



RESEARCH PAPER

The Dynamics of Color: Trauma, Violence, and the Aesthetics of Suffering in Han Kang's *The White Book*

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines trauma, violence, and the aesthetics of suffering in *The White Book* by Han Kang, focusing on the complexities of personal and historical trauma within South Korean culture. It explores the symbolic use of white imagery – objects and photographs – as representations of socio-political and psychological themes. Using a qualitative approach and Judith Herman's trauma recovery framework, the study investigates the novel's meditative and fragmented narrative, analyzing how metaphors, symbolism, and imagery articulate both individual and collective trauma. The narrator's journey reflects the transformation of trauma, revealing how trauma impacts identity and memory across generations. White serves as a powerful metaphor for both mourning and renewal, signifying loss while also suggesting healing. The paper argues that literature, particularly South Korean fiction, can facilitate trauma recovery by restoring confidence, rebuilding trust, and fostering societal reconnection. It concludes by encouraging further interdisciplinary inquiry into trauma, memory, and identity in literature, particularly within the context of Korean cultural and historical narratives.

Keywords: Color Imagery, Han Kang, Healing, Mourning, Psychological Suffering, Trauma, Memory, White Imagery

Introduction

In art and literature, colors function rhetorically and symbolically to convey themes, motifs, and various dimensions of human experience, including unspeakable pain, the aesthetics of suffering, and historical trauma. Scholars argue that colors are not inherently meaningful but acquire significance through cultural interpretation and individual perception. Within visual art, each hue is associated with distinct meanings shaped by historical, geographical, and temporal contexts. Ultimately, the significance attributed to colors is informed by historical narratives and personal experiences. Blair and Bloom (2011, p. 25) assert that 'colors could signify whatever people desired them to signify.' For example, blue symbolizes optimism and loyalty at Citibank in the United States, whereas in Iran, it conveys sadness. Similarly, red carries diverse cultural connotations: it represents good fortune in China, integrity in India, malevolence or danger in Western societies, and mourning in South Africa. Thus, the relationship between culture and color remains fluid, influenced by historical events and geographical circumstances.

Certain colors possess universal symbolic meanings that are derived from environmental and biological factors, despite the dynamic relationship between color and culture. White is often a symbol of purity, cleanliness, and a fresh beginning. It serves as a fundamental color, analogous to how salt amplifies flavor and silence delineates sound. Objects in the cosmos are discerned by the colors they reflect or emit. Consequently, white is often seen as a transitional region between life and death, representing both existence and absence. In an interview with Krys Lee on August 17, 2020, Han Kang said, "I was contemplating my older sister who passed away at birth." I reflected on the hue. This feeling

of a void and sterility maintains white as a symbol of innocence in many cultures. White is a symbol of tragedy in Korean literature, as evidenced by the white apparel of the Hanbok, as per BongHa Seo (2014). *The White Book* functions as both a prayer and a eulogy, depicting suffering as an ongoing process from birth to death. It commences with "Swaddling Bands" and concludes with "Mourning Robes". In this context, life becomes a stage where suffering undergoes transformation and evolution.

South Korean literature has attracted considerable interest from academics and authors focused on South Korean studies and trauma literature. Their contributions have transformed the literary scene by presenting distinctive viewpoints divergent from Western literary traditions. They mostly depict the suffering of the South Korean people from an indigenous viewpoint. Included among these writers is Han Kang, whose writings reflect the experiences of South Koreans contending with political turmoil and rapid societal transformation. The brutal repression of the 1980 Gwangju Uprising, during which government troops slaughtered hundreds of pro-democracy supporters, significantly influenced her worldview and understanding of trauma. This sad occurrence infuses her writing, serving as both a key topic and a persistent influence on her characters' lives.

This study examines the symbolic importance of color, with a focus on the color white, in South Korean contexts. In Han Kang's narrative, color imagery represents historical trauma, the aesthetics of suffering, and episodes of violence. It underscores the need for healing in contesting haunting memories that restrict local lives and suppress their voices. Employing Judith Lewis Herman's trauma theory, we examine Han Kang's portrayal of the traumatic experiences of locals, focusing on their burdens, anxieties, and the suppression of their voices.

