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SEAMUS HEANEY AND THE GODDESS

Abstract: The essay seeks to establish the affiliation of Seamus Heaney to ancient bardic tradition. A close analysis of chosen poems sheds light on Heaney's approach to interpreting poetry as religious invocation of the White Goddess, presented in Graves's famous study of poetic myth. Heaney looks for manifestations of the Goddess, who represents natural law and love of instinct and organic life, desacralized by a pragmatic, skeptical, moralizing spirit of the Age of Reason. As well as identifying how the natural and the poetic come together in Heaney's mythopoeia, the essay examines the impact of the British bardic tradition on the poet's vision of human condition which depicts modern man in search of his soul.

Key words: bardic tradition, the suppression of the female, religious invocation of the Goddess

My intention is to present Seamus Heaney as a poet whose creative sensibility can be traced to ancient bardic tradition (Skea 1994).[1] Native bardic literature was collected, systematized and elucidated in Robert Graves's famous study of poetic myth, *The White Goddess* (1961*)*. Graves illustrates how old Celtic stories, written down during early Christian times in Britain, were altered to conform to Christian orthodoxy, and how the pagan bardic tradition resisted attempts at Christianization. Graves argues that at the beginning of each ancient religion there was always a powerful female goddess who eventually was usurped by a male god. This suppression of the female was first enacted by the Greek mythologists. In his mythopoeic quest, Heaney was influenced by Graves, as was Ted Hughes (1992), who described his disillusionment with Western

[1] Ann Skea offers an interesting interpretation of Ted Hughes's *River* and *Remains of Elmet* in the context of the bardic tradition. Her discussion inspired me to look for manifestations of the Goddess in the poetry of Seamus Heaney.

Christian culture as a *mistreatment of the White Goddess*. For Hughes, the White Goddess represents natural law and love of instinct and organic life. Hughes claims that since the middle of the sixteenth century, a gradual rise of determination to divide nature into abstract good and physical evil has been observed. During the Reformation, the White Goddess was replaced by the Puritan Jehovah, and nature was replaced by culture. Graves's Goddess was put down, finally and decisively, by a pragmatic, sceptical, moralizing, desacralizing spirit: […] *the spirit of the ascendant, Puritan God of the individual conscience, the Age of Reason cloaked in the Reformation* (Hughes 1992:84).

Graves (1961:24) claims that all great poets, beginning with Homer, have recorded their experience with the White Goddess:

> *The test of a poet's vision, one might say, is the accuracy of his portrayal of the White Goddess and of the island over which she rules. 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 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.*

In Celtic culture the Goddess was a patroness of poetry. Ceridwen was the Celtic Goddess worshipped as the source of *Awen*, poetic inspiration. She was sometimes identified as Brigid and, like Graves's White Goddess, was also a goddess of nature, with the triple roles of wife, mother and layer-out of the dead. Another Irish Celtic goddess, Boand, was both the Goddess of Nature and the Patroness of Poetry, blinded by the light of inspiration when she looked into Nechtan's well (24). Bards pledged allegiance to the Goddess, who combined the beauty and the horror of the natural world. They were poets and seers, trained to compose orations for the tribal chief and satirize his enemies. They were initiated into the art of communicating with nature, which they worshipped as divine. Bards could cast spells and act as shamans, magicians or witch doctors (Matthews 1991).[2] In the poems of the ancient bard Taliesin, we read:

> *I am gifted with a perceptive spirit*
> *Clearly shall I prophesy* (Cad Goddeau qtd in Matthews1991:300)
> *I am a guide, I am a judge* (Bardic Lore 302)
> *I am a wise man of the primal knowledge* (The Hostile Confederacy 102)

From Taliesin's poems, the bard emerges as a prophet, a spiritual leader who has access to the *primal knowledge*.

