

‘Repetition or Containment’? Responses to Wounds in the First World War: Robert Graves, Ernest Hemingway and Wilfred Owen

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In 2002, Roma Ligocka, whose childhood was portrayed in Stephen Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List* (as the girl in the red coat), said authoritatively that ‘Contrary to popular belief, time does not heal wounds’.¹ Graves, however, has shown that poetry and the poetic imagination, if used to address time and trauma, have the potential to heal and transform even the most enduring wounds. Although Graves’s post war poetry grew out of interactions with psychoanalysis, Graves became disdainful of Freud and, as Miranda Seymour writes, ‘pretended to have despised all forms of psychoanalysis’.² Nevertheless, some biographers have suggested that Graves did in fact, discreetly, engage with treatment. In developing my argument, I will show that he did not. Despite lifelong reverberations of his early traumatic experiences Graves refused to commit to treatment, psychoanalytic or otherwise. I suggest that he needed his wounds to endure and there is reason to believe he unconsciously repeated them in a number of ways. As Paul O’Prey wonders ‘it is almost as if he had come to rely on emotional suffering as a prerequisite for successful writing’.³ Graves’s internalised wounds were a galvanising, creative force, and at least equal to the self-proclaimed effects of mixed parentage or the insidious psychological terrorism of Laura Riding.

In this paper, I want to explore the effects of Graves’s wounds, and what their implications were for both his writing and his life in which they appear to repeat with uncanny regularity. In exploring this, I will compare Graves with Ernest Hemingway, another veteran, who acts as a useful counterpoint to Graves in a

number of respects but with this exception: Hemingway's repetitions tend to occur in the external world while Graves are primarily in the internal world of his literary output. First however, I want to introduce Wilfred Bion, a tank commander in the First World War and later, psychoanalyst, whose experience of trauma at the time of his service and later exemplify many of the difficulties and concerns which also inform the emotional and intellectual terrain of Graves and Hemingway. Indeed, a triangulation between these three examples creates a thinking space to propose a generalised case about the internal conflicts that young men who are wounded, physically and psychologically, whilst fighting may be facing.

Writers who fought in the First World War often use narrative methods that reflect the divisions, existential confusions and conflicts enforced by war.⁴ For example, while on the Western front between 1917-1919, Bion wrote a factual diary of his experiences intended for his parents (he chose not to send letters home). Having lost his diary, he immediately re-wrote it from memory after demobilisation in 1919, which was unusual for a First World War memoir. Yet never recovering from the war and suffering recurrent nightmares, Bion felt unable to return to his account until 1958, when at age sixty he was stimulated to by a train journey through France with his second wife. Here Bion deals in much greater depth with two days in the battle of Amiens – 7 and 8 August 1918. He renders his account fictional, writing in the third person and including himself as the principal character in the action. But even this reiteration remained incomplete and ends on an unfinished sentence. It was not for another fourteen years in 1972 that he wrote his Commentary on the diary.⁵ Here Bion enacts a clear division between his younger, innocent, soldier self and the old psychoanalyst troubled by reflection. As Francesca Bion, Wilfred's second wife, writes

the conversation is between two characters only: BION, the inexperienced young man of twenty-one, and MYSELF, the wise old man of seventy-five. Memories come flooding back, reinforcing his dislike of his personality and the poor opinion of his performance as a soldier. (p. 192)

Speaking about his dislike of his older self, Bion says, ‘but I never recovered from the survival of the Battle of Amiens. Most of what I do not like about you seemed to start then’ (p. 202).

After these reworkings, Bion was again compelled to revisit his war in *The Long Weekend 1897–1919 Part Of A Life*.⁶ Here he recounts the first twenty-two years of his life, and deals with his worst war experiences again in the latter part of the book, but this time with a more vivid emotional resonance. The primary repeated example running through these texts is the death of his young runner Sweeting on 8 August 1918 which seems to have had a lasting effect.⁷

In his 1918 diary Bion tells the reader that he mentions this incident ‘in such detail, horrible as it is, because it had such a great effect on me’.⁸ In fact, he deals with this event in only four short paragraphs and only mentions Sweeting’s name twice. He describes them crouching together when a shell explodes above them wounding Sweeting. Knowing the wound fatal (‘the whole of his left side had been torn away’), Bion pretends to dress it and reassures Sweeting who was ‘quite a young boy and was terrified’. He adds ‘He gave me his mother’s address and I promised to write’. He notes how in Sweeting’s eyes were ‘mingled fear and surprise’, like ‘the eyes of a bird that has been shot’, and expresses his anger at the ‘criminal folly’ of our leaders who wanted to ‘satisfy their childish ambitions, that led to hell for us’.⁹