Unveiling Silence: The Portrayal of Trauma and Resistance in Post-Gwangju South Korean Literature

The emergence of the women's rights movement in the 1990s led to a profusion of female voices in Korean literature. Authors include Han Kang, Shin Kyung-sook, Kim In-suk, Seo Ha-jin, Jeon Kyung-rin, and Jo Kyung-ran, who pioneered the creation of "politically progressive and artistically subversive" fiction (Hwang, 2010, p. 52). Sanggum Li (2016) asserts in his piece *Modern Literature after the 1960s* that classifying and identifying any "new generation" of literature is an unfeasible and contentious endeavor owing to the multiplicity of published works (p. 25). Li asserts that the women authors of the 1990s unequivocally "opened up a new realm in Korean literature," a movement that has persisted throughout the decades, pushing the limits of Korean fiction via audacious analyses of modernism, feminine sexuality, and nationalism (2016, p. 34).

Throughout this era, some authors faced imprisonment and torture due to their political involvement, particularly under General Chun Doo-hwan (1979–1988), who broadened the scope of martial rule, closed colleges, curtailed press freedom, and banned political assemblies. In May 1980, several students and activists convened to demonstrate at Chonnam National University in Gwangju, advocating for fair elections and the abolition of martial law (Kim, 2005, p. 33). Despite their humanitarian efforts, Chun reacted with severe military reprisals. His forces murdered hundreds, maybe thousands, of people and apprehended and subjected many more to torture (p. 33). For South Koreans, Gwangju transcends its identity as a southwestern city; it epitomizes sacrifice, serving as the last resting place for hundreds of protestors who were slaughtered by their government.

Despite Han Kang's birth in Gwangju in 1970, which occurred after the Japanese occupation and the Korean War, she has a profound awareness of the enduring scars that the twentieth century has inflicted on both Korea and mankind at large (Shin, 2016). As a youngster during the Gwangju massacre, Han is part of a generation that, as Li (2016: 34) notes, continues to be affected by "the indirect influence of political suppression," which

informs their creative sensibility (2016, p. 34). The extensive range of human experience, including both the magnificent and the terrible, has presented her with a persistent moral dilemma (Shin, 2016). In an interview with Krys Lee, Han elucidates the persistent conflict between compassion and brutality, dignity and repulsion, which pervades her oeuvre. Contemplating these topics, she asserts, "Violence is inherent to humanity, and how can I reconcile with the fact that I am one of those individuals?", "Such suffering perpetually torments me"(2016).

The portrayal of trauma, violence, and the aesthetics of suffering in South Korean culture emerged in Han Kang's writings after the Gwangju Uprising. Han Kang illustrates the psychological trauma experienced by the local people, the bereaved families, and South Korean society, resulting in prolonged silence, suppression, and enforced amnesia by the state. Her contribution to the fragmentation of individual psyches, communal memory, and political awareness. She offers a devastating exploration of the massacre's repercussions from several viewpoints, including that of a little child who perished during the demonstrations. It explores the physical and emotional consequences of state-sanctioned violence, the tenuousness of memory, and the intergenerational impacts of collective trauma. Her depiction of tragedy, suffering, and brutality highlights the significant contribution to modern literature, especially in elevating the voices of the oppressed and voiceless.

The White Book (2016) explores life, death, and trauma, emphasizing the death of Han's older sister shortly after birth. Han uses a fractured, poetic, and episodic narrative style to underscore the importance of white, symbolizing innocence, loss, and transformation. Her tale progresses using a series of vignettes and prose segments, each contemplating the color white in a meta-fictional examination. This pattern connects her sister's deathly pale visage, the snow-laden Polish landscape imbued with its history, and the unmarked page onto which she inscribes. This study intricately connects whiteness with gender, transformation, corporeality, mourning rituals, spirituality, and evolving landscapes. The imagery in each section enhances the narrative's exploration of aesthetics, memory, and loss.

The paper seeks to answer the following questions: Why does Han Kang use white imagery to symbolize personal trauma and collective memory in *The White Book*? How does Han Kang negotiate personal trauma in *The White Book*, and to what extent does the protagonist succeed in overcoming it? For this purpose, it draws textual instances from the novel and interprets them through the lens of trauma theory and symbolic analysis.