Coleridge had the nightmare Life-in-Death, Keats chased La Belle Damme Sans Merci, and Wordsworth was haunted by Lucy. Since the twelfth century,

[2] E.O. Matthews (1991) accomplished an illuminating study of Taliesin, the Primary Chief Bard of the island of Britain, where he details the way of training, and the kinds of knowledge and powers of the early bards.

no generation has been entirely faithless to the Theme.[3] In the Goddess, the natural and the poetic come together. Bards praised her as their Muse. The ancient poet Taliesin declared:

> *I received the Muse*
> *From Ceridwen's cauldron* (Primary Chief Bard qtd in Matthews 1991:7)

Graves comments:

> *The poet is in love with the White Goddess, with Truth: his heart breaks with longing and love for her. She is the Flower-goddess Olwen or Blodeuwedd; but she is also Blodeuwedd the Owl, lamp eyed, hooting dismally, with her foul nest in the hollow of a dead tree, or Circe the pitiless falcon, or Lamia with her flickering tongue, or the snarling-chopped Sow-goddess, or the mare-headed Rhinnon who feeds on raw flesh. Odiatqueomo: 'to be in love' is also to hate* (1961:448).

E.O. James finds it characteristic that with the coming of Christianity, Mary, the Mother of the Redeemer, retained some features of the Magna Mater of the pagan world (James 1959:202). Graves disagrees with James, claiming that the only part of their respective biographies which the White Goddess and the Virgin Mother of Jesus share is the Nativity context. Unlike the Goddess, the Virgin is not the Muse, in her person, *ecclesiastic discipline becomes anti-poetic* (Graves 1961:425).

Heaney's poetry reveals manifestations of the Goddess. He worships her as his Muse but, first of all, as the female principle, nature, Irishness and Ireland herself. His declaration of allegiance to the Goddess becomes an overwhelming principle and theme of his verse:

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[3] Graves (1961:13) defines the Theme in the following words:

The Theme was still everywhere implicit in the popular celebration of the festivals now known as Candlemas, Lady Day, May Day, Midsummer Day, Lammas, Michaelmas, All-Hallowe'en, and Christmas; it was also secretly preserved as religious doctrine in the covens of the anti-Christian witch-cult. Thus the English, though with no traditional respect for the poet, have a traditional awareness of the Theme. 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 form of dreams, paranoiac visions and delusions. The weird, or rival, often appears in nightmare as the tall, lean, dark-faced bed-side spectre, or Prince of the Air, who tries to drag the dreamer out through the window, so that he looks back and sees his body still lying rigid in bed; but he takes countless other malevolent or diabolic or serpent-like forms.*

> *And when I say religious, I am not thinking of the sectarian division. To some extent, the enmity can be viewed as a struggle between the cults and devotees of a god and a goddess. There is an indigenous territorial numen, a tutelar of the whole island, call her Mother Ireland (Kathleen Ni Houlihan), the poor old woman, the Shan Van Vocht, whatever; and her sovereignty has been temporarily usurped or infringed by a new male cult whose founding fathers were Cromwell, William of Orange and Edward Carson* (Heaney 1980:57).

Like Hughes's concepts of myth-making, Seamus Heaney's mythopoeia is rooted in Jung's theories of the collective unconscious. His creative method derives from Hughes, as well as, from the Irish tradition. In order to diagnose and explore the nature of the Irish collective unconscious, Heaney resorts to mythology, archeology and philology (Ingelbien 1999:628). He announces that in his quest he will look for *images of symbols adequate to the predicament of Northern Ireland* (Heaney 1980:56).

Roland Barthes, whose *Mythologies* presents an interesting analysis of the function of myth, claimed that through myth, poetry attempts to uncover *the meaning of things* in order to *transform the sign back into meaning*:

> *Contemporary poetry is a regressive semiological system whereas myth aims at ultra-signification, at the amplification of a first system, poetry on the contrary attempts to regain an infra-signification, a pre-semiological state of language; in short, it tries to transform the sign back into its meaning: its ideal, ultimately, would be to reach not the meaning of words, but the meaning of things themselves* (Barthes 1993:133).

Barthes insists that myth cannot be obscure: *All the ambiguity of myth is there: its clarity is euphoric* (143). By nature, myth functions as an illumination. There is no obscure or complicated myth. To avoid the obscurity, the poet should rely on analogy (126), and this is precisely the strategy on which Heaney builds his mythopoeia. The Ireland of Heaney is the Goddess resembling the Female Deity of Graves and Hughes. Heaney's mythology of Irishness is built upon *his feminine and Gaelic vowel of the earth* (Ingelbien 1999:642) He presents Ireland as a sexually attractive woman and identifies Irishness with female sexuality (Morrison 1982:42). Writing about England, he employs the trope of seduction and rape in which he constructs his political etymology: *savage, feminine, northern religion dissolves the boundaries between the opposites, it comprises: Celt and Teuton, Catholic and Protestant, male and female* (Larissy 1990:155).