By 1958, in the fictionalised account, the Sweeting incident has been expanded and becomes an exemplar of the awfulness of the

war. He devotes much more time to it, conveys a greater sense of his relationship with Sweeting, the young man's reliance on Bion, and his part in Sweeting's fate. The physical presence of Sweeting is emphasised: 'Sweeting pressed himself as hard as he could against Bion, who then realised how frightened the young boy was'.¹⁰ In spite of realising that he had set his tank in the wrong direction, into the path of the enemy, Bion writes that he 'compelled Sweeting to look back and see the road' to confirm this perception implying that Sweeting would have had to climb out of the shell hole they were hiding in to do so – a detail missing from his earlier account. It is at this point that Sweeting asks Bion 'Why can't I cough?' and Bion refers to himself vomiting at the sight of the wound. Sweeting calls for his mother over and over and asks Bion to write to her. In this passage Bion introduces the repeated the mantra 'Mother, Mother, Mother . . .' Perhaps reminded of his own mother, Bion shouts 'Oh, for Christ's sake shut up'. Bion continues his description of the battle, but he returns to this poignant scene of Sweeting calling for his mother thirty pages later whereupon Sweeting is taken away as a casualty. He writes: "'Well, thank God he's gone,'" thought Bion, filled with passionate hatred of himself for his hatred of the wounded man'.¹¹

In the 1958 version Bion's animosity is not projected upon those responsible for the war as in the first account, but upon Sweeting for bringing out the worst in Bion, and upon himself for what he realises about his responsibility for his men. Since Sweeting appears to have been hit whilst 'compelled' by Bion's order to look out of the shell hole, it becomes likely that Bion's anger is partly a defence against guilt.

The same incident is described again in Bion's autobiography (1982) where yet another version of the events is rendered. He devotes four pages to this, and, confirming the view that Bion identifies with Sweeting's pleas for his mother, he begins the chapter by imagining his parents receiving news of his own death,

‘My mother and father, but particularly my mother’.¹² Bion repeats here that he and Sweeting hid in a deep shell hole but omits any idea that he had compelled Sweeting to look out of the shell hole at the road. In this version he gives a full account of his strained dialogue with Sweeting, Sweeting’s insistent “Mother, mother, mother” and Bion’s anxious attempts to quieten him: “Sweeting, *please* Sweeting... please, please *shut up*”.¹³ Sweeting is taken away by two men and Bion assumes he will die. Yet the incident returns six pages on: ‘I suddenly remembered Sweeting. I had not written’ and in this passage Bion repeats the mantra “‘Mother, Mother, Mother’”¹⁴ He evidently identified with the deeply felt desire to return the safety of the mother which Sweeting brought into consciousness. He goes on to describe, with brutal irony, the letter he would write to Sweeting’s mother, including the necessary lies added to soften the blow while the ‘Mother’ mantra breaks into the narrative twice. Seven pages later Bion describes his leave, sitting in a Turkish bath in Russel Square when memories break in on him:

‘Mother, Mother... You will write to my mother sir, won’t you?

‘No, blast you, I shan’t! Shut up! Can’t you see I don’t want to be disturbed?’ These old ghosts, they never die. They don’t even fade away; they preserve their youth wonderfully.¹⁵

In the successive dates, and long gaps between Bion’s revisions and reiterations of these experiences, the typographic divisions of *Commentary*, culminating in his emotive autobiography we can see an attempt, similar to that made by Graves, to say ‘goodbye to all that’. Both Graves and Bion fail. Graves spent years after the first world war producing highly personal and analytic poetry; Bion underwent two periods of psychoanalysis, in 1938 and a long period from 1946–1952. Roma Ligočka’s devastating comment

about the inability of time to heal trauma, on one level at least, seems borne out by this. The point I want to draw here however, is for those who suffer traumatic wounding, whether physical, psychological or both, the experience comes to be seen as a pronounced dividing line in their lives marking an irreversible change, a change which structures future experience. In an attempt to heal this fracture such a writer may be unconsciously compelled to repeat their wounding until they can find a way in which it can be assimilated. Those repetitions can be internally held and projected into poetry or prose or externalised as an abreaction (or delayed behavioural response).

Before considering the relationship between trauma, repetition and guilt for Graves and Hemingway, I want to turn briefly to Freud's ideas about trauma and repetition in order to clarify the mechanisms and denude them of the more negative connotations of 'Freudianism'. Freud's ideas about trauma develop over the course of his studies. There is no room to explore each phase here, but we can briefly trace his ideas about trauma from his first writings in 1892 up to 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' in 1920. The single idea that remains throughout is that traumatic neuroses is caused by internal conflict rather than an external event. For example, in 'On Hysterical Mechanisms' Freud writes that: 'In traumatic neurosis the active cause of illness is not the trifling bodily injury but the affect of fright – the psychic trauma' (Riviere, 1959, 27).¹⁶ It is here that Freud first proposed that 'hysterical patients suffer principally from reminiscences' (29). In 'Studies in Hysteria' (1885) the case studies Freud presents all describe patients whose memories are repressed due to an internal conflict, but the emotional tension or 'affect' is then 'converted' into physical symptoms. In spite of his subsequent view of the sexual aetiology of traumatic symptoms, Freud continues to explore ideas about internal conflict. As early as 1918, he was making a study of what he called 'war neurosis'. He published an introduction in 1918 for a short book, *Psychoanalysis and the War*

