In this respect, David Cowart's assertion in *History and the Contemporary Novel* that "history is always fictive, and literature is often historical" sums up the similarities between both modes of representation, p. 26.

[16] McHale answers this question in *Postmodernist Fiction*, resorting to Stanley Elkin and Günther Grass for whom official history was the history of the winners and of the male sex, respectively, p. 90.

[17] In *History and the Contemporary Novel*, Cowart includes in the first category Marguerite Yourcenar's *Memoirs of Hadrian* and Norman Mailer's *Ancient Nights*; in the second, George Orwell's *1984* and Walter Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz*; in the third, Thomas Pynchon's *V* and *Gravity's Rainbow*, D. M. Thomas's *The White Hotel* and Timothy Findley's *Famous Last Words*; and in the fourth, Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* and John Gardner's *Grendel*, pp. 9-10.

[18] In "Crossing Borders and Blurring Genres: Towards a Typology and Poetics of Postmodernist Historical Fiction in England since the 1960s", Nünning names James Farrell's *The Siege of Krishnapur* and Pat Barker's *The Century's Daughter*, as revisionist historical novels; Peter Ackroyd's novels, John Fowles's T*he French Lieutenant's Woman* and D. M. Thomas's *The White Hotel* are labelled metahistorical novels; John Fowles's *A Maggot* and Malcolm Bradbury's *The History Man* are categorised as implicit historiographic metafiction and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* as explicit historiographic metafiction, pp. 222-32.

[19] This is the case of Julian Barnes's *A History of the World in 10 and ½ Chapters* and A. S. Byatt's *Possession: A Romance*.

20 In her early study on metafiction, *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*, Hutcheon remarks that "*Tristram Shandy* [sits] alongside *Don Quixote* as the major forerunner of modern metafiction", p. 8. Similarly, in *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*, Patricia Waugh asserts that postmodernist "formal techniques seem often to have originated from novels like *Tristram Shandy* …, *Don Quixote* … or *Tom Jones*", pp. 23-4.

[21] See Hutcheon's "Conclusion" to *A Poetics* where the scholar claims that her poetics might be regarded as a problematics since it does not seek to totalise postmodernist discourse, pp. 222-31.

Chapter II

Postmodernist British Fiction

2.1. – The Rise of Postmodernist British Fiction

2.2. - D. M. Thomas as a Postmodernist Novelist

2.3. – Chapter Endnotes

2. - Chapter II – Postmodernist British Fiction

2.1. – The Rise of Postmodernist British Fiction

Despite acknowledging the importance of Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759-67) as both a cornerstone in British fiction and a major influence for postmodernist writers, in Randall Stevenson's opinion, the birth of postmodernist British fiction is to be found in the late 1930s with James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* (1939) as well as with Flann O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939)[1]. Brian McHale, however, deems Samuel Beckett's trilogy *Molloy*, *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable* (1950-2)[2] as the fictional works that mark the "transition from modernist to postmodernist poetics" (1987: 12), even though he paradoxically refers to *Finnegans Wake* in the following terms:

> Every expression belongs simultaneously to several frames of reference, none of them identifiable as the basic world of the text; … instead there is a perpetual jostling and jockeying for position among a plurality of simultaneously present (and therefore simultaneously absent) worlds (142).

From this description it seems unquestionable that Joyce's experimental novel resists interpretation, refuses to submit to a single frame of reference and, in contrast, fosters a decentred, dehierarchised view of both language and the world. It appears therefore to meet McHale's own criteria for a work to be labelled postmodern: the focus on ontological concerns[3]; actually, bearing the scholar's tenets in mind one might conclude that Joyce's groundbreaking fictional work seems to cast doubts about the existence of the real and to go well beyond the mere recording of it.

According to Stevenson, in *Finnegans Wake* "the breach between word and world is no longer a matter of doubt or negotiation, but of some certainty, even celebration" (1991: 21). In the same way, *At Swim-Two-Birds* foregrounds ontological uncertainty in that, as Stevenson observed, it "becomes a story about a man telling a story about storytelling" (22). In his line of thinking, one that I share, both Joyce's and O'Brien's novels are paradigmatic postmodernist texts because they can be read as "a prophecy of the self-reflexive foregrounding of language and fiction-making which has become a central, distinguishing characteristic of postmodernism" (22). In the wake of the afore-mentioned novels, Beckett's trilogy – *Molloy*, *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable* – further substantiates the theory that conceives words and language as an "evasive artifice" (Stevenson, 1991: 22). As a result, "language and the nature of narrative imagination become the central subjects of the trilogy" (22) and, I should add, of much of the subsequent literary production.

Joyce, O'Brien and Beckett exerted an undeniable influence on the generations that developed their literary efforts in the 1960s and 1970s, among whom figure Doris Lessing, John Fowles, B. S. Johnson, John Berger and Angela Carter. Nevertheless, the literary influences absorbed by these authors can also be found in foreign literatures and literary trends[4], particularly in South American magic realism, American postmodernism[5] and the French *nouveau roman*.

An expression first coined by Franz Roh in 1925[6], magic realism is broadly used nowadays to refer to the Latin-American fiction that emerged with the literary production of authors such as Jorge Luis Borges, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Mario Vargas Llosa and Alejo Carpentier, to name but a few. As the expression itself denotes, this literary trend promotes the mingling and juxtaposition of reality and fantasy (sometimes approaching subjective reality, the bizarre and the inexplicable on equal terms as the so-called objective reality) alongside the preference for complex and

winding narratives. Borges's *Ficciones* (1944) and Marquez's *Cien años de soledad* (1967) are undoubtedly typical examples of magic realist novels. Aslo, magic realism influenced such disparate authors as Italo Calvino – *Se una notte d'inverno un viaggiatore* (1979) – or, more recently, the 1998 Literature Nobel Prize winner José Saramago – particularly in *Memorial do Convento* (1982) and *Ensaio Sobre a Cegueira* (1995) – and, as I shall contend further on, it also cast its influence on British fiction.

American postmodernism, another major inspiration for British novelists, developed, for instance, with the works of William Burroughs – *Naked Lunch* (1959), Thomas Pynchon –*V.* (1963) and *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), John Barth – *The Sot-Weed Factor* (1960), Vladimir Nabokov – *Pale Fire* (1962), Ronald Sukenick – *The Death of the Novel and Other Stories* (1969) and Raymond Federman – *Double or Nothing* (1971). David Seed's essay "In Pursuit of the Receding Plot: Some American Postmodernists" (1991) – a title that *per se* suggests the chief characteristic of American postmodernist fiction, i. e., the gradual dissolution of the plot – delineates the concerns and narrative strategies that have replaced the telling of a good story among American fiction writers. According to Seed, they turned to "verbal and structural experimentation" so as to cope with "the enigmatic nature of the world" (36-7). These writers, he contends, "turned their back on mimetic realism" (52) by means of the creation of conspiracy paranoid atmospheres and by subverting narrative linearity.

From the French *nouveaux romanciers* came a significant set of ideological and compositional influences that together with the influences from South and North America changed the nature of British fiction. The most notable *nouveaux romanciers* were Alain Robbe-Grillet – *La jalousie* (1957) and *Dans le labyrinthe* (1959), Nathalie Sarraute – *Portrait d'un inconnu* (1948) and *Planétarium* (1959), Claude Simon – *Le vent* (1957) and *Histoire* (1967) and Michel Butor – *La bataille de Pharsale* (1969) and *La modification* (1957). These novelists were conscious that "the superannuated forms

of nineteenth-century fiction did not adequately reflect the epistemological and ontological uncertainty" (Smyth, 1991b: 56) of the postwar world. In order to unmask "the dominant ideology" (72) and simultaneously acknowledge the new status the reader had acquired in the fictional process, these novelists carried out an "assault upon the assumptions and procedures of classic realism" (55) by: *i*. encouraging "self-reflexivity" (55) in their novels; *ii*. structuring their narratives in a way that favoured "fluidity and instability" (56) in detriment of "linearity and chronology" (60); *iii*. proclaiming the "condemnation of omniscience" (56); *iv*. "privileging … interiority and the portrayal of the awakening artistic sensibility" (58); *v*. dismissing the "author as the source and guarantee of his/her discourse" (59); and *vi*. denoting an "increasing preoccupation with intertextuality" (59). Along with the undeniable influence the work of the *nouveaux romanciers* had on British fiction, one cannot fail to notice that its range was widely felt because, as Smyth remarked, "the *nouveau roman* has played a central role in the debates surrounding postmodernism" (54).

Acquainted with the new directions western fiction was taking, British writers, as Malcolm Bradbury put it, "looked back into the labyrinths of narrative to explore new or different paths" (1994: 344). The 1960s witnessed the publication of three novels that may be seen as signalling the rise of postmodernist British fiction: Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* (1962), John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969) and B. S. Johnson's *The Unfortunates* (1969).

A story about the making of a story, *The Golden Notebook* narrates, or rather enacts, Anna Wulf's search for an identity by means of writing the various facets of her existence: her life in Africa, her political life, her attempt to write her own story and her psychological collapse[7]. Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* operates within the conventions of the Victorian novel to subvert them and to reveal their inconsistencies. This narrative, however, is also famous for its narrative experimentalism. In Chapter 13,

Fowles intrudes into the diegetic level to inform the reader that the "story [he] is telling is all imagination" and that the "characters [he had created] never existed outside [his] own mind" (*FLW*: 95)[8]. Furthermore, unlike most conventional novels, the reader finds in Fowles's three distinct endings, in a clear denial of the teleological closure narrative development forces upon the text. Johnson's *The Unfortunates* constitutes a far more radical endeavour to destabilise both representation and the reading experience, as this novel comprises twenty-seven loose sheaves inside a box to be read in random order. It is not surprising, then, that Dominique Head singled out Johnson "as the central example of the 'experimental' novelist in the British postwar scene" (2002: 227).

Parallel to Johnson's experimentalism, in the 1970s John Berger's *G.* (1972) continued to perform the attempt to disrupt literary conventions by self-consciously exposing its own fictionality, as is clearly shown in the following example: "The principal protagonist was conceived four years after Garibaldi's death" (*G.*: 20)[9]. In addition to pointing to the textual origin of the character we are reading about, this passage ironically unsettles the readers' commitment towards the text: readers are constantly being reminded that they are actually reading a textual construct. Fowles's resistance to closure in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* echoes in *G.*, especially when the narrator remarks that "the writer's desire to finish is fatal to the truth. The End unifies. Unity must be established in another way" (*G.:* 77). Truth and unity in *G.* are not guaranteed by a single voice, that of the narrator, but by a convergence of voices such as Cézanne's, Pascal's, Levi-Strauss's, R. G. Collingwood's … whose texts and thoughts are borrowed and incorporated within the narrative.

The 1960s and 1970s were also decades for the revival of fantasy and of the gothic through the fictional writings of Angela Carter, whose works *The Magic Toyshop* (1967), *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* (1972) and *The Bloody Chamber* (1971) helped to restructure these genres. Strongly influenced by magic

realism, Carter's novels and short stories offered "a strategy for escaping altogether the obligation to express a male-dominated world" (Stevenson, 1991: 34) and would hold their effect in the fiction of the following decade.

Indeed, narrative fiction in the 1980s kept on exploring the narrative devices and themes put forth by the postwar generation of British writers. A decade characterised by the undisciplined growth of cities, the establishment of a multi-cultural society in Great Britain, Thatcherism and its attempt to restore the Victorian values of thriftiness and self-help, the escalating social exclusion and the endless conflicts in Ulster, the 80s provided the cultural ambience for writers to persist on improving and reworking the legacy of radical procedures inherited from previous decades.

Confronted with a grim social environment, novelists looked back to history to such an extent that Bradbury humorously noted that "the return to the past began to assume near-epidemic proportions during the decade" (1994: 404). In fact, there was an upsurge of historical fiction in the 1980s with novels such as D. M. Thomas's *The White Hotel* (1981), Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), Graham Swift's *Waterland* (1983), Peter Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor* (1985) and *Chatterton* (1987), Jeanette Winterson's *Sexing the Cherry* (1988), Julian Barnes's *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters* (1989) and Rose Tremain's *Restoration* (1989), to offer just a few examples. Yet, this return to history is not nostalgic; it aims at "making the relations of past and present narratives a matter for self-conscious literary examination" (406). This is so because as Susana Onega rightly observed in her essay "British Historiographic Metafiction in the 1980s" (1993), the above-mentioned writers "combine artistic creativity with the critical awareness provided by University trainings … and by their experience as literary critics" (50). Their intention is to show that "brought down to the level of human constructs, history, like literature, appears in principle incapable of offering ultimate answers about basic human questions" (52).

What these novels do is to try to answer the same questions the narrator of *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984) asks: "How do we seize the past? Can we ever do so?" (*FP*: 5)[10]. As can be inferred from the following passages from different postmodernist historical novels, these questions can only be answered with certain reservations:

> He – or she – knew that historians were full of bluff, and that complicated matters were best understood using zestful intuition untainted by any actual knowledge or research (*HW 10 ½ Chapters*: 39) [11].
>
> We make up a story to cover the facts we don't know or can't accept; we keep a few facts and spin a new story around them. Our panic and our pain are only eased by soothing fabulation; we call it history (*HW 10 ½ Chapters*: 39).
>
> I present to you History, the fabrication, the diversion, the reality-obscuring drama. History, and its near relative. Histrionics (*Waterland*: 46)[12].
>
> I reproduc'd the Past and filled it with such Details that it was as if I were observing it in front of me: so the Language of ancient Dayes awoke the Reality itself for, tho' I knew that it was I who composed these histories, I knew also that they were true ones (*Chatterton*: 85)[13].

The answer to the first question is that we seize the past by filling in the unknown gaps we come across, as implied in the above second and fourth excerpts. Historical knowledge, the first passage suggests, owes as much to intuition and imagination as to scientific research. Therefore, the answer to the second question remains highly disputable although I would tend to answer it affirmatively stressing, nonetheless, that history must possess some degree of fabrication and imagination.

Metafiction, however, served not only to light the debate over the validation of historical knowledge but also to playfully unearth some of the current issues regarding literary theory. Fowles's 1982 novel, *Mantissa*, provides humorous but thought-provoking insights about the novel as well as about modern fiction. Another novel about writing novels, *Mantissa* revolves around a writer's endeavours to persuade his muse that "story, character, suspense, description" are "antiquated nonsense from pre-modernist times" (*Mantissa*: 118)[14]. Demanding for more conventional writing techniques and themes, the muse complains that

> serious modern fiction has only one subject: the difficulty of writing serious modern fiction. First, it has fully accepted that it is only fiction, can only be fiction, will never be anything but fiction, and therefore has no business at all tampering with real life or reality (*Mantissa*: 117).

In the course of their opposing considerations about what form and themes a novel should contain, the characters address the theme of the death of the novel, which the strong-willed muse describes in the following terms:

> Of course the whole genre is in a mess. Death of the novel, that's a laugh. I wish to all my famous relations it was. And good riddance … It's what I loathe about this country. And America, that's even worse. At least the French are doing their best to kill the whole stupid thing off for good (*Mantissa*: 67).

Apart from the implied references to American postmodernist writers and to the *nouveaux romanciers* (which corroborate Onega's claim that postmodernist fiction writers are aware of contemporary literary movements and literary theory), Fowles's purposes in this discussion seem to be to criticise those who think that the postmodern propensity for self-reflexive fiction is synonymous with self-indulgent introspection devoid of any social, cultural and/or artistic use for the reader and for the genre itself[15].

Fowles's well-known violation of ontological barriers in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* was not an isolated destabilising stratagem in British fiction. In the 1980s several other works of fiction used the same device. Alasdair Gray's *Lanark: A Life in Four Books* (1981) also exploits the fictional effects the merging of ontologically dissimilar worlds entails. In the novel's fourth book, the meeting between Lanark and his author, Nastler, takes place; a strategy that allows Gray to employ self-reflexive digressions in his narrative. During Lanark and Nastler's conversation, the latter discloses the creative process underlying *Lanark*:

> During my first art school summer holidays I wrote chapter 12 and the mad-vision-and-murder part of chapter 29. My first hero was based on myself. I'd have preferred someone less specialized but mine were the only entrails I could lay hands upon. I worked poor Thaw to death, quite cold-bloodedly, because though based on me he was tougher and more honest, so I hated him. Also, his death gave me a chance to shift him into a wider social context. You

> are Thaw with the neurotic imagination trimmed off and built into the furniture of the world you occupy (*Lanark*: 493)[16].

Martin Amis's *Money: A Suicide Note* (1984) is yet another novel in which the author enters the fictional world and meets the main character, John Self, who, in the course of their first encounter, addresses the writer saying: "Your dad, he's a writer too, isn't he? Bet that made it easier". The answer comes immediately: "Oh, sure. It's just like taking over the family pub" (*Money*: 86)[17]. Fulfilling comic purposes rather than theorising on key concerns of contemporary literary studies, the intrusion of the author into his novel's diegetic world constitutes, nevertheless, a way of unsettling the conventions of realism.

Such conventions, as has already been referred, are constantly undermined in postmodernist fiction. The re-emergence of fantasy and of the gothic set in motion by Angela Carter went on in the 80s with Carter herself – *Nights at the Circus*, (1984), Ian Banks – *The Wasp Factory* (1984) and *Walking on Glass* (1985), Peter Ackroyd – *Hawksmoor* (1985) and Patrick McGrath – *The Grotesque* (1989). The plethora of novels that were attempting to revive the gothic tradition induced Bradbury to admit that "gothic violence, the uncanny, the fantastic and the grotesque were back" (1994: 412), which reflects postmodern fondness for so-called minor literary genres. Carter's *Nights at the Circus*, for example, employs fantastic elements (Fevvers, the protagonist, claims to have genuine wings and to be able to fly) with contemporary concerns on how women are perceived by the male gaze. Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor*, on the other hand, combines the gothic with the detective novel and undermines both by juxtaposing two parallel narratives (one set in the eighteenth century, the other in the twentieth) that merge inexplicably at the end of the novel.

Apart from these trends in postmodernist British fiction, the 1980s also witnessed the development of what Bradbury called "a new spirit of ethnic and stylistic

multiculturalism" (1994: 422). A new generation of novelists from different origins, for example Timothy Mo, Kazuo Ishiguro, V. S. Naipaul, Anita Desai, Ben Okri, Vikram Seth and Salman Rushdie, "married British with other kinds of fiction" (245), thus giving voice to post-colonial cultures[18]. The latter's *Midnight's Children* (1981) has long been acknowledged as an illustrative case of postcolonial literature, that is, the literature written in English from authors who either come from a Commonwealth country or descend from parents who were formerly colonised by Great Britain. In fact, Rushdie's novel deploys the themes frequently ascribed to this literary trend, namely the binaries identity/difference, integration/rootlessness, purity/hybridism, history/fable … In these respects, one of the characters provides insightful thoughts in what regards the feeling of simultaneously belonging and not belonging to a certain cultural heritage. As he witnesses one of Gandhi's examples of peaceful resistance, in this case a massive standstill, one of the characters of *Midnight's Children*, Dr Aziz

> notices a soldierly young man in the street, and thinks – the Indians have fought for the British; so many of them have seen the world by now, and been tainted by Abroad. They will not easily go back to the old world (*MC*: 33)[19].

The soldiers who were contaminated by western, and especially British, cultural patterns stand for the millions of colonised people who, on the verge of independence, are sceptical about the forthcoming transformations.

What novels like Rushdie's strive to achieve is "new, self-conscious kinds of identity from a fragmentary vision" (Head, 2002: 179). Accordingly, the narrator of *Midnight's Children*, Saleem Sinai, who was meaningfully born "at the precise instant of India's arrival at independence" and so "had been mysteriously hand-cuffed to history" (*MC*: 9), narrates his country's gradual transition from a colonised to an independent nation, placing the emphasis not on the construction of another grand narrative but on the recording of an overabundance of stories, "an excess of intertwined lives events miracles places rumours, so dense a commingling of the improbable and the

mundane!" (*MC*: 9). Remaining as a paradigmatic case of post-colonial literature, this novel, in the vein of many others that are commonly included within the reach of this literary trend, seeks to offer an alternative rendering of historical events.

The British literary scene in the 1980s translates Phillip's conclusion in Ackroyd's *Chatterton*: that "there were only a limited number of plots in the world (reality was finite, after all) and no doubt it was inevitable that they would be reproduced in a variety of contexts" (*Chatterton*: 70). Therefore, the mixing of genres as well as the intertextual references (parody, pastiche, direct quotation) displayed by novels such as Thomas's *The White Hotel* (1981), Ackroyd's *The Great Fire of London* (1982), or Fowles's *A Maggot* (1985) are part of a more comprehensive trend in western literature that aims at achieving a "spirit of literary replenishment" (Bradbury, 1994: 412).

