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Great War, White Goddess, and Translation as Catharsis: A Study of Robert Graves and Ted Hughes

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ABSTRACT

Great War, White Goddess, and Translation as Catharsis: A Study of Robert Graves and Ted Hughes

The First World War played a critical role in shaping the poetic consciousness of both Robert Graves and Ted Hughes. The combat trauma from which Graves suffered following his front line service confronted him with 'baffling emotional problems' on which the 'pathology of poetic composition relied', a mental conflict that–following the advice of W. H. R. Rivers–he repeatedly attempted to 'write out'. For Hughes, whose father returned from Gallipoli profoundly shell shocked, the war was Britain's 'number one national ghost', a phantom that he tried desperately to exorcise through his poetry. Yet although critics including D. N. G. Carter and Keith Sagar have utilised trauma theory to produce psychological readings of Graves's and Hughes's poetry that locate them as sites of catharsis, the field of modern literary studies has yet to scrutinise the theoretical relationships articulated in the poets' interpretations of classical texts, such as Graves's rendering of Homer's *Iliad* and Hughes's translation of Seneca's *Oedipus.* Does the medium of classical translation offer, in any unique way, an opportunity for catharsis? How do the poets' experiences of combat-related trauma affect the transmission of these classical texts?

Profoundly interdisciplinary, this project attempts to answer these questions while remaining centrally cognisant of Graves's mythopoetical influence on Hughes's oeuvre. Throughout this thesis, I examine the extent to which the mythopoetical framework proposed by Graves in *The White Goddess*, a text shaped by the freight of Graves's war experience, was embraced by Hughes, whose own formative years were dominated by the narrative of the First World War. The relationship between traumatic experience and the poets' shamanic approach to translation is delineated and tested within this discourse: their idolatrous adherence to–and in Hughes's case, fear of–the primacy of an archetypal matriarchal force, and their attempts to access the primitive nature of myth by stripping it of its patriarchal palimpsests of scholarship, are revealed as literary manifestations of a struggle to apprehend the meaning of their respective combat-related traumas, both direct and secondary, which remain ineluctably disrupted.

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Finally, my heartfelt thanks goes to my family–in all its permutations–without whose continued support this undertaking would not have been possible. Your kindness and generosity have sustained me.

For Joseph

'Inside the wolf's eye, the North star'
–Ted Hughes, 'Amulet'

ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Robert Graves, *The Anger of Achilles*
CP	Ted Hughes, *Collected Poems*
GTAT	Robert Graves, *Goodbye to All That*
Il.	Homer, *Iliad*
O	Seneca, *Oedipus*
SGCB	Ted Hughes, *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being*
SO	Ted Hughes, *Seneca's Oedipus*
TCP	Robert Graves, *The Complete Poems*
TGA	Robert Graves, *The Golden Ass*
TGM	Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*
TWG	Robert Graves, *The White Goddess*

INTRODUCTION

I

This thesis represents a new reading of the classical translations of the twentieth-century British poets Robert Graves and Ted Hughes. Throughout the following chapters, these translations will be located as potential sites of traumatic catharsis that combine, as their mode of functionality, two of the poets' leading preoccupations: the traumatic aftermath of war; and the matriarchal myth of the White Goddess.[1] In doing so, this thesis offers original insight into the interrelation between trauma and translation, identifying correlations that allow us to approach translation as a potentially healing process. Additionally, it builds on the current critical work that evaluates Hughes's appropriation of the mythopoetics of Graves's Goddess, re-assessing the influence of the earlier poet's poetry, prose, and translation on his oeuvre.

Discussing *The White Goddess,* his soon-to-be-published 'grammar of poetic myth', in 1946, Graves concludes that, although 'a very capacious & fantastic mare's nest', the book 'holds water nicely.'[2] The same, I hope, can be said of the following. Profoundly interdisciplinary, like the Goddess Graves takes as his subject this thesis is triple in aspect. It attempts to scrutinise three mutually inclusive relationships: the relationship between traumatic experience (a catch-all term I use, for the sake of consistency, to represent the essential mechanisms of a disorder that is mutably defined as combat-related stress, shell-

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[1] For the purpose of this study, catharsis denotes not simply the discharge, and thus relief from, intense and/or repressed emotions, but–as it is commonly deployed in relation to war neuroses–the recovery and synthesis of the 'forgotten memory', or traumatic origin. Also, on an unrelated note, as the two individuals this thesis discusses are male, I have chosen to use male gendered pronouns throughout.

[2] Robert Graves to James Reeves, 30 March 1946. Folder 4.6, Robert Graves Collection, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin. Hereafter abbreviated to HRC.

shock, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder [PTSD], and neurasthenia) and classical translation; between the discourse of the First World War and the Gravesian myth of the White Goddess; and between the work of Robert Graves and Ted Hughes. Each of these relationships influences the others, to varying degrees. As poets and individuals, both Graves and Hughes struggled to come to terms with the traumatic after effects of the First World War. Both turned to the Goddess myth to contextualise that struggle, and, later on in their careers, both turned their hand from poetry to classical translation. These translations, in turn, evoke the experience of war, the experience of trauma, and the conditions of man's relationship with the White Goddess, invariably using the latter as a framework of meaning within which to articulate the former. Any single piece of work that tries to untangle this 'mare's nest' will necessarily come with its own set of challenges, the majority of which, I hope, will be sufficiently addressed along the way. In drawing these tripartite strands together, however, the central question that this thesis poses is as follows: do we find, in the classical translations of Robert Graves and Ted Hughes, sites of traumatic catharsis that are *powered* by the vehicle of translation and, if so, how is this cathartic process inflected, aided, or abetted by the Gravesian myth of the White Goddess?

Two important points must be clarified before this question can begin to be answered. Firstly, the position of the translator as it is figured in the context of this thesis. Graves and Hughes's simultaneously disparate yet sympathetic approaches to translation naturally shape the figure of the translator as it is represented here. Their main concern is with conveying the *meaning* of the source text as they understand it rather than faithfully reproducing the syntax, form, and semantic register of the original: in Graves this results in plain prose translations

that owe more to the 'spirit' of the original than the 'letter';[3] in Hughes we find a technique of compression and simplification that (in places) is taken to primal extremes. Both interpolate material freely as it suits them. They thus fall into the category of producing 'free' translations, texts that carry with them the implication that, as Dimitris N. Maronitis's puts it, the translators see 'two distinct facets of the original text, where meaning and style, signifier and signifieds are kept emphatically apart.'[4]

Free translations are often discussed in terms of self-referentiality and even indulgence. The translator rejects notions of functional equivalence, and in doing so imposes himself on the text to an unacceptable degree, deviating from the original so profoundly that what is produced becomes an original work in its own right–a rewriting, or adaptation. What makes Graves and Hughes such compelling subjects as translators, however, is that their shared poetic exactitude repeatedly situates their 'free' translations in a sense of 'literalness' that comes back either to the *meaning of the words* that make up the body of the original work, or to their apprehension–however idiosyncratic–of its mythic substructure. Whether the translator is dealing in creative freedom or literary confinement, they are striving for equivalence with the essential content of the source text. The works in question could and have been referred to as adaptations: because Graves and Hughes have strayed from faithful renderings of their source material by performing various textual manipulations, their translations resist the 'traditional' definition of the term. This thesis, however, follows translation scholar Riitta Oittinen in proposing that 'the main difference between translation and adaptation lies in our attitudes and points of view, not in any concrete difference between

[3] Robert Graves, *The Golden Ass* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1950), p. 10. All further quotations are taken from this edition and are cited parenthetically in the text as (*TGA*, page number).
[4] Dimitris N. Maronitis, 'Intralingual Translation: Genuine and False Dilemmas', in *Translation & The Classic: Identity as Change in the History of Culture*, ed. by Alexandra Lianeri and Vanda Zajko (Oxford: OUP, 2008), pp. 367-86 (p. 377).

the two.'[5] Thus, no matter how 'freely' rendered the end result, the transposition of classical material into the modern versions which I will be discussing can and will be considered legitimate translations on the basis that the work of interlingual exchange is being done, even if this does not confine itself to the traditional parameters set by the source texts.

The second, not unrelated point to be addressed is the role myth plays in classical translation. For the purpose of this study, the texts in question are Homeric epic, Athenian tragedy, and Roman prose. Each of these texts is mythological in nature. Sophocles, Seneca, Homer–notwithstanding the span of possibilities the Homeric question poses–all self-consciously wrestled with the limits of the individual stories they were telling, drawn as they were from a vast network of interconnected myth, leading to each text comprising a compilation of variant, juxtaposing versions. And it is the intrinsic qualities of myth that make these classical texts such compelling–and demanding–source material for translators. As Vanda Zajko and Ellen O'Gorman assert, '[m]yth', from a psychological standpoint,

> conveys an aura of great antiquity and at the same time projects a sense of timelessness. […] Those who engage in the study of the ancient world return to myth and begin to analyze its role in dramatizing the concerns of society. Myth becomes a mode of expressing something, so that the focus shifts away from the story towards what the story is doing.[6]

We thus come to understand myth not as synonymous with fictive inventiveness, but as a 'way of processing truth in narrative form.'[7] As Richard Armstrong contends, myths transmit 'a shared orientation–*a common narrative configuration of the past*–which remains *productive* of

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[5] Riitta Oittinen, *Translating for Children* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000), p. 80.
[6] Vanda Zajko and Ellen O'Gorman, 'Myth and their Receptions: Narrative, Antiquity, and the Unconscious', in *Classical Myth and Psychoanalysis: Ancient and Modern Stories of the Self*, ed. by Vanda Zajko and Ellen O'Gorman (Oxford: OUP, 2013), pp. 1-18 (p. 1).
[7] Richard H. Armstrong, *A Compulsion for Antiquity: Freud and the Ancient World* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2005), p. 146.

meaning'.[8] For Graves, classical myth could be defined as 'the reduction to narrative shorthand of ritual mime performed on public festivals,' the 'true science' of which 'should begin with the study of archaeology, history, and comparative religion.'[9] 'True myth' (*TGM*, 10) is what emerges when these tools uncover a hidden meaning, and its purpose is to ensure humanity's commune with its divine or spiritual source. For Hughes, in what could be considered a more reflective turn, mythic meaning is produced via

> a subjective event of visionary intensity [...] It is only when the image opens inwardly towards what we recognise as a first-hand as-if religious experience, or mystical revelation, that we call it 'visionary', and when 'personalities' or creatures are involved, we call it 'mythic'.[10]

In Hughes's reckoning, as Laurence Coupe suggests, myth is thus 'a mediation between the external and internal worlds, and between the material and spiritual dimensions [...] the indispensable format for those symbolic acts by which we keep in touch with the sources of life.'[11] Both poets, then, consider myth as a means of mediation or communication with a higher power or with hidden meanings.

The myths on which classical texts depend, though populated by seers, prophecies, and theophanies, therefore remain profoundly human, representative of universal truth, and yet open to subjective interpretation. The canonical 'afterlife' of these texts is ensured by their persistent relevance: they speak across spatial and temporal boundaries to a readership which continues to value them as lucid and vital, and they possess, in Frank Kermode's words, 'a

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[8] Armstrong, *A Compulsion for Antiquity*, p. 146.

[9] Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*, combined ed. (1955; London: Penguin, 1992), pp. 12, 21. All further quotations are taken from this edition and are cited parenthetically in the text as (*TGM*, page number).

[10] Ted Hughes, *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), pp. 35-6. All further quotations are taken from this edition and are cited parenthetically in the text as (*SGCB*, page number).

[11] Laurence Coupe, 'Hughes and Myth', in *Ted Hughes,* ed. by Terry Gifford (London: Palgrave, 2015), pp. 13-24 (p. 14).

surplus of signifier', which allows them to 'signify more than is needed by any one interpreter or any one generation of interpreters.'[12] It is this plethora of meaning that permits a translator to effect the classical text's displacement and translocation into modernity. When the act of translating these texts occurs, argue Zajko and Alexandra Lianeri, the process should not be 'reduced to an instrumentalist approach to the past', but instead understood as being driven by 'the primary need to exceed what is one's own, to broaden the horizon of present meaning and experience and to negotiate a sense of situatedness between the past and the future.'[13] Classical narratives also, however, speak of what has been 'lost'. In a modern age characterised by an anxiety surrounding 'the implication of untamed chance for the human subject,' fragmented by war and political and social turbulence, the classics represent a 'golden age' of epic and tradition that become a locus of the desire to translate in terms not only of 'situatedness' but of a much sought after stability.[14]

The translations on which this thesis focuses, however, are anything but stable. Although the classical narratives, themes, and motifs with which Graves and Hughes engage are recognisable and intelligible, in the modern versions I will be discussing they are redeployed to articulate a subjective understanding of history and culture which is deeply rooted, not in the mythology of ancient Greece, but in a shared mythopoetic system which–founded as it is in a particular strand of what Lorna Hardwick, among others, has termed 'anthropological classicism'–'reveals a strong urge to re-enchantment and re-imagination'.[15] For Graves, in a romantic vision of classical form, myth takes as its subject the 'archaic magic-

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[12] Frank Kermode, *The Classic: Literary Images of Permanance and Change*, rev. edn. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1983), p. 140.
[13]Alexandra Lianeri and Vanda Zajko , 'Introduction: Still being Read after so Many Years: Rethinking the Classic Through Translation', in *Translation & The Classic,* ed. by Lianeri and Zajko, pp. 1-23 (p. 7).
[14] Ian Patterson, 'Time, Free Verse, and the Gods of Modernism', in *Tradition, Translation, Trauma: The Classic and the Modern,* ed. by Jan Parker and Timothy Matthews (Oxford: OUP, 2011), pp. 175-90 (p. 177).
[15] Lorna Hardwick, 'Can (modern) poets do classical drama?', in *Ted Hughes and the Classics*, ed. by Roger Rees (Oxford: OUP, 2009), pp. 39-61 (p. 58); Patterson, 'Time', p. 181.

makings that promoted the fertility or stability of a sacred queendom', and its study should 'begin with a consideration of [Neolithic Europe's] remarkably homogenous system of religious ideas, based on worship of the many-titled Mother-Goddess' (*TGM*, pp. 12-13). Following Graves, Hughes identifies the 'Great Goddess' as the 'mechanism' at the heart of ancient myth, 'the goddess of all natural law and of love, who was the goddess of all sensation and organic life–[an] overwhelming multiple, primaeval being'.[16] Their translations are profoundly shaped by their preoccupation with the 'lost', matriarchal religion over which this figure, whom Graves identified as the White Goddess, presided, and a belief in their ability to tap into the collective mythical imagination of the archaic past to reclaim it for modernity. In short, the source texts are re-mapped to reflect the translators' own mythopoetic agendas, and it is this thesis's position that, in doing so, Graves and Hughes are arguably undertaking a cathartic project. For both poets, the conditions of this matriarchal religion are bound up with their understanding of an equally shared (in a sense) traumatic event: the First World War. As this study will show, by utilising the mythology of the White Goddess as a lens through which to 'translate' the essential, mythic content of the source texts, they are in fact turning their gaze inwards in order to reconcile themselves with their own traumatic experience.

This thesis, I am aware, seems to cast its gaze in many different directions, and I hope it will have value for those interested in classical reception, or mythography, or the poetry and prose of Graves and Hughes, as well as in trauma. Despite its range, however, at a fundamental level it is a study of the relationship between traumatic experience and classical translation, and in order to lay a sound theoretical foundation the following pages will describe the relationship between these two discourses.

[16] Ted Hughes, *A Choice of Shakespeare's Verse* (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), p. 187.

II

Several critics have posited the cognateness of trauma and translation, leading to continuing interdisciplinary discussions that this introduction will attempt both to adumbrate and contribute to.[17] The majority of these discussions engage with what is, arguably, the defining traumatic moment of the twentieth century, the Holocaust; in doing so, they focus on the complex mechanisms surrounding the translation of survivor testimonies and trauma narratives, as well as the problematic act of witnessing. To what extent, then, could the current scope of trauma theory extend to and enlighten the field of classical translation, even reception studies as a whole? When we 'witness' the translation of a classical text into a modern target language, are we party to a traumatic event, that which is symptomatic of it, or a consubstantial nexus of traumatic meaning?

Once we consider trauma and translation in relation to one another we find a labyrinthine system of tensions, signifiers, and theoretical parallels that could just as easily overwhelm as elucidate the central question of this thesis. What is ultimately revealed is a dialectical process of exchange which operates on, and must therefore be organised into, several strata of meaning. To do so, my argument draws on two key texts: Freud's seminal *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), in which he compares Jewish history with the structure of trauma; and Walter Benjamin's pioneering essay 'Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers' ('The Task of the Translator', 1923). Together, these texts form a cohesive theoretical foundation in which a mutually informing dialogic prompts questions not only of the extent to which Benjamin's

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[17] Cf., for example, *Tradition, Translation, Trauma: The Classic and the Modern,* ed. by Jan Parker and Timothy Matthews (Oxford: OUP, 2011); *Translating Holocaust Literature*, ed. by Peter Arnds (Göttingen: V & R unipress GmbH, 2016); Charlotte Ryland, *Paul Celan's Encounters with Surrealism: Trauma, Translation and Shared Poetic Space* (Oxford: Legenda, 2010).

influence is exerted over Freud's monograph but–in the vein of T. S. Eliot's claim that 'the past [can] be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past'–to what extent Freud influences our reading of Benjamin.[18]

In *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud presents an anecdotal sketch of a trauma survivor suffering from what would be diagnosed today as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. His focus of interest is not the event as it occurs, but its apparent return after a period of delay, or latency:

> It may happen that someone gets away, apparently unharmed, from the spot where he has suffered a shocking accident, for instance a train collision. In the course of the following weeks, however, he develops a series of grave physical and motor symptoms, which can be ascribed only to his shock or whatever else happened at the time of the accident. He has developed a 'traumatic neurosis.' This appears quite incomprehensible and therefore a novel fact. The time that elapsed between the accident and the first appearance of the symptoms is called the 'incubation period,' a transparent allusion to the pathology of infectious disease. […] It is the feature one might term *latency*.[19]

The symptoms Freud refers to are those which now contribute to the current, admittedly mutable, definition of PTSD. Eminent trauma theorist Cathy Caruth cites these as 'a response, often delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviours stemming from the event'.[20] What Freud argues towards with the concept of latency in *Moses and Monotheism*, is that when the trauma subject experiences these symptoms–say, an uncontrollable, repeated

[18] T. S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', in *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: Critical Edition: The Perfect Critic, 1919-1926* [Vol. 1], ed. by Anthony Cuda and Ronald Schuchard (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 2014), pp. 105-14 (pp. 106-7). Available online at <http://muse.jhu.edu.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/book/32768> [accessed 5 September 2017].

[19] Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, trans. by Katherine Jones (1939; New York: Vintage, 1967), p. 84.

[20] Cathy Caruth, 'Introduction', in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. by Cathy Caruth (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995), pp. 3-12 (p. 4).

hallucination in which the subject literally 're-lives' the moment of impact in the train collision–he is experiencing the event *for the first time*. Until the period of latency is over, the original event remains ineluctable, un-witnessable. It is not merely that it is inexplicable, but that it has, for the subject, never happened–it is the symptoms themselves that are inexplicable, because they arise from a site of absence, a lacuna of referential meaning. 'The pathology [of PTSD]', Caruth asserts, 'consists […] solely in the *structure of its experience* or reception'; indeed, traumatic experience is not a pathology of 'falsehood or displacement of meaning, but of *history itself*.'[21] In its literality and immediacy, the experience of trauma is an instance of time happening out of the normal sequence, a temporal dislocation that challenges the very concept of referential history. As Anne Whitehead posits, in the wake of trauma '[h]istory is no longer available as completed knowledge, but must be reconceived as that which perpetually escapes or eludes our understanding.'[22] It is only through the act of witnessing–narrating one's trauma to another, bearing witness to *oneself* and one's *own experience*–that history once again becomes referential, and traumatic memory becomes translated into narrative memory.

When we compare Benjamin's 'The Task of the Translator', the parallels between the theories it proposes and those found in Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* are striking. Written as an introductory essay for his German translation of Baudelaire's *Tableaux Parisiens* (1857), 'The Task of the Translator' is considered a paradigmatically modernist attempt to construct a theory of translation. The foundational element of Benjamin's essay is his rejection of the

[21] Caruth. 'Introduction', pp. 4-5.
[22] Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2004), p. 13.

accepted, traditional theory of translation, which, he asserts, is to convey 'the form and meaning of the original as accurately as possible.'[23] John Johnston observes that

> Benjamin's impugnment of the traditional theory amounts to a twofold critique, since he shows that the traditional approach is based on a naïve and intellectually impoverished theory of language; and furthermore, that this necessarily puts the translator in an insoluble doublebind in which he or she must strive for 'fidelity' to either the letter or spirit of the original.[24]

To avoid this double bind, Benjamin argues, the drive to translate *must* be the drive to achieve something beyond the mere transmission of information, because information is a literary text's most 'inessential' quality.[25] Instead, translation should transmit a text's 'essential substance', that which is 'unfathomable, mysterious, poetic.'[26] Here we begin to see a correlation, grounded in ineluctability, between an unknowable traumatic moment and a source text's 'unfathomable' meaning, both of which must be 'translated' to be witnessed. Benjamin bases his observation on what he posits is a

> suprahistorical kinship of languages [which rests] in this: in every one of them as a whole, the same thing is meant. Yet this one thing is achievable not by any single language but only by the totality of their intentions supplementing one another: the pure language. […] It is the task of the translator to release in his own language that pure language which is under the spell of another, to liberate the language imprisoned in a work in his re-creation of that work.[27]

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[23] Walter Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator', in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 1: 1913-1926,* ed. by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (London: The Belknap Press, 1991), pp. 253-63 (p. 255).
[24] John Johnston, 'Translation as Simulacrum', in *Rethinking Translation: Discourse, Subjectivity, Ideology*, ed. by Lawrence Venuti (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 42-56 (p. 42).
[25] Benjamin, 'Task', p. 253.
[26] Benjamin, 'Task', p. 253.
[27] Benjamin, 'Task', pp. 257-61.

The import of this final sentence, with, in Dennis Porter's words, its 'resonant imagery of magical entrapment and liberation', is that 'it adds a third term to the dual relationship a translator is normally assumed to have with an original text, on the one hand, and a target language, on the other.'[28] According to Benjamin, the translator is charged with the task of accessing this 'pure language', an evocative and elusive expression for that which transcends conventional, referential communication. It is 'a force hidden within certain texts, a poetic potential, a kernel that is striving to go beyond the immediate shell of words.'[29] It is the translator's task to realise that potentiality. He is compelled to draw upon an *ur*-language that 'marks the point of interrelationship where languages converge and express what is beyond expression and history.'[30] This *ur*-language, or 'mysterious' element, can be aligned with our sense of the mythic: as a translator must tap into the 'pure language' of a classical text, he must invariably–as in the case of Graves and Hughes–strive to discern the 'truth' of the myths that underlie it.[31] 'Pure language' is the language of 'True myth'.[32] In both Freud and Benjamin, therefore, we find a theoretical trajectory that is described as the search for something essential but elusive, even 'lost'–that which confounds 'expression and history' and can be returned to only via translation. The trauma subject *must* re-experience the traumatic moment, through narration, in order to comprehend the original event, just as the translator

[28] Dennis Porter, 'Psychoanalysis and the Task of the Translator', *MLN*, 104/5 (1989), 1066-84 (p. 1068).
[29] *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, ed. by Mona Baker (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 194.
[30] Baker, *Routledge Encyclopedia,* p. 194.
[31] It perhaps goes without saying that, for both Graves and Hughes, this 'truth' is subjective. As Kierkegaard put it, 'the crucial thing is to find a truth that is truth *for me*, to find *the idea for which I am willing to live and die*. Of what use would it be for me to discover a so-called objective truth […] if it had no deeper meaning *for me or for my life*? [original emphasis]' (Søren Kierkegaard, 'Early Journal Entry: 1 August 1835', in *The Essential Kierkegaard*, ed. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2000), (pp. 7-12) p. 8).
[32] It is worth noting here that this reading of the theory of 'pure language' is, naturally, shaped by this thesis's project as a whole. This is arguably permissible because conflicting readings of Benjamin's theory abound. In diametric opposition to my own reading, de Man considered it to be 'a language that would be entirely freed of the illusion of meaning–pure form if you want' (Paul de Man, ''Conclusions': Walter Benjamin's 'The Task of the Translator'', in *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota P, 1986), pp. 73-105 (p. 84)). For Julian Roberts, however, 'pure language' is 'language in the condition of immediate correspondence with God's creative word, language that is total revelation', a reading more aligned with my own notion of 'pure language' as a vehicle for mythic meaning (Julian Roberts, *Walter Benjamin* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1983), p. 116).

must detour through the language of the source text in order to access–and communicate–the 'pure language' of the myth that exists beyond it. It appears that there is indeed a theoretical relation between trauma and translation, but in what sense can we say that it can effect personal or communal catharsis?

III

The story of catharsis, or the healing of trauma, is one of reintegration: the trauma subject must experience and reintegrate a history, a moment of time out of time that resists, as Whitehead puts it, both 'narrative structure and linear temporalities', into narrative memory.[33] A translation, too, is a connective tissue that joins two points in time, and can therefore be read as an integrative medium. Furthermore, both discourses syncretise the paradoxically interconnected dynamics of repetition and the occlusion of referentiality and representation that characterise traumatic experience. Indeed, Vito Zepinic argues that problems of translation exist at the heart of trauma's pathology:

> Unable to be liquidated (narrative) from the unconsciousness, the traumatic memories become *fixed ideas,* concrete and inflexible, and as they cannot be *translated* into a personal narrative, the traumatic memories continue to intrude [emphasis mine].[34]

For catharsis to be achieved, the trauma subject must translate traumatic memory–the memory of the original traumatic experience–into narrative memory. 'History', as Elizabeth

[33] Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*, p. 31.
[34] Vito Zepinic, *The Self and Complex Trauma* (Xlibris, 2012), pp. 260-1.

Cowie asserts, 'is constituted in this process';[35] so too, according to Lianeri and Zajko, a classical text 'enters the course of history' once it is subjected to the 'operation of translation.'[36] Like a source text, a traumatic event can be understood as a necessarily *refracting* original. Jan Parker sets up this term in the introduction to her edited volume *Tradition, Translation, Trauma* (2011), and it proves highly useful when interrogating the correlation between trauma and translation. 'Translation', she argues, 'is extraordinary in that it always involves a relationship that spans time and space: there is always by definition a refracting original, otherwise the translation could not exist.'[37] Just as a traumatic event refracts time, memory, and history itself, so a classical text refracts narrative, language, its deeper structure of 'pure language', and its deeper truth of myth. *Powered* by translation, a refracting source text conveys its truths across cultural and temporal boundaries, much in the same way that the deeper, refracting, truths of traumatic experience are conveyed through the power of narration.[38]

What, then, takes place during the act of translation when a translator is himself a trauma subject? In translating trauma (as in the case of war narratives) *from* a site of trauma, do we witness the deeper truths of both the original text and our own occluded experience? As Parker points out, if 'the metaphorical power of translation embraces travel between cultures and between times', then it must necessarily 'embrace[…] personal experience and

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[35] Elizabeth Cowie, *Recording Reality, Desiring the Real* (Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota P, 2011), p. 125.
[36] Lianeri and Zajko, 'Introduction', p. 15.
[37] Jan Parker, 'Introduction: Images of Tradition, Translation, Trauma…', in *Tradition, Translation, Trauma*, ed. by Parker and Matthews, pp. 11-25 (p. 8).
[38] It is worth noting–because it both contributes to and complicates my argument–that translation *itself* can be understood as a traumatic process. In discussing images of translation as a movement across temporal, spatial, linguistic, and cultural thresholds, Parker notes, many emerge as violent, including 'translation as decapitation' and 'cannibalistic reception' (Parker, 'Introduction', p. 12). We must think, therefore, not only in terms of 'the translation of trauma', be it Holocaust survivor testimonies or Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannos*, but also in terms of the 'trauma of translation': at both discourse and story level translation is revealed to be a fraught process (Parker, Introduction', p. 8).

active transformation of self by text.'[39] Whitehead touches on this (somewhat obliquely) in *Trauma Fiction* (2004), in which she posits that if the translated text is canonical, as the classical works with which this thesis engages are traditionally considered to be, then

> the story that results will already be familiar to the reader from the original version [who therefore] knows in advance the end which is to come, and that the decisions and fate of the character[s] are predestined from the outset. The motif of an inescapable trajectory or fate which the [translator] can produce through [translation], bears comparison with Freud's elaboration of the repetition-compulsion in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* [(1920)].[40]

If, however, the translator translates not the 'form and meaning' of the original's words, but the text's 'pure language' and deeper truth as they interpret it, they not only embrace the notion of un-referential history that traumatic experience presents us with–one in which the relation between language and the world is implicitly repositioned–they re-write history *itself*; in essence, the translation 'shifts from a reflective mode–based on a position of self-awareness and self-understanding–to a performative act, in which the text becomes imbricated in our attempts to perceive and understand the world around us.'[41] As this thesis will show, Graves's and Hughes's idiosyncratic (and often controversial) translations of classical texts reject the 'repetition-compulsion' mode of traditional translation, and in translating instead the text's mythical, deeper truth as they perceive it perform a movement *beyond* the repetitive experience/experiencing of trauma, to a site of witness in which they attempt to apprehend both the source text's mythical 'origin' and a refracting, original traumatic event.

[39] Parker, 'Introduction', p. 17.
[40] Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*, pp. 89-90.
[41] Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*, p. 13.

IV

This thesis explores the issues raised in the preceding pages through an analysis of three of the poets' classical translations: Robert Graves's *The Transformations of Lucius, Otherwise Known as The Golden Ass* (1950, hereafter *The Golden Ass*) and *The Anger of Achilles* (1959), and Ted Hughes's *Seneca's Oedipus* (1969). The source texts in question are, respectively, Homer's *Iliad* (c. 762 B.C.), Apuleius's *Metamorphoses* (late 2nd century A.D.), and Seneca's *Oedipus* (1st century A.D.). These translations have been chosen because they takes as their common ground the very things that bind Graves and Hughes together: they can be read as responses, however partial, to the traumatic after effects of the First World War, and each places this response within the framework of the Gravesian myth of the White Goddess. This study examines how all of these translations articulate notions of shell-shock, or traumatic experience, in different ways–some more convincing than others–and how Graves's myth of the White Goddess is deployed (and in Hughes's case, co-opted), to meet the translators' cathartic ends. Nonetheless, I own that any allusions I identify between Graves's and Hughes's translations and their personal experiences are, of course, subjective. The question of intentionality is contentious, and in some cases it seems likely that allusion is deliberate whereas in others it is more ambiguous. Regarding these instances, I would argue that we are dealing at the very least with an unconscious expression of the author's memory. Certainly I have taken into account the intense relationship the poets had to the texts they were translating, and how the textual patterns merged with their own beliefs and history and/or engaged with the themes of the White Goddess myth. The ontology of art cannot be finally settled; but in my discussion of their translations I find it more reasonable to assume that Graves and Hughes were cognisant (at some level) of their allusions to the extent that a 'writing out' of trauma would be

a natural, prevalent drive to individuals who were struggling to come to terms with the after effects of war.

Chapter One, 'Robert Graves: Great War, White Goddess', discusses Graves's wartime experience, his subsequent shell-shock, and the intricacies of the Goddess myth as a response to these pressures. It explores the effect upon Graves of trench warfare and the exigencies of the Somme, the experience, as D. N. G. Carter puts it, 'of killing, watching others being killed, of being–officially–'killed' himself'.[42] His early poetry will be discussed in relation both to this phenomenon and to his initial forays into using writing as a form of therapy, efforts that were ultimately abandoned in favour of reappropriating his trauma as a source of poetic inspiration. The burgeoning myth of the White Goddess is similarly present in this early work, and its function and development as a mythopoetic system in which chaos, suffering, and degeneration are brought under control will be delineated. Finally, Graves's idiosyncratic approach to classical translation will be opened up for consideration. This chapter thus provides the core materials for approaching the bio-critical textual analyses that follow in chapters Two, Three, and Five.

Chapter Two, '*The Golden Ass*', will centre on Graves's avid relationship with Apuleius's *Metamorphoses,* based on his understanding of it as a paradigmatic Goddess text and inspiration for *The White Goddess*. Using Nancy Shumate's *Crisis and Conversion in Apuleius's Metamorphoses* (1996) as a theoretical model, it will discuss the ways in which the tropes of metamorphosis and re-metamorphosis offer a mythic infrastructure on which Graves can transpose the experience of trauma and catharsis, enabling the act of translation to 'open up' a way into the articulation of these phenomena. The novel's themes and narrative also speak to Graves's experience in other ways, and these allusions will be drawn out at a textual level:

[42] D. N. G. Carter, *Robert Graves: The Lasting Poetic Achievement* (Basingstoke, Hants.: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 117-8

Graves's self-styled identity as *deutoropotmos*, or 'second-fated', following his near-death experience at the Somme in 1916; his denunciation of the evils of the 'mechanarchy' in which, for him, the current age is mired; and the tensions at the heart of the vacuum of silence and 'unspeakability' that the trauma subject inhabits.

Chapter Three, '*The Anger of Achilles*', investigates Graves's controversial assertion that Homer's *Iliad* should be read as satire, and how his attendant rewriting of the text's dynamics thwarts, to an extent, his cathartic translational project. His treatment of the figures of Achilles and Patroklos will be discussed in terms that relate them to Graves and his son David, respectively, and thus as refractions of his wartime experience and David's death in the Second World War. Finally, it will end with an analysis of a passage in which the Iliadic narrative is augmented by the interpolation of the Goddess, in a scene in which Graves essentially re-enacts his own 'death' and redemption at the age of twenty-one.

Chapter Four, 'Ted Hughes, After Graves', locates Hughes as Graves's mythopoetic inheritor. Hughes's adherence to the Gravesian Goddess myth will be tested, and the distinctions in his own approach to the system of meaning that she represents will be specified. Hughes will also, crucially, be situated within the Gravesian tradition of shell shock: as an individual whose life has been profoundly shaped by the traumatic after effects of the First World War, he will be identified as a secondary trauma subject whose urge to manifest a 'writing out' of trauma is just as prevalent as Graves's.

Chapter Five, '*Seneca's Oedipus*', offers a final bio-critical textual analysis, in this case of Hughes's translation of Seneca's *Oedipus*. Hughes's approach to translation as a shamanistic activity will be adumbrated, with a focus on the similarity between his and Graves's interest in releasing the 'pure language', or essential mythic content, of the source text–content invariably grounded in the myth of the White Goddess. His *Oedipus* will be revealed as a

paean to the Goddess that dwells largely on her destructive, but also redemptive, potential. By positioning both the Sphinx and Jocasta as Goddess figures, Oedipus as trauma subject, and plague-stricken Thebes as an uncanny, unnatural space that alludes both to No Man's Land and the traumatised mind, Hughes contextualises his own secondary traumatic experience, as well as his father's shell shock, within the conditions of her Myth. Ultimately, this 'rewriting' affords him a moment of cognitive recovery and integration, one that takes the release of Seneca's 'pure language' as its vehicle.

The concluding remarks will gauge the efficacy of translation as a cathartic tool (at least in the case of Graves and Hughes) comparing in the final account the similarities and divergences between their idiosyncratic brands of anthropological classicism. This discussion will be grounded in their differing experiences of trauma, and will propose new directions for further research. This thesis as a whole offers a challenge to the way we understand trauma and translation as intersecting fields, but it also proposes that Graves and Hughes's translations should be re-evaluated in the light of their traumatic experience and the First World War as an overwhelming and ongoing phenomenon–one whose sphere of influence extends not just to the present day, but also, via translation, back into the classical past.

I: Robert Graves

CHAPTER ONE

GREAT WAR, WHITE GODDESS

I

> *[The past] continues to haunt, influence, distort and occasionally redeem the present […] The Somme is like the Holocaust: it reveals things we cannot come to terms with and cannot forget. It never becomes the past.*
>
> – Pat Barker, qtd. in Maya Jaggi, 'Dispatches from the Front' (2003)[43]

Unswervingly committed to his regiment, the Royal Welch Fusiliers, Robert Graves is described in Siegfried Sassoon's *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* (1930)–under the pseudonym David Cromlech (a play on Graves and the Welsh for 'grave')–as having 'no use for anti-war idealism' but also, significantly, 'a first-rate nose for anything nasty.'[44] Certainly, Graves's war poetry lacks the bitter pathos of, for example, Sassoon's 'To Any Dead Officer' (1918). We find no dwelling on empty glory in these poems, and are rarely confronted with the immediacy of loss;[45] and yet we are moved nonetheless. The affective quality that achieves

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[43] *The Guardian*, (16 August 2003). Available at <http://books.guardian.co.uk/departments/generalfiction/story> [accessed 19 March 2014].

[44] Siegfried Sassoon, *The Memoirs of George Sherston: Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man, Memoirs of an Infantry Officer, Sherston's Progress* (Garden City, NY: Literary Guild of America, 1937), p. 148.

[45] One notable exception being 'The Last Day of Leave' (1916; in *The Complete Poems*, ed. by Beryl Graves and Dunstan Ward (London: Penguin, 2003) p. 415. All further quotations are taken from this edition and are cited parenthetically in the text as (*TCP*, page number)):

> The sun so hot it made the rocks quiver.
> But when it rolled down level with us,
> Four pairs of eyed sought mine as if appealing

this could be defined as something close to testimony, or witness. Indeed, in his seminal essay 'Graves and the White Goddess' (1956) Randall Jarrell cites an extensive list of post-war poems that comprise evidence enough 'to make any reader decide that Graves is a man to whom terrible things have happened.'[46] Thus, if the trenches of the First World War fashioned Sassoon and other contemporaries such as Wilfred Owen into canonical (anti-) War Poets, it could equally be said that they forged Graves into a poet who wrote about the traumatic *experience* of war, a phenomenon which, as Barker suggests in the quotation above, continues to be felt long after the war itself has ended. Profoundly shell-shocked following his front-line service, Graves writes about war in a singular fashion, and the value of his war poems is in revealing the effect of combat on his poetic vision.

Without the trauma of war we must imagine that both Graves's work and the mythopoetic system that informs it would be immeasurably different. By relentlessly attempting to draw meaning from the fragmentation wrought by traumatic experience upon his psyche, Graves strives in his writing to give expression to those forces which are both inexplicable and beyond his power to control. As Carter suggests, Graves believes fundamentally that the power of true poetry derives from 'the poet's secret commerce with what is not apparent, with what the rational consciousness has outlawed.'[47] In studying those forms of experience rooted in the irrational which are the *product* of traumatic experience, be they hauntings, visions, nightmares, or psychosis itself, Graves necessarily sets his sights on the void in his own history whence they emanate.

For a blind-fate-aversive afterword:–
'Do you remember the lily lake?
We were there, all five of us in love.
No one yet killed, widowed, or broken-hearted.'

[46] Randall Jarrell, 'Graves and the White Goddess', in *The Third Book of Criticism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), pp. 77-114 (p. 82).
[47] Carter, *Robert Graves*, p. 142.

When we approach his poetry, prose, and translations with this in mind, we realise that the trauma inflicted on Graves by the mechanised hell of the Somme enabled him to depart the confines of Aristotelian reason and empirical referentiality: it opened, in Frank Kersnowski's words, 'a door into the unconscious, [and] what Graves found within made unusual sense of what was without'.[48] Struggling, in the aftermath of world-shattering violence, to remake a world in which he can be transfigured, Graves's work charts his often terrifying confrontation with his wartime experience and ensuing shell-shock, and his eventual integration of these experiences into a system which gives them meaning. Those powers by which he feels most threatened are redeployed and deified in the figure of the White Goddess, 'the ancient Mediterranean moon-goddess whom Homer invoked in the *Iliad* […] and to whom most traditional poets ever since have paid at any rate lip-service.'[49] She is the reification of all that he sees as his undoing and, paradoxically, his salvation; one begets the other, in a cyclical interchange of destruction and rebirth. The feminine became for Graves the primal force upon which civilisation was founded, and the Goddess a sustaining, omnipotent influence to which, as a true poet, his life must be dedicated. She is the female principle in its three archetypal aspects: mother who bears man, the bride to whom he is lover, and the layer-out who presides over his death and burial. The poet offers himself in sacrifice to her, repeatedly, in order to be cleansed of his patriarchal sins (pride, possessiveness, even murder) and resurrected anew in the transcendence of her love. He must willingly suffer for his poetic inspiration, for what she offers is not bliss but a 'focus and

[48] Frank L. Kersnowski, *The Early Poetry of Robert Graves: The Goddess Beckons* (Austin, TX: U of Texas P, 2002), p. xii.
[49] Robert Graves, *The White Goddess*, ed. by Grevel Lindop, 4th edn. (London: Faber and Faber, 1999) p. 490. Unless otherwise indicated, all further quotations are taken from this edition and are cited parenthetically in the text as (*TWG*, page number).

challenge', happiness in the precise English sense of 'hap: happening.'[50]. This sacrifice is reminiscent of those made by the soldiers of the Great War but, in this life-giving context so anathema to the patriarchal destruction of the Somme, it is a sacrifice that results in renewal rather than futility. And, like his wartime experience, once fully realised the Goddess is in ascendency throughout the majority of Graves's writing.

To comprehend how Graves's classical translations are shaped by his trauma, we must read them through this mythopoetic lens. Firstly, however, we must chart Graves's progress towards his subjugated position as muse-poet. This task is complicated, Kersnowski posits, by a dilemma familiar to Graves's critics and biographers:

> [P]art of the problem in understanding his development is to be able to treat discursively what seems an inseparable whole: emotion, intellect, and spirit all tangled together like a bag full of fish hooks. To pick one out is to draw out many. [51]

This chapter will attempt an extrication of these 'fish hooks', a teasing-out of those elements of Graves's life and work which culminate in his seminal 'grammar of poetic myth' and celebration of his Muse, *The White Goddess* (1948). In doing so, it will examine the ways in which the trauma of war contributes to his apprehension of reality, and his consuming desire to narrate the Goddess's tale: the 'one story and one story only | That will prove worth your telling'.[52]

II

[50] Robert Graves, 'The Art of Poetry XI: Robert Graves', interview by Peter Buckman and William Fifield, in *Conversations with Robert Graves*, ed. by Frank Kersnowski (Jackson, MS: UP of Mississippi, 1989), pp. 92-108 (p. 95).
[51] Kersnowski, *The Early Poetry*, p. xii.
[52] Robert Graves, 'To Juan at the Winter Solstice' (1945; *TCP*, p. 405).

In 1955, reviewing Graves's latest *Collected Poems*, Lionel Trilling asserts that '[w]e have to see Graves as a poet of the first rank. […] He is in the tradition of the men who, by the terms upon which they accept their *ordinary humanity*, make it extraordinary.'[53] These terms are dictated by the marks of the psychological disturbances that Graves's schooling, the war, and his relationships left him with. Having been brought up in a family environment which vouchsafed the power of innocence to protect against the 'dirtiness, lustfulness and intrigue' of the outside world, Graves's psychological defences were entirely insufficient to combat the harsh realities of public school and, immediately afterwards, the war.[54] As Carter has pointed out, Graves's life was fraught throughout 'with terror and extraordinary violence […] few people have encountered so many forms in combination, or suffered them with such intensity'.[55] Graves would immediately ricochet from his oppressive days at Charterhouse school, an experience that exacerbated his 'great capacity for fear […], a superstitious conscience and a sexual embarrassment' (*GTAT*, p. 20-1), into what Jarrell describes as 'the organized masculine nightmare of the First World War'.[56] Following his demobilisation (and during his marriage to Nancy Nicholson, which eventually broke down), he entered into a deeply wounding relationship with the American poet Laura Riding that in some ways reprised the damage perpetrated on him by the war. The trauma of these years was cumulative, and he would emerge from them distinctly changed and, to return to Trilling's phrase, 'extraordinary'.

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[53] Lionel Trilling, 'A Ramble on Graves', in *A Gathering of Fugitives* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1956), pp. 20-30 (p. 30).

[54] Robert Graves, *Goodbye to All That*, rev. ed. (1957; London: Penguin, 2000), p. 31. Unless otherwise indicated, all further quotations are taken from this edition and are cited parenthetically in the text as (*GTAT*, page number).

[55] Carter, *Robert Graves,* p. 117.

[56] Jarrell, 'Graves and the White Goddess', p. 102.

If we turn to Graves's wartime letters, we can begin to chart the trajectory of this transformation. At first, there is a seeming (and understandable) sense of incomprehensibility, a trivialisation of the horror of trench warfare. He writes to his father Alfred Perceval Graves early in his deployment, describing fatal events in terms that verge on the comic:

> We go back to-morrow into some rather sensational trenches, but I hope not for long: the first excitement of the baptism of fire soon wears off, and the joys of sniping fat Germans, though sweet, are seldom long-lived. There is a ripple of machine-gun fire to and fro like a garden spray and the snippy sniper gets snapped.[57]

The almost jaunty alliteration of the final phrase belies a frightened young man hiding behind a crumbling balustrade of childish sensibility. This 'childishness' persists, as does the deconstruction of Graves's defences, in another letter to his father:

> I can't stick these horrid fellows who write home to say war is adorable. Let me explain what I mean. Last night–we had seventeen casualties yesterday from bombs and grenades–I went round the fire-trench, […] and turning a traverse sharply almost stepped on a Horrid Thing lying in the parados. We can afford to laugh at corpses, if we did not know them when alive, because with them it is a case of what the men call "nappoo fineesh": we can joke with men badly wounded who are going to recover: but when a German bullet […] strikes a man on the head and takes the scalp and a lot of his brains clean away, and still lets him live for two hours, the joke is there no more.[58]

Here, the corpse figuratively enters the realm of the Georgian nursery as the overwhelmed Graves resorts to coining the puerile idiom 'Horrid Thing'. But the joke, the 'playing' at war, is there no more. By March 1916 Graves writes from Fricourt to his patron Edward Marsh

[57] Qtd. in Alfred Perceval Graves, *To Return to all That* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1930), p. 325.
[58] Qtd. in APG, *Return*, pp. 326-7.

that 'the trenches are splendidly miserable [with] not a single canister-proof dug-out' to defend them from attack,[59] and in July, having advanced to the Somme Front Line, he tells Sassoon with uncanny prescience that he 'want[s] to go home to a quiet hospital ward with green screens and no cracks in the ceiling to make me think of trenches.'[60] Seven days after sending this letter Graves underwent one of the defining traumatic experiences of his life, one which not only left him hospitalised with severe injuries but radically transformed his conception of his own humanity. Although his personal mythology was rooted in and inflected by the Great War as a totalising experience, of all the events of 1914-18 it was this episode that proved to have the most profound effect upon its development.

On 20 July 1916 during an attack on High Wood near Mametz, Graves was, as he wrote to Marsh, 'punctured' by 'the old Bosche […] with a 5.9 Howitzer shell clean through chest and back.'[61] Seriously injured in the eye, leg, and chest by shell shrapnel, he was carried unconscious to a dressing station where field doctors informed his Colonel, 'Tibbs' Crawshay, that his wounds were plainly fatal. Drawing up the official casualty list, Crawshay therefore assumed Graves's death and reported him 'died of wounds.' His parents received the Colonel's letter of condolence five days later. Several hours after this letter was sent, however, subalterns 'clearing away the dead found [Graves] still breathing and put [him] on an ambulance for Heilly, the nearest field hospital' (*GTAT*, p. 181). The matter of his 'death', it turned out, proved difficult to clear up; Graves even read his own obituary in *The Times*, and his parents were unconvinced of his survival until they received an official wire on 31st July confirming he would shortly be transferred, alive, to England.

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[59] Robert Graves to Edward Marsh, 15 March 1916. *In Broken Images: Selected Letters of Robert Graves, 1914-1946*, ed. by Paul O'Prey (London: Hutchinson, 1982), p. 43. Hereafter abbreviated to *IBI*.
[60] Robert Graves to Siegfried Sassoon, 13 July 1916. *IBI*, p. 55.
[61] Robert Graves to Edward Marsh, 26 July 1916. *IBI*, p. 56

The significance of this experience is evident from Graves's letters, prose, and poetry. He writes to Sassoon in August of that year that

> [t]he rumour of my death was started by the regimental doctor and the Field Ambulance one swearing I couldn't possibly live–but it takes a lot to kill Youth and Ugliness however easily Youth and Beauty fade and die. […] By the way, I died on my 21st birthday. I can never grow up now.[62]

As he suggests, after this watershed moment it is not the Robert Graves that was, but the Robert Graves who perpetually *is*–an individual out of time–that leaves the hospital in Heilly, an uncanny double of his old self, neither dead nor alive. He is fundamentally changed, in the sense that he is now a creation of his own imagination.[63] In 1922, when quarrelling with Sassoon, he admonishes his friend with the following:

> It boils down to this […] You identify me in your mind with a certain Robert Graves now dead, whose bones and detritus may be found in *Over the Brazier, Fairies and Fusiliers* [his early poetry collections], and the land of memory. Don't. I am using his name, rank and initials and his old clothes but I am no more than his son and heir.[64]

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[62] Robert Graves to Siegfried Sassoon, 4 August 1917. *IBI*, p. 57. Graves's dating is not strictly accurate – his birthday fell on July 24th, not the 21st.

[63] This idea comes into his poetry later. In 'The Face in the Mirror' (1958), for example, Graves's body is no longer the 'lived-in' body but the body as a work of art, produced by reimagining himself through the metaphors of its wounds and scars:

> Grey haunted eyes, absent-mindedly glaring
> From wide, uneven orbits; one brow drooping
> Somewhat over the eye
> Because of a missile fragment still inhering,
> Skin deep, as a foolish record of old-world fighting. (*TCP*, p. 470)

[64] Robert Graves to Siegfried Sassoon, 31 May 1922. *IBI*, p. 134.

As Carter points out, following his twenty-first birthday Graves thus considers himself part of 'the select company of *deuteropotmoi*, or "second-fated", and in his imagination has transmuted a bizarre occurrence of war into a distinguishing metaphor.'[65] In the Classical period *deuteropotmoi* were individuals who had been pronounced dead, yet returned to their community; Graves writes of them in his 1957 poem 'The Second-Fated', 'a library of shades' assembled in that 'Hyperborean Queendom […] | Where pure souls matrilineally forgather', no longer '[r]uled by the death which [they] had flouted' (*TCP*, p. 477). By aligning himself with these figures he declares himself purified, a 'completed character' (*TCP*, p. 477). Graves is rendered exempt from the fundamental rules and conditions (patriarchy, history, death) of a world which no longer makes sense to him, characterised as it is by egregious violence and the vicissitudes of what he views as a defunct civilisation. In Ancient Greek society the liminality of *deuteropotmoi* afforded them exceptional abilities: knowledge pertaining to the ultimate reality could only be attained by the soul that has, as Socrates argues in Plato's *Phaedo,* been liberated from the 'dead' body.[66] When the soul 'returns' during a ceremony that declares the *deuteropotmos* officially alive, it does so endowed with supreme knowledge and other vatic gifts. This ritualised declaration amounts to a spiritual 'rebirth,' a rebirth Graves views himself as undergoing on his twenty-first birthday. Ultimately, it would provide the foundation for the tropic framework around which 'the single poetic theme' (*TWG*, p. 408) of the White Goddess is constructed.

* * *

[65] Carter, *Robert Graves,* p. 20.
[66] Plato, *Phaedo*, trans. by R. S. Bluck (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), p. 219 (66DE).

Graves returned to England two years after his 'death', swiftly married Nancy Nicholson and, in October 1919, took up his classical exhibition at St John's College, Oxford. He had suffered serious injuries, but more debilitating than his physical infirmity, Paul O'Prey asserts, was his mental condition: after the horrors of the Somme Graves was suffering 'from an acute form of post-traumatic stress, variously diagnosed at the time as shell-shock or neurasthenia.'[67] In 1917, Graves had accused Sassoon of being 'obsessed by the idea of the perpetual horror of the war,' trapped in 'a nightmare which you find yourself unable to wake up from.'[68] The war, he continued, 'is a joke for me and you' when they intrinsically knew that what would survive is a 'new world, emptier but wiser and happier than anything that has gone before.'[69] By 1919, however, the joke had become a cruel one, and Graves's 'new world' held terrors symptomatic of the complex trauma of war, with the mechanised horror of trench warfare lurking, extant, in the ubiquitous telephone and train. Graves's post-war poetry records the effect of his neurasthenia upon his day-to-day reality, and as such it offers a compelling account of the actuality of his experience.

Graves's traumatised condition is evident in early poems such as 'Haunted', 'Dicky', 'The Presence', 'Ghost Raddled', and 'The Pier-Glass'. In 'Haunted', published in his 1920 collection *Country Sentiment*, he details an aspect of shell-shock that is both familiar to us and adds a sinister gloss to Caruth's description of 'intrusive hallucinations':

> Gulp down your wine, old friends of mine,
>
> Roar through the darkness, stamp and sing
>
> And lay ghost hands on everything,
>
> But leave the noonday's warm sunshine

[67] Paul O'Prey, 'Captain Graves' Postwar Strategies', in *New Perspectives on Robert Graves*, ed. by Patrick J. Quinn (London: Associated UP, 1999), pp. 36-44 (p. 36).
[68] Robert Graves to Siegfried Sassoon, n.d. [1917]. *IBI*, p. 87.
[69] Robert Graves to Siegfried Sassoon, n.d. [1917]. *IBI*, p. 87.

To living lads for mirth and wine.

I met you suddenly down the street,

Strangers assume your phantom faces,

You grin at me from daylight places,

Dead, long dead, I'm ashamed to greet

Dead men down the morning street. (*TCP*, p. 92)

For Graves, as with countless of his contemporaries, the initiatory horror of the First World War engendered a state of waking nightmare from which he found himself unable to escape, a condition that would persist, in one form or another, well into the later years of his life. His existence was fractured–even doubled–by neurasthenia. *Country Sentiment* adroitly reflects this state of being, registering the sense of duality engendered by his shell-shock. It is an uncanny, schizophrenic volume: facile 'nursery toys' such as 'A Song for Two Children' are interspersed with intense, agonised verses in the vein of 'Haunted.' This resonates with Graves's own dilemma: much longed-for peace had been attained; Graves had returned to the country he loved; and yet the sentiments he had subscribed to as a Georgian could not be sustained beyond the traumatic impact of war. Although its title suggests its contents reside safely within the bounds of the Georgian, pastoral poetry Graves wrote–very successfully–before the war, the volume nonetheless conveys a sinister ambivalence.

Country Sentiment is made up, partly, of poems from an unpublished collection named *The Patchwork Quilt,* written in the early months of Graves's marriage to Nancy and soon after he had been classified as permanently unfit to fight. In 1918, Graves describes the collection to Siegfried Sassoon in terms that recall the 'Horrid Thing' of his early wartime letter to his father:

It won't be as striking as [Sassoon's own book of poetry, *The Old Huntsman* (1917)] but it will be damned good in spite of the occasional corpses that blunder up among the nursery toys. It shall be called *The Patchwork Quilt* I think, with an explanation perhaps of this kind:

> Here is this patchwork quilt I've made
> Of patterned silks and old brocade,
> Small faded rags in memory rich
> Sewn each to each with feather stitch,
> But if you stare aghast perhaps
> At certain muddied khaki scraps
> Or trophy-fragments of field grey,
> Clotted and torn, a grim display
> That never decked white sheets before,
> Blame my dazed head, blame bloody war.[70]

This stanza reveals a man who is well aware of the disordered, 'patchworked' state of his consciousness. War had rendered Graves a miscellany: memory, history, and reality had become unhinged, unrelated. Ten years later, in *Goodbye to All That*, Graves recalls that during this period

> I was very thin, very nervous, and had about four years sleep to make up. I could not use a telephone, I was sick every time I travelled in a train, and if I saw more than two new people in a single day it prevented me from sleeping. […] Shells used to come bursting into my bed at midnight even when Nancy was sharing it with me; strangers in daytime would assume the faces of friends who had been

[70] Robert Graves to Siegfried Sassoon, 9 July 1918. *IBI*, p. 95

> killed. When strong enough to climb the hill behind Harlech [his childhood home] and revisit my favourite country, I could not help seeing it as a prospective battlefield. (*GTAT*, p. 235)

In 'Ghost Raddled' (1919), later entitled 'The Haunted House', he deploys, in Seamus Heaney's terms, 'images and symbols adequate to [this] predicament'.[71] His neurasthenic symptoms are invoked as

> […] demons in the dry well
> That cheep and mutter,
> Clanging of an unseen bell,
> Blood, choking the gutter. (*TCP*, p. 84)

Graves's 'demons'–in 1919, at least–conspire to undo him, and it appears that the term 'Ghost Raddled' too viscerally evoked its author's haunted state; better to place the poem at the stately, Georgian remove implied by its surviving title. Its ghostly narrator asks what can remain, but 'Unrestrainable, endless grief':

> A song? What laughter or what song
> Can this house remember?
> Do flowers and butterflies belong
> To a blind December? (*TCP*, p. 84)

Graves has been 'blinded' by the horror of trench warfare, not only to the 'flowers and butterflies' of pre-war innocence, but to the originary traumatic events of the war which, in the guise of 'demons', are hidden at the dark foot of the 'dry well' of his unconscious. Like the

[71] Seamus Heaney, 'Feeling into Words', in *Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968-1978* (London: Faber and Faber, 1980), pp. 41-60 (p. 56).

‘unseen bell’ they persist in their obscurity, un-experienced, and will remain so: it is their manifestations, their ‘cheepings’, ‘mutterings’, and ‘clangings’ which comprise his nightmarish visions. That he chose not to revisit many of his war poems in later collections indicates how close to the surface of his psyche these hauntings perpetually lay. In the vein of ‘Haunted’, even the quickest glance over his shoulder, one feels, would set dead friends marching down the streets once more. And yet ‘Ghost Raddled’s ‘bell’, which, ‘unseen’, exists solely to produce *sound*, serves as an example of the phenomenon that would allow Graves a way into representing his neurasthenia at a modicum of remove. As will be seen, from his early poetry and throughout his oeuvre, the image of sound becomes a key trope in Graves’s articulation of traumatic, alienating experience. What’s more, although his later suppression of these poems indicates that Graves found them to be uncomfortable bedfellows, in the immediate post-war period his neurasthenia would emerge, not just as oppressive, but as a paradoxically *creative* force.

III

One of the foundational poems in which Graves mobilizes sound symbolically is ‘Escape’ (1916), an ironic yet mythically charged response to his ‘death’ on the battlefields of the Somme that reveals the incident’s profound psychological effect. It is based loosely around a letter Graves sent to Marsh on 7 August 1916:

> As a matter of fact, I did die on my way down to the Field Ambulance and found myself crossing Lethe by ferry. I had only just time to put on my gas-helmet to keep off the fumes of forgetfulness but managed it and on arrival at the other side began to feel much better. To cut a long story short, old Rhadamanthus introduced himself as my judge but I refused to accept his jurisdiction. I wanted a court

> martial of British officers: he was only a rotten old Greek. He shouted out: 'Contempt of Court' but I chucked a Mills bomb at him which scattered the millions of the mouthless dead in about two seconds and wounded old R. in the leg and broke his sceptre. Then I strode away, held a revolver to Charon's head, climbed into the boat and so home.[72]

Here we find Graves aligning the burgeoning myth of his own immortality with the mythology of ancient Greece, in an early attempt to provide a narratable structure for irrational experience. The poem this letter inspires stays relatively close to its source, but diverges enough to place a telling emphasis on sound:

> I felt the vapours of forgetfulness
> Float in my nostrils. Oh, may Heaven bless
> Dear Lady Proserpine, who saw me wake,
> And, stooping over me, for Henna's sake
> Cleared my poor buzzing head and sent me back
> Breathless, with leaping heart along the track.
> After me roared and clattered angry hosts
> Of demons, heroes, and policeman-ghosts. (*TCP*, p. 28)

The roaring and clattering of the pursuers mimics the traumatising cacophony produced by trench warfare. Graves attempts to describe its idiosyncrasies to Marsh several months before his 'death':

> It's rather trying, having to go back into trenches after a three months' holiday […] I have to get used to all the old noises, from the crack! rockety-ockety-ockety-ockety-ockety of a rifle bullet, to the boom!