Neurosis, which was a record of the papers presented at the Fifth International Psycho-analytical Congress in Budapest.¹⁷ As Hunt notes Freud recognised ‘from the outset that war neuroses were functional rather than organic, psychological rather than physiological’.¹⁸ Indeed, in 1920 Freud wrote a ‘Memorandum On The Electrical Treatments of War Neurotics’ in which he discusses the terms of the debate about the causes of war neuroses. He clearly deplored the use of such electrical treatments and argued that they are ineffective, based as they were upon the faulty view that the cause of neuroses is organic and related solely to the traumatic event itself. Again, Freud proposes that the cause is an internal conflict.¹⁹ In summary, he argues that the fear of loss of life, or of killing others, or rebellion against being under another’s control would oblige the soldier ‘to desert or pretend to be ill’. But since he believed that only a very small proportion of war neurotics were malingering then the emotional impulses that rebelled against active service made them ill were operative in them unconsciously. They remained unconscious because of other conflicting motives such as, ‘ambition, self-esteem, patriotism, the habit of obedience and the example of others’. Flight into illness then acts as a resolution of this internal conflict. A year before, Freud had expressed this conflict in terms of the pre-war ego conflicting with the ‘new warlike one’, a conflict W. H. R. Rivers takes up and modifies in *Conflict and Dream*.²⁰ By 1920 Freud was radically revising his ideas and wrestling with the question of why certain experiences should be repeated even though they are not pleasurable and thus fall beyond the pleasure principle. Here he gives the example of a soldier’s repeated nightmare or the child’s repeated game alongside many other typical instances in which people repeat experiences which are in fact harmful to them. On reflection Freud writes ‘[t]he impression they give is of being pursued by a malignant fate or possessed by some ‘daemonic power’ and that they seem to experience a ‘perpetual recurrence of the same thing’²¹ This description fits the kinds of

traumatic haunting conveyed so well by Graves in his volume 'The Pier-Glass' (1921). In reference to the 'repetition compulsion', the psychiatrist Paul Russell writes that it 'becomes a disorder in which memory is confused with perception. To whatever degree there has been a trauma, it is inappropriately over-remembered and rendered as present experience. Trauma is that which gets compulsively repeated'.²²

Freud gives a variety of explanation as to why this may be. Most relevant to my argument here however is that such repetitions allow the subject the chance to play a more active part in the events which formally afflicted them in a passive role and this allows them to gain mastery over the experience retroactively.

To bring these ideas into a contemporary context, one kind of repetition is an unconscious re-enactment that forces the inner, psychic wound out into external reality. While relatively unknown in the early twentieth century, most of us today are aware of individuals who self-harm, for example, by cutting or burning a part of their body.²³ This counter intuitive behaviour can be understood as a morbid form of self-help.²⁴ While the motivation for her actions may not be clear to the self-harmer, the act itself is nevertheless a conscious one. Freud however, as early as 1901, and using what he considered a 'clumsy expression', wrote about the 'half-intentional self-injury', in which the 'impulse to self-punishment' takes 'ingenious advantage of an external situation' until the 'desired injurious effects are brought'.²⁵ Self-punishment, aligned with a compulsion to repeat, might be a way, so far overlooked by scholars, to understand the terrific number of accidents, injuries and illness which, as we shall see, seemed to afflict Graves and Hemingway. In addition, this tendency toward self-harming behaviour points to the notion of unconscious guilt. Arguably too, the persistence of sickness and wounding suggests that these physical manifestations carry a number of operative functions. For instance, they might amount to an externalisation of internal wounds that could not be borne or consciously

acknowledged. This self-appointed suffering, for Graves, may also have become a prerequisite to atone for a sense of guilt for those he killed during the First World War. Seymour-Smith ends his biography by recalling that Graves told him in 1977 that he had ‘murdered a lot of men’.²⁶ It is no surprise that his post-war poetry repeatedly deals with themes of transgression, guilt and atonement, for example, ‘Haunted’, ‘The Pier-Glass’, ‘Reproach’, ‘Raising the Stone’, ‘The Gnat’. As Jean Moorcroft Wilson, Graves’s most recent biographer, notes of his traumatic symptoms from 1917:

Although the worst effects would die down in ten years or so, in 1935 he was still dreaming of trying to save people, with his ‘lieutenant’, from a burning house in which dead bodies with army identity discs would figure.²⁷

Indeed, I will argue that the primitivism and emotional force seen in *The White Goddess*,²⁸ although written nineteen years after *Good-bye to All That*,²⁹ in fact can be seen as carried over from unconscious elements of Graves’s war experience, particularly his wounding at Mametz Wood in 1916. Although increasingly unorthodox for a man born in 1895, Graves was nevertheless an extremely religious man. Utilising his reading of pre-Christian history, religion and myth, Graves transformed this wounding into a transfiguration, death and rebirth. The notion of transfiguration and the imagery of being struck or pierced which is a clear reverberation of his war wounds, is evident throughout his poetry and culminates in the Goddess myth, clearly indicated by the final line of the dedicatory poem with which this book begins ‘Careless of where the next bright bold may fall’.