Literature Review

Representations of Trauma: Color Imagery and Sufferings in South Korean Literature

As researchers, we highlight the role of color imagery in analyzing loss, traumatic events, and the aesthetics of suffering within the narrative of South Korean literature. Moreover, it aids the reader in broadening their comprehension beyond just words, phrases, and sentences, along with the cultural and geographical context. Furthermore, a review of previous studies on trauma application and the novel identifies the research gap, demonstrating the importance and value of the present study toward the path of healing. Trauma studies are more popular, and the impact of the term 'the psychological wound' is substantial both inside and beyond literary contexts in the modern day. Originating in the 1980s from psychology, cognitive science, law, cultural and literary studies, trauma studies are currently establishing themselves as a paradigm for literary interpretation.

Trauma Perspective of South Korean Literature

Trauma originates from the Greek, meaning 'wound,' 'scar,' or 'defeat,' and its translation varies from "Law to psychology, psychiatry, history, public health, sociology, and literature" (Marder, 2006, p. 5). Over time, the definition of trauma has changed across generations and literature, broadening to include the psychological and cultural scars resulting from previous traumatic events that continue to affect the present (Boehmer, 2012, p. 30). Griselda Pollock asserts that the 20th century is acknowledged as a 'post-traumatic period,' highlighting the enduring impact of the nuclear bomb, the Holocaust, wartime horrors, and terrorism on collective memory (2010, p. 21). The previous studies regarding political and social trends have shown that personal and communal traumas significantly influence the reconfiguration of identities, civic and ethical occurrences, and political dynamics (Bell, 2006, p. 3). Disseminating, articulating, and reconciling diverse historical experiences may influence the dynamics of modern global politics and facilitate the establishment of new paradigms for the future. According to Pollock (2010, p. 21), 'we' refer to those who did not directly experience loss and violence but were born into a society that continues to grapple with its repercussions.

Authors, artists, and filmmakers significantly contribute to exploring and expressing the need to revisit trauma in contemporary society, highlighting the visual elements and narratives that gather the disjointed remnants of the past and convey them immediately. Cinematic and literary depictions of trauma may be analyzed through the lens of trauma theory (Joyce, 2019, p. 462). The phrase was inscribed in the late 20th century to denote a particular academic focus on integrating psychoanalysis and clinical trauma research with literary criticism (Alexander C. McFarlane & Weisæth, 1996). Through the years, trauma theory has evolved into a significant domain of scholarly inquiry, with numerous post-colonial (Craps & Buelens, 2008; Visser, 2011) and feminist (Murray, 2013) theorists reinterpreting and challenging its traditional psychoanalytical foundations.

The previous studies on trauma theory emphasize the relationship between trauma and literary texts. As Farooqi & Jamil explore the concealment of the characters' identity in a hybrid culture within the context of a postcolonial setting. The characters are oppressed and become silenced under the influence of postcolonial traumatic experiences and the oppression of colonialism (2022, p. 1038). Similarly, Farooqi et al. examine the silence and intergenerational trauma in Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Afterlives*, emphasizing the journey toward healing trauma where the protagonists Kahlifa, Ilyas Hamza and Afiya strive to recover from traumatic experiences and reconnect with life again

Studies on Han Kang's Narratives

The previous studies on Han Kang's narrative identify the research gap in the existing literature that underscores the significance and contribution to the existing literary genre. Megan Walsh (2018) analyzes the narrative style of *The White Book* in her analysis. She regards the non-linear writing as an optimal realm for the coexistence of two sisters. Its figurative language and substance exhibit a planned but lyrical progression, enhancing its intellectual profundity. Walsh analyzes the text by categorizing it into three segments: In the first portion, the narrator presents a technique involving the description of white items. The second half showcases real occurrences, including the reinterpretation of her sister's life. The final part elucidates the findings obtained via this procedure. Reviewer Katie Kitamura perceives whiteness as 'a pressing appeal for the ritualistic potency of mourning, highlighting its importance in both personal and collective.' The text serves as a synthesis of poetry and prose, functioning both as an argument and a story

While the South Korean writer Sonjae reflects on traumatic historical events to honor their ancestors. The color white serves as a tabula rasa, comparable to quiet. This void may include all aspects of color, analogous to how silence underpins sound in the novel. By

depicting whiteness as an empty and mute condition, the book implies that both emptiness and muteness challenge traditional proportions. Silence arises when a character or narrator is profoundly impacted by sorrow and melancholy, rendering them incapable of voicing opposition to the corrupt system. Sonjae examines the text via an intersectional perspective, linking post-Holocaust experience with Han Kang's poetic sensibility. The European landscape shown in *The White Book* (Warsaw, Poland) illustrates grief and agony as universal human experiences transcending civilizations (2010).