Heaney's Ireland is timeless. By analogy, he can relate her to any historical period or event: at one point she is a soft feminine presence, a body raped by Viking raids. At another, she becomes a victim of sectarian hatred. Heaney sees the religious deity as feminine: consequently, Ireland assumes a spiritual dimension while the poet seeks a religion that *has a feminine component and a notion of the mother in the transcendental world* (Heaney 1980:61).

Heaney looks for manifestations of the Goddess also in philological terms. Ingelbien notices that his Ireland speaks in sensuous vowels and gutturals:

Heaney fuses a vision of origins with the vowel of primeval Irishness and offers the rough beast of his Celtic primitivism as the center that holds North together (Ingelbien 1999:649), reverting to a Celtic vowel music, which had been usurped by foreign consonants (643). Gaelic guttural and the vowels, which Heaney sees (or hears) as feminine and which he contrasts with the British, masculine, alliterative mode (636) confirm that Heaney's muse is always feminine.

We shall try to illustrate Heaney's presentation of the Goddess in chosen poems which testify to her influence on his diction and theme, trying to link the poet's affinity to bardic tradition in his worship of the Goddess.

Heaney's theme is a religious invocation of the Goddess. His poem *The Bog Queen* was inspired by P.V. Glob's *The Bog People,* the book of discovery in Ireland, with photographs and descriptions of corpses preserved in peat. Heaney's Bog Queen was probably modelled on the figure of a mysterious Viking woman, a well-born lady, excavated by a peat cutter in 1781 on the estate of Lord Moira in County Down. According to Glob, Lady Moira paid well for some of the hair and clothing. Heaney's creative imagination could also have been prompted by the Viking exhibitions held in Dublin in the 1960s.

The Bog Queen is devoted to the Goddess, who is the speaker and the persona. She lay for centuries, buried deep in the earth until her accidental excavation, her body being thus desacralized, though eventually returned to that earth from where it came**.** A plait of her hair and a piece of her clothing which were not re-buried grew, and the Queen was reborn, resurrected to a new life.

The Bog Queen is the Goddess of Nature, the Goddess of the Earth. As she lay waiting, her body, divided between the turf and stone, provided a connection between diverse manifestations of matter, of the elemental, as if acting on a unifying principle of creation, death and re-creation:

I lay waiting
between turf-face and demesne wall
between healthy levels
and glass-toothed stone.

The Bog Queen knows all creation belongs to her. Although she has no eyes and cannot see the organisms crawling on her body, she can identify them by their touch, as they can identify her. They constitute her braille alphabet. The Goddess of Nature relies on sensuous perception:

My body was braille
for the creeping influences
The rhythm of nature falls in tune with the body of the Queen:
dawn suns groped on my head
and cooled at my feet.

The Bog Queen sustains life, and she can also take it away; while her own body is being processed and transfigured, comprehended, as it were in the bowels of the Earth, she herself digests *illiterate roots* in the cavings of her stomach:

through my fabrics and skins
the seeps of water
digested me
the illiterate roots
pondered and died
in the cavings
of stomach and socket.

The Bog Queen lay waiting, but she was not dead. While her brain and body were being fragmented, she had dreams of Baltic amber, which intimates preservation and not the extinction of life; it symbolizes a change in the mode of existence. The Goddess is timeless:

I lay waiting
on the gravel bottom
my brain darkening
a jar of spawn
fermenting underground
dreams of Baltic amber.

The Bog Queen must have been confronted with some brutal power:

Bruised berries under my nails
the vital hoard reducing
in the crock of the pelvis.

Berries under the nails recall a fight with an attacker. There is also an indication of a sexual assault, *the vital hoard reducing in the crock of the pelvis*. In the mythology of the Goddess, the male, or the masculine, is connected with a culture which suppresses the female, or the feminine power of nature. On the other hand, the hoard was *vital*, and under her nails the Goddess has berries, fruit, which may imply that the attack on her body was a natural, ultimately regenerating process. Soon the Bog Queen will experience another invasion; for the time being, as she lies waiting, she reflects upon the rotting of her royal clothes and the dimming of her diadem crown:

My diadem grew carious,
gemstones dropped
in the peat floe
like the bearings of history.
My soul was a black glacier
wrinkling, dyed weaves
and Phoenician stitchwork

retted on my breasts'
soft morains.