[72] Robert Graves to Edward Marsh, 7 August 1916. *IBI*, p. 59.

> … swish …swish …Grr … GRR! … GRR! …*ROAR!* of a fifteen-inch shell and there are a lot of new terrors since last December.[73]

In a letter Graves sent to his father soon after he initially arrived in France, this soundscape holds little thrall: 'I wasn't frightened by the guns which bang away all day and night', he writes, '[t]he noise is just like the Blaenau Festiniog slate-blasters, with the rocket-like whistle of the shells going over.'[74] After years fraught with extended periods on the front line, however, the noise of battle has assumed a palpable, sinister identity of its own: in Fran Brearton's words, it 'is the sound of death' which has transmuted from the sounds of his Welsh childhood into 'a shrieking fevered waste' ('The Survivor Comes Home', *TCP*, p. 815).[75] In a 1971 interview, Graves describes being at home on leave as 'awful because you were with people who didn't understand what this was all about.' 'Didn't you want to tell them?' the interviewer asks. Graves replies 'You couldn't: you can't communicate noise. Noise never stopped for one moment–ever.'[76] Graves's experience of obliterating sound was thus so harrowing that it was incommunicable, and he would persistently try to counter this by capturing its essence in his poetry and short fiction (particularly 'The Shout' (1924)). In 'Escape', however, it is the buzzing heard in the speaker's head which is particularly significant. This sound, Kersnowski argues, 'describes Graves's inner world rather than the world outside him.'[77] The result of repeated minor head traumas–in *Goodbye to All That*, Graves writes of a shell exploding so closely that his 'ears sang as though there were gnats in

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[73] Robert Graves to Edward Marsh, 15 March 1916. *IBI*, p. 42
[74] Qtd. in APG, *Return,* p. 323.
[75] Fran Brearton, ''But that is not new': Poetic Legacies of the First World War', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Poetry of the First World War,* ed. by Santanu Das (Cambridge: CUP, 2013), pp. 229-41 (p. 235).
[76] Robert Graves, 'The Great Years of Their Lives: Robert Graves, Brigadier C. E. Lucas Phillips, Henry Williamson and Lord Chandos talk to Leslie Smith about the First World War', interview by Leslie Smith, *The Listener*, 2207 (15 July 1971), 73-5 (p. 74).
[77] Kersnowski, *The Early Poetry*, p. 41.

them' (*GTAT*, p. 96)–this 'buzzing' was as real for Graves as the dissonance of rifle-shots and shells, and became the dominant image within his aesthetic to describe his neurasthenia.

Graves revisits the internal, infernal buzzing of 'Escape' in 'The Gnat' (*The Pier-Glass* [1921]), a poem that Carter describes as 'a curiously intense, slow-motion analysis of the effect of noise upon consciousness and perception.'[78] If Graves's experience of trauma led him to adopt a phenomenological approach to the unconscious, it is 'The Gnat' which describes his progress. The poem tells the tale of a shepherd driven mad by the buzzing of a gnat which, having crawled into his ear, has buried itself in his brain. The insect is a mechanised horror, with 'wings of iron mail' and 'metal claws.' Believing his sheepdog Prinny to be the source of his torment the shepherd kills her, at which point the gnat absconds:

> Out flies the new-born creature from his mouth
>
> And humming fearsomely like a huge engine,
>
> Rockets about the room, smites the unseen
>
> Glass of half-open windows, reels, recovers,
>
> Soars out into the meadows, and is gone. (*TCP*, p. 110)

The gnat's buzzing, Graves writes, 'has many attributes which connect it with war-neurosis; it holds suggestions of air-raids of the zero-hour of attack, and the crazy noise of battle.'[79] It is trauma made sensory, encompassing both threat–'the zero-hour of attack'–and actuality–'the crazy noise of battle'.

The import of 'The Gnat' lies in this reading. In *The Meaning of Dreams*, Graves explains that 'to be rid of the gnat (shell-shock) means killing the sheep dog (poetry) and when the sheep dog is dead the shepherd ceases to be a shepherd and must become a labourer; that

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[78] Carter, *Robert Graves,* p. 159

[79] Robert Graves, *The Meaning of Dreams* (New York: Greenberg Publishers, 1925), pp. 164-5.

is, I would have to give up being a poet and become a labourer or bank-clerk.'[80] This view is born of his association with W. H. R. Rivers, Sassoon's psychiatrist at Craiglockhart hospital and a fellow Oxonian. 'As a neurasthenic', Graves writes in his introduction to *The Common Asphodel* (1949), 'I was interested in the newly expounded Freudian theory: when presented with English reserve and common-sense by W. H. R. Rivers, who did not regard sex as the sole impulse in dream-making or assume that dream-symbols are constant, it appealed to me as reasonable.'[81] For Graves and Rivers, what the poet refers to in 'Ghost Raddled' as 'clouded tales of wrong | And terror' (*TCP*, p. 84) are not something to be repressed, but should instead be used as a source of poetic inspiration. As Graves would later observe in *The Crowning Privilege* (1955),

> The pathology of a poetic composition is no secret. A poet finds himself caught in some baffling emotional problem, which is of such urgency that it sends him into a sort of trance. And in this trance his mind works, with astonishing boldness and precision, on several imaginative levels at once. The poem is either a practical answer to his problem, or else a statement of it.[82]

As the 'pathology of poetic composition' relied on 'baffling emotional problems', he was therefore reluctant to seek a non-poetic cure. As he writes in the first edition of *Goodbye to All That,* reiterating the problem at the heart of 'The Gnat',

> I had bad nights. I thought that perhaps I owed it to Nancy to go to a psychiatrist to be cured; and yet I was not sure. Somehow I thought that the power of writing poetry, which was more important to me than anything else I did, would disappear if I allowed to get myself cured; my *Pier-Glass* haunting would

[80] Graves, *The Meaning of Dreams*, p. 164.
[81] Robert Graves, 'Introduction' to *The Common Asphodel: Collected Essays on Poetry 1922-1949* (1949; New York: Haskell House, 1970), pp. vii-xi (p. vii).
[82] Robert Graves, 'The Poet and His Public: A Home Service Broadcast', in *The Crowning Privilege: Collected Essays on Poetry* (1955; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1959) pp. 211-18 (p. 214).

> end and I would become merely a dull easy writer. It seemed to me less important to be well than a good poet.[83]

Suffering, as Graves would eventually articulate in *The White Goddess*, was thus necessary not only to his own but to every poet's existence, and it must be accommodated rather than done away with. Inspired by Rivers, Graves resolved to embrace his hauntings and nightmares rather than suppress them; he believed, as Rivers did, that once the threat of war dissipated, so would his nightmarish visitations. Although they would both be proved wrong (Graves's symptoms would persist until the end of his life), Graves hoped to mirror the process of Freudian dream-interpretation, and resolve his internal conflict by writing out of his unconscious. 'When conflicting issues disturb [the poet's] mind,' he writes in *On English Poetry* (1922), 'which in its conscious state is unable to reconcile them logically, the poet acquires the habit of self-hypnotism, as practised by witch doctors, his ancestors in poetry.'[84] It is in this 'hypnotic' trance that true poetry is produced. Just as the Freudian subject, upon waking, must document the events of his dreams for analysis, so the rough draft of a poem written out of a poetic trance offers insights drawn from, and therefore into, the poet's subconscious.[85] *This* was the only truth available to Graves, since the war had denied him the comforts of an Aristotelian understanding of history based on 'the "probable and necessary" according to our every-day experiences of life.'[86] Graves's interpretation of this truth into what Michael Pharand describes as 'an understandable, logical, metrical pattern' functioned as a form of

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[83] Robert Graves, *Goodbye to All That* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1929), p. 381.
[84] Robert Graves, *On English Poetry* (London: Heinemann, 1922).
[85] Graves's sense of poetic trance may have been influenced by the Romantic vision of timeless-ness–Wordsworth's 'spots of time' (*The Prelude*, XII.208-10 (1850)) or Keats's 'waking dream' ('Ode to a Nightingale', (1819))–what John Barnard describes as 'those rare ecstatic moments when consciousness loses its sense of self, and the ego is overwhelmed by visionary being, freed from clock-time' (John Barnard, *John Keats* (Cambridge: CUP, 1987), p. 111), and it seems likely that Rivers's and Freud's approaches appealed to him precisely because they agreed with what he'd already taken to be a poetic truth.
[86] Graves, *On English Poetry*, pp. 72-3.

psychotherapy, leading to a more believable, authentic presentation of reality than could be found in rational narratives.[87]

Graves did not reveal the results of this form of 'self-analysis', but it did lead him to expound his theory of poetry as therapy in *On English Poetry*, *Poetic Unreason* (1924), and *The Meaning of Dreams* (1925). In the latter, Graves discusses the concept of 'Dissociation', the fragmentation of the individual into two or more 'selves' as a result of traumatic experience, a duality that he explored poetically in *Country Sentiment*. 'When a person is in a conflict between two selves,' he writes, 'and one self is stronger than the other throughout the waking life, the weaker side becomes victorious in the dream.'[88] This 'weaker side', most prevalent in heavy sleep, is attended by the images and sounds which comprise haunting. In this heightened state, history is less subject 'to the strict rules of time and space and probability which govern our logical thinking', and these audio-visual symbols 'are often the condensation and dramatisation of an enormous range of experience'.[89] Graves's weaker side, his irrational being, thus had access to the 'unreason' on which he would become poetically dependent. This would inaugurate a Gravesian pattern by which the poet is paradoxically *empowered* by submitting to a stronger force–by being the weaker element in a relationship–a pattern which would perpetuate throughout his life and work in the form of submitting to the cruel caprices of his Muse.

Although he resisted formalised analysis, Graves found it useful to put something similar to use when dealing with poetry itself. As he writes to Marsh in 1922, '[s]urface analysis' of individual poems 'will […] prevent writing by formula and the experience gained

[87] Michel Pharand, 'Avoiding the Psychoanalytic Confession-Box: Robert Graves and W. H. R. Rivers', *Gravesiana*, 1/4 (1997), 387-97 (p. 389).
[88] Graves, *The Meaning of Dreams*, p. 24.
[89] Graves, *The Meaning of Dreams,* pp. 36-7.

will enable the unconscious to create work with greater depth and sincerity than before.'[90] Graves applied this 'surface analysis', which he later named analeptic mimesis, not only to his own poetry but to others'. An exegetical method, it amounts to what John Bennett describes as 'the imitation of thoughts and sensations that occurred in the past.'[91] Founded on the belief, Bennett continues, that 'a poem is born not merely from a particular period and social class, but from an individual in a particular time and at a particular place, thinking particular thoughts', Graves's examination of a poem allowed him to clear away, through revision, its unnecessary rhetoric and produce a 'fair copy'.[92] As a true poet, he had access to the 'reality' of the poem: what it always *should* have been, had its author remained faithful to his muse. Here we see Graves attempting to access a semantic space, or truth, beyond the words on the page. This method becomes particularly relevant when we apply it to Graves's approach to translation, and his drive to uncover the true meaning, or 'pure language', of the source text, a meaning indelibly grounded in the mythic.

IV

Entrenched in memory and imagination, Graves's oeuvre depicts an escape into a mythic world where some benevolent force strives to impose an absolute control over the anarchy and deterioration of the current age, thus bearing a striking resemblance to T. S. Eliot's 'mythical method'.[93] That a movement towards myth equates to a movement towards control becomes understandable when considered in the context of the 'lost generation' of writers to

[90] Robert Graves to Edward Marsh, n.d. [early July 1922]. *IBI*, p. 142
[91] John Bennett, 'Revising for Reasonableness: Robert Graves as Critic and Poet', in *New Perspectives on Robert Graves,* ed. by Quinn, pp. 19-35 (p. 25).
[92] Bennett, 'Revising', p. 25.
[93] T. S. Eliot, 'Ulysses, Order, and Myth', in *The Complete Prose,* Vol.1, ed. by Cuda and Schuchard, pp. 476-81 (p. 479).

which Graves belonged. O'Prey describes these figures as the 'marginalised' group of the Great War's combatant survivors, 'disoriented by the common experience of and stubborn attachment to a war quickly receding in the national consciousness.'[94] As Samuel Hynes contends,

> [h]ere *lost* means not *vanished* but *disorientated*, wandering, directionless–a recognition that there was great confusion and aimlessness among the war's survivors in the early post-war years, much moving about, much changing of plans, many beginnings without endings[95]

For Graves, an ending or resolution to his sense of detachment from the post-war age could be found only by returning to the symbolic beginnings and cohesive narratives of a sustaining mythopoetic system. The book in which Graves sets out this system, *The White Goddess,* is a daunting text. Eliot referred to it as 'prodigious, monstrous, stupefying, indescribable', terms, one cannot help but notice, which are couched in the rhetoric of war.[96] It is also, at least in the context of this thesis, a sort of key, both in the sense that it unlocks a door to a deeper understanding of Graves's classical translations, and that it functions as an index of signposts which allow us to navigate and decipher their cartography. This is due to the fact that, although a work of supreme erudition, it is nonetheless explicable only in terms of Graves's subjective experience.

The White Goddess, as Brearton contends, is a 'war book' in which Graves attempts 'to contextualize irrational and senseless slaughter, to acknowledge the conflict between the poet and the world–the violence within and the violence without.'[97] Indeed, the disjunction

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[94] O'Prey, 'Captain', p. 43.
[95] S. Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (London: The Bodley Head, 1990), p. 339.
[96] Qtd. in Jarrell, 'Graves and the White Goddess', p. 78.
[97] Fran Brearton, 'Visions, Goddesses and Bog People', in *Graves and the Goddess: Essays on Robert Graves's The White Goddess*, ed. by Ian Firla and Grevel Lindop (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna UP, 2003), pp. 152-65 (p. 155).

between Graves's inner and outer experience is registered in *The White Goddess's* pages. It tells of the fragmented, *amphidexios* God of the Year, both 'himself and his other self at the same time' (*TWG*, p. 437), fighting for the affections of the Goddess:

> The Theme, briefly, is the antique story, which falls into thirteen chapters and an epilogue, of the birth, life, death and resurrection of the God of the Waxing Year; the central chapters concern the God's losing battle with the God of the Waning Year for love of the capricious and all-powerful Threefold Goddess, their mother, bride and layer-out. The poet identifies himself with the God of the Waxing Year and his Muse with the Goddess; the rival is his blood-brother, his other self, his weird. All true poetry [...] celebrates some incident or scene in this very ancient story, and the three main characters are so much a part of our racial inheritance that they not only assert themselves in poetry but recur on occasions of emotional stress in the forms of dreams, paranoiac visions and delusions. (*TWG*, p. 20)

It is no coincidence that 'the three main characters' of the story 'assert themselves' in the form of 'dreams, paranoiac visions and delusions', the very conditions that, as we know from Freud and Caruth, characterise the experience of trauma. And, as a metaphor for the coming to terms with the experience of war, the Goddess is nonetheless paradoxically as deadly as trench warfare:

> The reason why the hairs stand on end, the eyes water, the throat is constricted, the skin crawls and a shiver runs down the spine when one writes or reads a true poem is that a true poem is necessarily an invocation of the White Goddess, or Muse, the Mother of All Living, the ancient power of fright and lust–the female spider or the queen-bee whose embrace is death. (*TWG*, p. 20)

The God of the Waxing Year, tellingly, figures as 'king and supplanter, victim and murderer [whose] right hand does not know what his left hand does' (*TWG*, p. 437). With this occlusion

of referentiality and self-knowledge, the figure of the God of the Year is indicative of Graves's post-war neurasthenic state which, whilst its symptoms had retreated somewhat by the time *The White Goddess* was written, was still a part of his daily life. But the God of the Year also emerges in its duality as the archetypal Gravesian soldier: as Brearton points out, 'in the Great War, the friend is the enemy, the victim the killer, the lover the destroyer.'[98] The intolerable conflicted state which characterises Graves's immediate post-war existence is thus transmuted from an 'indecent and painful' battle between warring elements into an honourable paean to the poet's Muse, 'an age long and chivalrous war fought for the favours of the White Goddess' (*TWG*, p. 437).

The Second World War, too, makes its presence felt in *The White Goddess*. Although child sacrifice is a long-established topic of comparative religion and can be found in precursors to *The White Goddess* including, most notably, James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1890),[99] certain sections of Graves's book hold a mirror up to the tragic death of his son David in Burma in 1943, and they do so in ways which must have spoken to Graves's ensuing traumatic survivor guilt: children are sacrificed, 'burn[ed] to death as an annual surrogate for the sacred king' (*TWG*, p. 123), and in 1944 Graves writes to Basil Liddell Hart of 'the deeply religious habit of sacrificing one's eldest son.'[100] Here, too, we read of the loss of the Welsh poet Alun Lewis, killed in Arakan in 1944, very near to where David died. Although their correspondence was brief and they would never meet, Lewis represented for Graves a new hope for British poetry, and he grieved his loss terribly. In his final letter to Graves, Lewis provides the inspiration for one of the most oft-quoted phrases of *The White Goddess*: 'The *single* poetic theme of Life and Death … the question of what survives of the beloved' (*TWG*, p.

98 Brearton, 'Visions', p. 156.
99 Cf. Book II, Chapter 4: 'Sacrifice of the King's Son' (James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, abridged ed. (London: OUP, 1994), pp. 261-72).
100 Robert Graves to Basil Liddell Hart, 1 May 1944. *IBI*, p. 321.

17).[101] Once he has attuned himself to it, Graves consistently reiterates this 'single poetic Theme' (*TWG*, p. 408), a distillation of the whole range of human experience into that of the Orphic cycle of death and rebirth, a cycle into which he believed himself inaugurated following his 'death' in 1916.

* * *

As discussed above, the poet's identification with the God of the Waxing Year, who 'battles' for the Goddess's affections, is crucial. Although highly critical of the war's profiteers and chronically traumatised by its events, the patriotic dedication to suffering which he felt he and his fellow combatants embodied was, for Graves, the sole redeeming feature of the war. As he writes to Marsh in 1916,

> I always enjoy the trenches in a way, I must confess: I like feeling really frightened and if happiness consists in being miserable in a good cause, why then I'm doubly happy. England's is a good cause enough. [102]

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[101] Lewis gleaned this maxim from the Urdu poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz. In her book of English translations of Faiz's poetry, *The True Subject* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1988), Naomi Lazard offers this ring of quotations as an epigraph:

Faiz Ahmed Faiz to Alun Lewis, Burma, circa 1943:
"The true subject of poetry is the loss of the beloved."

Alun Lewis, in a letter to Robert Graves
before Lewis was killed, Burma, 1944:
"The single poetic theme of Life and Death–the question
of what survives of the beloved."

Robert Graves, *The White Goddess*,
Quoting Alun Lewis, 1947:
"The single poetic theme of Life and Death–the question
of what survives of the beloved." (p. v)

[102]Robert Graves to Edward Marsh, 15 March 1916. *IBI*, p. 43

In *The White Goddess*, Graves effectively transmutes the notion of military service as a necessary sacrifice into the religious service of the Goddess.[103] 'The pride', he writes, 'of "bearing it out even to the edge of doom" that sustains a soldier in the field, governs a poet's service to the Muse. It is not masochism, or even stupidity, but […] a willingness to risk all wounds and hardships, to die weapon in hand.'[104] Graves violently illustrates the paradigmatic demise of the Muse-poet, who, he writes, 'must, in a sense, die for the Goddess whom he adores', just as the 'Sacred King' did when her 'divine victim' (*TWG*, p. 494). It is a primeval, nightmarish death, which–as Brearton observes–is phrased in terms which recall not only the traumatic reality of the trenches, but also the repetitive noise of warfare which, for Graves, 'never stopped':[105]

> Poetry began in the matriarchal age, and derives its magic from the moon, not the sun. No poet can hope to understand the nature of poetry unless he has had a vision of the Naked King crucified to the lopped oak, and watched the dancers, red-eyed from the acrid smoke of the sacrificial fires, stamping out the measure of the dance, their bodies bent uncouthly forward, with a monotonous chant of: 'Kill! kill! kill!' and 'Blood! blood! blood! (*TWG*, p. 439)

In doing so, he becomes '"the beloved man", the Goddess's favourite' (*TWG*, p. 456), earning the redemption that her favour promises.

Thus, while Graves's war poems evoke a threat of death that overwhelms the speaker, in the poems which inaugurate his Goddess worship he voluntarily invites it: it is he who determines the conditions of his own suffering. In the archetypal Goddess-poem 'To Juan at

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[103] Brearton, 'Visions', p. 158

[104] Robert Graves, 'Oxford Chair of Poetry 1965: Lecture One', in *Poetic Craft and Principle: Lectures and Talks* (London: Cassell, 1967), pp. 97-121 (p. 109).

[105] Fran Brearton, 'Robert Graves and *The White Goddess*', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 131, 2004 Lectures (Oxford: OUP, 2005), pp. 273-302 (p. 297).

the Winter Solstice', for instance, he tells how 'each new victim treads unfalteringly | the never altered circuit of his fate,' dwelling on the Goddess's 'graciousness' and 'her smiling' (*TCP*, p. 406). As Andrew Painter suggests,

> In this way the White Goddess becomes not just a single metaphor for war, but an inverted one: deathly actions are now controlled in a way those of the war were not; the authorship of death is now with the pen and not with the bomb, and the White Goddess who would be the solution to what Graves thought of as the great patriarchal disaster is subject to the pen and becomes a controlled reproduction of that disaster modelled in the poet's hands.[106]

As a 'controlled reproduction' of the disaster of war, the monomyth of the Goddess condenses all that is finally important to Graves: even when she destroys us, she is an intrinsically recuperative force. Pain, evil, *trauma* are as necessary to the proper function of existence as the powers of good, and it is in acknowledgement and acceptance of this that the poet reaches a true understanding of his own reality. In 'Recalling War', published in Graves's *Collected Poems 1938,* Graves offers a stanza which both encapsulates the horrific actuality of war and alludes to man's proper response to the Goddess's attentions:

> War was return of earth to ugly earth,
> War was foundering of sublimities,
> Extinction of each happy art and faith
> By which the world still kept head in air,
> Protesting logic or protesting love,
> Until the unendurable moment struck–
> The inward scream, the duty to run mad. (*TCP*, p. 358)

[106] Andrew Painter, 'How and Why Graves Proceeded in Poetry', in *Graves and the Goddess*, ed. by Firla and Lindop, pp. 144-51 (pp. 145-6).

As Brearton points out, Graves would dedicate the rest of his literary career, from 1938 onwards, to sustaining the basic tenet of the poem: upholding the duty of 'recalling war', 'but doing so in a context where "art", "faith", and "protesting love" are central to, rather than sidelined by, the conflict.'[107] The Goddess provides this context, and to attain salvation–to gain access to his own history–the true poet has 'duty to run mad' not only to fight his country's wars, but to surrender his existence to her irrational reign.

We know from a diary note that 'Recalling War' was originally entitled 'Remembering War'. I agree with Carter that the current title is 'much closer to the real meaning of the poem, for the war, as the first stanza makes plain, cannot be truly 'remembered''.[108] I would propose an alternative (though no more valid) reading, however, to his claim that 'time has […] salved [war's] terror and confusion, so that memory alone cannot come at the experience: it must be 'recalled' by means of the imagination.'[109] 'Recall' does not operate solely in terms of imagination: it also functions as a summons to return. Steven Trout–in terms familiar to us from Caruth–contends that 'the war suggested, through its incomprehensible enormity and horror, that history had stopped, that human events were no longer open to exposition through empirical study.' [110] Time has not 'salved' Graves's traumatic experiences, because they occurred *out of time*, in a period of historical stoppage. In 'Recalling War', Graves demands the recovery and synthesis of a history that has been denied him. In its absence, he must use his imagination to create an anti-empiricist mythology that *can* be narrated, and so it is in the role of mythographer and Muse-poet that Graves

107 Fran Brearton, *The Great War in Irish Poetry: W. B. Yeats to Michael Longley* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), p. 86.
108 Carter, *Robert Graves*, p.197.
109 Carter, *Robert Graves*, p. 197.
110 Steven Trout, 'Telling the Truth–Nearly; Robert Graves, Daniel Defoe, and *Good-bye To All That*', in *New Perspectives on Robert Graves,* ed. by Quinn, pp. 175-87 (p. 186).

determines what can heal and redeem him. But what, exactly, does this redemption entail, and how does it relate to traumatic catharsis in actual terms?

V

The Goddess's redemptive role is adumbrated for Graves in the most 'comprehensive and inspired account of the Goddess in all ancient literature' (*TWG*, p. 65), Apuleius's *Metamorphoses*, which he would publish in translation two years after completing *The White Goddess*. Invoked under her 'true name' of Queen Isis by the hapless protagonist Lucius, the Goddess announces her presence thus:

> Behold, Lucius, I am come; thy weeping and thy prayer hath moved me to succour thee. I am she that is the natural mother of all things, mistress and governess of all the elements, the initial progeny of worlds, chief of the powers divine, queen of all that are in Hell, the principal of them that dwell in Heaven […] At my will the planets of the sky, the wholesome winds of the seas, and the lamentable silences of hell be disposed. […] Behold, I am present to favour and aid thee; leave off thy weeping and lamentation, put away all thy sorrow, for behold the healthful day which is ordained by my providence. (*TWG*, pp. 67-8)

The Myth's significance for Graves, then, is in its potential to enable him to 'leave off' (in a reductive sense) his 'lamentation and sorrow'. The Goddess's 'favour' will release him from the dark clutches of his traumatic symptoms, and allow him to be reborn, not into mortality, but into a transcendent state beyond the vagaries of referential history in which he can translate traumatic memory into narrative memory. Graves articulates this recuperative process in the poem 'Darien', in which the poet longs for the sacrifice of his old self at the

hands of the Goddess in order that he might be reincarnated as his own successor, the vigorous and powerful titular character:

> I knew then by the trembling of her hands
>
> For whom that flawless blade would sweep:
>
> My own oracular head, swung by its hair.
>
> "Mistress," I cried, "the times are evil
>
> And you have charged me with their remedy.
>
> […]
>
> "Sweetheart," said I, "strike now, for Darien's sake!" (*TCP*, pp. 438-9)

Transformed, he can return to the world with the ability to confront his own occluded history, thus 'remedying' the 'evil times'. No longer neurasthenic (a condition characterised by that which resists interpretation), but oracular (a condition characterised by prescience), he enters into what is known in the Western canon as the Orphic tradition.

The figure of Orpheus would become crucial to Graves's conception of both death and his relationship with the Goddess. Traditionally configured as the male archetype of the poet as traumatic victim and paragon of faithful love, he is subtly redefined in Graves's writing, Robert A. Davis observes, as 'the persona through which the poet can secure the release longed for in the pages of *The White Goddess* from the oppressions of the Great Wheel.'[111] For Graves, as he reveals in *The Golden Fleece* (1944), Orpheus is both poet and high-priest, 'burdened with the knowledge of the fate that awaits all true devotees of the

[111] Robert A. Davis, 'The Black Goddess', in *Graves and the Goddess*, ed. by Firla and Lindop, pp. 99-113 (p. 102).

Goddess who submit to the ordeals adumbrated in the cycle of the calendar alphabet', and officiator and psychopomp of her mysteries.[112] When questioned by Anacaeus if he desires the perfect rest of death, Orpheus replies:

> Not even death. We are all caught on a wheel, from which there is no release but by the grace of the Mother. We are whirled up into life, the light of the day, and carried down again into death, the darkness of the night; but then another day dawns red and we reappear, we are reborn […] Death is no release from the wheel, Anacaeus, unless the Mother should intervene. I sigh for perfect rest, to be taken at last into her benign keeping.[113]

But how to incite the Goddess's intervention? Just as Orpheus' defining action was an inarrestible 'looking back' at Eurydice as they ascended from Hades, thus losing her forever, so the Orphic theology is grounded in a unique version of an archaic Greek myth of memory. Known as *anamnesis*, it met Graves's demands as both poet and trauma subject. He describes its principles in *The White Goddess*:

> The Orphics had another, quieter solution […] It was: not to forget, to refuse to drink the water of cypress-shaded Lethe however thirsty one might be, to accept water only from the sacred (hazel-shaded?) pool of Persephone, and thus to become immortal Lords of the Dead, excused further Tearings-To-Pieces, Destructions, Resurrection and Rebirths. (*TWG*, p. 135)

Yet *anamnesis* is not without its own costs. Robert Romanyshyn stresses that it 'connotes more than the terms memory or remembering do. As un-forgetting it suggests a process that one

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[112] Davis, 'The Black Goddess', p. 102

[113] Robert Graves, *The Golden Fleece* (1944; London: Penguin, 2011), p. 109.

goes through […] a sundering of the person […] a painful awakening.'[114] To a mind like Graves's, the Orphic awakening would seem broadly analogous with the poet's engagement with the repressed, occluded truths of his unconscious, which exert themselves on his daily life as the traumatic symptoms which are themselves the very experience of his trauma.

In 'Instructions to the Orphic Adept' (1944), Graves describes the cycle of rebirth in which he felt he was embroiled. Here, memory plays a vital role in attaining salvation–a 'cure', of sorts. Unlike psychoanalysis, however, it adheres to Graves's poetic principles:

> So soon as ever your mazed spirit descends
>
> From daylight into darkness, Man, remember
>
> What you have suffered here in Samothrace,
>
> What you have suffered. (*TCP*, p. 402)

The Orphic adept–an initiate into the Orphic cycle of life, death, and sublime rebirth–is being instructed how to successfully navigate his descent into Hades. He must avoid the spring of 'Forgetfulness' […] | Though all the common rout rush down to drink', and instead visit the 'secret pool | […] of Memory.' There he will be challenged by guardians, and must reply with answers supplied by the oracle:

> […] they will ask you yet: 'What of your feet?'
>
> You shall reply: 'My feet have borne me here
>
> Out of the weary wheel, the circling years,
>
> To that still, spokeless wheel:–Persephone.
>
> Give me to drink!' (*TCP*, p. 403)

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[114] Robert Romanyshyn, ''Anyway, why did it have to be the death of the poet?' The Orphic Roots of Jung's Psychology' (2004), 55-87 (p. 68). Available at <http://204.50.56.189/gems/romanyshyn/RomanyshynDeathPoet> [accessed 21 May 2016].

Having dedicated himself to the Muse, realised in this poem as 'the three-fold Queen of Samothrace,' the poet has been freed from the constraints of time. At the 'still centre' of the Orphic cycle resides Persephone, an 'aspect of the White Goddess', and the poet's salvation.[115] The adept thus becomes immortal–reborn *outside of time*–one of the 'lords of the uninitiated | Twittering ghosts, Hell's countless populace', and an oracle himself.

These 'twittering ghosts' are Graves's hauntings, the nightmares that have commandeered his consciousness, setting 'dead men' marching in 'the morning street'. After 'his visionary journey beyond Time', Hugh Underhill contends, the poet

> [i]s 'reborn' into ordinary consciousness, but may now *command* his experience–is freed of the 'twittering ghosts' which have haunted his subjective existence and helped make it unmanageable–and, taking 'serpent shapes', may speak with the voice of an oracle in formally achieved poems about that experience. […] Subjectivity has been stabilized, a *transcendent* self has been fixed. [116]

Thus, in 'Instructions to the Orphic Adept' we discover the mutable nature of Graves's relationship with his own trauma, couched in the framework of his developing thesis of *The White Goddess*. What Graves is working towards is a rejection of 'forgetfulness' and a confrontation with his own history. This will enable him to control its manifestations and direct them solely towards poetry, but he will not, as Kersnowski posits, be able to 'control the force of his wartime memories and traumas until he [is] able to fix a being in his experience with the power to traumatise yet not destroy him'–a being who is realised in the figure of the White Goddess.[117] Graves is prepared, even eager, to be overwhelmed by his Muse; he would

[115] Hugh Underhill, *The Problem of Consciousness in Modern Poetry* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), p. 52.
[116] Underhill, *The Problem of Consciousness,* p. 52.
[117] Kersnowski, *The Early Poetry*, p. 59.

gladly suffer and die for her because, Davis contends, this will arm him 'with full remembrance of his past,' thus enabling him to achieve 'a level of mythic consciousness which frees him from bondage to time and oblivion.'[118] Although the effect of true poetry may be violent and unpredictable, its power derives from the poet's secret dealings with what the rational consciousness has interdicted–but in this, the poet's agency is key. By adopting the persona of Orpheus he exposes himself to the destructive vagaries of the Goddess, subjecting himself, as through *anamnesis*, to a painful psychic sundering. The cruelty, violence, and betrayal inherent in the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice thus depicts, for Graves, the transition from suffering to wisdom which the Muse poet must subject himself to.[119] The 'single poetic theme' of the White Goddess, O'Prey asserts, 'formalized and rationalized' this suffering.

Whence, then, did the Goddess come? We know that she existed for Graves, ethereally, as early as 1924, in the form of the 'death-white Fay' of 'A History' (*TCP*, p. 753). *The White Goddess* itself is formed upon a startlingly extensive knowledge of classical and biblical mythology, as well as texts as diverse as Lady Charlotte Guest's translation of *The Mabinogion* (1839) and Margaret Murray's *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* (1921).[120] There is a sense, however, that when Graves was conducting the research that would comprise *The White Goddess*, his erudition was simply adding contour to a sketch which was already fully formed in his mind. Ultimately, all of Graves's Goddess scholarship results in a world picture which is compulsively mapped with the peaks and (hidden) valleys of his own unconscious, a construct not only transcribed with the symbols and narratives of earlier cultures, but also with those aspects of his own experience and neurosis which he has successfully mythologised: his death

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[118] Davis, ' The Black Goddess', pp. 103-4

[119] Davis, 'The Black Goddess', p. 106.

[120] Grevel Lindop, '*The White Goddess:* Sources, Contexts, Meanings', in *Graves and the Goddess*, ed. by Firla and Lindop, pp. 25-39 (p. 29).

and rebirth at the age of twenty-one, and the destructive potential of woman-as-muse. As Randall Jarrell astutely puts it,

> Graves's theories, so astonishing in themselves, are–when we compare them with Graves's life and with psychoanalytical observation of lives in general, of the Unconscious, of children, neurotics, savages, myths, fairy tales–not astonishing at all, but logical and predictable; are so *natural* that we say with a tender smile, 'Of course!' We see, or fancy that we see, why Graves believes them and why he is helped by believing them. Few poets have made better 'pathological sense'.[121]

Graves, however, would disagree. 'My world picture', he writes in 1969, 'is not a psychological one, nor do I indulge in idle myth-making […]. It is enough for me to quote authentic myths and give them historical sense.'[122] But what sense can be made if history, displaced by trauma, no longer exists? It is difficult not to read this as Graves's rationalisation, in the later years of his life, of his experience: as Jarrell contends, 'by making the accidental circumstances of your life the necessary conditions of all lives, you have transformed yourself from an accident-prone analysand into an emblematic Oedipus'. [123] It is Graves, the paragon of matriarchal culture existing only to serve his Muse, who is the *authentic* poet, and it is therefore his 'dislocated' existence which makes 'historical sense'. The current age is denied validity, rendered abhorrent and abnormal by the two world wars in which man's service was dedicated not to his Muse, but to patriarchal, rational intelligence and the degenerate, profiteering puppet-masters who wield it. It is unsurprising, then, that Graves would turn his hand to classical translation, thus engaging with the textual repository of another, earlier time in which the figure of the Goddess is endlessly glimpsed and refracted through the prism of

[121] Jarrell, 'Graves and the White Goddess', p. 99
[122] Robert Graves, *On Poetry: Collected talks and Essays* (New York: Doubleday, 1969), p. 236.
[123] Jarrell, 'Graves and the White Goddess', p. 110.

Graeco-Roman mythology. Graves's approach to translating classical material is idiosyncratic at best and, as will be seen, in his quest to make 'historical sense' of his source texts he draws out what he distinguishes as their essential qualities, properties that resonate both with Benjamin's notion of 'pure language' and the bio-critical readings of Graves's work that we have discussed thus far.

VI

For Harold Bloom, the defining characteristic of Graves's later prose is his 'curious literalism', an aspect which, he argues, paradoxically constitutes both the weakness (the 'tendentious mythmaking' of *The White Goddess*) and strength (the persuasive vitality of *King Jesus*) of his work.[124] Bloom is referring here to Graves's efforts to prevent the reader from interpreting the Goddess as a metaphor for the poetic imagination, which he achieves by avoiding figurative language and literalising her manifestations. The same term can be applied to Graves's translations, where it refers not to the literal production of equivalence (as it traditionally would in a translative context), but a literalism born of a combination of interpretation and rationalisation, in which mythic material is 'decoded' to reveal the ritual meaning which best suits Graves's mythopoetic concerns. In the case of Graves's *translations*, however, this takes place at the level of language: where a Greek or Latin term is multivalent, Graves's choice of target word can be biased; or, more often than not, the source text is manipulated beyond recognition. This is the translational approach, as noted above, that Hardwick has described as a form of 'anthropological classicism'. Referring, in fact, to Hughes's translations (although, as will be seen, it is clear that he takes his cue from Graves), she defines this as a

[124] Harold Bloom, *Poets and Poems* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2005), p. 304.

'desire to engage with the primitive' that is founded in a sense of 'engagement-not-belonging', allowing the translator to 'contest, reject, and metamorphose what he finds in the ancient'.[125] This 'literalism' pervades Graves's translations, often making them strange beasts: in places they tend to become distant cousins of the original texts, sites of estrangement and absence. On the whole, this left classicist reviewers disturbed: *The Anger of Achilles,* for example, has been referred to as '[a]n outrageous sortie into the field of translation', in which 'Graves is forced into an extensive manhandling of the original Greek poem in order to make his interpretation at all legible. […] Every page has many gross misrepresentations of the *Iliad*'.[126] The text is marked by Graves's 'scattered yapping' and, in short, 'it is certainly not the kind of translation that a Hellenist would write to convey the real essence of Homer.'[127] *The Golden Ass* received similar attention: Graves is accused of rendering Apuleius's 'brightly coloured Roman mosaic' into 'a black-and-white pen-drawing';[128] of giving the reader 'no inkling of one of the greatest charms of the original, its piquantly unsuitable magniloquence of description and discourse';[129] and, although 'a charming and delightful narration', at times 'it can hardly be called a translation'.[130] As with the Gravesian material that precedes them, however, these translations are significantly shaped by Graves's own experiences, personal Myth, and critical preoccupations. As such, they can be read with greater understanding if we approach them not simply as literary anomalies (as the above critics have), but as refractions of Graves's splintered history and his experience of trauma.

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[125] Hardwick, 'Can (modern) poets do classical drama?', p. 58.
[126] Keith Aldrich, 'Graves vs. Homer', *Prairie Schooner,* 34/4 (1960), 394-6 (p. 395).
[127] G. E. Dimock, Jr., 'The *Iliad* Rescued: Or a Mustache for Mona Lisa', *The Hudson Review*, 13/2 (1960), 293-7 (p. 296); John E. Rexine, Review of '*The Anger of Achilles*', *The Classical Journal,* 57/6 (1962), 281-2 (p. 281).
[128] F. L. Lucas, Review of '*The Golden Ass*', *Times Literary Supplement* (2 June 1950), 336.
[129] D. S. Robertson, Review of '*The Transformations of Lucius, otherwise known as The Golden Ass* by Lucius Apuleius, translated by Robert Graves', *Classical Review*, 1/3-4 (1951), 241-2 (p. 241).
[130] J. J. M. Feldbrugge, Review of 'Robert Graves, *Apuleius: The Golden Ass*', *Mnemosyne*, Fourth Series, 5/2 (1952), 169.

The catalysing force behind Graves's singular approach to translation can be traced, as with many of the pressures which shaped him as both man and poet, back to Charterhouse. Here, Graves received a classical and poetic education which he describes as 'meager and wholly unpractical', primarily because (and here that curious literalism comes to the fore) it did not include courses adumbrating the truths which lay *behind* the words that he was instructed to learn by rote, courses such as 'primitive religion […] or even […] elementary nature study'.[131] Thus,

> [o]ne could get, for example, full marks for answering the classroom question 'What is Asphodel?' with 'A yellow flower mentioned by Homer as growing in Elysium, on soft beds of which the souls of the just were believed, in his time, to rest their weary limbs.'
>
> But this answer would be inaccurate as well as insufficient. […] *Asphodelos* as a flower name occurs nowhere in Homer; but four times as an adjective qualifying *leimon*, a meadow. It probably therefore stands for: *a*, not; *spod*, asher (*spod* could become *sphod* in Attic Greek); *elos*, valley. If so, the *asphodelos leimon* is really 'the meadow in the valley of what escapes unburned', namely of the king's soul which survives the funeral pyre; and *leimon* (formed from *leibo*, 'pour') may mean, rather, 'libation-place'.[132]

What resulted, Philip Burton argues, was 'the sort of translationese that schoolboys were […] encouraged to produce; a creaking style, heavy with archaisms, which only serves to make the author in question more remote and alien'.[133] Graves's inveterate distaste for this method of translation impelled him to write, in his introduction to *The Anger of Achilles*, that '[t]he *Iliad*

[131] Robert Graves, 'The Common Asphodel', in *The Common Asphodel: Collected Essays on Poetry 1922-1949* (1949; New York: Haskell House, 1970), pp. 327-30 (p. 327)
[132] Graves, 'The Common Asphodel', pp. 327-8.
[133] Philip Burton, 'The Value of a Classical Education: Satirical Elements in Robert Graves's *Claudius* Novels', *The Review of English Studies*, 46/182 (1995), 191-218 (p. 210).

deserve[s] to be rescued from the classroom curse which has lain heavily on [it] throughout the past twenty-six centuries.'[134] In the same Introduction, we find his translator's manifesto:

> Students (lamentably few, nowadays) who read Homer in the original have several competent cribs to guide them. Professor Richard [sic] Lattimore's *The Iliad of Homer* is the latest; he and Professor Webster make a reliable team. I approve of cribs, but dislike all the *translations* I have yet read. Translations are made for the general, non-Classical public, yet their authors seldom consider what will be immediately intelligible. (*AA*, p. 33)

The distinction Graves poses here places him in an intriguing position: neither traditional (canonical) Classical translator, nor a member of the 'non-Classical public'. For although he deigned his Classical education 'meager and […] unpractical', Graves was nonetheless a classically trained individual–although not to the extent, considering his Classical erudition, that one might expect.

When Graves matriculated to Oxford after the war, he did so with a scholarship to read 'Greats'. Burton describes this programme, somewhat disparagingly, as a 'course in classical literature and philosophy ancient and modern which is one of the ornaments of Western culture.'[135] Its 'ornamental' nature may have struck an atonal chord with Graves, as he swiftly changed courses to study English Literature. Discussing his translation of the *Iliad* with Kenneth Allsop, he admits a sense of lack, if not insufficiency, born of this shift:

> [W]hen a Greek scholar asks me what I've been working on, I mumble, 'A translation of the *Iliad*.' He then says, 'Oh, but aren't their dozens on the market! What sort of Classical degree did you get at

[134] Robert Graves, *The Anger of Achilles: Homer's Iliad* (1959; London: Penguin, 2008), p. 13. All further quotations are taken from this edition and are cited parenthetically in the text as (*AA*, page number).
[135] Burton, 'The Value of a Classical Education', p. 216.

> Oxford?' And I, mumbling even more, confess, 'Well, actually, I switched from Classics to English, and didn't sit for my finals.'[136]

In an earlier BBC interview, he states that 'I had a Classical scholarship at Oxford, but I didn't take it up because the war intervened […]. The only thing I learned at Charterhouse was Latin.'[137] He does not, therefore, count himself 'a scholar', and in doing so neatly sidesteps any criticism from Classical 'grammarians' on the validity of his translations by placing the onus firmly elsewhere: 'I expect the scholars to quarry for me. And if, unfortunately, I am misled by bad scholarship–it's just too bad.'[138] It was thus only with the aid of 'a lot of dictionaries, and reference books' that Graves was able to translate the *Iliad,* at least, from the original Greek.[139] Graves also applied, however, another far less tangible tool to the process of translation, one that is reminiscent of his poetic technique of analeptic mimesis. 'Everybody has some sort of parlour trick,' he claims,

> and one of the things which I have is that I can, if I practice, throw myself in the past. If you give me a coin or some other evidence, and give me some written description of the time–I can go back there, and know just what it feels like to be there.[140]

This fundamental belief in his own suprahistorical abilities is why, perhaps, when Graves makes certain controversial assertions about the way in which the classical authors intended

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[136] Robert Graves, 'The Poet and the Peasant', interview by Kenneth Allsop, *Conversations With Robert Graves*, ed. by Kersnowski, pp. 68-72 (p. 70).
[137] Robert Graves, transcribed manuscript of *Frankly Speaking*, interview by Malcolm Muggeridge, with Glyn Daniel, and Paul Dehn, for BBC Home Service, broadcast 9 May 1957. RG/G/A3, Robert Graves Collection, St John's College, University of Oxford. Hereafter abbreviated to St. John's, OX.
[138] Graves, *Frankly Speaking*.
[139] Robert Graves, 'Robert Graves', interview by Huw. P. Wheldon, in *Conversations With Robert Graves*, ed. by Kersnowski, pp. 49-56 (pp. 51-2).
[140] Robert Graves, transcribed manuscript of *Conversations with Robert Graves*, interview by D. G. Bridson, for BBC Third Programme, broadcast 9 August 1960. RG/G/A6, Robert Graves Collection, St John's, OX.

their texts to be read, he does so with such vehemence and conviction. An interrogation of the viability of the above statement is, happily, beyond the reach of this thesis. With the notion of psychic/psychological time-travel in mind, however, I would argue that Graves's idiosyncratic readings of Apuleius's *Metamorphoses* and Homer's *Iliad* are less firmly rooted in the classical past than his own traumatic history and personal Myth.

CHAPTER TWO

THE GOLDEN ASS

I

> *Augustine was false-hearted, a liar, and has done more harm to Xtianity than any other writer since the Roman Church was founded. On the other hand his fellow citizen of Madaura, Apuleius, was a genius whose* Golden Ass *is worthy of use in Sufi training.*
>
> – Robert Graves to Idries Shah, 6 Sept 1968[141]

So writes Robert Graves almost two decades after publishing his translation of Apuleius's *Metamorphoses*, commending the ancient author's 'genius' to a man who, unfortunately, would prove to be more than a little false-hearted himself.[142] By this point Apuleius had long been a prominent member of Graves's personal canon; while convalescing from war wounds on the Isle of Wight in 1917, Graves writes to Robert Nichols that 'I have here with me my Sorley, my Skelton, my Keats, and my ballad book; and also my dear Apuleius, so I'm not too badly off.'[143] For a prose writer to stand his own against a roster of the very few poets whom

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[141] *IBI*, p. 273.

[142] Having entered into what was–for Graves–a profoundly spiritual friendship with Shah, who purported to be directly descended from the Prophet Mohammed, Graves provided the introduction for Shah's *The Sufis* (1964). This idiosyncratic treatise on Sufism renounced Islamic religion in favour of a clandestine lore that could only be imparted by a Sufi master, a select group to which (predictably) Shah himself belonged. Their professional and personal relationship came to a bitter end in the wake of a scandal involving counterfeit mystical texts, which was cause for much embarrassment and would ultimately damage Graves's credibility as a historian; cf. Michel Pharand, ''In the Irish-Sufic Tradition': Robert Graves and Idries Shah', *Gravesiana*, 1/3 (1997), 305-17.

[143] Robert Graves to Robert Nichols, n.d. *IBI*, p. 73. The novel's importance for Graves is attested by a letter written by his wife Beryl to Betty Radice in 1984 (now preserved in the Penguin Archives), endorsing the revision of his translation by Michael Grant: 'It was Robert's favourite book and I'm sure he'd like it to be given

Graves, infamously cynical about the prose genre as a whole, considered to be worthy of his attention is no mean feat. What is it about the *Metamorphoses*, then, that so endeared itself to Graves? One indication lies in his correlation of Apuleius's 'genius' with Sufic enlightenment, a state he describes in his introduction to Idries Shah's *The Sufis* (1964) as one that

> comes with love–love in the poetic sense of perfect devotion to a Muse who, whatever apparent cruelties she may commit or however seemingly irrational her behaviour, knows what she is doing. She seldom rewards her poet with any express sign of her favour, but confirms his devotion by its revivifying effect on him.[144]

Although this later iteration of the Goddess lacks the erudite iconoclasm of Graves's 1948 'grammar of poetic myth', couched as it is in the rhetoric common to the stage of the poet's life which was marked by his tempestuous relationships with much younger 'Muses', it is she whom we find at the heart of Graves's affinity for the *Metamorphoses*. For Graves, the *Metamorphoses* is an Apuleian 'love'-song to the White Goddess, under her 'true name' of Isis, that foreshadows the devotional poetry of his later collections. In it he recognises what he would describe as 'the most comprehensive and inspired account of the Goddess in all ancient literature' (*TWG*, p. 65), leading to a symbiotic nexus of referentiality in which Apuleius's novel both shapes and–in the form of Graves's translation–is shaped by the mythopoeia of *The White Goddess.*

But how does this relate to Graves's cathartic project? In terms of what we have discussed about trauma and translation thus far, at surface level the *Metamorphoses* does not seem to offer much scope for the articulation of traumatic experience. When considered in

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'a new lease on life'' [Quoted in Sonia Sabnis, '*The Golden Ass* and the Golden Warrior', in *Robert Graves and the Classical Tradition*, ed. by A. G. G. Gibson (Oxford: OUP, 2015), pp. 123-42 (p. 128)].

[144] Robert Graves, 'Introduction' to Idries Shah, *The Sufis* (1964; London: The Octagon Press, 1977), pp. ix-xxii (p. x).

relation to Graves's trauma, it does not deal with war or (in any profound sense) loss, and the protagonist's greatest tragedy is that he is turned (literally, but impermanently) into an ass. The novel tells the story of its narrator, Lucius, a well-bred young gentleman led astray by his own *curiositas*. After foolishly trifling with magic in the hope of transforming himself into an eagle, he is instead turned by his lover (whether intentionally or not is never made clear) into an ass. He wanders across the Hellenic economic landscape in this asinine form, undergoing various trials and tribulations–narrated in the style of a series of ribald *Milesiae*–until, in the final book, he becomes acolyte to the goddess Isis who returns him to human form. This tale of divine redemption comes into Gravesian focus when we take into account the connection between Isis and the White Goddess; but nonetheless, the first ten books of the *Metamorphoses* read primarily as a comedy, albeit at times a dark one. Moreover, Graves's translation has been generally dismissed by the academy for 'too thoroughly smooth[ing] over the dark irregularities of Apuleius's Latinity', thus, one could argue, lacking the semantic depth and nuance that traditionally characterise trauma narratives.[145] As discussed in the previous chapter, however, wherever we encounter an incarnation of the White Goddess we are necessarily confronted with the vein of traumatic experience which underlies and shapes Graves's conception of both her and the works of literature to which she gives meaning.

This chapter, therefore, will concentrate upon the way Graves's translation of the *Metamorphoses* illustrates his theories of the White Goddess and the divine redemption made possible by her favour. In doing so, it will indicate his broad conception of metamorphosis and *re*-metamorphosis as giving ritual shape to the experience of trauma and catharsis, and investigate the ways in which translation–itself a form of literary metamorphosis–extends and facilitates this process. As Bakhtin has noted, 'Metamorphosis serves as the basis for a method

[145] J. G. DeFilippo, Review of '*Apuleius: Metamorphoses*, trans. J. Arthur Hanson', *American Journal of Philology*, 113/2 (1992), 300-3 (p. 301).

of portraying the whole of an individual's life in its more important moments of *crisis*: for showing *how an individual becomes other than what he was* [original emphasis].'[146] Thus, in Graves's *Golden Ass*, we find a text powered by the author's desire to achieve self-transformation. What ultimately emerges, however, is less an outright confrontation with Graves's traumatic origin than a 'setting-down', formalising, and legitimising of the Goddess Myth which, for Graves, is uniquely capable of facilitating this catharsis. Nonetheless, as will be seen, in places the 'pure language' of the source text speaks so emphatically to Graves's trauma that a form of witnessing, perhaps by necessity, still struggles to take place.

For the purpose of this study, I will be using J. Arthur Hanson's 1989 Loeb translation as a 'control' text, a relatively literal version that has been dubbed 'a model for its simplicity.'[147] Where specific words and phrases come under scrutiny, I will also compare Graves's text to that which succeeded it in the Penguin Classics series, E. J. Kenney's 1998 translation, and where appropriate to William Adlington's canonical 1566 version (although its archaism does not lend itself well to detailed comparative exegesis). Inevitably, I will give a position of privilege to those passages of *The Golden Ass* where I detect allusions to either the Goddess and/or Graves's personal history. There is an unavoidable subjectivity about any such discrimination, but I hope to show nonetheless that these selections simply exemplify a hermeneutic that permeates the entirety of the translation. In his groundbreaking book *Auctor and Actor* (1985), Apuleian scholar John J. Winkler posits that

> [e]ven a contemporary [reader] who knew all there was to know about Apuleius would have to judge from the book alone what its character was. Compare the modern case of Robert Graves, author of

[146] Mikhail M. Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel', in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, TX: U of Texas P, 2004), pp. 84-258 (p. 115).
[147] Warren S. Smith, 'The Peculiar Problem of Translating Apuleius' *Golden Ass*', *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, 17/4 (2010), 596-607 (p. 599).

> light verse, entertaining novels, and work expounding his serious belief in the White Goddess. Must we read *I, Claudius* strictly in terms of the Great Mother?[148]

Perhaps not; but in the case of the translation of a work so integral to Graves's conception of the Goddess, we would be foolhardy not to investigate where, how, and to what extent he moulds *The Golden Ass* to the contours of her myth.

II

Letters between Graves and E. V. Rieu, the editor of the Penguin Classics series who commissioned him to produce his translation, tell us that Graves was given somewhat of a free rein in choosing his source text. Their correspondence shows us that it was purely on Graves's suggestion that the project was mooted:

> Will you secure *The Golden Ass* for me? Or is that too barbarous for your public? […] Apuleius was an honest man, and I think that Adlington's superb translation is a bit too Elizabethan for modern reading. But what is the Penguin policy about Classical obscenity?[149]

Graves's acknowledgement here of the potentially unpalatable aspects of the *Metamorphoses*, as well as his awareness of market forces and dictates, is telling; prose, after all, was the 'show dog' he bred to 'feed his cat', the cat being poetry.[150] Yet this venture obviously meant more to him than lining his pockets so that he could dedicate time to writing verse (in which, by his

[148] John J. Winkler, *Auctor & Actor: A Narratological Reading of Apuleius's* Golden Ass (Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 1985), p. 14.
[149] Robert Graves to E. V. Rieu, 7 December 1944. Qtd in Steve Hare, *Penguin Portrait: Allen Lane and the Penguin Editors 1935-1970* (London: Penguin, 1995), p. 192.
[150] Qtd. in Kersnowski, *The Early Poetry*, p. 66.

own admission, there was no money). In a letter to Rieu dated 1st Oct 1946, Graves tells his editor that

> I have done about one third of *The Golden Ass* (though the *Transformations of Lucius* is the real title) and have been surprised etc. to find how incorrect Adlington's translation was, and how much of the inner sense of the story I missed in my casual readings of it.[151]

Graves, it seems, felt impelled to rescue what he considered to be a paradigmatic Goddess-tract from the muddied hermeneutic waters into which Adlington (the author of the translation that held sway both inside and outside of the academy at the time), had submerged it. The 'inner sense' to which Graves refers recalls Benjamin's notion of 'pure language', the mystic or–in de Man's words–'sacred' and 'divine' language at the heart of all languages that offers a 'utopian vision of linguistic harmony'.[152] As such, Graves's 'inner sense' alludes to a sacred, unifying principle that coheres a narrative which, on first reading, seems jarringly disjointed by the marked change in tone between the first ten Books and the eleventh Isis-Book.

This unifying 'inner sense' would become for Graves the single most important feature of his translation and his motivation (as translator) for ensuring the novel's survival. Kermode's definition of 'a surplus of signifier' is particularly apt when applied to the *Metamorphoses,* and there is very little consensus in the critical discourse that surrounds the novel on what this 'inner sense' actually *is*: is the novel simply a collection of entertaining *Milesiae,* or a moral allegory intended, as G. N. Sandy posits, to 'promote the Isiac faith in the

[151] Qtd in Hare, *Penguin Portrait*, p. 196.
[152] de Man, 'Conclusions', p. 97; *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. by Lawrence Venuti, 3rd edn. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), p. 71.

face of attack from Christian apologists of Apuleius's native Africa'?[153] One finds in the *Metamorphoses* not only a 'surplus of signifier' but, as Sandy notes, 'an amplitude of subject', a disconcerting amalgam of incompatible elements that is exemplified in the material occupying Books 4-7, approximately a third of the work.[154] Comic bandit-tales and the bizarre story of pseudo-Haemus frame the tale of Cupid and Psyche, juxtaposing the religious zeal of Book 11 and leaving the reader with a multitude of narrative strands to untangle. The critical impulse to apply an ordering lens to the text is therefore understandable.

Of these various lenses, the religious reading of the *Metamorphoses* is most relevant to Graves's hermeneutic.[155] Merkelbach (1962) is perhaps the most vociferous exponent of this view, which treats the Isiac final chapter as a lens through which to read the entirety of the preceding Books. Allusions to the Isis myth and cultic practices, Merkelbach and other pro-

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[153] G. N. Sandy, 'Book 11: Ballast or Anchor?', in *Aspects of Apuleius's* Golden Ass, ed. by B. L. Hijmans Jr. and R. Th. van der Paardt (Groningen: Bouma's Boekhuis B.V., 1978), pp. 123-40 (p. 123).

[154] Sandy, 'Book 11', p. 123.

[155] Another prevailing critical opinion privileges Plato's tripartite theory of Soul as it is articulated in the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*. Figured as what Nancy Shumate describes as 'a sort of fictionalized Platonic treatise', the novel can be read as an allegory depicting the 'ascent of the soul in stages from its limited existence in this world of transience and illusion to participation in the true reality of the ideal world' (Nancy Shumate, *Crisis and Conversion in Apuleius'* Metamorphoses (Ann Arbor, MI: U of Michigan P, 1996), p. 10). The central tale of Cupid and Psyche (4.28-6.24) lends itself most convincingly to this reading, which indeed seems difficult to argue against; Apuleius held a vocal position as a Middle Platonist in (as we view it today) the Second Sophistic, and even produced several derivative Platonic treatises (cf., for example, Stephen Heller, 'Apuleius, Platonic Dualism, and Eleven', *American Journal of Philology,* 104/4 (1983), 321-39; J. G. DeFilippo, '*Curiositas* and the Platonism of Apuleius's *The Golden Ass*', *American Journal of Philology,* 111/4 (1990), 471-92; S. J. Harrison, *Apuleius: A Latin Sophist* (Oxford: OUP, 2000)). When approaching Graves's translation, however, we can be fairly safe in assuming that Platonic philosophy is not part of what he considers to be the 'pure language' of the *Metamorphoses*. In *The White Goddess*, Graves accuses Plato and other Attic philosophers of playing a pivotal early role in the suppression of Western Goddess-worship:

> Then came the early Greek philosophers who were strongly opposed to magical poetry as threatening their new religion of logic, and under their influence a rational poetic language (now called the Classical) was elaborated in honour of their patron Apollo and imposed on the world as the last word in spiritual illumination. (*TWG*, p. 6)

Graves expresses his anti-Platonic views yet more decisively in a letter to the American classicist and translator William Arrowsmith, whose interest had been piqued by the idiosyncracies of Graves's translation. Defending his Goddess-centric reading of the *Metamorphoses* and his demurral of Platonic overtones, Graves writes in 1951 that '[p]ersonally myself, I think Plato stinks; but then I'm an eccentric' (Robert Graves to William Arrowsmith, 4 January 1951. Folder 3.3 [*The Golden Ass*], William Arrowsmith Papers, HRC). Although Graves faithfully translates those passages of the *Metamorphoses* in which critics find evidence of Apuleius's Platonic ideology, the overtly Platonic intimations we find in the source text do not re-exert themselves in Graves's version.