A distinct study examines the importance of color and elucidates the function of color symbolism in literature, using Han Kang's *The White Book* as a principal reference. This reference offers a comprehensive review of color perception and use across many cultural settings, highlighting that white represents sorrow in Korean and Asian traditions, while symbolizing dignity in Christianity. Han's use of white signifies loss, mourning, agony, and suffering, while also representing birth and healing, resulting in a complex interplay of meanings. The tale presents contrasts, providing a distinctive viewpoint and fostering hope for trauma healing in the viewer (Judd, 2020).

Numerous studies have investigated color identification and symbolism about culture and history as a significant representation in literature, particularly the color white, which symbolizes a blend of several hues, embodying blankness, purity, and grief throughout multiple civilizations. Korean society is seen as traumatized both personally and collectively; nonetheless, the avenues for rehabilitation within this society remain little examined. This study explores the perception of white as a symbol of grief and violence, alongside the human behaviors that facilitate a fulfilling life, utilizing the text of *The White Book* and Han Kang's unique portrayal of mourning her deceased sister, the division of the Korean peninsula, her struggles, and the contemporary challenges faced by South Korea. A review of previous studies on trauma theory and Han Kang's *The White Book* identifies an unexplored research gap.

Material and Methods

This research employs a qualitative interpretive approach to analyze trauma, violence, and the aesthetics of suffering as portrayed through color imagery in Han Kang's *The White Book*. This approach facilitates a comprehensive analysis of the novel's symbolism, thematic complexity, and narrative strategies. The research reveals how Kang's minimalist style, episodic structure, and symbolic whiteness articulate personal and historical trauma through interpretive analysis. This approach conforms to conventional research procedures in cultural and literary studies, highlighting textual analysis as a method for revealing profound meanings within tales. The primary source for this study is *The White Book*, which examines how color imagery symbolizes sorrow, loss, and perseverance. This research employs Herman's three-stage trauma recovery model (1992) to contextualize the book, examining the representation and processing of trauma within the text.

Moreover, secondary sources include South Korean magazines, literary critiques, research papers, essays, and theses that offer insights into the novel's historical and cultural context. These sources contextualize the work within extensive discourses on Korean symbolic color depiction, trauma literature, and socio-political impacts on narrative production. The research utilizes purposive sampling, choosing *The White Book* for its unique exploration of trauma and symbolism. The study uses textual and discourse analysis to investigate how Han Kang integrates poetic vignettes and symbolic objects into a comprehensive reflection on loss and healing. This theoretical framework offers a definitive paradigm for future research on trauma narratives and the use of symbolic color. This research enhances the comprehension of how color imagery conveys pain, memory, and resilience. Through Han Kang's lyrical exploration of whiteness, *The White Book* serves as a

deep meditation on the fragility of life and the enduring impact of trauma on individual and communal narratives.

This research uses narrative analysis to investigate the structural and aesthetic aspects of *The White Book*, concentrating on its literary and visual components. The study reveals how Han Kang creates meaning and elicits emotion through the analysis of language, narrative tactics, and recurring themes. The research explores the visual composition of the text, particularly the use of photographic images and white spaces and photographic images, to comprehend their influence on the novel's thematic complexity. The primary emphasis is on the symbolism of womb imagery and whiteness, serving as both literary themes and visual depictions. The research contends that these components establish a distinctive type of witnessing and grieving, so converting storytelling into an artistic act of recollection. This study demonstrates how *The White Book* combines textual and visual analysis to examine trauma, sorrow, and memory via the fusion of literature and art.

Theoretical Framework

Unspoken Memory: Paths to Healing

This research analyzes the bizarre behavior of the narrative in the chosen South Korean novel, investigating the complex subtleties and tense ambiance in the margins. It examines how these people traverse personal and social trauma within society, using Herman's three-stage trauma recovery model as a framework for self-directed rehabilitation. Furthermore, it examines the use of color imagery – specifically whiteness – together with themes of violence and the aesthetics of suffering to enhance the comprehension of personal loss, the anguish of separation from an older sister (the division of North and South Korea, and overarching social trauma).