The changing environment for fiction pioneered by Joyce, O'Brien and Beckett and carried out by the following generations of writers still resonates in the literary production of the 1990s, as can be deduced from the reading of novels such as A. S. Byatt's *Possession: A Romance* (1990), Jeanette Winterson's *Written on the Body* (1992), David Lodge's *Therapy* (1995), Rose Tremain's *Music and Silence* (1999) or even Jake Arnott's *The Long Firm* (1999). Furthermore, recent critically acclaimed novels, like Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2002), Hari Kunzru's *The Impressionist* (2002) and Yann Martel's *Life of Pi* (2002) assert the vitality of postmodernist British fiction. Whether by trying to "enlarge perceptions of 'Britishness'" (Head, 2002: 182), as in the case of both Kunzru and Martel's narratives, or by overtly claiming the fictive status of contemporary narratives – "Plots too were like rusted machinery whose wheels would no longer turn" (*Atonement*: 281)[20] – these novels keep going the postmodernist primary themes and narrative devices.

2.2. - D. M. Thomas as a Postmodernist Novelist

Having started his career as a poet and translator of Russian literature, D. M. Thomas turned to writing fiction in the late 70s. The peak of his literary career was the publication of *The White Hotel* in 1981, a novel which, as we shall see further on, gave its author both notoriety and distress. Nevertheless, one would be wrong to assume that Thomas's career as a novelist amounts to the above-mentioned best-selling novel. Before *The White Hotel*, Thomas had already published two novels – *The Flute Player* (1979) and *Birthstone* (1980) – albeit with scarce public acclaim. Although both these novels display fantastic and libidinal elements that will become recurrent features of Thomas's later work, they lack the boldness and narrative experimentalism that the author's subsequent narratives evidence. In Richard Cross's opinion, *Birthstone* "anticipates *The White Hotel* chiefly in its stress on psychological disturbance" (1992: 20); the novel's protagonist suffers from split personality and is alternately referred to as Jo, Joanne and Joe.

From the publication of *The White Hotel* onwards, Thomas's fiction displays thematic and formal elements that place him within the general label of "postmodernist author". His subsequent novels kept on exploring the postmodernist traits he had previously tackled in *The White Hotel*, namely the return to history, narrative heterogeneity and narrative self-consciousness.

2.2.1. - The Return to History

In an interview for *The European English Messenger* Thomas stated that he was "intensely preoccupied with the history of our [twentieth] century" and that most of his novels were "just explorations of history, of modern history" (Casedemont, 1994: 8). In fact, *The White Hotel* was only the first of a series of novels where Thomas handled one of the most traumatic events of the twentieth century – the Holocaust.

Theodor Adorno's statement that "after Auschwitz to write poetry is barbaric" coupled with Elie Wiesel's assertion that "by definition Auschwitz denies art and places itself beyond language"[21] installed moral constraints in what concerns representing the Holocaust in literature. Writers who attempted to write what today is known as "Holocaust Fiction" have come across a set of moral questions that, instead of demotivating them, compelled them to seek for innovative forms to approach the theme without being disrespectful towards the victims. Thus, the act of fictionalising the *Shoah* – the Holocaust – has always been haunted by dilemmas that can briefly be summarised in the following question: Is it possible to render in narrative form, i. e., aestheticise, the physical and mental agony of Holocaust victims and survivors without betraying the memory of those who actually endured such pain?

Several issues arise from this question. First and foremost, that which concerns the function of narrative and, ultimately, of literature. In Daniel Schwarz's words,

> One way we use our narrative is to step back from our needs, joys, and fears and try to give stability to self by finding structures out of which to create order and meaning. What Holocaust narratives do is rescue Jews from viewing anonymous photographs of victims – victims deprived of their humanity and reduced to the way the Nazis wanted to remember them – and to restore to them human dignity. It allows them the dignity of voice (2000: 13).

Owing to the fact that narrative engenders a cathartic effect both on the one who writes and on the one who reads, Holocaust narratives satisfy the need to come to terms with an experience which resulted in the splitting of the self. That is to say that when confronted with the possibility of annihilation such as the one Jews found in concentration camps, human beings are forced to look deep into the recesses of the human nature to find utter despair and horror. Consequently, if being human means to kill and torture other people, then the whole concept loses its relevance and the individual is left with the disintegration of his own selfhood alongside the void that results from the disbelief in the creative forces of the self.

Another issue that springs from the above question is that of the effect narrative has over what it seeks to represent. In other words, if one draws "upon literary skills" to represent a barbaric event, one is indirectly "rendering it familiar and in some sense tolerable, and thereby shearing away part of the horror" (Howe, 1988: 180). What is implicit in this utterance is the impossibility of language to fully convey human experiences, which, apparently, substantiates Adorno's and Wiesel's claims. Finally, if the Holocaust cannot be aestheticised, as the aforementioned theoreticians propose, then only historical accounts, memoirs and journals such as Wiesel's *Night* (1954) and Anne Frank's *Diary of a Young Girl* (1952) would count as legitimate representations of the Holocaust. However, whether a text is history, memoir or journal it still depends on language – words – to represent reality. As has already been shown in Chapter I (p. 26), language is an unstable system of signs and engenders a multiplicity of interpretations in different interlocutors. In addition, the historian, the memoirist and the diarist do nothing but rely on memory and narrative concatenation in order to make sense of what they try to record. It is my belief, therefore, that neither historical accounts nor memoirs and journals should be considered as more appropriate to represent the Holocaust since these modes of recording the past cannot but provide a partial view of the event.

Furthermore, the fact that memoirs and journals resort to subjective and often unreliable first-person narrators makes any rendering of this historical period a problematic one.

From what has been put forth, both Adorno's and Wiesel's statements seem radical, given that to remain silent is to partake in the Nazi designs to "erase all traces of a people and to deprive the Jews of their private selves" (Schwarz, 2000: 23). Holocaust fiction keeps on reminding us that it is possible to "recall and narrate the unspeakable" (12) and that even if the dead cannot be brought back to life, it is both "the word and the image [that] have rescued the Holocaust from oblivion" (23).

Ararat (1983), Thomas's narrative after *The White Hotel*, initiates a quintet of novels – *Russian Nights* –, which Thomas in the "Author's Note" of *Swallow* (1984) labelled as 'improvisational novels', and "explores the chaotic lives of Soviet poets against a background of an earlier genocide, that of the Armenians"[22]. Victor Surkov, an awarded Russian poet, meets a former soldier, Finn, in a cruise voyage. After being inquired about which book he is reading, Surkov hands his book to Finn who mutters "Ah! … Babi Yar … I was there" (*Ararat*: 36)[23].

Nevertheless, more than a soldier, Finn, who is on his way to deliver a speech at the United Nations, seems to be an angel of death, inasmuch as he not only witnessed but also took part in some of the most horrifying events of the twentieth century: the deportation of the Armenians from Turkey in 1915 and their ensuing genocide, and the Babi Yar massacre during the Holocaust in 1941. In one of the campaigns to deport the Armenians from Turkey Finn recounts that

> We rounded up all the male villagers from around Moush on 10 July: herded them into concentration camps and bayoneted them. The women and children we drove into large wooden sheds and set fire to them. Of the 60,000 Armenians who had been living in Moush, very few survived (*Ararat*: 37).

Similar accounts are presented sometimes in even more explicitly violent terms. Yet, what is disturbing in the six pages where Finn relates the horrors in which he has taken part is the answer to Surkov's question "When did you retire?"

> The old man sighed. "I've never truly retired. One becomes indispensable. Or at least one thinks one does. Actually nobody is indispensable; there is always someone ready to step into your shoes" (*Ararat*: 42).

This utterance seems to imply that events such as these may occur once again and that they do not constitute unprecedented events in western history nor "an occurrence outside of history, a sort of diabolic visitation" (Howe, 1988: 175). Resonating the postmodern conception of history as cyclical rather than progressively evolving in response to human belief in progress, the novel appears to refuse to exempt the perpetrators of genocides from the responsibility of their deeds.

In his 1993 novel, *Pictures at an Exhibition*, Thomas resumes the theme of the Holocaust, this time giving it as much prominence as he had done in *The White Hotel*. Set partly in 1940s Auschwitz and early 1990s England, the novel aims at questioning the clear-cut relationship between executioners and their victims. Chaim Galewski, a Czech Jew doctor, who is the narrator of the Auschwitz narrative, is a collaborator with the Nazis and helps one of them, Dr Lorenz, to overcome, by means of psychoanalysis, "the headaches as well as the dreams [that] were becoming so intolerable" (*Pictures*: 4)[24]. Besides healing Dr Lorenz, Galewski helped him in the selection of those who were to be sent to the gas chambers:

> The skin stretched tight over their bones. Their heads looked unnaturally large, their eyes sunk deep, luminous. Sores all over them. I got them all into a line.
> Dr Lorenz, a white coat over his uniform, stood on a wooden box; then gestured with his stick. The naked men had to run past him. It was always an absurd, grotesque sight. Running skeletons, pumping their arms, trying to stick out their chests as if they were Olympic sprinters. Many of them had swollen swinging testicles which bounced as they tried to run (*Pictures*: 35).

What is striking in this description is the absence of compassion on the part of a narrator who, one should not forget, is also a Jew. Furthermore, the narrator looks at the prisoners not as if they were living beings but as skeletons; lifeless bodies in all their pathetic and grotesque dimensions.

Apart from categorically asserting that he "could understand, only too easily, how a decent, civilised couple like Dr and Frau Lorenz could find most of [his] race unspeakable" (27), the narrator's empathy with Dr Lorenz's macabre mission is manifest, for example, in this extract:

> Still he was unfailingly courteous at the ramp … Assisting old ladies with a hand under their elbow; patting a child on the head, saying 'You'll be okay; it's nice where you're going.' And still climbing out of the Red Cross truck, entering the building where the Hungarian Jews were undressing before their shower, he would say to this or that person, 'I'm sorry it's so crowded; please remember your peg-number so you can find your clothes again' …
> And I understood him; understood his sense of mission, his conviction that this was for the greater good of humanity. We were on opposing sides, but I guess I might do the same (*Pictures*: 247-8).

Coming to this point, the reader realises that *Pictures at an Exhibition* does not attempt to be a conventional Holocaust narrative with its uncompromising and unambiguous cleavage between good and evil. Indeed, to quote Rüdiger Kunow, "the text suggests that the identities of victimizer and victim may not be so categorically apart, after all" (1997: 266).

In the 1990s English narrative, the reader finds Oscar and Myra Jakobson and several other characters, their relatives and friends, trying to come to terms with their past as Holocaust survivors. As Chaim Galewski in the Auschwitz section, Oscar is a psychoanalyst, who fails to help his wife, whose memories make her plunge into severe depression and lead her to commit multiple murder: she kills her guests at a Christmas-eve party. Echoing Oscar's words, "We are all displaced, everyone who was touched in any way by Nazism" (*Pictures*: 204), the couple commits suicide a few days later, unable to stabilise their selves. In his suicide note Oscar confesses that

> We all have lived long enough in this world. I am only anticipating death by a few weeks or months. Of course there will be some who will think our decision proves that Wiesenthal is right. (I'm sure you will have seen the newspaper reports or rather rumour-peddling.) I've no idea why people think KGB documents from the Baltic States are more reliable than released CIA documents! Do they think my mother, a shrewd down-to-earth Birmingham lady, didn't recognise her own son! I can't believe my cousin, Chaim Galewski, was a collaborator. And in any case, I am not him! (*Pictures*: 243).

In spite of these assertions, the mystery over the true identity of Oscar, the motivations for his wife to commit murder and the couple's suicide remain unresolved. It is clear that Thomas's intentions can be found in Oscar's exclamation "Ach! So much lost, so much lost! Beloved, vivid faces – vanished" (207) but, besides lamenting the loss of human lives, *Pictures at an Exhibition* also seeks to challenge the relationship between language and the unspeakable events it tries to mirror. When forced to recall disturbing episodes of their past, characters often speak with difficulty or even opt for silence, as in the following excerpts:

> 'And your wife. I bet she was pretty.'
> In a *strangled voice* I *whispered* yes. (*Pictures*: 7)
>
> It [Edvard Munch's "The Scream"] made them all *gaze in silence*; *uncomfortable*. (*Pictures*: 158)[25]

Words disturb because they mitigate painful memories. Since "the Holocaust experience cries out for communication" (Sauerberg, 1991: 102), no matter how embarrassing it may be[26], the Holocaust cannot die away "into nothing", but on the contrary, must be "repeated over and over again" (*Pictures*: 250). The attainment of this end, however, is ethically constrained. No other historical period in the history of mankind has posed such a great number of problems for novelists who, fearing that their rendering of this material might make it acceptable, recurrently prefer to "stick quite closely … to authentic material" (Sauerberg, 1991: 105). The "authentic" material (if there is any "authentic" account of the past) that Thomas made use of in his novel was *Those Were the Days: The Holocaust through the Eyes of the Perpetrators and*

Bystanders (1988) by Ernst Klee, Willi Dressen and Volker Riess[27]. This material comprises the third section of *Pictures at an Exhibition*, "Six Studies for Compassion", which contains (*verbatim*) six letters/reports by German officers who witnessed the massacre of orphaned Jewish children in the summer of 1941. "Six Studies for Compassion", the most explicitly violent section in the novel, denies the indirect account of a fictional narrator and favours the direct narration of those who carried out the killing.

The purpose, it seems to me, is not only to refrain from providing an aesthetic reproduction of the episode, thus not betraying the victims' memories, but also to substantiate the theory that regards historical documents as constructs that *per se* do not constitute the sole authority when one wants to recapture an historical period. Thus, Thomas does not fictionalise the massacre of the Jewish children; he incorporates eyewitness accounts into his novel, separating them from his fictional material but keeping a dialogic connection between the flesh and blood beings who perished and the imaginary characters he devised to convey his personal view of this epoch.

Eating Pavlova (1994), Sigmund Freud's fictionalised memoirs, features the Austrian psychoanalyst, who is not only dying in Hampstead, England, but also suffering intense pains and consequently spends long periods of time under the influence of drugs. In these drowsy moments, Freud has several dreams that cover and anticipate[28] some of the key episodes of twentieth-century history: *i*. the rise of Nazism in Germany – "Storm-troopers and motor-cyclists, all in black uniforms with the symbol of the Swastika, surround one tank in which rides a proud general" (*Eating*: 211-2); *ii*. the decimation of the Jews and, particularly, of Freud's sisters in gas chambers – "They wait for the warm water to drench them, but instead they are gasping for breath, clawing at their throats" (216); *iii*. the dropping of the Atomic Bomb in Japan – "There is a bright light … all round is a city flattened to the ground. Into the sky rises a cloud,

which forms a mushroom shape" (219); *iv*. the atmosphere of sexual promiscuity that led to the spreading of AIDS among the American homosexual community – "A bath-house, however, with no sinister overtones, but rather considerable comfort and luxury. Slim and muscular men rub each other's flesh" (249); and *v*. the emergence of feminism – "The placard I catch sight of bears the seemingly nonsensical words: LET'S HAVE SOME HERSTORY FOR A CHANGE" (259). A mixture of past, present and future, in *Eating Pavlova* history does not unfold in a linear, chronological sequence: it moves forwards and backwards following Freud's state of mind, thus putting into question any empiricist or positivist epistemology.

In his 1992 novel, *Flying in to Love*, Thomas's handling of history is more explicitly brought to light. Combining dream and history, in this case John Fitzgerald Kennedy's assassination or, as a psychologist in the novel puts it, the dreams that "are dreamt about Kennedy's assassination" (*Flying*: 3)[29], the novel seems to enact the assumption that there is always more in the world than we can ever know. In this particular point, Robert Frost's verses that serve as one of the epigraphs – "We dance round in a ring and suppose, / But the secret sits in the middle and knows" – suggest that reconstituting or reproducing reality owes more to supposition than to effective understanding. Narrative focus, however, lies as much on Kennedy's final days as on the way his murder affected the life of Sister Agnes, a teacher who throughout the years tries to keep the President's memory alive and to understand how "she had … entered history herself" (165).

In fact, *Flying in to Love* conveys several stances regarding historiography that can be said to meet the postmodernist concerns exposed in my first chapter (pp. 25-31). At the beginning of the novel, the narrator states that "history is a kind of dream" and that like a dream it "can begin anywhere" (3)[30]. Apart from directing our reading, these assertions also impart the belief that history amounts to a series of subjective

discontinuities instead of a coherent impartial set of events. Furthermore, as one of the characters declares, "all we have … are some remnants of history that have casually escaped the shipwreck of time" (99). In these remains of the past historians "discover … a coherence" (165) that, consequently, makes history an assemblage of interpretations liable to cultural and ideological bias. Finally, the fact that in the postmodern era local histories have gained considerable significance in detriment of an all-inclusive history is also openly displayed, for example, in the contention that "history was what happened to you" (165) as well as in the following speculations:

> What if there was no universal 'plot'? If pure chance had called forth the Big Bang … It would explain the Holocaust; and would explain on a humble personal level why her sister had been deserted by her husband in her fifties, and why her sons had a drug problem and HIV (*Flying*: 165).

Sister Agnes's thoughts point to the fact that there may be no transcendental design lying behind the movements of history but that history may well be driven haphazardly.

Sister Agnes is one of the many characters in Thomas's novels that at some point in their lives find themselves helplessly caught in a chain of events they cannot understand but, eventually, have to come to terms with. Painful as it may be, these characters are forced to readjust their selves to a new world order and throughout that process they speculate on their positioning and role in historical change as well as on the very nature of that change.

2.2.2. – Narrative Heterogeneity

Apart from the historical figures that Thomas frequently draws into his novels' fictional worlds[31], most of his characters are individuals who have not done anything

extraordinary but who find themselves tangled up in the web of history. Echoing Linda Hutcheon's contention[32], Thomas's fiction evinces the contemporary concern with giving voice to the "ex-centrics", i. e., those who do not make it into history books but who make it into novels. This is the case of Dr Lorenz and Chaim Galewski, and of Oscar and Myra Jakobson in *Pictures at an Exhibition*, unknown figures whose lives serve to approach a crucial moment of twentieth-century history, as well as of Sister Agnes, in *Flying in to Love*, whose life converged with an enigmatic event in recent history the author tries to revisit: Kennedy's assassination.

This privileging of those who are left at the margins of history is indeed a recurrent feature of Thomas's fiction. In *Charlotte* (2000), the author embraces the theme of female social and sexual liberation by means of revisiting Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847). Thomas's novel, however, offers a different account of Jane Eyre's marriage to Mr Rochester. Brontë's Jane blissfully claimed that

> I hold myself supremely blest – blest beyond what language can express; because I am my husband's life as fully as he is mine. No woman was ever nearer to her mate than I am: ever more absolutely bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh (*Jane Eyre*: 445-6)[33].

Unlike this idyllic portrayal of marital life, Thomas narrates in *Charlotte* an unhappy, because unconsummated, marriage that Jane did not question, owing to her inexperience. Upon consulting a friend on account of still not having given birth, Jane learns the fundamentals of husband/wife relationships and decides to confront her husband on the subject. At this point, humiliated with his wife's discovery Mr Rochester runs away and breaks his neck in a fall from his horse. Decided to learn more about her dead husband's past, Jane finds out that a boy had been born to the first Mrs Rochester (Brontë's mad woman in the attic) in Martinique. Convinced that "finding [her husband's] son would bring [him] alive to [her] again" (*Charlotte*: 78)[34], Jane decides to sail to Martinique where she finds out Mr Rochester's son, marries him and

finally, before dying of a tropical disease, "was able to experience in full the passion that [her first husband] could not provide her" (199). What apparently is at stake in this novel is women's gradual acquisition of a voice that enabled them to express their most intimate desires free from gender constraints.

Parallel to Jane's nineteenth-century story, the reader is presented with a twentieth-century narrative in which an English married teacher and academic, Miranda Stevenson, under the name of Charlotte Brontë, books into a hotel in Martinique to deliver a conference on the author of *Jane Eyre*. The subsequent four chapters (from Chapter 6 to Chapter 10) unfold Miranda's sexual meetings with several waiters, drivers and also with a fellow local teacher. By virtue of the juxtaposition of these two narratives, Thomas is able to confront the past, when women were sexually repressed, with the present-day scene, which, to a certain extent, released women from "that decorum and conventionality which cut off [their] breathing like a Victorian corset" (139).

The author's handling of postmodern pluralism is not restricted to conferring a voice to those who felt coerced to remain silent. Thomas's celebration of plurality is also felt on the narrative level since his novels exhibit a plurality of voices alongside a proliferation of discourses that make his fiction complicit with the resistance to notions of absolute truth and authority. If the story of *Charlotte* is relatively easy to recount, one should not take it for granted that his narrative techniques favour story over plot. Conversely, Thomas's body of fictional works frequently manifests a puzzling and winding unfolding of events. More often that not, his novels develop in discontinuous, albeit not unrelated, sections.