Isis scholars argue,[156] permeate the text in what Robert Carver describes as 'a complex pattern of intra-textual relations', effectively foreshadowing Lucius's ultimate redemption by the Goddess and initiation into her mysteries.[157] There can be no doubt that Graves, too, firmly believed in the novel's religious import. Crucially, he was translating the *Metamorphoses* between 1945 and 1949, the same period in which he was preparing his own Isis-book for publication: 'I am making slow progress with *The Golden Ass*', he writes to his secretary Karl Gay in February 1947, 'because I keep tinkering with *The White Goddess*.'[158] Just as he perceived intra-textual relations in the *Metamorphoses*, so an inter-textual network was developing between Graves's translation and his grammar of poetic myth, a network that was profoundly informed by his traumatic experience.

Graves's religious hermeneutic agenda is laid out clearly and unapologetically in the introduction to his translation, where he charges that the author's 'greatest desire [for the novel] was to show his gratitude to the Goddess whom he adored' (*TGA*, p. 20). This is hardly surprising, considering Adlington's translation is quoted at length in *The White Goddess* as evidence that the Goddess, as Kersnowski puts it, is 'universally manifest'.[159] Drawn from Book 11, where Lucius first encounters the Goddess after 'invok[ing] her from the depth of misery and spiritual degradation' (*TWG*, p. 65), the excerpt spans an unprecedented four pages (in the latest edition), ending with Isis's declaration of beneficence (see Chapter One, p. 56 of this thesis). Graves interprets the *Metamorphoses* as a fundamentally religious text because for Lucius, as for Graves, the Goddess offers redemption from the rigours and terror of his experience. It is incomprehensible to the poet that a foundational text for the system of

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[156] Cf. P. G. Walsh, *The Roman Novel* (Cambridge: CUP, 1970) and J. Tatum, 'Apuleius and Metamorphosis', *American Journal of Philology*, 93 (1972), 306-13.
[157] Robert H. F. Carver, *The Protean Ass: The Metamorphoses of Apuleius from Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Oxford: OUP, 2007), p. 3.
[158] Robert Graves to Kenneth Gay, 15 February 1947. In *Between Moon and Moon: Selected Letters of Robert Graves 1946-1972*, ed. by Paul O'Prey (London: Hutchinson, 1984), p. 41.
[159] Kersnowski, *The Early Poetry,* p. 163.

meaning in which his own mythopoesis is grounded should be nothing more than a series of irreverent tales rounded off by an anomalous eleventh Isis-Book.

As is the case for other pro-Isis scholars, for Graves the theme of Book 11 is therefore physical and spiritual salvation, unmitigated by irony: both Graves and Lucius have suffered traumatic trials (although the latter's are, admittedly, mordantly seriocomic), and both are characterised by a drive to re-assert their identity under the auspices of the Goddess's love. Both as Isis and in her Gravesian incarnation she meets a dire spiritual and epistemological need engendered by crisis. For Graves, her Myth coheres the welter of suffering and confusion that characterised his traumatised state into a productive system of meaning, just as Lucius's re-metamorphosis is presented in Book 11 as a reward for enduring the suffering of the preceding books. As the figurehead of a divine apparatus that will enable them to translate their experience from base futility to purpose, the Goddess alone can restore their humanity. Graves's transformation of what F. L. Lucas describes as an 'exotic compound of pornography, poetry, picaresque adventure, and rather maudlin mysticism' into an earnest account of religious experience is thus entrenched in his belief in the Goddess's powers.[160] And for the poet-translator, straying from the original text in order to convey this belief was a moral responsibility.

In his introduction to *The Golden Ass*, Graves raises an issue that stems from trying 'to make the English rendering of any Latin text convey the sense of the original' (*TGA*, p. 10). It is, he poses, 'essentially a moral problem: how much is owed to the letter, and how much to the spirit' (*TGA*, p. 10). The phrase is redeployed in the title of his 1962 address to the Institute of Linguists, 'Moral Principles in Translation', in which he clarifies his position by stating that '[t]he translator's first problem is: what exactly does the reader need? Is it the

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[160] F. L. Lucas, '*The Golden Ass*', p. 336.

literal text, in as faithful an English rendering as possible?'[161] He goes on to answer his own question with a diatribe that can be summed up quite simply as 'No'. What the reader needs, Graves asserts, is to be made unequivocally aware of the original author's intentions for the text and thus that text's essential meaning, transmitted not by the 'literal text' but by its 'pure language'. As Philip Burton puts it, Graves defines the 'good interpreter' as 'one who can discern and reproduce this essence faithfully, even if this involves a certain amount of addition to or subtraction from the original.'[162] For those familiar with the original Latin, the primary 'victim' of this addition and subtraction was the *Metamorphoses*' distinctly Apuleian style. Lucas, in particular, was damning:

> A translator's task is to give as much as possible of his author's meaning and (far harder) as much as possible of his author's style. For behind the style lies the man. It is much more difficult to translate a man than a story; but the attempt seems worth while. A Roman Oscar Wilde should not be made to write as if he had been a Roman Defoe.[163]

The stylistic changes introduced by Graves are emphatic. While Pierre Médan argues that '[i]n using poetic terms […] Apuleius means […] to spread out in front of his readers his profound knowledge of the Latin language, extending to its most refined nuances and most rare peculiarities', Graves does not detect a poetic strain in the *Met*:[164] Apuleius was in fact, he argues, 'competing with the sheet-woman/street-corner story-teller of his time, & I am

[161] Robert Graves, 'Moral Principles in Translation', in *Mammon and the Black Goddess* (1962; London: Cassell, 1965), pp. 115-39 (p. 129).
[162] Philip Burton, ''Essentially a Moral Problem': Robert Graves and the Politics of the Plain Prose Translation', in *Robert Graves and the Classical Tradition*, ed. by Gibson, pp. 143-64 (p. 163).
[163] Lucas, '*The Golden Ass*', p. 336.
[164] Pierre Médan, *La Latinité d'Apulée dans les Métamorphoses* (Paris: Hachette, 1925), p. 197 [trans. by S. J. Harrison, qtd. in Harrison, 'The Poetics of Fiction: Poetic Influence on the Language of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*', in *Aspects of the Language of Latin Prose*, ed. by Tobias Reinhardt, Michael Lapidge, and J. N.Adams (Oxford: OUP, 2005), pp. 273-86 (p. 274)].

making him compete with the simple, nervous style of (say) the *New Yorker*.'[165] His assertion in his introduction that 'paradoxically, the effect of [linguistic] oddness is best achieved in convulsed times like the present by writing in as easy and sedate an English as possible' (*TGA*, p. 10) offers some insight into the motivation for his approach. Any exertion of control Graves imposes upon the source text can be read, not as a representation of 'oddness', but as an attempt to reconstitute a sense of subjective control in a world whose 'convulsed times', in the wake of the suffering imposed by two World Wars, reflected his inner, traumatised state. The baroque, complicated language of the *Metamorphoses* would too well have signified the confusion of his inner and outer existence to communicate the redemptive, unifying project of the Goddess. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that he felt impelled to 'clean up' Apuleius's paradigmatic articulation of Goddess-worship by reconceptualising it in a plain prose style.

With this in mind, it is also significant that the words used by scholars to describe Apuleian language speak equally well to traumatic experience: '[O]dd';[166] 'unpredictable [and] incredibly demanding';[167] it has a certain 'immediacy';[168] and is freighted with 'dark irregularities'.[169] Just as Graves's neurasthenic condition was marked by its 'unreason'-ableness, capriciousness, abruptness, terrifying (and impossible) visions, and its mental and physical taxation, so the *Metamorphoses* places its reader under rigorous and unremitting strain. By translating Apuleius into 'the plainest possible English', Graves controls and influences his own (and his readers') experience of the *Metamorphoses,* a text which in many ways resembled the disorientation that characterised his post-war state.[170] In doing so, he draws on the poetic

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[165] Robert Graves to William Arrowsmith, 17 December 1950, Folder 3.3 [*The Golden Ass*], William Arrowsmith Papers, HRC.
[166] *The Oxford Guide to English Literature in Translation*, ed. by Peter France (Oxford: OUP, 2002), p. 542.
[167] Smith, 'Peculiar Problem', p. 598.
[168] Winkler, *Auctor*, p. 17.
[169] DeFilippo, 'Review', p. 301.
[170] Robert Graves, 'Moral Principles in Translation', p. 130. In *The Reader Over your Shoulder: A Handbook for Writers of English Prose* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1943) that Graves wrote with Alan Hodge, twenty-five principles of

style of collections such as *Country Sentiment*, in which the experience of war and shell-shock are generally conveyed in lucid terms. These forces will breach their limit in Graves's translation of the final Book; until we turn to that passage, however, it would be worthwhile to sketch the outline of those traumatic forces and how they shape *The Golden Ass* as a whole.

III

At both micro- and macro-level, the *Metamorphoses* can be read as a model for Graves's myth of the White Goddess and his relationship to her, a relationship which is entrenched in his experience of trauma. The framework of traumatic experience delineated by Caruth in *Unclaimed Experience* can be applied convincingly to both Lucius's narrative as *actor* [actor/character] (as it relates to Graves as trauma subject) and Apuleius's narrative as *auctor* [author] (as it relates to the Gravesian concept of the 'mechanarchy', his term for the 'Late Christian epoch of two world wars and their horror-comic aftermaths').[171] In *Crisis and Conversion*, Shumate argues that

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clear statement and sixteen principles of graceful expression are proposed, of which many (it seems) were applied to Graves's *Golden Ass*: 'characteristically poetical expressions should not be used in prose' (p. 188); 'no word or phrase should be ambiguous' (p. 147); and 'no unnecessary idea, phrase or word should be included in sentence' (p. 175). The 'foppish rhetoric' of the Elizabethans Sir Philip Sidney and John Lyly–a result, apparently, of the fact that they are both recent graduates–is condemned, while the 'all-purpose English prose' of Ben Jonson is singled out for praise. Having 'served in the Army,' Graves and Hodge argue, 'it was natural that [Jonson's] unambiguous and moral judgements should be expressed in a firm and lucid style' (pp. 80-3). The correlations one can draw here between the modern and Elizabethan writer, as Burton points out, are clearly delineated: '[t]he ideal plain prose stylist,' Graves implies, 'should be educated, but not too much or too recently, and preferably should have an army career behind them–someone, in short, like Robert Graves' (Burton, 'Moral Problem', p. 154). *TROYS* invited criticism for its perceived arrogance in using the prose of both historical and contemporary writers to illustrate grammatical, logical and stylistic faults. Yet for some, including Evelyn Waugh, the treatise was an understandable response to 'an unhealthy age' in which 'the present decay of literary decency […] is abundantly apparent in many quarters' (Evelyn Waugh, 'Review of *The Reader Over Your Shoulder*', in *The Essays, Articles, and Reviews of Evelyn Waugh,* ed. by Donat Gallagher (New York: Little Brown, 1983), pp. 275-7 (at p. 275). For Graves, this literary decay was symptomatic of the generalized cultural degeneration he perceived in the mid-twentieth century.

[171] Robert Graves, 'Foreword' to *Collected Poems 1965* (London: Cassell, 1965), pp. i-ii (p. ii).

> the experience of Lucius as it is represented in the *Metamorphoses* exemplifies a type of conversion that operates within a cognitive framework rather than a moral one. […] According to this pattern of crisis and conversion, a perception of the collapse of familiar cognitive constructs precedes the convert's reconstruction of a new world and world view along religious lines. […] The process of conversion is a kind of shift in cognitive paradigms, and the period of crisis before conversion is an unsettling sojourn into paradigm limbo, so to speak, during which habituated structures of meaning and systems for organizing reality disintegrate.[172]

I propose to test the limits of this theory by examining both Apuleius's authorial project and Lucius's experience through the lens of Caruth's model. I agree with Shumate that Lucius's narrative operates at a cognitive, as opposed to a moral level, but I read his 'crisis' as a traumatic break, and his conversion as a moment of catharsis. Although I am not proposing that the *Metamorphoses* should be re-evaluated as a trauma narrative, it is certainly possible that Graves, whether consciously or unconsciously, recognised the novel's elements of destabilisation and reaffirmation of meaning (what Shumate calls 'the complex issues of world building') as familiar to his own experience and reconceptualised the text accordingly.[173] There are thus connections to be drawn between the figures of both Lucius and Apuleius with Graves himself. [174] As Shumate points out, the instability of Lucius's world is characterised by the collapse of binary relations between cultural and ontological categories: animal and human, male and female, and even death and life coalesce. This notion of death-in-life and

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[172] Shumate, *Crisis*, pp. 14-15.
[173] Shumate, *Crisis*, p. 16.
[174] This is not entirely new ground: in *Poems 1930-1933* (1933) Graves collected a group of prose-poems under the title 'As It Were Poems', in which he identifies himself with a character in various ancient myths or rituals and asks of each: 'where was I?' Here he claims to have been present at the events recorded in the *Metamorphoses*:

> In the legend of that Lucius whom a witch of Thessaly turned into a dumb ass and who after many cruel adventures was restored to human shape by the intervention of the goddess Isis, where was I?
> I was that impassioned ass in the gold trappings. (*TCP*, p. 335)

Hopefully, therefore, it will suffice to acknowledge that although drawing biographical and experiential comparisons between Graves and the figure of Lucius may appear reductive, to do so is to follow the poet's lead.

life-in-death is, of course, familiar to Graves as a self-styled member of the *deuteropotmoi*. Whether in terms of inner or outer worlds, the fact remains that for both Graves and Lucius the once predictable sequences of cause and effect have collapsed. Graves's lived experience is recognisable in the representation of Lucius's fictional one, characterised as it is by 'the trauma of a spontaneous and unmediated epistemic breakdown'.[175]

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The epistemic breakdown of the *Metamorphoses'* world begins, in fact, before Lucius-*actor*'s metamorphosis takes place. From the outset, the novel is rooted in the irrational, or–to use a term previously deployed in relation to Graves's neurasthenia–'unreason'. This unreason-ableness is most evident in Books 1-3, with their tales of witchcraft, resurrection, and the account of the unnerving *risus* festival. Indeed the action in these books takes place, as Friedrich Solmsen posits, in an

> uncanny condition halfway between substantial reality and a mere façade that may dissolve at any moment and reveal horrors undreamt of and indeed impossible as long as normal causality and the laws of nature remain in force.[176]

Although the notion of Lucius-*actor* navigating an 'uncanny condition' characterised by lurking 'horrors' speaks emphatically to Graves's post-war, neurasthenic experience, it is also useful to consider Solmsen's statement in terms of the Apuleian *auctorial* narrative voice. Upon examination, Apuleius's project bears distinct resemblances to Graves's own preoccupation

[175] Shumate, *Crisis*, pp. 35, 44.
[176] Friedrich Solmsen, *Isis among the Greeks and Romans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1979), pp. 97-8.

with denouncing the irrational hostility and tumult of the mid-twentieth century, a stage of civilisation that he would come to term the 'mechanarchy'.

For certain scholars, the *Metamorphoses* can be read as a diagnosis of the socio-political ills which plagued the historical moment that Apuleius inhabited. 'His world', Jack Lindsay contends,

> shows the Roman State at the height of its expansive power and prosperity. The period [of the Antonine emperors] was that which Gibbon rated as the happiest known by men. In fact the rot had long set in and the world rang hollow to a knock. By the end of the century the cracking-up of the State built by Augustus was going violently on. Apuleius is thus the man of a world in which there is much apparent stability. […] Yet under the impressive surfaces the corrosion was busily at work, […] preparing the series of upheavals through the peasant-based army which led to the general crisis of the third century.[177]

The *Metamorphoses*, as the work of a 'great and sensitive artist who feels the subterranean tremors in the human sphere […] aware in his own way of the growing fissure between social reality and people's ideas of themselves', reflects this climate of unease.[178] The novel's sense of disquiet, focused as it is on identity, is registered in the 'furious contradictions' between our expectations for the characters' actions and the way in which they actually behave.[179] By positioning the protagonist as a tormented, human consciousness trapped in the body of the paradigmatic beast of burden, Apuleius is able to appraise the actions of the *Metamorphoses*' other characters from a distinctly subversive perspective. What Lindsay calls the 'dark and dangerous fissures of betrayal yawning under the comfortable surfaces of everyday life and

[177] Jack Lindsay, 'Introduction' to Apuleius's *The Golden Ass* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1960), pp. 5-29 (p. 12).
[178] Lindsay, 'Introduction', p. 13.
[179] Lindsay, 'Introduction', p. 13.

the assumptions of State-power' are likewise figured in the novel's preoccupation with imbalanced power dynamics and abuses of authority by which Lucius-ass (among others) is consistently victimised until Isis redeems him.[180]

Solmsen's concept of a tension between 'substantial reality' and a 'façade' thus resonates with Lindsay's assessment of Apuleius's historical moment, but it also finds correlation with Graves's sustained critique of the current age, which he would decry in 1969 as 'that blind and irresponsible successor to matriarchy and patriarchy–the mechanarchy.'[181] Considered by Graves to be the arch-enemy of poetic truth, the mechanarchy is defined by its hollow materialism and 'loveless circumstance', and like the Antonine period is characterised by rot and corrosion, driving unstoppably towards crisis in the wake of the Second World War.[182] Indeed, in his final years, it would become for Graves a nightmare from which he could not escape. He was incapable of conducting a late interview because he was preoccupied with only three things: he did not know where his passport was; he was convinced that mechanical diggers were being sent to tear up his garden; and he was tormented by the memory of the men he had killed in the war, bearing the burden of a murderer's guilt.[183] As Carter asserts, '[t]he facelessness, mechanization and violence of our age could scarcely be more succinctly emblematized.'[184] Graves's censorial, anti-mechanarchial perspective relates his position as translator to that of Apuleius as *auctor*. If it can be said of Apuleius that he uses the *Metamorphoses* to diagnose and condemn the 'corrosive' forces of his age, then it can be similarly said of Graves that he uses *The Golden Ass* to articulate his despair at the dehumanising nature of a civilisation in which the Apollonian façade of 'philosophy, science and industry' (*TWG*, p. 10) is prevalent. By its very nature this

[180] Lindsay, 'Introduction', p. 13.
[181] Robert Graves, 'Introduction' to *Poems About Love* (New York: Doubleday, 1969), p. 5.
[182] Robert Graves, 'Oxford Chair of Poetry 1965: Lecture Two', in *Poetic Craft*, pp. 125-50 (p. 125).
[183] D. N. G. Carter, 'The Great War and Graves's Memory', *Gravesiana,* 4/1 (2014), 84-108 (pp. 88-9).
[184] Carter, 'The Great War', p. 89.

condition disguises the fact that 'the prime elements of poetry have been dishonoured' and, as a result, that man 'has brought ruin on himself' (*TWG*, p. 10). Just as Graves railed against those dominant political, social and cultural forces which he believed had plunged contemporary society into an 'intellectually and morally imperfect confusion', so Apuleius's novel can–in parts–be read as a critique of the moral and philosophical decline that he witnessed around him.[185]

The primary theme that relates the *Metamorphoses* to Graves's conception of the mechanarchy, however, is the transgression for which Lucius incurs his metamorphosis: *curiositas.* Lucius's pursuit of 'forever desirable' magical knowledge leads him to meddle with a Thessalonian erotic witch cult, with disastrous results.[186] His attempt to master the witch Pamphilae's forbidden lores and practices, unlocking knowledge that he believes will allow him to access the supranatural world, backfires and renders him victim of the very powers he has called forth. Instead of turning into an owl as desired, he is metamorphosed into an ass: 'the most hateful to [Isis]', states Graves in his introduction, 'of all beasts in existence' (*TGA*, p. 13). *Curiositas* translates as 'curiosity', or 'inquisitiveness', which can be defined, in a blameable sense, as the 'undue or inquisitive desire to know or learn'.[187] For Graves, the present age's 'desire to know or learn' was the root of the mechanarchical problem. As Carter asserts, if there is 'one consistent villain in Graves's poems it is the principle of abstraction [that] discount[s] all [the] complexities of the emotive life.'[188] It is the intellect, the Apollonian, that which is rationally understood rather than subjectively perceived which characterises the 'loveless circumstance' he found so disturbing. That Lucius's desire for

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[185] Robert Graves, 'Introduction' to *Collected Poems* (London: Cassell, 1938), p. xxiv.
[186] Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, trans. by J. Arthur Hanson, Loeb, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP), 2.6. All further quotations are taken from this edition and are cited parenthetically in the text as (*Metamorphoses*, book, chapter).
[187] Cf. "curiosity, n." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press [accessed 23 June 2017].
[188] Carter, *Robert Graves*, p. 178.

knowledge was focused on the magical does not excuse him from Graves's censure. In a 1965 interview, Graves describes the trajectory by which civilisation has entered into its current mechanarchical state, and the role that magic will play in remedying it:

> First of all–never mind what happened first because it's complicated–then you had a matriarchy, then you had a patriarchy, now we have a 'mechanarchy', the rule of the machine. And matriarchy and patriarchy are both destroyed by mechanarchy, and something else has got to happen. And what's going to happen is one of the most exciting things … I think somehow that the principle of magic–(when I say magic people don't know the difference between magic and sorcery even)–but anyhow the principle of magic will re-establish itself.[189]

Frank Kersnowski once asked Beryl Graves about her husband's preoccupation with this particular form of magic. In reply she simply handed him the poem 'At Best, Poets', which reads:[190]

> Woman with her forests, moons, flowers, waters,
> And watchful fingers:
> We claim no magic comparable to hers–
> At best, poets; at worst, sorcerers. (*TCP*, p. 534)

The knowledge Lucius seeks in the *Metamorphoses* is magical in the Gravesian sense of 'sorcery', not the 'magical language' of poetic myth that was 'bound up with popular religious ceremonies in honour of the Moon-Goddess, or Muse, some of them dating from the Old Stone Age, [which] remains the language of true poetry' (*TWG*, p. 6). This

[189] Robert Graves, 'Intimations', interview by Malcolm Muggeridge (1965). Qtd. in Gareth Knight, *The Magical World of the Inklings* (1990; Cheltenham: Skylight Press, 2010), p. 8.
[190] Kersnowski, *The Early Poetry*, p. 164.

Goddess/woman/moon magic was quashed by the ascendance of patriarchy and Apollonian knowledge, while sorcery continued to be propagated by those who were not privy to the workings of the Goddess. It is these 'sorcerers' who, for Graves, Lucius signifies in his pre-metamorphosed state.

For Graves, then, Lucius's *curiositas* exemplifies the destructive nature of the mechanarchy. In *The Golden Ass*, Lucius describes himself as being 'anxious to improve my education,' with 'few subjects [that] fail to interest me' (*TGA*, P. 27). Although undoubtedly erudite and well-educated himself, Graves was suspicious of 'subjects', or objects of study, which were not related to the poetic project. As he writes in *On English Poetry* (1922),

> A particular aspect of the moon may fire some emotional tinder and suggest a poem, but the Moon is no more the subject of the poem than the murder of the Archduke was the cause of the late European War.[191]

It is through perception and how what is perceived relates to the individual–what it inspires in him–that we truly come to know the world around us, argues Graves, not through 'study'. In the mechanarchic system of knowledge 'the Moon is despised as a burned out satellite of the Earth and woman reckoned as "auxiliary state personnel"' (*TWG*, p. 10). Lucius typifies the greedy acquisition of knowledge for knowledge's sake or, worse still, in pursuit of the (non-poetic) power to which Graves is so opposed.

There are thus several correlations between Graves's psychological, intellectual, and emotional post-war condition and the world-building exercise of the *Metamorphoses* which allow us to approach his reception of it bio-critically: it corresponds significantly with Graves's traumatically impelled myth of the Goddess, not least because it played a large part in

[191] Graves, *On English Poetry*, p. 43.

inspiring it; Lucius's trajectory of conversion replicates the catharsis that Graves seems to be striving towards; and the *mise-en-scene* of the novel, as well as its primary narrative thread of *curiositas*, speak to Graves's conception of the mechanarchical age in which he lived, itself a result of the cultural trauma wrought by two world wars. If ever a text was poised to articulate the epistemological concerns central to Graves's cathartic project, *The Golden Ass*, it seems, is it. Indeed, Graves begins this work at the very outset of his translation, executing what would prove to be a controversial 'rewriting' of Apuleius's already infamous Prologue.

IV

The most divisive divergence that Graves makes from the original text (and sense) of the *Metamorphoses* is his reconceptualisation of its prologue as 'Apuleius's Address to the Reader' (*TGA*, p. 25). By categorically defining the identity of the prologue's speaker as Apuleius himself, Graves flies in the face of scholarly convention. The issue of the speaker's identity has long been contested, and arguments have been made not only for Apuleius himself, but also for Lucius (the novel's narrator), or a combination of the two. As Carver points out, the Prologue is deliberately elusive, inaugurating 'the hermeneutic game that Apuleius plays with his reader' throughout the novel; he 'appears to be exploiting a recognition that authorial identity is ultimately a function of language, that the author qua author can have no existence independent of the text.'[192] This being the case, each of the identities proposed above is problematic. Indeed, Stephen Harrison concludes that the prologue contains evidence enough to take Apuleius out of the running altogether:

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[192] Robert H. F. Carver, '*Quis ille?* The Role of the Prologue in Apuleius' *Nachleben*', in *A Companion to the Prologue*, ed. by Ahuvia Kahane and Andrew Laird (Oxford: OUP, 2001), pp. 163-74 (p. 163).

> The autobiography given to the speaker by the writer indicates that he is Greek in origin and mother-tongue. […] it is very unlikely to apply to Apuleius, son of a *duumvir* from Madauros in Africa Proconsularis, established as a Roman *colonia* in the Flavian period: Apuleius's own statements about his home city and about the Greek language strongly suggest that it was not a place where Greek was influential […]. Apuleius surely spoke Latin before Greek […], and thus cannot be the speaker of the prologue.[193]

Graves has no such hesitations. Hanson's translation reads 'Who am I? I will tell you briefly. Attic Hymettos and Ephyrean Isthmos and Spartan Taenaros, fruitful lands preserved for ever in even more fruitful books, form my ancient stock' (*Metamorphoses*, 1.1). The second paragraph of 'Apuleius's Address to the Reader', however, begins: 'Let me briefly introduce myself as Lucius Apuleius, a native of Madaura in North Africa, but of ancient Greek stock' (*TGA*, p. 25). The 'playful self-consciousness' and riddling 'elusiveness' that Winkler suggests Apuleius demonstrates in the *Metamorphoses*' prologue is negated as Graves abruptly 'solves' (or ignores) the conundrum it poses.[194] But why, and to what effect?

As Ken Dowden asserts, '[o]penings of novels deserve special attention: they contribute to the definition of the work and to the definition of the relationship between reader, narrator, and subject matter.'[195] By assimilating the prologue's speaker to Apuleius-*auctor,* Graves takes a firm stance in defining a personal agenda that, along with his deployment of a plain prose style, seems to be rooted in eradicating hermeneutic ambiguity. For Graves there is only one possible interpretive lens that can be applied to the *Metamorphoses*: the myth of the White Goddess, the framework of meaning by which he has ordered his post-traumatic existence. In its original form, Apuleius's prologue poses too many

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193 S. J. Harrison, *Framing the Ass: Literary Texture in Apuleius'* Metamorphoses (Oxford: OUP, 2013), pp. 71-2.
194 Winkler, *Auctor*, p. 182.
195 Ken Dowden, 'Prologic, Predecessors, and Prohibitions', in *A Companion to the Prologue*, ed. by Kahane and Laird, pp. 123-36 (p. 123).

problems to conform to that framework. As Ahuvia Kahane and Andrew Laird point out, it 'disturbs its reader at the same time as it promises delight. It is a cunning play as well as an innocent pledge.'[196] Although it holds some 'clues' which allude to the eleventh Isis Book–phrased, in Hanson's translation, as references to an 'Egyptian papyrus inscribed with the sharpness of a reed from the Nile' (*Metamorphoses,* 1.1)–it strenuously resists a monovalent reading. Apuleius's 'contribution to the definition of the work' is hermeneutic obfuscation.

In Graves's view, however, although a literary work written in dedication to the Goddess can be many things, 'cunning' and problematic are not two of them; if a poem, it can 'disturb' in the sense that it sends a 'shiver run[ning] down the spine' (*TWG*, p. 20), but not in the sense that Kahane and Laird intend. It should not dismay or confuse, but should 'bespeak [the Goddess's] unseen presence' (*TWG*, p. 21) and all that it necessarily implies to her acolyte. An invocation of the Muse must therefore begin with the author's honest appraisal of his relationship to her, an appraisal that cannot be undertaken if there is any confusion surrounding his identity. By eradicating the prologue's 'problems', Graves moves towards effacing the hermeneutic inconsistencies posed by the rest of the text *vis a vis* an Isiac reading**.** The prologue's speaker is presented unassailably as Apuleius, whom Graves's introduction has previously assured us is a devotee of the Goddess, and the *Metamorphoses* should therefore be read as a Goddess-tract. Indeed, Graves argues,

> [Apuleius's] reference [in the Prologue] to family connections with Ephyra (Corinth), Mount Hymettus, celebrated for its honey, and Taenarus the main Greek entrance to the underworld, are clearly allegorical. These places were chosen as ancient cult-centres of the Triple Goddess whom he adored in her successive aspects as the sovereign of Life, Love and Death. (*TGA*, p. 18)

[196] Ahuvia Kahane and Andrew Laird, 'Introduction', in *A Companion to the Prologue,* ed. by Kahane and Laird, pp. 1-8 (p. 1).

As such, Graves's 'Address to the Reader' poses no 'disturbing' threat to the reader, his Goddess-centric project, or himself–only the integrity of his translation.

The places of origin that the narrator offers us in lieu of his identity would certainly have resonated with Graves. Corinth intra-textually refers to the setting of what he called 'the most […] inspired account of the Goddess in all ancient literature', the passage in Book 11 in which Lucius narrates his first encounter with Isis. It was also one of the few places where the 'ancient language' of poetic myth which Graves extols in *The White Goddess* 'survived purely […] in [a] secret Mystery-cult' (*TWG*, p. 8) following the advent of patriarchy. The famed honey of Mount Hymettus recalls the Goddess in her aspect of 'queen bee about whom male drones swarm in midsummer' (*TWG*, p. 188) and 'whose embrace is death' (*TWG*, p. 20), a characterisation that alludes to her ruthless treatment of her suitors. It is *Taenaros Spartiatica*, however, known particularly for its function as entrance to the underworld (as at *Metamorphoses* 6.18), which would have been especially relevant to Graves's own personal myth. Whomever the prologue's narrator may be, as Dowden puts it, 'he has no home unless in death', and although a 'clearly allegorical' reference, the trope of the underworld speaks strongly to the poet's self-conception as *deuteropotmos*.[197] 'Escape', which offers a mythologised account of his restitution after his 'fatal' wounding at the Somme, takes the poet's *katabasis* to the underworld as its subject. For Graves, the *auctorial* presence behind 'Apuleius's Address to the Reader', Taenarus signifies the trenches of the Great War in which he met his own 'death' at the age of twenty-one. Not only will a part of his traumatised self always be at 'home' there, perpetually reliving the terrors of the Somme as he systematically repeats the cycle of traumatic experience, they are also the site of the second birth by which he re-defined

[197] Dowden, 'Prologic', p. 134.

his humanity in the wake of his own symbolic demise. They are the setting of his personal *katabasis* and *anabasis.*

V

Katabasis, and the underworld itself, play a prominent role in the *Metamorphoses* Taenaros is a recurring locale throughout the novel: as well as being one of the points, in the prologue, where the narrative (if only metaphorically) begins, it is integral to Psyche's tale (6,18,1; 6,20,1) and, as Dowden points out,

> the world of death to which it is the entrance is very obviously present in the initiation of Lucius: *accessi confinium mortis et calcato Proserpinae limine* [...] *nocte media vidi solem* (11,23,7). Thus the world of death is economically alluded to as beginning in the Prologue and must be confronted by the hero, and then by the heroine of the *mise-en-abyme*.[198]

Because of the narrative conspicuity of this 'world of death', much scholarly work has been done on the *Metamorphoses*' *katabases*. The majority of this focuses on the allusive relation between Psyche's descent to the underworld in the Cupid and Psyche tale (Dowson's '*mise-en-abyme*') and the sixth book of Vergil's *Aeneid*. Graves makes several semantic choices in his own translation, however, which align Psyche's *katabasis* with his own master text, *The White Goddess*, and thus interpolate his personal experience into the framework of Apuleius's novel. In doing so, he narrates his hoped for transformation from passive trauma subject to one who has Orphically transcended the melee of history and time.

[198] Ken Dowden, 'Geography and Direction in *Metamorphoses* 11', in *Aspects of Apuleius's* Golden Ass: *Volume III, The Isis Book, A Collection of Original Papers,* ed. by Wyste Keulen and Ulrike Egelhaaf-Gaiser (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2012), pp. 156-67 (p. 157).

Psyche's *katabasis* draws on *Aeneid* 6 in a variety of ways,[199] but it may have interested Graves in its relation to another Vergilian source. Aeneas's *katabasis* began at a gateway to the underworld located at Lake Avernus, on the Bay of Naples; Psyche's takes place at Taenarus, the site from which Orpheus descends to the underworld in Book 4 of Vergil's *Georgics*. As Harrison points out, '*Taenarum* at *Metamorphoses* 6.18 picks up *Taenarias* [...] *fauces* at *Georgics* 4.472', creating a 'clearly symbolic and intertextual topography' that significantly relates Psyche to the figure of Orpheus.[200] The narrative correlations are self-evident: both characters are instructed to perform their *katabasis* in order to retrieve something from the underworld, and both sabotage their own projects by succumbing to *curiositas* and looking at it when they had been ordered not to. This parallelism would have been particularly significant for the author of 'Instructions to the Orphic Adept', who in *The White Goddess* writes of Orpheus being originally inspired by the Moon-Goddess (*TWG*, p. 95) and lauds the Orphics' unique solution for the main problem of paganism, 'Must all things swing round again for ever? Or how can one escape from the wheel?' (*TWG*, p. 135). I have delineated in Chapter One the ways in which this remedy–'not to forget'–provided a model for Graves's cathartic project, and, as will be seen, his treatment of Psyche's *katabasis* in *The Golden Ass* reproduces this framework of meaning.

Psyche's *katabasis* is considered by many scholars to be an analogy for Lucius's trials throughout the novel. As Finkelpearl contends, 'both wander about pursued by a malevolent goddess [in Psyche's case, Venus; in Lucius's, Fortuna] and then are saved and brought to a higher spiritual state.'[201] As an Ass, Lucius takes a 'hellish' journey, suffering countless humiliations, physical abuses, and the on-going fear of torture and death, particularly at the

[199] Cf. esp. Ellen D. Finkelpearl, 'Psyche, Aeneas, and an Ass: Apuleius *Metamorphoses* 6.10-21', *TAPA*, 120 (1990), 333-47.
[200] Harrison, *Framing the Ass*, p. 14.
[201] Ellen D. Finkelpearl, *Metamorphosis of Language in Apuleius: A Study of Allusion in the Novel* (Ann Arbor, MI: U of Michigan P, 1999), p. 111.

hands of the bandits who capture him in Book 5; so Psyche must undergo various trials, under threat of death from Venus, during her descent to the underworld. The notion that the novel as a whole describes a katabatic descent (until the religious *anabasis* of book 11) certainly ties in with Graves's hermeneutic approach to the *Metamorphoses*, as well as the theme of death and rebirth that is so central to his personal myth. If the allusive echoes in the section that deals with Psyche's *katabasis* are designed to link Psyche with Lucius, then–in the case of *The Golden Ass*–we can legitimately associate Graves with Psyche, as we have with Lucius-*actor.* As such, his manipulation of the source text reflects his own experience of both a traumatic 'descent' into the hell of neurasthenia and an 'actual' *anabasis* from the clutches of death.

One such instance of this manipulation occurs in Graves's translation of the final labour that Venus sets Psyche, '*Sume istam pyxidem et de die protinus usque ad inferos et ipsius Orci ferales penates te derige*' (*Metamorphoses,* 6.18), which in Graves reads 'Please take this box and go down to the Underworld to the death-palace of Pluto' (*TGA*, p. 151). Hanson translates the same sentence as 'Take this jar and go straight down from the daylight to the underworld and Orcus' own dismal abode' (*Metamorphoses*, 6.16), highlighting Apuleius's emphasis on the changes Psyche will experience in terms of illumination. Apuleius creates a chiaroscuro effect here, intentionally off-setting the daylight which characterises the mortal realm with the darkness that lies beneath it, epitomised by Pluto's 'dismal', funereal or, as Kenney translates it, 'ghostly' home.[202] Graves, however, rejects the contrast Apuleius sets up; he makes no mention of light or its absence, and does not translate *ferales* in its adjectival form. Instead, Pluto's 'abode' is envisioned as a 'death-palace', and *ferales* is taken to signify 'fatal' or 'deadly.' The lack of reference to the daylight Psyche must leave (but, as the reader knows, inevitably return to) emphasises the abject nature of her destination. This figuration draws on

[202] Apuleius, *The Golden Ass, or Metamorphoses*, trans. by E. J. Kenney, rev. edn. (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 101.

Graves's strange relationship with (the supposedly haunted) Berry Pomeroy Castle, about which he said, when introducing his poem 'The Devil at Berry Pomeroy' at a reading in 1953,

> As a child I used to have nightmares about an unknown castle and this remained unidentified for 40 years. And then one day I visited Berry Pomeroy in South Devon. I don't believe in reincarnation and therefore can't explain why this place is so familiar and horrible to me.[203]

As Emma McEvoy points out, the Castle signifies for Graves 'a kind of evil archetype, untied from linear time' and 'severed from nature', a feature of his nightmares before he ever encountered it in reality.[204] Like the movement enacted by Psyche's *katabasis*, entry into the castle at Berry Pomeroy involves a descent away from the world of traditional time into a sinister state of either enforced stasis or of fruitless repetition. The analogies to be drawn between this state of being and traumatic experience are clear: trapped in a neurasthenic condition from which he cannot escape, Graves is locked in a cycle of recurring 'hauntings' or visions. The poem describes the uncanny aspect and activity of this 'horrible' edifice, a palace of death and sexual menace where the speaker

> […] heard bells toll
> For a monster's soul
> That was born, half dead,
> With a double head;
> I saw ghosts leap
> From the ruined keep;

[203] Qtd. in Emma McEvoy, *Gothic Tourism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2016), p. 127.
[204] McEvoy, *Gothic*, pp. 128, 157.

I saw blows thwack

On the raw back

Of a dying ass. (*TCP*, p. 452)

Published three years after *The Golden Ass*, 'The Devil at Berry Pomeroy' here recalls both Lucius-ass and the 'lame ass loaded with wood' (*TGA*, p. 152) that Psyche encounters during her *katabasis.* The suicidal ghosts, doomed ineffectually to repeat their own deaths, likewise allude to Pluto's 'death-palace' but in a sense that aligns it with what Francis Bacon called 'the palace of the mind' where, for Graves at least, traumatic memories are caught in a cycle of repetition.[205] These, perhaps, are the same ghosts of 'Haunted', dead comrades who appeared to Graves on the busy streets of Oxford, and it may also be significant that the first and last corpses Graves encountered during his combat service were suicides.[206]

Pluto's death-palace thus operates as a locale where there is no hope of catharsis. Death–in its masculine form–is in supremacy here, and its inhabitants are intended to suffer without recourse to redemption. A locus which can only function within the patriarchal Olympian discourse that he so disdains, it is anathema to an Orphic adept such as Graves: a final destination where traumatic memory cannot be translated into narrative and from which, therefore, there is no return. Although the Goddess reigns in her aspect of death as she does in life and love, she does so from a locale far removed from the underworld as it is imagined in *The Golden Ass*. In the later poem 'The Face in the Mirror', Graves describes the space she inhabits–figuratively or not–as a 'high silk pavilion' (*TCP*, p. 470), not the underworld. While she promises destruction, she also offers rebirth; in its elevation, sensuousness, and promise of organic movement the pavilion diametrically opposes Pluto's

[205] Francis Bacon, 'Of the Proficience and Advancement of Learning, Divine and Human', in *The Works of Francis Bacon, in Ten Volumes*, Vol. I (London: W. Baynes and Son, 1824), pp. 6-235 (p. 93).
[206] Graves, *Goodbye To All That* (1929), p. 302.

desolate death-palace, emblematising the possibility for renewal that the latter negates. By delineating these tensions in his translation, Graves imposes his own religious convictions upon the text: in the patriarchal Olympian theocracy, death is death, and trauma is final; once succumbed to, there is no hope of *anabasis* or catharsis. Such is only possible under the auspices of the Goddess.

It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that the Goddess appears to enter Graves's translation further into Psyche's *katabasis.* Graves deviates significantly from the source text when translating Apuleius's account of Cerberus, whom Psyche will encounter on her descent. In Hanson's translation the hell-hound is figured as

> a huge dog with a triple head of vast size, a monstrous, fearsome creature who barks with thundering jaws, trying in vain to frighten the dead, to whom he can do no harm now. (*Metamorphoses*, 6.19)

Kenney's translation follows the same pattern:

> [Cerberus is] a huge dog with three enormous heads, a monstrous and fearsome brute, barking thunderously and with empty menace at the dead, whom he can no longer harm[207]

Graves's, then, is familiar, but with some crucial differences:

> Cerberus, the huge, fierce, formidable hound with three heads on three necks, all barking in unison, who terrifies the dead; though of course the dead have no need to be frightened by him because they are only shadows and he can't injure shadows. (*TGA*, p. 153)

[207] *The Golden Ass*, trans. by Kenney, p. 103.

Apuleius's Cerberus draws here on Vergil's depiction of the same in *Aeneid* 6, emphasising the futility of the dog's purpose (which amounts to guarding a desolate and insubstantial space), as–to an extent–does Graves. While both Hanson and Kenney reiterate Apuleius's notion of Cerberus striving to frighten those who no longer experience fear, however, Graves's Cerberus succeeds: the creature is not merely barking with 'empty menace' or 'trying in vain to frighten the dead'. Although they have no need to be, Graves's 'shadows' are legitimately 'terrif[ied]' of it. It is 'Escape' that offers us some insight into why Graves's Cerberus may still inspire terror in those who have nothing to fear.

Apart from the poem's speaker, Cerberus is the most prominent figure in 'Escape', and his exploits account for over half the poem. The speaker is revived during his descent to the underworld by the Goddess in the form of Proserpine, who 'Cleared my poor buzzing head and sent me back' to the mortal world. He finds his way barred by Cerberus, however, who 'stands and grins above me now, | wearing three heads–lion, and lynx, and sow' (*TCP*, p. 28). This is not the traditional Cerberus of classical myth: although the number of the heads attributed to the watchdog has varied from three, to fifty, to one hundred, none were thought to be anything other than canine.[208] The distinct quality of the heads is reiterated in *The Golden Ass*, where Graves stresses that the three heads belong to three separate necks. Graves's model for his Cerberus in 'Escape' seems to be chimerical, and indeed–many years later–in a chapter of *The White Goddess* entitled 'Fabulous Beasts', he aligns the watchdog with the female Chimera, describing it as 'a bitch miscalled a dog, […] a cognate beast, with the usual triad of heads–lioness, lynx and sow' (*TWG*, p. 400). In this form, she is synonymous with the threefold Goddess in her aspects of 'mother, bride and layer-out' (*TWG*, p. 20): as lynx she is mother, 'an autumn beast, apparently mentioned by Gwion [an incarnation of the

[208] William Smith, *A Classical Dictionary of Biography, Mythology and Geography: Based on the Larger Dictionaries*, 5th edn. (London: Murray, 1859), p. 163.

ancient Welsh bard Taliesin] in his *Can Y Meirch*' (*TWG*, p. 400), and thus identified in the *Song of Amergin*, an ancient Celtic character-alphabet, as 'the womb: for every holt' and 'the shield: for every head' (*TWG*, p. 9); as lioness she is indomitable bride, 'URANIA – The Queen of Heaven […] Ura (oura) means the tail of a lion […] and since the lion expresses anger with its tail the word may mean "the Queen with the Lion's Tale"' (*TWG*, p. 133); and as sow she is Arianhrod in her final stage of layer-out, the 'Old-Sow-who-eats-her-farrow' (*TWG*, p. 94).

As he was working on *The White Goddess* at the same time as he was translating the *Metamorphoses*, this figuration may well have already solidified itself in Graves's mind. Although he does not go so far as changing Cerberus's gender in his translation (he still refers to the dog as 'him'), it is certainly possible that in *The Golden Ass* the watchdog acts as the Goddess's representative in the underworld. It is understandable, then, that he/she might inspire fear in the dead who (unlike the true poet) have not committed to the service of the White Goddess. Nonetheless, as in the *Metamorphoses*, in *The Golden Ass* the threat the watchdog poses is an empty one. For the Goddess to be equated with powerlessness, in any incarnation, is unacceptable to Graves. Unable to manipulate the source text legitimately to the extent that the meaning is reversed (i.e. Cerberus is, in fact, able to harm the dead), he offers an idiosyncratic explanation as to why the dead have no real reason to fear the watchdog: it is not because they are dead, *per se*, but because they are 'only shadows'.

In this closing phrase, Graves neatly sums up the fate of the patriarchal oppressor. In the 1937 sonnet 'Callow Captain', which revaluates the years recorded in *Goodbye to All That*, the '[f]ortunate soldier' whom we take to be the poem's speaker receives the blessings in store for the true poet:

to be spared shame

Of chapter-years unprofitable to spend,

To ride off into reticence, nor throw

Before the story-sun a long shadow. (*TCP*, p. 349)

The 'story-sun' of the final line signifies the Apollonian, patriarchal, rational discourse which typifies everything Graves finds so abhorrent about the mechanarchy, and the shadow the speaker avoids casting is the destructive imprint the male mind leaves on the world around it. As Carter asserts, to 'ride off into reticence' is 'to cheat the sun-dial of [the poem's] motto'; not only is he relieved of 'the frantic strain of swimming against the stream of time' but also, unlike the patriarchal agent, he leaves no shadowy remainder of the damage he has wrought upon the female principle.[209] The figures which mill, terrified, around Cerberus in *The Golden Ass* are not simply dead, they are the smudges left by the sticky fingers of the patriarchy, '*only* shadows [emphasis mine]', so useless and insubstantial that they are cursed as incoherent reflections of their former selves. They are irredeemable–the dead have souls; shadows do not–and they cannot be injured: they are injury itself.

To pass Cerberus and get into 'the presence of Proserpine herself', the Goddess in her redemptive aspect, Psyche must throw the dog one of the 'sops' (*TGA*, p. 153) she has been tasked with carrying on her descent. Whereas Hanson has 'cakes' (*Metamorphoses,* 6.19), Graves's 'sops' is a redeployment of the language of 'Escape'. In the poem, the speaker bemoans his lack of 'even a honeyed sop' to 'cram' into 'Cerberus' wide mouths' (*TCP*, p. 28). Although 'sop' can be taken in this context at face value–a piece of bread dipped in water, or, in this case, honey–it can also refer to a company of fighting men. Primarily dialectal, the term was prevalent in Arthurian texts such as the alliterative *Morte Arthur* (1400) and *Merlin*

[209] Carter, *Robert Graves*, p. 38.

(1500), literature which we can confidently assume Graves was familiar with from his researches for *The White Goddess*.[210] While the 'honeyed sop' of 'Escape' is no doubt equivalent to Hanson's 'cake', by the time Graves came to translate the *Metamorphoses* it may well have taken on a useful multivalency. What Psyche offers to appease Cerberus as the Tripartite Goddess is, on one reading, Graves's war-time service and identity as a soldier–an individual for whom the endurance of suffering, a pre-requisite for the Muse's true poet, is second nature.

In the Western tradition, *katabases* and the completion of trials forge individual identity. The figures that the hero encounters on his descent are significant because they articulate the conditions by which this identity is decided. For Psyche/Lucius, the figure of Cerberus bespeaks Apuleius's critical and mythological heritage; but more than this, it alludes to the trials she must undergo–and overcome–in a wider sense. As Michael Gagarin contends,

> [t]he possibility of failure created by obstacles in the land of the dead […] represents the boundaries that structure human existence, whether social, intellectual, or experiential boundaries, such as those that exist between initiates and noninitiates and between the living and the dead.[211]

To appease Venus and achieve rebirth Psyche must navigate these boundaries successfully, proving that she is worthy of the state of perfect love she hopes to achieve with Cupid. She thus programmatically represents Lucius's own trials in the frame narrative, the obstacles he most overcome in order to be reborn in the perfect love of Isis. For Graves, Psyche's *katabasis* offers a unique opportunity to articulate his own movement toward realising what James

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[210] Cf. "sop, n.2." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press [accessed 13 March 2016]. Graves makes extensive use of the Arthurian poem 'The spoils of Annwm' to support his evaluation of Gwion's riddles in the *Hanes Taliesen* (*TWG*, pp. 103-5).
[211] *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece and Rome*, ed. by Michael Gagarin, Vol. 1 (Oxford: OUP, 2010), p. 119.

Gollnick calls 'the highest potential of individuation': the process of reclaiming a sense of psychological wholeness from the fragmentation of his shell-shock.[212] By interpolating an incarnation of the Tripartite Goddess into Psyche's *katabasis*, Graves freights the narrative with those elements of her Myth which he has integrated into a system of meaning that transmutes his suffering itself into a form of 'trial'. As a representative of the Goddess as she is experienced pre-catharsis, the Cerberus encounter thus alludes to the trajectory which Graves hopes to complete in his own process of psychological recuperation.

VI

As discussed in Chapter One, the Goddess's recuperative role is outlined for Graves in the most 'comprehensive and inspired account of the Goddess in all ancient literature', what is described by scholars as the *Metamorphoses*' 'Little Aretalogy' in Book 11. As this passage is clearly so integral to Graves's conception of the White Goddess, any divergences his translation makes from Apuleius's text are of particular significance and can be read, perhaps, as a rewriting of the foundational text of his entire mythopoetic belief system. Of all the textual 'sites' across his translations, the Aretalogy offers Graves the most cogent opportunity to legitimise the monomyth upon which his translational cathartic project is based.

This being the case, the Aretalogy has less to do with translating Graves's actual traumatic experience into narrative form than it does with creating the conditions by which this is possible. As the first in a series of published translations (or, as Gore Vidal puts it, 'retranslat[ed] […] tributes' to the Goddess), *The Golden Ass* is a testing ground for Graves's

[212] James Gollnick, *Love and the Soul: Psychological Interpretations of the Eros and Psyche Myth* (Canada: Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion, 1992), p. 81.

theories of translation.[213] The Aretalogy is the apex of something hugely significant for Graves. By moulding it to the contours of his own myth he gives voice and validation to his project. What traces we find of his neurasthenia, then, contribute to a 'sounding out' of the fitness of his medium to his task. If this foundational vision of the Goddess can be used to articulate the vicissitudes of his experience, events that contribute so meaningfully to his formation of her redemptive nature, then translation's capacity as a cathartic tool is reinforced.

Although, in general terms, Graves adheres to the Aretalogy's original Latin, there are some deviations he makes from Apuleius that are more striking than others. Whereas in Hanson's translation she refers to herself as ruler of 'the plaintive silences of the underworld' (*Metamorphoses*, 11.5), in Graves her 'nod governs […] the lamentable silences of the world below' (*TGA*, p. 271). Lament is a powerful word to deploy here, not only in the context of Graves's history but also in terms of poesis. Graves's poetry is rarely discussed in terms of lament, apart, perhaps, from 'The Last Day of Leave' (1916), which mourns the relative idyll of his pre-Somme existence with the evocative lines, 'Do you remember the lily lake? | We were all there, all five of us in love, | Not one yet killed, widowed or broken-hearted' (*TCP*, p. 415). The idea of loss, however, is one that is familiar to the trauma subject: the loss of history; of memory; and of a cohesive relationship with reality. These 'lamentable silences' can be read as the lacunas of referential history that characterise Graves's post-war experience. That they belong to 'the world below' emphasises the intrusive role that Graves's unconscious plays in his waking life. Yet while Graves has no control over these forces they are nonetheless subject to Isis's 'govern'-ment and, therefore, intervention.

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[213] Gore Vidal, 'Robert Graves and the Twelve Caesars', *The Nation* (1959). Available at <http://www.rjgeib.com/thoughts/desolation/gore-vidal> [accessed 5 June 2016].

The next passage begins the Aretalogy proper. Here, as Simon Brittan-Ortiz points out, Graves not only misrepresents Apuleius but 'the very religion of which Graves makes him a devotee.'[214] In the passage in question, Isis lists the various names by which she is known and worshipped:

> My divinity is one, worshipped by all the world under different forms, with various rites, and by manifold names. In one place the Phrygians, first-born of men, call me Pessinuntine Mother of the Gods, in another the autocthonous people of Attica call me Cecropian Minerva,–in another the sea-washed Cyprians call me Paphian Venus; to the arrow-bearing Cretans I am Dictynna Diana, to the trilingual Sicilians Ortygian Proserpina, to the ancient people of Eleusis Attic Ceres (*Metamorphoses*, 11.5)

Graves renders the same lines as:

> Though I am worshipped in many aspects, known by countless names, and propitiated with all manner of different rites, yet the whole round earth venerates me. The primeval Phrygians call me Pessinuntcia, Mother of the gods; the Athenians, sprung from their own soil, call me Cecropian Artemis; for the islanders of Cyprus I am Paphian Aphrodite; for the archers of Crete I am Dictynna; for the trilingual Sicilians, Stygian Proserpine; and for the Eleusinians their ancient Mother of the Corn. (*TGA*, p. 271)

This confusion of deities well represents what Grant Showerman refers to as 'the apparently chaotic condition of paganism when viewed as a system', the remarkable complexity of data which Graeco-Roman religion encompasses and which Apuleius was attempting to formulate into a syncretised whole–namely, the worship of Queen Isis.[215] As previously discussed, as far as Graves was concerned chaos was not an acceptable state for his foundational Goddess-

[214] Simon Brittan-Ortiz, 'Priests and prejudice: Graves, Apuleius and Translated Muses', *Gravesiana*, 2/2 (1999), 130-43 (p. 141).
[215] Grant Showerman, 'Introduction. – The Significance of Franz Cumont's Work', in Franz Cumont, *The Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism,* 2nd ed. (New York: Dover Publications, 1956), pp. v-xiv (p. vii).

tract to be mired in. By replacing 'Minerva' with 'Artemis', Graves demonstrably shapes Apuleius's text in an attempt to corral it within the ordered (if intricate) monomyth of the White Goddess.

Cecropian Minerva derives her name from Cecrops, traditionally viewed as the first king of Attica. Cecrops founded Athens after leading a colony from his native Sais in Egypt, thus introducing Egyptian Art and civilisation to the Hellenes. This, of course, would imply that the people of Attica (i.e. Athenians) were not autochthonous, as Apuleius claims. Minerva is the Roman goddess identified with the Greek Athene, Goddess of Wisdom, and as such she is bestowed with Athene's attributes; Graves describes her in *The White Goddess* as the 'Latin goddess of wisdom and inventor of numbers' (*TWG*, p. 205). She is also, significantly, specifically aligned with the masculine side of nature. The twentieth chapter of *The White Goddess* imagines 'A Conversation at Paphos–43 AD' that Graves 'listened' to via the medium of an 'analeptic trance' (*TWG*, p. 341). It 'transcribes' the dialogue between 'Theophilus, a well-known Syrian-Greek historian' and 'Lucius Sergius Paulus, a Roman Governor-General of Cyprus under the Emperor Claudius' (*TWG*, p. 341). Paulus poses the question of 'why the Goddess Athene has a male name as her principle title', to which Theophilus responds:

> "She has become androgynous. […] The Goddess is worshipped first and is all-powerful; presently a God enters into equal power with her, and either they become twins, as happened when Artemis agreed to share Delos with Apollo of Tempe, or else they are joined in a single bi-sexual being. Thus the Orphic hymn celebrates Zeus as both Father and Eternal Virgin. **|** […] [T]herefore if Jupiter is Eternal Virgin, Minerva is equally Eternal Father" (*TWG*, pp. 351-2)

Minerva is thus a victim of 'the most important single fact in the early history of Western religion and sociology […] the gradual suppression of the Lunar Mother-Goddess's

inspiratory cult, and its supersession […] by the busy, rational cult of the Solar God Apollo' (*TWG*, p. 492). As the wisdom/knowledge aspect of the Capitoline Trio and Jupiter's androgynous counterpart, Minerva emblematises the Apollonian, patriarchal system of the mechanarchy that Graves considers the direst threat to the true poetic principle. This matriarchal prejudice drives Graves to supplant Minerva with Artemis, a goddess who, although forced to 'share' her site of worship with her brother Apollo, never surrenders her intrinsic femininity.

Artemis is a central figure in Graves's myth of the White Goddess. The Greek Goddess of the Moon, she was also worshipped as Dictynna and as Britomartis, the virgin goddess of hunting, and was succeeded by the Roman goddess Diana. Graves conflates these figures in *The Greek Myths*, replicating the mythic concentration he deploys in the *Golden Ass*'s Aretalogy.[216] Graves is not placing too much strain on Apuleius's text here. In the *Metamorphoses*' prayer to Isis (which precedes the Little Aretalogy) Lucius pays specific attention to what could be described as the Goddess's lunar qualities, addressing her as 'you who illumine every city with your womanly light, nourish the joyous seeds with your moist fires, and dispense beams of fluctuating radiance according to the convolutions of the Sun' (*Metamorphoses,* 11.2). Maaike Zimmerman points out that there is a Ciceronian precedent for interpreting these moist, life-giving effluences as emanations of the moon. In *De Natura Deorum* (45 BC), Cicero observes that

[216] Cf. *TGM*, pp. 301-2 'The Moon-goddess was called Britomartis in Eastern Crete. Hence the Greeks identified her with Artemis (Diodorus Siculus: v. 76; Euripides: *Hippolytus* 145 and *Iphigeneia among the Taurians* 127; Hesychius *sub* Britomartis), and with Hecate (Euripides: *Hippolytus* 141, with scholiast). In Western Crete she was Dictynna, as Virgil knew: 'They called the Moon Dictynna after your name' (Virgil: *Ciris*, 305). Dictynna is connected in the myth with *diction*, which means a net, of the sort used for hunting or fishing; and *Dicte* is apparently a worn-down form of *dictynnaeon*–'Dictynna's place.' After the introduction of the patriarchal system a murderous chase of the sacred king by the goddess armed with a net was converted into a love chase of the goddess by the sacred king [Minos's pursuit of Britomartis].'

> Her [the moon's] position in north or south creates in her course the equivalent of the winter and summer solstices; she is the source of the many effluences which result in the nurture and growth of living creatures, and which cause the plants which sprout from the earth to swell and ripen.[217]

Apuleius, Zimmerman continues, 'may have enjoyed wrapping his allusions to the above theories about the moistening effluences of the moon into one striking oxymoronic phrase.'[218] Certainly Graves made much of these allusions to lunar power, investing Isis with an agency not found in the source text:

> you whose womanly light illumines the walls of every city, whose misty radiance nurses the happy seeds under the soil, you who control the wandering course of the sun and the very power of his rays (*TGA*, p. 269)

Here the 'womanly' aspect of the moon is stressed, as is its dominance over the masculine sun ('you who control […] the very power of *his* rays [emphasis mine]'). Whereas in Hanson's translation Isis's 'beams of light' can only be sent forth 'according' to the sun's movements, in Graves's *Golden Ass* the sun, the archetypal symbol of patriarchy and rational thought, is under Isis's complete control.