Being researchers, our investigation of trauma representation reveals three distinct levels. Initially, we analyze the themes that shape the symbolic representation of whiteness in the text, framing it as a metaphor for border-crossing, separation, motherhood, and, especially, political instability and socioeconomic issues in South Korea. The narrator conveys her grief at the estrangement from her older sister using symbolic objects like a swaddling band and white snow, while also contending with overarching social trauma. Her lyrical work conveys profound emotions, culminating in the symbolic representation of her sister's demise.

The second phase of our research investigates trauma in the context of the socio-political environments of Poland and South Korea. In this context, whiteness surpasses its cultural implications, symbolizing the shared suffering of the South Korean people as they empathetically connect with the traumas of others beyond borders and differences. Finally, we examine the profound environment that cultivates a bond between the narrator and readers, enabling them to get a better comprehension of trauma and, subsequently, reconsider the challenges it poses. Our primary objective as scholars is to comprehend trauma, how it is portrayed in literary works, and the intricacies of its intergenerational transmission.

Trauma is a nuanced and contentious concept, extensively discussed within the humanities and social sciences. Modern definitions are mostly based on Sigmund Freud's (1920, p. 8) notion of "traumatic neurosis." Dora Osborne (2013, p. 23) elucidates that a violent or overpowering prior event might hinder one's capacity for meaningful recollection. Freud (1920, p. 25) posited that such events leave imprints buried within the unconscious – the segment of the mind that harbors repressed ideas, instinctive responses, and latent impulses. He contended that these suppressed memories present as cognitive, dysphoric, and autonomic symptoms, particularly recurring and disturbing dreams. These

delayed symptoms signify the mind's involuntary reversion to an unresolved pain at the time of the occurrence (p. 25).

Freud (1920, p. 13) posits that this obsessive repetition may only terminate when forgotten recollections are recognized and recreated using replacement language or objects. The psychoanalyst's function was to assist the patient in expressing thoughts until unconscious, repressed recollections were verbalized. The act of addressing and rethinking trauma is sometimes termed "the work of mourning," "memory-work," or "trauma processing" (Durrant, 2004; Visser, 2014, p. 110; Woods, 2012, p. 104). Freud's notion goes beyond the 'talking cure' of psychoanalysis, including how artists endeavor to depict and reinterpret the ineffable remnants of memory via imagery and ideas. Their artistic manifestations provide alternate methods for interpreting and processing trauma, rendering Freud's ideas significantly relevant outside therapeutic contexts.

During the 1990s, many theorists from United States (A. et al., 1996; Caruth, 1995, 1996; Felman & Laub, 1992; Hartman, 1995; Herman, 1993) advanced a psychoanalytic framework for examining artistic and cultural depictions of trauma, drawing upon the interplay between Freudian memory theory and art. Cathy Caruth (1995), who coined the term trauma theory to delineate this field, has been so impactful that further developments of her work are sometimes termed "Caruthian theory" (Visser, 2014, p. 109). The co-edited book by Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1992), has been significantly influential. These theorists emphasized the essential function of literature in confronting trauma (Dalley, 2013, p. 28). Healing and grief rituals include a sequence of behaviors that aid in the processing and recuperation after loss. Survivors, by documenting their tales, perform a ritual of lamentation. The text functions as a conduit, connecting the conscious and unconscious, the deceased and the living, to express, externalize, and purge distressing memories that would otherwise be insurmountable or incomprehensible (Felman & Laub, 1992, p. 5)

In literary studies and trauma theory, 'witnessing' has three different interpretations. The primary testimony is the one who articulates or documents their trauma. The role of the writer or reader is also significant, they interact with another's tragic tale (Freedman, 2018, p. 27). Ultimately, the subsequent generations' witness, who did not personally endure the loss and violence experienced by their forebears, interact with the repressed remnants of cultural memory transmitted to them. These people are often characterized as witnesses to "post-memory" (Hirsch, 1997, p. 53; Osborne, 2013, p. 23).