A paradigmatic case, besides *The White Hotel* as will be examined in Chapter III, is *Pictures at an Exhibition* which is composed of nine sections with dissimilar narrative voices: "Death and the Maiden" (pp. 1-69) is told by a witness narrator;

"Jealousy" (pp. 73-127) also resorts to this sort of narrator but, in this case, the reader is confronted with a polyphony of discourses as the voices of patients alternate with that of the analyst; "Six Studies for Compassion" (pp. 131-43) shares the heterogeneity of the previous section, given that it refers to the six letters/reports that tell of the massacre of the Jewish children; "The Lonely One" (pp.147-88) adopts the perspective of an impersonal narrator; "Scream" (pp. 191-244) constitutes a series of letters exchanged between the main characters; "Madonna" (pp. 247-59) resumes the narrative of the first section; "Patterns of an Observed Disturbance" (pp. 263-4) parodies the voice of a literary reviewer; "The Kiss" (pp. 267-74) consists of a soliloquy from a patient undergoing therapy; and finally "Consolation" (p. 277), the shortest section in the novel (it contains only a four-line paragraph), resumes the impersonal narration. Together with the fact that these sections have distinct time settings – the 1940s in the cases of "Death and the Maiden", "Six Studies for Compassion" and "Madonna" and the 1990s in the remaining sections – the narrative heterogeneity the novel puts on display renders the search for meaning a difficult undertaking.

Another illustrative example of Thomas's fictional universe is the quintet of novels *Russian Nights*: *Ararat* (1983), *Swallow* (1984), *Sphinx* (1986), *Summit* (1987) and *Lying Together* (1990). The author's writing techniques (fragmented narrative, random presentation of time, unmarked voice shifts, alternation of past and present), the transition of characters from one novel to another, the intentional mixing up of characters' names (namely, Rezanov/Rozanov and Sparsky/Charski) and the utter disrespect for fictional boundaries (prose sections evolve into narrative verse or dramatic texts) make the understanding of *Russian Nights* a process of reading backwards as we move forwards (as will be seen, *The White Hotel* installs an identical process), of reassessing already known material and of reconstituting, as far as the text allows us, narrative coherence. Still, regardless of readers' commitment to unravel the

labyrinthine structure of the quintet of novels, *Russian Nights* will remain as an endeavour to show that textual meaning lies not in the text itself but in the various voices (of previous texts or authors) that converge in it as well as in the reader, whose search for meaning is what enables the text to signify.

Since the publication of *The White Hotel*, Thomas's novels turned to a combination of different genres (with the exceptions of *Summit* and *Flying in to Love*). Hence, in *Russian Nights*, the reader is offered narrative verse, autobiography, drama and epistolary narrative. In *Charlotte*, one can also note the presence of features of the diary and epistolary narratives. Finally, *Pictures at an Exhibition* displays sections in the epistolary mode ("Six Studies for Compassion" and "Scream") and in the usually non-literary genre of book review ("Patterns of an Observed Disturbance").

Intertextuality is yet another central narrative device in Thomas's creative process. His quintet of novels has Alexander Pushkin as a major literary influence, and more particularly Pushkin's unfinished narrative, *Egyptian Nights*. *Ararat*, for instance, includes Thomas's own translation of an excerpt from Pushkin's work, which is then developed in the narrative. As the writer keeps on reminding us in each novel's "Author's Note" the quintet was conceived as a tribute to the Russian writer, whose *Egyptian Nights* elaborates on the theme of improvisation. It is this theme that Thomas also approaches in *Russian Nights*, relating it to matters of authorship and originality. His admiration for Pushkin, however, is part of a wider passion for Russian culture and literature. The Russian poet Anna Akhmatova and Nareg, a classic Armenian poet, are also quoted in *Swallow* and *Ararat*, respectively.

Besides Russian literature, Thomas's fiction also evinces a dialogic relationship with British literary tradition. Henry Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885), for instance, is included and revised in *Swallow*. In *Charlotte*, Chapter 38 of Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is incorporated into the narrative, without it being graphologically signalled to the

reader. Apparently, the author relies on his readers' proficient knowledge of English literature and, more specifically, of this text to comprehend his parodic rewriting of this canonical novel.

Thomas's intertextual practices are not restricted to verbal texts; non-verbal forms of aesthetic representation, like painting and music, are also drawn into his fictional works. *Pictures at an Exhibition* has its nine sections entitled after paintings from the Norwegian artist Edvard Munch, whose work portrays human decay and suffering. In fact, the deformed grotesque figures Munch represented, especially in his most notorious painting, "The Scream", are sometimes said to prefigure the Holocaust. The two main characters of the Auschwitz sections, Chaim Galewski and Dr Lorenz, are music lovers and when the two meet for the first time, the latter is listening to *Tristan und Isolde* (1854) by Richard Wagner, a composer whose anti-Semitism is well-known. As the narrative proceeds and it becomes clear that the writer's purpose is to rethink the relationship between the Jews and the Nazis, other musical references appear, namely *Der Tod und das Mädchen* (1817) by Franz Schubert, *Judas Maccabaeus* (1747) and *Messiah* (1742) by Georg Frideric Handel. The beauty of these musical pieces forces the narrator to admit that he "could see how difficult it was to eradicate all Jewry from German life" (*Pictures:* 56). By juxtaposing a composer who represents art at the service of racial prejudice with other composers who were themselves the victims of such prejudices, Thomas forces his readers to think about the moral responsibilities of representation, be it literature, painting or music.

Therefore, one can infer that Thomas's narrative procedures corroborate Hutcheon's assertion that "the postmodern impulse is not to seek total vision" (1999: 48) but if any absolute perception or truth is to be unveiled it will certainly be placed in the "local, the limited, the temporary [and/or] the provisional" (43) and, I should add, in the dialogic relationship with other voices, texts and artistic forms.

2.2.3. – Narrative Self-Consciousness

Writing in an age that fosters all kinds of self-consciousness (in cinema, painting, architecture…), Thomas also deploys in his fiction the processes upon which narrative construction is based. Metafiction, the laying bare of the artifices that stand at the foundations of aesthetic representation, is used in his novels to reflect on the limits of aesthetic representation, to question the boundaries between fact and fiction and to debate the notion of 'truth' both in fiction and in the world.

The first of these topics is brought to light in *Charlotte*, in which the narrator of the nineteenth-century section remarks that in novels, particularly in Victorian novels, "the pen falters just at the point where, perhaps, the most interesting narrative begins: *after* the wedding ceremony" (*Charlotte*: 21). In addition to foregrounding the author's purpose in this novel (to take as a starting point Jane's marriage and reflect on Victorian sexual repression), this excerpt makes it clear for the reader that the act of narrating entails an arbitrary selection of events. Expanding on this theme, the narrator ironically adds that

> No novel, whether a virile, rumbustious concoction by Mr Fielding, an urbane social comedy by Miss Austen or – dare I say it? – a gloomy, muffled romance by one of the Miss Brontës, can be more than a feeble echo of what actually occurs to us (*Charlotte*: 43).

In the above excerpt, the narrator invites the reader to question the belief that Victorian realist novels depicted reality. Irrespective of all the artifices and "transparency of realistic language" (Currie, 1998: 62), these novels represent, mediate reality rather than depict it.

Ararat, the first novel that forms the quintet *Russian Nights*, offers some considerations on how fact and fiction appear to be, in the light of postmodernist thought, permeable and interchangeable categories. When asked about his occupation, Surkov replies that he is a writer who has written poetry, a biography and two novels. As if to justify this erratic production, he explains:

> There's no longer a great difference between real life and fiction … But that's a feature of our age generally, don't you think? Fiction seems tame compared with reality; and people's reality is so fantastic it seems like fiction (*Ararat*: 35-6).

Taking into consideration catastrophic events such as the Holocaust or the nuclear destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, reality seems beyond language; it seems to resist any kind of representation, thus blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction. As Surkov tries to convey, in the postmodern era, anything authors can imagine is liable to be put in practice because there seems to be no limit to what our technocratic age can achieve. Yet, the indistinctness that arises when a writer does not clearly dissociate fact from fiction originates an ethical problem, especially when delicate, traumatic occurrences are at stake. Having chosen the Holocaust as subject matter in some of his novels, Thomas is well aware of such a controversy and therefore the narrator in *Sphinx* asks Barash, a Russian poet, "if he didn't think it was slightly immoral, mixing reality and fiction". The poet replies that "the trouble with most novels … was precisely that they *were* fiction" and that "one knew they weren't true" (90)[35]. From these statements one may infer that for Thomas the problem of mixing imaginary events with factual ones which, as will be examined, constitutes one the most controversial questions raised in *The White Hotel*, rests in the innate knowledge one possesses about the essence of a work of fiction: it is not reality but a make-believe world. One of the roles of the postmodernist writer, it is implied, is to expose and draw the reader's attention to the fictionality of fiction.

It has already been suggested that the debate over the notion of truth is one of primary importance for postmodernist philosophy. Whether a text is a novel, a poem, a biography or someone's memoirs it still relies on language to communicate and on the arbitrary selection of the one who writes. *Eating Pavlova*, Thomas's eleventh novel, uses the memoir genre to contest the existence of an absolute unifying truth. The narrative instance responsible for the unravelling of events, a dying Freud, confesses to have "sometimes fictionalised" (*Eating*: 193). This unmistakable declaration of unreliability is further foregrounded when he admits that "that chapter was a pack of lies" (194). Even though they are fictionalised accounts, Freud's memoirs disclose relevant information about the essence of this genre, namely that "memoirists lie while pretending to be honest" (193) and that "not everything needs to be spelt out in a memoir" (250).

All in all, Thomas should be considered, in my opinion, a postmodernist writer given that his novels include those characteristics Edmund Smyth pins down as distinct postmodernist traits[36]. In addition, the author's literary production is part of the literature that embodies the transformations and major concerns (political, social, moral and artistic) of the postmodern era. Indeed, in Thomas's *oeuvre* one can pinpoint the convergence of *topoi* that are said to be intrinsically related to postmodernity, namely the splitting of the self; the instability of language; the distrust in authority, centre, truth, totality and teleology; the preference for local, discontinuous and heterogeneous narratives; the celebration of pluralism; the return and re-evaluation of history; and the self-conscious attitude towards art, language and the fictional process. Also, one can approach Thomas's fictional universe from its overriding political, social and moral concerns, especially in what regards the writer's commitment towards giving voice to

those who are politically or socially repressed and to the countless victims of racial, religious or political persecution.

2.3 – Chapter Endnotes

[1] See the author's essay "Postmodernism and Contemporary Fiction in Britain" for further information on this issue, pp. 21-2.

[2] These dates refer to the original French publication of these novels. They were first published in English in 1955, 1956 and 1959, respectively.

[3] See Chapter I, 1.3. – Characteristic Postmodernist Elements in Narrative Fiction - where I present a discussion of Brian McHale's tenets, p. 16.

[4] I have chosen to approach these three major influences of British postmodernism chronologically. Yet, for geographic and cultural reasons, the *nouveau roman* and American postmodernism were the first to cast their influence on British novelists.

[5] Even though the phrase "American metafiction" is generally preferred to refer to the American experimental writing from late 1950s to the 1970s, I have opted for the expression "American postmodernism" given that, in my opinion, it results in a less restrictive expression to account for the literary innovation carried out in the literary output of the precursors of postmodernism in the United States of America.

[6] See J. A. Cuddon's *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (1991, Penguin, London) for further details on the circumstances in which the expression appeared, pp. 521-2.

[7] See Malcolm Bradbury's *The Modern British Novel* for more detailed information about the structure of this novel, p. 352.

[8] All quotations are taken from the 1998 Back Bay edition (New York) and page references are presented in parentheses in the main text.

[9] All quotations are taken from the 1996 Bloomsbury edition (London) and page references are presented in parentheses in the main text.

[10] All quotations are taken from the 1985 Picador edition (London) and page references are presented in parentheses in the main text.

[11] All quotations are taken from the 1990 Picador edition (London) and page references are presented in parentheses in the main text.

[12] All quotations are taken from the 1992 Picador edition (London) and page references are presented in parentheses in the main text.

[13] All quotations are taken from the 1987 Grove Press edition (New York) and page references are presented in parentheses in the main text.

[14] All quotations are taken from the 1984 Panther Books edition (London) and page references are presented in parentheses in the main text.

[15] As I have already shown in Chapter I, 1.3.2. – Metafiction - these assumptions cannot be farther from what metafiction represents, p. 23.

[16] All quotations are taken from the 1987 Paladin Books edition (London) and page references are presented in parentheses in the main text.

[17] All quotations are taken from the 1986 Penguin edition (London) and page references are presented in parentheses in the main text.

[18] See Bradbury's *The Modern British Novel* for a more comprehensive inquiry about the relevance of these new voices to British contemporary fiction, pp. 422-7.

[19] All quotations are taken from the 1995 Vintage edition (London) and page references are presented in parentheses in the main text.

[20] In Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2002), Vintage, London.

[21] Quoted by Rüdiger Kunow in "Emotion Recollected in Tranquillity? Representing the Holocaust in Fiction", pp. 249-50.

[22] See Thomas's official website, http//www.dmthomasonline.com, which provides some information about the author's life and literary output.

[23] All quotations are taken from the 1984 Abacus edition (London) and page references are presented in parentheses in the main text.

[24] All quotations are taken from the 1993 Bloomsbury edition (London) and page references are presented in parentheses in the main text.

[25] Italics mine.

[26] One of the minor characters of *Pictures at an Exhibition* remarks, referring to her father, that "the holocaust embarrassed him", an utterance that echoes a general feeling among western civilisation, p. 197.

[27] In the acknowledgement page of *Pictures at an Exhibition* Thomas informs that he has used the English translation by Deborah Burnstone published in 1991 by Hamish and Hamilton, Brighton.

[28] Sigmund Freud died in 1939, before the events he dreams of have taken place.

[29] All quotations are taken from the 1993 Sceptre edition (London) and page references are presented in parentheses in the main text.

[30] In *Eating Pavlova* Freud makes a similar remark when he states that "for every individual history begins with his birth; all that has gone before is myth", p. 56.

[31] The most notable examples are Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) in *The White Hotel* and *Eating Pavlova* and John Fitzgerald Kennedy (1917-63) in *Flying in to Love.*

[32] See Chapter I, 1.3.3. – Historiographic Metafiction - where these issues are discussed, p. 29.

[33] In Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1994) Penguin, London.

[34] All quotations are taken from the 2001 Duckworth edition (London) and page references are presented in parentheses in the main text.

[35] All quotations are taken from the 1987 Abacus edition (London) and page references are presented in parentheses in the main text.

[36] See Chapter I, 1.3. – Characteristic Postmodernist Elements in Narrative Fiction - for Smyth's complete list, p. 15.

Chapter III

A Narratological Analysis of *The White Hotel*

3.1. – The Elusiveness of Truth: Narrative Instance, Narrative Level and Focalisation

3.2. – Postmodernist Originality: Intertextuality and Genre Hybridisation

3.3. – Reading Forwards and Backwards: Narrative Time

3.4. – Narrative Self-Consciousness: Undermining Representation

3.5. – Chapter Endnotes

3. - Chapter III – A Narratological Analysis of *The White Hotel*

Having started his literary career as a poet and translator of Russian literature, D. M. Thomas turned to writing fiction in the late 1970s and gained public and critical acclaim with the publication in 1981 of *The White Hotel*, a postmodernist novel that was shortlisted for the Booker Prize and that is frequently placed under the label of "Holocaust Fiction". Whilst his remaining novels have been relatively ignored, *The White Hotel* gained the right to figure in most works about British, and not only, postmodernist fiction[1]. In Mary Robertson's words, this novel

> may well become a classic because of the powerful writing, its formal craftsmanship, and its confrontation with weighty matters in such a way that readers will return to it again to find some new connections and debate about its problems (1984: 474).

Soon after its publication, this fictional work gave origin to "a storm of controversy" due to the combination of "an account of the slaughter of thousands of Russian Jews by the Germans at Babi Yar with pornographic material" (Alexander, 1990: 97). The main character is Lisa Erdman, a Russian opera singer, who becomes a patient of Freud, another important character who, in Thomas's own words, is the "discoverer of the great and beautiful modern myth of psychoanalysis" (*W. H.*, "Author's Note") [2]. Her therapy being "completed", Lisa carries on with her life, marries and goes back to Russia where she is killed in the Babi Yar massacre to be finally reborn in what Marguerite Alexander called an "ahistorical" Palestine (1990: 103).

Given that the novel includes Freud as a "dramatis personae" (*W. H.*, "Author's Note") and holds psychoanalysis under scrutiny, alert readers and reviewers should

expect it to contain libidinous material. In fact, *The White Hotel* seems to aim at illustrating and simultaneously undermining Freud's theories regarding the incompatibility between civilization and individual sexual fulfilment, put forth in Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), and the "conflict between the forces of life, or Eros, and those of Death, or Thanatos" (Lougy, 1991: 97), as proposed in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). Viewed in this light, the following excerpt from the novel acquires a new significance: "I jerked and jerked until his prick released / Its cool soft flood. Charred bodies hung from trees, / He grew erect again, again I lunged" (*W. H.*: 23). Playing on the ambivalence of the verbs 'jerk' and 'lunge' (simultaneously conveying pain and pleasure) as well as on the correlation between orgasm and death, Thomas moves well beyond the sheer pornographic display of elements to theorise about the "warring instincts of Eros and Thanatos, of love and death" that, according to Freud, govern "the human psyche and, by extension, human society and human history" (Wollheim, 1991: xv). The association between love and death will reach its culmination in the following passage, which narrates Lisa's death:

> He adjusted his clothing and picked up his rifle. With Semashko's assistance he found the opening [Lisa's vagina], and they joked together as he inserted the bayonet, carefully, almost delicately. The old woman was not making any sound though they could see she was still breathing. Still very gently, Demidenko imitated the thrusts of intercourse; and Semashko let out a guffaw, which echoed from the ravine walls, as the woman's body jerked back and relaxed, jerked and relaxed. But after those spasms there was no sign of a reaction and she seemed to have stopped breathing. Semashko grumbled at their wasting time. Demidenko twisted the blade and thrust it in deep (*W. H.*, 219-20).

Awestruck and horrified by the extreme cruelty he/she comes across, the reader is forced to read between the lines and search for meaning in the symbolism underlying this passage. In Laura Tanner's view,

> because the symbolic framework of the novel is accessed only through an immediate perception of the work's violence, the process of reading involves an act of redirecting the gaze, not away from violence entirely but *through* violence to its symbolism (1991: 140).

The novel's abundant display of sexual material is not an exclusive device of this particular work of fiction for, as Rebecca Scherr noted, novels that take the Holocaust as the topic of their fictional universe often "replace the absence of sexuality characteristic of memoirs of camp experience with an overabundance of erotic imagery", which for this scholar is an evident sign of "a general discomfort with the historical facts or methods one can employ to represent the Holocaust" (2000)[3]. Besides, the charge of being pornographic seems inaccurate since Lisa is not treated as a sexual object but, rather, "is depicted overall with dignity and subjective empathy" (Robertson, 1984: 456). In my opinion, early reviewers placed too much emphasis on the sexually explicit passages of the novel at the expense of its structure and themes. Anne Duchêne, for instance, wrote that "readers disinclined to contemplate fists repeatedly rammed into vaginas, or multiple suckling of hotel dinner guests" (1981: 50) should not even attempt reading Chapters I and II. Slightly more discerning was Allan Hollinghurst's review, which nevertheless also drew attention to what he deemed as the "problem" of the novel – its "pornography" (1981: 14). As to the passage that narrates Lisa's death, he did not hesitate in considering it "vulgar carelessness" (14). Others, like David Frost, understood the libidinous sections as structurally and thematically relevant because, in his view, "the idea of a fictional Freudian case-study serves usefully to link the initial pornographic writings to the more naturalistic portions of the book" (1982: 412).

In the same line of thinking seems to be Hermione Lee's article on the 1981 Booker Prize contenders. Having ironically stated that Rushdie's "*Midnight's Children* would win … because novels set in India regularly win Britain's top literary awards" (1981: 1268), Lee turns to D. M. Thomas's novel and classifies it as "highly original and disturbing" given that "it is intricately organized, structured in sections" whose

relationships "become only gradually apparent" (1268). This article is, to my knowledge, the only one that did not draw attention to the novel's sexually explicit passages but to its structure and originality.