There are at least thirty references to wounds in *The White Goddess* (1997),³⁰ many of which are injuries caused by lightning, spears or knives. There are references to sharp and piercing wounds (pp. 20, 47, 295, 309, 378, 390), spears, darts and swords

(pp. 144, 301, 463), being torn or cut into pieces (pp. 84, 97, 120, 178, 195, 309, 391), being burned (pp. 47, 121, 123) and being struck by lightning (pp. 101, 182, 191, 358, 405). References to lightning are not surprising given Graves's experience of being struck by lightning during his early army career. These references to wounds can also be read alongside Graves's preoccupation with wounds in his poetry and understood as symbolic allusions to the experience of being shot. Sharp pains and wounding, often to the head, come to represent for Graves moments of poetic inspiration or moments in which love *strikes*. The tendency to repeat these wounds in the pattern of his love poetry and *The White Goddess* indicates that Graves's work is compelled by a profound understanding of his mortality, a need to test himself repeatedly and to atone for guilt.

As testament to the unconscious endurance of trauma, it was not until 1976 when in his eighties that the guilt Graves once described vividly in his poems returned to haunt him. When Graves no longer had the strength to resist the memories and emotions still present from his war years, nor to project them into his writing, he was compelled to return to France in his mind and relive some of the horrors of the war he had fought in sixty years earlier.³¹ McPhail and Guest comment that 'it was a particularly cruel twist of fate that at the end of his long life Graves – like others who fought in the First World War – believed himself back in the front line, a state of mind in the 1970s and 1980s that remained with him for longer than the actual period of his experiences in France over sixty years earlier'.³²

For Bion, a capacity to reflect fully upon his war experiences was predicated upon the foundation, stability and contentment found in his second marriage to Francesca: not unlike Graves in his second marriage to Beryl. From this base, in 1958 stimulated by a train journey through France with his Francesca, Bion was able to reflect upon certain episodes to which he would regularly revert, for example, in which other tanks were hit and the

occupants effectively cooked inside, and particularly upon the poignant death of Sweeting in 1918 as described above. Bion would go on to develop psychoanalytic theory, using Freud's concept 'projection' and Melanie Klein's 'projective identification' and would establish the overriding developmental concept of 'containment'. 'Containment' is a communicative, developmental process, often unconscious, whereby one person projects certain kinds of unbearable experiences onto another person – we could say a frightened baby into its mother, or a traumatised soldier into a psychiatrist. The mother/psychiatrist are in turn disturbed by the projection, but do not block it. Rather, they assimilate and try to make sense of the experience internally, and then they communicate this back to the baby/patient in a form which is changed by this internal processing and can thus be managed by the baby/patient. It is not difficult from here to see, as Michael Roper does, how the extreme wartime threat of the body's annihilation initiates Bion's notion of psychic disintegration, which he later called very aptly, 'nameless dread', and the mental capacity needed to withstand or 'contain' it, both for oneself and others.³³ Further, one can postulate that infants whose parents provided them with good psychological containment during their earliest years will be far less susceptible to trauma in their later years having established a more robust internal structure. In this case, they would also be far less dependent upon maladaptive coping strategies such as self-harm, repetition or other neurotic behaviours.

While Graves and Bion achieved a partial integration of these divisions and confusions, not all writers are successful in this. Ernest Hemingway joined the Italian army in 1918 and served as an ambulance driver. While Graves and Hemingway seem, temperamentally, diametrical opposites they do share some characteristics – like Bion, they were both tall, rugged, physically active and imposing individuals. Both were clumsy, extremely accident prone, with a tendency towards hypochondria when

under stress. Both were argumentative, could be self-obstructive and had difficulty maintaining close friendships. Both suffered severe wounds during active service which appeared to have a lasting impact on their lives and writing. As a slightly lurid aside, both seem to have had an unhealthy preoccupation with wounds and there are similar accounts related to this: Dennis Brian describes Hemingway spending hours digging bits of shrapnel out of his leg.³⁴ R.P. Graves describes Robert Graves on leave after poor army dentistry, attempting to dig out a tooth with tooth pick, then finally with a nail scissors.³⁵

Published in 1929, the same year as *Good-bye to All That*, Hemingway describes his experiences of war are in *A Farewell to Arms*.³⁶ The novel begins with its protagonist, Frederic Henry, watching troops marching by the house:

The dust they raised powdered the leaves of the tress. The trunks of the trees too were dusty and the leaves fell early that year and we saw the troops marching along the road and the dust rising and the leaves, stirred by the breeze, falling and the soldiers marching and afterwards the road bare and white except for the leaves. (p. 3)

Hemingway builds on this description by noting how ‘all the country [was] wet and brown and dead with the autumn’ (p. 4). By repeating the word ‘dust’ he conjures up human mortality (‘from dust to dust’) and correlates the effect of war on the vulnerable soldier with its effect on the natural world, which is laid waste. On p. 2, he evokes an image that will return with renewed poignancy at the text’s conclusion. He describes the troops marching in the rain, carrying equipment beneath their capes ‘as though they were six months gone with child’. This image prefigures the birth of Frederic’s still-born son and the death of his lover Catherine as a consequence of this difficult birth. Hemingway did not, in fact, have such an intimate relationship with his real-life nurse, Agnes

Von Kurowsky, or conceive a baby: both Catherine and the still-born infant are intimate metaphors for the devastation of war.