This paper employs Judith Lewis Herman's trauma recovery framework from her book, *Trauma and Recovery*. Her paradigm has three phases: "establishing safety, remembrance and mourning and the reconnection" (1993, p. 3). This concept assists traumatized persons in recovering from traumatic events, including the enduring impacts of personal and historical trauma, war trauma, and other significant losses. In *The White Book*, the narrator's sorrow at her elder sister's demise is interwoven with the historical tragedy of Korea's division. As her sister's life was abruptly ended, so was Korea's cohesiveness, resulting in fractured and displaced families. The depiction of the white swaddling cloth intertwines with snow and fog, representing both grief and the ruptures of history. By contemplating whiteness, she connects individual and communal grief, acknowledging trauma as a phenomenon that transcends temporal and geographical boundaries. In grieving her sister, she also grieves Korea's divide, converting remembrance into a testament – an endeavor to recognize suffering and seek healing.

Iqbal analyzes in *Memory, Trauma, and Desire: The Depiction of the Unspoken Past in Han Kang's Novel The Vegetarian*, the intricate interplay of trauma, desire, and memory. The research examines the influence of suppressed emotions on identity formation via fragmented narrative and minimalist language. Yeong-hye, the protagonist, experiences a profound shift, renouncing conventional society conventions and adopting vegetarianism as

a show of rebellion. Furthermore, the book explores corporeal desire as a catalyst that drives individuals to face their history and reconstitute their identity outside established limitations. This approach enables Yeong-hye to reflect on her past, revealing the emotional and psychological anguish stemming from both individual and communal trauma (2025, p. 1454)

Results and Discussion

Metaphorical Representation of White: Depicting Personal and Historical Trauma through Visual Imagery

The White Book is a profound and contemplative exploration of loss, remembrance, and restoration. It intertwines personal trauma with overarching historical trauma. The work is very personal, in contrast to her other works, but also alludes to the shared traumas of history. The novel begins with an index of white objects – swaddling bands, shrouds, snow – through which the narrator reflects on healing and change, comparing the act of writing to the application of a soothing balm to an injury. This story centers on the demise of the narrator's older sister, who died shortly after birth. This personal trauma mirrors the devastation and subsequent restoration of the city in which the narrator now lives – a metropolis that was almost obliterated during World War II and meticulously restored. She perceives her reflection in this setting, characterizing her life as a renewal upon the remnants of loss.

The novel examines the potential for a persistent bond between the narrator and her dead sister, similar to narratives in which the spirits of the departed endure inside the living. She wonders if her inexplicable childhood feelings were reflections of her sister's existence. Han Kang's lyrical and meditative text, complemented by monochromatic photography, elicits a profound feeling of delicate sorrow, especially using symbolic imagery such as a white stone being cleansed in water, implying both suffering and restoration. She posits that mourning is both personal and collective. The narrator contemplates the forgotten collapse of her nation, highlighting historical trauma that remains unsolved. It serves as a process of grief and renewal, reflecting on how writing may provide comfort and influence identity after loss. *The White Book* is a deep examination of memory, loss, and the subtle but potent process of healing, conveyed through its lyrical form and evocative imagery.

The story takes a contemplative tone, exploring sorrow, loss, and a fragmented landscape that embodies both personal and historical tragedy. The narrator compares the sudden death of her infant sister to the historical devastation of Warsaw, which was obliterated during World War II and subsequently rebuilt. The interaction between personal and historical trauma is the essence of the work, examining how previous traumas are retained and altered by narrative. Herman's three phases of trauma recovery – establishing safety, recollection and grief, and reconnection – facilitate the narrator's healing journey. The work prioritizes philosophical contemplation above a sequential narrative, presenting itself as a fragmented personal reflection on grief, suffering, trauma, and recovery. We examine and elucidate these fragmented words, images, lines, and scenes within the framework of the three phases of trauma recovery, emphasizing how the story promotes healing from personal and historical trauma.

The narrative employs color imagery consistently to alleviate anxiety, anguish, and suffering from trauma, thus regulating her psychological turmoil for the preservation of her psyche. Han Kang states, "Swaddling bands, Salt, Snow, Ice, Moon, Rice, Waves, Yulan, White bird, Newborn's gown, Shroud" (2016, p.11). The narrator employs white objects to provide physical protection and serve as anchors for emotional stabilization, averting the overwhelming nature of loss. The narrator begins with the making of a list, including color imagery, specifically focusing on white items and occurrences, including swaddling bands,

snow, ice, and the moon. Han Kang says, “With each item I wrote down, a ripple of agitation ran through me. I felt that yes, I needed to write this book, and that the process of writing it would be transformative”. The intensity of her writing effort seems to be driven by a bizarre, quite divine experience of physical suffering. This transcends a mere headache; it embodies an innate awareness of an experience she struggles to express, which she attempts to convey through the unsettling but exquisite phenomena of whiteness. While the first sentence does not reference her sister, it becomes more evident throughout the chapter that the narrator's attraction to whiteness is anchored in her family's repressed, tragic past.