By introducing Artemis into the 'Little Aretalogy', Graves interpolates a figure crucial to his own monomyth of the White Goddess into the Apuleian syncretic system upon which the same monomyth is based. With Artemis taking Minerva's place, Isis is tainted by no trace of patriarchy. As such, she can be fully realised as the formidable feminine force upon which Graves's redemption from the ongoing effects of traumatic experience depends. Untempered by the male principle, the Goddess can fulfil her potential to alleviate the trauma of a war

[217] Cicero, *The Nature of the Gods*, trans. by P. G. Walsh (Oxford: OUP, 1997), 2.50.
[218] Maaike Zimmerman, 'Text and Interpretation, Interpretation and Text', in *Aspects of Apuleius's* Golden Ass: *Volume III*, ed. by Keulen and Egelhaaf-Gaiser, pp. 1-27 (pp. 6-7).

entrenched in patriarchal discourse and practices. For Lucius, this recuperation follows the Little Aretalogy, when he is re-metamorphosed into human form by Isis. His return to humanity, however, is not bereft of its own challenges–challenges which once again convincingly align his experience with Graves's.

VII

For Graves, Lucius's re-metamorphosis functions as the gateway to a longed-for moment of catharsis, symbolised in the *Metamorphoses* by Lucius's conversion and initiation into the Isis-cult. Tellingly, in the narrative space between these two points Lucius is marked by an ontological condition that would have been profoundly familiar to the poet as trauma subject: that of silence. In *Trauma Fiction*, Whitehead writes that trauma is 'a non-experience, causing conventional epistemologies to falter', a locus of unrepresentability that is signified by Lucius's inability to verbalise.[219] Until his initiation, despite finally being returned to human form and therefore to the realm of language, Lucius is situated in a site of linguistic and communicative absence. Like the trauma subject whose world is shaped by a silence that is symptomatic of a memory in crisis, so Lucius is unable to 'tell' his own experience.

The implications of this silence are, in the context of the *Metamorphoses*, rendered ambiguous by the conflicting critical readings of the religious narrative of Book 11. These readings interpret the Isis-Book as either, Wytse Keulen and Ulrike Egelhaaf-Gaiser observe,

> the true and serious report of the protagonist's genuine experiences as an Isiac convert, or […] as comedy, continuing the atmosphere of entertaining fiction in the preceding ten books of the

[219] Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*, p. 5.

> *Metamorphoses*, with the credulous dupe Lucius featuring in the final book as the butt of authorial irony and the victim of an exploitative cult[220]

For those who read Book 11 as 'comedy' or, more appropriately, satire, Lucius's silence signifies an 'acquiescence of mind […] to an authoritative interpretation of his life.'[221] Lucius is so 'taken in' by the Isis cult that plans to take advantage of him that he surrenders his narrative authority over his own experience. In the context of *The Golden Ass,* however, such questions are redundant. Although Graves may have interpreted Apuleius's style as 'humorously inflated', he had no doubt that the content of Book 11 was profoundly religious.[222] Each part of it was meaningful, including Lucius's silence.

It is Lucius-*auctor* (the novel's narrator, who benefits from a hindsight unavailable to either the first-time reader or Lucius-*actor*) who describes the phenomenon of Lucius's *aposiopesis* (a rhetorical figure intended to capture the persuasive effects of sudden silence, taken from the Greek word for 'becoming silent'). Once re-metamorphosed, we expect the newly humanised Lucius-*actor* to finally take the opportunity to communicate via intelligible speech. Instead, as Hanson's Lucius tells us,

> I was completely dumbfounded and stood speechless, rooted to the spot. My mind could not comprehend this great and sudden joy. I did not know what would be most appropriate to say first, where to find opening words for my new-found voice, what speech to use in making an auspicious inaugural of my tongue now born anew, or with what grand words to express my gratitude to so great a goddess. (*Metamorphoses*, 11.14)

[220] Wytse Keulen and Ulrike Egelhaaf-Gaiser, 'Preface', in *Aspects of Apuleius's* Golden Ass: *Volume III*, ed. by Keulen and Egelhaaf-Gaiser, pp. vii-xvi (p. vii).
[221] Winkler, *Auctor*, p. 211.
[222] Robert Graves, 'The Golden Ass', *Times Literary Supplement* (30 June 1950), 405.

Graves has the following:

> I stood rooted to the ground with astonishment and could not speak for a long while, my mind unable to cope with so great and sudden a joy. I could find no words good enough to thank the Goddess for her extraordinary loving kindness. (*TGA*, p. 278)

As Finkelpearl puts it,

> when speech is restored, Lucius [is] hesitant and speechless. […] Lucius-*auctor* devotes a great deal of space to eloquent retrospective incoherence [while] Lucius-*actor* is presented as wondering silently, in a series of indirect questions[223]

The 'inability to begin' that, as Finkelpearl goes on to contend, is so 'artfully and expressively presented by Lucius-*auctor*' is truncated by Graves. This technique of compression is one that we are familiar with from Graves's poetry, where any superfluity is eschewed in favour of a direct engagement with the subject. Yet the slightly stilted phrasing of 'could not speak for a long while' and 'could find no words good enough' creates a jarring effect of stoppage, as if even Lucius-*auctor,* from his privileged position of hindsight, has difficulty in narrating his experience. This effect is contextualised by Geoffrey H. Hartman's notion that '[l]iterary verbalization' is the only effective tool we have available to us to 'make the wound perceivable and the silence audible.'[224] Here, perhaps, we find an instance of a failed attempt by Graves to give voice to his own traumatic experience.

Although, at the close of the passage, Lucius's silence is presented as an inability to thank Isis for her intervention, both translations begin by focusing simply on his inability to

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[223] Finkelpearl, *Metamorphosis*, p. 193.
[224] Geoffrey H. Hartman, 'Trauma Within the Limits of Literature', *European Journal of English Studies*, 7/3 (2003), 257-74 (p. 259).

speak *at all*. In Hanson's translation this is couched in terms of indecision: Lucius hesitates because he can't think of an appropriate or auspicious beginning. Apuleius's Lucius is concerned with the 'firstness' of his words; there is an anxiety around setting the tone for all the language that will follow, including that with which the *Metamorphoses* will ultimately be narrated. Considering the linguistic idiosyncrasies of the novel, and that Lucius will go on to pursue an oratorical position in the Roman law courts, this concern with language is appropriate. In Graves's translation, however, these concerns are redacted outright. Lucius-*actor*, Lucius-*auctor* observes, is immersed in a silence that will last for an unspecified 'long while'. When viewed through the lens of trauma this phrase–paradoxically–speaks volumes. As Joy Kogawa observes, for the trauma subject there is inevitably 'a silence that cannot speak. There is a silence that will not speak.'[225] In the wake of what the High Priest of Isis will call, in Graves's translation, Lucius's 'sinister punishment' for his transgressions, Lucius transitions from a state of wanting to speak/narrate but being physically unable to (imprisoned as he is in the form of an ass), to a state of being physically able to speak/narrate but lacking the drive and/or cognitive ability to do so.[226] These divergent but associative silences represent, for a trauma subject such as Graves, what Rudolf Freiburg describes as

[225] Joy Kogawa, *Obasan* (Boston: Godine, 1981), epilogue.

[226] Lucius's inability to speak while in asinine form is a key narrative element throughout Books 2-10. For Shumate, this loss of language–an ordering system that permeates all others–signals Lucius's 'weakening grip on the entire range of his world's ordering mechanisms' (Shumate, *Crisis*, p. 122). As such, it corresponds with the disengagement from referential reality and memory that engenders traumatic silences. As a narrative tool, it is regularly evoked to articulate his inability to deflect and apportion blame, thus registering the injustice of his subjugated condition. In Book 7, for example, he is unable to defend himself against the bandits' accusations that he has stolen from his benefactor Milo: despite his attempts to cry 'Not guilty', Lucius-ass can only utter the first word repeatedly, 'without restraint',

> but I simply could not pronounce the second word. I stayed on that first word and brayed again and again, 'Naw … naw…,' although I vibrated my pendulous lips as roundly as I could. (*Metamorphoses,* 7.3)

> an aesthetic programme capable of depicting the infinitesimal nature of great pain […]. But silence is also elaborate, wordless speech, which adumbrates the underlying trauma. Silence is the last phase of communication, after a traumatised victim has lost his or her trust in even the expressiveness of metaphor and myth.[227]

This 'last phase of communication' signifies the ineluctable nature of Lucius's 'traumatic' asinine experience, one which–even after he has undergone the conversion/catharsis experience of initiation–Graves's Lucius-*auctor* struggles to put into words. Despite having narrated the traumatic history itself–his testimony of witness–he is unable to convey the actuality of Lucius-*actor*'s silence. In the introduction to *Primo Levi: Recording and Reconstruction of Testimonial Literature*, Judith Kelly states that the value of testimonial literature consists of

> the ability of the narrator to get to the heart of the nature of the event for the individual, and also to render that account in such a way that its significance may be comprehended by those who have not participated in it.[228]

Lucius-*auctor*, of course, has achieved this: having undergone conversion and initiation he has constructed what P. Berger calls a 'cognitive and normative edifice' to replace the old one that has disintegrated.[229] His newly acquired voice signals his participation in this new system of meaning, allowing him to communicate his experience via the medium of the preceding 10 Books. Unlike Graves he has been fully redeemed in the Goddess's love and achieved the hoped-for catharsis. In Apuleius, his narration is therefore complete and fully realised, to the

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[227] Rudolf Freiburg, ''I do remember terrible dark things, and loss, and noise': Historical Trauma and its Narrative Representation in Sebastian Barry's *The Secret Scripture*', in *Contemporary Trauma Narratives: Liminality and the Ethics of Form*, ed. by Susana Onega and Jean-Michel Ganteau (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 70-86 (p. 78).

[228] Judith Kelly, *Primo Levi: Recording and Construction in the Testimonial Literature* (Leicester: Troubador, 2000), p. 2.

[229] P. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (1967; New York: Anchor Books, 1990), p. 20.

extent that he can even, in the original text, confidently narrate the mode of silence within which, as Lucius-*actor,* he was confined. In Graves's translation, however, this moment stalls. The awkward phrasing of 'could not speak for a long while' distinguishes Graves-*auctor* from Lucius-*auctor*. He cannot adequately verbalise Lucius's silence, a silence that reflects his own traumatic lacunas. As Susan Onega points out, the 'task of attenuation and transmission has always been the function of myth and fantasy genres', but in this moment the *Metamorphoses* does not prove fit for purpose: the metaphorisation of Graves's experience falters; the description of traumatic shock remains un-attenuated, and the 'truth' of his own silence remains un-transmitted.[230]

In both translations, this silence is explained as being brought about by a 'great and sudden joy', but to read Lucius's re-metamorphosis as an exclusively joyful event is to treat it reductively. Just as metamorphosis itself is traumatic, so is re-metamorphosis, a radical change in anterior form associated with a correspondingly cataclysmic return to humanity that parallels its obverse. It is so 'great and sudden' an event that Graves's Lucius-*auctor* states baldly that his 'mind was unable to cope' with its reality. In the face of such 'joy' he undergoes a form of stress-related breakdown, and this is explicated somewhat by deductions we can make from Graves's unconventional gloss of this emotion throughout his earlier work. For Graves, 'Joy' and its attendants (bliss/delight/ecstasy), characterised by their intensity, signal hazard. In 'Sick Love' he writes of the 'momentariness' and illusory nature of extreme pleasure, represented by the 'innocent' eating of apples and the feel of sun on the skin. These pleasures are conducted in the perilous space 'between dark and dark' and tainted by the speaker's

> listening horror for the cry

[230] Susan Onega, 'Affective Knowledge, Self-awareness and the Function of Myth in the Representation and Transmission of Trauma', *Journal of Literary Theory*, 6/1 (2012), 83-101 (pp. 88-9).

That soars in outer blackness dismally,

The dumb blind beast, the paranoiac fury (*TCP*, p. 293)

Elsewhere, in 'The Cool Web', joy's destructive nature (and language's ability to defend against it) is sounded decisively: 'there's a cool web of language winds us in, | Retreat from too much joy or too much fear' (*TCP*, p. 283). The joy that Lucius feels at Isis's intervention signals (and, in its greatness and suddenness, bears the threatening traces of) the traumatic episodes that precede it. For Caruth, the study of trauma and recovery brings one repeatedly to an unusual paradox: 'that in trauma the greatest confrontation with reality may also occur as an absolute numbing to it, that immediacy, paradoxically enough, may take the form of belatedness.'[231] In *The Golden Ass*, Lucius's joy participates, uncannily and belatedly, in the traumatic shock with which Graves was so familiar.

Although in this moment Lucius is unable to speak, an account of his trials and redemption is summarily provided by another voice, that of the High Priest Asinus. Speaking, as Winkler puts it, 'at some length and with a good deal of authority', Asinus regales the mute Lucius with an 'authoritative version of his life' (which the priest has received via the insight of the Goddess herself) delivered in direct speech in the form of what can be considered a testimony-by-proxy.[232] There are some significant discrepancies between Hanson's and Graves's translations of this passage which speak to Graves's conscious/unconscious interpretation of the *Metamorphoses* as trauma narrative. Whereas in Hanson's translation the Priest observes that 'you […] reaped the perverse reward of your ill-starred curiosity' (*Metamorphoses,* 11.15) Graves has '[y]our luckless curiosity earned you a sinister punishment' (*TGA*, p. 279). Both Kenney and Adlington, like Hanson, translate *sinistrum praemium* in terms of

[231] Cathy Caruth, 'Introduction', p. 3.
[232] Winkler, *Auctor*, pp. 210-11.

reward: Kenney has 'bitter reward',[233] while Adlington, with 'sinister reward', appears to have been the model for Graves's own translation.[234] The notion of 'punishment' vs. negative 'reward' is telling here. Within the theoretical framework of reward-and-punishment-based learning, a 'negative reward' is technically classed as an absence of punishment, intended to generate a positive learning signal.[235] Although one could not legitimately describe Lucius's metamorphosis and ensuing trials as an 'absence' of punishment, in a general sense this accords with the first-time reader's reading of the *Metamorphoses* As Niklas Holzberg points out,

> [i]t comes as something of a surprise for the reader to hear that the sufferings of the ass were a form of divine punishment. In the part of the story prior to Lucius' transformation into the ass, the appeasement of his 'slavish desires'–obviously an allusion to the passionate nights spent with […] Photis–and his lively interest in witchcraft are nowhere termed an offence against religion.[236]

Moreover, the idea of a positive learning outcome makes narrative sense. The ironic 'reward' of ill-fortune bestowed upon Lucius by the goddess Fortuna, identified by the Priest as the architect of Lucius's misfortunes, has led him to a state of religious enlightenment.[237] Without his sufferings, Asinus suggests, Lucius would have never been driven to appeal to Isis for succour and would not, therefore, have been invited to join the Isis-cult, a social and spiritual position vastly preferable to that which he occupied, pre-metamorphosis, in the first three Books.

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[233] *The Golden Ass,* trans. by Kenney, p. 203.
[234] Apuleius, *The Golden Ass or, the Metamorphoses*, trans. by W. Adlington, intro. by Timothy Richard Wutrich (1566; New York: Barnes & Noble, 2004), p. 220.
[235] Nomy Arpaly and Timothy Schroeder, *In Praise of Desire* (Oxford: OUP, 2014), p. 131
[236] Niklas Holzberg, *The Ancient Novel: An Introduction*, trans. by Christine Jackson-Holzberg (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 59.
[237] In Roman religion, Fortuna and Isis are merged to create a composite deity. Isis is therefore in some way responsible for Lucius's metamorphosis: she creates the conditions by which he will achieve enlightenment.

For Graves, however, there is nothing ironic about Lucius's experience, and it is important for him that there be no ambiguity about its narrative effect. As he tells us in *The Golden Ass*'s introduction, 'Lucius's punishment' for 'meddl[ing] with the supernatural […] was to be transformed not into an owl, as he had hoped, but into an ass' (*TGA*, p. 13). Before the first-time reader of Graves's translation has even begun the novel they are instructed as to how the main body of the text should be interpreted. Lucius's sufferings, despite generating the same learning outcome as we find in the source text, can be construed as nothing but outright 'punishment', and a 'sinister' one at that. Graves's work registers a consistent preoccupation with 'sinister' punishments: discussions of the archetypal narrative instance of this particular compound, the fate of Lot's wife in Genesis, recur in at least nine of his prose works, including *Count Belisarius* (1938; London: Penguin, 2006; p. 43), *The Nazarene Gospel Restored* (London: Cassell, 1953; p. 615), and his *Oxford Addresses on Poetry* (London: Cassell, 1962; p. 90). In *The White Goddess*, he speculates that one of the *Hales Taliesin* riddles, the sequence that forms the foundation of his argument about the druidic alphabet of trees,[238] can be answered thus: 'Who, in line 21, witnessed the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah? Lot, or perhaps the unnamed "wife of Lot"' (*TWG*, p. 82). It is pertinent, perhaps, that Lot's wife not only suffers the only physical metamorphosis in the Old Testament but also earns her punishment through curiosity. Resonant with the dynamics of 'looking' and *curiositas*, the tale of Lot's wife speaks to Lucius's own moment of metamorphosis. Graves's short story 'The Shout', too, narrates an equally sinister punishment. The deafening, primal shout of the asylum inmate Crossley (whose 'soul is spilt in pieces') has the ability to kill or send the hearer mad, the most threatening near-instance of which occurs when he barely restrains himself from unleashing it on a group of children who

[238] Cf. Lindop, 'The White Goddess', pp. 28-30.

startle him.[239] It is worth noting that, in a 1930 letter to Clarence Winchester, Graves refers to 'The Shout' as '(though fantastically) an autobiographical story.'[240]

It is unsurprising, then, that punishment plays a significant part both in the myth of the White Goddess and in Graves's understanding of his own PTSD, especially when we consider that, in 'The Shout', the punishment in question takes extreme noise as its vehicle. Freud outlines the theoretical relationship between suffering and punishment in the context of traumatic experience in 'Analysis, terminable and interminable' (1937):

> No stronger impression arises from the resistance during the work of analysis than there being a force which is defending [the self] by every possible means against recovery and which is absolutely resolved to hold on to illness and suffering.[241]

The traumatised subject manifests the paradoxical drives of wanting to be cured and resisting treatment, the latter as a result of individual variations of 'the sense of guilt and the need for punishment' engendered by traumatic experience.[242] This contradictory mental set is familiar to us from Graves's resistance to psychoanalytic treatment: as discussed in Chapter One, Graves made it clear in his prose and poetry (cf. 'The Gnat') that he felt to cure his '*Pier-Glass* haunting' was to lose 'the power of writing poetry,' and at the time it seemed 'less important to be well than to be a good poet.'[243] Yet it is difficult to argue that he also regarded his PTSD as a fitting punishment for the moral 'crimes' he committed during the war.

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[239] Robert Graves, 'The Shout', in *Robert Graves: Complete Short Stories*, ed. by Lucia Graves (1924; Manchester: Carcanet, 1995), pp. 7-22 (p. 7).
[240] Robert Graves to Clarence Winchester, 22 February 1930, Folder 4.8, Robert Graves Collection, HRC.
[241] Sigmund Freud, 'Analysis, terminable and interminable', in *The Complete Psychological Works*, ed. by James Strachey, Vol. XXIII (London: The Hogarth Press, 1959), pp. 216-53 (p. 242).
[242] Freud, 'Analysis', p. 242.
[243] Robert Graves, *Goodbye to All That* (1929), p. 381.

Carter has discussed this dynamic as it plays out in the poem 'Nebuchadnezzar's Fall' (1920) in which, although he 'slip[s] through the net of personal reminiscence', Graves utilises the Bible story to examine the ramifications of the moral delinquency of the Great War at the level of civilisation, sounding out the parameters of his later conception of the mechanarchy:[244]

> Down on his knees he sinks, the stiff-necked King,
>
> Stoops and kneels and grovels, chin to the mud.
>
> Out from his changed heart flutter on startled wing
>
> The fancy birds of his Pride, Honour, Kinglihood. (*TCP*, p. 245)

Drawing on the language of the front-line–the 'stiff-necked' British officer, his 'chin to the mud' of the trenches–the poem describes a punishment which results in the loss of all the principles which Nebuchadnezzar considered his redeeming features. I have discussed previously the shame and guilt which Graves carried with him following the war, and the ways in which this was integrated into his neurasthenia: the encounters, as articulated in 'Haunted', with dead friends he failed to save; his repeated assertions, once dementia had set in, that he had 'killed too many Germans'. Although Graves felt intense pride for his regiment, the part he played in the war at an individual level was, he felt, morally ambiguous. He was reduced to something less than he was, leading to his assertion that 'When I left the army, just after the First World War, I made a resolve never to be anybody's stooge'–to never again permit himself to be Othered from himself or his ideals in the name of another's cause.[245] Nebuchadnezzar, brought low by the hubris Graves locates in 'the pride of his soaring eagle heart' and his 'courtship of

[244] Carter, *Robert Graves*, p. 140.
[245] Graves, 'Robert Graves', p. 55.

Heaven's high stars', is likewise–in Carter's words–reduced to 'unregenerate brutishness.'[246] Indeed, he is rendered into an image of debased animality:

> He crawls, he grunts, he is beast-like, frogs and snails
>
> His diet, and grass, and water with hand for cup.
>
> He herds with brutes that have hooves and horns and tails,
>
> He roars in his anger, he scratches, he looks not up. (*TCP*, p. 72)

Like Lucius, whose foolish pride led him to believe that he could 'play with black magic' and even 'thrust himself onto the gods [without] patiently awaiting their summons' (*TGA*, p. 13) (note the correspondence between the latter phrase and Nebuchadnezzar's 'courtship of Heaven's high stars'), Nebuchadnezzar is removed from the realm of culture and resituated in the realm of nature, transformed into a bestial version of his former self. The three figures–the soldier, the privileged young nobleman, and the king–are thus bound together in a system of punishment for their misdeeds and the traumatic transformation of emotional/psychological (Graves) and physical (Nebuchadnezzar, Lucius) states of being.

In the context of the Myth of the White Goddess, this punishment has been well earned by man's patriarchal folly. In 'The Challenge' (1938), Graves delineates the male-female relationship as he conceives it, with the poet cast as a solar hero who has been punished for presuming to hold woman in sexual dominion:

> In ancient days a glory swelled my thighs,
>
> And sat like fear between my shoulder-blades,
>
> And made the young hair bristle on my poll.

[246] Carter, *Robert Graves*, p. 140.

> […]
>
> Queens I had to try my glory on,
> And glory-princes my queens bore to me.
> Royally I swept off all caitiff crowns.
>
> […]
>
> The Moon's the crown of no high-walled domain
> Conquerable by angry reach of pride:
> Her icy lands welcome no soldiery.
>
> Thus I was shamed, I wandered in the fields,
> I let my nails grow long and my hair grow long
> […] An idiot pawn of that inhuman power. (*TCP*, pp. 378-9)

The moon as female archetype is proved un-'conquerable', and once again the speaker is reduced to bestiality, allowing his nails and hair to grow long as he assumes his true, animalistic nature. Like the speaker of the poem, Lucius and Graves's moon-inspired fear (easily interchangeable with awe) is justified: for Lucius, who in Book 11 wakes on the beach at Corinth 'in sudden terror' as a 'dazzling full moon was rising from the sea', this is borne of the recognition that 'the Moon-Goddess', in all her 'power and majesty', is the 'sole sovereign of mankind' (*TGA*, p. 268); Graves, as he writes in the early poem 'I Hate the Moon' (1916), lives in the knowledge that she has the power to 'one day […] do [him] some dreadful thing' (*TCP*, p. 17) if she so desires. As a subject of her 'inhuman power' Lucius's punishment is to metamorphose into something equally inhuman: in attempting to subjugate women sexually (in

the figure of Pamphilae) he is no better than a beast, and as punishment his anterior body becomes a signifier for his inner psyche.

As it is only by willingly accepting and undergoing the trials of her chosen punishment that the true poet can hope to be redeemed by the Goddess's love, within the framework of her Myth Graves's punishment for his own transgressions–against humanity as a soldier, against woman as a man–takes on constructive rather than destructive meaning. By negating the ambiguity around the intended effect of Lucius's metamorphosis, Graves aligns translator and protagonist in a shared quest for production of meaning. Traumatic experience becomes the means by which they both pay for their transgressions and earn their redemption. When considered in terms of an ultimate rebirth, Bakhtin offers an insight which neatly bridges the gap between Lucius's fictive experience and Graves's lived one: 'the time spent by Lucius in everyday life [the period spent as an ass]', Bakhtin contends,

> coincides with his presumed death (his family considers him dead), and his leaving that life is his resurrection. The ancient folkloric core of Lucius' metamorphosis is in fact precisely death; the passage to the nether regions and resurrection. In this instance everyday life corresponds to the nether regions, to the grave.[247]

Both Graves and Lucius undergo a metamorphic, schematic 'death' (Graves as *deutoropotmos*) and emerge profoundly changed, reconstituted as acolytes of the Goddess for whom religious fulfilment operates as a sacrifice of the self-hood which preceded it.

At the close of his speech Asinus describes the benefaction that awaits the would-be initiate. Several critics have interpreted the following as a sure sign that, when writing Book 11, Apuleius's tongue was firmly in cheek:

[247] Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel', p. 121.

> But to be safer and better protected, enlist in this holy army, to whose oath of allegiance you were summoned not long ago. Dedicate yourself today to obedience to our cult and take on the voluntary yoke of her service; for as soon as you become the Goddess's slave you will experience more fully the fruit of her freedom. (*Metamorphoses*, 11.15)

Zimmerman argues that Hanson's translation is the first to register the 'ingenious play' Apuleius engages in by employing such felicity of expression: the inherent ambiguity in the final phrase makes his readers 'think hard about what kind of "emancipation" the priest is advocating here.'[248] Is Lucius merely moving from one state of servitude to another?

For Graves, both question and answer are the same, but completely devoid of irony, or at least not in the sense that we expect:

> But to secure today's gains, you must enrol yourself in this holy Order as last night you pledged yourself to do, voluntarily undertaking the duties to which your oath binds you; for her service is perfect freedom. (*TGA*, p. 279)

According to Graves's biographer Richard Perceval Graves, the poet who was engaged in the process of committing himself to lifelong service of the archetypal female principle particularly enjoyed the irony of the final phrase not because of its paradoxical nature, but because he had recited the words 'whose service is perfect freedom' countless times during Morning Prayer as a child.[249] As he notes in *The White Goddess*, St. Augustine had borrowed the phrase from Apuleius (although Graves incorrectly assigns it to Lucius's address to Isis), engendering its eventual integration into the Protestant liturgy (*TWG*, p. 475, n. 1). Now Graves is able to enact a

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[248] Zimmerman, 'Text and Interpretation', p. 20.
[249] Richard Perceval Graves, *Robert Graves and the White Goddess: 1940-1985* (1995; London: Phoenix Giant 1998), p. 136.

discursive reappropriation; by reclaiming the phrase from the narrative of the patriarchal deity who had usurped the Goddess, he is able to reintegrate it into what he considers to be her religion's foundational text of worship. Within the Myth of the White Goddess, the ambiguity surrounding the concept of being freed for slavery is nullified: 'her habit has never been to coerce, but always to grant or withhold her favours according as her sons and lovers come to her with exactly the right gifts of their own choosing, not her dictation' (*TWG*, pp. 475-6). While the poet's subservience to her is complete, it is not *true* dedication unless he maintains an element of agency.

The notion of service, of course, draws on Graves's military background. It allows him to transmute the vast sacrifice in the name of duty that he witnessed on the front line into a productive ethos, one necessary to the worship of the White Goddess. In doing so, the traumatic power that the trenches exerted on him is reconstituted as a life-giving, if not benign, force. Graves's adherence to the ideals of dutiful service led him to attempt to re-enlist at the outbreak of the Second World War, despite his previous conviction that he would never again play 'stooge' to another man's agenda; as Carter points out, this urge to 'serve' points to 'the real sustaining myth in Graves's life', which was eventually incorporated into that of the White Goddess–the myth of the 'forlorn hope'.[250] Drawn from the Dutch phrase *verloren hoop*, or 'lost troop', the term was adopted by the English in the early sixteenth century to refer to a body of men detached on what amounted to a suicide mission, such as the first wave of an offensive manoeuvre.[251] For Graves, the 'forlorn hope' epitomised the true poetic conditions of service to the Muse: to fight without fear of inevitable death, and to labour relentlessly in the knowledge that no reward is guaranteed other than the honour of meeting

[250] Carter, *Robert Graves*, p. 47.
[251] Cf. "for'lorn ,hope, n." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press [accessed 21 January 2017].

Her will. The prose gloss to the phrase 'her service is perfect freedom' can be found, nearly two decades after *The Golden Ass* was published, in *Poetic Craft and Principle* (1967):

> A poet cannot afford to identify himself with any organization formed for political, financial or ecclesiastic ends. […] At the outbreak of the First World War I volunteered for the regular infantry and found myself among men whom detestable trench conditions either destroyed or ennobled. Although we were caught in a demonic machine […] [w]e remained free because we were volunteers and bound to one another by a suicidal sacrament. Holding a trench to the last round of ammunition and the last man, taking a one-in-three chance of life when rescuing a badly wounded comrade from no-man's-land, keeping up a defiant pride in our soldierly appearance: these were poetic virtues. Our reward lay in their practice […] The pride of 'bearing it out even to the edge of doom' that sustains a soldier in the field, governs a poet's service to the Muse.[252]

The final lines of the Shakespearean sonnet from which Graves draws his quotation–'Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks, | But bears it out even to the edge of doom'–signal the paradoxical yet vital convergence, for Graves, of love and suffering/service and freedom.[253] The soldier of 'the forlorn hope' ensures his freedom, despite inevitable suffering, because he is bound not by officialdom but by a 'suicidal sacrament'. So, too, acolytes such as Lucius and the true poet find transcendent, spiritual freedom in serene self-surrender. By submitting to the rigours under which the Goddess places them, they enter into a state of perfect forgiveness and subservience, and in doing so make freedom from the 'Great Wheel' of traumatic experience a possibility.

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[252] Graves, 'Lecture One', in *Poetic Craft*, pp. 108-9.
[253] William Shakespeare, 'Sonnet 116', in *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (Ware, Herts.: Wordsworth Editions, 2007), p. 1239.

As the first of Graves's several forays into classical translation, *The Golden Ass* is the sounding ground for his translational methodology. By exerting a plain prose style upon the baroque mechanics of Apuleius's Latin he subjects the *Metamorphoses* to a medium of control that perpetuates across other aspects of his translation: rather than an exercise in 'disastrous exordium[s]' (as fellow translator P. G. Walsh would have it), the deft and unapologetic manipulation, or 'mistranslation', of the novel's themes and vocabulary can be read as a representation of what Graves perceived to be the source text's 'inner sense', or 'pure language'.[254] Although these efforts are largely put towards entrenching the conditions of the Goddess myth in one of its own foundational texts, this also allows Graves, in places, a 'working out' of the ways in which this myth offers him, as trauma subject, the opportunity for catharsis. Where Graves's traumatic experience *does* intrude on *The Golden Ass*'s narrative, it is keenly felt: in his conception of Pluto's abode as a 'death-palace' that refracts the psychological prison of his neurasthenia; and in his struggle to iterate the silence that necessarily attends trauma, the very incommunicability that he must ultimately supplant with narration in order to achieve catharsis. Ultimately, however, the *Metamorphoses*' subject matter resists–to an extent–the truth of his experience. Graves taps into the novel's 'pure language' in ways that resonate with *The White Goddess*, but the originary traumatic events of 1914-18 remain elusive. It is in his translation of the Western canon's archetypal war-book and 'poem of force', Homer's *Iliad*, that these unbearable actualities rise to the surface.[255]

[254] P. G. Walsh (trans.), *Apuleius: The Golden Ass* (Oxford: OUP, 1994), p. xlix.
[255] Cf. Simone Weil, 'The *Iliad*, or the Poem of Force', *Chicago Review*, 18/2 (1965), 5-30.

CHAPTER THREE

THE ANGER OF ACHILLES

I

Swordsman of the narrow lips,

Narrow hips and murderous mind,

[…]

You who, capped with lunar gold

Like an old and savage dunce,

Let the central hearth go cold,

Grinned, and left us here your sword

Warden of sick fields that once

Sprouted of their own accord.

– Robert Graves, 'The Destroyer' (1948; *TCP*, pp. 426-7).

In his Introduction to *The Anger of Achilles,* Graves charges that for centuries the *Iliad* has been grossly misunderstood. He proposes that, unlike other ancient court epics written specifically to exalt their author's rulers (Graves cites as examples the Hittite *Song of Ullikummi* and the Ugaritic *Baal*), the *Iliad* should be read as a satire rather than a 'literary work […] of almost superhuman eloquence', a 'tragedy salted with humour' (*AA*, p. 13) designed to inspire mirth, not reverence. Homer's intention, Graves asserts, was to attack rather than praise those mythical figures whom the current Mycenaean ruling class appropriated as their ancestors

and, in doing so, subversively satirise–under the names of Agamemnon, Achilles, and others–the 'semi-barbarous Dorian princelings' (*AA*, p. 16) for whom he performed his court epic. He was simply giving the public what they wanted: humour. 'His pictures of the king-gods of his day', Graves argues,

> were all caricatures. His whole attitude to the gods is pure comedy. […] What has been missed is that Homer's jokes were all deadpan. He delighted in guying terrible old bores. He had the comic dignity of the old Irish and Welsh story-tellers […] He had to keep a straight face and conceal his dirty cracks to avoid libel. He was like Cervantes, no more serious and as serious, cynical but a man of deep human sympathy.[256]

Thus, in *The Anger of Achilles*, Agamemnon emerges as a weak, deceitful busybody, while Achilles is 'the real villain of the piece' (*AA*, p. 23): the archetypal warrior-figure who lies behind the biting satire of Graves's earlier poem 'The Destroyer', he is portrayed as a 'murderous', 'savage dunce', charged with sacrificing the men under his command to his own outrageous self-interest.

Perhaps understandably, therefore, Graves's translation has been widely dismissed by Classical scholars (see the Introduction of this thesis, p. 64). And yet, as with the majority of his oeuvre, this text is significantly shaped by Graves's own traumatic experiences, points of pressure which configure his notions surrounding military command and its responsibilities. While Homer's satire, he argues, was motivated by a deeply felt resentment against the iron-age descendants of the 'Dorian invaders who drove his own ancestors overseas' (*AA*, p. 16)–a historical justification which is not elaborated on in his introduction–for Graves the *Iliad* reflects the emotional and psychological toll of a far more immediate history. As he told an

[256] Graves, 'The Poet and the Peasant', p. 69.

interviewer in 1970, 'in satire, you can say what you like; you can break all the rules of euphony in describing the threat of evil,'[257] and it is in essence the war, as Brearton contends, that 'allows Graves to break [these] rules.'[258] Satire enables the evocation of traumatic experience–alluded to by Graves's 'threat of evil'–because traumatic shock is denuded of its power by satirical laughter: when we ironise something (for what is satire, as Northrop Frye contends, but 'militant irony'?), we distance and protect ourselves from it.[259] In Freudian terms, such laughter enables 'the triumph of narcissism – the victorious assertion of the ego's invulnerability'.[260] The ego, faced with forces that threaten to destroy it (such as the traumatic flashbacks of the Somme which plagued the shell-shocked Graves), uses satire to both acknowledge and resist the suffering that these forces would elicit. By responding to a traumatic event with humour, as Robert M. Polhemus puts it, one 'asserts the power of the mind and body over the universe of death'.[261]

Unlike *The Golden Ass*, in which the focus is predominantly on the Goddess herself with Graves's traumas infiltrating her discursive domain, in *The Anger of Achilles* Graves's Goddess enters the theatre of war. Indeed, in translating this archetypal war-poem from ancient Greek to English, Graves is obliquely yet unavoidably confronting his own traumatic war experience, something he has avoided for twenty years after suppressing almost all of his war poetry and, in 1929, saying *Goodbye to All That* with his war memoir. *The Anger of Achilles* thus offers him an opportunity to address the war experience that still traumatises him under the guidance of the Goddess to whom he has now dedicated his life. For clarity, Prof. Richmond

[257] Robert Graves, '*Playboy* Interview', interview by J. McKinley, in *Conversations with Robert Graves*, ed. by Kersnowski, pp. 144-67 (p. 162).
[258] Brearton, *The Great War*, p. 85.
[259] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1957), p. 223.
[260] Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, ed. by James Strachey (1905; New York: Norton, 1960), p. 285.
[261] Robert M. Polhemus, *Comic Faith: The Great Tradition from Austen to Joyce* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980), p. 19.

Lattimore's 1951 translation of the *Iliad*–widely considered one of the finest English translations available–will be used as a 'control' text against which to compare *The Anger of Achilles*. Aside from its obvious merits, it already bears some relation to Graves's translation; we can be sure he read it while preparing *Anger* for publication, because he damns it with faint praise as 'a competent crib' (*AA*, p. 33) in his own introduction.

II

In his introduction, Graves points to several sections of the *Iliad* in which he reads the poet's voice as overtly satiric. When Nestor offers to drive the mortally wounded Machaon out of danger, 'Homer's humour', apparently, 'is at its dryest [sic]' (*AA*, p. 22). Instead of helping the wounded soldier ('though after fifty years of warfare he can hardly have avoided picking up a little surgery') Nestor embarks instead on 'a long story of his own youthful adventures' and 'is still droning on when the Trojans swarm over the rampart' (*AA*, p. 22). This criticism recalls the ironic bitterness with which Graves refers to ineffectual, callous commanders in *Goodbye to All That*. He recounts an incident involving some fellow officers who survived a battle at Bethuné in which one company incurred 'five hundred and fifty casualties, including eleven officers killed' (*GTAT*, p. 143). On reporting to headquarters, Graves writes, the officers were greeted by a colonel 'sitting down to a meat pie' who 'looked up dully' and said:

> 'So you've survived, have you? […] Well, all the rest are dead. I suppose Mr Choate had better command what's left of the "A" Company; the bombing officer will command what's left of the "B"; Mr Henry goes to "C" Company. Mr Hill to "D". The Royal Welch are holding the front line. We are here in support. Let me know where to find you if you're needed. Good night.' Not having been offered a piece of meat pie or a drink of whisky, they saluted and went miserably out. (*GTAT*, p. 143)

The colonel's lack of interest in the survivors' welfare aligns him with Graves's configuration of Nestor: just as the latter does not aid the wounded soldier, so the colonel offers the officers no sympathy nor enquires as to their welfare (or the welfare of their men). It is enough that they are alive and can therefore return to their posts; the human cost of the operation is summarily ignored. By the end of the war Graves no longer felt that this cost had been justifiable, believing that patriarchal warmongers determined to make a profit out of the death of a generation had perpetuated the war beyond need. This rancour is evinced elsewhere in his introduction to *The Anger of Achilles*, where he voices his distaste for the warmongering which permeates the Iliadic narrative. In Book 13, he contends, Homer 'jokingly makes [Menelaus] rage against the Trojans as insatiable in their love of war–as though he had not been attacking them for the past ten years–and then plunge back into battle' (*AA*, p. 23).

Where we will begin our own exegesis, however, is with the titular protagonist. Despite the fact that Achilles is sometimes seen as a problematic figure,[262] within Western culture he nonetheless traditionally serves as the archetype of the military hero. Unmatched in his military prowess and sense of personal honour, his courage, intuition, and attacking force are consistently held up as model virtues for the ideal soldier. Despite his flaws (those virtues are, in the *Iliad*, employed for self-serving means), the figure of Achilles functioned as a model of valour for Roman emperors, Alexander the Great, Medieval knights, and modern revolutionaries. Graves therefore flies in the face of convention when he states in his introduction that

[262] Cf. Katherine Callen King, *Achilles: Paradigms of the War Hero from Homer to the Middle Ages* (Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 1987), which discusses (among other examples) Catullus's 'brutal portrait' of Achilles in Poem 64, in which 'the sharp irony produced by the application of the terms *virtutes, felix, pietas,* and *castus* to the perpetration of suffering and brutality ensures that [our] judgement [of Achilles and the Age of Heroes which he represents] will be a severe one' (pp. 116-8).

> Homer treats Achilles with irony rather than humour. Though we are enlisted at the start as this ill-used hero's partisans, Achilles is soon discovered to be the real villain of the piece, who heartlessly watches the massacre of his comrades, just to spite Agamemnon. (*AA*, p. 23)

Although it would be reductive to claim that, in Graves's translation, Nestor simply stands for the inept military figures he encountered in the British Army, or that Menelaus represents the callous generals or profiteering politicians and warmongers he despised, it is difficult to deny that, upon reading *The Anger of Achilles*, certain patterns emerge. Achilles, however, proves to be a more challenging, mutable figure. Resisting any singular framework of representation, Graves's Achilles can arguably be read as an embodiment of the central paradox of the poet's traumatic experience.

Achilles's 'villainy' takes the form of withdrawing from the battlefield in retribution for Agamemnon's seizure of Briseis, an unforgivable slur against his own *timē* ('prestige'). To mark his withdrawal from the social structure of the Achaean army, he swears an oath on a sceptre which is carried by those Greeks who would 'administer | the justice of Zeus'.[263] This divine 'justice', *themistes*, has been disavowed by Agamemnon and the 'nonentities' he rules (*Il.*, 1.231), those Greeks who have done nothing to prevent–and thus tacitly approved–Agamemnon's transgression of social boundaries: his appropriation of Briseis and the substandard value he has placed on Achilles's prestige. Achilles's *timē* is specifically bound up with his *bie*, his destructive force, which in the context of the *Iliad* equates to his prowess as a warrior. Achilles therefore stresses that it is this specific aspect of himself which both Agamemnon and his supporters have sacrificed, an error of judgment that will have

[263] Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. by Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1951), 1.238-9. All further quotations are taken from this edition and are cited parenthetically in the text as (*Il.,* book, line number).

devastating results. This is a pivotal moment in the *Iliad,* one that sets the poem's tragic chain of events in motion. Lattimore's translation of the oath is pitch-perfect:

> And this shall be a great oath before you:
> some day longing for Achilleus will come to the sons of the Achaians,
> all of them. Then stricken at heart though you be, you will be able
> to do nothing, when in their numbers before man-slaughtering Hektor
> they drop and die. And then you will eat out the heart within you
> in sorrow, that you did no honour to the best of the Achaians. (*Il.* 1.239-44)

In Graves's version of the oath, however, Achilles simply seems to be sulking. His translation appears to lack the depth of feeling, of wrath and oblivion, which Lattimore's conveys:

> I vow
> That all you Greeks assembled now
> Before me – mark my words! – one day
> Shall miss Achilles in the fray
> And long for him, finding your chief
> Incapable (despite all grief)
> To save from Hector's murdering sword
> Whole regiments; then at last, my lord,
> Your anger inwards you shall turn,
> cursing that folly that dared spurn
> Him who indignantly here speaks:
> The best and bravest of all Greeks! (*AA*, p. 45)

Graves, it seems, maintains his habitual ironic stance; and yet, crucially, he translates this section into verse. These poetic interruptions occur regularly throughout *The Anger of Achilles*, increasing in frequency as the narrative reaches its climax in the later books. Comparing the *Iliad* to the epics of the 'ancient Irish bards' in a 1960 interview, Graves contends that the latter

> made a practice of keeping the story in prose and whenever they came to some point of real interest, some dialogue between lovers or some complaint of a dying hero […] then they took up their harps and wrote it as poetry, and that kept the prose story fresh and also preserved the actual lyrics, which were really the excuse for the story.[264]

In Graves's opinion, Homer similarly 'contain[s] a number of individual poems wherever the action livens up; but great patches of it could just as well be in prose'.[265] That this stanza is deployed as a poetic interlude thus indicates, as he outlines in his introduction, that its significance is such that he must 'take […] up his harp and sing' because 'prose will not suffice' (*AA*, p. 35). But where exactly is this significance situated? Are these lines simply a prime example of Homer's satirical 'voice', or does the passage speak to Graves in other ways?

Graves's translation certainly positions Achilles as the object of satire. His speech is pompous ('fray', 'folly') and–in his own words–'indignant' (the solemnity of '[a]nd this shall be a great oath before you' is reduced to the blustering 'mark my words!'). And yet the oath's intention could not be more serious, nor its scope more explicit. With these words he effectively condemns his former comrades to death: only Achilles, it is understood, can match

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[264] Graves, *Conversations with Robert Graves*, St. John's, OX.
[265] Graves, *Conversations with Robert Graves*, St. John's, OX.

Hector on the battlefield, and only an army in which Achilles is included can therefore hope to defeat the Trojan host. In his absence, the remaining Achaeans will undoubtedly be slain–a narrative eventuation that Graves was patently aware of. In Lattimore's translation, Achilles's oath is addressed to Agamemnon[266]–it is he who has sacrificed Achilles's *biē*, and when the time comes to face Hector he will literally be able 'to do nothing', locked in a state of ambivalent stasis. In Graves's translation, however, Achilles speaks to the Achaean host *about* Agamemnon. It is the men whom he is abandoning, and the result of this action will be that Agamemnon is explicitly 'incapable' of saving them. Although Achilles singles out the Achaean 'chief' as responsible for their imminent deaths, Graves makes clear that this is only the case because the petulant, 'spiteful' Achilles has abandoned his innocent comrades to the whims of an incompetent General. He is punishing them not by withdrawing his skill as a warrior, but by withdrawing his skill as a protector.

This detail is particularly significant for our reading of *The Anger of Achilles*, but the question of intentionality persists. As proposed in this thesis's Introduction, and in regards to my discussion of *Anger* as a whole, I do not believe that the 'trauma knowledge' Graves brought to his translations was inert. His role as 'knower' is contributive–but this includes the practice of unconscious knowing; and while it is straightforward enough to say that Graves was consciously attempting to write his own history onto the framework of the *Iliad*–surely an instinctive drive to one who was still undergoing the effects of PTSD–the struggle that we find in its pages between narration and occlusion is one that was undoubtedly being fought at a subconscious level. One might propose that Graves, in satirising Achilles, was consciously taking pot-shots at the military leaders he served under during the First World War; despite

[266] Cf. *Il.* 1.223-4: 'But Peleus' son once again in words of derision | spoke to Atreides, and did not yet let go of his anger.'

his intentions, however, his unconscious intervenes and an entirely different figuration emerges.

The key to this lies in Graves's evaluation of an officer's–and therefore his own–role in the military command structure. In a 1971 interview he says:

> I hated coming back to England. […] Our world was the trenches, and what really kept us there–and when I say us I mean young officers–was the sense of duty to our men. We were not fighting the Germans, we were seeing that our men weren't being mucked about by somebody else.[267]

Although he down-plays it here, Graves firmly believed that an officer's job was to ensure the survival of the men in his command; there could be no greater affront to military (or gentlemanly) honour than to renege on this moral responsibility. In his biography of his uncle's early life, *The Assault Heroic* (1986), R. P. Graves recalls the horror Graves experienced when he learnt that a disastrous offensive he was involved in at Cambrin on 25 September 1915, in which 'the "B" and "C" Companies of the Royal Welch Fusiliers had been more or less destroyed [and] most of [his] fellow officers had been killed', had never been expected to succeed.[268] 'Their job', R. P. Graves writes,

> had been to provide a diversion from the main attack at Loos some miles to the south. […] To realize that so many men had been deliberately sacrificed simply 'to provide a diversion', and that he himself had come very close to death as a result, was a profound shock for Robert. […] [When he heard that another diversionary attack had been planned] he found that his nerves were near breaking point: 'It was difficult for me to keep up appearances with the men; I felt like screaming.'[269]

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[267] Graves, 'Great Years of Their Lives', p. 74.
[268] Robert Perceval Graves, *Robert Graves: The Assault Heroic* 1895-1926 (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1986), pp. 136-7.
[269] Graves, *The Assault Heroic*, p. 137.

The lack of value placed on Graves's own life, and the lives of his men, by British military command is reminiscent of Agamemnon's transgressive attitude towards the value of the individual which Achilles criticises in his oath (note the anachronistic 'whole regiments' to describe the volume of losses). In *The Anger of Achilles*, however, although Agamemnon is the object of Achilles's condemnation, the translation's satirical framework ensures that it is the selfish figure of Achilles who truly fails his former comrades by willingly relinquishing his responsibility towards their protection.

This draws on the discourse of what Jonathan Shay describes as Moral Injury, an essential part of combat-related trauma that happens when there is a betrayal of 'what's right' by someone who holds legitimate authority in a 'high-stakes situation'.[270] Graves must have understood the literary depth and import of this passage, but it also, surely, must have struck a personal chord with him. As he wrote to Spike Milligan in December 1968, 'an officer's main task was to *save life* [emphasis mine]'.[271]Although Graves did not abandon his post on the front line, he did lead his men into a situation which, for many, meant certain death. We find in this passage not comedy or ridicule, but the guilt and shame that are at the centre of moral injury. These are the very emotions that Graves writes about in 'Haunted', where he describes seeing waking visions of the men who died under his command: 'Dead, long dead, I'm ashamed to greet, | Dead men down the morning street.'

Thus, in this passage, Achilles emerges not only as a reflection of the ranking officers Graves found so contemptible but also of the poet himself. The process of translation, it seems, has allowed him to write his own traumatic experience into the narrative framework of

[270] Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (1994; New York: Scribner, 2003), p. 208.
[271] Robert Graves to Spike Milligan, December 1968. In *Dear Robert, Dear Spike: The Graves Milligan Correspondence*, ed. by Pauline Scudamore (Stroud, Gloucs.: Phoenix Mill, 1991) p. 90.

the *Iliad.* And yet the blustering, comic tone that Graves adopts, and his use of words such as 'fray', create an ironic, trivialising distance not only between *The Anger of Achilles* and the *Iliad*, but between *The Anger of Achilles* and the reality of trench warfare which, in the context of Graves's own experience, included British poison gas which drifted back onto their own lines and men being literally cut in half by machine-gun fire. While Graves's translation draws on his traumatic experience–as indicated by the words 'regiment', 'incapable', and 'murdering' (which has very specific modern connotations; soldiers are not, in the classical tradition, generally viewed as murderers)–it paradoxically distances itself from it through the vehicle of satire. Satirical laughter, which this passage doubtlessly intends to inspire, maintains its protective function in the face of the brutality and injustice of the trenches. The *animal ridens*, unlike the *animal rationale*, laughs instead of speaking his whole truth.

In a passage that speaks to an event in which Graves's own conduct–rather than that of his superiors–is the source of trauma, the ironic framework intervenes in his cathartic translational project and we are left, not with resolution or clarity but the lurking remnants of his unnarratable experience. His translation retains too much of what he perceives as Homer's 'humour' to recount truly a traumatic event in which he was not only failed by his own commanding officers, but in turn failed those who depended on him for survival. Satire obstructs, rather than reveals, the *Iliad*'s 'pure language'. Nonetheless, despite Graves's best efforts to 'write out' the destructive behaviour of his superiors, the reflection he sees staring back at him in the mirror of Achilles is more disturbing than that of Agamemnon, Nestor, and Menelaus combined: it is his own. There is perhaps as much of Graves in 'The Destroyer', *The Anger of Achilles* suggests, as there is of Achilles: 'old', 'savage', and of 'murderous mind', Graves remains 'warden' of the 'sick fields' of the trenches from which, forty years on, he still cannot escape.

III

While Graves's first-hand knowledge of the horrors of trench warfare informs much of *The Anger of Achilles*, there is one episode–the *Patrokleia*–that seems to draw on a different well of experience. The aspect of difference on which the following reading will focus is Graves's treatment of the figure of Patroklos. While every other major Iliadic character in *The Anger of Achilles* serves as the butt of Gravesian satire, Patroklos alone is held up as a paradigm of 'heroic' virtue. '[T]he kindest-hearted and most unselfish soldier in the Greek camp' (*AA*, p. 23), he is the antithesis of the Achillean archetype Graves denounces in 'The Destroyer'. The root of this singular characterisation (in the context of *The Anger of Achilles*, at least) lies, I would argue, in a traumatic event that occurred not during the First but the Second World War: the death of Graves's eldest son David, who was killed in action in 1943.

Achilles's relationship with Patroklos has been a perennial subject of Homeric criticism. In the context of my own reading, I will draw particularly on the notion of Patroklos's role as *therapon*, or ritual substitute, for Achilles. In cultic terms, the *therapon* assumes the burden of the king's misdoing and is sacrificed in his place, a practice that Graves explores throughout *The White Goddess*.[272] Several Homeric scholars have observed the penetration of this cultic theme into the *Iliad* and, more specifically, the *Patrokleia*. As Margo Kitts puts it,

[272] Cf. *TWG*, p. 123: 'The custom of burning a child to death as an annual surrogate for the sacred king is well illustrated in the myth of Thetis, Peleus and Achilles.'

> the ultimate ritual substitute identified with Achilles, and who will die while Achilles is away, is Patroklos, the *therapon* who dies suited out in Achilles's armour and pretending to be Achilles, fighting the battle that Achilles refuses to fight.[273]

This notion of a sacrificial, substitute figure corresponds with what we know of David Graves and his relationship with his father on several levels: he was killed in combat, a fate that Graves himself narrowly avoided; he died while serving in the Royal Welch Fusiliers, a regiment into which Graves tried but failed to re-enlist upon the outbreak of the Second World War; and like Achilles, Graves's response to David's death implies that he felt a sense of responsibility, failed protection, and survivor guilt. Thus, in Patrokleia of The *Anger of Achilles*, we once again find Graves taking up the mantle of the ambiguous figure of Achilles in an effort to narrate a moment of his own traumatic history.

* * *

Despite the continued suffering that the Great War inflicted on him, Graves wholeheartedly believed in the rectitude of Britain's involvement in the Second World War. He was heartened when David joined his old regiment, the RWF, with whom he was deployed against the Japanese in Burma in late 1942. On 18 March 1943 David's company was ordered to attack a Japanese bunker at Arakan (Northern Burma) that, according to his fellow Fusilier Captain John C. Bennett, was 'impossible to get at'.[274] Indeed, Bennett continues, 'the attack should never have been ordered':

[273] Margo Kitts, *Sanctified Violence in Homeric Society: Oath-Making Rituals in the Iliad* (Cambridge: CUP, 2005), pp. 106-7.
[274] Lucia Graves, 'David Graves's Last Days: A Fellow Fusilier Remembers', *Gravesiana,* 4/1 (2014), 6-24 (p. 14).

> When the whistle blew for the attack to take place, there were three regiments there, so about three hundred men went in the first time. The tallest men, with the longest legs, were chosen for the first attack–in the Welsh regiments there were a lot of shorter men, who were kept back for the second attack, myself included. David was tall so he went with the first attack. Of course, there was never a second attack, it was cancelled because it became obvious that we wouldn't achieve anything and just lose men unnecessarily.[275]

David, however, was already lost. His stand had been heroic. As one newspaper reported,

> The company ahead [of David's] was held up by heavy automatic mortar fire and grenades. Carrying on with a sergeant and a Bren gunner he bombed his way to the first position, where the sergeant and Bren gunner were put out of action. Undeterred he returned with a new load of grenades, and, crossing the open ground swept by heavy enemy fire, attacked single-handed a new strongpoint which the Japanese were defending with grenades. He charged and captured the post alone, and was continuing to advance when he was shot [in the head].[276]

David was last seen falling into a trench after being shot. As the body could not be reached by remaining RWF forces, he could only be declared 'Missing, believed Killed.' This ambiguity was to be compounded by the fact that, due to the stench of the decomposing bodies in the trench and the flies they attracted, after four or five days Bennett's regiment was ordered 'to move back twenty yards, thirty yards, and the gunners put down a barrage which blew all the bodies away. […] [A]ll the bodies were destroyed'.[277] David's body could never be reclaimed, and he would therefore never be declared officially 'Killed in Action'.

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[275] Lucia Graves, 'David Graves', p. 14.
[276] Qtd. in Martin Seymour-Smith, *Robert Graves: His Life and Work* (London: Paladin, 1987), p. 367.
[277] Lucia Graves, 'David Graves', p. 17.

The ramification of this was that Graves would never attain the closure he so desperately needed. In April 1943, after learning that David was missing, Graves wrote to Alan Hodge that

> The war has just given me a body-blow; the usual horrible telegram has arrived saying that David is missing since March 19th […]. Of course 'missing' may mean a whole lot of things, just as 'died of wounds' in my case meant 'unconscious'; but it's no place to be missing at the best of times, and the Japs aren't too good to prisoners.[278]

This early alignment of David's fate with his own shows that, from the outset, he contextualised what befell his son through the lens of his own experience. Once all hope of David's survival had been lost, the idea that he had survived combat when David had not haunted Graves. We find traces of this guilt in the unpublished, undated poem 'A Ghost from Arakan':

> *He was not killed.* The dream surprise
> Sets tears of joy pricking your eyes.
> So cheated, you awake:
> A castigation to accept
> After twelve years in which you've kept
> Dry-eyed, for honour's sake.
>
> His ghost, to be sure, is watching here
> To count each liberated tear
> And smile a crooked smile:
> Still proud, still only twenty-four,

[278] Qtd. in Seymour-Smith, *Robert Graves*, p. 367.

Stranded in his green jungle-war

That's lasted all this while. (*TCP*, p. 826)[279]

The opening phrase, '*He was not killed*', draws directly on Graves's own revenant past; but in his son's case, the telegram informing the family that a mistake had been made would never arrive. David's presence is palpable. In the first stanza he watches, counts, and smiles at an intimate proximity (close enough to see the speaker's 'liberated' tears) that is shattered by the penultimate line. Not at the poet's shoulder but still '[s]tranded in his green jungle-war', David is caught in a distant, timeless place that remains ever 'green', having 'lasted all this while'. 'Stranded' articulates his father's sense of responsibility: a traditionally nautical term that describes the running aground of a ship by force, it speaks to the influential part Graves played in David's enlistment.

Apart from this poem and the self-'castigation' that drives it, however, Graves remained reticent about David's death. References to it in correspondence are few and far between, and on the instances he discusses it he does so with a puzzling lack of emotion. In a letter to Kiedrych Rhys dated 24 Aug 1943, he writes:

> [David] was killed (or is presumed so) in a single-handed attack on a Jap strong point after taking two others, one with a sergeant and Bren gunner, another singlehanded. He used grenades. It was at Donbaik in Burma with our 1st battalion–I mean the Royal Welch–and he was recommended for a D.S.O but will get nothing because only the V.C. is posthumously awarded & anyway the positions were afterwards lost. Anyhow, it was a good death–for a civilization like this–and it is no use thinking about what he might have become. He was a good chap and rounded off a decent life decently.[280]

[279] Although undated, we can infer from Graves's reference to 'twelve years later' that the poem was written twelve years after David's death circa 1955, around four years before *The Anger of Achilles* was published.
[280] Robert Graves to Kiedrych Rhys, 24 August 1943, Folder 5, Robert Graves Collection, Special Collections, University of Victoria.

In this excerpt we find what G.S. Fraser refers to as a typically Gravesian 'knack of flat and final statement […] as well as that ability to make a jocular manner go with a sad tone of voice, that ability to seem, whatever is being said, not entirely committed to it.'[281] There are elements of the 1918 poem 'When I'm Killed' here, in which death is positioned as an emotionless event. The poem's almost prophetic final stanza reads:

> So, when I'm killed, don't wait for me,
>
> Shot, poor lad, so bold and young,
>
> Killed and gone – don't mourn for me.
>
> On your lips my life is hung:
>
> O friends and lovers, you can save
>
> Your playfellow from the grave. (*TCP*, p. 37)

The 'jocular manner' paired with a 'sad tone of voice' which Fraser observes in Graves's writing is caught in the final playfulness of 'grave' and Graves. 'A Ghost from Arakan', perhaps, is a wiser, wearier answer to this early poem, a comment on the inevitability of mourning and the lot, not of those killed, but those whom the dead leave behind.