However, in describing the wounds Hemingway suffered: severe injuries to the knee (though from machine gun fire rather than a mortar explosion), and a skull fracture where a trench beam struck his head, here experienced by Frederic, *A Farewell to Arms* appears to be historically accurate. The description is dispassionate and initially disembodied, Frederic seems to become disconnected, like a mere observer, and initially unidentified with his bodily experience. This is not unlike Graves's account of his wounding in *Good-bye to All That* (pp. 180-181). After the blast, Hemingway writes, 'I tried to breathe but the breath would not come and I felt myself rush bodily out of myself and out and out and out' (p. 50). He feels he is dead, but after a moment in which Frederic seems to float, he breathes and comes back to life. He takes in the scene of devastation around him and becomes aware of a wounded soldier who begins to scream in agony and bite his arm. Frederic, whose wounds are similar if not as severe, tries to attend to the soldier who dies before he is able to fashion a tourniquet. Only now does Frederic, perhaps through a slow identification with the suffering of the now dead soldier, realise the extent of his own injuries:

I knew that I was hit and leaned over and put my hand on my knee. My knee wasn't there. My hand went in and my knee was down on my shin. I wiped my hand on my shirt and another floating light came very slowly down and I looked at my leg and was very afraid. (p. 51)

In *The Faces of Hemingway*, Dennis Brian brings together a variety of portraits by friends, acquaintances, biographers and eyewitnesses so that, to quote 'The Devil's Advice To Storytellers', 'Nice contradiction between fact and fact / Will

make the whole seem human and exact' (lines 21–22). Brian's collection is suggestive, and may help us make sense of Hemingway's tendency toward placing himself in danger, his depression, and eventual suicide.

As we shall see, Carl Baker's description of Hemingway's tendency toward accidents and illness comes close to those about Graves's clumsiness and psychosomatic illnesses. Seymour-Smith, Graves's first biographer, stated that after the war 'Graves was a perennially clumsy man'.³⁷ However, he seemed to have carried this trait from childhood. Climbing in Harlech as a boy, he lost his foothold on a quarry-face and nearly fell.³⁸ At thirteen he broke his two front teeth (p. 11). Later, boxing at Charterhouse in his fifth year, Graves dislocated both his thumbs (p. 48). The second volume of R.P. Graves's biography, *The Years With Laura 1926-1940*, refers to Graves suffering from nervousness;³⁹ digestive illnesses, which lasted for five months (p. 237); repeated boils, one of which was a 'fistula connected with the colon' requiring an operation (p. 272); mental disintegration (pp. 258); 'violent toothache' (p. 281); painful cramps over the liver, which showed 'no internal obstruction' upon x-ray (p. 288), a damaged shoulder from a bicycle crash (297) and back pain (p. 302). Seymour-Smith recalls of Graves that, although he acquired a Land Rover in 1955, only his wife drove it since 'the idea of being driven by Graves in a car' was not a safe one.⁴⁰ R.P. Graves also recounts Graves's post-Second World War ailments and accidents. He suffered an 'extremely dangerous experience' in 1947 when he was 'stung on the heel by an adder' and experienced visions and fever before falling unconscious.⁴¹ In 1959 alone Graves managed to break his finger, badly bruise his chest and damage his back.⁴² Describing himself passing through a psychosomatic period in 1964 Graves had 'fallen and injured his knee; and had also developed a cyst on his elbow'.⁴³ In 1966 Graves was x-rayed for stomach pains for which, like his earlier liver pain, no organic cause was discovered.⁴⁴

Similarly, Baker states that Hemingway suffered physically and ‘denied he was accident-prone, but his poor eyesight, and physical awkwardness combined to cause a remarkable series of mishaps’.⁴⁵ Archibald MacLeish notes how, though a ‘remarkably strong, heavy man, he was a bit of a hypochondriac . . . always having sore throats’.⁴⁶ Hemingway also boxed, though not well, but unlike Graves, who had very little mechanical aptitude, he flew *and* crashed planes, and drove across rough ground at high speeds. He became actively involved in the Pamplona Bull Run, hunted lions, and reported on war from danger zones.⁴⁷ Brian assessed that ‘[i]t was rare for him not to be wounded or injured in war and peace. He broke his arm, repeatedly smashed his skull, shot himself in the legs, and was burned in a bush fire, as if testing his endurance or immunity to pain’.⁴⁸

Brian attributes Hemingway’s depression and eventual suicide to three causes: war trauma, the rejection of his first love, Kurowsky, and the rejection by his parents, who, like Graves’s parents, disapproved of the lifestyle their son adopted after the war.