However, the controversy around *The White Hotel* was not merely confined to the accusation of "sensationalizing Jewish experience" (Alexander, 1990: 97). Besides this, D. M. Thomas was also accused of plagiarising Anatoli Kuznetsov's *Babi Yar: A Document in the Form of a Novel* (1970)[4], which presents an account of the massacre by one of the survivors, Dina Pronicheva. Triggered by D. Kenrick in a letter to the editor of the *Times Literary Supplement*, the allegation of plagiarism was due to the fact that there was a "discrepancy between [Thomas's] open acknowledgement … in large type of his debt to Freud … and the much less prominent reference printed in minute type on the copyright page" (1982: 355) of Kuznetsov's work. In a letter refuting these accusations, Thomas claimed that the indebtedness to Kuznetsov's novel was less visible as a result of editorial choices. In the following months, several reviewers and fellow writers gave their contribution to this controversy writing to the *Times Literary Supplement* and changing the initial focus on the charge of plagiarism to that of the moral implications of using in a novel an eyewitness account of a delicate event such as the Holocaust. In this respect, too, Thomas's novel was "castigated for fictionalising real, that is historically documented, horrors" (Wirth-Nesher, 1985: 15).

As the above-mentioned issues pertain mainly to the postmodern use of intertextual references, they will be given separate treatment elsewhere in this chapter. Similarly, save for the sensationalist reception of *The White Hotel*, this work "deserves recognition as an elegantly structured novel of ideas" (Hughes, 1985: 37); an opinion which I subscribe completely and that will be foregrounded throughout this chapter.

3.1. – The Elusiveness of Truth: Narrative Instance, Narrative Level and Focalisation

The structure of *The White Hotel* in seven sections[5] foregrounds the existence of conflicting, though complementary, narrative voices as well as different focalisers who mediate what the narrator verbalises. These voices that, in this fictional postmodernist work, complement but also oppose one another, together with their positioning in relation to the narrative, manifest the postmodern distrust in a unique truth able to grant a centre and/or authority to any of the narrative sections.

The novel begins with a "Prologue" (*W.H.*, 9-15) in epistolary mode: a series of fictional letters, five of them, exchanged between members of Freud's psychoanalytic circle that brings up the themes to be developed subsequently. In the first letter written by Freud (*W.H.*, 12-3) the reader is presented with the first reference to the main character: "a young woman suffering from a severe hysteria" who has just "*given birth* to some writings which seem to lend support to [Freud's] theory: an extreme of libidinous phantasy combined with an extreme of morbidity" (*W. H.*, 12-3). The next two sections of the novel ("*Don Giovanni*" – pp. 19-30 – and "The Gastein Journal" – pp. 19-30) are also introduced in another letter by Freud (*W.H.*, 13-4), who attached to it what he qualified as a "somewhat extraordinary *journal*" as well as some verses written "between the staves of a score of *Don Giovanni*" (*W.H.*, 13-4). In his third and final letter (*W.H.*, 15) Freud reveals that he has finally finished a paper on this patient of his. Yet, he warns his correspondent Herr Kuhn, who is to publish this case study, that he should not "be alarmed by the obscene expressions scattered through her poor verses, nor by the somewhat less offensive, but still pornographic, material in the expansion of her phantasy" (*W.H.*, 15).

The following section, Chapter I, entitled "*Don Giovanni*" (*W.H.*, 19-30), is a narrative poem divided in four parts, which interweaves lyricism, love, sex and death, and that constitutes the "poor verses" Freud had referred to in one of his letters in the previous section: "I dreamt of falling trees in a wild storm / I was between them as a desolate shore / came to meet me and I ran, scared stiff" (*W.H.*, 19). The autodiegetic narrative voice, in Genettian terms a variety within the homodiegetic type characterised by the fact that this "narrator-hero…yields the privilege of the narrative function to anyone" (Genette, 1983: 247), that recounts Lisa's meeting with a stranger who takes her to a white hotel is from the outset highly unreliable, insofar as the reader is aware that the narration is the product of a woman who is suffering from hysteria. Therefore, this narrator seems to meet one of the prerequisites of unreliability, namely, to quote Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, that of a "problematic value-scheme" (2002: 101). Furthermore, Lisa not only is the sole focaliser of this section, a case of fixed internal focalisation, that is, "where everything passes through" her eyes (Genette, 1983: 189), but also is too involved in the events she narrates to render the story in an authoritative manner. The reader has reasons to be suspicious of this voice because as he/she reads on, he/she realises that Lisa's poem is full of dreamlike imagery that can be related to the unconscious, for instance: "I dreamt of falling trees in a wild storm" (*W.H.*, 19) or "I gave birth to a wooden embryo" (*W. H.*, 24). The reader is, then, invited to read between the lines a poem that was probably not unintentionally written between the staves of an opera since, as I hope to demonstrate, *The White Hotel* focuses on the act of reading and interpreting as a process of unearthing layers of meaning.

The narrator's authority is also undermined in that she seems not to be able to provide the chain of events with some kind of temporal logical coherence, that is, while the lovers are immersed in their lovemaking in the white hotel, several dramatic happenings take place without any apparent chronological relation or sequence. Neither

time nor cause and effect seem to have meaning for a narrator who does not come to terms with the outpouring of catastrophes, such as a fire, a flood, an avalanche and an accident with a cable car, that increase the death-toll of the guests of the white hotel, and which, oddly enough, does not seem to affect the narrator or her lover.

The section that follows, "The Gastein Journal" (*W. H.*, 33-80), is actually the prose version of the narrative poem, the reader had first heard of in Freud's letter (*W. H.*, 12-3). The narration is Lisa's, who on this occasion distances herself from the events in which she has played a central role, adopting the voice of an extra-heterodiegetic narrator: "She stumbled over a root, picked herself up and ran on blindly" (*W. H.*, 33). In Genettian terminology, this is a narrator "in the first degree who tells a story he is absent from" (Genette, 1983: 248), i. e., Lisa tries to place herself outside the narrated events, at an extradiegetic level, through the use of third-person personal pronouns. The journal, therefore, represents Lisa's attempt at structuring the surreal atmosphere of her previous poem, following a request by Freud. The reader becomes aware of this when Lisa writes, "When you asked for an interpretation I thought I'd turn it into the third person to see if that would help make more sense of it" (*W. H.*, 164).

Lisa expands on her poem positioning herself outside the events she narrates thus acquiring, using Rimmon-Kenan's terms, a "higher narratorial authority" (2002: 96) which is one of the qualities of omniscient narrators. Indeed, at the beginning of the journal, the narrator seems to possess that godlike ability to be everywhere, to know everything and to master the past, the present and the future, when, for example, she plunges in the characters' minds and reveals their inner thoughts, as in "He thought she was remembering her husband" or when she remarks that the main character "would not be singing for any time to come" (*W. H.*, 35), revealing that time is not a constraint.

In fact, this section accords with what we, as readers, would expect of prose writing, namely, a more detailed and logical account of events to lessen subjectivity and

the introduction of minor characters to furnish the narrative with a new dimension in what concerns the disasters that take place in the white hotel and the bizarre phenomena that occur constantly. Contrary to "*Don Giovanni*", in "The Gastein Journal" time is felt even if not totally understood, as we may observe in these two excerpts: "The evening sped by, as though the watchmaker, at the next table, had trebled the speed of all the clocks and watches" (*W. H.*, 57) and "They had no idea what time it was. Time, that had raced during the evening, now dragged for Madame Cottin, lying open-eyed in the dark; and did not exist, in different ways, for the sleeping guests, for the dead down in the cool store rooms, and for the lovers" (*W. H.*, 58).

On this basis, one should not assume that the fact that Lisa has chosen to tell her irrational experiences in a detached way would lessen the degree of subjectivity, since surreal visions, such as, "scarlet stigmata" (*W. H.*, 44) springing to one of the character's hands, whales in a lake by the mountainside and a "breast flying through the yew trees" (*W. H.*, 54), appear regularly in the narrative, alongside with apparently nonsensical dialogues like this one between the lovers: "'Shall I open the window?', he suggested. 'If you like', she murmured. 'Only I can't afford to become pregnant'" (*W. H.*, 38). Confronted with the fantastic ambience of "The Gastein Journal", which reaches its culmination when Lisa breastfeeds several hotel guests (*W. H.*, 61-2), the reader cannot but recall Freud's remark that these writings were the consequence of a disturbed mind and, therefore, dismiss this narrating instance as another unreliable voice.

Unlike the previous section, in the journal the reader perceives the narrated events through the focalisation of different characters. This is the case, for example, of the young man with whom Lisa starts an affair:

> He saw the attractive bosom of her black-and-white striped dress rising and falling in agitation. Her long straight black hair framed a somewhat heavy face. The pleasantly curved lips did not altogether compensate for the large

> nose. She had a darkish, greasy complexion, which he enjoyed because he had spent three years on a very inadequate diet (*W. H.*, 36).

Triggered by the perceptual verb to see, "he saw", Lisa's description though verbalised by the narrator is filtered through the eyes of the young man whose "inadequate diet" (the time he served in the army) makes him look at Lisa with lustful intentions. Variable internal focalisation is employed further in this section, particularly when the hotel guests meet to discuss both the tragic events that keep on haunting that place and the unusual visions noticed by most of them.

Scepticism about the existence of a unique totalising truth is also substantiated when, halfway through this section, the narrative account is interrupted to include twenty-two postcards written by some of the hotel guests (*W. H.*, 46-9). This abrupt narrative shift gives way to the inclusion of multiple internal focalisation, that is, when "the same event may be evoked several times according to the point of view of several letter-writing characters" (Genette, 1983: 190). It is a device that allows the reader to realise how the various characters perceived, and were affected by, the terrible events that occurred in, as well as near, the white hotel. An elderly nurse, for instance, perceives the whole situation altruistically because the only reference to the disaster is relatively covert and related not to herself but to another person: "Elise is picking up" (*W. H.*, 46). An army major, however, displeased with the overcrowded yacht on which he is sailing, sadistically remarks: "The flood didn't get rid of enough" (*W. H.*, 47). One can assume, therefore, that the challenging of the notion of truth is not only achieved by means of unreliable narration but also by displaying several focalisers that render narrative meaning problematic and provisional.

The fourth section, Chapter III, Freud's case study reporting Lisa's therapy that had also been mentioned in the prologue, owes its title, "Frau Anna G." (*W. H.*, 83-

130), to the fact that Freud wanted to conceal his patient's true identity, a procedure the real Freud made use of frequently. In this section, which begins with

> "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" (*W. H.*, 83)

Freud appears as an extra-homodiegetic narrator, i. e., "a narrator in the first degree who tell his own story" (Genette, 1983: 248) yet who is not the protagonist but rather an observer. In this particular narrative the narrator is the Austrian analyst, who sets himself to interpreting Frau Anna G's/Lisa's writings, thus becoming, as Paul Weibel well observed, "an epitome of the reader, an avid hunter of symbols who tries to make sense of seemingly meaningless fortuitous elements" (1989: 73). Save for the transcription of a dream related by Frau Anna/Lisa in one of her therapy sessions with the Viennese analyst (*W. H.*, 94-5), here the focaliser is almost exclusively Freud, whose perceptions and interpretations of his patient's previous writings ("*Don Giovanni*" and "The Gastein Journal") help the reader to better understand her delirious and surrealistic narrations. Having gone through two sections replete with obscure imagery and loosely-related events, the reader finds solace in this narrative voice that seems to be able to turn Lisa's writings into a coherent narrative and, therefore, to provide an authoritative interpretation of her visions. In this respect, the assertive tone the narrator employs - a device Thomas uses to illustrate "Freud's commitment to scientific realism" (Easthope, 1999: 138) - contributes to a growing belief that one is reading a reliable interpretation, especially when the analyst concludes that

> the symptoms were, as always with the unconscious, appropriate: the pains in breast and ovary because of her unconscious hatred of her distorted femininity; anorexia nervosa: total self-hatred, a wish to vanish from the earth. Also, the breathless, choking condition which had afflicted her during her puberty reappeared, as a consequence of having glimpsed the true circumstances of her mother's death (*W. H.*, 127).

Nevertheless, the rational interpretations Freud offers are fewer in number when compared to the uncertainty that pervades his discourse. As the following excerpts clearly show, his case study displays more doubts and questions than certainties:

> By the time I had put down the notebook I was convinced that it *might* teach us everything, *if we were only in a position to make everything out* (*W. H.*, 105).
>
> Here, *it seemed* to me, was evidence of Anna's profound identification with her mother (*W. H.*, 106).
>
> The flood, and the hotel fire, *could be* related to her mother's death (*W. H.*, 112).
>
> *Might* it not therefore be that all living things are in mourning for the inorganic state, the original condition from which they have by accident emerged? (*W. H.*, 117).
>
> [Italics mine]

The narrator appears to be well aware that meaning eludes him and, more importantly, that no one can categorically assert that one has the means to reach the truth. Faced with the impossibility to rationalise Frau Anna's/Lisa's symptoms, Freud feels compelled to admit that "No analysis is ever complete; the hysterias have more roots than a tree" (*W. H.*, 127) in a clear acknowledgement of his limited knowledge[6]. This assertion accords with the postmodern perception of knowledge. Drawing on Jean-François Lyotard's claim that in the postmodern age grand narratives, overarching theoretical explanations of the world, have lost their credibility in favour of "petits récits"[7], explanations that are partial, local, and provisional, postmodernist novels have endeavoured to foreground these assumptions. After reading the three initial sections of *The White Hotel*, the reader realises that knowledge, to quote Kathleen Wheeler, is always "perspectival and contextual" and not "transcendent or objective and neutral" (1999: 16). Thus, in order to come to terms with Lisa's story, Lisa herself, Freud and the reader will have to resort to a multiplicity of narratives, each presenting an unfinished fragment of her life.

"The Health Resort" (*W. H.*, 133-92), Chapter IV, is the first of three sections told by an extra-heterodiegetic narrator with omniscient scope of vision but, for the first time in the novel, with an unknown identity. The narrating instance begins the "Health Resort" telling that "In the spring of 1929, Frau Elisabeth Erdman was travelling by train between Vienna and Milan" (*W. H.*, 134) and for about thirty pages the narrative voice persists in the manner of a realist narrator, informing the reader that Lisa Erdman is the real Anna G.. In fact, one can state, to quote Paul Cobley, that this narrator is "above and beyond the events in the narrative" (2001: 101) and, what is more important, that he seeks to incorporate the main character within a plausible social setting, a feature that contrasts with Lisa's delirious writings of herself. The reader follows Lisa from 1929 through to 1935, the year she became an opera singer, married Victor, her best friend's husband, who had become a widower, and adopted his young son, Kolya. Once again, the reader relies on this narrating instance and deems this section as the authoritative centre he/she has sought, only to be deceived once more as, half way through this narration, an exchange of letters between Lisa and Freud undermines all that has previously been written.

The longest letter transcribed in this section (*W. H.*, 162-72) constitutes the sole embedded narrative one finds in *The White Hotel*. The novel cannot be said to possess one main framing narrative but several, intertwined by symbols, events, allusions and reinterpretations, that give the reader a feeling of *déjà vu*. "The Health Resort", however, contains within the omniscient primary diegesis a metadiegetic narrative or "second-degree narrative" (Genette, 1983: 231) as the French theorist put it, which consists of the letter in which Lisa gives Freud permission to publish her case study as Frau Anna G. and reveals that the doctor had seen what she had allowed him to see, owing to the fact that she had been "incapable of telling the truth" (*W. H.*, 163). Only now in 1931, ten years after her sessions with Freud, does Lisa feel she is capable of

disclosing the information she had withheld from her analyst. Strategically inserted in the section the reader believes to be the authoritative account of Lisa's life, this metadiegetic narrative is meant to destabilise readers' expectations. In narratological terms, Lisa is at this point an intra-homodiegetic narrator, i. e., "a narrator in the second degree who tells his own story" (Genette, 1983: 248), but not necessarily the whole story because when the first-degree narrative instance resumes the narration, the following comments are presented:

> She felt a great relief at having declared everything – everything that was relevant. She had intended to tell him also about having slept with the "unimportant" man in the train from Odessa to Petersburg, her first experience of sexual intercourse and also her first experience of hallucination; but her letter had grown so long, and so full of the correction of lies, that she took fright. One more might 'break the camel's back'; and really it was *not* important, she could not say it had ever preyed on her mind (*W. H.*, 172).

This is an unequivocal recognition that narrative telling entails a selection of material, a positioning of the narrating subject in relation to the object of narration as well as an interpretation of the facts that make up the text.

When the reader proceeds to the next section, Chapter V, "The Sleeping Carriage" (*W. H.*, 195-222), he/she becomes aware that the narrative is delaying the rendering of a totalising chronicle of Lisa's life. This sixth section recounts Lisa and her stepson's forced trip to Palestine. Half way through the voyage, she understands that they are being taken not to the Promised Land but to a ravine at Babi Yar where they are to be shot, together with a quarter of a million Jews. At the moment the shootings begin, Lisa and Kolya jump down the ravine at the bottom of which she lies wounded, waiting to suffer a most horrible death: a soldier thrusts a bayonet inside her vagina and impales her.

> He awoke, for about the tenth time that night, and groaned to himself when he realized it still wasn't dawn. He listened to the sounds of rustling in the wall. He would never hear those sounds again. His mouth was dry with excitement; he wanted to command the sun to rise, so they could start out on their journey (*W. H.*, 196).

The first three pages of this section are filtered through the eyes of young Kolya, as can be seen in the above excerpt, from the time he wakes up to the moment when his stepmother gets up to prepare for the train journey (*W. H.*, 198), focalisation shifting then to Lisa. This favouring of internal rather than external focalisation, "when an anonymous agent, situated outside the fabula, is functioning as focalizor" (Bal, 1985: 105), is of great importance for the way readers sympathise with the fate of these characters. Internal focalisation through Kolya makes the reader partake of his excitement about the coming trip but, more importantly, one has also the disturbing feeling that one knows more than the character. For instance, when the narrator verbalises Kolya's excitement, as in "Tomorrow night he would be sleeping in a train!" (*W. H.*, 195), Freud's warning to Lisa in "Frau Anna G." that trains symbolise death (*W. H.*, 95) provokes uneasiness in the reader. This feeling is heightened when we read that Kolya "couldn't understand why his father should have been put in prison for having travelled abroad, years and years ago, or for putting on an opera about a cruel Tsar" (*W. H.*, 197) consequently concluding that his father would surely come back. Again, the uncomfortable privilege of knowing more than the character himself settles in as readers infer that Kolya's father had most probably been executed.

The shift in focalisation, from Kolya to Lisa, a more mature character and therefore with a *Weltanschauung* more akin to the reader's, serves to clarify what the reader has speculated so far. If Kolya was feeling excited about the journey, Lisa for her part shivered not because of the cold but because of her "uncertainty and apprehension" (*W. H.*, 198). As we go on, we realise that our speculations about Kolya's father were correct when, for instance, we read that "never had it seemed the right time to tell him [Kolya] that his father would not be coming back" (*W. H.*, 200). With respect to the

purpose and destination of their journey, the following passage clears any possible doubt:

> The order said that all Yids living in the city of Kiev and its vicinity were to report by eight o'clock on the morning of Monday, 29 September 1941, at the Melnikovsky and Dokhturov Streets (near the cemetery). They were to take with them documents, money, valuables, as well as warm clothes, underwear, etc. Any Yid not carrying out the instruction and who was found elsewhere would be shot (*W. H.*, 204-5).

Resorting to our historical background, several elements in this passage corroborate our fears: the term 'Yid' (offensive word for Jew) indicates the prejudice and intolerance the Jewish people had to face; the date (1941) points to the time when the Nazi programme to exterminate the Jews was thriving; the place where they are to gather, near the cemetery, functions as an ominous detail; the order to carry all their belongings betrays the Nazis' intentions to dispossess the Jews of their resources; and, finally, the threat of execution if orders were not observed indicates the utter helplessness of their situation.

The variable internal focalisation offered in the introductory pages of "The Sleeping Carriage" allows the reader to share these characters' inner feelings and fears and, so, to sympathise with them. This also prepares one to come to terms with the pathos that ensues as Kolya and Lisa are executed at Babi Yar. Coming to this point, the narrative seems to have reached some kind of closure: Lisa Erdman, the protagonist, has died and the reader feels enlightened as to what her visions of sex and death meant. Hence, her symptoms, which Freud through his psychoanalytic approach had tried to understand, were not rooted in the past but rather in the future. In the words of Lars Sauerberg, Lisa's visions and symptoms were above all "proleptic stigmata" (1989: 7) of her fate as one of the victims of the Holocaust.