Each paragraph is titled after one of the white items or phenomena from the narrator's list and consists of a lyrical study of that object or occurrence, including a depiction of a salt hill, the imagery of frozen waves, or a melting snowflake. This generates a sequence of interlinked times and memories, all linked to her sister in some manner. The narrator repeatedly revisits the same picture, perhaps obsessed with a certain part or aspect of the color. I have discovered that these interconnected descriptions may be broadly classified into many groups, or more accurately, constellations of recurring pictures.

In another textual instance, Han Kang claims, “She resolved to practice observing white things, to write about them, to gather images of white things in her heart” This statement reveals the underlying aim embedded in the narrator's unconscious mind. The narrator's decision to watch, document, and collect photographs of white objects signifies a purposeful coping strategy that enables her to navigate sadness in an organized and contemplative manner. By concentrating on white items, she participates in a mindful meditation that anchors her in the present, averting emotional overload. Writing down these artifacts externalizes her grief, turning it into a physical and controllable entity instead of allowing it to persist as an unarticulated burden. The metaphor of collecting white objects in her mind implies an internal repository of healing components, enhancing emotional resilience. This action corresponds with Judith Herman's notion of creating safety in trauma recovery, whereby a survivor first develops stability and control before completely addressing distressing memories. By using this approach, the narrator establishes a safeguarding environment that allows her to confront both personal and historical pain without surrendering to despair.

The White Book encapsulates emotional safety by establishing narrative distance, exemplified by the phrase, “She had an elder sister. She had died, her heart failing less than two hours after she was born. That child's fate had been such” (Kang, 2016, p. 27). The narrator assumes a detached, objective tone, indicating an attempt to safeguard oneself emotionally before confronting profound sorrow. Another example of emotional safety is shown in the statement, “If you take a deep breath and keep on walking, it is possible to avoid being pulled into darkness” (Kang, 2016, p. 29). Deep inhalation denotes tranquility and self-regulation, a common technique in trauma recovery for controlling powerful emotions. Advancing denotes progress – both psychological and physical – implying that rehabilitation needs patience and a conscious effort to prevent falling into despair. This corresponds with Herman's trauma recovery paradigm, particularly the phase that builds safety, during which survivors develop coping strategies to stabilize themselves before confronting deeper trauma.

Herman (1993) argues that the fundamental objective of the second phase is the recollection of the trauma coupled with simultaneous grief. In *Trauma and Recovery*, she posits that it is essential to articulate prior experiences, asserting that “the ‘action of telling a story in the safety of a protected relationship can produce a change in the abnormal processing of the traumatic memory” (p. 183). Remembrance and mourning can be observed throughout the narrative of the selected text. For instance, “Newborn gown” encapsulates the themes of recollection and grief as the narrator provides a comprehensive account of her mother's painful events related to premature delivery. The following section discloses that the emotional pain in the infant daughter does not survive but passes away.

The narrator recalls the account of her mother being home alone, with the closest telephone being twenty minutes away, when she experiences the first pains. Her due date remains two months off, and she is entirely prepped. In response, she takes a seat and starts sewing a little white outfit for her infant. Regrettably, her daughter survives for about two hours. Han Kang highlights this catastrophe in the following manner:

She dressed the bloodied little body in the gown she'd just made and held the whimpering scrap in her arms. For God's sake, don't die, she muttered in a thin voice, over and over like a mantra. After an hour had passed, the baby's tightly sealed eyelids abruptly unsealed. As my mother's eyes met those of her child, her lips twitched again. For God's sake, don't die. Around an hour later, the baby was dead. They lay there on the kitchen floor, my mother on her side with the dead baby clutched to her chest, feeling the cold gradually enter into the flesh, sinking through to the bone. No more crying (Kang, 2016, p. 20).