Brian also discussed Hemingway with the psychiatrist Philip Scharfer, who says of him: ‘Without knowing it, a lot of people relive a certain fear in the hope that repeating it and exposing themselves to it, will make it easier to face’.⁴⁹ This comment reflects Freud’s original idea of a ‘repetition compulsion’, and is supported by the contemporary thinking about trauma.⁵⁰ However, there is reason to believe that Scharfer’s reading is too general and unrelated to the specific events of Hemingway’s life. While Brian’s concluding view in *The Faces of Hemingway* is insightful, given the unique collection of accounts he musters, his account does not realize its interpretive potential. With Graves as a helpful counterpoint, I want to look again at Hemingway’s experience using a psychodynamic framework to develop a stronger explanation for Hemingway’s fate.

Brian discusses the effects of Hemingway's war trauma which 'stayed with him for life in recurring nightmares' and the 'symptoms of his shellshock, one of which was an irrational fear of night' in which he believed 'if he fell asleep in the dark he would never wake' (p. 317). He also notes how Hemingway sustained 'an incredible number of injuries especially to the head' (p. 318). I would suggest we see these head injuries as well as instances of shooting his own legs in the light of Hemingway's war wounds as repetitions. Hemingway appears to be driving himself, despite his fear of the dark or death, back towards that moment, the dividing line, when he felt he had died, but then returned – an experience reminiscent of Graves's death and 'rebirth' in 1916.

A clear instance of this compulsion occurs when, in Uganda in 1954, Hemingway becomes trapped in a crashed and burning plane with several other, and sustains a severe concussion butting his way free – which he volunteers to do. Shortly afterwards, he joins a group fighting a bush fire, but 'stumbles' and falls 'into the flames' (pp. 236–7). Why does Hemingway keep doing this? One view advanced by Arthur Waldhorn is that he 'had an extremely heightened ego and he needed constant affirmation of his doubts about himself' (p. 237). Yet the precise nature of these unconscious repetitions suggests a different cause. A person with a *vulnerable* ego is more likely to need 'constant affirmation' than someone with a *heightened* ego. Someone with a heightened ego is far less likely to be compulsively driven toward injury. Could the recognition of an underlying vulnerability overlaid with a profound sense of guilt (for survival, for having killed) bring one closer to an understanding of the machoistic and, seemingly self-destructive behaviour of writers like Graves and Hemingway?

Hemingway was awarded the *Croce di Guerra* for bravery. In *A Farewell to Arms*, Frederic does not know why he is given a war medal. In fact, directly after his wounding in Italy, Hemingway was reported to have carried an injured soldier to safety.

Contemporary accounts of the event published in *The Faces of Hemingway* disagree. Some believed that it would be ‘physiologically’ impossible to carry a soldier after ‘losing his kneecap’,⁵¹ while others (e.g. Brian and Baker) are clear that he did so (p. 21).

The solution I think, lies in Baker’s comment that ‘he was unconscious during his so-called act of heroism, and he might have felt ashamed to claim heroism for something he didn’t remember’ (p. 21). Brian notes that ‘[a]n Italian officer told Hemingway that he had carried the wounded soldier back with him’ (p. 19). In traumatic episodes both pain and memory can indeed be blocked out, but, as George Santayana, wrote in 1954, ‘those who cannot remember the past are condemned to relive it’.⁵² In this sense, I suggest that in Hemingway’s repeated testing of his physiological strength and endurance, there is an unconscious questioning of his capacity to have endured a moment which he could not recall.

The order of experience Hemingway encounters, one that brings notions of selfhood, courage, masculinity and guilt into question, can be illuminated, I think, by a comparable phenomenon explored by Conrad in *Lord Jim* (1900).⁵³ Jim, in a moment of great emotional confusion and pressure, acts in a way that he cannot understand or accommodate within his conception of self. He jumps from his ship leaving vulnerable passengers still aboard, as he believed the ship was sinking. The ship does not sink and Jim finds that others had remained aboard. He confesses ‘[i]t was as if I had jumped into a well – an everlasting deep hole’ (p. 70), and Marlow, the story’s narrator, confirms that ‘[h]e had tumbled from a height that he could never scale again’ (p. 70). Jim agonises over this and cannot escape the consequences it has for his sense of self-worth. Finally, he recovers only by placing himself in extreme danger, on behalf of others, and facing this danger with a ‘proud and unflinching glance’ (p. 226). Summarily, for Hemingway and Graves, war draws out and throws into relief

those inner conflicts about worthiness, guilt, endurance, courage and masculinity that might otherwise have remained hidden. The point here is that while war drew out these conflicts, it didn't necessarily put them in! This susceptibility is likely to have been partly constitutional, and partly based upon early life experiences. Less romantically than Conrad's Jim, and at an unconscious level, Hemingway and Graves are both physically and psychologically compelled to replicate aspects of their war experience in order to come more fully to terms with the internal conflicts war uncovered. Primarily, the psychological driver bound up with their wounds is unresolved guilt.

