

## Robert Graves, *Poeta*

Fearing his awesome mother,  
the trenches' cruelty  
and neurasthenic terror  
copied his inner war.  
He galloped his marriage-bed  
with Materfamilias,  
booted and cruelly spurred,  
astride his back.

He worshipped a Great Mistress  
who guaranteed his art;  
she came from another country  
preaching unholy writ,  
the guardian of a secret  
wisdom which he could suffer  
only through her; there at her  
crumbling feet he grovelled  
for his pain.

Under a phallic hammer  
his Idol broke, so lost  
her esoteric power.  
A gentler woman came  
with no ordeals or torments,  
no sorcery but only  
uncomplicated love;  
their peace and tenderness  
thawed out each other's winter  
in a bleak Devon.

But in his mental womb  
a creature was conceived  
then born – the White Goddess,

a mythic metaphore  
of purity and terror.  
He'd stared into the heart  
of love and dreamed it barren.  
Come, mighty Mother, Muse  
and Mistress, mount his flanks  
again; he craves your spur  
to goad reluctant art  
from misery!

Time would wear out his body,  
whiten his hair but bring  
no wisdom; the surgeon's knife  
would hasten drooling-time.  
Then he would relive  
those wild white women of  
Euripides in the groves  
of Deia, pitiless furies  
come to torment his age,  
chasing those Jill-O-Lanterns  
over their perilous mires  
into oblivion.

Norman Buller