"The Sleeping Carriage" does, at last, shed light on the enigmatic dreams Lisa had endeavoured to understand throughout her life, but still it is far from being the

stable outcome one expects a narrative to offer. The chapter that follows, Chapter VI, "The Camp" (*W. H.*, 225-40), Lisa's afterlife, turns once again to the dreamy ambience of Chapters I and II, albeit the strange elements we find in it are displayed in a less surrealistic manner: "After the chaos and overcrowding of the nightmarish journey, they spilled out on the small, dusty platform in the middle of nowhere" (*W. H.*, 225). This final chapter of *The White Hotel* seems to suggest that death may after all not be the ultimate closure and that, whether in life or narrative, there might be a possibility of renewal.

Indeed, when Lisa arrives at 'the Promised Land', she meets Lieutenant Richard Lyons, nephew of a guest she had met at the white hotel. The intriguing dialogue that follows – Lisa remarked that his uncle thought he was dead, to which the young man replies: "Not quite!" (*W. H.*, 226) – seems to suggest that their journey is not over yet; that instead of Heaven they have reached Purgatory. As the narrative proceeds, Lisa catches sight of Freud with a heavily bandaged jaw (*W. H.*, 227) - Freud died from cancer in the mouth - and the reader learns further on that she could not dance "because of her painful hip" (*W. H.*, 228). These two passages lend support to the fact that "The Camp" is after all another stage in their journey and not the ultimate place where physical ailment would be no longer felt. Nowhere in this section does D. M. Thomas imply that this is the final destination; this a-historical place seems more like a "transit camp" (Cross, 1992: 43) because, while Lisa is looking for a place to settle in, the narrator mentions that "later they would be sent on further" *(W. H.*, 226).

In this "multi-vision novel" (Zhang, 1993: 57) the reader is invited to be a producer of meaning, while trying to make sense of the clues unveiled by the divergent narrative voices: a recurrent feature of Thomas's fictional procedures. Moving from chapter to chapter, one realises that each section impairs the previous, thus suggesting that "the desire for coherent stories also keeps us from truth" (Wirth-Nesher, 1985: 27).

As Robert Newman remarked, "the novel functions as palimpsest" (1993: 118), in that it installs the process of reading backwards as we move forwards: each section adds new elements that are meant simultaneously to enlighten us in what regards the plethora of enigmatic events and to challenge our interpretive skills and force us to reread earlier sections in the light of the new information that is disclosed. In what concerns the reading experience of this novel,

> we encounter a text that challenges the faith we have in our interpretive powers. And as we seek out certain generic conventions, such as identifiable narrative voices or recognizable points of view, we soon discover that the novel either denies us such familiar landmarks or destabilizes their presence (Lougy, 1991: 91).

The particular way the fictional material is structured in this novel allows us to conclude that not only is it meant "as a novelistic device" to celebrate "complexity itself" but also, thematically speaking, to "mime the therapeutic process underlying psychoanalysis" (MacInnes, 1994: 261).

It seems to me that *The White Hotel* constitutes a paradigmatic postmodernist novel, owing to its foregrounding of the contemporary distrust in totality, centre and truth. As Linda Hutcheon rightly observed, postmodernism questions "commonly accepted values of our culture" (1999: 42), namely closure, teleology and subjectivity. Consequently, the postmodernist writer distrusts the neat conclusions of traditional narratives and prefers, on the contrary, subjective and inconclusive narrative structuring in order to defy "the human urge to make order" (41), which in this fictional work is constantly frustrated. Also, postmodernist novels such as *The White Hotel* aim at questioning "whose truth gets told" (123) rather than claiming that there is only one truth to be disclosed. By resorting to multiple voices and differing points of view to narrate Lisa's story, D. M. Thomas seems to suggest that meaning and, therefore, veracity is anything but guaranteed. Hence, *The White Hotel* is less concerned with presenting one totalising vision or an authoritative truth than with the enactment of the

postmodern view that there may be no totalising or true discourses but only partial, incomplete and provisional versions of reality.

3.2. – Postmodernist Originality: Intertextuality and Genre Hybridisation

The postmodernist writer, it has already been suggested[8], is aware that it is impossible to be truly original inasmuch as contemporary writing is regarded as the reworking of previous themes, texts and genres. Instead of deploring this fact and consequently to view it as a constraint, postmodernist authors, like D. M. Thomas, openly and self-consciously embrace this new trend to seek originality in the intertextual and in the hybrid.

In fact, *The White Hotel* can be said to be a confluence of distinct texts and concurrently a reworking of established genres. Overtly or covertly, the novel sets up intertextual relationships with such works/texts as Alexander Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin: A Novel in Verse* (1830), together with Peter Tschaikowsky's opera adaptation of the same work (1879); Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *Don Giovanni* (1787), Biblical texts like the book from The Old Testament *The Song of Solomon*; T. S. Eliot's poem "Marina" (1930); Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy* (1306-1321); Freud's writings, especially his case studies; and Anatoli Kuznetsov's *Babi Yar: A Document in the Form of a Novel* (1970), arguably the most radical case of intertextuality in Thomas's novel, as we shall see further on.

The above-mentioned works constitute what Genette calls hypotexts: the source texts and consequently "a major source of signification" (Allen, 2002: 108) that are drawn into the hypertext, which, in this case, is *The White Hotel*. In writing this novel,

Thomas confesses, "his ideal … [was] what Pushkin did in *Eugene Onegin*": to write a "free novel, one that can take you by surprise as you go along" (Casedemont, 1994: 8). *Eugene Onegin* tells, in its framing *récit*, the love affair between Onegin and Tatyana, a devoted reader, who "From early youth … read romances, / And novels set her heart aglow; / She loved the fictions and the fancies / Of Richardson and of Rousseau" (*Eugene Onegin*: 49)[9]. The heroine's preference for epistolary novels is mirrored in the narrative as she expresses her love for Onegin by means of a letter. However, if in Pushkin's novel "the letters provide a framework for [his] portrayal of passion" (Stovel, 1998: 2), in *The White Hotel* letters fulfil more eclectic purposes. Thus, the letters that compose the "Prologue" provide "a framework for the novel" (5) while the letters included in "The Health Resort" are meant to make the reader distrust of a voice he/she believed to be trustful.

Among the embedded letters in this section, the reader also finds one in verse by Lisa (*W. H.*, 182-4) that parodies Tatyana's in *Eugene Onegin*; Tatyana was a role she had played when the leading singer and best friend Vera Serebryakova had broken her arm and was unable to perform the part. The letter, which consists of the reply to Victor's proposal of marriage upon Vera's death, ends with Lisa's acceptance of the proposal. In addition, Tatyana's letter expresses the typical fears of the romantic young lady who decides to reveal her love in spite of having "first tried silence and evasion" (*Eugene Onegin*: 73). Unable to soothe her desiring love for Onegin, Tatyana accusingly asks him "Why did you ever come to call?" (73), to admit later on that "The heavens chose my destination" (74), an utterance that conveys a deterministic attitude towards life. Finally, Tatyana explains why she had to write the letter by hyperbolically stating that "You filled my dreams and sweetest trances" (74).

Lisa's afore-mentioned letter constitutes a parodic rewriting of Tatyana's given that "her reply to Victor comes framed in the words of Tatiana" (Bartkowski and

Stearns, 1990: 289). From the outset, she establishes a parallel between herself and Pushkin's heroine when she observes that "In one way only I resemble / Reckless Tatiana – that my breast / Is all on fire and cannot rest" (*W. H.*, 182). Nevertheless, being a mature woman, her breast is not burning on account of girlish infatuation but because of something that transcends human understanding. Lisa also asks Victor "Why have you disturbed my peace?" (*W. H.*, 193) but, unlike Tatyana, she has a past she is not completely cured of. In her words,

> The heart was cool, the embers ashen,
> For long ago I found release
> From the indignities of passion.
> I was contended, in a fashion,
> And would have stayed so till I died (*W. H.*, 183).

The "indignities of passion" Lisa mentions in this letter refer to an early childhood memory that she had reported to Freud in the following terms:

> On one occasion in my childhood I wandered on to Father's yacht when I wasn't supposed to, and I found my mother, and my aunt and uncle, there all together, naked. It was such a shock, I thought I was seeing my mother's (or perhaps my aunt's) face reflected in a mirror; but no, they were both there. I thought my mother (or perhaps my aunt) was kneeling in prayer; my uncle kneeling behind her. Quite clearly it was intercourse *a tergo* (*W. H.*, 165).

Lisa's inability to distinguish her mother from her aunt was due to the fact that these were twin sisters but one should also not forget that she was only three years old when this event took place. Her disturbed sexuality could then be explained by this early occurrence that might have given rise to her future unsatisfactory relationships: with a young Russian, with her anti-Semitic husband and with other occasional lovers she had had. Therefore, Victor's letter awakens in her the memories she had "found release" from but not a complete cure.

Furthermore, whilst Tatyana affirmed her conviction that fate was responsible for her passion, Lisa remarks: "I do not know why I am frightened / To pick the blossom that I crave, / As if my body were a grave" (*W. H.*, 183). Her splitting self

makes her incapable of understanding why her heart is "worn through" (*W. H.*, 183) and her inner fears, triggered by her delusions and poor health, contrast with Tatyana's dreams and sweet trances. The hypertextual connection between these two texts and these two female characters aims at shedding light on Lisa's future. The learned reader knows that Tatyana and Onegin's love, though not tragic, is far from being a happy one: Tatyana marries an aristocrat when she finds out her love is unrequited and lives a happy life until the moment Onegin sees her, now a mature woman, and falls in love with her; yet she declines his love for her, saying: "But I am now another's wife, / And I'll be faithful all my life" (*Eugene Onegin*: 210). The inclusion of Pushkin's story in *The White Hotel* can be understood as an anticipation of Lisa's marriage to Victor: she moves to Kiev where she is to find her death and a few months after their marriage Victor is arrested and executed. The analogy that might be drawn is that neither Tatyana nor Lisa Erdman can be said to have had an utterly satisfying marriage.

Mozart's *Don Giovanni* is another text that is cited in Thomas's novel, in my opinion, to give additional support to the association between sex and death. The story of an incorrigible womaniser, Mozart's opera also relates to *The White Hotel* in the irrational elements it contains: while boasting about his sexual triumphs, Don Giovanni hears a voice that warns him he will stop laughing before dawn and, in fact, that night in a ball at his house a white statue walks in and takes his life. In addition to the supernatural elements that link these two texts - the appearance of a ghostly figure in *Don Giovanni* and Lisa's clairvoyance in *The White Hotel* - the use of Mozart's opera as a hypotext, as Wirth-Nesher proposed, might suggest Lisa's identification "with a mythic rake and libertine, punished in hell for his sexual appetites" (1985: 18). No doubt, one should not overlook Lisa's repentance expressed when, referring to her delirious writings, she shamefully observes, "Such obscene ramblings – how could *I* have written them?" (*W. H.*, 163). Apart from these connections, the operas evoked as

hypotexts, both Tschaikowsky's *Eugene Onegin* and Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, "confirm that the structure of the novel is based on musical principles and that its individual parts may be regarded as variations on a theme" (Weibel, 1989: 78).

The structure of *The White Hotel* has indeed sparked numerous interpretations. Mary Hughes in her essay "Revelations in *The White Hotel*" points out the structural similarities between this novel and the Bible. For her,

> just as the Bible begins with Eden, a creation early threatened by a flood, and ends in the book of Revelation with the destruction of the world and the beginning of the new, so in *The White Hotel*, the story of Lisa Erdman really begins with her Edenic fantasy, a dream world marred by drowning and flood, and ends with what may surely be read as an analogue for the end of the world and the beginning of a new life (1985: 44).

In addition to showing similarities with the new world after the apocalypse, the world Lisa encounters following her death owes some resemblance with Dante's conception of Hell, Purgatory and Heaven, inasmuch as these are hierarchically arranged in circles from the lowest to the highest. The alert reader notices this indebtedness to Dante's *Divine Comedy* when in "The Camp" the heroine meets her mother and asks her "what the conditions were like in her settlement", to which she replies: "Well, it's not the lowest circle, by any means" (*W. H.*, 233). Remaining a valid interpretation of Thomas's narrative, Hughes's deductions however point to an undeniable factor, namely that a comprehensive analysis of *The White Hotel* must come to terms with the Biblical imagery that springs throughout the text.

The Bible is summoned to the diegetic world of the novel when in the "Prologue" Freud sends Lisa's writings about her eerie experiences in the white hotel to a fellow psychoanalyst, Sachs, for him to comment on them. His reply reads: "her phantasy strikes me as like Eden before the Fall" (*W. H.*, 14). Despite the abundant Biblical imagery underlying Lisa's writings, I shall direct my analysis towards the

sections in which the Bible is more overtly alluded to and/or quoted, such as in "The Sleeping Carriage" and "The Camp".

Following the narrator's account of Lisa's death and his own reflections on the Babi Yar massacre, the reader encounters a direct allusion to *The Song of Solomon*[10], the Biblical celebration of love, in the final lines of "The Sleeping Carriage": "But all this had nothing to do with the guest, the soul, the lovesick bride, the daughter of Jerusalem" (*W. H.*, 222). Intentionally placed after the protagonist's death, the reference to *The Song of Solomon* – a celebration of love and renewal – prepares the reader for the final section in which this sacred text is more frequently called forth to engage in intertextual associations with *The White Hotel*.

In "The Carriage", somewhat puzzled with the new world she encounters, Lisa remembers a quotation in Hebrew whose source she cannot trace: "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it" (*W. H.*, 228). This passage is, in fact, taken from *The Song of Solomon* (8: 7) and asserts the everlasting power of love which cannot be extinguished even by death itself. The unconditional power of love is further reiterated when she receives a letter with yet another direct quotation from this Biblical text signalled by italics, which constitutes both an invitation for the lover and a hyperbolic statement about the omnipresence of the loved one:

> *Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land. O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely* (*W. H.*, 230).
>
> [Italics from the original text]

Upon close inspection of the handwriting, Lisa finds out that the letter has come from Alexei, her first lover, who wishes to have her share his life. However, the offer is declined for the love she has to give is not meant to be directed to one single individual

but to humanity itself. In this respect, Lisa or, in the words of Lieutenant Lyons, "the r-rose of Sharon" (*W. H.*, 239), seems to be destined to nurture those in need, as the following passage suggests:

> "We're desperately short of nurses," he said. "Can you help?" … "Yes, of course!" she said. She hurried towards the unit, breaking into a run; and only then did she realize that all day her pelvis had not hurt, nor her breast" (*W. H.*, 240).

By altruistically devoting herself - and her self - to easing the pain of others, the protagonist finally seems to achieve a satisfying life. The moment of epiphany that ensues in the closing lines of *The White Hotel* – "She smelt the scent of a pine tree. She couldn't place it … It troubled her in some mysterious way, yet also made her happy" (*W. H.*, 240) -, which evokes T. S. Eliot's poem "Marina", hints at the subject's reunion with the whole, the moment the self identifies with the universe.

"The scent of a pine tree" that "troubled her in some mysterious way" and that "also made her happy" (*W. H.*, 240) are images borrowed from T. S. Eliot and a statement about paternal love in which nature, represented by the "scent of pine" and "the breath of pine"[11], suggests the expression of fatherly love towards the daughter[12]. The "voluptuous bride of The Song of Solomon" (Hughes, 1985: 45) who claims to be "sick of love" (*Song of Sol.*, 5: 8) is identified with Lisa to affirm, as David Higdon proposes, "the never-ending vitality of the individual" (1995: 331). Furthermore, the allusions to *The Song of Solomon*

> perform four separate tasks: to mark that epiphanous moment when Lisa experiences crucial insight about human love and acts on this insight; to underline the power of love as a primary thematic force; to remind the reader of the allegorical dimension of the work; and to bring to fruition a significant web of motifs in the pages of *The White Hotel* (1995: 331).

Sigmund Freud's writings are also a major hypertextual reference in *The White Hotel*, especially in the "Prologue" when we come across several letters allegedly exchanged between the Austrian analyst and some of his friends and in "Frau Anna G."

which, as Thomas revealed in his memoir, was meant "to echo Freud's style" (*Mem. Hal.*: 46)[13]. By drawing historical figures into the diegetic world, the opening section of *The White Hotel* works "as a framing device that links the fictional novel to documented reality" (Wirth-Nesher, 1985: 18) and introduces characters, themes as well as a web of motifs the reader will only fully understand further on in the narrative.

With regards to "Frau Anna G.", Freud's case study on Lisa Erdman, we are in the presence of a carefully-planned pastiche[14] of genuine Freudian case histories which, as I shall try to demonstrate, is neither frivolous nor indicative of lack of originality[15], inasmuch as this section is fundamental for the novel's thematic and structural unity. For the scholar Hanna Wirth-Nesher, this section "is a masterful imitation of Freud's case histories in its organization, rhetoric and tone" because "Thomas misses none of Freud's characteristics, such as his sense of all results being somewhat incomplete" (1985: 20). On the compositional level, Thomas's efforts were to imitate without transforming the source text given that he wanted Freud's "voice [to ring] true" (*Mem. Hal.*: 47). Yet, on the thematic level, the implications brought about by the inclusion of Freud and his innovative methods go well beyond the mere reverence for this historical figure and his contribution to the progress of science.

Although he is never ridiculed, Thomas's Freud is portrayed as a vulnerable figure who is aware of the flaws of his approach. His procedures turned out to be incapable of healing his patient as Lisa lived in a "pastpresentfuture" (Klonowska, 1996: 93) incompatible with the psychoanalytic method that unearths one's past to explain the present, thus excluding the future from the equation. After reading Lisa's letter (*W. H.*, 162-72) where she confesses to have hidden facts from him, the analyst replies (W. H., 174) and at the end of his missive cites Heraclitus: "The soul of man is a far country, which cannot be approached or explored" (*W. H.*, 174). It is particularly significant that an assertion denoting such a high degree of scepticism was summoned

by Freud himself given that it "shows the extent to which the novel presents psychoanalysis itself only as a tentative exploration of human truth" (MacInnes, 1994: 257).

The sympathetic feelings Thomas and the reader hold towards Freud are heightened when in the course of his analysis of Lisa he writes,

> I have said that at certain moments Frau Anna's expression reminded me of the faces of the victims of war neuroses. It is still not clear to us why those poor victims of the battlefield force themselves again and again to relive in dreams the original traumatic events (*W. H.*, 116).

Even though one feels that he is close to a more fulfilling explanation of his patient's symptoms, one also realises that such an explanation is something he is unable to conceive insofar as Lisa is a victim-to-be. Freud's theoretical approach lacks the mystical inclinations that Carl Jung's model seems to possess. In the letter that opens the "Prologue" (*W. H.*, 9-11), Ferenczi reports several incidents that suggest that, overall, *The White Hotel* conforms more to a Jungian rather than a Freudian reading. Firstly, on their arrival to New York, Freud, Jung and Ferenczi were suddenly caught in the middle of a mist that Jung named a "'prehistoric monster'" forcing them to slip back "into the primeval past" (*W. H.*, 9). Freud dismissed this incident as unimportant and made fun of Jung's mysticism. Secondly, when they were still in Bremen on the eve of their sea-trip, Freud "slipped off his chair in a faint" on account of his colleague's insistence in talking about "peat-bog corpses" of prehistoric men "mummified by the effect of the humic acid in the bog water" (*W. H.*, 10). When Freud regained consciousness, he accused Jung of "wanting him out of the way" (*W. H.*, 10). Finally, as a way of entertaining themselves during their sea-journey, the three psychoanalysts took to interpreting each other's dreams. Jung's interpretation of Freud's dream deeply disturbed the latter since it pointed to his sexual interest in his sister-in-law. Upon the

incessant demand for more details, Freud refused to reveal "anything more personal" because he felt it could "'risk his authority'" (*W. H.*, 11).

"The little tension between Jung and Freud" (*W. H.*, 9) Ferenczi had reported at the beginning of his letter may be said to anticipate the pressure Freud's psychoanalysis sustains when confronted with Lisa's clairvoyance and afterlife. These two mystical elements accord better with Jung's theoretical approaches than with Freud's because, to paraphrase Rowland Wymer[16], Freud was a materialist and a rationalist who believed that mental life was not independent from the body; in other words, that all psychic phenomena were grounded in an organic base. Further, he also assumed that the key to understanding the present was in the past. Jung, however, was a mystic given that he thought some parts of the mind were not subject to the laws of space and time and, consequently, the idea of an afterlife could not be dismissed *a priori*. The Swiss psychoanalyst accepted precognitive experiences and believed that the present and the prospect for a better adaptation were the chief goals of psychology. In the light of this exposition, Lisa's utterance in the closing pages of the novel - "it's the future that counts, not the past" (*W. H.*, 237) - might indicate that her vision and dreams were after all a yearning for wholeness, that is, a foretelling of "the future evolution of [her] psyche" (Hughes, 1985: 41). Equally revealing of the vulnerability of Freudian psychoanalysis, is the passage in which Lisa sees Freud in her afterlife - a dying man whose authority has completely deserted him:

> She passed him one day, when he was being wheeled to the medical unit. His head was drooping, and he did not see her. He looked dreadfully ill and unhappy. If she made herself known to him, she would have to cast even more serious doubts on the accuracy of his diagnosis, and that might add to his gloom. It was best to keep away, and just pray that the doctors could help him. (*W. H.*, 228).