In the second phase of trauma recovery, the narrator has a chance to recall her familial traumas and promptly discloses them to the reader, thus advancing her healing path. The expression "Don't die" resembles a supplication or a desire for longevity, demonstrating how her mother always remembers the moment when her daughter Seol moved her head and opened her eyes to gaze at her.

By remembering and mourning, the narrator reflects on the devastation of Warsaw during World War II. Through the metaphor of her older sister, she symbolically relates this catastrophe to the partition of the Korean peninsula. The narrator's subconscious is confined by this barrier, mournfully reflecting on it in meditative words. This division fractures both the individual psyche and burdens the overall consciousness of Korean society. The narrator observes footage of a war-devastated metropolis, first resembling a snow-covered landscape but later disclosed as fragmented stone and ash, marred by constant airstrikes from 1944 to 1945 (Kang, 2016, pp. 24-25).

Herman's third stage of healing facilitates survivors' rehabilitation into the community. Trauma diminishes people's social connections with both the community and family, resulting in isolation and loneliness, preventing them from sharing their wounds and scars with others. Herman (1993) contends that the primary objective in the third stage of rehabilitation is to restore trust and cultivate connections with others. For instance, Han Kang argues that, "A white butterfly stuttering forward might snatch at her gaze, tug her a few paces farther in the wake of those wingbeats, like a soul's fretful palpitations" (2016, p. 84). The butterfly embodies transition and rebirth, often signifying novelty and hope throughout a process of change. In this context, Han Kang parallels the terms "stuttering forward" and "soul's fretful palpitations" to illustrate the gradual but continuous process of healing, recognizing the fluctuations inherent in it. The butterfly symbolizes the narrator's progression from personal and historical trauma to healing, reflecting her hope for this transformation. The phrases above also signify the narrator's desire to recover and re-establish a connection with life. Nonetheless, the "stuttering" movement suggests that the narrator has not yet achieved complete healing, although they are progressively advancing towards a future when recovery is very possible.

Another instance can be seen in the following sentence: "I wanted to show you clean things. Before brutality, sadness, despair, filth, pain, clean things that were only for you, clean things above all" (Kang, 2016, p. 91). This part illustrates the narrator's optimism as she tries to cultivate trust and confidence, aiming to guide the reader into a future replete with promise and opportunity. The expression "show you clean things" implies the narrator's desire to present something new, untainted by grief or anguish. Despite being trapped by trauma, her aspiration for purity and regeneration underscores her hope for change and a new beginning.

Herman's third phase of healing is shown through the natural imagery in Han Kang's writing, which highlights the mood of reawakening. She writes, "She might become aware only then of the surrounding trees, their slow reanimation as though in thrall to something, giving off a strange and stifling scent, flaring up into a still more lush proliferation, into thin air, toward the light" (Kang, 2016, p. 84). The narrator portrays recovery from trauma by depicting the trees' gradual revival, with "slow reanimation" symbolizing their gradual restoration to vitality. This also signifies the beginning of spring, a season characterized by fresh growth and optimism. The expression "flaring up" encapsulates the process of development and rebirth, signifying a transition towards fresh beginnings and advancement beyond the enduring impacts of tragedy, whether personal or historical.

Conclusion

The White Book by Han Kang embodies trauma, violence, and the aesthetics of suffering through the dynamics of color imagery. Han Kang examines the personal and historical trauma within South Korean culture through the use of white items, imagery, metaphors, and symbolic interpretations. The narrator reveals her inner world in a meditative and fragmentary literary style, commencing her exploration of trauma, particularly the loss of her older sister after her early birth. White symbolizes the aesthetics of suffering and explores the complex nature of trauma, gradually leading the narrator towards recovery. The white objects symbolize the sorrow of mourning in South Korean culture while also embodying the gradual recovery of emotions and the rebirth of nature.

The narrator attempts to depict trauma, including her personal trauma related to the loss of her older sister soon after her early birth, alongside historical trauma, including the devastation of Warsaw post-World War II and the partition of North and South Korea. The narrative further explores how aesthetics function as a means of healing. Consequently, certain pictures and metaphors elicit a feeling of resilience, even under profound darkness. This gradual healing approach corresponds with Herman's three-stage trauma recovery framework, outlining a path of restoration and resilience. The study advocates for more research on the selected novel to investigate its historical aspects and a psychoanalytical perspective, revealing new pathways for readers.

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