Despite its flatness of tone, Graves's letter to Rhys seems to elide something more fraught. To state that 'it is no use thinking about what [David] might have become' suggests that, in fact, this was exactly what plagued him. The short story 'Miss Briton's Lady Companion' (1967)–a portrait of his mother, Amy–gives us some insight into how Graves felt about his first son. He writes of his mother that 'the most wonderful possible thing happened to her: she had a boy [Graves]. Which incidentally was the most wonderful thing that ever

[281] G. S. Fraser, 'Poetry of Robert Graves', *The Changing World: Quarterly Review* (1947), 51-63 (p. 59).

happened to me.'[282] While the ensuing sentence–'I unashamedly adore life'–implies that we should understand Graves to mean that 'the most wonderful thing' to ever happen to him was to be born, one cannot help but read this as a knowing allusion to the birth of his first son.[283] Whether this is the case or not, 'decent' is a peculiarly dry word to use to describe David in the context of his death; but, as Graves would have known, it is derived from the Latin *decentem*, 'to become' or 'to be fitting'. To say that both David's life and death 'became' him is to say that he adhered to those heroic virtues which Graves considered paramount: duty, suffering, and sacrifice. In 'Miss Briton' Graves asserts that he 'prefer[s] to think that a child is born either with or without nobility of heart'.[284] We can safely assume that, for Graves, David belonged to the former category. After all his was, as Graves observes, 'a good death'.

The same epithet can be applied to Patroklos. A 'good death', in Iliadic terms, is one which ensures *kleos* through combat: a warrior dies in battle at the height of his physical powers, as opposed to suffering a 'bad death' characterised by impotence and old age. The most significant effect of Patroklos's death, however, is the fundamental change it exerts on Achilles. For the first time, he feels a pain that is couched not in terms of a *suffering-from*, but a *suffering-with*. As Dean Hammer contends, the distinction is crucial:

> In Achilles' earlier experience of pain, he saw himself as *suffering-from* the dishonor brought about by Agamemnon. Achilles' response is one of anger in which he seeks to restore his esteem by reversing this suffering, inflicting pain upon others while staying removed from the infliction of pain by others. […] With the death of Patroklos, though, Achilles experiences a *suffering-with*, in which his own pain is

[282] Robert Graves, 'Miss Briton's Lady Companion' (1969), in *Robert Graves: Complete Short Stories*, ed. by Graves, pp. 314-23 (p. 319).
[283] Graves, 'Miss Briton's Lady Companion', p. 319.
[284] Graves, 'Miss Briton's Lady Companion', p. 315.

> connected to the suffering of another. […] Achilles is unable to disassociate himself, and his own sense of esteem, from the loss of another.[285]

As Achilles makes this movement towards acknowledging his intrinsic relatedness to Patroklos, he simultaneously enters into the realisation that it is he who is ultimately responsible for the loss of his friend. This is articulated as the delayed response to what Mark Buchan calls the 'riddle' of Patroklos's death, one which is set up in Book 16 and resolved in Book 18. 'Why', asks Buchan, 'is Hector not allowed to kill Patroclus directly, but instead is the "third killer", as Patroclus himself claims, after Apollo and Euphorbos?':[286]

> No, deadly destiny, with the son of Leto, has killed me,
> and of men it was Euphorbos; you are only my third slayer. (*Il.* 16.849-50)

In Book 18, Achilles answers the riddle by claiming the title for himself:

> *I have killed him*, and Hektor, *having savaged* him,
> has stripped away that gigantic armour…' (*Il.* 18.82-3; trans. Buchan, *Perfidy*, p. 49)

The phrase that Buchan translates as 'I have killed' is, he notes, a contentious one. It can be read as either 'kill/destroy' or 'lose', and the vast majority of scholars/translators favour the latter; Lattimore, for instance, has 'I have lost him, and Hektor, who killed him'. But when we consider Patroklos's role as Achilles's *therapon*, it becomes clear that the narrative tool of Patroklos's three killers (Buchan calls them 'red herrings') prepares the way for this verbal

[285] Dean Hammer, 'Towards a Political Ethic', in *Bloom's Modern Criticism: The Iliad*, ed. by Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 2007), pp. 155-80 (p. 159).
[286] Mark Buchan, *Perfidy and Passion: Reintroducing the* Iliad (Madison, WI: U of Wisconsin P, 2012), p. 48.

ambiguity.[287] The burden of responsibility for Patroklos's death lies with Achilles, who by refusing to fight but allowing his friend to enter the fray as his surrogate has effectively killed him. Graves, tellingly, has 'Today, Hector killed him', swiftly followed by the qualifying statement 'I failed him in his hour of need' (*AA*, p. 297). Although it is Hektor who physically 'killed' Patroklos '*Today*', his actual death was set in motion by Achilles's abnegation of his protective duty.

The implications of ritual surrogacy in the *Patrokleia* have been discussed by, among others, Nadia Van Brock, Steven Lowenstam, Margo Kitts, and Gregory Nagy, who assert that the implicit and figurative concordance of Achilles and Patroklos is best understood in cultic terms.[288] The textual evidence to support their argument can be found at various points, including Achilles's emphatic self-identification with his friend at *Il.* 18.81-2, where he tells his mother Thetis that he 'loved him […] | as well as my own life.' As Kitts points out,

> [t]he cultic and epic identity between Patroklos and Achilles infers not only that Achilles essentially has sacrificed himself in his oath by the scepter, but also that Achilles has sacrificed Patroklos, who is so closely identified with Achilles[289]

The sacrificial elements of Patroklos's death and funeral were first ventured by Van Brock, who argues that Homer may have implicitly alluded to Bronze Age Anatolian rituals in which a *tarpanalli* (an earlier formation of *therapon*) wearing the king's dress and functioning as his alter-ego would die in his stead as part of an annual ritual killing.[290] So too Patroklos, who

[287] Buchan, *Perfidy*, p. 49.
[288] Cf. Nadia van Brock, 'Substitution rituelle', *Revue Hittite et Assianique*, 65 (1959), 117-46; Steven Lowenstam, *The Death of Patroklos: A Study in Typology* (Königstein, Ts.: Hain, 1981), pp. 126-31, 174-7; Kitts, *Sanctified Violence*, pp. 106-7; Gregory Nagy, *Best of the Achaeans: Concepts of the Hero in Ancient Greek Poetry* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1979), pp. 33, 292-3.
[289] Kitts, *Sanctified Violence*, p. 107.
[290] van Brock, 'Substitution rituelle', pp. 117-46.

impersonates Achilles by leading the Myrmidons into battle dressed in his armour, is killed in his place. This ritual death prefigures Achilles's own, acting as its substitute in a narrative whose confines ensure that Achilles cannot die. Patroklos's funeral rites therefore enact the funeral rites for Achilles, and in Book 23 Achilles suggests that, once he too has died, both their 'ashes' should be mixed in 'one single vessel' (*Il.* 23.91-2) (a funerary urn). As Nagy contends, '[t]he Iliadic tradition requires Achilles to prefigure his dead self by staying alive, and the real ritual of a real funeral is reserved by the narrative for his surrogate Patroklos.'[291]

The term *therapon* comes into play at a climactic point in the *Iliad*'s narrative, when Achilles prays to Zeus for Patroklos's safety. Lattimore translates this as 'henchman' (*Il.* 16.243; also 16.165, 653; 17.164, 388; 18.152). At story level, this means that Patroklos is Achilles's dearest friend and confidant; at the level of master narrative, he is Achilles's other self. Graves translates *therapon*, variously, as 'squire' (pp. 268, 284) or not at all, preferring a straight 'Patroclus' to the epithet. 'Squire' dwells on Patroklos's role as Achilles's attendant, but it is anachronistic and unbefitting for either the Iliadic context or Graves's own. It is also telling that, for the most part, Graves simply refuses to translate the word *therapon*. We know that both the word and the cultic practice were familiar to Graves from his work on the White Goddess, so why would he ignore or dismiss a narrative feature that must have spoken to him emphatically?[292]

I would argue that, in Graves's translation, a similar process occurs to that which overtook him when translating Achilles's oath. There is an element of 'turning away', whether consciously or unconsciously, from the implications of *therapon* as it relates to his own

[291] Nagy, *Best of the Achaeans*, p. 113.

[292] In *The White Goddess*, Graves uses the terms 'surrogate', 'substitute', or '*tanist*' (its Celtic equivalent) to signify the role of the *therapon*. Cf. '[T]he King in early Mediterranean society was, to begin with, merely the ruling Queen's handsome young escort, doomed to be sacrificed at the end of his term. But, by early historical times (to judge from Greek or Latin myths) he had won executive power as the Queen's representative, or King, and the privilege of sacrificing a substitute' (p. 494); 'Hercules is male leader of all orgiastic rites, and has twelve archer companions, including his spear-armed twin, who is his *tanist* or deputy' (p. 120).

biography. If indeed Graves 'imprinted' David on the figure of Patroklos, might an element of denial have caused an aversion to a term that so blatantly states his sacrificial role? If so, using Patroklos's name in lieu of the epithet allows more scope for establishing a more traditional father/son relationship between the pair, without dwelling overtly on the traumatic guilt that Graves felt following his death. Indeed, exchanges between Achilles and Patroklos that precede the *Patrokleia* set up this father/son dialectic. Early in Book 16 Patroklos, in mourning for the many Achaean lives that have been lost as a result of Achilles's revenge against the Greek army, visits Achilles to ask to fight in his stead. Visibly upset, he '[stands] by him and we[eps] warm tears, like a spring dark-running | that down the face of a rock impassable drips its dim water' (*Il.* 16.3-4). For the first time in the poem, Achilles responds with compassion to someone else's suffering:

> and swift-footed brilliant Achilleus looked on him in pity,
> and spoke to him aloud and addressed him in winged words: 'Why then
> are you crying like some poor little girl, Patroklos,
> who runs after her mother and begs to be picked up and carried,
> and clings to her dress, and holds her back when she tries to hurry,
> and gazes tearfully into her face, until she is picked up?
> You are like such a one, Patroklos, dropping those soft tears.' (*Il.* 16.5-11)

It is generally accepted within Homeric scholarship that this section marks the inauguration of Achilles's shift from a state of suffering-from to a state suffering-with: he begins to extend beyond himself and participate in the normative social word from which he has withdrawn. Yet Graves's translation deflects this reading:

Achilles rallied him: 'Why come weeping to me, Patroclus, like a heart-broken little girl to her mother?

' "Mother," sobs the pretty creature,
Clutching at her gown,
"Take me with you, pick me up,
Carry me to town!"

'And the mother, though molested,
Has no other choice:
She obeys that tearful, shrill,
Too insistent voice.' (*AA,* p. 263; original quotation marks)

Far from 'rallying' Patroklos, this sequence seems intended to demean and demoralise. The tender mockery of Lattimore's translation, crafted to convey the intimacy of the two heroes' relationship and, perhaps, the fact that Achilles is not yet completely comfortable expressing such an alien ('weak') emotion as pity, is elided. A historical precedent for this lies in the work of the Homeric grammarian Aristarchus of Samothrace (c. 220-143 B.C.),

> who wished to replace the [Homeric] manuscripts' unanimously transmitted […] 'pitied' [at 16. 5] with the unsupported conjecture […] 'was astonished at' on the grounds that, if Achilles really felt pity for Patroclus, he would not have made fun of him by comparing him to a little girl.[293]

Graves appears to be reflexively following Aristarchus's lead here. The little girl of the simile is 'shrill' and 'too insistent'–there is nothing 'soft' about her tears–and the mother figure (who stands for Achilles) feels 'molested'. Despite Graves's obvious affection for David, this family

[293] Glenn W. Most, 'Anger and Pity in Homer's *Iliad*', in *Ancient Anger: Perspectives from Homer to Galen,* ed. by Susanna Braund and Glenn W. Most (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), pp. 50-75 (p. 68).

portrait is far closer to the dynamic the two shared than the one Lattimore's translation depicts.

Graves's relationship with his son was undoubtedly strained following his decision to leave Nancy and their children in 1927 in order to start a new life with Laura Riding (David would have been seven years old, the eldest of three). There are numerous accounts of squabbles between the two in Graves's diaries: an entry for 2nd June 1936 reads '[A letter t]o David discouraging Nazi enthusiasm'; for 21st August 1937: 'David got angry & rushed away with *Time* when I didn't want him to remove it'; for 7th October 1938: 'A reckless letter from David. Impertinent to me, impertinent to Laura.'[294] This familial in-fighting is all rather par for the course, but David also chose to attend Cambridge rather than his father's *alma mater* Oxford, a decision that Graves felt as a personal slight. As Martin Seymour-Smith notes, 'Graves's antipathy to Cambridge, if not all Cambridge men, [was] more than skin deep', and indeed in 1937 he wrote to L. A. G. Strong that 'I wanted David to go to Wadham because at the moment it is the best of the smaller Oxford colleges; but he apparently is steering for Jesus Camb. and naturally one can't Oppose!'[295] There must have been some element of opposition, however, as he received a letter from David in 1938 which reads:

> I am sorry you are so against me going to Cambridge. I don't see any reason for my not doing so. Apparently you think it would be nice for me to go to St John's and be received with open arms, just because some of my relations happened to have made a name for themselves. I think there could be nothing more loathsome … my recollections of Oxford are unhappy and sordid–I'm sure I don't know why, but there it is …[296]

[294] Diary of Robert Graves 1935-39, Special Collections, University of Victoria. Available online at <http://spcoll.library.uvic.ca/Digit/GravesDiaryProject/home> [accessed 17 April 2014].
[295] Seymour-Smith, *Robert Graves,* p. 362; Robert Graves to L. A. G. Strong, 27 March 1937, Folder 4.10, L. A. G. Strong Collection, HRC.
[296] Qtd. in Seymour-Smith, *Robert Graves*, p. 362.

If we take the view that Graves reads Patroklos as a David figure, then the antagonism inherent to his translation becomes understandable. Just as Graves cannot 'Oppose' David's entrance to Cambridge, so the mother of the simile 'has no other choice' but to 'obey' her daughter, however grudgingly.

When we read this Gravesian father/son relationship as a palimpsest for Achilles and Patroklos's own, other divergences Graves makes from the source text become explicable. Further into their encounter at the start of Book 16, Patroklos finally entreats Achilles to allow him to lead the Myrmidons into battle in Achilles's place. Lattimore's translation reads:

> But if you are drawing back from some prophecy known in your own heart
>
> and by Zeus' will your honoured mother has told you of something,
>
> then send me out at least, let the rest of the Myrmidon people
>
> follow me, and I may be a light given to the Danaans. (*Il.* 16.36-9)

Graves has the following:

> Possibly your refusal to fight can be explained by some oracle, or by some promise that Zeus made your mother. If so, why should I not lead the Myrmidons as a forlorn hope against the enemy? Please put them under my orders (*AA*, p. 264)

Graves's use of the phrase 'forlorn hope' in place of Lattimore's 'light' is a critical mistranslation. Tapping into the discourse of Graves's mythography, his war experience, and the figure of the *therapon*, it exemplifies the role Graves understood Patroklos to assume. Lattimore's 'light' draws on the notion that Patroklos will serve as a shining beacon of hope

for the Greeks despite the fact that, as we know, it will inevitably be extinguished; it also sets up an opposition between Patroklos and Achilles, who in Book 18 will describe himself as 'no light of safety to Patroklos' (*Il.* 18.103). 'Forlorn hope' does very different work. We have already discussed the significance the military term held for Graves (as previously noted, '[t]he pride of "bearing it out even to the edge of doom" that sustains a soldier in the field,' he wrote in 1967, 'governs a poet's service to the Muse'), and when we consider the heroism and futility of David's last stand it seems likely that, along with the comrades Graves lost at the Somme, he stood as a paradigm for this particular notion of sacrifice.[297]

While Lattimore's 'light' plays with ideas of how easily it can be extinguished into its obverse, darkness, Graves's prefiguration of Patroklos's imminent death is sketched far more insistently than the original text allows. He makes explicit the narrative convention that

> Patroklos cannot fight alone, cannot defeat Hector alone, and can succeed only if he fights together with Achilles. Once Patroklos fights alone, he will die. And it is in this telling context, at *Iliad* XVI 244, that the wording of Achilles refers to Patroklos as his personal *therapon* [which essentially means] that *Patroklos is doomed to die as the other self of Achilles*.[298]

This relates significantly to David's death, albeit obliquely. Obviously it is not the case that David was literally fighting in his father's place: although he tried unsuccessfully to re-enlist in the RWF, the likelihood that–had he succeeded–Graves would have attacked the Japanese bunker so that his son did not have to is patently absurd. Yet we know that, following the loss of his friends and the men under his command at the Somme, Graves suffered profoundly not

[297] Graves, 'Lecture One', in *Poetic Craft*, pp. 108-9.
[298] Gregory Nagy, *The Ancient Greek Hero in 24 Hours* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2013), pp. 146-7.

only from moral injury but also from the aspect of PTSD known as survivor guilt.[299] How much more acute must this have been in relation to his son's death, especially as Graves considered himself *deuteropotmos*, one who has effectively cheated death? In short, would Graves had believed that by escaping death on his twenty-first birthday, he in some way condemned his first born son to die in his stead?

If Patroklos is 'doomed to die as the other self of Achilles', that doom has been orchestrated, as discussed above, by Achilles himself. So too Graves, who throughout his work on the White Goddess is so invested in the practice of sacrificial surrogacy, must have felt responsible for David's death, which in turn will have inflected his mode of mourning. One of the most lyrical passages in Book 16 is Achilles's prayer to Zeus for Patroklos's safety, which I quote here at length:

> 'High Zeus, lord of Dodona, Pelasgian, living afar off,
> brooding over wintry Dodona, your prophets about you
> living, the Selloi who sleep on the ground with feet unwashed. Hear me.
> As one time before when I prayed to you, you listened
> and did me honour, and smote strongly the host of the Achaians,
> so one more time bring to pass the wish that I pray for.
> For see, I myself am staying where the ships are assembled,
> but I send out my companion and many Myrmidons with him
> to fight. Let glory, Zeus of the wide brows, go forth with him.
> Make brave the heart inside his breast, so that even Hektor
> will find out whether our henchman knows how to fight his battles
> by himself, or whether his hands rage invincible only
> those times when I myself go into the grind of the war god.

299 Cf. Graves's poem 'The Survivor Comes Home' (1918): 'Am I alive and the rest | Dead, all dead? sweet friends […] | For me now night never ends, | A night without rest. (*TCP*, p. 815)

> But when he has beaten back from the ships their clamorous onset,
>
> then let him come back to me and the running ships, unwounded,
>
> with all his armour and with the companions who fight close beside him.'
>
> (*Il.* 16.233-48)

Acknowledging its narrative significance, Graves renders this section in verse:

> 'Pelasgian ZEUS, you live and move
>
> In chill Dodona's awesome grove,
>
> Surrounded by your Sellian priests–
>
> They lie upon the ground like beasts
>
> With unwashed legs, and from the sound
>
> Of leaves true oracles expound.
>
> You are the god who pitied me,
>
> Who honourably made good my plea
>
> By humbling Agamemnon's prides;
>
> O now, once more, be at my side,
>
> While here I wait unarmed, and send
>
> Patroclus out, who calls me friend,
>
> My warlike Myrmidons to lead
>
> Against the Trojans.
>
> Deign to speed
>
> His victory, O All-Seeing One;
>
> Vouchsafe that when the fight is done
>
> Hector will grant that my dear squire
>
> Burns with his own unaided fire:
>
> Not waiting for me on the field,
>
> To help him shine with spear and shield;
>
> Also, that when from this our fleet

The routed enemy retreat,

He shall march back across the plain

Unwounded to my arms again.' (*AA*, p. 268)

Profoundly reminiscent, especially in the last stanza, of 'A Ghost from Arakan', this poetic interlude is rife with mistranslations that, as will be seen, edge it away from prayer and into guilt-ridden elegy.

The first divergence Graves makes from the source text is his expansion of Homer's description of the cultic site of Dodona where, according to Jane Harrison's *Prolegomena*–one of Graves's source texts for *The White Goddess*–the Pelasgian (pre-Hellenic) and Achaean cultures first met.[300] While Graves includes the details of the Sellian priests' 'unwashed legs' and the fact that they 'lie upon the ground', he adds that this makes them akin to 'beasts' and that they derive their oracles from 'leaves'. This latter point refers to the prophetic oak at Dodona in which the god was said to reside. The Pelasgi, as Lewis Spence suggests, regarded the oak at Dodona as 'the tree of life', and believed the rustling of its leaves and the voices of the doves which lived in its branches to bespeak the god's presence.[301] Aeschylus mentions the sacred tree in *Prometheus Bound,* in which Prometheus, assuring Io that he knows what has happened during her journey thus far, says that she has travelled to 'Dodona where | is the oracular seat of Zeus Thesprotian, |the talking oaks, a wonder past belief'.[302]

We can deduce that this detail's importance for Graves lies in the scholarly view that, as Harrison contends, Dodona was the site at which the particular blend of Pelasgian and Achaean belief systems led to the displacement of the 'old Earth Mother and her dove

[300] Jane Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (1903; Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1991), p. 333.
[301] Lewis Spence, *An Encyclopedia of Occultism* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2006), p. 309.
[302] Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, trans. by David Grene, in *Greek Tragedies*, ed. by David Grene and Richmond Lattimore, Vol. 1, 2nd edn. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1991), pp. 61-106 (ll. 830-2).

priestesses' by 'Zeus and his shadow-wife, Dione'.[303] Achilles's prayer is thus directed at a god who, in Graves's mythography, is both impotent and culpable for usurping the true, matriarchal religion of the White Goddess. In *The Greek Myths* he writes of the 'Earth-goddess of Dodona, who appeared in triad' (*TGM*, p. 143):

> All oracles were originally delivered by [her], whose authority was so great that patriarchal invaders made a practice of seizing her shrines and […] appointing priests. Thus Zeus at Dodona […] took over the cult of the oracular oak, sacred to Dia or Dione (*TGM*, p. 181)

In the Olympian religion Dione, whom Graves refers to as 'divine queen', is rendered ancillary, a 'shadow-wife' (*TGM*, p. 759) to Dodonaean Zeus, typifying the patriarchal project Graves so despises. In *The Anger of Achilles*, Achilles's prayer to Zeus is therefore rendered foolhardy and futile–it is the Goddess whom he should be supplicating to save Patroklos. The priests who attend the oracle are for Graves not pious but beast-like; that they 'lie upon the ground' does not bespeak 'a form of primitive ascetism', as W. Crooke suggests, but that they are lowly, false prophets; that their legs are 'unwashed' is not a 'survival of some ascetic ritual, as the Hindu Faqir smears himself with dust and ashes to indicate […] that he is in a state of taboo', but evidence of their patriarchal taintedness and impurity.[304]

From the outset, then, *The Anger of Achilles*'s version of the prayer is entrenched in irony (note Graves's derisive 'O All-Seeing One') and ineffectiveness, clearly foreshadowing the impossibility of Patroklos's hoped-for survival. The lines 'Vouchsafe that when the fight is done | Hector will grant that my dear squire | Burns with his own unaided fire' both reflect and manipulate Lattimore's 'Make brave the heart inside his breast, so that even Hektor |

[303] Harrison, *Prolegomena*, p. 333.
[304] W. Crooke, 'Some Notes on Homeric Folk-Lore', *Folklore*, 19/1 (1908), 52-77 (pp. 68-9).

will find out whether our henchman knows how to fight his battles | by himself'. Patroklos is specifically *Achilles's* 'dear squire', re-enforcing the heroes' personal relationship, whereas in Lattimore he is 'henchman' to the Myrmidons as a collective unit. 'Burns with his own unaided fire' renders Lattimore's 'knows how to fight his battles | by himself' as dramatic metaphor, and incorporates elements of Graves's earlier sonnet 'To Lucia at Birth' (1945), written to celebrate the arrival of his daughter on 21 July 1943–just months after David was declared Missing in Action. Considering the poem was written to welcome a child so hard on the heels of the loss of his first, during the ongoing uncertainty of the war that killed him, its intensity of feeling is not unusual. The octave reads:

> Though the moon beaming matronly and bland
> Greets you, among the crowd of the new-born,
> With 'welcome to the world' yet understand
> That still her pale, lascivious unicorn
> And bloody lion are loose on either hand:
> With din of bones and tantarará of horn
> Their fanciful cortège parades the land –
> Pest on the high road, wild-fire in the corn. (*TCP*, p. 409)

For Graves, the moon was anything but 'matronly and bland', and his warning to his daughter is not to trust her apparent wholesomeness: she is a harbinger of madness, and her greeting–'welcome to the world'–is almost malevolent in tone. The moon's attendants, the 'lascivious unicorn' and 'bloody lion' of the British Royal coat of arms, mark the insidious patriarchy and violence that characterise the world Lucia is being welcomed into. As heraldic supporters the animals' enmity is the stuff of folklore, prompting D. H. Lawrence to ask in *The Crown*,

> What is it then, that they want, that they are forever rampant and unsatisfied, the king of beasts and the defender of virgins? What is this crown that hovers between them, unattainable? Does either of them ever hope to get it? […] Now they are at it, they have forgotten all about the crown. It is a greater thing to have an enemy than an object.[305]

Although Graves's opinion of Lawrence was notoriously low,[306] the phrase '[i]t is a greater thing to have an enemy than an object' resonates with 'To Lucia at Birth', which dwells–at its heart–on hostility. 'Rampant and unsatisfied', too, speaks to the idea of a world in which violence, often unjustifiable, is an all too prevalent state. The 'pale'ness of the unicorn brings to mind the threatening white of the goddess, in this instance not 'defender of virgins' but overtly sexual in its lasciviousness, and references the 'pale horse' of Revelation 6:8, whose rider is death.

This allusion to the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse is reinforced in the final line of the octave, where 'Pest on the high road' draws on the notion of pestilence roaming unchecked.[307] The final phrase, 'wild-fire in the corn', suggests both famine (another of the Four Horsemen's weapons) and unbridled destruction, while also obliquely referencing a more contemporary phenomenon. Fireweed, or *chamerion angustifolium*, is so-called because it is often the first coloniser in the soil after forest fires; during World War Two, however, it earned the name bombweed due to its rapid growth in areas bombed by the Luftwaffe. As Kersnowski asserts, the sonnet thus 'illustrates the nature of Graves's understanding of war'

[305] D. H. Lawrence, 'The Crown', in *Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine and Other Essays*, ed. by Michael Herbert (Cambridge: CUP, 1988), pp. 251-306 (p. 253).
[306] In a 1944 letter to Peter Gamble he writes (with deletions included), '[a]s for D. H. Lawrence as a 'vulgar bard', ~~well, he *was* bawdy [very often] sometimes and he *was* vulgar [in the] very often in [his] the sense of he was~~ no, I wouldn't say that: but I admit that his 'Dionysian' prose has ~~so a~~ a repellent ~~quality for me a~~ quality ~~that I do not keeps his I~~ for me, ~~that I cannot be comfortable in a room where his books are on a shelf.~~ which I ~~would ch~~ can only explain as a sort of ~~smell~~ sick-room smell.' Folder 4.2, Robert Graves Collection, HRC.
[307] 'And [the Horsemen] were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts of the earth.' Revelation 6.8, English Standard Version Bible.

and the 'lost belief in a self-determined life' that it engendered.[308] At this juncture it had changed to belief in a life that 'is determined by unpredictable and uncontrollable violence predicated by a force he could neither influence nor avoid', a certainty made more acute by David's death.[309] Achilles's elegiac hope that Patroklos 'Burns with his own unaided fire' not only attests that he wishes his friend to succeed in combat without him, it also draws on Graves's conception, in 'To Lucia at Birth', of the insane and destructive activity of war, as rampant and cataclysmic as 'wild-fire in the corn.' Both Patroklos and David, characterised in the last by their heroic deeds in combat, burned with this 'fire'–and it is this which killed them.

At its heart, as in the source text, Graves's prayer is for the safe return of Patroklos. In Lattimore this is figured as 'let him come back to me and the running ships, unwounded, | with all his armour and with the companions who fight close beside him.' In *The Anger of Achilles*, Achilles simply asks that Patroklos 'march back across the plain | Unwounded to my arms again.' Again, the elegiac strain is notable; Graves's Achilles's plea is plaintive, almost tender, while Lattimore's focuses as much on the safe return of Achilles's famous armour and the Myrmidon host as it does on Patroklos himself. The false hope in 'A Ghost from Arakan' that '*He was not killed*' is evident here, as Graves's Achilles gives voice to the translator's impotent wish to hold his dead son once more. It is in Book 18, however, that Graves moves beyond an articulation of loss and his allusions to David as ritual *therapon* come to the fore.

In conversation with his mother, Thetis, Achilles assures her that he 'must die soon […]; since I was not to stand by my companion | when he was killed' (*Il.* 18.96-7). Graves renders this as 'I failed him in his hour of need, as I failed my other comrades' (p. 297): the pervasive sense of guilt we find in Book 16 continues, with Graves alluding to his failure not

[308] Frank Kersnowski, 'Robert Graves's Enduring War', *Gravesiana,* 4/1 (2014), 125-41 (pp. 136-7).
[309] Kersnowski, 'Robert Graves's Enduring War', p. 137.

only to protect David but also to save the comrades who died during the First World War. A crucial mistranslation at *Il.* 18.104, however, opens up a new perspective: while Lattimore's Achilles describes himself as 'a useless weight on the good land' because of his refusal to fight while his men went to war, Graves's Achilles is 'a useless encumbrance to the earth' (*AA*, p. 297). This image, as Hammer contends, 'strikes at the heart of self-esteem, [an] esteem [connected] to a failure to take care of another.'[310] Moreover, in Graves's version Achilles becomes the epitome of all the translator detests about the current age. 'Encumbrance' signifies a state of being characterised by molestation and perplexity; Achilles has become a burden or impediment to the earth itself (and all that implies for Graves in terms of Goddess-worship), rather than a simply static 'weight', an immovable body *on* the 'land' or ground. As he writes in *The White Goddess*,

> to think with perfect clarity in a poetic sense one must first rid oneself of a great deal of intellectual *encumbrance*, including all dogmatical doctrinal prepossessions: membership of any political party or religious sect or literary school deforms the poetic sense [emphasis mine]. *TWG,* p. 400.

By refusing to fight and relinquishing responsibility for Patroklos Achilles counters Graves's central belief system. Achilles's dogma is his own pride and self-involvement, a condition that is anathema to the mythography of the Goddess–in which the poet must submit fully to her demands–and for the conditions of military heroism–in which the officer must put his men before himself. Had he considered events with 'perfect clarity in a poetic sense' he would have been granted the foreknowledge that the reader has possessed all along: Patroklos will die because Achilles cannot. As soon as he is given dispensation to fight he becomes Achilles's surrogate.

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[310] Hammer, 'Political Ethic', pp. 160-1.

The tensions here are, admittedly, problematic. If Graves's Achilles bears traces, as the text suggests, of the poet himself, the figuration is unflattering at best. But we know from biographical accounts that while pride and self-involvement are not terms Graves would use to publicly describe himself, commentators might be less kind–and they are certainly traits of which his family would accuse him. While Achilles exemplifies everything that Graves detests, in *The Anger of Achilles* he is nonetheless moulded to reflect a side of Graves that very much existed. In Graves's *Patrokleia* we thus find a paean to David and, more significantly, the traumatic outlines of his father's response to his death, sketched far more coherently than the single poem he dedicates to it. The translation takes 'A Ghost From Arakan' and sets it on the epic stage, but the lines 'While here I wait unarmed, and send | Patroclus out, who calls me friend', taken from Achilles prayer to Zeus, maintain the bitter irony and intimacy of feeling we find in the earlier poem. Achilles 'send[s]' Patroklos 'out' to die, just as Graves 'strands' David in the fatal 'jungle-war' that persists for the poet long after his son's death.

IV

Given that my analysis of *The Anger of Achilles* thus far has focused a Gravesian articulation of traumatic experience unmediated by the Goddess myth and, to some degree, unattenuated by the act of translation, what evidence can we find of her recuperative power in the text? Indeed, when she is revealed through Graves's perception of the *Iliad*'s 'pure language', does translation become a more effective vehicle for catharsis? Although she does not appear in *The Anger of Achilles* in a literal sense she is nonetheless (as with the majority of his later work) a potent presence. In what Sibylle Ihm refers to as Graves's mythographical 'universe of self-

referencing', she is the answer to many of the hermeneutic and ontological questions which the *Iliad* raises, and, at certain points in his translation, Graves's quest to reveal the 'pure language' of the *Iliad* results in a vision of the Goddess that is determined by the nature of his combat-related trauma.[311] One such passage can be found in Book 18, in which the poet diligently describes the images engraved on Achilles's sublime Hephaestean shield. First Lattimore's translation:

> But the other army, as soon as they heard the uproar arising
> from the cattle, as they sat in their councils, suddenly mounted
> behind their light-foot horses, and went after, and soon overtook them.
> These stood their ground and fought a battle by the banks of the river,
> and they were making casts at each other with their spears bronze-headed;
> and Hate was there with Confusion among them, and Death the destructive;
> she was holding a live man with a new wound, and another
> one unhurt, and dragged a dead man by the feet through the carnage.
> The clothing upon her shoulders showed strong red with the men's blood.
> All closed together like living men and fought with each other
> and dragged away from each other the corpses of those who had fallen. (*Il.,* 18.530-40.)

And now Graves's:

> Meanwhile, the allied leaders, still busily discussing capitulation, heard a distant hubbub, and hurried to the ford. Some of their chariots had already sprung the ambush and become engaged. On the battlefield, Hephaestus engraved the figures of Strife, Tumult, and Death. Strife, recognizable by her blood-stained tunic, grasped a freshly-wounded man; Tumult, an unwounded one; Death held a corpse

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[311] Sybille Ihm, 'Robert Graves's *The Greek Myths* and Matriarchy', in *Robert Graves and the Classical Tradition*, ed. by Gibson, pp. 165-80 (p. 169).

> by its ankles. The combatants were extraordinarily life-like: they cast spears, lunged, struck, hauled away the dead for despoilment. (*AA*, p. 306)

Graves significantly alters this scene of military retaliation. His selective, deliberate misreading of this section effaces the patriarchal Olympian mythology which it alludes to, and–as will be seen–relocates the *Iliad*'s narrative within the matriarchal discourse of *The White Goddess.* Graves also presents us with a battlefield that bears traces of the Somme, relating aspects of the scene to his own experience of modern combat. Note his use of military anachronisms: Lattimore's 'other army' is replaced by 'allied leaders'; 'overtook them' by 'sprung the ambush'; and 'fought a battle' by 'became engaged.' Moreover, Graves's treatment of Iliadic sound signifies this passage as one which bears the marks of his own trauma, often represented, as discussed in Chapter One, by the trope of overwhelming noise.

'Hubbub', the oddly childish word that replaces Lattimore's 'uproar', is a particularly Gravesian descriptor. Staunchly proud of his paternal Irish heritage (his Grandfather, Charles Graves, was the Bishop of Limerick), he would have been drawn, one feels, to the word's Irish connotations: the OED cites its etymological root as *abu!*, the war-cry of the ancient Irish, which developed into the sixteenth-century *hooboube*, 'often referred to as an Irish outcry'.[312] In modernity, it refers to both the noise of a crowd and to the shouting of a war cry–apt, then, for the context in which Graves uses it in *The Anger of Achilles*. 'Hubbub' appears elsewhere in his short story 'The Myconian' (1976) as an 'indescribable' outburst generated in the throes of 'pain [and] misery', and provoked by the sight of death.[313] As ever, Gravesian representations

[312] "hubbub, n." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press [accessed 17 June 2015].
[313] Robert Graves, 'The Myconian', in *Robert Graves: Complete Short Stories*, ed. by Graves, pp. 280-93 (1976; p. 292).

of sound are aligned with traumatic experience. The word also recurs in 'Blackening Sky', an entry in his Colophon to *Love Respelt* (1967):

> Lightning enclosed by a vast ring of mirrors
>
> Instant thunder extravagantly bandied
>
> Between red cliffs no hawk may rest upon,
>
> […]
>
> Against this insensate hubbub of subsidence
>
> Our voices, always true to a fireside tone (*TCP*, p. 594)

Not only do these stanzas draw on Shelley's assertion that '[p]oets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration; the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present', here 'hubbub' encapsulates the incipient, perpetually reflected, and thus seemingly inescapable chaos of the patriarchal mechanarchy which threatens the poet and his Muse, cast in stark relief against the muted, 'fireside tone' of their own 'voices' which softly '[m]editate on the secret marriage of flowers | or the bee's paradise' (*TCP*, p. 594).[314] The noise which 'hubbub' embodies, both here and in Graves's translation of the *Iliad*, is formless, destitute of sense or feeling, and therefore anathema to the poet. In *The Anger of Achilles*, it specifically projects connotations of the mechanised horror of the Somme, as well as the apocalyptic cacophony that attended it, onto the Shield's mimesis of the Skamandrian plain: whereas Lattimore's army is roused by the 'uproar arising | from the cattle', Graves's 'allied leaders' are responding to the 'distant hubbub' made by the 'chariots [that] had already

[314] Percy Bysshe Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, in *The Selected Poetry and Prose of Shelley*, ed. by Bruce Woodcock (Ware, Herts.: Wordsworth Editions Ltd., 1994), pp. 635-60 (p. 660).

sprung the ambush and become engaged.' It is the traumatic dissonance of battle which dominates this scene as Graves envisions it, not the lowing of livestock, and when the allied leaders hurry to the ford to find the source of the noise they are met by the embodiments of those aspects of warfare that Graves associates with the noise of battle, and therefore his own neurasthenic condition: 'Strife, Tumult, and Death'. It is at this juncture, however, that Graves rewrites patriarchal Homeric Olympian dynamics by introducing the figure of the White Goddess herself.

In terms of the Shield's ekphrasis, one would find difficulty arguing against the proposition that this scene be categorised as Homeric narrative: at this juncture in Lattimore's translation, we are 'viewing' a battlefield, not 'reading' a shield; there is no break in the forward motion of action. Graves, however, 'zooms out' before the three aspects of warfare can truly materialise: 'On the battlefield, *Hephaestus engraved the figures* of Strife, Tumult, and Death [emphasis mine].' In a 1955 letter to the mycologist R. Gordon Wasson, Graves writes that 'Hephaestus, originally a Helladic hero–he was matrilineal, without a father–is said to have been educated by the Goddess Thetis'.[315] By reintroducing Hephaestus into the scene, Graves not only reminds us that he is resituating the *Iliad*'s narrative within a matriarchal framework–the god was created by a self-sufficient femininity, and the shield, the bearer of the very events we are reading, is implicated in that matrilineal line–he also implicitly draws Thetis into the narrative, a deity who, Graves writes in *The White Goddess*, was an incarnation of the Triple Goddess succeeded by Olympian Zeus c. 1243 BC (*TWG*, p. 222). Graves thus implies that the scene we are reading is being created by a craftsman sprung from purely feminine origins, and whom the White Goddess herself, in one of her many aspects, has instructed in his art.

[315] Robert Graves to R. Gordon Wasson, n.d. [c. October 1955], Tina and R. Gordon Wasson Archive, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., USA.

The Greek word *eris* is traditionally translated, as Lattimore has done, as 'Hate' rather than 'Strife'. Both words equate to discord and antagonism, but 'Hate' implies a more personal aversion, whereas 'Strife' signifies the impersonal hostilities of enemy factions that characterised the Great War. *Kudoimo* refers to the uproar, confusion, or din of battle, and here Graves substitutes Lattimore's more generic 'Confusion' with 'Tumult'. Like 'hubbub', this dwells on the noise produced by the antagonists–a noise that Graves seems unable to escape. Finally, we are introduced to *ker*–'Death.' At this stage, Graves's deliberate misreading comes to the fore. It would be salient, therefore, to provide a brief mythological background for this figure.

Ker is not, in fact, death itself; this is *thanatos*, whom ker attends. A complex, protean figure, *ker* is a female death-spirit of mutable form. Like Hate she is more personal than death, and therefore significantly more dangerous: '[e]ach man', writes James Redfield, 'has his own *ker*, who watches him hungrily. The *ker* has an interest in his death and leads him to it.'[316] A 'ravisher and swallower', *ker* is thus bound inextricably to two aspects of Graves's Triple Goddess ('lover and layer-out'), as this wonderful passage, taken from Emily Vermeule's *Aspects of Death*, elucidates:[317]

> [T]he *ker* of black *thanatos* can knock a man down and master him; no one can duck or avoid her, she is ten thousand. She is more active and vivid than the usual personifications of battle-field panic and noise, for she is sometimes dressed and her clothes are sprinkled with blood; she has hands and drags corpses by the heels; she has jaws and will later have claws. She is the poetic and private equivalent of the corpse-ravagers of war, the birds and dogs, or the sphinxes, Sirens and Harpies; she has been

[316] James M. Redfield, *Nature and Culture in the* Iliad*: The Tragedy of Hector* (1975; Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1994), p. 184.

[317] Emily Vermeule, *Aspects of Death in Early Greek Art and Poetry* (Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 1979), p. 253.

> understood as a ghost, a bacillus, lust, disease, lack of morals; a sister of sleep, death, and the furies […]. In art she is winged, and may be designed both as attractive and repulsive, as death is both.[318]

Considering *ker*'s points of contact with Graves's Goddess, that 'ancient power of fright and lust', his treatment of this figure in his own translation is particularly telling. Although *ker* recurs forty-seven times throughout the *Iliad*, Homer only personifies her fully on Achilles's shield, where she holds 'a live man with a new wound, […] another one unhurt, and drag[s] a dead man by the feet.' Across all of the other translations I have consulted, she is thus figured as Death, heralding, facilitating, and revelling in the demise of the combatants. In *The Anger of Achilles*, however, some of her part is given to other players, and Homer's Olympian dynamics are subverted: it is 'Strife' who wears *ker*'s blood-stained tunic, and 'grasp[s] a freshly wounded man', while 'Tumult' attends the 'unwounded' one; *ker* is associated only with the dead, not the dying–only with those whom the Goddess favours, who, like the second-fated, have passed beyond mortal time. She 'h[olds] a corpse by the ankles' instead of 'dragg[ing] [him] by the feet through the carnage', enacting both a lover's embrace and the bearing aloft of a sacrificial offering. Within the context of the *Iliad*, *ker*'s dragging of the dead warrior foreshadows Achilles's desecration of Hector's body. What work, then, is Graves's reconceptualisation of this scene doing, and how does it contribute to situating *The Anger of Achilles* in the corpus of his writing that strives towards post-traumatic catharsis? To address this question, it is fruitful to regard Graves's passage as the product of densely layered lenses: here, his war experience and personal Myth collude to furnish Homer's *Iliad* with a representation of the Goddess, in her third aspect of *death*-goddess, reigning over trenches which signify both the Trojan War and the Battle of the Somme.

[318] Vermeule, *Aspects of Death*, pp. 39-40.

The *keres*, as Redfield points out, have teeth, wings and talons: they are thus a composite of the conventional Homeric scavenger animals, dogs and birds, that eat the unburied dead, and are therefore 'emblematic of the antifuneral.'[319] *Keres*, however, do not feast on unburied corpses; they eat men who are dying. 'The presence of the *keres* on the battlefield', Redfield continues, therefore

> suggests that the antifuneral is latent in all combat–that the defilement of the dead by scavengers is an extension of combat and a development of its inner logic. […] At the moment of death the organism is converted from subject to object; flesh becomes meat. The *keres* devouring the dying are an image of organic death.[320]

Unlike Lattimore's 'Death', Graves's *ker*, or 'Death-*Goddess'*, does not participate in this objectifying process. It is Strife who grips a freshly-wounded man, reduced by the obliterating enmity of war to nothing more than an assemblage of functioning and non-functioning parts; as in the dehumanising, regurgitated casualty lists of the Great War, the individual soldier becomes nothing more than a statistic, categorised as able-bodied, wounded, or dead. 'Tumult', the trauma of unbearable noise, 'grasps', clutches, and greedily seizes the senses of the (visibly) unwounded man, as psychically debilitating as the physical 'Strife' manifested outwardly in the wound of his comrade. 'Death', however, stands aloof; her charge is no longer a dying or traumatised man, but a 'corpse'. Without its Gravesian context, this term could confuse my reasoning; a corpse, by definition, literalises the breakdown between subject and object that is crucial for the establishment of identity. As Julia Kristeva writes in *Powers of Horror,* '[t]he corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is

[319] Redfield, *Nature*, p. 184.
[320] Redfield, *Nature*, pp. 184-5.

death infecting life. Abject.'[321] Graves held a similar view, but the valorising principles of God and science, emblematic as they are of the patriarchy he detests, are displaced by suffering and sacrifice. On the battlefield, the corpses of his fellow soldiers were testaments to their sacrifice, and they often function in his work as signifiers of consolation. In 'The Dead Fox Hunter', he commemorates an incident at Loos where he found the corpse of a fellow officer in no man's land who, 'hit in seventeen places […] had forced his knuckles into his mouth to stop himself crying out and attracting any more men to their death' (*GTAT*, p. 133) by attempting to save him:

> We touched his hand – stone cold – and he was dead,
>
> And they, all dead behind,
>
> Had never reached their goal, but they died well
>
> … For those who live uprightly and die true
>
> Heaven has no bars or locks (*TCP*, p. 19)

In *Goodbye to All That*, Graves describes the corpses abandoned on no man's land that, 'after the first day or two, […] swelled and stank' (*GTAT*, p. 137). By lifting the dead body above the Iliadic battlefield, Graves's 'Death' saves the warrior from this organic, antifuneral fate. The fallen soldier remains part of culture, not nature.

The dead man is thus held in a moment of stillness in a climate of nightmare, by the Olympian figure in the scene who is most significantly related to the White Goddess, and as such this image both corresponds with Graves's Myth and disassociates it from Kristeva's notion of a corpse 'seen without God'. This figure of mortal death, suspended and subverted,

[321] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1982), p. 4.

stands for the poet as *deuteropotmos*, second-fated, released from death–as Graves was at twenty-one–by the Goddess he serves, and who is literally *seen with him*. We are presented with an image of the White Goddess removing the soldier from the battlefield, extricating him from his traumatic surroundings. He has suffered, sacrificed his old self, and has been rewarded with her redemptive love. He will not rot, he will not be eaten; the possibility remains that he may be reborn, purified and healed.

What we find in these lines of Graves's translation, then, is a moment in which the poet rewrites the *Iliad* in order to dramatise, in the terminology of physical transcendence, his own metaphysical recovery from the effects of shell-shock–his ultimate struggle to be 'reborn', transfigured from traumatised subject into an individual who has, in his own words, 'ceased to feel the frantic strain of swimming against the stream of time.'[322] Within the new, matriarchal framework that Graves imposes on the *Iliad*, signified by both the Goddess's presence and his introduction of the matrilineal Hephaestus into the text, this passage moves away from the traditional concept of a translation towards a site of self-awareness and healing.

This transcendent state, in which Graves finds himself removed from the 'stream of time', was practically enacted by his retreat in 1929 to Déya, the Mallorcan village where–apart from the ten years marked by the Spanish Civil War–he would spend the rest of his life. There he lived in disregard of modernity, avoiding, as he wrote to Hugo Manning in 1950,

> what poets suffer who do not live (as I do) on reefs guarded by their hallucinations; […] But you see this is an enchanted island, prosaically enchanted against flying saucers and Anglo-Catholicism and the Partizan Review & it has been my home [since] I suddenly realized that the glory had departed from

[322] Robert Graves, 'Introduction', *The Common Asphodel*, p. x.

England; & upped sticks & offed.[323]

What other poets 'suffered' from was the 'loveless circumstance' of the mechanarchy, a state of being engendered by the degenerative turmoil of a post-war society that attacked both the psyche and the poetic sensibility. Graves would never re-enter the fray, either of battle or of 'history' as he conceived it, withdrawing from the terrors and confusion of the modern age and, as Carter puts it, his disengagement from society 'consolidated as no other Graves's sense of himself as being apart, fatedly different from his fellow men.'[324] For Graves, this withdrawal takes on ontological importance and religious significance because of his hierophany of the White Goddess, and, to some extent, *The Anger of Achilles* is doing similar work. By shaping the *Iliad* to the contours of the Goddess myth Graves enlists a canonical text–in the fullest sense of the word–as ballast to the idiosyncrasies of his personal poetic ideology, thus legitimising his retreat from the 'real' world to his hallucination-guarded reef of poetic iconoclasm. If the Goddess is enshrined in as paradigmatic and cogent a text as the *Iliad*, he is asserting, then surely her powers, including her cathartic potential, can be less convincingly denied.

* * *

When Graves describes the White Goddess as 'the ancient Mediterranean moon-goddess whom Homer invoked in the *Iliad* […] and to whom most traditional poets ever since have paid at any rate lip-service' (*TWG*, p. 490) he is undoubtedly referring to the opening lines of the epic's proem (which he translates as 'Sing, MOUNTAIN GODDESS, sing through me'

[323] Robert Graves to Hugo Manning, 29 March 1950, Hugo Manning Papers, HRC.
[324] Carter, *Robert Graves*, p. 27.

(*AA*, p. 39)). And yet this invocation extends, arguably, to Homer's *Ker*; it undoubtedly encompasses the paean of that other forerunner, Apuleius, and his address to the Goddess as Isis in Book 11 of his *Metamorphoses*. *The Golden Ass* and *The Anger of Achilles* perform, then, similar functions. By engaging in an idiosyncratic form of anthropological classicism, both sound the conditions of the Goddess myth, and both ground that myth in a foundational text that enables it to be brought to bear on the problem of his shell-shock. The war and Graves's neurasthenia are oblique but persistent ghosts lurking behind the arras of *The Golden Ass*; in *The Anger of Achilles*, based as it is on a source text which takes war as its subject, these tensions are amplified and encountered more directly. In each case, Graves's perception and redeployment of the source text's 'pure language' enables, in some places more successfully than others, a narration of his traumatic experience. Whether catharsis of any kind is achieved is, of course, speculation; but there can be little doubt that–unconsciously or consciously–the drive to broach the lacunas of referentiality that make up his fragmented history, from which the traumatic symptoms which he strives to articulate in his translations spring, takes up the earlier work of his suppressed war poetry. But is this mythopoetic approach to translation singular to Graves, or as a model for 'writing recovery' can it be extended beyond his work? Chapters Four and Five take up this question, exploring the relationship between the poetic conscience, translational project, and traumatic experience of Graves and those of a poet that could be said, like Lucius, to be an acolyte of his Goddess: Ted Hughes.

II: Ted Hughes

CHAPTER FOUR

TED HUGHES, AFTER GRAVES

I

> *Graves, once the social historian of The Long Week-End, withdrew forty years ago to Majorca and has since found a retreat even more securely insulated from British social and political realities–the mythological Never-Never Lands ruled over by goddesses, white and black, where lately he seems to have been joined in mumbo-jumbo by Ted Hughes.*
>
> – Donald Davie, *Thomas Hardy and British Poetry*[325]

Hughes and Graves, as Donald Davie disparagingly observes, are bound together by the figure of the White Goddess. Hughes had little time for Graves's historical fiction–*Count Belisarius* gave him 'that perpetual twist in the stomach that an apparent fake does'[326]–or poetry–'he's good I think within narrow limits, within a very barren bit of ground'[327]–but *The White Goddess* became, very early in his career, 'the chief holy book of [his] poetic conscience.'[328] He first read it at seventeen, after his favourite teacher gave him a copy before he left school, and it was the first book he recommended to his future wife, Sylvia Plath.[329] It would prove to be hugely influential on his own craft and poetic ethos, and his avowal to its

[325] (London: Routledge, 1973), p. 102.
[326] Ted Hughes to Sylvia Plath, 5 October 1956. In Christopher Reid, *Letters of Ted Hughes* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007), p. 58. Hereafter abbreviated to *LTH*.
[327] Ted Hughes to Sylvia Plath, 5 October 1956. *LTH*, p. 53.
[328] Ted Hughes to Robert Graves, 20 July 1967. *LTH*, p. 273.
[329] Cf. Ted Hughes to Robert Graves, 20 July 1967. *LTH*, p. 273.

theme of a manifest, female divine power would culminate in the inimitable *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being*, a Hughesian 'grammar of poetic myth' which makes happy bedfellows with Graves's tract. Hughes, too, is a poet whose work is often discussed in terms of trauma: the T. S. Eliot prize-winning *Birthday Letters* (1999) was received as an exposition of the 'big unmanageable event' that was his marriage to Plath and her suicide, as was the more symbolic and carnivalesque *Crow* (1970).[330] Hughes and Plath's tumultuous relationship and the tragic event that characterises it even find their analogue in Graves and Riding's own period of interdependent emotional turmoil, including Riding's failed suicide attempt in 1927.

The disparities between their poetic styles, however–Hughes is visceral where Graves is aloof–means that when they are discussed in comparison, this is often as far as the similarities are drawn. Yet while it is true that his marriage to Plath inflects the majority of Hughes's work, it is also widely recognised that, like Graves, Hughes's work bears the traumatic traces of the First World War. Both his father and uncle (William and Walt, respectively) fought in the conflict, and in his poetry and prose Hughes describes William as suffering from shell-shock following his return from Gallipoli. The Calder Valley in which Hughes spent his childhood was likewise ravaged by the loss of a generation of young men: as Henry Hart puts it, Hughes 'often described Yorkshire as being in perpetual mourning for the dead of World War I'.[331] Some critics have read Hughes comparatively with Wilfred Owen (whose *Collected Poems* he reviewed in 1964), but little work seems to have been done that contextualises Hughes's work in the light of Graves's own writing on the war.[332] Still less is

[330] Ted Hughes to Nicholas Hughes, 20 February 1998. *LTH*, p. 711.
[331] Henry Hart, 'Seamus Heaney & Ted Hughes: A Complex Friendship', in *Ted Hughes: From Cambridge to Collected*, ed. by Mark Wormald, Neil Roberts, and Terry Gifford (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 145-59 (p. 150).
[332] Cf. Leonard M. Scigaj, 'The Deterministic Ghost in the Machine of *Birthday Letters*', in *Ted Hughes: Alternative Horizons*, ed. by Joanny Moulin (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 1-16 (p. 14); Jo Gill, 'Ted Hughes and Sylvia

made of the fact that both Graves and Hughes were prolific translators. This, perhaps, is because once the bulk of Hughes's classical translations emerged (*Tales from Ovid* (1997), *The Oresteia* (1999), *Alcestis* (1999)) adaptations by modern poets were somewhat *de rigeur*. By the time *Alcestis* and *The Oresteia* were published Seamus Heaney had translated Sophocles's *Philoctetes* (*The Cure at Troy* (1991)), Tom Paulin had produced a version of Sophocles's *Antigone* (*The Riot Act* (1984)), and Derek Walcott had adapted Homer's *Odyssey* into the epic *Omeros* (1990)–to name a few. There is enough rich ground for comparatively analysing Hughes's translations with those of his contemporaries without casting back to Graves's, especially as the latter's source texts are–on the surface–so disparate from Hughes's own.

Yet when we consider these converging spheres–the traumatic effects of war; the White Goddess; classical translation–in their totality, it becomes apparent that while Hughes and Graves's relativity begins with the Goddess, it does not end there. The following chapter will discuss these three points of contact as a process of accretion, leading into a reading, in Chapter Five, of Hughes's translation of Seneca's *Oedipus* that intertextually maps it with Graves's *The Anger of Achilles* and *The Golden Ass*. In the process, I hope to ascertain not only that the Goddess and the spectre of the First World War are as present in Hughes's translations as they are in his poetry, but that these two forces are as mutually inclusive for Hughes as they are for Graves–indeed, that Hughes's exposure to the war by means of place and people left him particularly poised to embrace Graves's mythopoetics. The relationship between traumatic experience and Hughes's shamanic approach to translation will also be tested: his adherence to and fear of the primacy of an archetypal matriarchal force, and his attempts to access the primitive nature of classical myth by purging it of its patriarchal

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Plath', in *The Cambridge Companion to Ted Hughes* (Cambridge: CUP, 2011), ed. by Terry Gifford, pp. 53-66 (p. 64); Tim Kendall, 'Ted Hughes's 'Bayonet Charge''. Available at <http://war-poets.blogspot.co.uk/2012/04/ted-hughes-bayonet-charge> [accessed 22 January 2017].

palimpsests of scholarship–the drive to uncover a text's inner sense, or anthropological classicism, familiar to us from Graves–will be revealed as literary manifestations of a struggle to apprehend the traumatic implications of the First World War, which although experienced second-hand nonetheless functions as a displaced historical (in the sense of a personal history) event.

This final point warrants a brief aside. My argument is cumulative and tentative, and as such I recognise that a comparative analysis between the two poets that is couched in the discourse of the Great War is problematic. For Graves, of course, that experience was lived, while Hughes only felt the effects of the emotional, physical, and cultural aftermath: as Brearton puts it, the war became part of his 'social and cultural landscape, a still-living memory around [him]'.[333] Yet enough work has been done on the clinical phenomenon known as secondary trauma to support the validity of a reading that positions this 'still-living memory' not just 'around' but *within* the poet. Secondary traumatisation, as Gina Ross contends in *Beyond the Trauma Vortex* (2003), 'arises from the simple fact that, in dealing with the fear, pain, and suffering of traumatised people, […] bystanders often experience similar emotions and aftereffects themselves.'[334] More often than not, and certainly within the context of the First World War, these 'bystanders' were the family members of the soldiers who returned from the Front. These 'aftereffects and emotions' mimic and participate in those of the direct trauma subject: modern clinical research has provided ample evidence that, like PTSD, symptoms of Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorder include intrusive re-experiencing and avoidance.[335] When in *Ted Hughes and Trauma* (2016) Danny O'Connor proposes that Hughes's war poems 'do not detail the experience of growing up as a child of

[333] Brearton, 'But that is not new', p. 231.
[334] Gina Ross, *Beyond the Trauma Vortex: The Media's Role in Healing Fear, Terror, and Violence* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2003), p. 73
[335] Cf. Charles Figley, *Compassion Fatigue: Coping in Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorder in Those Who Treat the Traumatized* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

parents who lived through the war, but instead swallow the imagery and metaphors of the original World War I poets and regurgitate them in a more contemporary idiom', he is not entirely incorrect.[336] However, the poems in which Hughes deals with war are far more nuanced than a mere 'regurgitation': they are (perhaps, in *Hawk in the Rain* (1957), slightly clumsy) attempts to wrestle with a traumatic effect that is not felt and recapitulated superficially, but experienced at an intensely personal, psychological level.

The tensions surrounding what Marianne Hirsch has called 'postmemory', the quality of absence and presence that characterises generational transmission of trauma, evidence themselves in the (perfectly valid) arguments over who counts as a trauma subject, or what counts as a memory–or a traumatic occlusion of memory. For the purpose of this thesis, however, I would argue that as an individual whose formative years were dominated by the narrative of the First World War, Hughes–despite being separated in time and space from the war itself–can still be referred to as suffering from combat-related trauma. In his own words, he fell, like Alice through the looking glass, into 'the fairy-story world' of the First World War because he 'got the experience secondhand but *fairly whole*. And as it occurred to the actual participants [emphasis mine].'[337] He was an eyewitness to the long-reaching, directly traumatic effect of the war on the people and place that constituted his home, and while I allow that his symptoms will have been less existential and less of a threat to the self as Graves's, they were nonetheless equally real.

[336] Danny O'Connor, *Ted Hughes and Trauma: Burning the Foxes* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 110.
[337] Ted Hughes, 'On Writing for Radio', interview by Anthony Thwaite, 16 January 1963. Qtd. in Leonard .M. Scigaj, *The Poetry of Ted Hughes: Form and Imagination* (Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1986), p. 93.