The psychoanalyst is at this point not only an object of compassion but also totally different from the figure who, in the "Prologue", had impressed American scholars with

his insightful lectures and of whom Ferenczi had said: "Freud astonished even me with his masterly skill, by delivering five lectures without any notes – composing them during a half-hour's walk beforehand in my company" (*W. H.*, 9).

If the hypertextual use of Freudian case studies held psychoanalysis under scrutiny and challenged its foundations, the inclusion of passages from Anatoli Kuznetsov's *Babi Yar* shattered the distinction between fact and fiction and set going a debate over the notion of originality in contemporary literature. Despite having been warned in the copyright page about the indebtedness to Kuznetsov's work, when the reader reaches "The Sleeping Carriage" he/she comes to realise that there are no typeface changes to signal the excerpts borrowed from the Russian fictionalised account of the 1941 Babi Yar massacre. The only sign which, to a certain extent, might help the alert reader to locate Kuznetsov's material is when Dina Pronicheva, the survivor of the massacre, whose testimony Thomas admitted to have used, enters the diegetic world of *The White Hotel* as "an actress at the Kiev puppet theatre" (*W. H.*, 215) Lisa had once met. Nevertheless, only a close reading of Dina's testimony in *Babi Yar* can help clarify this point. Once that reading is carried out one realises that Thomas has borrowed extensively from Kuznetsov's work, more precisely from pages one-hundred and eight to one-hundred and eleven. In *The White Hotel*, from the moment the narrator announces that "it started to get dark" (*W. H.*, 216) up to the passage when one learns that "The German soldiers had lit a bonfire and it looked as though they were making coffee on it" (*W. H.*, 217), Thomas quotes *verbatim* from *Babi Yar*, with the exception of a paragraph and two linking sentences which refer to Lisa's and Kolya's reactions to the events. In the next pages, Thomas occasionally quotes Kuznetsov as, for instance, when after jumping into the ravine Lisa realises that "she had fallen into a bath of blood" (*W. H.*, 218), which in *Babi Yar* reads: "she had fallen into a bath full of blood" (*Babi Yar*, 110).

The incorporation of someone else's material in this section of *The White Hotel* provoked a wave of controversy, notwithstanding the "skilful use of Dina Pronicheva's experiences" (Foster, 1995: 278). Triggered by Kenrick's letter[17], mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the accusation of plagiarism was soon forgotten. Ian McEwan's contribution to the symposium on plagiarism organised by the *Times Literary Supplement* expressed his support in what regards Thomas's narrative choices in "The Sleeping Carriage", especially so when McEwan admitted that "writers borrow from one another, and the more self-aware they are in doing so, and the more celebrated their source, the less likely they are to be accused of plagiarism" (1982: 413). Even so, the borrowing of Kuznetsov's *Babi Yar* remained a subject of discussion. Martin Amis, for example, referred to the borrowed passage (*W. H.*, 216-9) in the following terms: "The testimony is unbearably powerful; it is the climax of the novel; it is in plain terms, the best bit – and Thomas didn't write it" (2002: 142). Due to the controversy this particular passage caused, Thomas wrote to the *Times Literary Supplement* in defence of his novel. In his first letter, the author explained that

> at the outset of Part V the narrative voice is still largely authorial (though affected by Dina Pronicheva's tone) because there is still room for fiction; Lisa is still a person. But gradually her individuality is taken from her on that road to the ravine; and gradually the only appropriate voice becomes that voice which is like a recording camera: the voice of the one who was there. … The witness's testimony was the truthful voice of the narrative at that point. … The time for imagination was before (1982a: 383).

Certainly influenced by Kuznetsov's claim in *Babi Yar* that his book contained only the truth, Thomas most likely felt that quoting Dina's testimony or, as he seems to see it, the truth as opposed to fiction, was the most respectful way to deal with the Babi Yar mass execution. The urge to approach Holocaust material respectfully[18] led him, in the opinion of some detractors, to draw into his fiction a witness who should have been kept outside the realm of imagination. This assertion seems to meet Emma Tennant's opinion who also contributed to the discussion and argued that

> 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, for his or her own ends, to a made-up character, using the very words of that human being's testimony. Fact and fiction, reality and unreality do not blend this way (1982: 412).

But the fact is that in postmodernist writing, fact and fiction, reality and unreality blend in this and in various other ways. Dina Pronicheva's intrusion into the "récit" constitutes what McHale designates an "ontological scandal"[19] and the mixing of fictional and historical figures at the diegetic level, as Sylvia Kantaris rightly observed, shows that in *The White Hotel* "fantasy and reality do not operate in isolation from each other" (1982: 463). Still, the narrative twist engendered in this section, "The Sleeping Carriage", is regarded by some, among whom figures Rebecca Scherr, as "a dangerous move in our era of Holocaust deniers, who claim the Holocaust itself is a conspiracy perpetuated through narrative and photographic fiction" (2000). Some years after the initial controversy, Thomas asked himself "to what extent may a writer of fiction use documentary sources?" His answer was "as much as he feels he needs to, unless art is unrelated to life and history (*Mem. Hal.*: 84). On these grounds, blurring the distinctions between reality and dream, history and fiction results in rendering uncertain "the ontological status" (Zhang, 1993: 56) of the events the narrative seeks to represent.

In addition, the narrative devices used in "The Sleeping Carriage" denote the postmodernist claim that "all texts, even the allegedly transparent prose of historical writing, are contaminated by narrative conventions belonging more to fiction and fantasy" (Gabbard, 1990: 239). No matter how hard Kuznetsov tries to persuade us that his account is the truth, one should bear in mind that he, like Thomas, chose an omniscient narrative voice and the point of view of a woman to tell a testimony that had been given in the first person. Therefore, the initial interview, Dina Pronicheva's, has most certainly given rise to an "*emplotting*, which is already a *fictionalising*" (Genette,

1993: 27) that inevitably distorted historical data and that significantly reflected in the work's subtitle: *A Document in the Form of a Novel*. What both Thomas and Kuznetsov did amounted to relying on the testimony of a witness to recreate an experience none of them endured. In James Young's words, they "seem to share similar motivations in their narrative technique, both believing that in some areas of their own fiction they have neither the right nor the requisite experience to reimagine such suffering" (1988: 204). The summoning of Kuznetsov's work into *The White Hotel* implies that irrespective of its "methods of verification, when it comes to telling about the past, the account will take the form of a story" (Ommundsen, 1993: 50). For Thomas, Pronicheva's testimony, whose initial function was not aesthetic but factual, acquired aesthetic qualities and overcame "its scientific value or its documentary interest" (Genette, 1993: 18).

The author's purpose in "The Sleeping Carriage", as he explains in *Memories and Hallucinations*, was to make his "unique character, Lisa" become "a part of history, part of the amorphous mass of victims" (47). Until this moment Lisa's existence seemed untouched by the ever-changing historical progress, precisely because the fundamental issue in the first sections of the novel was the protagonist's inner struggle with her self[20]. Historical events such as the Russian Revolution at the beginning of the century, brought about when Lisa is sexually abused by anti-Semitic sailors (*W. H.*, 168), are only "obliquely indicated" (Cross, 1992: 38). Her fatal meeting with history (as cruel as her psychological and physical distress had prefigured) makes her individual history gain "a sufficient degree of universality to become the voice of history" (Klonowska, 1996: 90). Thomas's heroine's personal history, the ever-written details of her existence and her hysteria acquire in this section a new, though not definite, meaning, as she "is unable to do anything about the course of history" (Weibel, 1989: 71).

It seems that the use of Kuznetsov's work as a source of inspiration does not merely translate the postmodernist belief that both reading and especially writing are

predominantly intertextual, that is, that texts refer to other texts in an endless process of quotation. Pronicheva's account in *Babi Yar* had struck Thomas as incredibly analogous with the poem section entitled "*Don Giovanni*", which had been published in 1979 in a magazine under the title of "The Woman to Sigmund Freud". The succession of catastrophes in Lisa's poem dominated by the four elements - water, fire, earth and air - found resonance in *Babi Yar* where the victims "had fallen into the ravine, … earth was flung down on the sea of corpses, … the nazis burned the dug-up corpses" and, a few years later, "a dam burst, flooding the ravine" (*Mem. Hal.*: 40). Upon realising the similarities between the poem and the atrocious events at Babi Yar, the author "knew that 'The Woman to Sigmund Freud' was the start of a novel which would end at Babi Yar" (40). In the particular case of *The White Hotel*, the use of someone else's material reflects both Thomas's indebtedness to a text that was the genesis of his novel and his reluctance in fictionalising the Holocaust.

The abundant dialogue between this narrative and the plethora of hypotexts referred to in this analysis appears to convey the belief that if any structural whole is available to us, then it surely lies in the dialectic relationship between different texts, voices and discourses. What *The White Hotel* enacts is the theory according to which "a text can only be explained by another text" (Weibel, 1989: 76). Lisa writes her experiences and, later on, rewrites them in order to better understand her condition; she also narrates some stages of her existence to her analyst and afterwards provides another version of the facts. Similarly, Freud writes his interpretation of Lisa's texts - written and oral - and by exposing his scepticism towards the validity of his analysis leaves space for a reinterpretation; in this respect, the final two sections of the novel can be said to be a rewriting of the psychoanalyst's theories regarding his patient's symptoms since his interpretations are disavowed and new readings emerge. Consequently, in this novel the emphasis is on constant rewriting as a process of unearthing hidden

information because, as Weibel states, "in the act of reading … we create a new text, a new metaphor that is not identical with the real but, on the contrary, takes us further from it" (77).

Moreover, the variety of texts drawn into the diegetic domain of *The White Hotel* foregrounds the notion that texts are not "individual, isolated object[s] but, rather, a compilation of cultural textuality" (Allen, 2002: 36). In the same way that our life "is embedded in a confusing mass of impressions, and all our actions are influenced by our interpretation of the signs surrounding us" (Weibel, 1989: 76), so too the novel resorts to a multiplicity of sources (previous texts) to approach a theme – the Holocaust – that appears to resist human understanding. Still, *The White Hotel* denies the presentation of a totalising interpretation; instead, it self-consciously exposes the intertextuality intrinsic in both reading and writing. In other words, it shows that every text is a response to a previous text, which in its turn calls for yet another text *ad eternum* and, in so doing, suggests that "Lisa Erdman is not quintessentially herself, but also everywoman" (Stovel, 1998: 11).

Deeply related to the issue of intertextual relationships is paratextuality, which comprises "those liminal devices and conventions … that mediate the book to the reader" (Macksey, 1997: xviii). For Genette, the paratext "is what enables the text to become a book" and what enables it to have a "better reception" and "a more pertinent reading" (Genette, 1997: 2). In Thomas's novel, paratexts such as epigraphs, acknowledgements, author's notes, titles and footnotes bear not only pragmatic but also intertextual and thematic functions. These paratextual elements or, to be more precise, peritexts – paratexts that are within the text as opposed to epitexts, for example, interviews, publicity announcements, that "are located outside the book" (1997: 5)[21], cannot be overlooked for they provide crucial hints regarding an integrative approach to this, and any, fictional work.

The epigraph Thomas chose to open his novel belongs to W. B. Yeats's poem "Meditations in Time of Civil War" and can be interpreted as an anticipation of "the harsh events of modern European history to be treated in *The White Hotel*" (Foster, 1995: 269). By quoting four specific verses from Yeats's poem, the author signals the reader on how to read his narrative and simultaneously indicates a text and a poet with whom he somehow has identified. The verses elected from the Irish poet are:

> We had fed the heart on fantasies,
> The heart's grown brutal from the fare;
> More substance in our enmities
> Than in our love…

On going through these lines, the reader or, as Genette puts it, the epigraphee[22], is led to believe that *The White Hotel* will deal with a particularly brutal historical period. Furthermore, the reader's "hermeneutic capacity is put to the test" given that the possible significance of these verses "will not be clear or confirmed until the whole book is read" (Genette, 1997: 158). Only when this task is performed will the reader be able to relate the fantasies that nourished the heart in Yeats's poem with Lisa's dream of a place, the white hotel, whose "spirit … was against selfishness" (*W. H.*, 80). Similarly, the poem's suggestion that a heart that follows its ideals becomes subject to hate and violence echoes Lisa's destiny as one of the victims of the Holocaust.

Thomas's acknowledgements is yet another peritext of crucial importance for the reading of the novel. The first of the two chief references made in it indicates the novel's main, and most controversial, intertextual relation: the indebtedness to Kuznetsov's *Babi Yar*. The second informs the reader that section one of "*Don Giovanni*" was originally published as an independent poem. Together with the epigraph, these paratextual elements, whose "raison d'être" resides in their being at "the service of something other than [themselves]" (Genette, 1997: 12), enhance the

intertextual nature of Thomas's writing and point to the confluence of disparate texts, voices and discourses that make up *The White Hotel*.

The "Author's Note" that precedes the "Prologue" will mainly provide the reader with content-oriented information. It is this peritext that allows Thomas to tell the reader that the "'terrain'" of this novel" is the "landscape of hysteria" and that the "discoverer of the great and beautiful modern myth of psychoanalysis", Sigmund Freud, "becomes one of the dramatis personae" ("Author's Note") in the novel's diegetic universe. Aware that his portrayal of Freud "abide[s] by the generally known facts of the real Freud's life", i. e., that the reader may find it difficult to separate fact from fiction, Thomas declares that "the role played by Freud in this narrative is entirely fictional" ("Author's Note"). This paratextual unit claims that in spite of its use of historically known figures and facts, *The White Hotel* is to be read as a work of fiction; in other words, that it is a text "that imposes itself essentially through the imaginary character of its objects" (Genette, 1993: 21).

Titles also figure among the other paratextual elements Genette includes in his work *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. The French narratologist divides titles into thematic, a category used "to describe titles that bear on the subject matter of the text" (Genette, 1997: 81), and rhematic, those that designate "the work by more purely formal … features" (86-7). The puzzling title Thomas created for this novel falls into the first category since the white hotel is the place Lisa dreams of and where a sense of community is felt. Yet, the symbolism of the colour 'white' adds further ambivalent signification to the novel, inasmuch as this colour has been contradictorily associated with death but also with birth, the maternal milk the newborn seeks and that constitutes a promising start for him. In my view, it is this latter meaning that underlies Lisa's recurrent allusions to her breasts in "*Don Giovanni*" – "both [nipples] were swollen" (*W. H.*, 20) – and in her prose version of this poem, "The Gastein Journal", where she

breastfeeds several hotel guests. The connection between this colour and maternal milk, and therefore renewal, culminates in her meeting with her mother in "The Camp" when she "sucked contentedly, first at one nipple and then the other" (*W. H.*, 235). The title 'The White Hotel' metonymically refers to the protagonist's search for a wholeness she is to find in her meeting with her mother and with the realisation that she becomes complete by helping the other 'guests' of the place they all find themselves in.

The relationships one may establish between the titles of the seven sections of the novel and the content and even form of the narrative that follows demonstrate that titles were carefully selected to stimulate readers' interpretive skills. The prologue, for example, has been employed frequently in western literature to designate the introductory piece of a work of fiction. Although it can be considered the "incipit" of the novel, "by calling this "The Prologue", Thomas removes it from narrative itself" (Wirth-Nesher, 1985: 18) and points to a long tradition of the novel, from Cervantes to contemporary fiction, that makes use of the prologue to provide "an explanation of the origin of the story that denies its purely fictional nature" (18). In other words, even though Thomas resorted to a number of paratextual elements to assert the fictiveness of *The White Hotel*, he also included a series of credible imitation of letters exchanged between historical figures who recount historical facts to self-consciously foreground the interconnectedness between fact and fiction, which in this novel and, as has already been discussed[23], in some postmodernist novels, is constantly being pushed to its limits. In Richard Cross's perspective, "the Prologue establishes a high degree of verisimilitude at the outset" and implicitly informs the reader that he/she is to read the letters "as psychological documents rather than autonomous aesthetic objects" (1992: 25).

The next section of the novel, "*Don Giovanni*", was given a title that bears a thematic relationship with the remaining of the narration: like in Mozart's opera, in

Lisa's poem a relationship between sex and death, Eros and Thanatos is put forth. The title ascribed to the third section, "The Gastein Journal", frustrates readers' expectations because if this is deemed a rhematic title, i. e., that what one is about to read will be an intimate first-person account, readers soon discover not an autodiegetic "récit" but rather an extra-heterodiegetic one whose link with the title lies solely in the place setting: Gastein. The genre indication implied in the title is subverted altogether in yet another challenge to readers' horizons of expectation and interpretive skills.

The pastiche of Freudian case studies, "Frau Anna G.", relates to a certain extent thematically with the subject matter, given that the reader encounters the analysis of a patient Freud named Anna G. but who is rapidly identified with the heroine. Yet, the fact that the title of this section follows the procedures the real Freud adopted in his case studies, giving them a title after an imaginary name[24], should indicate, at least to the alert reader, the form of the narrative. In this line of thinking, the title "Frau Anna G." could be seen as rhematic as well. The final three sections of the novel, "The Health Resort", "The Sleeping Carriage" and "The Camp", display thematic titles "ranging from the most straightforward factual designation", the first one, "to the most doubtful symbolic relationship" (Genette, 1997: 76-7), the remaining two. The symbolic relation that largely "depends on the receiver's hermeneutic obligingness" (77) is to be found in "The Sleeping Carriage", which prefigures the protagonist's death, because coming to this point of the narrative the reader already knows that in the diegetic world of *The White Hotel* trains symbolise death. Thus, the metaphorical association between this title and the narrative that reports the alleged voyage to the Promised Land is fully understood when the Babi Yar genocide takes place. Now that the reader has established the link between Lisa's hysteria and the Holocaust, he/she might be tempted to associate "The Camp" with the factual knowledge he/she possesses about Nazi concentration camps. On purely symbolic grounds such an association is legitimate, granted that one

renders concentration camps and Thomas's "The Camp" as a set-up stage in the Jews' journey to annihilation and renewal, respectively. However, the portrayal of the afterlife in the novel's final section differs significantly from German concentration camps in the sense of regeneration and the possibility of a promising future that pervades this section and that was altogether absent from the grim places where the Nazis imprisoned the Jews. Thus, the reader has to move from factual erudition about twentieth-century history to grasp the symbolism this narrative engenders.

Thomas's commitment to blurring the frontiers between fact and fiction is further enacted in "Frau Anna G." where a succession of footnotes is displayed throughout the analysis in order to create a sense of closeness to Freud's style and narrative devices. These paratextual units contribute to the enhancement of "the nonfictional aspect of the narrative" (Genette, 1997: 332), which is clearly a facet the author seeks to explore in *The White Hotel*. In this section of the novel, one comes across two types of notes: authorial and actorial. Whereas the first are the responsibility of the author, D. M. Thomas, the second, Genette refers, attempt to substantiate "the authority not of the author but of his subject, who is himself an author" (339). In "Frau Anna G.", the distinction between these two kinds of notes is made clear due to the fact that, unlike actorial notes, authorial annotations are contained in square brackets. In addition, authorial notes are employed to provide additional biographical information on Freud, to comment on his narrative devices or to identify a quotation the analyst used to support his reasoning, as the following examples demonstrate:

> 2 [Freud's unusual emphasis on the mother's role may have owed something to the recent death of his own mother, on 12 September 1930] (*W. H.*, 128).

> 2 ['Frau Anna G.' was, in fact, an opera singer, not an instrumentalist. Freud's desire to protect her identity gave rise to the change; though he always regretted having to depart from the facts, even in apparently trivial details] (*W. H.*, 103).

> 1 [One of Freud's favourite quotations. Charcot's dictum in full was "*La theorie c'est bon, mais ça n'empêche pas d'exister*" (theory is good, but it doesn't prevent things from existing)] (*W. H.*, 111).

The narrator's – Freud's - notes, however, set up a relationship of "continuity and homogeneity" (Genette, 1997: 320) with the text they depend on. To put the point another way, these notes are meant to produce the illusion that they are real or could be real if Thomas had not warned us that this section has no factual basis. Indeed, the actorial notes displayed here serve the purpose usually assigned to ordinary notes in essay writing – to supply additional information to the main text, as in this case:

> 1 Anna's father had completely rejected his Jewish heritage, and in consequence she herself felt not in the slightest degree Jewish. She once described herself to me as "mid-European Christian" (*W. H.*, 113).