Returning to Graves with this in mind, it is interesting to speculate about why Graves refused to undergo treatment in the form of psychoanalytic psychotherapy. First however, it should be made clear that both Miranda Seymour's and R.P. Graves's suggestion that Graves underwent psychoanalysis is unfounded. Seymour references a debt, for 'information and suggestions', to Pat Barker, author of a trilogy of novels about the soldier poets of the First World War.⁵⁴ What Seymour learns from Barker can as easily be learned from primary sources, such as Sassoon's biography, that Rivers took an informal, non-dogmatic approach to treatment of his patients. Seymour's hint that Graves underwent psychoanalysis (pp. 69, 106) is invalidated, as Rivers did not provide a weekly, formal analysis of Graves. Uniquely, Rivers combined a Freudian analytical knowledge with a Jungian respect for the creative individual's capacity to work through their own difficulties – an approach that Graves takes up in *On English Poetry*. Graves felt able to engage in informal meetings with Rivers exactly because this was not an analysis. R.P. Graves suggests that in the Spring of 1921 Graves was about to embark upon a period of psychoanalysis,⁵⁵ a period to some extent glossed over in the 1929 edition of *Good-bye to All That*,⁵⁶ and omitted altogether from the 1957 edition.⁵⁷ He also says that Graves 'embarked upon a course of psycho-analysis' in 1923, but this is

based on vague comments in A.P. Graves's Diary which is more likely referring to Graves's attempted self-analysis.⁵⁸ Graves, in 1929 said 'I thought that perhaps I owed it to Nancy to go to a psychiatrist to be cured; yet I was not sure'.⁵⁹ Thus R.P. Graves states that Graves changed his mind about not seeking professional help and visited Rivers in Cambridge, who in turn 'sent him on to McDowell, a London nerve specialist'.⁶⁰ McDowell told Graves to stop all work, and postpone his degree in order to avoid a breakdown. Neither Graves's occasional meetings with Rivers, nor a one-off consultation with a nerve specialist (not even a psychotherapist) can be classed as 'psychoanalysis'.

Graves does not undergo psychoanalysis but, as I have argued elsewhere, he does incorporate psychoanalytic thinking into his own poetic practice.⁶¹ Through the influence of Rivers, Graves postulates a poetic method that is psychoanalytic at root since it derives from a dynamic model of the internal world in which poetry itself is seen as resulting from the unconscious reconciliation of internal conflict. Indeed, from the chapter 'My Name Is Legion' in *On English Poetry* in 1922 up to 'The Poet in a Valley of Dry Bones', written thirty-five years later for his Oxford addresses of 1962, Graves retains the sense of conflicting internal experience becoming reconciled.⁶² In 1962 he argues that he only gains access to this conflictual experience whilst in a poetic trance, and this is his key difficulty. In Graves's poetics the production of poetry happens at an unconscious, or at least deeply subconscious, level. To submit to psychoanalytic therapy Graves would be forced to draw these conflicts out into the conscious mind in order to process and resolve them effectively, in his view, robbing himself of the materials and emotional conditions needed for poetry.

On the other hand, the unconscious, unresolved elements compel Graves in two directions, one is toward acting out these elements in regular accidents, injuries and psychosomatic

illnesses, the other is toward writing and poetry where issues of wounding, courage, and guilt can be projected onto the page, and held there.

For Hemingway the First World War, in conjunction with early experiences, had the effect of structuring the way he lived: the war would fuse with personal experience, and life would become a battle. For Hemingway and Graves, much of the horror, particularly that which was internalised, was initially repressed. Attempts to come to terms with this horror were unconsciously made either through accidents, injury and illness or indirectly through writing. Both writers expressed a manic, vivacious, and, in different ways, hedonistic approach to life. Yet, Hemingway became increasingly unwell due to repeated severe injury, alcoholism and depression, whereas Graves gradually became more secure and contented. He had gradually sublimated this pattern of wounding into his writing, principally *The White Goddess*, and his relationships.

In the background, containing this complicated psychological situation, was Graves's wife. As Bion had Francesca, so Graves had Beryl, who was prepared to provide some measure of the 'containment' which all veterans of war, both past and current, need and surely deserve. A measure of the care and dedication both Bion and Graves experienced can be seen in the fact that both women, remarkable in their own right, spent much time in their widowhood editing and publishing the work of their late husbands. Indeed, Graves was finally to suffer only when his mental faculties gave way in 1976 to horrific war memories in his eighties, and particularly when the deep sense of guilt he felt for his actions, forgivable though they may seem to us today, could no longer be defended against. But for most of his life Graves found a way of integrating the compulsion to repeat his experience into his poetry and particularly into the post-First World War myth of *The White Goddess*.

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NOTES

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² Miranda Seymour, *Robert Graves: Life On The Edge* (London: Doubleday, 1995), p. 106.

³ Ian Firla and Grevel Lindop, *Graves and the Goddess: Essay on Robert Graves and The White Goddess* (London: Associated University Presses, 2003), p. 126.

⁴ Bernard Adams, *Nothing of Importance* (London: Methuen, 1917).

⁵ Wilfred R. Bion, *War Memories 1917-1919* (London: Karnac, 2015).

⁶ Wilfred R. Bion, *The Long Weekend 1897-1919: Part of a Life* (Abingdon: Fleetwood Press, 1982).

⁷ *War Memories*, pp. 248-249.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 125.

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 125.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 244.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 279.

¹² *The Long Weekend*, p. 247.

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 249.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 256.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 264.