II

'The First World War goes on getting stronger', Hughes writes in a 1965 review of an anthology of war poetry, 'our number one national ghost.'[338] It was a personal ghost, too–Brearton calls him 'one of the most war-haunted of post-1945 British poets'–and one that dogged him from his youth.[339] It grew 'stronger', as Hughes asserts, as it transformed from an unspoken reality into a commemorated myth, accruing the pity of the war poetry and the extrapolations of the memorialists; but for the poet its most urgent form would always be found in the figure of his shell-shocked father and the landscape of the Calder Valley. The war was central to Hughes's poetry from his first collection onwards: *The Hawk in the Rain, Wodwo* (1967), *Remains of Elmet* (1979), and *Wolfwatching* (1989) all contain poems that directly explore, to a lesser or greater extent, the effects of the war on his father, uncle, and Yorkshire itself; still more it permeates obliquely. William Hughes fought at Gallipoli with the Lancashire Fusiliers, and was embroiled in the disastrous offensive at W Beach that claimed 254 of the 950 men (a further 283 were injured) who landed there in April 1915.[340] The sole survivor of his battalion–which was brought up to battle strength three times during the campaign–he returned to England profoundly shell-shocked.[341] As Hughes describes him in 'Dust As We Are' (1989), he was 'killed, but alive', a *deutoropotmos* like Graves, whose hyper masculine 'displays of muscular definition' thinly disguised an eerily womblike (in its moistness and fecundity) inner landscape made up of

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[338] Ted Hughes, Review of *The Men Who March Away: Poems of the First World War*, ed. by I. M Parsons, *The Listener*, 1897 (5 August 1965), 208.
[339] Brearton, 'But that is not new', p. 235.
[340] 'The Gallipoli Campaign', *The National Archives.* Available at <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/firstworldwar/battles/gallipoli> [accessed 1 February 2017].
[341] Hughes references his father's status as a lone survivor in a late poem entitled 'The Last of the 1st/5th Lancashire Fusiliers'.

Swampquakes of the slime of puddled soldiers

Where bones and bits of equipment

Showered from every shell-burst. (*CP*, p. 753)

First hand accounts of the Cape Helles front-line give some insight into the horrors of William's experience, which is belied by the battalion war diary's clipped statement of 'Heavy Casualties.'[342] Barbed wire entanglements far into the sea meant that the Fusiliers struggled to make it ashore, with one survivor describing 'the front of the wire' as 'a thick mass of men, many of whom never moved again.'[343] The Turkish forces who occupied the cliffs above the beach subjected those that did to heavy artillery, resulting in a hellish landscape littered with disfigured corpses: 'Men had lost arms and legs,' attested one medic, as recorded in Geoffrey Moorhouse's study of the Gallipoli conflict, *Hell's Foundations* (1992), 'brains oozed out of shattered skulls, and lungs protruded from riven chests; many had lost their faces and were, I think, unrecognizable to their friends.'[344] As Hughes indicates in 'For the Duration' (1989), William's shell-shock manifested itself characteristically:

Your day-silence was the coma

Out of which your night-dreams rose shouting.

I could hear you from my bedroom –

The whole hopelessness still going on,

No man's land still crying and burning

Inside our house[345]

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[342] Qtd. in Peter Doyle, *Gallipoli 1915* (Stroud: Spellmount, 2011), p. 79.
[343] Captain H. R. Clayton, 1st Batallion Lancashire Fusiliers. Qtd. in Peter Doyle, *Gallipoli 1915* (Stroud: Spellmount, 2011), p. 79.
[344] Qtd. in Geoffrey Moorhouse, *Hell's Foundations* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1992), p. 66.
[345] Ted Hughes, 'For the Duration', in *Collected Poems*, ed. by Paul Keegan (London: Faber and Faber, 2003), p. 761. All further quotations are taken from this edition and are cited parenthetically in the text as (*CP*, page number).

William's 'day-silence' is typical of traumatised combat veterans, who generally find it impossible to discuss 'their' war with civilians. Indeed, in Hughes's case, there was a sense of that history being as challenging to hear as it was to vocalise. 'We were very close,' Hughes writes in an unsent letter to Moorhouse in 1994,

> and for his last decade he lived with me or near me, but I never questioned him directly. Never. I can hardly believe it now, but I didn't. He managed to convey the horror so nakedly that it fairly tortured me when he did speak about it.[346]

The ramifications of this incommunicability would become clear to Hughes later on, when he would describe his father–in 'Out' (1967)–as being mired in a traumatic history which he could no more leave behind than he could translate into narrative:

> While I, small and four,
> Lay on the carpet as his luckless double,
> His memory's buried, immovable anchor,
> Among jawbones and blown-off boots, tree-stumps, shell-cases and craters,
> Under rain that goes on drumming its rods and thickening
> Its kingdom, which the sun has abandoned, and where nobody
> Can ever move again from shelter. (*CP*, p. 165)

The 'immovable anchor' of William's memory neatly conceptualises the conditions of post-traumatic stress, in which memories lack verbal narrative and context, and exist only as static, unspeakable, evocative sensations and images (the 'jawbones' and 'blown-off boots' of the

[346] Ted Hughes to Geoffrey Moorhouse, 8 January 1994. Add MS 88918, Edward James Hughes Papers, British Library, London. Hereafter abbreviated to BL.

second line). Yet Hughes's role in this silent drama, as 'the son of an infantryman of the First World War', is not just one of total immersion in a history that is not his own.[347] As an adult he casts his childhood self in the role of that 'anchor', his consciousness acutely shaped by William's war-time experience. Not merely his father's son, he is 'an offspring of that war, one for whom it was virtually the Creation Story, and such a shattering, all-inclusive, grievous catastrophe [that] [m]y historical horizon […] was closed by [its] dead.'[348] This notion of a historical horizon that, at its limit, is punctuated by the incomprehensible mass slaughter of the First World War indicates that Hughes felt his own history began where his father's had reached a coda, 'buried' in the sand of W Beach and, by extension, the trenches of the Somme. As he writes in 'A Masque for Three Voices' (1992), 'I died those million deaths. Yet each one bled | Back into me, who live on in their stead, | A dusty blossom of the British dead' (*CP*, p. 825). Not made afresh, wiped clean of the insidious residue–the 'ashes and dust', perhaps, to which the dead have returned–of the Great War's violence, he is a manifest continuation of the process of William's trauma. Hughes's language draws on the poppy–Britain's national symbol of remembrance, an emblem of the principles and bravery of the dead–which provides the final image of Isaac Rosenberg's 'Break of Day in the Trenches' (1916):

> Poppies whose roots are in man's veins
>
> Drop, and are ever dropping;
>
> But mine in my ear is safe—
>
> Just a little white with the dust.[349]

[347] Ted Hughes, 'Notes: A Masque for Three Voices', in *Rain-charm for the Duchy and Other Laureate Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), pp. 58-60 (p. 58).
[348] Hughes, 'Notes: A Masque for Three Voices', p. 58.
[349] Isaac Rosenberg, 'Break of Day in the Trenches', in *The Poems and Plays of Isaac Rosenberg*, ed. by Vivien Noakes (Oxford: OUP, 2004), p. 128.

The paradox Rosenberg sets up here is that the rooted, living flowers 'Drop, and are ever dropping', whereas the plucked and therefore essentially dead flower behind the speaker's ear, whitened by the dust to which corpses return, is 'safe'. By combining the two images Hughes frames the paradox of his own experience. The dropping poppies of Rosenberg's poem do so because they are rooted, as Elizabeth Vandiver puts it, 'in the bloodshed of the Western Front.'[350] Hughes's poetic sensibility 'blossoms' from the similarly fecund ground of his father's trauma, yet like the plucked flower he was nonetheless 'saved' the actuality of his experience, bearing instead the traumatic traces of its aftermath.

'Blossom'-ing like a blood-stain from his father's wound, he likewise participates in a twentieth-century version of the myth of Hyacinthus: accidentally killed by a discus thrown by his lover Apollo, the youth is reified as a symbol of remembrance in terms that foreshadow the discursive use of the poppy in the wake of the First World War. As Ovid has it in his *Metamorphoses*,

> the flowing blood that stained the grass
>
> Was blood no longer; and a flower rose
>
> Gorgeous as Tyrian dye, in form a lily,
>
> Save that a lily wears a silver hue,
>
> This richest purple. [351]

[350] Elizabeth Vandiver, *Stand in the Trench Achilles: Classical Receptions in British Poetry of the Great War* (Oxford: OUP, 2010), p. 143.

[351] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. by A. D. Melville (Oxford: OUP, 1987), 10.210-13.

Unable to rescue him from death, Apollo ensures Hyacinthus's metamorphosis, a subversion of mortality that allows him to live on in an altered form which eternally acts as testimony to Apollo's loss:

> Apollo (who had wrought the work of grace)
>
> Inscribed upon the flower his lament,
>
> AI AI, AI AI, and still the petals show
>
> The letters written there in words of woe.[352]

As a living, breathing 'blossom of the British dead', in opposition to the calcified symbol of Remembrance Day poppies, the trauma of the First World War is as much inscribed on Hughes's psyche as Apollo's lament is reiterated on the hyacinth's petals. In the process of this morbid blossoming, Hughes endlessly seeks to recuperate the moment of (psychic and physical) injury that eludes him precisely because it lies beyond the boundaries of his own recall.

Which is not to say that Hughes's poetry does not turn repeatedly to that task. 'Six Young Men' (1957) eulogises six Yorkshiremen who all died in that conflict, and yet are immortalised in a pre-war photograph:

> Their shoes shine. One imparts an intimate smile,
>
> One chews a grass, one lowers his eyes, bashful,
>
> One is ridiculous with cocky pride –
>
> Six months after this picture they were all dead. (*CP*, p. 45)

[352] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 10.214-17. The 'AI, AI' markings found on Hyacinth petals reiterate Apollo's grief: 'A new flower you shall be with letters marked / To imitate my sobs' (X.205-6).

As Leonard Scigaj points out, the ironies of the poem 'quickly become compounded' as 'recollections of [the men's] several moments of death intrude' on the stasis of the image.[353] Hughes's syntax conflates past and future, life and death, into one perpetual moment of limbic unease. One man, like the first wave of fusiliers to storm W Beach, was 'shot in an attack and lay | Calling in the wire', yet the photograph nonetheless 'keeps him alive' in his pre-war state. 'Six Young Men' thus finds its precedent in Graves's magnificent 'The Last Day of Leave', in which he recalls a day spent with four companions before he returns to the trenches (where, like the men in Hughes's photograph, he too would be 'fatally' wounded). The poem closes with a 'blind-fate-aversive afterword':

> 'Do you remember the lily lake?
>
> We were all there, all five of us in love,
>
> Not one yet killed, widowed, or broken-hearted' (*TCP*, p. 415)

Hughes's poem is arguably weakened by the comparison. Conscious of the challenge of representing trauma through language, he attempts to meet it by inserting himself into the poem:

> To regard this photograph might well dement,
>
> Such contradictory permanent horrors here
>
> Smile from the single exposure and shoulder out
>
> One's own body from its instant and heat. (*CP*, p. 46)

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[353] Scigaj, *The Poetry of Ted Hughes,* p. 47.

The stiff formality with which the poem ends rings a little false against the pathos of Graves's 'afterword', and the self-aggrandising nature of these final lines jars against the consistent self-effacement of 'The Last Day of Leave' as a whole. Graves's persona is 'the youngest one, the odd one out', and it is the poem itself which does the work of Hughes's photograph, capturing the five friends as they 'looked out over the moor | at rough hills blurred with haze, and a still sea: | Our tragic day'. The tragedy of 'The Last Day of Leave' is evoked by what Carter terms its 'syntactical discreteness', which compels us to feel 'not only what it itself describes, but also something that lies between the stanzas which is essential to the poem'–the transience of life, the 'profound unnaturalness' of youth cut short by war.[354] The capacity of 'discreteness' to convey trauma would later become clear to Hughes. When interviewing survivors of the First World War for a planned work on Gallipoli, it was the less eloquent of two veterans he spoke to concurrently who seemed to convey the war's actuality: 'words, narrative, dramatic skill concealed everything in the one. While in the other, exclamations, vague hesitating words, just something about his half movements and very dumbness released a world of shocking vividness'.[355]

With its focus on morbid physicality, the ending of 'Six Young Men' owes more to Owen than Graves, drawing on what Hughes referred to as the former's 'special taste for the horrible, a romantic fever for the Gothic and macabre'–although it is difficult not to read this in conjunction with Sassoon's critique of Graves's 'first-rate nose for anything nasty'.[356] As a rule this applies to the bulk of Hughes's early war poetry: another Owen-like poem from *The Hawk in the Rain* is the largely unsuccessful 'Bayonet Charge', which numerous critics have aligned with 'Spring Offensive' (1918). As Tim Kendall points out, the repetition of 'raw' in

[354] Carter, *Robert Graves*, pp. 55-7.
[355] Ted Hughes, 'Orghast: Talking Without Words', in *Winter Pollen* (London, Faber and Faber, 1994), pp. 122-7 (p. 123).
[356] Ted Hughes, 'The Crime of Fools Exposed', *New York Times Book Review* (12 April 1964), 4.

the line ‘raw | in raw-seamed hot khaki’ draws on Owen’s similarly repetitive ‘eased of pack-loads, were at ease’, and both poems share the theme of rapidly changing temperatures (‘molten’, ‘cold’, and ‘flame’ in ‘Bayonet Charge’; ‘’hot’, ‘burned’, ‘flames’, and ‘cool’ in ‘Spring Offensive’).[357] An evocation of man’s violent nature, the poem nonetheless dwells on what Hughes understood to be the thrust of Owen’s poetry, which was intended, he charges,

> to oppose the propagandists in England with a propaganda of a finally more powerful kind. He set himself to present the sufferings of the front line, with the youth and millions of deaths and smashed hopes of his whole generation behind him, as vividly and frighteningly as possible, not because they were piteous — in spite of all his misleading talk about “pity” — but because it was wrong, and the crime of fools who could not see because they would not feel.[358]

Yet Hughes’s reading of Owen as a poet concerned not with the pity of war but with the machinations of warmongers once again brings him back (with a sense of inevitability) to Graves, who by the end of the First World War believed that politicians determined to make a profit out of the death of a generation had perpetuated the conflict beyond need. It was these ‘fools who […] would not feel’ as much as his own traumatic past to whom Graves attempted to say ‘Goodbye’ with the publication of *Goodbye to All That* and his subsequent emigration, and indeed it is this sentiment that lurks behind ‘The Remembrance Day’ section of Hughes’s ‘Out’, which includes the lines ‘So goodbye to that bloody-minded flower. | […] Goodbye to all the remaindered charms of my father’s survival’ (*CP*, p. 166).

The sheer volume of casualties in the Gallipoli campaign, to whose number Hughes’s father would have been added if not for the breast-pocket paybook which saved him from a shrapnel fragment, transforms the poppy into nothing but a ‘bloody-minded flower’. It is both

[357] Kendall, ‘Ted Hughes’s ‘Bayonet Charge’’.
[358] Hughes, ‘The Crime of Fools’, p. 4.

a persistent or stubborn symbol (in the colloquial sense) and one which bleeds into the mind, ensuring the prominence of the war in modern memory. An inversion of Rosenberg's 'Poppies whose roots are in man's veins', it infects subsequent generations with the blood shed by the men of 1914-18, ensuring an almost biological legacy. Bidding 'goodbye to the remaindered charms of [his] father's survival', Hughes repudiates the paternal history that encroaches on his own, as well as the stifling grief that attends it. 'Remaindered' rather than 'remaining', it is surplus to requirements, and like an overstock of books can be 'sold at a reduced price owing to a fall in demand'.[359] These lines, as Neil Roberts argues, voice 'an expression of despair at the inefficacy of mourning, a cry of rage and anguish whose hyperbole only betrays the hopelessness.'[360] They constitute a violent resolution to escape the grip of inherited traumas. Despite this resolve, however, Hughes would struggle to do so.

III

Part of this struggle was grounded in the fact that, for Hughes, the very landscape of his childhood (and that which he identified himself with) was infused with the traumatic memory of the First World War. The Calder Valley lost countless young men to the war, a toll that pervades *Remains of Elmet* and is still felt as late as *Wolfwatching*, in which Hughes speaks of 'Souls […] mouldering | Inside those great barns – the seed-corn | Lugged back from the Somme' ('Slump Sundays', *CP*, p. 750). Even as early as *The Hawk in the Rain* Hughes gives a voice to the traumatised landscape, declaring emphatically that 'the stones cry out under the horizons' ('Wind', *CP*, p. 37). Here the geological features that make up Hughes's *physical*

[359] "remaindered, adj." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press [accessed 11 February 2017].
[360] Neil Roberts, 'English Elegies', in *A Companion to Poetic Genre*, ed. by Erik Martiny (Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), pp. 77-92 (p. 81).

horizon align themselves with the war dead that mark his 'historical horizon'. As O'Connor points out, '*Remains of Elmet* portrays a multitude of crumbling structures as symbolic of a crumbling community', and Hughes's stones may represent the cenotaphs and gravestones of the Lancashire Fusiliers interspersed throughout the valley, or the remains of mills and dry-stone walls fallen to disuse and disrepair after workers did not return from the war.[361] In the poem 'Walls at Alcomden' (1979), where once '[t]he stone rigging was strong', built and tended by '[e]xhilarated men | […] riding the first winter', now there are '[n]o survivors.| Here is the hulk, every rib shattered' (*CP*, pp. 461-2). Like the broken bodies of the men that once populated it, the valley's physical infrastructure has been fragmented by the aftermath of war's violence and fallen into decay. Hughes invokes the pathos *a minore* of a ship run aground by the use of maritime terminology ('rigging', 'hulk'), and in doing so transports the reader from the landlocked valley to the open water of W Beach.

In 'Under High Wood', the first part of 'Walt' (1989) the landscape of *Remains of Elmet* breaks temporal and spatial boundaries and becomes not a monument to the war but, in a mimetic sense, the Somme itself. As O'Connor contends, the poem 'replays the war' as Hughes's uncle

> recalls how he imagined himself walking through their home region of West Yorkshire as he lay in No Man's Land, shot by a German Sniper. Walt points to a spot in this Yorkshire landscape and says: 'This is where he stopped me' ('Walt', *CP*, p. 770)[362]

This notion of Hughes's childhood landscape reflecting that of the front-line draws on Graves's assertion that, after returning to Wales upon being demobbed, 'when I was strong

[361] O'Connor, *Ted Hughes and Trauma*, p. 102.
[362] O'Connor, *Ted Hughes and Trauma*, pp. 105-6.

enough to climb the hill behind Harlech and revisit my favourite country I found I could only see it as a prospective battlefield' (*GTAT*, p. 235). For both poets, the landscape of their childhood evokes the trauma of war, enforcing its inescapability. This is reiterated in Graves's 'Rocky Acres' (1920), a poem which envisages the 'desolate rocky hill-country' behind Harlech in terms that relate it, antithetically, to the battlefields of the Western Front:

> Yet this is my country, beloved by me best,
> The first land that rose from Chaos and Flood,
> Nursing no valleys for comfort or rest,
> Trampled by no shod hooves, bought with no blood. (*TCP*, p. 71)

Carter finds in the poem

> a personal gloss to the text "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my salvation" […] a superb rejection of *laissez-faire* ease as Graves, literally as well as metaphorically, rises above adverse circumstance.[363]

The anodyne nature of the first stanza ensures that, to an extent, this 'rejection of *laissez-faire* ease' is effective: while in 'Six Young Men' Hughes despairs at the lack of transformation that the Yorkshire landscape has undergone despite its loss of a generation ('And still that valley has not changed its sound | Though their faces are four decades under the ground'), for Graves the unchanged country of North Wales represents a stoicism he knows he must adopt in order to survive the taxations of his traumatic experience. But there are also elements of

[363] Carter, *Robert Graves*, p. 25.

primal violence at work in 'Rocky Acres', a 'fierce equilibrium' familiar to us from Hughes's nature poetry:[364]

> No mice in the heath run nor no birds cry
> For fear of the dark speck that floats in the sky.
>
> He soars and he hovers rocking on his wings,
> He scans his wide parish with a sharp eye,
> He catches the trembling of small hidden things,
> He tears them in pieces dropping from the sky:
> Tenderness and pity the land will deny,
> Where life is but nourished from water and rock,
> A hardy adventure, full of fear and shock. (*TCP*, p. 71)

We thus find in the poem a relatively prosaic precursor to Hughes's 'Hawk Roosting' (1957), whose subject charges that

> I kill where I please because it is all mine.
> There is no sophistry in my body:
> My manners are tearing off heads –
>
> The allotment of death. (*CP*, p. 69)

While the war is undoubtedly evoked by the landscape of 'Rocky Acres', as in 'Hawk Roosting' the violence of the natural world equally gestures toward something Other, an antithesis of the Sophoclean rationality that, for both Graves and Hughes, determined the

[364]Carter, *Robert Graves*, p. 27.

devastating course of the current age. Carter writes of the poem that it is 'a topographical blueprint for Graves's eventual Goddess-oriented aesthetic, as it is also a confirmation of what he regards as the prime poetic virtues of courage and endurance.'[365] This dynamic is equally at play in the visions of Hughes's war-ravaged (in a cultural sense) Yorkshire. In 'Long Screams' (1979), he seems to invoke the Goddess in her creative aspect to counteract the sheer scale of those war dead who belong to the Calder Valley:

> Unending bleeding.
>
> Deaths left over.
>
> The dead piled in cairns
>
> Over the dead.
>
> Everywhere dead things for monuments
>
> Of the dead.
>
> And now this whole scene, like a mother,
>
> Lifts a cry
>
> Right to the source of it all.
>
> […]
>
> She has made a curlew. (*CP*, p. 461)

The landscape is at once 'in perpetual mourning', an uncanny double of No Man's Land, and the Muse herself, the 'mother' who takes the trauma that characterises it and transforms it into narrative–the 'single cry' of a curlew, the same bird that in Graves's 'Love in Barrenness' (1938), first published as 'On the Ridge' in *Oxford Poetry* (1921), is heard 'Mourning' below the

[365] Carter, *Robert Graves*, p. 27.

ridge on which the poet's battalion was stationed at the Front Line. It is in this way that Hughes articulates the Goddess myth that he inherited from Graves–vital, urgent, and awed. Where Graves, however, champions the courage and endurance which service to the Goddess takes as its requirements, transmuting the suffering of his war experience into something productive, Hughes's poetic response to the primal feminine is, as will be seen, couched in something approaching terror.

IV

Despite their similarity of subject matter, Graves's poetry did not entirely appeal to Hughes: 'Some of his recent stuff has been dreary', he writes to Charles Tomlinson (n.d., c. 1970), 'though one could say that about him right from the start. He's always produced loads of slag.'[366] Nonetheless–as numerous critics have noted–perhaps more than any other book, *The White Goddess* had a profound effect on Hughes as a poet.[367] Hughes shared Graves's preoccupation with social and political non-conformity and his hostility towards the Apollonian tradition of rational thought, but it was the syncreticism of *The White Goddess* in particular which appealed to a mind already steeped in disparate religions and mythologies. In a 1992 letter to Anne-Lorraine Bujon, Hughes grounds his 'intricate metaphysical system' in his childhood interest in folklore:

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[366] Ted Hughes to Charles Tomlinson, n.d., Folder 20.5, Charles Tomlinson Collection, HRC. This is, however, contrary to a view Hughes expressed to Nick Gammage in a letter dated 7 April 1995: 'His good poems are […] perfect, undated, solid, irreducible' (*LTH* p. 680). Either time has softened his outlook, or Hughes spoke less honestly to a Gravesian scholar looking to draw correlations between the two poets than he did to a personal friend.

[367] Cf., for example: Neil Roberts, *Reading Ted Hughes: New Selected Poems* (Penrith: Humanities E-Books, 2007), p. 27; Joanny Moulin, 'Psychoanalytic Readings', in *Ted Hughes*, ed. by Gifford, pp. 118-30 (p. 119); Keith Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes* (Cambridge: CUP, 1975), *passim.*; Janne Stigen Drangsholt, 'Hughes and Gender', in *Ted Hughes*, ed. by Gifford, pp. 85-100 (pp. 85-6); Coupe, 'Hughes and Myth', p. 18; Ekbert Faas, *The Unaccommodated Universe* (Santa Barabara, CA: Black Sparrow Press, 1980), p. 200.

> I came across a small group of folktales in a children's encyclopedia that I was borrowing out of our parents' shop. That was my first literary shock: I could not believe such treasures could exist. […] I became totally preoccupied–a mania–in collecting them. […] That mania has continued ever since–in cyclic waves of renewed realization that these things are the great treasures of the world. As I see it now, the result of that mania was, that by the time I was fifteen or sixteen I was familiar with the mythic and metaphysical systems of all the old civilizations, and was deep into their common life.[368]

It is this same 'common life' that is the basis of Graves's argument in *The White Goddess*. It was a contentious inheritance, however; before he was introduced to Graves's work Hughes had not been exposed to 'anybody who had the slightest interest in folklore and mythology. So it was in a way my own and *unspoiled*.'[369] This is perhaps why, in a 1995 letter to Nick Gammage, Hughes recalls a 'slight resentment to find him taking possession of what I considered to be my secret patch. […] I regarded all that as my specialty.'[370] 'All that', for Hughes, was less a developed Gravesian system than the notion of an 'imaginative world that fitted into the natural world', what he would call the 'metaphysics of the Paleolithic world.'[371] This (by his own admission) 'vague and inclusive phrase' suggests how he felt the mythological and natural world, in the sense of an 'animal kingdom', all 'hung together in a wonderful single thing.'[372] It is through this lens that Hughes read *The White Goddess*, and while for Graves the Goddess is a somewhat literal manifestation of a primal, female, irrational force that embodies the tension between *thanatos* and *eros*, for Hughes she and all she represents are above all else manifest in Nature itself.

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[368] Ted Hughes to Anne-Lorraine Bujon. Add MS 88918/1/52, Edward James Hughes Papers, BL.
[369] Ted Hughes to Anne-Lorraine Bujon. Add MS 88918/1/52, Edward James Hughes Papers, BL.
[370] Nick Gammage, ''The Nature of the Goddess': Ted Hughes and Robert Graves', in *New Perspectives on Robert Graves,* ed. by Quinn, pp. 149-58 (p. 150).
[371] Ted Hughes to Anne-Lorraine Bujon. Add MS 88918/1/52, Edward James Hughes Papers, BL.
[372] Ted Hughes to Anne-Lorraine Bujon. Add MS 88918/1/52, Edward James Hughes Papers, BL.

Nonetheless, as for Graves, the Goddess presents for Hughes what Claas Kazzer sums up as 'a powerful, historically and psychologically charged image that unifies key conflicts under one common name and in one particular set of associations.'[373] Hughes delineated these conflicts and associations in his note to *A Choice of Shakespeare's Verse* (1971), where he describes her in Gravesian terms as combining the aspects of Venus, 'the goddess of natural law and of love, who was the goddess of all sensation and organic life', and 'Isis, mother of all the gods, and all living things; the Queen of Heaven'.[374] Yet like Graves's Goddess she is equally

> the Queen of Hell, […] demon of destruction and death. In that form she is also Hecate, Goddess of witchcraft, all magical operations, the underworld, spirits, the moon, darkness, hounds, etc.[375]

It is this loving/destructive principle that allows Hughes to transpose her so readily onto Nature in the fullest sense, in that Nature is by definition a cyclic process defined by the will to kill and the will to survive.

Hughes would develop and crystallise his notion of the Goddess in *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being* (1992), in which he argues that the playing out of this mythic pattern or–as he called it–'tragic equation' formed the grand narrative of Shakespeare's oeuvre. Much insightful work has been done on *SGCB*, which inevitably draws comparisons with *The White Goddess* as Hughes's own 'grammar of poetic myth'; enough, indeed, for any further discussion of it here to verge on redundancy.[376] Yet it is worth noting that, for Hughes,

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[373] Claas Kazzer, ''Earth-Moon.' Ted Hughes' Books for Children (& Adults)', in *Ted Hughes: Alternative Horizons,* ed. Moulin, pp. 101-14 (p. 101).
[374] Hughes, *A Choice of Shakespeare's Verse*, pp. 187, 189.
[375] Ted Hughes, *Shakespeare's Verse*, p. 189.
[376] Cf. , for example, John O'Meara, *Shakespeare, the Goddess, and Modernity* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2012), pp. 23-5; Roberts, p. 28; Paul Bentley, *The Poetry of Ted Hughes: Language, Illusion, and Beyond* (1998; London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 96-7; Neil Corcoran, *Shakespeare and the Modern Poet* (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), pp. 200-22.

civilisation's disassociation from nature and its suppression of the primal feminine in lieu of a rational, 'God-centred patriarchy' had resulted in man's estrangement from his 'inner world' and therefore the 'important half of our experience.'[377] The inhibition of this 'important half'–natural human sexual and imaginative energies–that was the physiological imperative of this religious shift was deeply problematic: the division of the inner and outer worlds of man's existence, he believed, led to a disturbance of fundamental energies that manifested as 'two worlds, with mutually contradictory laws, or laws that seem to us to be so, colliding afresh every second, struggling for peaceful coexistence'.[378] It was thus the root of the violence he found not only in the natural world but the world of man; a violence, indeed, which reached its cataclysmic conclusion on the battlefields of the First World War. As David Whiteley points out, Hughes saw poetry, and the poetic imagination, as an integrative power that would 'restore a sense of wholeness to humanity', but must necessarily 'be exercised in an arena of profoundly antagonistic and contradictory forces.'[379] Following Jung, Hughes perceived war to be the inevitable result of this psychological–in the collective sense–turmoil. As Jung proposes in *Present at avenir*:

> The separation from his instinctive nature [grounded in the collective unconscious] unavoidably leads civilized man to a conflict between the conscious and the unconscious, spirit and nature, knowledge and belief, that is to say a splitting up of his being that becomes pathological when, things having gone too far, the conscious can no longer impose new oppressions or neglects upon the instinctive nature.[380]

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[377] Ted Hughes to Nick Gammage, 7 April 1995. *LTH*, p. 680; Ted Hughes, 'Myth and Education', in *Winter Pollen,* pp. 136-53 (p. 144).
[378] Hughes, 'Myth and Education', p. 150.
[379] David Whiteley, 'Ted Hughes: Poetry, Education and Memory', *The Ted Hughes Society Journal*, 3/1 (2013), 37-42 (p. 39).
[380] Carl Jung, *Present et avenir*, trans. by Roland Cahen (1957; Paris: Buchet/Chastel, 1963), p. 117.

In Jung's formulation of the collective unconscious Hughes thus found an expression of the primal, inner world of man, the repression of which is the cause of the twentieth century's degeneration into persecution and violence. He would address this explicitly in *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being*, where he forwards the notion of 'shamans' emerging at critical moments in history: 'These figures are not always spiritual warriors of the Christ type. They occasionally appear on a lower plane as fanatic, national leaders, simply–like Hitler' (*SGCB*, 89).

Graves had little time for Jung, accusing him of organising 'a humourless and watertight psychological system' which lacked any 'poetic understanding, [or] sense of history.'[381] He believed that Jung's premise of the collective unconscious could be explained away by the process of 'iconotropy', whereby the unsolvable 'mystic cyphers' which Jung attributes to 'the pre-conscious structure of the psyche which was already in existence when there was as yet no unit of personality' are in fact merely the result of a 'mythographer […] accidentally or deliberately misinterpret[ing] a sacred picture or ritual drama.'[382] Graves also wholly rejected Jung's gendered metaphor of the *anima*, to which various critics including, most emphatically, Randall Jarrell have attributed his formulation of the Goddess. Nevertheless, Hughes 'read Graves through Jung', and what is critical to this thesis, particularly, is Hughes's prescription to the belief that the mythography of the White Goddess 'had its roots in [a] biology' that was explicated by Jung: in short, that the Goddess was a symbol of the *anima,* the feminine aspect of the male psyche, and that the creative process enabled a Jungian 'individuation'.[383] Through this activity, the contents of the poet's personal and collective unconscious are made conscious through the experience of this female

[381] Robert Graves, 'Jungian Mythology', *The Hudson Review*, 5/2 (1952), 245-57 (pp. 246, 250).
[382] Graves, 'Jungian Mythology', p. 250.
[383] Qtd. in Ann Skea, 'Ted Hughes and the Goddess'. Available at <http://ann.skea.com/THandGoddess> [accessed 25 November 2016].

archetype, healing the psychic wound that the repression of the 'inner world' she represents has inflicted. As with Graves, then, for Hughes the Goddess is a vehicle for psychological catharsis; but despite his investment in Jungian thought, the violent conflict between female and male, instinct and reason, subconscious and conscious is, in Hughes's poetry, most often fought on the natural plane.

As Keith Sagar contends, 'Hughes's divinity is the Great Goddess, and she is nature, incarnate life on earth.'[384] Hughes's later poetry, especially after *Crow*, depicts the mythic violence of this nature Goddess, a chaos engendered by rational, secular civilisation's rejection of her primacy. Only one, early poem–'Song' (1957)–emerges as a typical Gravesian paean to the Goddess. Here Hughes seems to be establishing a relationship with the aspect of *The White Goddess* which, as he told Gammage, particularly interested him: 'those supernatural women. Especially the underworld women.'[385] Like the bulk of Graves's Goddess poetry, the poem is addressed to a female figure:

> O lady, consider when I shall have lost you
> The moon's full hands, scattering waste,
> The sea's hands, dark from the world's breast,
> The world's decay where the wind's hands have passed,
> And my head, worn out with love, at rest
> In my hands, and my hands full of dust,
> O my lady. (*CP*, p. 24)

In this final stanza we find the Goddess in her destructive aspect, leaving her lover/acolyte 'worn out with love' and reduced to mere 'dust'. Yet there are also traces of No Man's Land

[384] Keith Sagar, *Ted Hughes and Nature: 'Terror and Exultation'* (Peterborough: Fastprint Publishing, 2009), p. 55.
[385] Gammage, 'The Nature of the Goddess', p. 150

here, and the carnage of W Beach: a moonlit wasteland, a dark sea choked with bodies, and the remaining 'dust' foreshadowing Hughes's depiction of his shell-shocked father in 'Dust As We Are'. Although 'Song' could hardly be categorised as a war poem, in a letter to a young reader in 1992 Hughes describes the creative process that engendered it in terms which marry its violence with a type of Gravesian unreason:

> When I was 19 [1949] I was a Radio Mechanic on an isolated RAF station near Spurn Point. One night, 3 am I was sitting up on a night watch writing. I was stuck on a numb little couplet which went
>
> A hope ran crying out of the wood
> A fear clung to it, drinking blood
>
> (the image was of a Hare, with a stoat clinging to its nape). As I stared at this, trying to coax something out of it I heard a distinct voice inside my head–which simply dictated to me Song. I kept it–as a freakish sort of thing.[386]

The 'distinct voice' Hughes describes, combined with the vivid, abstract imagery (fear, hope) imposed on the natural (the stoat and the hare), the 3am setting, and the 'numb'-ness of the initial inspiration combine to evoke something much like the Gravesian poetic trance, in which the poet 'still [has] access to conscious thought while keeping in touch with dream … your own memory … pictorial imagery as children know it and as it was known to primitive man.'[387] In this context 'Song's cataclysmic violence (a whole 'world's decay') emerges as a grandiose extrapolation of the initial, localised inspiration. Hughes transitions from nature, to Goddess, to war (or the warlike) with ease.

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[386] Ted Hughes to Carol Lee, 6 January 1992. Add MS 88918, Edward James Hughes Papers, BL.
[387] Graves, 'The Art of Poetry XI: Robert Graves', p. 105.

‘Song’ also bears the traces of ‘I Hate the Moon’ (1916), an early Gravesian poem subtitled ‘*After a moonlight patrol near Brickstacks*’:

> I like the stars, and especially the Big Bear
>
> And the W star, and one like a diamond ring,
>
> But I *hate* the Moon and the horrible stony stare,
>
> And I know one day it’ll do me some dreadful thing. (*TCP*, p. 17)

Recalling the terror of crawling through No Man’s Land under the spotlight of a full moon, the poem articulates the threat which reaches its devastating conclusion in ‘Song’, while retaining the childlike urgency of Hughes’s ‘numb’ couplet. Hughes’s lunar subject matter, and particularly the notion of the moon as a potentially destructive totem, aligns him convincingly with Graves. This connection persists as Hughes moves away from the more formal mode of ‘Song’, through his nature poetry and into his mythic phase. In ‘The Harvest Moon’ (*Season Songs*, 1976) she is apocalyptic:

> […] all the moonlit cows and all the sheep
>
> Stare up at her petrified, while she swells
>
> Filling heaven, as if red hot, and sailing
>
> Closer and closer like the end of the world. (*CP*, p. 323)

While in the ‘The Warm and the Cold’, from the same collection, she has descended into madness:

> Such a frost
>
>   The flimsy moon

Hast lost her wits. (*CP*, p. 343)

Earlier in the poem 'Moonlight freezes the shaggy world' so that '[t]he past and the future | Are the jaws of a steel vice'. So extreme are the moon's powers in this extraneous state that, like Graves's Goddess, she has upset the traditional laws of time and space. Unlike Graves's Moon-goddess, however, who enables the Orphic adept to transcend time and escape the rigours of a traumatic history that consistently imposes itself on the present, Hughes's subject is caught–crushed–between a past he cannot leave and a future he cannot fully enter, which in a very acute sense is the fundamental condition of traumatic experience. While the destruction that Graves's Moon-goddess wreaks is alleviated by an actively invited redemption, the transcendence Hughes's Goddess offers is more feared than longed for. This difference is deliberate. As Hughes writes to Gammage,

> what I resented about Graves was the way he took the Moon, and all the reflections of its properties and its possessions, without ever convincing me that he has done more than perceive their poetic significance. Even a very fine poem like Juan in the Winter Solstice seems to me to be slightly inventorising the demonic properties. I can't ever feel that he experiences them first hand and recreates them in their own occult terms.[388]

The irony of Hughes's reading is that it is Graves's 'first hand' experience of the war that leads him to evoke and describe the Goddess in the way that he does. As Gammage points out,

[388] Ted Hughes to Nick Gammage, 7 April 1995. *LTH*, p. 680.

> For all the excitement of the chase, there is something distancing and detached in Graves's evocation of the Goddess. […] It is as if this control of the verse and the emotion behind it was part of Graves's defence mechanism–a means of controlling the threat of the energy. [389]

The reverential distance at which Graves places the Goddess is a product of his traumatic experience. He must exert control over the 'threat of her energy' because not to do so is to succumb to the same dangerous 'unreason' that characterises his shell-shock. She cannot offer catharsis if she cannot be controlled. Where Graves is cautious, however, Hughes's evocation of the Goddess is less mediated, reflecting the poet's trepidation in the face of her powers. In 'Crow's Undersong' she is both fecund and inexorable, a state matched by the ripeness of the first line and the unpunctuated flow of the verse:

> She brings petals in their nectar fruits in their plush […]
> She has come amorous it is all she has come for
> If there had been no hope she would not have come
> And there would have been no crying in the city
> (There would have been no city) (*CP*, p. 237)

Here Hughes aligns the Goddess with the Sphinx of the Oedipus myth (with Thebes as the lamenting city), an allusion borne of the fact that he was working on his translation of Seneca's *Oedipus* at the same time as *Crow*. This image is emblematic of the fundamental aspect of difference that sets Hughes's and Graves's Goddesses apart. Like Graves, Hughes is concerned with the redemption of the violence caused by the Goddess's suppression, a wound wrought on nature by patriarchal culture. Yet while for Graves the Goddess is muse to whom the poet must gladly submit, for Hughes she is a riddling Sphinx–unmitigated chaos,

[389] Gammage, 'The Nature of the Goddess', p. 151.

terrifying in a way that Graves's Goddess is not. As Sagar asserts in *The Laughter of Foxes*, when in the poetry preceding Plath's death Hughes attempted to 'reveal the true face of Nature […] that face, as it emerged from behind the veils, was monstrous.'[390] For Graves the cycle of death and rebirth that the true poet must suffer at the hands of the Goddess may be arduous, but it is nonetheless his 'privilege and fate to fall enamoured of [her]' ('Darien') and can be borne with something approaching bliss. For Hughes, however,

> the whole business is monstrous: tragic on a cosmic scale, where the only easements are in the possibilities of a temporary blessing from the Goddess (an erotic fracture in the carapace of the tragic hero) or of becoming a saint. There is a third possibility, in some degree of self-anaesthesia, some kind of living death. (*SGCB*, p. 293)

She is an energy that is beyond his control, and one he struggles to reconcile himself with. 'Hughes's poetry', as Gammage observes, 'is itself an emanation of th[is] energy, as if his own biological apparatus is attuned to it', and in place of the elevation and, in Davies's words, 'toneless' quality of Graves's Goddess poetry we find the violence and viscera that characterise Hughes's poetic engagement with both the inner and outer world.[391] Yet despite the disparity in their articulation, Graves and Hughes's Goddesses both function as responses to the traumatic aftermath of the First World War. '[T]he war', writes Gammage, 'became a key mythology through which [Hughes] was able to explore the destructive elements of Nature'–in short, the Goddess herself.[392] I would argue, however, that it was the *The White Goddess* that provided the key mythology through which Hughes was able to explore the trauma of war.

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[390] Keith Sagar, *The Laughter of Foxes: A Study of Ted Hughes*, rev. ed. (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2006), p. 13.
[391] Gammage, 'The Nature of the Goddess', p. 152; Donald Davie, 'The Toneless Voice of Robert Graves', *The Listener*, 1579 (2 July 1959), 11-13 (p. 12).
[392] Gammage, 'The Nature of the Goddess', pp. 151-2.

V

When discussing his 1960 volume *Lupercal*, Hughes acknowledges the pervasiveness of Graves's influence: 'I was noting the other day which [poems] had reference to Graves's White Goddess, and out of 41 pieces there are only about 6 that are not direct representation of her or her victims.'[393] *Lupercal* contains two poems that explicitly take the war as their subject or inspiration–'Mayday on Holderness' and 'Wilfred Owen's Photographs'–but as with Graves, we find less of the Goddess in Hughes's war poems than we do the war in his Goddess poems. One exception is 'Scapegoats and Rabies' (1967), in which the poet is incarnated as a military General in a state of psychological transition:

> Knives, forks, spoons divide his brains.
> The supporting earth, and the night around him,
>
> Smoulder like the slow, curing fire
> Of a Javanese headshrinker.
>
> Nothing remains of the *tete d'armée* but the skin–
> A dangling parchment lantern
>
> Slowly revolving to right, revolving to left,
>
> Trembling a little with the incessant pounding,

[393] Ted Hughes to Daniel Huws, 3 December 1959. *LTH,* p. 153.

Over the map, empty in the ring of light.

III

Wit's End

The General commits his emptiness to God (*CP*, p. 188)

Hughes writes in a 1970 essay that Western civilisation's rejection of the Goddess has resulted in the mind's exile from nature, leading to man's 'progressively more desperate search for mechanical and rational and symbolic securities, which will substitute for the spirit-confidence of the Nature he has lost.'[394] Sagar identifies the General's transition to 'emptiness' as redressing this balance:

> [he] transcends his schizoid Western culture by opting for an excarnantion of the fleshy body and its automatic responses to the environment, and adopting an oriental subjective monism, a realisation of the self as the creator of its own unitive relationship with nature[395]

This may be true, but there is an argument to be made that in asserting a monistic shift 'Scapegoats and Rabies' also describes the process–although not necessarily successful–of attempting to achieve redemption under the auspices of the Goddess. For Hughes, after all, the Goddess *is* nature. The General's movement toward a 'realisation of the self' can therefore be read as striving for catharsis in the wake of traumatic experience. As 'General',

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[394] Faas, *The Unaccommodated Universe*, p. 186.

[395] Leonard M. Scigaj, 'Oriental Mythology in *Wodwo*', in *The Achievement of Ted Hughes*, ed. by Keith Sagar (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1983), pp. 126-53 (pp. 133-4).

the poet has matured from the younger man who absorbed his father's trauma into one who has internalised it so thoroughly that he now marshals his *own* war, raging unchecked throughout his inner landscape. Where once Hughes

> (…) divined
>
> With a comb,
>
> Under his [William's] wavy, golden hair, as I combed it,
>
> The fragility of skull. And I filled
>
> With his knowledge. ('Dust As We Are', *CP*, p. 753)

his face now 'hangs in the dark, like a lantern', located 'Somewhere behind the lines, over the map':

> Every shell that bursts
>
> Blows it momentarily out, and he has to light it.
>
> […]
>
> Every attack every rout
>
> Storms through that face, like a flood through a footbridge.
>
> Every new-dead ghost
>
> Comes to that worn-out blood for its death-ration. (*CP*, p. 188)

The traumatic symptoms return insistently, evoked by the persistent repetition of 'every', as the face registers the poet's inner turmoil. It is difficult not to draw comparisons with Graves here: in 'The Face in the Mirror' the poet confronts 'Grey haunted eyes', as much 'a foolish

record of old-world fighting' as the 'brow drooping | somewhat over the eye | Because of a missile fragment still inhering | Skin-deep'. The same shells, too, that 'used to come bursting into [Graves's] bed at midnight' (*GTAT*, p. 235) extinguish the lantern of the General's face, undermining his sense of self (he is left in a state of 'facelessness') as he experiences an obliterating history that is not his own. His very blood is 'worn-out', blood that Hughes inevitably shares with his father; both genetically and figuratively speaking, the same blood that William shed on W Beach runs through his son's veins. The ghosts of the war dead come to drink from it just as the souls in Homer's underworld came to drink from Odysseus's sacrificial pit:

> I took the victims, over the trench I cut their throats
> and the dark blood flowed in–and up out of Erebus they came,
> flocking toward me now, the ghosts of the dead and gone…
> […] great armies of battle dead, stabbed by bronze spears,
> men of war still wrapped in bloody armour–thousands
> swarming round the trench from every side[396]

The blood allows the souls who drink it to 'speak the truth' (*Od.*, X1.149), to recount their deaths and even to prophesy. So it is that Hughes took on his father's dead and the lost generation of the Calder Valley,

> Naked men
> Slithered staring where their mothers and sisters

[396] Homer, *Odyssey*, trans. by R. Fagles (Penguin: London, 1996), XI.40-7. All further quotations are taken from this edition and are cited parenthetically in the text as (*Od.*, book and line number).

Would never have to meet their eyes, or see

Exactly how they sprawled and were trodden. ('Dust As We Are', *CP*, p. 753)

Like the ghosts of dead friends Graves sees in 'Haunted', the war-dead encroach relentlessly on Hughes's present: he 'meet[s] their eyes' just as Graves's dead 'grin' at him in the street. As 'Scapegoats & Rabies' progresses, the General's trauma acts as vehicle for them, like the ghosts of the *Odyssey*, to speak the unspeakable. In the next section of the poem, 'Wit's End', he achieves oracular status by 'commit[ting] his emptiness to God':

[…] in the place of his eyes

Crystal balls

Roll with visions

And his voice rises

From the dead fragments of men (*CP*, p. 188-9)

This commitment, as Scigaj contends, qualifies as an abandonment of 'the analytic ego and dualistic thinking' in lieu of 'a state of complete personality dissolution and a realisation of emptiness'.[397] The poet/General undergoes a process of transcendence analogous to that of Lucius in *The Golden Ass*. He becomes one with the deity, and experiences 'the God within the self as the creator and ground of all being.'[398] By dedicating himself to the Goddess's service, the poem suggests, Hughes will finally be able to give 'voice' to the previously internalised, unnarratable trauma which in an essentialist sense is not his own, but is drawn from the traumatic 'fragments' to which he has long been exposed: his father, his uncle, and the shattered physical and psychological landscape of the Calder Valley.

[397] Scigaj, 'Oriental Mythology', p. 134.
[398] Scigaj, 'Oriental Mythology', p. 134.

Yet despite the poem's claims, this redemption is never fully realised. That 'God' here has supplanted 'Goddess' is problematic; Hughes's God (and particularly the God of the *Wodwo* period in which 'Scapegoats and Rabies' was written) is rationalistic, Apollonian, and at odds with what Hendrik Vandermoere calls Hughes's 'fundamentally vitalistic world view.'[399] One could argue that Hughes's God–in the sense of a divine state of being–is Nature, and what is Nature but the Goddess herself. This could simply be an aesthetic choice–'The General commits himself to the Goddess' simply does not scan. The alternative, however, is that–as with Graves's poetry–the act of crafting the poem is not itself cathartic. This reading is grounded (paradoxically) in the fundamental difference, delineated above, between Graves and Hughes's apprehension of the Goddess. As Vandermoere points out, while Hughes rallies against Western civilisation's suppression of the Goddess, and the instinctive, natural, inner world she encompasses, her 'elemental, irrational powers' are nonetheless 'perceived as dangerous and destructive':

> They are chaotic forces that may at any moment destroy the cosmic system, the work of the order-creating intellect. […] The Apollonian ego feels totally defenceless against these powers.[400]

Were he to dedicate himself to her fully, he would be spared the strenuous cycle of traumatic experience; but to do so he must open himself up to what he perceives as total annihilation – what would be left, the poet asks himself, for her to redeem? The General figure in 'Scapegoats and Rabies' reflects the poet's hesitance. 'This insistence on the threat issuing from elemental forces,' Vandermoere continues,

[399] Hendrik Vandermoere, 'God and Gog in *Wodwo*: Ted Hughes as Mythographer', in *Sense and Transcendence: Essays in Honour of Herman Servotte*, ed. by Ortwin de Graef, Vik Doyen, Erik Hertog, Roger Janssens, Guido Latré, and Hedwig Scwall (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven UP, 1995), pp. 99-128 (pp. 100-3).
[400] Vandermoere, 'God and Gog', p. 99.

> is linked with the choice of poetical persona. Whether the persona functions as a speaker/actor [usually a representation of the subjective self] in most cases it embodies the standpoint of the rational ego. Precisely from that standpoint the subconscious and the elemental forces of nature are perceived as menacing, destructive.[401]

Unprepared in the face of this threat, he 'commits his emptiness' not to the Goddess but God as intellectual order, whose 'blinding pentagram of […] power', in *Wodwo*'s 'Logos', caused 'Creation', the primeval feminine, to 'convulse[…] in nightmare' (*CP*, p. 155). This God cannot save him, and as such the oracular utterings the General gleans from the 'dead fragments of men' are not realised as cathartic narrative but as choked, glottal attempts to rationalise that which is fundamentally irrational, the experience of trauma itself:

> A Frankenstein
>
> A tank
>
> A ghost
>
> Roaming the impossible
>
> Raising the hair on men's heads. (*CP*, p. 189)

These are the iterative images that haunt the poet, not an account of the history from which they sprung. The 'impossible' here is the temporal/spatial locus that they occupy (but should not), the streets of Graves's Oxford, for example, or the valleys of Hughes's Yorkshire where, he tells us, '[t]he people are not detached enough from the stone, as if they were only halfborn from the earth, and the graves are too near the surface.'[402] Like Lucius, who in the

[401] Vandermoere, 'God and Gog', p. 99.
[402] Quoted in Keith Sagar, 'Hughes and his landscape', in *The Achievement of Ted Hughes*, ed. by Sagar, pp. 2-13 (p. 10).

final stages of his initiation into the Isis-cult is 'exposed to the gaze of the crowd, as when a statue is unveiled, dressed like the sun' (*TGA*, p. 286), so Hughes's General affirms himself as

> A LANTERN
> IN THE HAND
> OF BLIND PEOPLE. (*CP*, p. 189)

But unlike Lucius, who is offered to the masses as an illuminated example of the Goddess's redemptive power, a lantern is of no use to the blind. This phrase may, as Scigaj puts it, affirm the General's 'sympathetic commitment to his brethren', but in doing so it signals his continued participation in the common rout.[403] Not set apart, he necessarily remains within the confines of the spiritual blindness that is the plight of the Western mind, and thus mired in the traumatic experience of the First World War.

While there are fundamental differences between Graves's and Hughes's experience of war, both of their lives were profoundly shaped by its traumatic after-effects, and both use the Goddess myth to make sense of it as a physical and psychological phenomenon. Both poets share the belief that the war was the inevitable consequence of man's rejection of the Goddess, the irrational world she represents, and, for Hughes particularly, Nature in which she is incarnate. However, while Graves is eager to commit himself to the transformational round of love, death, and rebirth in which 'the pain and torment undergone' as the Goddess's consort are aligned with the suffering wrought by his trauma and transmuted into 'the central test of the poet's oracular knowledge', Hughes 'sees only the destructive portion' and faces the process with terror.[404] This aspect of difference is rooted in the disparity between their

[403] Scigaj, 'Oriental Mythology', p. 134.
[404] Scigaj, *The Poetry of Ted Hughes,* pp. 170, 94.

experience: having lived through the mechanised hell of the Somme and emerged as second-fated, Graves has already been subjected to the sunderings and tearing-to-pieces that is the lot of the Muse-poet. For Hughes they remain at a secondary traumatic remove.

Nonetheless, the Goddess still symbolises cathartic potential for Hughes. He sketches the contours of her Myth (as he conceives it) in *Gaudete* (1977), a complex, multi-faceted work that records the struggle of the central character, Reverend Lumb, to clarify his relationship to the Goddess. As Scigaj observes, in the volume's 'Epilogue', Lumb

> progresses from a passive state of helplessness at what he perceives to be the overwhelming destructiveness of the Goddess to an acceptance of the temporal round of death and rebirth; then to a more balanced focus that recognizes the sensual, creative, and spiritual aspects of the Goddess, and finally to the role of healer/seer *actively engaged* in reviving Cerridwen and in transmuting the essence of the experience into imaginative vision.[405]

In these Epilogue poems, the war and the Goddess enter into direct discourse with one another. Here we find a reiteration of the natural violence that prompted Hughes's first Goddess poem, 'Song', when he was nineteen years old–'the image [...] of a Hare, with a stoat clinging to its nape'–married with the ubiquitous images of the Front Line that populate the cultural imagination:

> A stoat throbs at the nape of the lumped rabbit
> Who watches the skylines fixedly.
>
> Photographs of people – open-mouthed
> In the gust of being shot and falling (*CP*, p. 358)

[405] Scigaj, *The Poetry of Ted Hughes,* p. 189.

Lumb experiences something akin to the shepherd of 'The Gnat', a manifestation of trauma as noise that is articulated as a 'screech, sudden – | Its steel was right inside my skull | It scraped all round, inside it' (*CP*, pp. 360-1). Faced with these traumatic stressors, it is the Goddess who intervenes on Lumb's behalf:

> And you grab me
> So the blood jumps into my teeth
>
> And 'Quick!' you whisper, 'O quick!'
> And 'Now! Now! Now!'
>
> Now what?
>
> That I hear the age of the earth?
>
> That I feel
> My mother lift me up from between her legs? (*CP*, p. 358)

By apprehending the Goddess in her fullness, as not just destroyer but mother and lover, he is redeemed, reborn 'from between her legs'. Like Lucius on the beach at Corinth he sees 'An unearthly woman wading shorewards' (*CP*, p. 362), and goes on to describe the Goddess in terms drawn from both *The Golden Ass* and *The White Goddess*:

> She rides the earth
> On an ass, on a lion.
> She rides the heavens

On a great white bull.

She is an apple.

Whoever plucks her

Nails his heart

To the leafless tree. (*CP*, p. 363)

The first stanza recognises her destructive qualities, aligning Isis with Set-as-ass in the yearly murder of Osiris. As Scigaj points out, however, '[t]he last two lines of the first stanza […] present a union of opposites on a transcendent plane–the Goddess riding the white bull (her consort) […] theriomorphic counterpart of Dionysus [and] a symbol of divination in Greek, Cretan, and Celtic cultures' across the heavens.[406] Furthermore, crucially,

> In the second stanza Lumb recognizes that pain and suffering must inevitably occur to gain this superior understanding: whoever strives for the apple of consummation with the Goddess must nail his heart to the 'leafless tree'–the cross of suffering. For the first time Lumb acknowledges that suffering may function as just one part of a purposive cosmic cycle.[407]

Anne Stevenson calls the *vacanas* to the Goddess that make up *Gaudete*'s 'Epilogue' poems of 'powerful insight', and it is therefore fitting that Hughes mines *The Golden Ass,* a text in which Graves casts himself as a translator-*cum*-psychopomp with unique religious insight, for their imagery.[408] Chapter Five of this thesis will elucidate the ways in which Hughes's approach to translation itself participates in and diverges from Graves's own, with the figure of the psychopomp transmuting into that of the shaman, before embarking on a bio-critical analysis

[406] Scigaj, *The Poetry of Ted Hughes,* p. 194.
[407] Scigaj, *The Poetry of Ted Hughes,* p. 194.
[408] Anne Stevenson, 'The Recognition of the Savage God: Poetry in Britain Today', *New England Review*, 2/2 (1970), 315-26 (p. 323).

of his translation of Seneca's *Oedipus*.[409] Here, as will be shown, the central problem is that which Lumb faces in *Gaudete*. In order for the Goddess's redemptive potential to be realised, she must be apprehended fully; something that the figure of Oedipus, as Appollonian riddle-solver and trauma subject, both obstructs and facilitates.

[409] *Seneca's Oedipus* was not, however, Hughes's first translation outright. This was an excerpt of one hundred lines from Book V of Homer's *Odyssey*, commissioned for the BBC's Third Programme in 1960. It would not be made available in print until the *Collected Poems* of 2003.

CHAPTER FIVE

SENECA'S OEDIPUS

I

'For everybody must answer the sphynx'

– Ted Hughes, *Seneca's Oedipus*, p. 8.

If Graves's translations are characterised, to refer back to the definition appropriated from Bloom (see p. 63 of this thesis), by a 'curious literalism', then as translator Hughes is quite emphatically his successor. For the later poet, however, this 'literalism' was predicated on a sense of literal equivalence that was largely absent from Graves's work. With only enough O'Level Latin to pass his Cambridge *tripos* and even less Greek, the 'literalistic' approach–a word-for-word exchange, privileging denotation over sense–was his only recourse: as with Graves, his classical translations were conducted, as he freely admitted, with the aid of dictionaries, cribs, and other translations of a literal bent. Yet for Hughes, this method carried an inherent value. Immediately preceding the period in which he translated Seneca's *Oedipus*, Hughes became heavily involved in the translation and promotion of work by Eastern-European holocaust survivors such as Janos Pilinszky and Vasko Popa. It was this activity that compounded his sense of literalness as a benchmark, and cast it as the foundation of his methodology when working with classical texts. When translating poetry into English, Hughes found, literalness was in and of itself the most effective way of accessing the actuality

of the source text. As he wrote in an editorial to *Modern Poetry in Translation*, the journal he began in collaboration with Daniel Weissbort to showcase this work,

> the first ideal is literalness, insofar as the original is what we are curious about. The very oddity and struggling numbness of a word for word version is what makes our own imagination jump. […] The minute we gloss [the original author's] words, we have more or less what he said but we have lost him. We are ringing changes–amusing though they may be–on our familiar abstractions, and are no longer reaching through to what we have not experienced before, which is alive and real.[410]

It is in this 'struggling numbness', he asserts, that we find the essential content and import of the source text. It is hardly coincidental that this phrase could be applied equally to the condition of traumatic experience, of which emotional numbness and an inability to 'connect' are prevalent symptoms. Familiar, too, is the sense of 'reaching through to what we have not experienced before'–of trying to reclaim an elusive history. There is thus an implicit dialogue between the position he was in as translator and his desire to reconcile himself, finally, with the traumatic aftermath of the First World War: just as his exposure to the trauma of war is secondary, so he is removed by degrees from the source text due to his lack of ancient languages. His father and uncle, the latter of whom became a 'glass' through which Hughes hoped to 'see' the conflict 'as it had been' ('My Uncle's Wound', 1989), are living, breathing cribs that enable him to decode the experience of war, participating in the same discourse of mediation as the word-for-word versions Hughes relied on as translation aids. As Sasha Dugdale points out, '[l]iterals are often pleasing to read because of the shadow of otherness

[410] Ted Hughes, 'Editorial', *Modern Poetry in Translation*, 3 (1967). Qtd. in *Ted Hughes and Translation*, ed. by Daniel Weissbort (Nottingham: Richard Hollis, 2011), p. 201.

that hangs over them, and Hughes particularly relished this quality.'[411] What better way to describe the condition of the trauma survivor–present but immersed in a continuous past, 'killed but alive'–than otherness?