Despite being "addressed only to certain readers", those who are "interested in one or another supplementary or digressive consideration" (Genette, 1997: 324), the notes encountered in "Frau Anna G." bring about a two-fold function in the "récit". Whilst the actorial notes – Freud's notes - are meant to lend factual credibility to this case study, authorial notes in square brackets - Thomas's - mark his presence as the author and therefore point to the fictional aspects of the text. It is indeed this constant playing on readers' expectations that defines both "Frau Anna G." and *The White Hotel*. Thomas's novel, in the manner of a vast number of metafictional novels that appeared in the second half of the twentieth century[25], does not seek to suppress the evidence that it is making use of narrative conventions, as realist novels usually do; on the contrary, it bares "the devices that make it seem real" (Martin, 1986: 175) and, consequently, demonstrates that fiction is a pretence.

The disdain for totality, unity and closure does not rest uniquely in the multiplicity of texts and narrative devices Thomas made use of in his novel. One of the aesthetic achievements of *The White Hotel* is the manner it juxtaposes different genres

so as to claim that, when it comes to telling a story, there are no privileged literary categories. According to Sauerberg in *Fact into Fiction: Documentary Realism in the Contemporary Novel*, one can find in Thomas's novel such disparate genres as "epistolary narrative", "surrealistic stream-of-consciousness prose", "pastiche", "traditional realism", "documentary" and "allegorical vision" (1991: 115-6).

Although Sauerberg's classification accounts for the variety of narrative forms that constitutes this novel, it is my belief that he mixes genres with modes of enunciation. Bearing in mind Genette's definition of genres in *The Architext: An Introduction* as "properly literary categories" and modes as "categories that belong to linguistics, or … pragmatics" (1992: 64), the above-mentioned classification mixes genres (lyrical), subgenres (epistolary), modes of enunciation (narrative) and literary devices (stream-of-consciousness prose and traditional realism). It seems to me that, the seven sections of *The White Hotel* do not correspond to seven different genres or subgenres as the final three sections are essentially structurally similar prose narratives, though different in tone - what Sauerberg called "realistic", "documentary" and "allegorical". The genre hybridisation evinced in the novel pertains mainly to the first four sections: the "Prologue", epistolary narrative; "*Don Giovanni*", narrative poem; "The Gastein Journal", surrealistic narrative; and "Frau Anna G.", psychoanalytic case study. What, in my opinion, is at stake in this fictional work is that the mixing of genres disturbs "our generic expectations" and forces us to reconsider "how texts are sorted into categories, and how the category itself determines our mode of reception" (Ommundsen, 1993: 9). The fact that Freud's case study is read as the first coherent and, to some extent, authoritative account of Lisa's existence owes much to its being written in the manner of a real Freudian case study, with footnotes that lend it a degree of veracity. Hence, it is the reader's acquired knowledge that clinical studies aim at enlightening us about a specific case that conditions the way we approach "Frau Anna

G.". The confluence of genres in *The White Hotel* results in a hybrid novel that mirrors the postmodernist distrust in a unifying centre out of which emerge stable meaning and consequently authority. The unity of Thomas's novel is not in any of the sections but in the integral (as opposed to the exclusive) reading of each part.

For Thomas as well as for most postmodernist novelists, the quest for originality is not in the utopian belief that an artist can create an aesthetic object from nothing but his/her own creative powers. Thus, as the author himself observed when he was asked once again to comment on the accusation of plagiarism,

> we are all part of the great stream, and in most ages of literature this has been absolutely accepted: in the eighteenth century it was accepted that you would be strongly influenced and could quote from the classics, and Pushkin was very aware that he was influenced by Byron. … If a novel had as much allusion and quotation in proportion as *The Waste Land*, it would be absolutely savaged. … I was astonished by the amount of indignation, as though in a novel every word has to be out of the writer's own mind, which becomes absurd – it would mean that a novel by Jackie Collins or Barbara Cartland was considered original even though it's mostly cliché, whereas a work like *The Waste Land* isn't original because there are quotations from so many authors (Casedemont, 1994: 10).

Postmodernist originality, according to Thomas, is to be found in the acknowledgement that one's creative efforts are not truly one's own but part of a continuum the artist can self-consciously play upon. The summoning of dissimilar texts into the fictional world of *The White Hotel* together with the deployment of several genres in the recounting of the narrative show that originality lies in the hybrid, the dialogic and the discontinuous and not in the neat, coherent and/or monologic discourse.

3.3. – Reading Forwards and Backwards: Narrative Time

Studying the temporal order of a narrative implies comparing "the order in which events … are arranged in the narrative discourse with the order of succession these same events … have in the story" (Genette, 1983: 35). In other words, one has to make sense of the events such as they are arranged at the level of the "récit" in order to set up a chronological sequence. Thomas's novel, with its convoluted progression of events, renders this task a difficult undertaking owing to the favouring of temporal complexity - retrospection, anticipation, simultaneity and repetition - over chronological linearity.

Time is treated differently in the various sections of the novel. In the "Prologue", for example, the reader is confronted with three fundamental moments in the history of psychoanalysis, that is, in Thomas's history of psychoanalysis. The letter that opens the "Prologue" (*W. H.*, 9-11) is dated 8 September 1909 and tells mainly of a journey to America Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung and Sandor Ferenczi undertook. This moment is a key one for the diegesis because, as we have already seen in the previous chapter, the tension that develops between Freud and Jung foreshadows the more Jungian reading *The White Hotel* is prone to. Moreover, a set of mysterious events is reported in Ferenczi's letter that gains new significance in subsequent sections. Firstly, the mist Jung named a "'prehistoric monster'" might be regarded as mankind's inner propensity to do evil in the manner that it is portrayed in "The Sleeping Carriage". Secondly, the incident with the peat-bog corpses that so disturbed Freud finds resonance in Lisa's visions of death in "*Don Giovanni*" and "The Gastein Journal" and in the Babi Yar massacre. Finally, Ferenczi's description of a movie the three psychoanalysts had seen in New York which did not have "much of a plot" (*W. H.*, 10) can be read as a

metafictional digression in that this comment also applies to the reading experience of both "*Don Giovanni*" and "The Gastein Journal".

The three following letters (*W. H.*, 12-15), dated February and March 1920, precipitate a narrative leap of eleven years. In 1920 Freud put forward his theory that life revolves around the tension between the creative forces of Eros and the destructive forces of Thanatos and incidentally Thomas's Freud became Lisa's therapist, a patient whose symptoms will defy his theory. The fifth letter (*W. H.*, 15) that closes this introductory section, dated May 1931, refers to the time Freud completed the case study on Frau Anna G./Lisa and deemed it ready for publication.

The importance these three periods have in terms of the diegesis should not be underestimated. The year 1909 coincides with the moment during Lisa's adolescence when she was first confronted with anti-Semitism and "realized that there was something *bad* about being Jewish" (*W. H.*, 168). The anti-Semitic feelings took then the form of sexual abuse as some Russian sailors "forced [Lisa] to commit acts of oral sex with them, saying that was all [she] was good for" (*W. H.*, 168) but later on they will take a more tragic form. On the other hand, 1920 marks the period her illness forced her to seek the help of the Viennese doctor, who fails to cure her; instead, Freud's therapy helped Lisa to readjust her splitting self to outside reality. The last date referred to in the "Prologue", 1931, is recovered in "The Health Resort" in Lisa's long letter to her analyst in which his authority was put in question by the new facts Lisa confesses to have kept hidden from him. Thus, of the key moments of the novel's diegetic development only the genocide at Babi Yar in 1941 is not mentioned in the introductory section because such an unspeakable event was both literally out of Freud's reach (he died in 1939) and metaphorically beyond the domain of psychoanalysis or, indeed, beyond the domain of any theoretical framework.

Bearing these dates in mind, it is possible to establish a chronological line of events even though at the level of the "récit" chronology is subverted due to the long retrospective movements as well as, to a lesser extent, to the prospective probing into the future that pervades the novel. The chronological reach of *The White Hotel* can be pursued as far back as the 1890s and up to 1941. The "Prologue", as discussed, covers the period between 1909 and 1931 and the next two sections, "*Don Giovanni*" and "The Gastein Journal", are included within this period since both report events that happened in 1920. Freud's case study exhibits as time boundaries "the Autumn of 1919" (*W. H.*, 83) and "about a year later" (*W. H.*, 129). The next section, "The Health Resort", however, represents a major temporal progression as the reader re-enters the narrative "In the spring of 1929" (*W. H.*, 133) to accompany the protagonist's existence until November 1936, when she writes a letter to her aunt (*W. H.*, 191-2) telling of her happy life as a married woman in Kiev. There is also a long retrospective movement embedded in this section, in the form of the letter Lisa wrote to Freud (*W. H.*, 162-72). This metadiegetic narrative takes the reader as far back as the 1890s, when Lisa witnessed her uncle making love to her mother and her aunt, and comes to an end in March 1931, two months before Freud's letter to Herr Kuhn included in the "Prologue" (*W. H.*, 15). Five years elapse between "The Health Resort" and "The Sleeping Carriage", which narrates events that occurred in 1941. Until this point of the narrative the task of setting up a chronology of events is made difficult but not impossible. Nevertheless, "The Camp", the final section, constitutes a challenge to our notions of time as it describes a timeless place, that is, a place beyond the temporal boundaries around which we organise our existence.

The narrative unravelling of *The White Hotel* makes use of retrospective movements, what Genette calls analepses, which result in "a discordance between the two orderings of story and narrative" (Genette, 1983: 36). In "Frau Anna G." analepses

occasionally interrupt narrative progression - almost exclusively marked by Freud's personal interpretation of Lisa's writings - especially when the patient herself tells a particular moment of her past in their therapy sessions. However, the metadiegetic narrative (Lisa's letter) immersed in a section that recounts events from 1929 to 1936 in "The Health Resort" (*W. H.*, 162-72), takes the narrative back to the 1890s in order to disclose essential information about the protagonist's childhood. From the time Lisa was three years old, the narrative shifts ahead to her relationship with Alexei and reformulates what she had formerly said about this matter to, once again, move backwards and narrate the incident with the Russian sailors. Until the narrative reaches the present (1931), these analeptic moves are abundantly deployed, mirroring the protagonist's erratic memory.

Nevertheless, analepsis is not the single device employed by Thomas to disrupt linear progression of time. Equally important, though, are the proleptic narrative segments associated with the heroine's ability to foresee the future. Lisa's prose version of her narrative poem, "The Gastein Journal", is particularly the section in which a greater number of prolepses are displayed, as for example in "She would not be singing for some time" (*W. H.*, 35) and "also she saw this friendly young soldier lying frozen in his coffin" (*W. H.*, 36). The use of both analepses and prolepses in this narrative creates an atmosphere of discontinuity and undermines pre-established notions regarding the principle of causality. For this reason, the exercise of trying to reach a conclusion as to what caused a particular behaviour is invariably frustrated due to the protagonist's constant reformulations of her past as well as to the profusion of proleptic segments which insinuate that causes may be in the future and not in the past.

The feeling of chronological disorder and incoherence is pushed to the limit with the narrative's emphasis on repetition, which installs a sense of *déjà vu*. Given the high number of occurrences, I shall point out here those which I believe to be more relevant

for the understanding of the narrative. Therefore, the dramatic events described in "*Don Giovanni*" are repeated in prose form in "The Gastein Journal" and in "The Sleeping Carriage". The visions of penetration that predominate in both Lisa's writings in "*Don Giovanni*" and "The Gastein Journal" are also reinforced in "Frau Anna G.", when Freud tells his patient that he "was interested only in penetrating to the truths which I was sure her remarkable document contained" (*W. H.*, 107), and in "The Sleeping Carriage" in the description of Lisa's death (*W. H.*, 218-20). Finally, in the dream that opens the prose version of the poem (*W. H.*, 33-4), Lisa finds herself naked running away from soldiers' shots in the course of which she meets a small boy who tells her "Don't be frightened, lady … I'm alive too" (*W. H.*, 33). This narrative sequence is retold in "The Sleeping Carriage" when Dina Pronicheva scrambling up the Babi Yar ravine hears a boy whispering to her "Don't be scared, lady! I'm alive too" (*W. H.*, 220).

In *The White Hotel* events are duplicated, thus suggesting that meaning and narrative coherence are not singular but plural; that they are to be looked for in the diverse rather than in the uniform. Moreover, this fictional work shatters preconceived notions of time in that, as I have already mentioned in the previous section, Lisa lived simultaneously in the past, the present and the future. Such a simultaneity is partly the cause for her tragic destiny since her symptoms were read according to standard conceptions of time. In my opinion, Lisa dies at Babi Yar not because it was her destiny but because psychoanalysis failed to grasp the true meaning of her visions. Consequently, the heroine's misfortune lies as much on her tragic meeting with history as on her inability to understand that the key elements to avoid such an end were within herself, in what the outside world considered hysterical visions.

Echoing the postmodernist notion of time, the novel confronts the past, the present and the future, exhibiting "an urge to unmask the continuities that are taken for

granted in the western narrative tradition" (Hutcheon, 1999: 98). The narrative unfolding in *The White Hotel*, and in most of Thomas's fictional works, is intentionally erratic, discontinuous and unpredictable although a close reading reveals that the events are masterfully knit. A characteristic of Thomas's narrative technique, the questioning of pre-established conceptions of time is intended to draw readers' attention to the fact that our existence cannot be explained satisfactorily if we only resort to the past and confront it with the present. *The White Hotel* seems to imply that we must also leave space for the irrational, the mystic and the unknown future.

3.4. – Narrative Self-Consciousness: Undermining Representation

In Aleid Fokkema's work *Postmodern Characters: A Study of Characterization in British and American Postmodern Fiction* (1991), the author argues that "perhaps in no British postmodern novel is the emphasis on writing so great" (129) as in *The White Hotel*; a novel that overtly deals with "textuality and textual dynamics" (Wren, 1996: 123) and in this process undermines representation.

Dating back to the Greek philosophers, the idea that man is "the representational animal, *homo symbolicum*" (Mitchell, 1999: 11) has become a key concept among western literary theorists. Plato, for instance, regarded literature as a representation of life, thus as an illusory substitute for reality. The mimetic nature of literature, in other words, its potential for depicting reality, led Plato to be suspicious of it insofar as literature could "stir up antisocial emotions" and encourage "imitation of evil" (15). Contrary to Plato, Aristotle "insists on treating mimesis largely as an artistic issue rather

than a socio-cultural and philosophical one" (Cobley, 2001: 61). According to him, narrative "*records* and *re-enacts* human action" (62).

Thomas's novel seems to subscribe to the assumption that the relationship between narrative and the world is not merely one of reference but of *re*-presentation; that "the signs in a narrative are not the same as those in the world" (225). The information the reader is given about Lisa Erdman is mediated by texts, narratives. The "Prologue", with its letters, constitutes the first example of how her availability to the reader is mostly 'textualised'. Then, the next two sections provide additional elements about her illness by means of narrative constructions Lisa herself wrote. Until this stage of the narrative, "we have only *literary* evidence of her existence" (Klonowska, 1996: 94), which seems to accord with J. Hillis Miller's assertion that "the human capacity to tell stories is one way men and women collectively build a significant and orderly world around themselves" (1999: 69). Lisa writes both "*Don Giovanni*" and "The Gastein Journal" in order to give meaning to what she was feeling. In this case, naming her feelings and providing them with narrative concatenation, however loose it may be, renders her chaotic existence slightly more familiar.

Freud's case study on Frau Anna G./Lisa only enhances the impression that the heroine is made available to us through textual devices, as she becomes the "subject of his medical journal" (Klonowska, 1996: 94). Undoubtedly, there are numerous indications in the analyst's discourse that point to the 'narrativity' of his case study and, concomitantly, of Lisa. After giving an overall description of his patient's clinical situation, Freud remarks that his exposition had been "the *story* which the unfortunate young woman told [him]" (*W.H.*, 91). Further on in his narrative, he asks himself "What was I to make of this *memory*?" (*W.H.*, 99) and then admits his surprise while "*rereading* Anna's journal" (*W.H.*, 109). Finally, when all that Lisa had recounted seemed clear to him, Freud states that he "had listened to her agitated *account* with a

growing assurance of its *conclusion*" (*W.H.*, 122) and, therefore, it was "time to *summarize* what we know about this unfortunate young woman's case" (*W.H.*, 125)[26]. Nouns such as 'story', 'account', 'memory' and 'conclusion' together with the verbs 'reread' and 'summarize' point to the fictiveness, the illusory nature of the analyst's interpretation as well as to the object of his interpretation.

All that narratives can do (Lisa's, Freud's or anybody's) is to tell the story

> in a manner which is detailed, precise, "alive", and in that way give more or less *illusion of mimesis* – which is the only narrative mimesis, for this single and sufficient reason: that narration, oral or written, is a fact of language, and language signifies without imitating (Genette, 1983: 164).

Both in her own writings and in Freud's reading of them, Lisa's thoughts, visions and actions are rendered in words, which amount to saying that they are *re*-presented (made present) and not faithfully depicted, given that "narrative form clearly involves a foreshortening of the world" (Cobley, 2001: 185).

The sections that follow, "The Health Resort", "The Sleeping Carriage" and "The Camp", told by an extra-heterodiegetic narrator with omniscient scope of vision, may be seen as some sort of interruption in the novel's challenge to representation. Yet, by undermining Freud's authority and all we had taken for granted, Lisa's letter included in "The Health Resort", which was "so full of the correction of lies" (*W. H.*, 172), reminds us that the text we are reading is a fabrication woven out of other texts. Similarly, the borrowing of Kuznetsov's documentary novel, an unequivocal acknowledgement of the limits of fictional representation, enhances the awareness of the narrative's overt subversion of traditional forms of representation.

On these grounds, *The White Hotel* can be considered an historiographic metafiction as it meets Hutcheon's definition for this postmodernist novelistic genre[27]. In effect, Thomas's narrative confronts the past with the present (and also with the future, as already referred) to question preconceived ideas that the past can be known in

its wholeness. Moreover, this novel hints at the distinctions between history and fiction which are not as well-defined as we sometimes are led to believe. It also brings 'ex-centrics' into the forefront of its fictional universe. Finally, *The White Hotel* lays bare its own fictionality and actually turns it into a major theme.

For these reasons, it seems to me that Nünning's sub-categorisation of Hutcheon's expression 'historiographic metafiction' into 'Revisionist Historical Novels', 'Metahistorical Novels' and 'Explicit or Implicit Historiographic Metafiction'[28] appears as inadequate in what concerns a proper categorisation of *The White Hotel* since this novel does not fit into one single classification, reflecting, once again, the postmodernist distrust in fixed overarching categories. On this basis, the fact of portraying the 'meeting' of an unknown ordinary female figure with a key moment of twentieth-century history allows us to conclude that *The White Hotel* falls into Nünning's first category: 'revisionist historical novel'. Lisa is an 'ex-centric' both in the sense that in the light of the moral codes of the early decades of the twentieth century her behaviour can be considered unusual (as suggested by the phonetic similarities between the word "ex-centric" and "eccentric") and in the sense that she is at the margin of a male-dominated society.

Also, this text clearly insists on unmasking the distortions underlying the writing of past events. Lisa's constant lies and reformulations of previously recounted events are meant to affirm that the past cannot be known unrestricted from subjective memory, the mediation of language and the interpretive skills of the receiver. Thus, taking these aspects into account, *The White Hotel* may likewise be classified as a 'Metahistorical Novel'. Finally, one may as well regard Thomas's novel as an 'Implicit Historiographic Metafiction' in that it does not overtly theorise on historiography – like his other fictional work *Flying in to Love* does - but rather incorporates subtle allusions to the limits of history within the structure of the narrative. This is the case of the Babi Yar

sequence, in which the suggestion that Kuznetsov's version of the massacre is also a construct and not the whole truth is indirectly stated.