¹⁶ Sigmund Freud, 'On Hysterical Mechanisms', in *Sigmund Freud: Collected Papers 1*, ed. by Joan Riviere (London: Basic Books, 1959), p. 27.

¹⁷ Sigmund Freud, 'Introduction,' in *Psychoanalysis And The War Neuroses*, ed. by Sandor Ferenczi and Karl Abraham (London: The International Psycho-Analytical Press, 1921), pp. 1-4.

¹⁸ Nigel C. Hunt, *Memory, War And Trauma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 23.

¹⁹ Sigmund Freud, 'Memorandum On The Electrical Treatments of War Neurotics' in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: Introductory letters on Psycho-analysis*, ed. by James Strachey, vol. xvi (1916-1917) (London: Vintage Books 2001).

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²² Paul Russell. *Trauma, Repetition and Affect Regulation: The Works of Paul Russell*, ed. by Daniel Kriegman and Judith G. Teicholz (London: Rebus Press, 1999), p. 3.

²³ *Children and Adolescents in Trauma: Creative Therapeutic Approaches*, ed. by Chris Nicholson, Kedar Nath Dwivedi, and Michael Irwin (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2010), pp. 131-144.

²⁴ Armando R. Favazza, *Bodies Under Siege: Self-mutilation and Body Modification in Culture and Psychiatry* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. xix.

²⁵ Sigmund Freud, *The Psychology of Everyday Life* (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1960), pp. 179-180.

²⁶ Martin Seymour-Smith, *Robert Graves, His Life And Works* (London: Bloomsbury, 1995), p. 549.

²⁷ Jean Moorcroft Wilson, *Robert Graves: From Great War Poet To Good-bye To All That (1895–1929)* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), p. 183

²⁸ Robert Graves, *The White Goddess* (London: Faber, 1948).

²⁹ Robert Graves, *Good-bye to All That* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1929).

³⁰ Robert Graves, *The White Goddess*, ed. by Grevel Lindrop (Manchester: Carcanet, 1997).

³¹ R.P. Graves, *Robert Graves and the White Goddess* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1995), p. 499.

³² Helen McPhail and Phillip Guest, *On the Trail of the Poets of the Great War: Robert Graves & Siegfried Sassoon* (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 2001), p. 110.

³³ Michael Roper, 'Beyond Containing: World War I and the Psychoanalytic Theories of Wilfred Bion', in *History and Psyche: Culture, Psychoanalysis, and the Past*, ed. by Sally Alexander and Barbara Taylor (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 160-162.

³⁴ Denis Brian, *The Faces Of Hemingway* (London: Grafton Books, 1988), p. 22.

³⁵ R.P. Graves, *Robert Graves and the White Goddess 1940-1985* (London: Weidenfeld, 1995), p. 161.

³⁶ Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1929). Further references to this ed. are given after quotations in the text.

³⁷ Seymour-Smith, p. 29.

³⁸ R.P. Graves, *Robert Graves and the White Goddess*, p. 35. Further references to this ed. are given after quotations in the text.

³⁹ R.P. Graves, *The Years With Laura 1926-1940* (London: Weidenfeld, 1990), p. 232. Further references to this ed. are given after quotations in the text.

⁴⁰ Seymour-Smith, p. 449.

⁴¹ R.P. Graves, *Robert Graves and the White Goddess*, pp. 138-9.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 292.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 397.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 424.

⁴⁵ Brian, p. 74.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 318.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 311.

⁵⁰ See Paul Russell, *Trauma, Repetition & Affect Regulation: The Works of Paul Russell*, ed. by Judith Guss Teicholz and Daniel Kriegman (London: Rebus Press 1999); Gordon Turnbull, *Trauma From Lockerbie to 7/7: How Trauma Affects Our Minds and How We Fight Back*

(London: Transworld, 2012); Bessel Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps The Score: Mind, Brain and Body in the Transformation of Trauma*

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⁵¹ Brian, p. 20. Agnes von Kurowsky, who nursed Hemingway at the time, says ‘I never heard about him carrying a wounded man to safety’.

⁵² George Santayana, *The Life Of Reason* (New York: Scribner, 1954), p. 82.

⁵³ Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim* (London: Peerage Books 1991).

⁵⁴ Miranda Seymour, p. 69.

⁵⁵ R.P. Graves, *Robert Graves: The Assault Heroic 1895-1926* (London: Weidenfeld, 1986).

⁵⁶ *Good-bye to All That* (1929), p. 83.

⁵⁷ *Good-bye to All That* (London: Cassell, 1957).

⁵⁸ R.P. Graves, *The Assault Heroic*, p. 278, 367.

⁵⁹ R.P. Graves, *Robert Graves And The White Goddess*, pp. 277-8.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 243.

⁶¹ Chris Nicholson, “‘The needle dips and pokes’”: Graves, Childhood and Psychoanalysis’, *Gravesiana: The Journal of the Robert Graves Society*, 3.3 (Summer 2012), pp. 490-504.

⁶² Robert Graves, *On English Poetry* (New York: Knopf, 1922); Robert Graves, *Oxford Addresses on Poetry* (London: Cassell, 1962).