Weissbort argues that Hughes's encounter with Eastern-European poets such as Pilinszky and Popa 'helped him to enlarge an existing preoccupation with the historical dilemma of the West, deepening his identification with World War One and with the poets of both wars.'[412] If this is what drew Hughes to translate their poetry, then it finds its equal in translation's potential for the poet to open up 'ways in' to his secondary experience of war, and the traumatic implications of that identification. Hughes himself suggests that the surge in demand for translated poetry in the 1960s and '70s was symptomatic of the post-war condition:

> If the Modern Age burst from its crib in the 1914-18 war, it came to consciousness of itself in the 'sixties. It was forced to consciousness. One can easily understand the suddenness of the need to communicate, to exchange dreams and revelations and brainwaves, to find a shared humanity on the level of the heart. The flux of poetry translation followed inevitably.[413]

The impetus for this popularity boom, then, was a desire, on the behalf of civilisation itself, to confront the truth of what had happened to it in the preceding decades, an almost impossible task when faced with the negating capabilities of the concentration camps (of which both Pilinszky and Popa were survivors). At a macro level this effectively describes Hughes's own

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[411] Sasha Dugdale, '*Modern Poetry in Translation* is Ted Hughes's Greatest Contribution', *The Guardian* (14 November 2015). Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/nov/14/ted-hughes-modern-poetry-in-translation-magazine-greatest-contribution> [accessed 15 November 2016].
[412] Daniel Weissbort, 'Introduction', in *Ted Hughes: Selected Translations,* ed. by Daniel Weissbort (London: Faber and Faber, 2006), pp. vi-xi (p. x).
[413] Ted Hughes, 'Introduction', *Modern Poetry in Translation* (1982). Qtd. in *Ted Hughes and Translation*, ed. by Weissbort, p. 22.

motivation for turning his hand to translating classical texts; as Weissbort points out, 'Hughes was looking for the Truth, that which underlies language and which survives translation'.[414]

While the translation of Eastern-European poetry diagnosed the ills of the twentieth century, for Hughes it was the translation of ancient drama and poetry that offered a way into subjective 'Truth' and a diagnosis for his personal, war-inflicted 'affliction'. The key to this, as with Graves, was the potency of myth. Hughes outlines its role in the essay 'Myth and Education', in which he argues that myths are

> [o]penings of spiritual experience, a dedication to final realities which might well stop us dead in our tracks and demand of us personally a sacrifice which we could never otherwise have conceived. […] And behind [them] stands not just the crowded breadth of the world, but all the depths and intensities of it too.[415]

The apprehension of these myths–which, at their heart, are all evocations of the Goddess–does the same work on the individual as the death camps did on the poets Hughes favoured in translation. In the face of such overwhelming experience one is confronted by the 'final reality' of one's *ur*-self. As Hughes writes of Pilinszky in the Introduction to his *Selected Poems* (1976),

> Whatever he met in those camps evidently opened the seventh seal for [him]. It was a revelation of the new man: humanity stripped of everything but the biological persistence of cells. After this experience there emerges at the heart of his poetry, a strange creature, 'a gasping, limbless trunk', savaged by

[414] Daniel Weissbort, 'Ted Hughes and Truth, *Irish Pages,* 3/1 (2005), 177-192 (p. 178).
[415] Hughes, 'Myth and Education', p. 139.

> primal hungers, among the odds and ends of a destroyed culture, waiting to be shot, or beaten to death, or just thrown on a refuse heap–or simply waiting in empty eternity.[416]

This image of a 'gasping, limbless trunk' evokes the Gravesian figure at the heart of the Goddess mythos: the sacrificial king, crucified on the lopped oak and surrounded by 'dancers, red-eyed from the acrid smoke of the sacrificial fires, stamping out the measure of the dance, their bodies bent uncouthly forward, with a monotonous chant of "Kill! kill! kill!" and "Blood! blood! blood!"' It also speaks to Hughes's description of the characters of Seneca's *Oedipus* as 'more primitive than aboriginals […] spider people, scuttling among hot stones', and it is this primitivism which appealed to Hughes's mythic sensibilities, far more than 'the radiant moral world of Sophocles' depicted in the Greek version of the Oedipus play.[417] As Zajko suggests, Hughes re-oriented Seneca

> away from [his] place in the literary canon and re-evaluated [him] for the part [he] play[s] in rendering visible archaic matter, the productions of the collective mythic imagination, now dimly remembered by an aggressively modern world as a dream.[418]

For Hughes, the 'mythic imagination' is identified with 'unendurable intensity […] a rough register of what it feels like to live in the psychological gulf that opens at the end of an era' (*as per* the condition of the 'limbless trunk' at the heart of Pilinszky's poems), or, in the case of

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[416] Ted Hughes, 'Introduction' to János Pilinszky, *Selected Poems*, trans. by Ted Hughes and János Csokits (Manchester: Carcanet, 1976), pp. 7-14 (p. 9).
[417] Ted Hughes, *Seneca's Oedipus* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), p. 2. All further quotations are taken from this edition and are cited parenthetically in the text as (*SO*, page number).
[418] Vanda Zajko, 'Ted Hughes and the classics', in *The Cambridge Companion to Ted Hughes,* ed. by Gifford, pp. 107-20 (p. 107).

Seneca's 'spider people', at the beginning of one–before civilisation has even constituted itself.[419]

It is difficult to ignore the correspondences between the image of 'spider people, scuttling among hot stones' and the dreadful activity of No Man's Land, or Hughes's notion of the 'unendurable intensity' of encountering a 'psychological gulf' with traumatic experience itself. As discussed above, Hughes's sense of the mythic and his combat-related trauma are mutually inclusive; classical myth allowed a 'working out' of the problems his trauma presented him with, such as the division of inner and outer worlds–or the estrangement from the Goddess–that was (for Hughes) the root cause of mechanised warfare. At Cambridge, his switch from English to Archaeology and Anthropology provided him with all the tools he needed to do this work. As Sagar observes, the move was

> inspired. […] he could recycle this knowledge of how other cultures and times had tried to express and deal with the same problem through his own psyche and into his work. Here was no facile dipping into the myth-kitty for cheap portentousness, but a recognition that the ancients had already found virtually definitive symbolic expression for the essentials of the problem, as such modern psychologists as Freud and Jung freely admitted.[420]

To return somewhat to where we started, it was his dogged pursuit of these 'definitive' symbols that justified, for Hughes, his idiosyncratic approach to classical translation, which must here be distinguished from his approach to *poetic* translation. Weissbort believed that Hughes's later translations of classical works 'represent[ed] a development of [the]

[419] Ted Hughes, *Tales from Ovid* (London: Faber and Faber, 1997), p. xi.
[420] Keith Sagar, 'Ted Hughes and the Classics', in *Ted Hughes and the Classics*, ed. by Rees, pp. 1-24 (pp. 2-3).

"literalistic" approach' he delineated in his introduction to Pilinszky's *Selected Poems*, in which he states that[421]

> the very thing that attracted me to [his] poems in the first place was their air of simple helpless accuracy. Nothing conveys that so well as the most literal crib, and I suppose if we had the audacity that is what we should be printing here. As it is, we settled for literalness as a first principle.[422]

This 'development' manifested, in his *Oedipus*, as a combination of both 'literalness as a first principle' and a willingness to add material that he felt drove at the 'Truth' of the underlying myth; Hughes justifies his aberrance from a strictly literal approach by arguing, in *Modern Poetry in Translation* (No. 3, Spring 1967), that 'where the translator already is an interesting and original poet in his own right, […] in his "versions" we are glad to get more of him, extensions and explorations of his possibilities, as in the extraordinary Heine and Rilke translations in Lowell's *Imitations*'.[423] Nonetheless, by rejecting the traditional 'parallel' method that aims to produce an equivalent of the source text's 'unique verbal texture', Hughes was more readily able to engage with the primitive *ur*-text–the myth itself as he understood it, the play's 'pure language'–which lay beneath the palimpsest of both the original author's dramatisation and subsequent scholarly accretions.[424] Thus, when undertaking his translation of Seneca's *Oedipus*, the translation process became one of 'simplifying, or in a way limiting the language' in order to 'bring out some quite thin but raw representation of the real core of the play.'[425] In Hughes's case, as Lorna Hardwick claims, 'the 'equivalence' between ancient and modern is [therefore] defined by taking *possession* of

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[421] Weissbort, 'Introduction', in *Ted Hughes: Selected Translations*, ed. by Weissbort, p. x.
[422] Hughes, 'Introduction' to János Pilinszky, *Selected Poems*, p. 14.
[423] Qtd. in *Selected Translation*s, ed. by Weissbort, pp. 200-1.
[424] Hardwick, 'Can (modern) poets do classical drama?', p. 60.
[425] Ted Hughes, 'Ted Hughes: Literature and Culture', interview by Stan Correy and Robyn Ravlich, *Doubletake* (March 1982). Available at <http://ann.skea.com/ABC1> [accessed 23 November 2016].

the myth [emphasis mine].'[426] Hardwick's use of 'possession' here is telling, because on close inspection it is evident that Hughes's approach to translation correlates significantly with his ideas surrounding poetry and shamanism. In his classical translations, I would argue that it is as much a case of the myth taking possession of the poet as the poet taking possession of the myth.

II

Hughes's concept of poetry as a shamanistic activity is, for all intents and purposes, an analogue of Graves's notion of the poetic trance: both are essentially cathartic processes which turn trauma into inspiration. For Graves, the trance enables the poet to confront and even solve 'baffling emotional problem[s]', of which the resulting poem becomes either a 'statement' or 'answer'.[427] Hughes's shaman, similarly, can 'enter trance at will and go to the spirit world. […] He goes to get something badly needed, a cure, an answer'.[428] Yet where Graves is matter of fact about this skill, inherent (he believes) to true poets, Hughes discusses the shamanic quest with something approaching trepidation:

> Poets usually refuse the call. How are they to accept it? How can a poet become a medicine man and fly to the source and come back and heal or pronounce oracles? Everything among us is against it.[429]

His hesitation is understandable. For Hughes, the shaman must necessarily undergo something as much akin to what Pilinszky suffers as 'limbless trunk' as did Graves in the

[426] Hardwick, 'Can (modern) poets do classical drama?', p. 60.
[427] Robert Graves, 'The Poet and his Public', p. 214.
[428] Qtd. in Michael Sweeting, 'Hughes and Shamanism', in *The Achievement of Ted Hughes*, ed. by Sagar, pp. 70-89 (p. 71.)
[429] Qtd. in Sweeting, 'Hughes and Shamanism', p. 71.

trenches of the Somme where he became *deuteropotmos*. The initiatory dream call that invites the poet-as-shaman to undertake his quest into the spirit world inevitably involves

> a magical death, then dismemberment, by a demon or equivalent powers, with all possible variants of boiling, devouring, burning, stripping to the bones. From this nadir, the shaman is resurrected with new insides, a new body created for him by the spirits.[430]

This cycle of annihilation and rebirth is familiar to us from the myth of the White Goddess, and indeed it is the mythic content of the shamanic dream which speaks to Hughes: the possibility, as Michael Sweeting posits, of harnessing its material to 'control emotional energy.'[431] Though dangerous, shamanism is nonetheless a force for the equilibrium Hughes so desires because it involves the mastery of 'energy expressed through ecstasy, energy which can revitalise and empower or bring order to chaos and destruction.'[432] The poet is thus left with a choice:

> If you refuse the energy, you are living a kind of death. If you accept the energy, it destroys you. What is the alternative? To accept the energy, and find methods of turning it to good, of keeping it under control–rituals, the machinery of religion. The old method is the only one.[433]

Just as for Graves there is 'one story, and one story only', so for Hughes '[t]he old method is the only one.' For art to be, as he asserts, 'the psychological component of the autoimmune system', the poet must take on the mantle of shaman and conduct flights back into the

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[430] Ted Hughes, 'Secret Ecstacies: Review of *Shamanism,* by Mircea Eliade and *The Sufis*, by Idries Shah', *The Listener*, 1857 (29 October 1964), 677-8 (p. 677).
[431] Sweeting, 'Hughes and Shamanism', p. 72.
[432] Sweeting, 'Hughes and Shamanism', p. 72.
[433] Hughes qtd. in Faas, *The Unaccommodated Universe,* pp. 200-1.

recesses of his own mind, in the hope of accessing not only the truths of his own existence but those of the mythic substructure that underpins civilisation.[434]

If poetry, or at least the kind of poetry Hughes held in highest regard, was indeed a form of shamanistic activity, how does this play itself out in his translations? There is an element of condensation at work here: as Susan Bassnett proposes, 'the shaman, in Hughes's vision, is also a translator, someone who crosses over into another dimension, then brings back news of his experiences in a form that is accessible to the people waiting for his message.'[435] If shamans can be defined as figures that have access to two worlds, or viewpoints, which they combine within themselves, then they have the capacity of synthesis which is itself definitive of translation. Moreover, if poetry involves a ritualised flight into the unconscious, inner, or spirit world, in the aim of uncovering mythic truth, then as an art form that aims to uncover the 'truth' of a source text, translation describes this same trajectory as a formal process. Indeed, Janos Csokits, collaborator on the translations of Pilinszky's poems, describes Hughes's technique in distinctly shamanistic terms:

> It is almost as if he could X-ray the literals and see the original poem in ghostly detail like a radiologist viewing the bones, muscles, veins and nerves of a live human body. The difference is that x-ray pictures do not show the human face, whereas Hughes can see and visualize the whole astral body of the poem […] It is eerie when it happens, one can almost hear the humming of a high tension line, but the effect is not that of a technical device; it has more to do with extra-sensory perception.[436]

[434] Ted Hughes, 'Hughes: The Art of Poetry No. 71', interview by Drue Heinz, *Paris Review*, 134 (1995). Available at <https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/1669/ted-hughes-the-art-of-poetry-no-71-ted-hughes> [accessed 7 September 2016].
[435] Susan Bassnett, *Ted Hughes* (Tavistock, Devon: Northcote House, 2009), p. 83.
[436] Qtd. in Weissbort, 'Ted Hughes and Truth', p. 184.

This sense of discerning a text's 'astral body' rings true with what Hughes was trying to achieve with his translation of Seneca. In his introduction to the published version, he states that he wanted to access *Oedipus*'s 'inner power':

> I was in complete sympathy with [the director] Peter Brook's guiding idea, which was to make a text that would release whatever inner power this story, in its plainest, bluntest form, still has, and to unearth, if we could, the ritual possibilities within it. (*SO*, pp. 7-8)

This unearthing of 'ritual possibilities' acknowledges the potential for the shaman to give a mythic explanation, one that is therefore inevitably couched in ritual, for the problem that he faces. For Hughes, this was how to achieve catharsis from the rigours of traumatic experience; and Seneca's *Oedipus*, containing a constellation of references that reflected Hughes's war- and Goddess-centred preoccupations, was uniquely poised to meet this task.

III

Hughes translated Seneca's tragedy at the request of Peter Brook, the director of the production that would be staged at the National Theatre in 1968, after the initial commissioned translation by David Turner failed to meet the requirements of Brook's ideas for the play. Hughes began by working from Turner's text with the aid of the literal and ubiquitous Loeb Classics edition of Seneca's tragedy, which includes a *verso* translation by F. J. Miller. John Talbot questions whether Hughes, 'no Latinist', ever 'really lay eyes' on the original, citing the poet's claim that he had 'set [him]self against Latin' as a schoolboy.[437] In a

[437] John Talbot, 'Eliot's Seneca, Ted Hughes's *Oedipus*', in *Ted Hughes and the Classics*, ed. by Rees, pp. 62-80 (p. 62); Ted Hughes, 'Fantastic Happenings and Gory Adventures', in *Winter Pollen*, pp. 4-7 (p. 6).

similar vein, H. Stead notes that early drafts of Hughes's introduction to the published script indicate an estrangement from the Senecan source text that is belied by the final version: 'working from the Turner and the American Victorian translation by Miller',[438] becomes 'working from the Turner, with an occasional glance at the original to get my bearings,'[439] which eventuates in the final version as '[w]e found the only way forward was for me to go back to the original Seneca, eking out my Latin with a Victorian crib' (*SO*, p. 7). This, Stead argues, can be attributed to the fact that 'Hughes seems to have felt compelled to display a direct engagement with Seneca's Latin, perhaps to maintain his public image as a learned man of letters.'[440] He finds further evidence for his claim in Hughes's copy of Miller's translation, which 'contains marginalia on the right hand page (the English side), and perhaps significantly not once on the left (the Latin side).'[441]

But how significant is this, really? Talbot is at least somewhat correct, in as much as Hughes (as we have seen) was no Latinist. Stead's assessment, however, is arguably flawed. The differing early drafts of Hughes's introduction could just as legitimately describe a developing process as a burgeoning falsehood. Although it is undoubtedly true that he relied on the Loeb heavily as a paratextual translation aid, it is difficult to believe that Hughes, immersed in a collaborative project intended to unearth the 'raw dream' of Seneca's tragedy, dispensed with the source text altogether. Although there is something to be said for Stead's assessment that Hughes suffered from 'an internal struggle between his own working class Northern upbringing and his perception of the cultural expectations of the Metropolitan literary élite', it is unlikely that Hughes would simply lie about grappling with the Latin, or

[438] MS 24.55(3), Ted Hughes Collection, Liverpool University Archives, Liverpool. Hereafter LUA.
[439] MS 24.55(3), Ted Hughes Collection, LUA.
[440] H. Stead, 'Hughes's *Oedipus* – by many hands', p. 6. Available at <http://www.classicsandclass.info/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/GW_Hughess-Oedipus.pdf> [accessed 27 June 2016]. [Pre-print copy of Stead, 'Seneca's Oedipus: By Hook or by Crook', in *Seneca in the English Tradition*, ed. by Teresa Grant and Katie Fleming [special edition of *The Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, 40/1 (2013), 88-104].
[441] Stead, 'Hughes's *Oedipus*', p. 5.

that he would neglect to mine such a rich linguistic seam.[442] As Hardwick points out, Hughes 'excavated the ancient theatre texts to lay bare the mythology in ways that allowed his *own poetry* to be an intertext [emphasis mine]', not preceding translations, and this 'excavation' began at the ground-level of Seneca's Latin, even if it did not end there.[443] Nonetheless, what one takes away from Hughes's translation is that it reads far more–one could say unashamedly so–like Hughes than it does Miller.

Roberts contends that the 'Hughesian' nature of Hughes's classical translations indicates that he was far less concerned with adhering to 'a principle of literalness' when working with ancient texts than he was when translating modern poetry.[444] As we have seen, this is somewhat true. But in an initial drive towards absolute literalness, Hughes ultimately dispensed, to a large extent, with the Loeb, scaling his translation back to the kind of 'literal crib' he did not have the 'audacity' to print in *MPT*. As he tells an interviewer in 1982:

> When I translated the *Oedipus*, I went back to a school crib. I had a Victorian translation which is a very elaborate, stately translation of these very stately, elaborate passages of Seneca's, stuffed full of all… a whole cartload of references to mythological figures. And I had a crib, just a plain word-for-word crib, and a little bit of Latin of my own. And I began by making an absolute word-for-word translation, so that it was just like a–just, well, every variant, and so on–bracketed variants. Just plain stilted Latin sentences into an English vocabulary. A completely unreadable thing really. But that gave me the… a

[442] Stead, 'Hughes's *Oedipus*', p. 6. In a 1997 letter to Andrew Motion commending his biography of Keats, Hughes registers as 'familiar, exact & profound' the elitist, 'embattled English attitudes' that '[Keats] himself, & his poetry, provoked during his life': 'Some day I ought to set down my experience of having come into Southern England (age 18 when I first heard & met a boy from a public school & first met King's English spoken live) out of the Calder Valley (1930s vintage) via the South Yorks coal belt. […] I experienced exactly the same mortifying pressures of exactly the same attitudes […] attitudes [that] are still in place […] and still twisting the same screws'. *LTH*, p. 702.
[443] Hardwick, 'Can (modern) poets do classical drama?', p. 55.
[444] Neil Roberts, *Ted Hughes: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 179-80.

sense of what, maybe, there was in the original, which I couldn't get from the Victorian translation. All you got from that was stately Victorianness.[445]

Hughes's lack of annotation on the Latin *verso* of the Loeb, therefore, can be explained by the fact that he was producing a separate, comprehensive, literal version of his own.[446]

Hughes's reference to the 'very stately, elaborate' language of Seneca's version highlights the main stumbling block he encountered when translating the text, and which drove him to create the word-for-word version. Seneca's lavish rhetoric and long descriptive passages obscured the myth which, as translator-shaman, Hughes was trying to severalise. Describing the challenge of Seneca's style, Hughes claims that he was

> gradually forced to see the deep poetic design that holds it all together […] Behind the second-hand Roman rhetoric you sniff not only the nightmare of Nero's Rome, but the thoroughly barbaric lunar spirit which is under the true poetry of Western Europe, and you remember that Seneca was a Spaniard.[447]

Recalling Graves's discernment of the 'inner sense' of Apuleius's *Metamorphoses*, Hughes thus acknowledges that Seneca's lyric (as opposed to traditionally tragic) style afforded him the means to articulate what Donald J. Mastronarde refers to as 'the themes of evil' that seem to have occupied his mind and to have pervaded the brutal society of Neronian Rome.[448] His choice of phrasing–Nero's Rome as a 'nightmare'–resonates allusively with Joyce's (often misquoted) phrase, 'History […] is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake', a

[445] Ted Hughes, 'Ted Hughes: Literature and Culture'.
[446] On a pragmatic note, it is likely that Hughes's copy of Miller's translation remained unannotated because there is simply not enough marginal space in the Loeb editions to produce lists of 'bracketed variants' for every word on the page itself.
[447] MS 24.55(3), Ted Hughes Collection, LUA.
[448] Donald J. Mastronarde, 'Seneca's Oedipus: The Drama in the Word', *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 101 (1970), 291-315 (p. 315).

metaphor that has been repeatedly appropriated from the fictional historical context of *Ulysses* and applied to the totalising experience of the First World War.[449] The artistic expression of a fiercely intelligent but deeply ruminative individual immersed in a violent society, Seneca's *Oedipus* is thus intrinsically aligned with Hughes's own oeuvre, whose thematics of evil and violence consistently engage with the mechanisms of trauma and war.

As Stead points out, Hughes's identification of Seneca as Spanish, and his reference to true poetry's 'barbaric lunar spirit', are knowing allusions to Graves and *The White Goddess*. The former is a nod to Graves's honorary Mallorcan status, while also 'impl[ying], in a Gravesian sweep, that true poetry is otherwise absent from Roman, or Apollonian, literature'.[450] Far from participating in the derivative, typically Roman forms of expression, Seneca 'was not a literary pasticheur. Under the bookish surface is something still *molten* [emphasis mine]'.[451] This idea of a molten sensibility simmering beneath the surface, as will be seen, is highly significant. It alludes to an apprehension of, or relationship with, the 'Truth' of the myth–the text's 'pure language'–that meant, for Hughes, that Seneca was 'closer to Shakespeare than to Sophocles, and here at the beginning of a tradition rather than the end.'[452] This final identification with Shakespeare firmly establishes Seneca within Hughes's firmament of Goddess-centric authors. By implicating him in the inauguration of a tradition that would culminate in *Venus and Adonis* and the 'tragic equation', Hughes positions *Oedipus* as a seminal Goddess text. As Kate Fleming asserts, despite the fact that, as a commissioned translator, Hughes was engaging with *Oedipus* as a result of happenstance rather than desire, he had found in the Latin author 'a deeply resonant interlocutor' with whom he shared a

[449] James Joyce, *Ulysses* (New York: Random House, 1961), p. 34.
[450] Stead, 'Hughes's *Oedipus*', p. 12.
[451] Qtd. in Stead, 'Hughes's *Oedipus*', p. 12.
[452] Qtd. in Stead, 'Hughes's *Oedipus*', p. 12.

common focus.[453] 'Couched and understood alongside his wider oeuvre', Fleming continues, Hughes's translation 'reflects and perhaps, more critically, reflects *upon* a particular stream of post-war pessimism and the rejection of Enlightenment'.[454] Yet, while this is essentially true, Hughes's translation does far more than Fleming credits it with. Not merely crafted to reflect, it is intended to intervene in and narrate Hughes's traumatic experience. While indisputably a post-war text, for Hughes it is also used as a tool to engage with a war that, in many respects, is ongoing.

The aforementioned notion of a 'molten' presence simmering under the surface of the tragedy refers to the vitality and power of the myth that operates as its *ur*-text, for which Hughes provided an idiosyncratic gloss. For Hughes, the 'raw dream [of the Oedipus myth], the basic, poetical, mythical substance of the fable' (*SO*, p. 8)–the crime which, as shaman, he was tasked to expatiate–was not the murder of Laius but the killing of the sphinx. This aspect of difference is crucial to our understanding of both Hughes's translation and the cathartic project he was undertaking. Oedipus's murder of the sphinx–a primal, feminine power, nature embodied–can be located definitively within Hughes's formulation of Western civilisation's Apollonian rejection of the inner/natural world and its devastating consequences. Hughes breaks this down into simple cause and effect when he states that 'the whole abstraction of Socrates' discourse must inevitably, given enough time and enough applied intelligence, result in machine guns.'[455] As Fleming contends,

> The 'basic mythical substance' of Seneca's Oedipus is, therefore, its reiteration–as Hughes understood it–both of the symbolic, fraught, and timeless symmetry between man and woman (both as individual,

[453] Katie Fleming, ''For Everybody Must Answer the Sphinx': Ted Hughes's Translation of Seneca's *Oedipus*', in *Seneca in the English Tradition*, ed. by Grant and Fleming, 105-21 (p. 106).
[454] Fleming, 'For Everybody Must Answer the Sphinx', p. 108.
[455] Qtd. in Sagar, *Laughter of Foxes*, p. 8.

> but also, more 'cosmically' as Nature, the Goddess), and the destructive relationship of the 'ego' with the natural world and the consequences of this.[456]

By applying his (male) intelligence to the (female) problem of the sphinx and solving her riddle, thus estranging himself from nature, Oedipus sets himself on his tragic trajectory. He is the embodiment of what Graves, in *The White Goddess*, delineated as the enemy of true poetry:

> The function of poetry is religious invocation of the Muse; its use is the experience of mixed exaltation and horror that her presence excites. [...] This was once a warning to man that he must keep in harmony with the family of living creatures among which he was born, by obedience to the wishes of the lady of the house; it is now a reminder that he has disregarded the warning, turned the house upside down by capricious experiments in philosophy, science and industry, and brought ruin on himself and his family. (*TWG*, p. 10)

Oedipus's downfall is thus the consequence of his violent rejection of everything the Sphinx embodies, just as the First World War (in Hughes and Graves's discourse) was the inevitable eventuation of man's alienation from his inner world and the Goddess who ruled it.

'Molten' also, importantly, refers back to the violent imagery of 'Bayonet Charge'–'The patriotic tear that had brimmed in his eye | Sweating like molten iron from the centre of his chest'–and this seemingly minor allusion indicates something of Hughes's wider conception of the play and its appropriateness as a cathartic tool. Seneca's tragedy is well suited to an exploration of traumatic experience. A. W. Schlegel calls Senecan drama 'beyond description bombastic […], unnatural both in character and action, revolting from their violation of propriety', an accusation that could be levelled at the overwhelming

[456] Fleming, 'For Everybody Must Answer the Sphinx', p. 111.

experience of war itself.[457] Helen Slaney, discussing the reception of the tragedies, argues that 'in order for a [later] work to qualify as senecan it must exhibit two or more of the following qualities: 'rhetoric, excess, metatheatricality, delirium, possession, abjection, horror, confinement, or *sympatheia*.'[458] It is significant that several of these descriptors correspond with Hughes's concerns: delirium and possession speak to the shamanic experience, while abjection and horror describe the activity of war and, to an extent, the traumatised mind. The construction of the play, too, reflects the mechanisms of trauma. As Slaney points out, the tragedies are characterised by a 'fixatedness' or 'obsessive return', proceeding 'less through plot than through a series of distended episodes'.[459] This sense of an 'obsessive return' draws, of course, on the nature of traumatic experience; and the relegation of formalised narrative coherence to something less than vital, if not subordinated completely to the primacy of atmosphere, evokes the challenge of narratability faced by the trauma subject. As such, there is something inherent in Seneca's *Oedipus* that speaks to the traumatised, post-war sensibility; as Brian Arkins points out, it is

> no surprise that a century which has witnessed the Holocaust, the Gulags, Hiroshima and much else should be engaged in the rehabilitation of Seneca's tragedies. Far from being contemptible as drama, these tragedies speak directly to our experience.[460]

Unlike the 'radiant moral world' of Sophocles's play, Seneca's tragic vision is grounded in an irredeemable, existential bleakness that is defined by the mechanisms of violence and suffering. It is the effect of that suffering on the individual with which Seneca is concerned,

[457] A. W. Schlegel, *A Course of Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*, trans. by J. Black (1815; London: H. G. Bonn, 1846), p. 211.
[458] Helen Slaney, *The Senecan Aesthetic: A Performance History* (Oxford: OUP, 2016), p. 3.
[459] Slaney, *The Senecan Aesthetic*, pp. 26-7.
[460] Brian Arkins, 'Heavy Seneca: his Influence on Shakespeare's Tragedies', *Classics Ireland*, 2 (1995), 1-16 (p. 2).

and there is an inward, psychodramatic turn in his *Oedipus* that reflects Hughes's concern with the state of man's inner world and, at a personal level, his struggle to reconcile himself with his traumatic experience. As Charles Segal puts it, Seneca dealt in

> a rich vocabulary for exploring morbid states of mind, […] the corrosive effects of anger, fear, resentment […]. These passions appear not so much in open conflicts with the gods or with social or religious norms as in the isolation of the individual soul, trapped in the hell of its own torments.[461]

'Trapped' in such a 'hell', Hughes would have recognised in Seneca's *Oedipus* something familiar from his own poetry. The distortions and exaggerations of Seneca's rhetoric lends itself well to articulating what is repressed, and the unconscious struggles to be apprehended through the vehicles of metaphor and imagery. Unlike Sophocles, Seneca dwells less on how tragic circumstances drive his characters to act than on how it makes them feel. As Dana Gioia argues, 'what inspires him both as a dramatist and a poet is imagining from the inside what it is like to experience unbearable levels of pain.'[462] Seneca's language, and his concern with the extremity of human suffering, result in a tragedy populated by–in a very modern sense–profoundly traumatised figures.

This preoccupation with the extremity of experience is evidenced at the close of the play, which in Sophocles ultimately ends with civic rehabilitation (Oedipus is justly exiled, leaving the eminently–in this narrative, at least–reasonable and responsible Creon to rule in his stead). Seneca's *Oedipus,* however, closes with a remaining focus on the blinded, abject king, whose self-mutilation was not, as in Sophocles, an act of shame–he cannot bear to look upon his children or face his father in Hades–but of punishment: he deems death too light a

[461] Charles Segal, *Language and Desire in Seneca's Phaedra* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1986), p. 3.
[462] Dana Gioia, 'Introduction' to *Seneca: The Tragedies*, ed. by David R. Slavitt, Vol. 2 (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1995), pp. vii-xliv (p. xxxvii).

sentence preferring 'to protract his agony and make his suffering commensurate with his sins.'[463] His assumed death will happen outside the narrative framework of the drama, but his acceptance of it is figured in his final words as fulfilling his obligation to the city: 'Milder skies come when I am gone […] all pestilential humours of the land I take with me'.[464] As Frederick Ahl points out, in the text's historical context '[h]is death becomes something of a Roman *devotio*–a general's ritual dedication of himself to sacrificial death on the battlefield'.[465] Seneca's Oedipus thus resembles the ritually sacrificed sacred kings of the Waxing and Waning Year that are so vital to the Gravesian mythos and who themselves, of course, give meaning to the sacrifice paid on the battlefield by the dead of 1914-18. Nonetheless, when Seneca's Oedipus 'staggers out of Thebes, alone and unconsoled', there is no evidence that the city is saved, or that his suffering has been in any way productive.[466] This reflects Hughes's concerns about the challenge set by the Goddess: while for Graves her myth transmutes the suffering of the soldier/trauma subject into something meaningful, for Hughes this is mitigated by a fear of the overwhelming nature of her demands upon the poet. In Seneca's Oedipus he finds a manifestation of his worst fears. Despite the catharsis that the Goddess can bestow, can he be redeemed?

As with my discussion of Graves's translations, I will be using as a 'control' text the translation that we know Hughes himself used as an aid, Miller's Loeb edition. As noted above, however, there are interesting tensions between his objective to pare down the verbal density of Seneca's language and his tendency to introduce new material that reflects his conception of the 'raw dream' of the Oedipus myth. This being the case, any efforts to

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[463] Gioia, 'Introduction', p. xlii.
[464] Seneca, *Oedipus*, trans. by F. J. Miller, in *Seneca: Tragedies*, Vol. 1 (London: Heinemann, 1917), pp. 425-523 (ll. 1054-9). All further quotations are taken from this edition and are cited parenthetically in the text as (*O*, line number).
[465] Frederick Ahl, 'Two Faces of Oedipus: An Introductory Essay', in *Two Faces of Oedipus: Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannus and Seneca's Oedipus*, ed. and trans. by Frederick Ahl (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2008), pp. 1-132 (p. 125).
[466] Gioia, 'Introduction', p. xlii.

perform a systematic comparative analysis are often confounded. The published version of Hughes's *Oedipus* refers to itself as an adaptation, and–as an unmistakably Hughesian piece of writing–its most appropriate 'control' text is as much his own poetic output as any other translation of the source text. Nonetheless, as discussed in this thesis's introduction, the play still adheres to the principles of translation (although we can certainly call it 'free'). As Zajko points out, it is 'a translational work in the broad sense' (a sense which is located in Hughes's notion of translation as a shamanic quest), because it involves 'linguistic skill, the negotiation of cultures and imaginative engagement with forces beyond the rational'.[467] Seneca himself observed that when dealing with a source text one must assume the character of a bee producing honey: 'we should so blend these delicious flavours into one delicious compound that, even though it betrays its origin, yet it nevertheless is clearly a different thing from whence it came'.[468] As with Graves, the most interesting work occurs where Hughes takes control of Seneca's material and redeploys it as his own. In his moments of extended interpolation, he is mining what he refers to in *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being* as the 'crypts and catacombs' of the text, rather than its 'upper architectural marvels'.[469] He is simply translating the myth into narrative, rather than the source text–accessing, arguably, the 'pure language' of Seneca's *Oedipus.*

I will begin by examining Hughes's articulation, through the means of translation, of the First World War-as-plague: how the plague is exacted on Thebes due to Oedipus's murder of the Sphinx, and how this is extrapolated into the rejection of the natural world which Hughes identifies as the ultimate cause of the First World War. I will then discuss the ways in which Hughes redeploys Jocasta as an elemental figure, who as a composite with the

[467] Zajko, 'Ted Hughes and the classics', p. 114.
[468] Seneca, *Epistulae Morales*, trans. by R. M. Gunmere, Vol. 2 (London: Heinemann, 1970), epistle 84.5.
[469] Ted Hughes, *Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being*, rev. ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1993), p. 39.

Sphinx sounds the conditions of the poet's relationship with the Goddess within the context of his secondary trauma. My analysis will close with an examination of Hughes's translation of the play's Ode to Bacchus, an interpolation which specifically addresses the question of translation's capacity for catharsis. Charles Segal says of Seneca that he produces

> not tragedies of action, in which fallible human characters struggle towards insight through interpersonal dialogue; they are tragedies of suffering, in which inhuman and superhuman forces struggle towards personification through torrential poetry, and the human body becomes their battleground.[470]

As will be seen, for Hughes the *Oedipus* becomes a battleground on which he strives not only to apply ritual meaning to the activity of those other, literal battlegrounds which claimed a generation of Yorkshiremen and the sound mind of his father, but a site of conflict and tension between text and myth, in which the alleviation of the poet's secondary trauma is the ultimate goal.

IV

In *Apocalypse*, drafted over the Christmas break of 1929-30, D. H. Lawrence declared that 'the sphinx-riddle of man is as terrifying today as it was before Oedipus, and more so. For now it is the riddle of the dead-alive man, which it never was before.'[471] Lawrence's 'dead-alive man'–who both solves and embodies the answer to the Sphinx's riddle–is the Hughesian rationalist, whom Lawrence calls 'fool' for 'stripping [himself] of [his] emotional and

[470] Slaney, *The Senecan Aesthetic*, p. 1.
[471] D. H. Lawrence, *Apocalypse*, in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of D. H. Lawrence: Apocalypse and the Writings on Revelation*, ed. by Mara Kalnins (Cambridge: CUP, 2002), pp. 57-152 (p. 92).

imaginative reactions, and feeling nothing.'[472] Lawrence's influence on Hughes's poetic ethos is generally acknowledged, and this alignment between their notions of a culture that has crippled its sense of inner being is to be expected.[473] In the interwar context of Lawrence's statement, however, his 'dead-alive' paradox gestures further towards the historical moment in which it was made, not only encompassing a generation of traumatised combat survivors but, unwittingly, Graves's appropriation of the *deutoropotmos* identity ('killed-but-alive') which Hughes so readily bestows on his father.

From here, it is a simple ideological movement to characterise Oedipus as an archetypal 'dead-alive man'. Keeping in mind Hughes's comment on the 'whole abstraction of Socrates' discourse' leading to mechanised warfare, Jean-Joseph Goux's assessment of the two figures' 'intertextuality' is pertinent:

> There is a familial relation between Socrates and Oedipus. They are both situated at that moment of de-projection that brings back to the subject what had originally been attributed to external reality or expected from the performance of rituals. The world is no longer laden with cryptophoric signs attesting to the multiple presence of gods, for *it is in man himself and only in man that the basis of all significations* can be found. It is this familial relation between Socrates and Oedipus that Hegel revealed so magisterially when he identified Oedipus's mythical answer to the Sphinx with the 'know thyself' that gave birth to philosophy in its Socratic origins [emphasis mine].[474]

Like Socrates, who in Graves's words 'turned[ed] his back on poetic myths' and thus 'the Moon-goddess who inspired them' (*TWG*, p. 7), Oedipus finds significance only in his rational

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[472] Lawrence, *Apocalypse*, p. 92.
[473] Cf. Keith Sagar, ''Straight Oxygen': Ted Hughes' Debt to D. H. Lawrence', *Journal of D. H. Lawrence Studies,* 2/1 (2009), 71-9; Rand Brands, 'Behind the Bestiaries: The Poetry of Lawrence and Ted Hughes', in *D.H. Lawrence's Literary Inheritors,* ed. by Keith Cushman and Dennis Jackson (London: Macmillan, 1991), pp. 110-201; Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes*, *passim.*
[474] Jean-Joseph Goux, *Oedipus Philosopher*, trans. by Catherine Porter (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1993), p. 150.

objectivity, not the primitive, instinctual forces that the Sphinx reflects and embodies. Oedipus may have solved her riddle, but because he cannot see nature as anything other than threatening, he fails utterly at the test which he was set. The true character of Oedipus's challenge is outlined in Campbell's *Hero With a Thousand Faces* (1949), which argues that '[t]he mystical marriage with the Queen goddess of this world', the prize Oedipus *could* have won (instead of marriage with his mother, the Queen of Thebes), 'represents the hero's total mastery of life.'[475] In order for him to attain this, like Lumb in *Gaudete* he must comprehend the Goddess fully:

> By deficient eyes she is reduced to inferior states, by the evil eye of ignorance she is spellbound to banality and ugliness. But she is redeemed by the eyes of understanding. The hero who can take her as she is, without undue commotion but with the kindness and assurance she requires is potentially the king, the incarnate god of the created world.[476]

As Sagar observes, 'Oedipus is emphatically not that hero.'[477] He approaches the Sphinx and her riddle 'with the maximum of commotion and minimum of kindness. His blindness is not the blindness of Teiresias, the price to be paid for inner vision. It represents a refusal to see what, at the denouement, is being thrust in his face.'[478]

It is Oedipus's 'dead-alive' negation of the Sphinx-Goddess's divine power that, in Hughes's configuration (as discussed above), sets him on his path to ruin. To answer her riddle with 'man', as Willis Goth Regier puts it, 'is narrow-minded, maniac, selfish, and wrong.'[479] He completely misreads her as sign. While Lowell Edmunds argues that the riddle

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[475] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, rev. ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1972), p. 120.
[476] Campbell, *Hero*, p. 116.
[477] Keith Sagar, *Literature and the Crime Against Nature: From Homer to Hughes* (London: Chaucer, 2005), no p.n. Available at <http://www.keithsagar.co.uk/literature> [accessed 13 December 2016].
[478] Sagar, *Literature and the Crime Against Nature*, no p.n.
[479] Willis Goth Regier, *Book of the Sphinx* (Lincoln, NE: U of Nebraska P, 2004), p. 75.

'seems to bear no necessary relation to any detail of the legend. […] It is not clear why it must be this riddle and not some other', to Hughes its appositeness is self-evident.[480] While Socratic thinking inevitably results in machine guns (which are themselves, Hughes charges in Part VI of 'A Masque for Three Voices' (1992), the 'riddle' […] | that stumped the First World War', the applied intelligence of Oedipus's answer unleashes something just as deadly. His objectively anthropocentric worldview dooms him to a violent and psychologically crippling expatiation but it also, significantly (and in Seneca, specifically), catalyses the Theban plague. The plague's description in Act I of *Oedipus* is characterised by a monochromatic extremity of language, a focus on its devastating physical effects, and evocations of profound suffering, horror, and despair. With its visualisation of the plague-infested Theban landscape, the choral 'Plague Ode' (*O.*, 110-210) in particular, as A. J. Boyle contends, 'present[s] a world where nature has been inverted, the barriers between life and death have dissolved, and the living and the dead conjoin.'[481] For Hughes, this dissolution of boundaries offers a unique opportunity to articulate the traumatic resonances of the First World War, shell-shock, and No Man's Land within the narrative framework of Seneca's tragedy.

V

To trace the Hughesian dynamics of the plague, we must begin with the Sphinx's riddle. Although the educated reader will come to the *Oedipus* plays with an assumed knowledge of what the riddle itself entails–in Apollodorus it runs 'What is that which has a single voice, and

[480] Lowell Edmunds, 'The Sphinx in the Oedipus Legend', in *Oedipus: A Folklore Casebook*, ed. by Lowell Edmunds and Alan Dundes (1983; Madison, WI: U of Wisconsin P, 1995), pp. 147-73 (p. 148).
[481] Seneca, *Oedipus*, trans. and ed. by A. J. Boyle (Oxford: OUP, 2011), p. lx.

has four feet, and then two feet, and then three feet?'[482]–neither Sophocles nor Seneca actually includes it in their dialogue. Hughes, however, from the outset exceeds not only the limits of Seneca's play, but his own: functioning as a prologue to the published version of his translation is an interpolation that could be a choral ode (but is not signposted as such):

> show us
>
> show us
>
> a simple riddle   lift everything aside
>
> show us
>
> a childish riddle
>
> what has four legs at dawn
>
> two legs at noon   three legs at dusk
>
> and is weakest when it has most?
>
> 'I will find the answer'   is that an answer?
>
> show us (*SO*, n.p.)

It is unclear if this 'Riddle Ode' was included in the play's performance: it is not attributed to a speaker, precedes Act One, and is bereft even of a page number. It simply floats, untethered, on a blank page at the start of the slim volume, and it is the first taste the reader has of the text's idiosyncratic formal style. Here we see for the first time the result of Hughes's attempts to find 'a simple language and tone for a supercharged theme', the indentations,

[482] Apollodorus, *The Library of Greek Myths*, trans. by Robin Hard (Oxford: OUP, 1997), III.v.8.

paucity of punctuation, spacing, and lower-case orthography which he adopted when preparing the performance's script.[483] In order to achieve the desired extremity of compression, as Roberts notes, Hughes '[did] away with complex sentence structure and [wrote] in a series of ejaculatory phrases, punctuated [due to the spacing] on the basis of speech rhythm rather than grammar.'[484] These formal idiosyncrasies may offer an explanation for why he chose to include the Riddle Ode in such a prominent/preliminary position. As Talbot observes, while the performance's actors could replicate, to an extent, the rhythm of the text,

> *Readers* of Hughes's play have access to a dimension of meaning unavailable to theatre audiences: they can see on the page the orthographical [eccentricities]. It mattered to a man who put 'The Thought Fox' on paper how a writer might 'set neat prints' onto the blank page, what shape the reader might see in the words once 'the page is printed'.[485]

The 'dimension of meaning' to which the reader of the 'Riddle Ode' is party is that of fragmentation.[486] What Hughes has 'set' onto the page is the formal equivalent, in both a physical and psychological sense, of the effects of an exploded bomb: in the disjointed lines, phrasing, and spacing of his *Oedipus* we see the 'shape' of both dismembered bodies and the shell-shocked mind. As the first, jarring, evocation of the poetic intensity this creates, it is significant that we are introduced to this style through the medium of the 'Riddle Ode'. The text appears incomplete and fragmentary, yet is contained in the finished and composed form

[483] Ted Hughes to Nick Gammage, 15 December 1992. *LTH*, p. 618.
[484] Roberts, *Ted Hughes,* p. 183.
[485] Talbot, 'Eliot's Seneca', pp. 69-70; quoting 'The Thought Fox', *CP*, p. 21.
[486] It is interesting, however, that, critics such as Helen Slaney locate the performability of Hughes's *Oedipus* as residing (in part) in the almost violent, or wounding nature of his style: 'his verbal patterns obey the equally insistent but more organic authority of the speaking body. In one sense, it seems, Hughes has let Seneca loose from the metrical cage, but this deliverance *re-embeds the words in the performer's flesh* [emphasis mine]' (Slaney, *The Senecan Aesthetic*, p. 258). In performance, it seems, Hughes's language achieves a distinctly shrapnel-like quality.

of a riddle that is by its very nature, requiring an answer, nonetheless equally incomplete and fragmentary. If the answer to this limit-breaching riddle is 'man', it is indeed the 'dead-alive' man who survived 1914-18, the traumatised figure for whom, as Sarah Cole asserts, 'the very notion of dualist borderlines become unstable, porousness and ontological confusion replacing strict lines of control.'[487] Hughes's style is therefore also a formal allusion to the flawed state of mind from which the riddle's 'maniac' answer will spring, and in so doing exact untold destruction on the Apollonian culture that it holds dear. Hughes shows us on the printed page what Oedipus realised too late: the riddle is a trick, but it is also a trauma site.

The simple directive of the 'Riddle Ode'–'show us'–indicates Hughes's wider project. He will 'lift […] aside' the palimpsest of Seneca's text to reveal the 'raw dream' of the Oedipus myth, and in doing so attempt to reflect on and narrate his own trauma. Man is 'weakest when it has most' (another interpolation) because his rampant materialism estranges him from nature, but also–in a reductive sense–because a mind overwhelmed by the sensory experience of war or, in Hughes's case, its secondary effects, is profoundly compromised.[488] The answer to this problem ('I will find the answer') is to find catharsis in enunciation: literally, to 'show us'. Seneca, unlike Sophocles, recognised the dramatic potential in the riddle scene and 'shows' it to his audience via Oedipus's narration. Hughes follows suit, but his treatment of the Sphinx encounter dispels and recasts Seneca's rhetorical concerns to illuminate his own preoccupations. Miller's version has the following:

> The Sphinx, weaving her words in darkling measures, I fled not; I faced the bloody jaws of the fell prophetess and the ground white with scattered bones. And when from a lofty cliff, already hovering over her prey, she prepared her pinions and, lashing her tail like a savage lion, stirred up her

[487] Sarah Cole, *Modernism, Male Friendship, and the First World War* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), p. 194.
[488] This admittedly conflicts, however, with Graves's conception of having been made a better poet by his neurasthenic experience (see Chapter One, p. 46 of this thesis).

> threatening wrath, I asked her riddle. Thereupon came a sound of dread; her jaws crashed, and her talons, brooking no delay, eager for my vitals, tore at the rocks. The lot's intricate, guile-entangled words, the grim riddle of the winged beast, I solved. (*O*, ll. 90-102)

And Hughes:

> not even the sphynx
> twisting me up in her twisted words she did not
> frighten me   she straddled her rock   her nest of
> smashed skulls and bones   her face was a gulf her
> gaze paralysed her victims   she jerked her wings up
> that tail whipping and writhing   she lashed herself
> bunched herself   convulsed   started to tremble
> jaws clashing together biting the air   yet I stood
> there   and I asked for the riddle   I was calm
> her talons gouged splinters up off the rock   saliva
> poured from her fangs   she screamed   her whole
> body shuddering   the words came slowly   the
> riddle   that monster's justice   which was a death
> sentence   a trap of forked meanings a noose of
> knotted words   yet I took it   I undid it   I
> solved it (*SO*, pp. 18-19)

Hughes's sphinx is a primal force, as much nature-goddess as monster. His emphasis on her avian qualities–the 'smashed skulls and bones' on which she rests form a 'nest', and elsewhere Jocasta refers to her as 'that birdwoman' (*SO*, p. 19)–reflects Graves's conception of her myth as deriving from an icon of the 'winged Moon-goddess of Thebes', an aspect of the White

Goddess whose 'composite body represents the two parts of the Theban year–lion for the waxing part, serpent for the waning part–and to whom the new king offers his devotions before marrying her priestess, the Queen' (*TGM*, p. 375). Like the Triple Goddess she is destroyer, lover, and mother combined: in her destructive element her face is a 'gulf' of oblivion, her gaze paralysing; as lover she reaches ecstasies of passionate physicality, 'bunch[ing]', 'convuls[ing]', and 'trembl[ing]'; and as mother she births the riddle like an infant, 'scream[ing]', 'her whole body shuddering' as 'the words c[o]me slowly'. Because she is nature incarnate, exacting her revenge on those who turn their back on her, what Miller has as the Sphinx's 'grim riddle' becomes in Hughes 'that monster's justice which was a death sentence'. This is the same justice invoked in 'Law in the Country of the Cats' (1957), in which two men look 'into the gulf of the eye of the other'–just as Oedipus regards the 'gulf' of the Sphinx's face–and there is

> […] a flash of violent incredible action,
> Then one man letting his brains gently to the gutter,
> And one man bursting into the police station
> Crying: 'Let justice be done. I did it, I.' (*CP*, p. 491)

Here the 'objective' commentator acknowledges that violence, more often than not, finds that its retribution derives from the psychological law of the conscience–the violent man invites persecution because he believes he deserves it. Oedipus is no different. Nonetheless, by solving the riddle he has missed his rightful 'time to die all this frenzy now this | praying for death it's too late' (*SO*, p. 19). The riddle is a 'death sentence' to his people, but not for their king.

As Seneca's text tells us, it is the Sphinx's rotting corpse that has brought pestilence to the city: 'That dust, that cursed dust of the artful monster is warring against me still; that pest which I destroyed is now destroying Thebes' (*O*, ll. 106-8). For Hughes, however, this takes on a more graphic dimension:

> yet she's not dead   as if I'd never solved her riddle
> she never died   she changed   I drove her off the
> rock and her questions stopped   but her rottenness
> is flying   her stench is a fog smothering us   as if
> we were living inside her carcase (*SO*, p. 19)

Not 'destroyed' but 'changed', the Sphinx continues to interrogate what it means to be 'man' (in relation to the natural world), even though her 'questions [have] stopped'. By misreading her as a sign, Hughes's Oedipus 'chooses the living death rather than facing the world as it is';[489] he drives the Sphinx to her death and unleashes her deadly, abject 'rottenness'. This state of decay recalls the 'hopeless' soldiers of 'Scapegoats and Rabies', whom the war will leave with

> Rotten heads on their singing shoulders,
> The blown-off right hand swinging to the stride
> Of the stump-scorched and blown-off legs
> Helpless in the terrible engine of the boots. (*CP*, p. 187)

[489] Anne Schofield, 'The Oedipus Theme in Hughes', in *The Achievement of Ted Hughes*, ed. by Sagar, pp. 22-36, p. 203.

The soldiers' '[r]otten heads' reflect the conditions of the Front; killed or maimed, bodies (and body parts) are left to degenerate, while the sense of immeasurable loss lives on, the proud stance of their 'singing' shoulders ironically evoking the 'old lie' which drew them to their deaths. They are inheritors of the dead of Graves's 'Ghost-Raddled' who pour 'Unrestrainable, endless grief | From breasts long rotten' (*TCP*, p. 84). In this context, the miasma that the Sphinx unleashes is the grisly pollution of the battlefield; but it is also, equally, the 'rottenness' of the shell-shocked mind. Like the '[r]otten heads' of Hughes's soldiers, the plague elicits the sense of degeneration wrought on the traumatised psyche. Mastronarde contends that in Act One Seneca gives 'not only a physical description of plague-stricken Thebes, but a mental-emotional description of Oedipus'; in Hughes, however, they mutually inform one another, as the translator himself is implicated in the scene.[490] Hughes's Sphinx exacts both a physical and mental toll on the Thebans, articulated in terms derived from the discourse of shell-shock: trauma subjects often describe their experience as involving an element of derealisation, which manifests itself in a sense of unreality or 'mental fog'. Rather than being covered by Miller's 'dust', the Thebans are 'smothered' by a 'fog' of unreason as much as actual vapours; the world around them enters a state of epistemological breakdown as the plague indiscriminately 'fastens on everybody […] men women children no distinction' (*SO*, p. 15) and the stars realign: 'the dog star the lion one on top of the other a double madness' (*SO*, p. 14). With its dissolution of boundaries and traditional relations, the city itself becomes symptomatic of trauma.

The Senecan notion of the Sphinx as forerunner to the plague is elucidated by Graves, who notes that 'the Sphinx-goddess of Thebes is called by Aeschylus (*Seven Against Thebes* 777) "the man-snatching Cer"' (*TGM*, p. 280). As a derivative of *Ker*, this contributes to

[490] Mastronarde, 'Seneca's *Oedipus*', p. 292.

his own figuration of the Goddess in his translation of *Iliad* 18.530-40 (see Chapter Three, pp. 166-8 of this thesis). Although her name 'came generally to mean "fate", "doom", or "destiny"–multiplied into *ceres*, "spites, plagues, or unseen ills"', she is more astutely 'a goddess of Death in Life' (*TGM*, p. 280). Her powers as such are evinced by Oedipus's description of the plague's effects upon the natural world, a description which, in Hughes's version, evokes the actuality of both the Somme and W Beach.

For Seneca, as Susanna Braund points out, 'inversions and perversions of Nature are signs of moral as well as cosmological chaos' and in his *Oedipus* this is 'pervasive'.[491] This elision of boundaries is typified in Oedipus's soliloquy, of which the following is but a small selection. Miller's version reads:

> Dirce is dry, scant flows Ismenus' stream, and with its meager wave scarce wets the naked sands. With paling light glides Phoebus' sister athwart the sky, and the gloomy heavens are wan in the lowering day. No star in clear nights glitters, but a heavy, black fog broods o'er the lands. The citadels of the heavenly gods and their homes on high are veiled in hellish aspect. (*O*, ll. 37-49)

And Hughes:

> the river Dirce our strong swift
> Dirce it has been sealed off springs dried up a
> bed of hot stones infernal a string of stinking
> puddles what light there is stifles under this
> strange fog this hellish reek thickening and
> hanging all day and all night the funeral pyres are
> smouldering stench of carcases burning worse

[491] Susanna Braund, *Seneca: Oedipus* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), p. 50.

stench of unburied carcases rotting   the stars
cannot pierce through to us   the moon crawls
through this fog too close hardly visible   heaven's
cut off we're buried away here between our walls (*SO*, p. 14)

Where Miller is restrained, even genteel ('scarce wets the naked sands'), Hughes's translation draws on the 'hellish' actuality of the Front Line. The 'string of stinking puddles' evokes the 'Swampquakes of the slime of puddled soldiers' ('Dust As we Are', *CP*, p. 753) and 'Puddles unwinding heavy crimson' ('Flanders', *CP*, p. 128) that make up Hughes's vision of the Front, corroborated by Graves's first-hand account of the 'Trench stink of shallow-buried dead" ('Through The Periscope', *TCP*, p. 805). Dirce is not simply 'dry' but a 'bed of hot stones', providing the landscape for the Senecan figures Hughes envisions in his introduction, the 'spider people' who 'scuttl[e] among hot stones' like soldiers dodging through the wire. The interpolation of 'unburied carcases' is a self-evident allusion to the reality of No Man's Land, nonetheless drawn from elsewhere in the prologue (*non ossa tumuli sancta discreti tegunt*, 'No separate mounds cover the hallowed bones' (*O*, l. 66)).

The descriptor 'infernal' is freely interpolated, and references the Infernal Regions of the Cabbala tradition in which Hughes was well versed.[492] In *Capriccio* (1990), a volume that deals with the deaths of his lover Assia Wevill and her daughter Shura, Hughes would explore the concept of the Infernal Regions as a space where the Goddess reigns in her destructive aspect. In 'Opus 131', the room in which Assia's body is found is described as the 'wrong dimension', from which 'Flooded horror' (*CP*, pp. 796-7). In Graves's *King Jesus* the infernal regions are likewise described as the domain of one 'of the Goddess's three persons […] a sort

[492] In an interview on October 8, 1996, Hughes told Eilat Negev that 'I am interested in ancient rituals… I have studied Kabbala, the Jewish mystic wisdom. In my twenties and thirties I started reading it.' ('Poetry Is a Way of Talking to Loved Ones When It Is Too late', *The Daily Telegraph* (2 November 1998)).

of Hecate'.[493] Plague-stricken Thebes, then, is figured as the domain of the Goddess as destroyer, in which she exerts the fullness of her retributive power. The term 'infernal' can also be aptly used to describe Hughes's vision of No Man's Land in 'The Dream Time' section of 'Out' as a 'kingdom, which the sun has abandoned, and where nobody | Can ever again move from shelter' (*CP*, p. 165). It also, however, reveals a deeper connection. In the *Crow* poem 'Crow's Elephant Totem Song' we find an echo of William's laughter, which in 'Dust As We Are' is described as being 'so nearly intact' but nonetheless 'A strange thing, with rickets – a hyena. | No singing – that kind of laughter' (*CP*, p. 754). This unnatural expression of emotion, depleted of humanity, reaches its primal fulfilment in 'Totem Song', where hyenas 'rage in madness | […] Amidst paradings of infernal laughter' (*CP*, p. 238). O'Connor acknowledges that in 'deploying military language' Hughes equates the infernal hyenas, who 'showed their scorched heads and grinning expressions | Like the half-rotted stumps of amputations' (*CP*, p. 238), with the soldiers of the First World War.[494] But as we have already seen, the effects of the plague on Thebes and the natural world are not merely representative of the physical dimension of war. The infernality of the hyena's laughter, and their activity at large, more accurately reflect the inner workings of William's experience. Their 'Totem Song' runs thus:

> Lift us from the furnaces
>
> And furies of our blackened faces
>
> Within these hells we writhe
>
> Shut in behind the bars of our teeth
>
> In hourly battle of death
>
> The size of the earth (*CP*, p. 238)

[493] Robert Graves, *King Jesus: A Novel* (1946; London: Penguin, 2011), p. 8.
[494] O'Connor, *Ted Hughes and Trauma*, p. 108.