The metafictional digressions in *The White Hotel*, either related to historiography or to the act of writing and interpreting, draw attention to "the material existence of language and fictional systems, the 'stuff' of literature which the reader otherwise tends to overlook" (Ommundsen, 1993: 9). In this novel, metafiction is foregrounded in two different manners: it is brought about by one of the characters, as for example, when Freud concludes in "Frau Anna G." that "no analysis is ever complete" (*W. H.*, 127); or it is subtly introduced in the narrative. This latter procedure takes two forms: the employment of various hypotexts, calling attention to the fact that texts signify in relation to other texts; and the use of various sections that undermine (rewrite) one another, pointing to the impossibility of texts to provide a stable explanation of reality. By exposing the "various rules governing the representational game" (Ommundsen, 1993: 33), Thomas's narrative offers the reader an active role because, like the Austrian psychoanalyst, he/she has to read between the lines and make sense of the plethora of interpretive possibilities the text engenders. In an essay entitled "Postmodernism and Literature (or: Word Salad Days 1960-90)", Barry Lewis concludes that "the pursuit of clues appeals to the postmodernist writer because it so closely parallels the hunt for textual meaning by the reader" (2001: 126). Therefore, in his/her detective-like approach to the diegesis, the reader cannot simply be a "bystander" since he/she "is provoked into an awareness of the role s/he plays in activating the text" (Ommundsen, 1993: 77). In this respect, Barthes's contention that it is in the reader that "the multiplicity [of the text] is focused" (1977b: 148) seems to find support in this novel. The author of both "*Don Giovanni*" and "The Gastein Journal", Lisa, is clearly shown not to be in control of her writings. For that reason, she cannot be the only source of interpretation; on the contrary, if any interpretation is to be drawn out

of her compositions, it is the reader (in diegetic terms, Freud) who is to perform it, even if this interpretation is later on disavowed. What *The White Hotel* seeks to demonstrate is that all that the author is able to do is to explain his/her text by means of another text - Lisa's prose version of her poem - and, consequently, we have all the reasons to be sceptical "about the idea of the author as the origin and end of the meaning of a text" (Bennet, 1999: 22).

In the light of these theoretical approaches, representation is seriously challenged in *The White Hotel* given that, confronted with the impossibility of depicting the world, the novel singles out the act of writing as the object of narrative inquiry. The loss of fixed points of reference, such as, an all-inclusive grand narrative capable of accounting for the weighty matters the narrative deals with, results in a proliferation of 'petits récits' offered as a counterpoint to the dominant discourse. Psychoanalysis could not explain the various 'little narratives' embodied in Lisa's pre-cognitive gift, as suggested in this passage:

> Most of the dead were poor and illiterate. But every one of them had dreamed dreams, seen visions and had amazing experiences, even the babes in arms (perhaps especially the babes in arms). Though most of them had never lived outside the Podol slum, their lives and histories were as rich and complex as Lisa Erdman-Berenstein's. If a Sigmund Freud had been listening and taking notes from the time of Adam, he would still not fully have explored even a single group, even a single person (*W. H.*, 220).

Individuals' complex inner and social lives are not given adequate prominence in metanarratives, owing to the latter's exploration of universal variants, which, as the above-mentioned excerpt appears to indicate, constitutes the main reason for us to be suspicious of any narrative that claims to have found the means to reach the truth.

With its emphasis on writing, that is, on the human urge to tell stories, *The White Hotel* is in consonance with the Barthesian claim that "narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting, … stained glass windows, cinema, comics, news item, conversation" (1977a: 79). In the

light of this universality of narrative, Heraclitus's assertion that "the soul of man is a far country, which cannot be approached or explored" (*W. H.*, 174 and 220), twice quoted in the novel - the first time by Freud, the second by the narrator of "The Sleeping Carriage" - gains a new meaning because only through narrative, i. e., a linguistic construct, can we approach one's soul. Yet, if stories fail to depict the world or the recesses of our psyche, they are apt to tell something about both the subject who writes and about themselves.

In his discussion on the nature of narratives, Martin McQuillan singles out several pivotal points, namely that *i.* "stories are everywhere"; *ii.* "not only do we tell stories, but stories tell us: if stories are everywhere, we are also in stories"; *iii.* "the telling of a story is always bound up with power, property and domination"; *iv.* "stories are multiple: there is always more than one story"; *v.* "stories always have something to tell us about stories themselves: they always involve self-reflexive and metafictional dimensions" (2000: 3). Consequently, in Thomas's narrative Lisa's texts disclose crucial information about its author, herself, not because her account is fact-based but precisely because it mirrors the subject's demented perception of reality as well as her search for her identity. Thus, *The White Hotel* enacts for us "that story-telling, whether spoken or thought in our daily lives or written down in literature, is the constitutive force in all identity creation" (Wheeler, 1999: 18). Conversely, Freud's case study may be understood as a means to exert his male power over his patient: by explaining Lisa, he maintains her within the boundaries of his interpretive skills, that is, within his control. However, as Fokkema rightly observed, Lisa "has only one weapon against complete subjection: continuous revision" (1991: 136). By constantly revising her past, she resembles an eluding sign that both Freud and the reader try to seize. But, soon enough, they find out that narratives call for other narratives, signs call for other signs, endlessly. Therefore, the sense of renewal explored throughout the novel, especially in

its final section "The Camp", finds an equivalent in the narrative structure of the text, whose heterogeneity, thematic and structural, stands for the regeneration inherent in narrative.

With a story presented "from different angles", *The White Hotel* creates, in Frank Conroy's opinion, "the effect of the author circling in on his subject in a spiral" (1982: 143), which symbolises psychoanalytic procedures. Contrary to Conroy, I believe that the structure of this novel bears a resemblance to a circle because the various sections do not develop parallel to one another but, rather, in circular movements, where each time the narrative passes through known facts, new information is added. Such a narrative structure makes it difficult not only to pinpoint the beginning and the end but likewise to decide whether the novel proceeds to some kind of closure. If the final section may be said to embody the end of Lisa's search for her whole self, it also suggests that her happiness is achieved with the return to maternal protection and with the acknowledgement that she is destined to soothe other people's pains. Therefore, the circle initiated in "*Don Giovanni*" becomes complete: "The Camp" is not the end of a straight line but some undetermined point in a circle bound to eternal continuity. In this respect, the pessimism that results from history's unyielding effects on individual lives is mitigated in the spiritual turn brought about in the final section.

For all these reasons, *The White Hotel* stands within postmodernist British fiction as a paradigmatic example of the aesthetic concerns of the contemporary world. Wirth-Nesher analyses this fictional work in three different aspects: *i.* artistically, as innovative fiction; *ii.* intellectually, as psychoanalytic fiction; and *iii.* morally, as Holocaust fiction[29]. Thomas's novel is indeed highly innovative not because the author invented a groundbreaking narrative technique but because he combined well-known fictional devices to create a powerful hybrid work of fiction. Furthermore, *The White Hotel* turns to psychoanalysis - like *Pictures at an Exhibition* and *Eating Pavlova* - and

uses it both as a major theme and as a structuring device. Finally, as "Holocaust Fiction", this novel cannot avoid the controversy that surrounds the fictional representation of the Holocaust in twentieth-century history. Nonetheless, it seems to me that in spite of the extreme violence Thomas employed to convey the victims' suffering and of the appropriation of testimonial material, nowhere in the novel does Thomas appear to be disrespectful or unsympathetic towards the victims. He does not sensationalise the fate of the six million Jews who perished during World War II; his intention was to approach these matters in a thought-provoking manner and thus present an artist's perspective about the human drive to destruction. However, the openness the narrative foregrounds together with the inconclusive nature of the questions it raises does not culminate in a nihilistic vision of existence because, if not in the physical world, at least in the afterlife, Eros can win its battle with Thanatos.

By employing multiple narrators, dissimilar modes of expression and intertextual references, discontinuous narrative progression and metafictional narrative structuring, Thomas has written a novel that touches upon essential contemporary matters: the validity of narrative and historical truth; the role of individual lives in historical progress; the unstable relationship between fact and fiction; the problematic definition of originality; the heterogeneity of interpretations inherent in the text; and the nature of both good and evil. Since the answers are not positively expressed in the text, *The White Hotel* "disturbs, disorients, frustrates [but also] moves and engages us – and in its tentativeness, it rings true" (Wirth-Nesher, 1985: 27).

3.5. – Chapter Endnotes

[1] Indeed, this novel is extensively offered as a paradigmatic postmodernist work in the following works: Patricia Waugh's *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (1984); Brian McHale's *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987); Randall Stevenson's *The British Novel since the Thirties: An Introduction* (1987); Linda Hutcheon's *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988) and *The Politics of Postmodernism* (1989); Alison Lee's *Realism and Power: Postmodern British Fiction* (1990); Marguerite Alexander's *Flights from Realism* (1990); Edmund Smyth's *Postmodernism and Contemporary Fiction* (1991); and Aleid Fokkema's *Postmodern Characters: A Study of Characterization in British and American Fiction* (1991).

[2] All quotations are taken from the 1999 Phoenix edition (London) and page references are presented in parentheses in the main text.

[3] Page references are not provided given that this article was published in an E-Journal at www.othervoices.org.

[4] All quotations are taken from David Floyd's 1982 translation for Penguin (London) and subsequent page references are presented in parentheses in the main text.

[5] Section One – "Prologue" (pp. 9-15); Section Two – "*Don Giovanni*" (pp. 19-30); Section Three – "The Gastein Journal" (pp. 33-80); Section Four – "Frau Anna G." (pp. 83- 130); Section Five – "The Health Resort" (pp. 133-92); Section Six – "The Sleeping Carriage" (pp. 195-222); Section Seven – "The Camp" (pp. 225-40).

[6] In *The Unconscious* Anthony Easthope reports that in a paper entitled "Analysis Terminable and Interminable", published in 1937, Freud admitted that "sometimes therapy ended satisfactorily, in other cases it couldn't because 'absolute psychic health' is impossible", p. 23.

[7] See Lyotard's discussion about the demise of grand narratives in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, pp. 60-7.

[8] See Chapter I, 1.3.1 – Intertextuality - for a more comprehensive discussion of this issue, pp. 19-20.

[9] All quotations are taken from the 1998 Oxford edition (trans. James E. Falen, Oxford) and page references are presented in parentheses in the main text.

[10] For the purpose of this research I have used King James's version of *The Holy Bible* published by Cambridge University Press.

[11] In T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land and Other Poems* (1990), Faber and Faber, London, p. 67.

[12] The complete poem reads:

Marina

Quis hic locus, quae regio, quae mundi plaga?

What seas what shores what grey rocks and what islands
What water lapping the bow
And scent of pine and the woodthrush singing through the fog
What images return
O my daughter.

Those who sharpen the tooth of the dog, meaning
Death
Those who glitter with the glory of the hummingbird, meaning
Death

Those who sit in the stye of contentment, meaning
Death
Those who suffer the ecstasy of the animals, meaning
Death

Are become unsubstantial, reduced by a wind,
A breath of pine, and the woodsong fog
By this grace dissolved in place
What is this face, less clear and clearer
The pulse in the arm, less strong and stronger –
Given or lent? more distant than stars and nearer than the eye

Whispers and small laughter between leaves and hurrying feet
Under sleep, where all the waters meet.
Bowsprit cracked with ice and paint cracked with heat.
I made this, I have forgotten
And remember.
The rigging weak and the canvas rotten
Between one June and another September.
Made this unknowing, half conscious, unknown, my own.
The garboard strake leaks, the seams need caulking.
This form, this face, this life
Living to live in a world of time beyond me; let me
Resign my life for this life, my speech for that unspoken,
The awakened, lips parted, the hope, the new ships.

What seas what shores what granite islands towards my timbers
And woodthrush calling through the fog
My daughter.

[13] All quotations are taken from the 1988 Victor Gollancz edition of Thomas's *Memories and Hallucinations: A Memoir* and page references are presented in parentheses in the main text.

[14] See Chapter I, 1.3.1. – Intertextuality - for a definition of pastiche, pp. 21-2.

[15] See Chapter I, 1.3.1. – Intertextuality - in which pastiche is discussed as a creative postmodernist feature, pp. 21-2.

[16] See Rowland Wymer's "Freud, Jung and the 'Myth' of Psychoanalysis in *The White Hotel*" for a more detailed analysis of the difference between their psychoanalytical approaches, p. 62.

[17] See Chapter III - A Narratological Analysis of *The White Hotel* – p. 75.

[18] See Chapter II, 2.2.1. – The Return to History - in which a more comprehensive discussion of the relationship between fiction and the Holocaust is offered, p. 51-3.

[19] See Chapter I, 1.3.3. – Historiographic Metafiction - where I present McHale's contentions on how contemporary authors deal with the questioning of historical truth, p. 28.

[20] See Barbara Klonowska's essay "Totality and Individuality: History vs. a History in D. M. Thomas's *The White Hotel*" where the scholar states that the first two chapters of Thomas's fictional work place the emphasis on psychological problems rather than in historical ones, p. 90.

[21] See Gérard Genette's seminal work *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* for a more thorough examination of these textual features, pp. 1-15.

[22] See Genette's above-mentioned work in which this term is defined, pp. 155-6.

[23] See Chapter I, 1.3.3. – Historiographic Metafiction - for a more thorough discussion of how contemporary authors blur the boundaries between fact and fiction, pp 28-31.

[24] As examples of this characteristic in Freudian case studies, one could list "Anna O.", "Fräulein Elizabeth von R." and "The Wolf-Man".

[25] See Chapter I, 1.3.2. – Metafiction - for additional information on this subject, pp. 22-5.

[26] The italics in these five quotations are mine.

[27] See Chapter I, 1.3.3. – Historiographic Metafiction - where Hutcheon's definition of this postmodernist genre is offered, pp. 28-9.

[28] See Chapter I, 1.3.3. – Historiographic Metafiction - in which a more comprehensive discussion of this matter is presented, p. 31.

[29] See Wirth-Nesher's "The Ethics of Narration in D. M. Thomas's *The White Hotel*" for the scholar's full exposition, p. 16.

Conclusion

The White Hotel is a novel with unquestionable artistic merits: its structure manages to surprise the reader as well as the learned scholar; its disturbing subject matter is laid down in such a way that it eludes the imposition of a definite perspective, to the point that some critics have seen in this apparent uncompromising attitude a sign of Thomas's impotence towards providing a satisfactory resolution for the serious issues this narrative raises. Nevertheless, I believe that it is precisely this ostensible undecidability that makes *The White Hotel* a novel that will keep on being read and discussed in academic circles. Its defiant stance regarding the arbitrary teleology dictated by overarching narratives, which in this text are rendered ephemeral, constitutes its strength. In writing this fictional work, Thomas's compromise was not in conforming to the prevalent discourse but in the foregrounding of the postmodernist claim that local, provisional and individual discourses should be taken into account in any narrative.

Indeed, one can hardly say that Lisa Erdman is a typical heroine: she is not particularly beautiful or talented (she never reached the status of Prima Dona); she was unable to conceive; she was half Jew, half Christian; her love affairs were not in any way successful or satisfying; and she was emotionally not in control of her self. The only extraordinary thing in this character was her prescient gift, which in practical terms she could not use to her benefit, given that the theoretical framework she turned to – psychoanalysis – was powerless to come to a reasonable explanation for her visions. Apart from the overt assertion that metanarratives are provisional, what is also at stake in Thomas's novel is that a purely rational interpretation of both the world and existence

is necessarily limited. Rationalism, empiricism and positivism, the three basic fundamentals that have guided western philosophy, history and politics in the past three centuries, are challenged in *The White Hotel*, as the narrative hints that there may be elements in one's existence that are beyond reason, experimentation and known facts. In the same fashion, the notion of progress is put in question: the technological breakthroughs that asserted man's supremacy over the natural world were used to annihilate a people. As opposed to historical progress, this text proposes a spiritual progress that ultimately is a re-encounter of the individual with his/her self.

As the narrative seems to put forth, knowledge and meaning do not proceed from a unifying reassuring centre but from many different points at the margins. Herein lies the novel's foregrounding of postmodernist decentring and plurality. Echoing these two key factors of postmodernity, *The White Hotel* enacts the loss of a point of reference by claiming that unity is to be found in a diversity of sources: history, psychoanalysis, Christianity and in individual life. Therefore, Thomas's fictional work defies order, hierarchies and pre-established systems and strives to demonstrate that these categories are not universal but, rather, contingent. In *The White Hotel*, so-called universal categories like time, causality and progress are constantly under pressure by an unconventional display of narrative events.

The notion of originality is also overtly debated in this text. For centuries, the value ascribed to a work of art, irrespective of the means of expression, depended on the recognition that the creative product had effectively been the result of an individual's inventive faculty. Against this inaccurate notion of originality, which denies the indebtedness to the literary continuum every author belongs to, this postmodernist novel delineates narrative fiction as inherently intertextual and parodic. Whether unmistakably cited in the narrative or surreptitiously alluded to in the text, the multiplicity of previous

texts, styles and genres displayed in *The White Hotel* demonstrates that quotation is intrinsic to the writing of narrative fiction.

On this basis, *The White Hotel* self-consciously theorises on the nature of aesthetic representation, reflecting one of the characteristic features of postmodernist fiction: self-reflexivity. In fact, metafiction underlies this novel's narrative construction. Overall, it can be read as an undeniable statement that memory, the past and therefore history are conveyed by means of texts, i. e., by words that cannot portray the world faithfully. Yet, the gap between the world and the text, in other terms, between real life and narrative, is not a reason to cry out that the novel is dead but instead to formulate new creative ways to make the genre 'Novel' develop into a new stage. In this respect, the emphasis on writing as self-knowledge, the conviction that meaning depends more on the reader than on the author and the admission that more than generating a single interpretation what texts do is to call for other texts endlessly result in a novel that turns representation into its subject matter and indirectly claims that knowledge is communicated through narratives, that is, through textual constructs liable to originate dissimilar interpretations. Given that the sign is elusive, that narrative telling entails selecting, positioning and the inevitable interference of one's ideology, no narrative can be said to enclose a universal totalising vision. As the succession of sections that permanently rewrite one another clearly shows, in *The White Hotel* narratives do not possess in themselves the ultimate truth. It is in the various versions, in the multiple perspectives in which the story is offered and in the numerous intertextual references that the reader and the researcher are going to find *their* truth.

These characteristics that have been so far ascribed to *The White Hotel* are also encountered in D. M. Thomas's remaining literary output. The truth is that the concerns with the porous relationship between history and fantasy, the privileging of anonymous figures in the handling of history, the presentation of a decentred view of knowledge,

the employment of multi-perspective narrative unravelling, the belief that literature is necessarily dialogic and the use of metafictional devices to foreground the nature of fiction are all fictional strategies Thomas recurrently turns to in his *oeuvre*. Such strategies are part of the author's anti-establishment attitude; in fact, most of his novels can be considered unconventional not only in structural terms but also in terms of content. His handling of delicate issues, like the Holocaust or Kennedy's assassination, does not merely comply with known facts but always seeks to undermine official history by mingling fact and fantasy or by presenting an historical event from the perspective of an unheard-of protagonist, thus embodying an alternative, but not necessarily unfounded, view of events.

Consequently, Thomas's attitude towards the recorded past is, without exception, one of critical rethinking, not of nostalgic reminiscence. Hence, his handling of history is not meant to highlight its edifying aspects and deplore the present but to unmask the inconsistencies and discriminatory essence of any recording of the past. Therefore, microhistories are put together with macrohistory and, in the dialectic association between the two, an unorthodox account is offered.

I believe that in this dissertation narratology was not employed as an end in itself but as a means to discern, as far as possible, the extent to which *The White Hotel* employs innovative postmodernist techniques. The narratological analysis carried out in this research, ranging from an analysis of narrators, narrative levels, focalisation and narrative time to the study of intertextuality, the mixing of genres and metafiction, does not cover the entire reach narratology embraces. Only the above-mentioned fields of analysis were subject to more extensive inquiry since, in my opinion, they were the most relevant aspects for the understanding of the textual dynamics of *The White Hotel*. Used in this manner, narratology revealed that Thomas's novel does not conform to rigid classifications and that, like the postmodernist novels referred to in the course of

this study, it constitutes an endeavour to redefine the genre 'Novel'. Viewed in this perspective, no single classification (holocaust fiction, historiographic metafiction, psychoanalytic fiction or other) seems to be appropriate for this text. If anything, *The White Hotel* is a hybrid postmodernist novel that aims at representing in fictional terms the main artistic, political, philosophical and moral concerns of postmodernity.

To conclude, this fictional work is neither the reflection of a depthless society nor does its structural diversity result in kitsch, owing to the ingenious connection between content and form, none of which is given privileged status. These are, indeed, intricately intertwined: the formal audacity the novel exhibits reflects the content, which aims at asserting that knowledge is communicated via a multiplicity of narratives. Accordingly, the post-cognitive questions *The White Hotel* raises – Are the subject, the real and/or the truth *a priori* concepts or merely human constructs? – further corroborate the cultural relevance this novel acquires in the contemporary world. It is, therefore, simultaneously a daring and disturbing endeavour to come to terms with one's most overriding concerns.

Select Bibliography

This select bibliography, which consists of the works cited in the text together with those that were consulted for the purpose of this research, is divided into three main sections: **A - Narratological Works and Other Theoretical Works**; **B - Works on Postmodernism and Postmodernist Fiction**; and **C - Works by/on D. M. Thomas**.

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