As O'Connor points out, 'the reason that Hughes's hyenas are "In hourly battle of death | The size of the earth" is because his relatives had found themselves in a similar situation during the war', but in fact William's 'battle' persisted long after the war was over.[495] He is 'imprisoned in his silence', as we are told in the unpublished poem 'His Silence', just as the hyenas are 'shut in behind the bars of their teeth' and the Thebans are 'cut off' behind their walls.[496] Like Graves, who experienced flashbacks of 'Shells […] bursting into [his] bed at midnight', William's 'night-dreams rose shouting | […] No man's land still crying and burning | inside our house' ('For the Duration', *CP*, p. 761), evoking the 'hells' in which the hyenas 'writhe'. His traumatic memories find their 'infernal' counterpart in the 'furnaces and furies' of 'Totem Song' and the 'funeral pyres' of Hughes's *Oedipus.*

Returning to the physical dimension, Hughes's translation of the final line of this excerpt evokes the confining nature of trench warfare by concentrating on the claustrophobic effect of the plague. Senecan horror makes effective use of the unnerving, *unheimlich* nature of confined spaces; as Gareth Lloyd Evans observes when discussing Senecan reception, '[o]f all Shakespeare's plays, *Titus Andronicus* is the one most readily compatible with Seneca's mode. […] It has […] that bunched up, walled-in, claustrophobic privacy of horror and cruelty characteristic of the classical writer.'[497] Hughes's translation manipulates this sensibility to apply, not merely to a '*domus*' where a malignant 'ancestral history lies buried', but to the entire city:[498] 'heaven's | cut off we're buried away here between our walls' does very different work than 'The citadels of the heavenly gods and their homes on high are veiled in hellish aspect.' In Miller it is the Olympian gods who are obscured by a 'heavy, black fog', but

[495] O'Connor, *Ted Hughes and Trauma*, p. 108.
[496] Poetry draft in Add MS 88918/1/52, Edward James Hughes Papers, BL.
[497] Gareth Lloyd Evans, 'Shakespeare, Seneca and the kingdom of violence', in *Roman Drama*, ed. by T. A. Dorey and Donald R. Dudley (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965), pp. 123-59 (p. 137).
[498] Slaney, *Senecan Aesthetic*, p. 33.

in Hughes it is the Thebans who are 'buried'.[499] In Hughes it is also not the 'gods' but 'heaven' that is 'cut off', for his deity makes her presence felt, no longer 'Phoebus' sister' (Hughes and Brook were determined to divest the play of its many mythological references) but simply 'the moon'. This is the Goddess in her lunar aspect, the maddening, 'cruel Moon' of Graves's poem of the same name, whose eye is 'small and sharp and very sly' (*TCP*, p. 34). She does not 'glide' but 'crawls […] too close', overseeing the carnage she has wrought on the city. In Graves's 'I Hate The Moon' she menaces the poet from her vantage point above No Man's Land, threatening to do 'some dreadful thing' (*TCP*, p. 17); in Hughes's vision of a Theban landscape painted in the violent brushstrokes of the Somme, she has realised her devastating potential.

This analysis supports Hardwick's observation that Hughes's sensibility is founded in a sense of 'engagement-not-belonging', an approach to translation which allows him to 'contest, reject, and metamorphose what he finds in the ancient'.[500] As discussed above, his *Oedipus* is thus largely in dialogue 'with his own poetry rather than directly with the source text.'[501] Yet, as we have seen, there is also an intertextual engagement with Graves's war poetry, and this allusive framework extends to Graves's identity as *deuteropotmos*. In an interpolated digression towards the close of Act One, Hughes's Oedipus states that 'I saw my own dead body in the gutter' (*SO*, p. 21), embodying the poet who, in 'Escape', proclaims that he '*was* dead, an hour or more' before being resurrected, and foreshadowing the end of the play where Oedipus will be expatiated as ritual scapegoat. We find, then, both Graves's and Hughes's war in Act One

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[499] This recalls, too, Jung's conception of '[h]umanity, huddling behind the walls of its culture, believ[ing] it has escaped the experience [inherent in man's confrontation with primordial nature] until it succeeds in letting loose another orgy of bloodshed.' Carl Jung, 'Volume XII', in *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, ed. by Sir Herbert Read, Michael Fordham, and Gerhard Adler, and trans. by R. F. C. Hull, Leopold Stein, and Diana Riviere (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), pp. 5525-6049 (p. 5615).
[500] Hardwick, 'Can (modern) poets do classical drama?', p. 58.
[501] Hardwick, 'Can (modern) poets do classical drama?', p. 58.

of his *Oedipus,* while the Goddess is represented by the threatening, subversive figures of the moon and the Sphinx.

VI

Hughes's most resounding evocation of Graves's Goddess, however, is his handling of the figure of Jocasta. As Gammage contends, it is in Hughes's development of Jocasta 'that he gives us […] his most vibrant dramatisation of the goddess in all her aspects–diabolic, tender, and motherly. It is his most potent conjuring of the beauty within the creative impulse of nature.'[502] Profoundly aligned with the figure of the Sphinx, for Hughes she is integral to the elemental myth underlying the play. Implicated in prescribing Oedipus's doom, not only within the framework of the myth but in the Gravesian/Hughesian context of traumatic experience, she nonetheless offers as creatrix an opportunity for Hughes to explore the cathartic potential of the true poet's passionate dedication to the Goddess.

Seneca's Jocasta is a perfunctory figure: she appears at the start of the play to rally Oedipus to action, reappears to be cross-examined about the facts of Laius's death, and finally returns to the stage to assume responsibility for her part in their incest and to commit suicide. For Hughes, however, Jocasta was 'a very absorbing Proteus', a primal amalgamation of

> Sphynx/womb/hell/body/forbidden/questionmark/mother/darkness/death[503]

Oedipus's comparison of the effects of the plague to 'living inside' the Sphinx's 'carcase' (see above) as a child lives in the womb is one of the various efforts Hughes makes to connect the

[502] Gammage, 'The Nature of the Goddess', p. 157.
[503] Ted Hughes to Peter Redgrove, n.d. [1968]. *LTH*, p. 281.

Sphinx-goddess with the figure of Jocasta. He is not alone in this. In *The Greek Myths*, Graves tells us that Jocasta is the Goddess's acolyte: in his version of the myth she is the Sphinx's 'priestess', who commits suicide in a ritual imitation of her mistress who, 'overcome by Oedipus, killed *herself* [emphasis mine]' (*TGM*, p. 375). Hughes added material for her, and created a more reflective, aggressive character than exists in either Seneca or Sophocles because, as he told Peter Redgrove, early on in the translation process he 'developed the feeling that the play [was] really about Jocasta.'[504] In Act One of Hughes's play she is given an original speech that has no precedent in Seneca, but instead drives to the heart of the mythic 'raw dream' that Hughes was attempting to expose in his translation.

In this interpolated speech Jocasta describes herself as a 'doorway', a 'cavemouth' (*SO*, p.18) (an allusion to the Sphinx's lair) through which Oedipus has exited and entered, threshold site of his coming into being. '[T]he strength of the whole earth', she cries, 'pushed him through my body and out | it split me open and I saw the blood jump out after him' (*SO*, p. 18). Thus aligned with the creative force of nature, she is equally cognisant of the repercussions that his alienation from this force will incur. She articulates this in terms that bring us, once again, back to the Front Line:

> I knew the thing in my womb was going to have to
>
> pay for the whole past
>
> I knew the future was waiting for him like a greedy
>
> god a maneater in a cave
>
> was going to ask for everything   happiness strength
>
> and finally life
>
> as if no other man existed   I carried him for this

[504] Ted Hughes to Nick Gammage, 28 July 1993. Qtd. in Gammage, 'The Nature of the Goddess', p. 158.

for pain and for fear

for hard sharp metal   for the cruelty of other men

    and his own cruelty

I carried him […]

for rottenness and dropping to pieces

I carried him for death bones dust (*SO*, p. 17)

Uninhibitedly transhistorical, Jocasta's speech performs a temporal movement that references the plights of both Oedipus and the men of 1914-18. The 'hard sharp metal' for which Oedipus is destined refers both to the iron links used to bind his ankles before he is 'exposed' on Cithaeron and the devastating mechanised weaponry of the First World War: the exploded shell that leaves a 'shrapnel hole' above William Hughes's heart ('For the Duration', *CP*, p. 760), for example, or the 'kiss of death, bullet on brow' (*CP*, p. 154) that strikes the subject of 'Bowled Over'. The toll of 'happiness strength | and finally life' is that paid by both the war dead and Yorkshire itself, populated by 'the melting corpses of farms' and 'cenotaphs', 'A land naked now as a wound | That the sun swabs and dabs | Where the miles of agony are numbness' ('Wadsworth Moor', *CP*, p. 474). Similarly, the imagery of 'rottenness' and 'death bones dust' is familiar to us from poems such as 'A Haunting' and 'A Masque for Three Voices' (with its reformulation of the poppy as a 'dusty blossom of the English dead'), and the sense of 'dropping to pieces' refers as much to physical degeneration as the collapse of civilisation as we know it in the face of total war.[505]

The speech as a whole, however, participates far more in the mythopoetics of Hughes's *Crow* sequence than his poetry that deals overtly with the events of 1914-18. In a

[505] In *The War in the Air* (1908), H. G. Wells 'looks back' at the beginning of the twentieth century from the imagined security of a future world-state. In doing so, he accurately predicts the cataclysmic European conflict that would unfold just six years later: 'the whole fabric of civilization was bending and giving, and *dropping to pieces* and melting in the furnace of the war [emphasis mine]' (H. G. Wells, *The War in the Air* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1908), p. 352).

letter to Gammage, Hughes asserts that he 'translated Seneca's *Oedipus* in among writing the Crow pieces', and the affinity between the 'supercharged theme' of the play and Hughes's project for *Crow* is apparent from poems such as 'Snake Hymn', 'Crow and Mama', and 'Song for a Phallus'.[506] In the latter, Hughes's assertion that the First World War was the result of man's negation of the Goddess and all that she represents is obliquely stated. In this savage parody of the Oedipus myth, we find Jocasta and the Sphinx have merged into a readily interchangeable figure: just as Oedipus's birth 'split[s]' Jocasta open in Hughes's translation, so the Oedipus of 'Song for a Phallus'

> […] took an axe and split
> The Sphinx from top to bottom
> The answers aren't in me he cried
> Maybe your guts have got em
>
> Mamma Mamma (*CP*, p. 249)

Out of the Sphinx, rendered as much 'doorway' as the Jocasta of *Oedipus*, emerge Laius ('his Daddy dead') and Jocasta herself ('his Mammy'), but preceding them pour forth

> […] ten thousand ghosts
> All in their rotten bodies
> Crying, You will never know
> What a cruel bastard God is
>
> Mamma Mamma (*CP*, p. 249)

[506] Ted Hughes to Nick Gammage, 15 December 1992. *LTH*, p. 618.

These 'ghosts' recall the 'rotten' soldiers of 'A Haunting' and the 'mortised four-year strata of dead Englishmen' ('Out', *CP*, p. 165) to which Hughes's father felt he rightly belonged. An undated draft of 'Song for a Phallus' that Hughes sent to Eric Walter White bears the incomplete deletion '"Sure as Oedipus", they cried | "A cruel bastard [God is]"'.[507] This alignment of the two figures is validated by what Alan Bold calls Hughes's 'massive certainty of visionary utterance', a sense of *knowing* that allows him to 'dispute the state of the world' with a hypocritical God whose religious strictures have encouraged mankind to break from its primitive nature.[508] Like Oedipus, the patriarchal Christian God usurped the Goddess from her rightful position of primacy: in *The White Goddess*, Graves speculates on the disastrous outcome of His 'crime':

> The new God claimed to be dominant as Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the end, pure Holiness, pure Good, pure Logic, able to exist without the aid of woman; [...]. The outcome was a philosophical dualism with all the tragi-comic woes attendant under a spiritual dichotomy. If the True God, the God of the Logos was pure thought, pure good, whence came evil and terror?[509]

By inflicting a mortal wound on nature itself, Oedipus dooms a generation of Thebans to death, just as in Graves and Hughes's conception it is the fate of a God- rather than Goddess-centred civilisation to descend into an irredeemable violence that lies outside the natural cycle of life and death.

The notion of a productive, womb-like wound, out of which the various figures of 'Song for a Phallus' emerge, is a potent symbol for Hughes. It is cast as a both punishment and challenge, one which Oedipus resoundingly fails to meet:

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[507] Ted Hughes to Eric Walter White, n.d, Folder 43.1, Eric Walter White Papers, HRC.
[508] *Cambridge Book of English Verse 1939-1975*, ed. by Alan Bold (Cambridge: CUP, 1976), p. 229.
[509] Robert Graves, *The White Goddess*, 3rd edn. (London: Faber and Faber, 1952), p. 465.

The Sphinx she waved her legs at him

And opened wide her maw

Oedipus stood stiff and wept

At the dreadful thing he saw

Mamma Mamma

'Maw' traditionally signifies the mouth or gullet of a voracious animal, but here it seems just as likely to refer to the Sphinx's sex, and in doing so syncretises this with its Middle English definition of 'womb'.[510] Moreover, although the definition is now obsolete, 'maw' denotes the honey stomach of a bee.[511] This allusion situates the Sphinx of the poem in the same tradition as the Sphinx of *Oedipus*, that of the Goddess who, Graves tells us, 'is herself a queen bee about whom male bees swarm in summer' (*TWG*, p. 188). Here Oedipus is equated with the 'ritually lamed' sacred king who, in an early formation of the annual transition between the Gods of the Waning and Waxing Year, 'died violently as soon as he had coupled with the queen [the Goddess's representative] as the drone dies after coupling with the queen bee' (*TWG*, p. 324). Threatened by her generative potential and sexual dominance, and unable to recognise that by constituting chaos she 'contains the secret of Creation', Oedipus is reduced to inept libido in its most ineffective form.[512] In Hughes's *Oedipus*, however, although Jocasta's womb is likewise figured as a nexus of creation and destruction, as a vessel that ramifies itself at a cosmological level its emphasis is on consciousness-enlarging regeneration:

[510] The *OED* cites *MS Vernon Homilies* in *Archiv f. das Studium der Neueren Sprachen* (c. 1390): 'Whon seint Thomas was in hire mawe'; and J. Davies, *Scourge Folly* (1611): 'Florella's wombe is full... Such fulnesse of her Mawe, so made her swell.' "maw, n.1." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press [accessed 9 August 2017].
[511] In *Feminine Monarchie* (1609) Charles Butler claims that 'You shal never find his [the Drone's] maw without a good drop of the purest nectar.' (Charles Butler, *The Feminine Monarchie, Or the Historie of Bees* (Oxford: Joseph Barnes, 1609), Ch. 4, H.)
[512] Schofield, 'The Oedipus Theme in Hughes', p. 201.

what ropes of blood were twisting together what

bloody footprints

[…]

my womb tied everything together every corner of the

earth and heavens

and every trickle of the dead past

twisted it all into shape inside me (*SO*, p. 17)

The newborn Oedipus is 'a bag of blood a bag of death | a screaming mouth' (*SO*, p. 18), forged from the essential, life-giving element of his mother's body:

and my blood didn't pause

didn't hesitate in my womb

considering the futility

it didn't falter reckoning the odds it poured on

into him blood from my toes and finger ends

blind blood blood from my gums and eyelids

blood from the roots of my hair blood from before

any time began (*SO,* p. 17)

Talbot contends that although '[t]he atmosphere of horror and gore feels Senecan,' it takes its 'language and imagery' from Hughes's own poetry.[513] Yet although, as we have seen, resonances between the speech and Hughes's poetic oeuvre undoubtedly abound, Hughes's interpolation can ultimately be traced back to the source text. Despite its having no equivalent in the original, Hughes appears to draw inspiration from another part of Seneca's

[513] Talbot, 'Eliot's Seneca', p. 64. Talbot cites as a source 'The Brother's Dream', a poem in which the speaker, 'fending off a bear attack with a fatal knife, describes his escape in terms of a horrific and bloody birth'.

tragedy–the *extispicium*, a divination by means of inspecting the entrails of sacrificed animals. In doing so, he deftly reveals the ritual's different strata of meaning in order to locate Jocasta as a site of traumatic potentiality.

During the *extispicium*, the disorder that the plague has wrought on nature is linked with unnatural relationships between Oedipus and his family. Two animals are described on stage, a 'pure white bull' and a 'heifer whose neck has never borne the curved yoke' (*O*, ll. 299-300). The bull represents Oedipus, the heifer Jocasta. When the sacrifice takes place, the heifer throws herself 'upon the ready steel and with one blow [falls]' (*O*, ll. 341-2), just as Jocasta is killed by a single self-inflicted stroke of the sword in Act 6 (*O*, ll. 1036-1041). The heifer's wound, similarly, foreshadows Jocasta's: its 'breast gapes wide' and blood 'pours' from it 'in a stream' (*O*, l. 347), while Jocasta's 'capacious womb' (*O*, ll. 1038-9), once pierced, drives out the sword with 'strong streams of blood' (*O*, l. 1041). Teiresias's daughter Manto inspects the beasts' innards, and her description of the heifer compounds their interrelation. She finds a 'heart, diseased through and through' and 'withered' (*O*, ll. 356-7) that, as P. J. Davis asserts, 'points to the antiquity and depth of evil lodged in the house of Cadmus', a traumatic heritage which the play explores in its Ode to Bacchus.[514] Further 'monstrosity' (*O*, l. 371) awaits:

A foetus

in an unmated heifer! nor does it lie in accustomed

[514] P. J. Davis, 'Fate and Human Responsibility in Seneca's *Oedipus*', *Latomus*, 50/1 (1991), 150-63 (p. 159). Seneca's Ode to Bacchus dwells on the doomed line of Cadmus, providing a historical/mythological context for Oedipus's misfortune, as well as a sense of inevitability. At ll. 439-444 the ode describes 'a maenad, the impious comrade of Ogygian Bacchus […] her hand a light thyrsus brandishing.' This is Agave, Laius's aunt, who resisted Bacchus' advances and as punishment was driven mad and induced, with her companions, to tear her son Pentheus limb from limb and then (when 'freed from the frenzy') look 'on their infamous deed as thought they knew it not.' Her affiliation with Jocasta is implicit, as Davis points out: both have 'unwittingly committed crimes involving blood relations', and 'Jocasta has attempted to kill her son' (Davis, 'Fate and Human Responsibility', p. 153).

> fashion, but fills its mother in an unnatural place.
>
> Moaning it moves its limbs, and its weak members
>
> twitch with convulsive rigors. (*O*, ll. 371-5)

As A. J. Boyle contends, Manto's double-headed cry–'The positions have been changed […] all things are reversed' (*O*, ll. 366-7) and 'Nature is subverted; even the womb follows not its law' (*O*, l. 371)–'underscores the meaning of this ritual nightmare, which will be replayed less symbolically by a blind man and his female kin in the play's final act.'[515] But the presence of an embryo in the unmated cow reflects directly on Jocasta: as she cannot be legally married to Oedipus, she is technically 'unmated', despite being married twice. The foetus fills the heifer in 'an unnatural place', just as Oedipus as husband has returned to the womb whence he was born and, as aberrations of nature, their children are equally 'unnatural'. The *extispicium* highlights one of the central thematic concerns of the play: that the plague, or as Joe Park Poe calls it, 'the malign force which is in the ascendant', is not a simply negative force.[516] Participating in the mechanisms of Hughes's unconventional style, 'it has a creative vitality of its own, producing strange forms, maimed and distorted versions of nature's norms'.[517] It is difficult to imagine a more astute descriptor for the emotional and psychological effects of shell-shock.

It is Seneca's notion of a 'womb that follows not its law' that supplies the foundation for Jocasta's interpolated speech, which is, in the end, at once a meditation on the conditions of traumatic experience and a reiteration of the Goddess's capacity to assuage it. The blood that 'pours' from Jocasta into Oedipus obverts the blood that 'pours' from the heifer's wound.

[515] A. J. Boyle, *Tragic Seneca: An Essay in the Theatrical Tradition* (Abingdon, Routledge, 1997), p. 94.
[516] Joe Park Poe, 'The Sinful Nature of the Protagonist of Seneca's *Oedipus*', in *Seneca Tragicvs: Ramus Essays on Senecan Drama*, ed. by A. J. Boyle (Berwick, Victoria: Aureal Publications, 1983), pp. 140-58 (p. 146).
[517] Poe, 'The Sinful Nature', p. 146.

The 'ropes of blood' combine with 'every trickle of the dead past' to transform Jocasta's womb, like that of the heifer, into a trauma site. It corresponds emphatically with the phenomenon of the traumatised psyche, a *mind* that follows not its law: it is, in its transhistoricity and unreasonability, unnatural. Like the Sphinx's 'maw' and Jocasta's bloody chamber that Oedipus 'split[s …] open', Hughes's mind is both 'womb' and wound. Hughes explores this relationship in the 'Remembrance Day' section of 'Out', in which he proposes that **'**The poppy is a wound, the poppy is the mouth | of the graves, maybe the womb searching' (*CP*, p. 166). By deconstructing the poppy as a symbol of wartime remembrance, as E. Hadley observes, Hughes 'stresses that this flower is better associated with active pain and death than remembrance'.[518] Rather than signifying the 'remorse' of a nation that exacted such a price from his father and then adopted artificial systems of mourning to 'render order out of war's chaos', the poppy is best understood as emblematic of the devastation the war inflicted on its participants, and of the 'womb searching'–the grieving mother of 'Griefs for Dead Soldiers' (1957) who 'Cannot build her sorrow into a monument | And walk away from it' because 'The dead man hangs around her neck, but never | Close enough to be touched […] | all that remains in a world smashed' (*CP*, p. 44).[519] The bereaved womb searches uselessly, perpetually to reclaim its lost progeny. Only Jocasta, whose son is 'killed-but-alive', is a 'cauldron', 'doorway', and 'cavemouth' (*SO*, p. 18) inside which the 'dead past' can 'twist[…] into shape' (*SO*, p. 17); like the grieving mother she carried Oedipus for death and 'final disaster' (*SO,* p. 16), but he is nonetheless fated to return, 'Close enough to be touched'.

Struggling to reconcile 'the dead past' that returns to haunt him with the present moment, Hughes's suffering is compounded by the 'ropes of blood' that tie him, viscerally, to

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[518] E. Hadley, *The Elegies of Ted Hughes* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 26.
[519] Hadley, *The Elegies of Ted Hughes,* p. 26.

his father's experience. Hughes's emphasis on blood in this section is significant to our reading of Jocasta as a goddess figure. In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva proposes that

> Blood, indicating the impure, […] inherits the propensity for murder of which man must cleanse himself. But blood, as a vital element, also refers to women, fertility, and the assurance of fecundation. It thus becomes a fascinating semantic crossroads, the propitious place for abjection where *death* and *femininity*, *murder* and *procreation*, *cessation of life*, and *vitality all come together*[520]

This syncretic notion of fecundity and death evinces the paradox of the Goddess, and in this moment Hughes's Jocasta and his Sphinx-Goddess truly become one. Here we find the primordial mother of 'Crow's Undersong',

> She comes with the birth push
> Into eyelashes into nipples the fingertips
> She comes as far as blood and to the tips of hair
> […]
> She stays
> Even after life among the bones (*CP*, p. 237)

By combining in the figure of Jocasta both the conditions of traumatic experience and the mythic conditions of the Goddess, Hughes moves towards achieving the redemptive potential that Graves sets up in *The White Goddess*. The debilitating nature of his secondary trauma becomes, when transposed into a dedication to the Goddess played out at the level of *Oedipus*'s 'raw dream', part of her transformational round of death and rebirth. Like the real Lumb in *Gaudete*, Hughes's 'struggle to clarify his relationship to the Goddess in words finally succeeds

[520] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror,* p. 12.

in attaining a new level of awareness, a knowledge of self that liberates his imagination and lifts his experience from the mud of temporal clay into the healing realm of spirit'.[521] His suffering becomes productive, and Oedipus's encounter with the womb-as-wound–although no less terrifying–symbolises not just death but the promise of resurrection. In Jocasta's speech he is positioned not as Goddess-denier but as her ritual victim and consort, the King of the Waxing Year:

> but I carried him not only for [death bones dust] I carried him to be
>
> king […]
>
> he was the warrant of the gods
>
> he was their latest attempt
>
> to walk on the earth and to live (*SO*, p. 17-18).

In *The White Goddess,* Graves cites a version of the *Song of Amergin*, a liturgical hymn dating from 1268 BC, that he proposes was 'chanted by the chief bard of the Milesian invaders, as he set his foot on the soil of Ireland' (*TWG*, p. 200). Quoting R. A. Stewart Macalister, Graves describes the *Song* as 'a pantheistic conception of a Universe where godhead is everywhere and omnipotent.'[522] It is, at a fundamental level, an invocation of the Goddess that provides a brief summary of his poetic myth, and within it we find a blueprint for Hughes's Jocasta:

> I am the womb of every holt,
>
> […]
>
> I am the queen of every hive,

[521] Scigaj, *The Poetry of Ted Hughes,* pp. 188-9.
[522] R. A. Stewart Macalister, *The Secret Languages of Ireland* (Cambridge: CUP, 1937), p. 31.

> […]
>
> I am the tomb to every hope. (*TWG*, pp. 210-11)

Fleming argues that

> [t]he significant extension of Jocasta's role in Hughes's version is testament both to the specificity of the production itself, but also to his insistence on the symbolic binary of man and woman, and the framing of the 'mythical substance' of Oedipus through this.[523]

The 'binary of man and woman' that she refers to here is, in fact, the binary of dead-alive man and Goddess as the primal feminine incarnate. Hughes's dual formation of womb and wound appropriates Graves's notion of the Goddess as 'womb […] queen […] tomb', the creative/destructive principle made manifest, and thus inaugurates an encounter with her in the hope of alleviating that binary and achieving catharsis. By developing his Jocasta to reflect not only his Goddess-centric reading of the Oedipus myth but to position her as a 'doorway' through which the trauma of war can enter the framework of his translation, he enunciates the conditions of his traumatic experience. And, just as Crow undergoes an 'Examination at the Womb Door' ('Who owns […] | All this messy blood? *Death* | […] But who is stronger than death? | *Me, evidently*.' (*CP*, p. 219)), Hughes moves closer to apprehending his father's 'death' and the catalyst of his own secondary trauma. Ultimately, however, his expansion of Jocasta's role, a product of his engagement with the 'pure language' of the myth that underlies Seneca's text, enables him to express the unnaturalness of trauma and the rigours of its effects, but not to refashion it into an encounter with an occluded history. The Goddess's cathartic potential is evoked, but not eventuated. Elsewhere in his *Oedipus*, however, he

[523] Fleming, 'For Everybody Must Answer the Sphinx', p. 114.

descends deeper into myth and ritual and, as a result, is met with more success. For Hughes, the secondary trauma subject, the originary traumatic event is ultimately his father's shell-shock. If he can come to terms with this experience, then healing is possible.

VII

One of the choral centrepieces of Seneca's tragedy is the Ode to Bacchus (*O*, ll. 403-508), an intricate paean to the god, crowded with mythological references, both straightforward and obscure. In Hughes's Ode to Bacchus, the dramatic instability of his translation takes an overtly primitive turn which brings the Gravesian formulation of the Goddess myth into sharp relief. His most significant point of divergence from the source text, it brings Hughes closer to articulating his traumatic experience than perhaps anywhere in the play. In his *Oedipus* we find something entirely alien to Seneca or Sophocles but not, as will be seen, the underlying myth as Hughes perceived it.

Talbot calls Hughes's version 'a raucous apotropaic chant […] to a vaguely defined, chthonic version of the god' but, in fact, there is nothing 'vaguely defined' about the ode's subject, nor its intention.[524] Bacchus-Dionysus is a dominant figure in Hughes's mythic corpus. As Bassnett points out, he represents 'both the pre- and anti-rational world [and] is an intoxicating antidote to the limitations of culture.'[525] In Hughes's Bacchus-ode, we find a companion piece to the ritual, 'monotonous' chant Graves describes as the archetypal invocation of the Goddess: the '"Kill! kill! kill!" and "Blood! blood! blood!"' of the 'red-eyed' dancers who surround the 'Naked King crucified to the lopped oak'. This 'Naked King' is, in

[524] Talbot, 'Eliot's Seneca', p. 76.
[525] Zajko, 'Ted Hughes and the classics', p. 110.

a sense, an aspect of Bacchus himself. Bacchus-Dionysus, in *The Greek Myths*, is described as 'a type of sacred king whom the goddess killed ritually with a thunderbolt […] and whom her priestesses devoured' (*TGM*, p. 57). In Jungian terms (which are perhaps more pertinent to Hughes than Graves), he is 'the abyss of impassioned dissolution, where all human distinctions are merged in the *animal divinity* of the primordial psyche–a blissful and terrible experience [emphasis mine].'[526] This 'animal divinity' is, of course, the force that Hughes is attempting to reconcile himself with. It follows, then, that Hughes would translate Seneca's florid, literary ode into an 'anthropologically suggestive', pounding chant, far more evocative of Graves's ritualistic principles than anything in the source text.[527] In Seneca the ode begins:

> Bind your streaming locks with the nodding ivy,
> and in your soft hands grasp the Nysaean thyrsus!
> Bright glory of the sky, come hither to the
> prayers which thine own illustrious Thebes, O
> Bacchus, offers to thee with suppliant hands. (*O*, ll. 403-7)

Hughes has the following:

> OO-AI-EE … KA
> CHANT 3 times
> REPLY 3 times
>
> DANCE DEATH INTO ITS HOLE
> DANCE DEATH INTO ITS HOLE

[526] Carl Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, trans. by R. F. C. Hull, 2nd. ed., Bollingen Series 20 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 1980), p. 90.
[527] Talbot, 'Eliot's Seneca', p. 79.

INTO ITS HOLE

ITS HOLE

ITS HOLE

ITS HOLE

HOLE (*SO*, p. 30)

In the context of the mythology of *The White Goddess*, Hughes's anthropological reformulation is fitting. As Fleming points out, it is

> notoriously difficult successfully, and with serious rather than comic impact, to 'translate' choral odes on to the modern stage, and Hughes's tribalistic chant gives, perhaps, a more convincing flavour of the ritualistic aspects of the choral ode.[528]

Nonetheless, Hughes's 'abandonment' of Seneca's Bacchus-ode has significant implications for his poetic and cathartic project.[529] Talbot proposes that Hughes found inspiration in Eliot's 'Sweeney Agonistes', whose style and tone draw on a similar primitivism.[530] While

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[528] Fleming, 'For Everybody Must Answer the Sphinx', p. 109.
[529] Fleming, 'For Everybody Must Answer the Sphinx', p. 109.
[530] As Talbot observes, the final chorus of Eliot's play shares a 'primitively percussive' musicality with Hughes's Ode ('Eliot's Seneca', p. 78):

> And perhaps you're alive
> And perhaps you're dead
> Hoo ha ha
> Hoo ha ha
> HOO
> HOO
> HOO
> KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK
> KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK
> KNOCK
> KNOCK

there are doubtless similarities between the two pieces, the content of Hughes's ode reflects a Gravesian drive to utilise the Goddess myth as a means of giving shape to the horror of war. Here we find Hughes translating the *ur*-text of Seneca's *Oedipus* into a textual framework that enables him to draw meaning from his secondary traumatic stress via the vehicle of ritual and myth.

In Seneca, the function of the ode is to offset the malignity and degeneration that characterises the physical world of the play, accentuated by the framing scenes of the *extispicium* and the return of Laius's ghost. It is a testament to the existence of the principle of good, despite all the evidence to the contrary, with Bacchus as its representative: the natural world over which he presides is one of fecundity and wholesomeness, diametrically opposed to the moribund state of plague-gripped Thebes. As Poe observes, Bacchus is evoked 'in a setting of almost Arcadian serenity.'[531] The ode 'opens with fresh growth (*corymbo*, [*O*, l. 403]; *thyrsis*, [*O*, l. 404]), softness (*mollia*, [*O*, l. 404]), and brightness (*lucidium caeli decus*, [*O*, l. 405)]', and the over-arching tone is that of festivity:[532] the god is lauded as triumphant, his hair left loose and wreathed 'with the nodding ivy' (*O*, l. 403); 'wanton initiates lead […] mystic revels' (*O*, l. 431); the goddess Ino is 'encircled by bands of Nereids dancing' (*O*, ll. 445-6); and Bacchus and Ariadne are wed as he rescues her from Naxos (*O*, ll. 488-503). Bacchus's role as the bringer of 'growth, life, and the creative power of propitious nature' is accentuated:[533] 'white fountains of snowy milk and […] wine' pour from the earth (*O*, l. 493); trees and 'vernal foliage' flourish (*O*, l. 453); and spring abounds (*O*, ll. 412, 452). The ode seems fantastical in its excess, but this is the point. It is an idealised fantasy of nature as a productive,

KNOCK

(T. S. Eliot, 'Sweeney Agonistes', in *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), p. 124.)

531 Poe, 'The Sinful Nature', p. 142.
532 Mastronarde, 'Seneca's Oedipus', p. 306.
533 Poe, 'The Sinful Nature', p. 142.

creative force, one that adheres to the traditional rules and processes that the plague–as its anathema–has disturbed.

Yet while Seneca's ode works in contrast to the prevailing darkness that shrouds the rest of the play, Hughes's ode references and appropriates the very material its predecessor seems to repudiate. We find, for instance, the abject physicality of Jocasta's speech here, with its depiction of the infant Oedipus as 'a bag of blood a bag of death | a screaming mouth' (*SO*, p. 18):

> LET IT LIVE
>
> TEAR THE BLOOD
>
> OPEN ITS MOUTH
>
> LET IT CRY (*SO*, p. 30)

'IT' can be read here as a typically Hughesian compression of the fecund phenomena of Seneca's ode into a single, guttural signifier. In this context the ode rejects the notion of the infant Oedipus as 'bag of death', representing instead the inexorability of new life and the possibility for renewal, nature's primal resurgence ('LET IT LIVE') in the face of Apollonian oppression. Oedipus's initial description of the plague is invoked to emphasise this point: while the protagonist moves ironically from perversions of nature ('there's something wrong with the sun' (*SO*, p. 21)) to externalised self-reflection ('I met myself in my own doorway' (*SO*, p. 21))–as husband-son/brother-father he is the most profound perversion in the play–the Bacchus-ode conflates these into an image of a threshold encounter: 'WHILE THE SUN STANDS AT THE DOORWAY' (*SO*, p. 30). As Phoebus Apollo, the sun represents the applied intelligence that engendered Oedipus's downfall, initiated by what Graves refers to as 'the busy, rational cult of the Solar god' who 'suppress[ed] the Lunar Mother-Goddess's

inspiratory cult' (*TWG*, p. 492). Trapped, static, 'AT THE DOORWAY', unable to move past the threshold and participate in (or influence) a cosmos where its anti-poetic principles have no value, it is juxtaposed with an active, thriving natural universe, able only to 'STAND' motionless

> WHILE THE STARS TURN
> WHILE THE MOON TURNS
> WHILE THE SEA TURNS (*SO*, p. 30)

These intratextual allusions cohere to identify the Bacchus-ode as a poetic interpolation in which the larger tensions and mechanisms of the play are tested at the level of ritual. Despite its participation in the 'negative' imagery of the wider play, like its predecessor the ode seems to offer a vision of nature triumphant: death has been 'DANCE[D] INTO ITS HOLE', and in its place reigns life triumphant ('LET IT CRY' (*SO*, p. 30)). But, like the Sphinx's riddle, Hughes's ode may be both trick and trauma site. Its primitivism renders it inherently ambiguous and, at a deeper level, it can be read as a variation on the destructive nature of traumatic memory in which death, not life, is in ascendance.

Despite the Bacchus-ode's characterisation as a bright note offsetting the darkness of the rest of the play, if Hughes's version *is* an examination of traumatic experience it nonetheless takes its cue from Seneca's text. While the original ode reflects a festive mood, offering–as Mastronarde points out–a moment of 'relief and release between the horrors of the plague and *extispicium* which precedes and the more dreadful necromancy which follows', menacing notes nonetheless 'intermittently jar this serenity', and malignant forces threaten to

breach the ode's surface.[534] This is because Seneca's ode struggles to contain both the diegetic and mythological past. Its reference to 'suppliant hands' (*palmis supplicibus*, l. 408) reminds the audience that Thebes is begging for mercy, while its nod to Bacchus's childhood, spent disguised as a girl 'with false-seeming limbs' (*falsos imitatus artus*, l. 419) so as to escape Juno's 'wrath' (*iratam*, l. 418), introduces the theme of metamorphosis in all its uncanniness and unnaturalness. Bacchus's fluidity of form recalls the Sphinx and, of course, Oedipus as an embodiment of collapsed boundaries. These discordant notes subvert the otherwise bright outlook of the ode, and play into the Hughesian notion of something 'molten' bubbling beneath the surface of the text. Moreover, by exerting this insistent pressure on the integrity of the ode's Arcadian sensibility, they perform like traumatic memories intruding on the trauma subject's post-war present. Hughes's version of the ode can therefore be read as a ritual meditation on the experience of trauma in which 'IT' functions as the return of what is fundamentally unknown: an inassimilable encounter with death.

Hughes attempts to forge a productive relationship with death as both concept and reality in several of his 'war' poems. In a draft of an unpublished poem entitled 'Sixty Years On', Hughes states that 'I am the child of ghosts | And these are the towns of ghosts', but this matter-of-fact appraisal of the emotional and psychological aftermath of the war belies the amount of energy he devoted to attempting to reconcile himself with his father's near-death, William's subsequent trauma, and the loss of a generation of Yorkshiremen.[535] In 'Mayday on Holderness', though 'The North Sea lies soundless' (*CP*, p. 61),

> Beneath it
>
> Smoulder the wars: to heart-beats, bomb, bayonet.

[534] Mastronarde, 'Seneca's *Oedipus*', p. 306.
[535] Poetry draft in Add MS 88918/1/52, Edward James Hughes Papers, BL.

‘Mother, Mother!’ cries the pierced helmet.

Cordite oozings of Gallipoli,

Curded to beastings, broached my palate (*CP*, p. 61)

In this apotheosis of violence, as Kendall observes, ‘the images constitute the horrific return of what has been repressed, broaching (both meanings: initiating and piercing) the poet’s palate.’[536] Gallipoli is acknowledged as the ‘beastings’ on which Hughes’s poetic sensibility was nourished in its infancy, in which the bomb and bayonet are as vital and ubiquitous as ‘heart-beats’. The cry of ‘Mother! Mother!’ is emitted not by a speaker, but by the fatal wound beneath the hole in the ‘pierced helmet’: as in Caruth’s expansion of the Freudian analogy of Tancred and Clorinda, in which the latency of trauma gives rise to the belated knowing of a disassociated second self, Hughes draws attention ‘to a voice that is paradoxically released *through the wound*’.[537] This voice, however, ‘the other within the self that retains the “unwitting” traumatic events of one’s past’, consistently evades the poet.[538] In ‘His Silence’, Hughes interrogates the unspeakability of his father’s trauma:

How little he told. How silently

He sat through the years. […]

[…] Himself

He kept hidden. Where was it?

Who was it. I never saw it.

I never really saw it. Who was he?

[536] Tim Kendall, *Modern English War Poetry* (Oxford: OUP, 2006), p. 203.
[537] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996; Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 2016), pp. 2-3.
[538] Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 8.

[…]

Did he live imprisoned in his silence?

Maybe he did. Maybe he bequeathed me

A peculiar form of [ineligible]

Guarding the scar deep in confinement.

Maybe that is my problem.[539]

This silence, however, exacts its own toll:

Maybe

His silence can tell me this.

Maybe that other father I never knew

Was the one I would know too well.[540]

'[T]oo well' evokes the intimacy, as a secondary trauma subject, that Hughes shares with his father's 'bequeathed' experience. The father he 'never knew' is the man who existed before the 'four-year mastication by gunfire and mud' ('Out', *CP*, p. 165). What emerged from the war was the 'reassembled infantryman' who 'tentatively totters out' of the ruins after being 'blasted to bits' (*CP*, p. 166), and in 'Dust As We Are' the poet shares the fate of the post-war survivor, 'Mangled' by his 'lonely sittings' with 'nerves lasered' (*CP*, p. 753). Ultimately, Hughes knows, William 'had been heavily killed', and this death returns again and again, encroaching on the present, a 'bleached montage' of 'lit landscapes' (*CP*, p. 753) that overwhelms Hughes's outlook in the same way that a photography flash will momentarily blind the sitter.

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[539] Poetry draft in Add MS 88918/1/52, Edward James Hughes Papers, BL.
[540] Poetry draft in Add MS 88918/1/52, Edward James Hughes Papers, BL.

These poems are non-representational exercises in catharsis, and therein lies their failing as a tool; but in Hughes's Bacchus-ode, the Oedipus myth is reduced to its essence in a shamanic evocation of the traumatic return: as Oedipus returned to the place of his 'death' and conception, so death itself cannot be constrained:

> LET IT CLIMB
>
> LET IT COME UP
>
> LET IT COME UP
>
> LET IT CLIMB
>
> LET IT LIVE
>
> OPEN THE GATE
>
> OPEN THE GATE
>
> […]
>
> LET IT CRY (*SO*, p. 30)

Here the return of the repressed is not only acknowledged but *invited*, with the explicit aim of narration ('LET IT CRY'). Hughes compels the wound (and so his father)–finally–to speak. This narration of trauma is only made possible, as with Graves, through the intervention of the Goddess. Death can only 'CRY' out

> WHILE THE WIND
>
> CROSSES THE STONES
>
> WHILE THE STARS TURN
>
> WHILE THE MOON TURNS
>
> WHILE THE SEA TURNS (*SO*, p. 30)

Here the 'unkillable North Sea' of 'Mayday on Holderness' plays its part in the inimitable cycle of nature that the Goddess embodies. In this frenzy of uninhibited, cosmological activity she is in her primacy, all-powerful, and equipped to offer redemption to the objective 'YOU' of the ode who is, in fact, both William Hughes and (therefore) the poet's 'I', the I which suffers, in Paul Bentley's words, 'fantasies of voracious aggression and disintegration' which are a result of its exposure to the effects of the First World War.[541] The figure of the poet as trauma subject is invoked and confronted in terms that acknowledge Hughes's drive towards a sense of reintegration with the natural world in the face of 'man's failure to perceive the relationship of nature to the inmost psychology of man':[542]

> YOU UNDER THE LEAF
> YOU UNDER THE STONE
> YOU UNDER THE BLOOD UNDER THE SEA
> YOU UNDER THE EARTH (*SO*, p. 30)

Buried under the blood of the war-dead as much as the inter-generational bequest of trauma (the 'blood' he shares with his father), or under the 'SEA' of William's experience as 'his memory's buried, immovable anchor', Hughes calls himself out of the 'deep […] confinement' he identifies in 'His Silence'. The Goddess is the answer to the 'problem' of his 'imprison[ment]' in a history that is not his own and, as 'THE MOON TURNS', she will release him–as poet-victim–from what Graves described in *The White Goddess* as the oppressions of the Great Wheel.

[541] Bentley, *The Poetry of Ted Hughes*, p. 19.
[542] Qtd. in Carol Bere, 'Hughes, Ted', in *The Literary Encyclopedia*, 4 October 2004. Available at <http://www.litencyc.com/php/speople.php?rec=true&UID=5137> [accessed 28 April 2017].

Manumission from the Great Wheel–the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth that the suffering soul endures as acolyte of the Goddess–is, as previously noted, analogous with the Orphic solution to the repetitive cycle of traumatic experience in which both Graves and Hughes are mired. Redemption comes only from the benevolence of the Muse once the poet has proved himself 'true' and perceives her, Nature, and therefore his inner self with Campbell's 'eyes of understanding'. Oedipus, in 'Song for a Phallus', fails to read this challenge for what it is–an opportunity. He attempts to 'smash his way out of the darkness' by brute force, and simply ends where he began:[543]

> He split his Mammy like a melon
>
> He was drenched with gore
>
> He found himself curled up inside
>
> As if he had never been bore.
>
> Mamma   Mamma (*CP*, p. 250)

In his Ode to Bacchus, however, Hughes reaches a state of shamanic enlightenment, finally coming face to face with the previously unknowable figure at the heart of his trauma, the father whose history has consistently eluded him:

YOU

YOU

YOU (*SO*, p. 31)

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[543] Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes*, p. 119.

* * *

Tim Supple observes that the particular hallmark of Hughes's *Oedipus* is an 'almost unbearable clarity: the moment of thought seen in the moment of speech, glaring with an unavoidable definition'.[544] This 'clarity' is so 'unbearable' because it moves progressively– through his vision of the plague, the figure of Jocasta, and his translation of the Bacchus Ode– towards a moment of traumatic witness. Despite his wider project to alleviate contemporary culture's estrangement from, even conflict with, nature, in his translation of Seneca's tragedy 'Hughes is not offering global solutions to the problems of Western Civilisation'.[545] As Anne Schofield points out, '[l]ike Eliot's *Waste Land*, Hughes's Oedipus myth is "the chart of his own condition"'.[546] Hughes himself would argue that 'I can't believe that he [Eliot] took the disintegration of Western civilisation as a theme which he then found imagery and a general plan for. His sickness told him the cause. Surely that was it. He cleansed his wounds and found all the shrapnel.'[547] In his *Oedipus*, Hughes was attempting to dig out and confront the psychological 'shrapnel' of his secondary trauma: the actuality and after effects of his father's service in the First World War, and the deep-seated aftermath of the loss of a generation of Yorkshiremen on the Calder Valley.

Hughes's understanding of the 'raw dream' of the Oedipus myth became his vehicle, and his version of the play is as much a translation of this *ur*-text as it is Seneca's tragedy. In

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[544] Tim Supple, 'First sighting: a tall and reserved figure', in *The Epic Poise: A Celebration of Ted Hughes*, ed. by Nick Gammage, pp. 163-6 (p. 163).
[545] Schofield, 'The Oedipus Theme in Hughes', pp. 208-9.
[546] Schofield, 'The Oedipus Theme in Hughes', pp. 208-9.
[547] Faas, *The Unaccomodated Universe,* p. 204.

his iteration of Seneca's plague he evokes the physical reality of the Front Line and investigates the degenerative effects of shell-shock. In his redeployment of Jocasta as an elemental Goddess figure he extrapolates his formulation of the Sphinx as Nature incarnate; in doing so, he describes the conditions of man's alienation from his inner being, a failing which he perceives to be the root cause of the devastating violence that produced the 'dead alive' men of 1914-18–a cohort to which William Graves emphatically belonged. Although Hughes's syncretic phenomenon of

Sphynx/womb/hell/body/forbidden/questionmark/mother/darkness/death

is undoubtedly retributive and destructive, the Goddess is not represented in this aspect alone. As Poe asserts, 'we have seen that in [*Oedipus*] evil is not truly the opposite of good; that the malignant power in the universe is not just lethal but is full of life and wildly creative.'[548] Like the plague, which ushers in new (if unnatural) ways of being, the redemptive capacity of the Goddess–her ability to remove the poet from the incessant round of his secondary traumatic experience–is adumbrated in the figure of Jocasta, but her potential remains unrealised until the shamanic flight of the Ode to Bacchus. Here, Hughes's translation performs at the level of ritual, amalgamating the myth of the White Goddess into the 'primitive, raw shape of [Seneca's] drama' and, in doing so, unleashing the 'pure language' at its heart. As Michael Sweeting posits, in a shamanic undertaking such as that which Hughes performs with his translation of the Bacchus Ode, a 'mystical return to chaos and destruction' of what Mircea Eliade calls 'normal profane experience' enables 'a recreation and resurrection'.[549] By allowing Hughes, finally, to narrate a confrontation with the father he both knew 'too well'

[548] Park Poe, 'The Sinful Nature', p. 148.
[549] Michael Sweeting, 'Hughes and Shamanism', p. 79; Mircea Eliade, *Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries* (London: Fontana, 1968), p. 80.

and ‘never knew’, *Seneca’s Oedipus* enables Hughes to emerge from the dark chthonic womb of trauma and narrate his experience, becoming in the process a site of triumphant catharsis.

CONCLUSION

In the penultimate paragraph of his introduction to *The White Goddess* (in Grevel Lindop's current edition), Graves illustrates his vision of a ruined world, in which the matriarchy of the Goddess affords the only salvation. This passage has been quoted fragmentarily throughout this thesis, but I offer it in its entirety here:

> The function of poetry is religious invocation of the Muse; its use is the experience of mixed exaltation and horror that her presence excites [....] This was once a warning to man that he must keep in harmony with the family of living creatures among which he was born, by obedience to the wishes of the lady of the house; it is now a reminder that he has disregarded the warning, turned the house upside down by capricious experiments in philosophy, science, and industry, and brought ruin on himself and his family. "Nowadays" is a civilization in which the prime emblems of poetry are dishonoured. In which serpent, lion, and eagle belong to the circus-tent; ox, salmon and boar to the cannery, racehorse and greyhound to the betting ring; and the sacred grove to the saw-mill. In which the Moon is despised as a burned-out satellite of the Earth and woman reckoned as "auxiliary State personnel." In which money will buy almost anything but truth, and almost anyone but the truth-possessed poet. (*TWG*, p. 10)

In a similar vein, the historian H. A. L. Fischer wrote in 1935 that 'men wiser than I have discerned in history a plot, a rhythm, a predetermined pattern. These harmonies are concealed from me. I can see only one emergency following another as wave follows wave.'[550] For Graves, the series of profound and life-altering traumas to which he was subjected during the First World War (and beyond), following each other as 'wave follows wave', left him with a clear purpose. Although by departing England for Déya he essentially removed himself

[550] H. A. L. Fisher, *A History of Europe*, Vol. I (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1935), p. vii.

from a world which no longer concerned him, the passage above indicates that he was nonetheless compelled to offer, at least, an alternative to this state of infinite crisis and spiritual vacuity. With the publication of *The White Goddess* he has thus, as Carter asserts, 'undertaken the Herculean task of sweeping away three thousand years of a male-dominated civilization that has gone disastrously awry, in order to fetch us back to the orderliness, warmth, and comfort of the matrilineal hearth'.[551] Above all, the 'orderliness and warmth' that Graves is striving towards is a state of psychological and emotional alleviation: the Goddess renders his traumatic experience meaningful and productive, and ultimately represents the possibility for a life unmarred by its persistent rigours. The true poet's devotion to her, he claims in his *Oxford Addresses on Poetry*, will ensure the end of 'total wars'; but on a subjective level, it will also ensure that the war raging unabated in his unconscious can move toward conclusion.[552] She is both palliative and cure; and, in the end, for the majority of Graves's later work she operates as a master signifier. As Jarrell puts it,

> All that is finally important to Graves is condensed in the one figure of the Mother-Mistress-Muse, she who creates, nourishes, destroys; she who saves us–or, as good as saving, destroys us–as long as we love her without question, use all our professional, Regimental, masculine qualities in her service. Death is swallowed up in victory, said St Paul; for Graves Life, Death, everything that exists is swallowed up in the White Goddess.[553]

This extends, as we have seen, beyond Graves's poetry and prose to his translations. The same applies, as an interwoven factor, to the Great War. As Brearton puts it, 'Graves's aesthetic is committed solely to the attempt to deal with [its] effect[s]', and it is the Goddess

551 Carter, *Robert Graves*, p. 16
552 Robert Graves, 'The Personal Muse', in *Collected Writings on Poetry*, ed. by Paul O'Prey (Manchester: Carcanet, 1995), pp. 336-53 (p. 350).
553 Jarrell, 'Graves and the White Goddess', pp. 111-2.

who provides 'a framework in which to write about, or perhaps more importantly, not write about the war itself'.[554] In both accounts, as has been demonstrated, the interdependent thematic concerns of the Great War and the White Goddess exceed Graves's oeuvre to influence Hughes's work.

In 1957, Hughes claims that what 'excites [his] imagination is the war between vitality and death'.[555] For Brearton, this results in a poetic consciousness in which the First World War becomes 'more than the sum of its parts […] a life/death struggle' between man and the natural world that he has estranged himself from.[556] Yet in a late, undated poem about his father, 'The Last of the 1st/5th Lancashire Fusiliers', William's post-war condition is extrapolated to represent the large-scale, cultural aftermath of the First World War in terms which make clear that the relationship Hughes identifies between Nature and civilisation is by no means binary: when contextualised by warfare, each permeates the other's sphere, binding them together. Nature encroaches on the manmade *accoutrements* of the Front Line: the war is 'an idea in the *muzzle*d calibre of the big guns, | In the grey, *wolvish* outline [emphasis mine]'; but war is also a 'kind of careless health' that, once over (physically, at least) has 'left the father' in a reduced but animalistic state himself, 'long-billed, spider-kneed' and 'Bow-backed', like a strange, silent bird (*CP*, p. 850). His sons' initial response upon seeing him make his way tentatively across 'frosty cobbles' is to laugh, but

> Remembering it, remembering their laughter
>
> They only want to weep
>
> As after the huge wars

[554] Brearton, *The Great War*, pp. 85, 87.
[555] Ted Hughes, 'Ted Hughes Writes', *Poetry Book Society Bulletin,* 15 (September 1957), 1-2 (p. 1).
[556] Brearton, 'But that is not new', p. 235.

Senseless huge wars

Huge senseless weeping. (*CP*, p. 850-1)

The 'grey, wolvish outline' of not only the heavy weaponry but the war itself haunts Hughes's poetry and, subsequently, his translations in an aesthetic that keeps Nature and the Goddess who embodies it as a consistent focus, stressing the connections and interdependencies between them. Trying to make sense of the 'Senseless huge wars' and, by extension, craft the 'Huge senseless weeping' (the *Hughes's* 'senseless weeping'?) that it inspired into something with purpose becomes, as it was for Graves, the poet's duty. The challenge that this presents him with, as secondary trauma subject, is apparent. In 'A Masque for Three Voices', despite knowing fundamentally 'what ghosts breathe in my breath'–the traumatic inheritance passed on by his father and Yorkshire's lost generation–the 'shiver of their battles' remains his 'Shibboleth' (*CP*, p. 825). Unable to access the actuality of combat, he falters at a legitimate enunciation (or pronunciation) of their experience. The Goddess Myth attenuates this representative lacuna. Sean O'Brien accuses Hughes of being fundamentally 'uninterested by the developing social and political reality of the British Isles in his adult lifetime', choosing to preoccupy himself instead with 'the natural world and its mythic function'.[557] This is somewhat reductive: myth–and specifically the Goddess Myth–was by no means an evasion of history for Hughes, whose sense of the 'developing social and political reality' of modern Britain was of an age that continued to feel the traumatic reverberations of his father's war as a cataclysmic event. It is a Britain that, like Hughes himself, 'took in the blood of the First World War with their mother's milk', and the mediating lens that the Gravesian Goddess

[557] Sean O'Brien, *The Deregulated Muse* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1998), p. 37.

provided him with enabled the expression of a sense of trauma, a phenomenon already characterised by dislocation, that has been twice refracted: by the originary event itself, and by the condition of postmemory in which Hughes finds himself mired.[558] In both his poetry and translation she comes as violence, in a manner that encapsulates and to an extent remedies the traumatic effects of war: in *Gaudete*'s *vacanas* she is 'The spider clamp[ing] the bluefly', whose 'death panic' transforms, under her auspices, into 'sudden soulful absorption' (*CP*, p. 358); in *Seneca's Oedipus* she is–in the figure of Jocasta–both destructive and generative in equal measure, source and final destination: 'I am the root   my blood is | the dark twisted root   this womb   darkness | swallowing all order and distinction   so die' (*SO*, p. 54). The Goddess provides, finally, Heaney's 'images and symbols adequate to [the] predicament' of Hughes's combat-related, if secondary, trauma.

So what role, in the end, does classical translation play in this process? Its efficacy as a cathartic tool, at least in regards to Graves and Hughes, has been tested in these pages. The persistent notions that oscillate around the idea of a source text's 'pure language'–its 'inner sense', 'raw dream', mythic substructure, *ur*-text–are solidified in the functionality of what Hardwick refers to as 'anthropological classicism', a term that can be justifiably applied to the activity of all of the translations discussed. Consciously or unconsciously, a 'writing out' of trauma has taken place in *The Golden Ass*, *The Anger of Achilles*, and *Seneca's Oedipus*, a striving towards the apprehension of an elusive history that has been given–in Hughes's case, ritual–shape by the hermeneutic possibilities inherent to the medium of translation. Apuleius's *Metamorphoses*, Homer's *Iliad*, and Seneca's *Oedipus* have all been mined for that which speaks not only to the Goddess myth, but also to the translators' traumatic experiences. In some cases, it seems that the narrative framework of the source text has enabled the recovery and

[558] Hughes, *Rain-Charm for the Duchy,* p. 59.

synthesis of a traumatic origin. In *The Anger of Achilles*, Graves describes his own 'death' on the battlefield, lifted beyond the carnage of warfare by the Goddess-as-*ker*; he also holds himself accountable, as Achilles, for the death of David Graves-as-Patroklos. In *Seneca's Oedipus*, Hughes orchestrates a definitive encounter with the figure of his father, the primary source of his secondary trauma. In other places, translation simply facilitates the expression of traumatic experience itself: in *The Golden Ass*, Lucius embodies the silence and unspeakability that characterise Graves's shell-shocked condition, while the interpolated speech Hughes crafts for Jocasta amplifies the unnatural dynamics of the traumatised mind at both a biological and cosmological level. At their most effective, each of these translations couches these moments of 'witness', or testimony, in the language, images, and mechanisms of the Myth of the White Goddess.

Ultimately, the opportunity translation affords for a revisionist encounter with a source text, combined with the exigencies of the Goddess whom Graves and Hughes adored and feared in equal measure, opens up what Benjamin views as a 'third space, distinct from source and target [languages]' in which, crucially, the work of traumatic catharsis can take place.[559] This is the site of 'pure language', a place between language, myth, and lived experience where narration of traumatic memories becomes viable. For Benjamin, '[i]n all language and linguistic creations there remains in addition to what can be conveyed something that cannot be communicated […] And that which seeks to represent […] itself […] is that very nucleus of pure language.'[560] Reiterating the problem that lies at the heart of trauma, an inability to communicate a memory, or history, that remains elusive, the source text's 'pure language' enables Graves and Hughes to 'represent'–to varying degrees–their experience.

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[559] Susan Bassnett, *Translation* (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 13.
[560] Benjamin, 'Task', p. 261.

What more can be done? Each strand of research that this thesis attempts to interweave could undoubtedly be taken further. Although Hughesian scholarship has certainly acknowledged Graves's influence upon his work, both fields of study would benefit from a more sustained analysis of the interconnective tissue that binds their poetry together, both in terms of the war and the Goddess. Hughes's place as a war poet, although deftly propounded and substantiated by scholars such as Brearton, Kendall, and O'Connor, deserves to be more fully recognised, an objective which could perhaps be achieved by a special collection of Hughes's poems pertaining to war, or an edited collection of critical papers which take these poems as their focus. The relationship between trauma, myth, and translation, too, could be more thoroughly tested, and beyond the confines of Graves's and Hughes's oeuvre: what possibilities does this 'third space', the remit of anthropological classicism, hold? The effectiveness of practitioner-led projects that use ancient drama as a cathartic vehicle for veterans suffering from PTSD has been widely acknowledged;[561] as evidence for the power of authoring narratives to recover from trauma and create a sense of self is universal, is there scope for similar therapeutic schemes involving the translation of ancient texts–using cribs, glosses, and other paratextual aids, as both Graves and Hughes did–thus enabling veterans to re-write paradigmatic texts of war and combat-related stress (such as Sophocles's *Ajax*) within the light of their own experience?

* * *

[561] Cf. Peter Meineck's *Aquila* theatre company, funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, which launched the *Warrior Chorus* programme in 2017, training veterans to present innovative public programmes based on ancient literature (http://www.aquilatheatre.com/warrior-chorus/); Brian Doerries's *Theater of War*, which presents readings of Sophocles's *Philoctetes* and *Ajax* to military communities, with the aim of de-stigmatizing psychological injury and forging a common vocabulary for openly discussing the impact of war (www.theaterofwar.com)

In conclusion, it could be said of both Graves and Hughes that, in the words of Wilfred Owen's 'Mental Cases', 'these are men whose mind the Dead have ravished'.[562] Graves is haunted by the loss of both his son and the men who died under his command, while Hughes's entire aesthetic seems to have been shaped by his father's shell-shock–a man who 'killed-but-alive' unwittingly initiated his son's secondary trauma–and the persistent influence of the Calder Valley's war dead. Combined, the White Goddess and the act of classical translation make steps toward counteracting that ravishment through the revitalising power of a 'pure language' that, in the end, is as much the language of witness as it is of myth.

[562] Wilfred Owen, 'Mental Cases', in *The Poems of Wilfred Owen*, ed. and intro. by Owen Knowles, 2nd edn. (1994; Ware, Herts.: Wordsworth Editions, 2002), p. 92.

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