If we follow the trope of nature vanquished by culture, the words can be read as a lament of the Nature Queen, dethroned, with *gemstones dropped, wrinkling dyed weaves,* the diadem that *grew carious.* With the Goddess of Nature buried, Culture was installed on the throne. The Bog Queen suffers freezing cold in the ground, hibernating but not dead. Like Snow White from the fairy tale, she lay waiting for a rescuer. Ironically, the Bog Queen's hibernating inertia is not interrupted by a prince, but by the intrusion of a turfcutter's spade: she is *barbed* and *stripped*. The story of the Bog Queen, the Goddess of Nature, clashes with the random action of a mortal, the turfcutter who digs her out. Thus the elemental, divine dimension becomes humanized. The man who hurts the Goddess recognizes her royal status and, full of concern and gentle care, returns her to the Earth's embrace:

I was barbed
and stripped
by a turfcutter's spade
who veiled me again
and packed coomb softly
between the stone jambs
at my head and my feet.

The turfcutter sells a lock of the hair and some clothing of the Bog Queen to *the peer's wife*, unaware that by cutting off the hair, which the poet calls *a slimy birth cord*, he liberates the Goddess who, detached from the peat, is resurrected to a new life:

and I rose from the dark
hacked bone, skull-ware
frayed stitches, tufts,
small gleams on the bank.

There is something ironic and anti-climactic in the fact that the Goddess was not revived by a heroic deed or a magic spell, but by an act of curiosity involving a little profiteering. Now the Bog Queen, like Graves's White Goddess, horrifies: by liberating her, resurrecting her, the turfcutter has released some potentially evil force out of a Pandora's box. When outraged, the Goddess will show her evil side.

In *Sybil* (1975), we see a different face of the Goddess: she is a prophetess, the poet-persona's source of inspiration. *Sybil* is the centre-piece of a three-part composition *Triptych* (1975), which precedes *The Toome Road* (1979) in *Field Work* (1979). The two outer poems of the *Triptych* show natural rural life destroyed by the intrusion of culture and civilization. Unlike in *The Bog Queen*,

where the speaker is the persona, here we have the Sibyl, reminiscent of both the Celtic prophetess of the Druid era and the Roman Sibyl evoked as co-witness of the coming disaster in the *Dies Irae*, the Last Judgment (Gifford, Roberts 1983:94), who speaks in answer to the poet-persona's question: *what will become of us?*. The poet articulates sounds with difficulty, his tongue, paralyzed with fear and awe, makes an attempt to move and formulate the question:

My tongue moved, a swung relaxing hinge.
I said to her, 'What will become of us?'

The voice of Sibyl is the voice of nature, the sound of water and earth exploding:

And as forgotten water in a well might shake
At an explosion under morning
Or a crack run up a gable,
She began to speak.

The poet's question concerns the future of man; Sybil states that the human condition will deteriorate and man will be degraded to the status of a beast:

I think our very form is bound to change
Dogs in a siege. Saurian relapses. Pismires.

The human race will degenerate into a species placed lower than dogs on the evolutionary ladder where a man will relapse into pismire status. *Pismires* means *ants*, but the word itself recalls urine and muck (Schmidt 1985:220). *Dogs in a siege* suggest a reversal of national, or even cultural, standards: dogs are generally seen as attackers, they run loose and are not besieged by enemies.

The prophetess identifies herself with people and is one with her subjects: she says *our form*, not *your form*. She threatens but also gives hope of survival on condition that her people change:

Unless forgiveness finds its nerve and voice,
Unless the helmeted and bleeding tree
Can green and open buds like infants' fists
And the fouled magma incubate
Bright nymphs

The prophetess clearly sees the hope of regeneration in terms of natural processes. The tree *helmeted* and *bleeding* makes the reader think of wars and conflicts. The bleeding tree is reminiscent of *Dream of the Rood*, an Anglo Saxon poem about the crucifixion and the Druid cult of the trees. Only forgiveness can put an end to the degeneration process: then trees will be green again and bear fruit. The *bright nymphs* recall the Helicon of inspiration. Poetry

will be born out of *fouled magma*, of the bodies and graves of those who lost their lives in the brotherly feud, a concept akin to Yeats's *terrible beauty is born*.

The Bog Queen speaks now: *My people think money and talk weather*. Is this really the Bog Queen speaking here, or is it Sybil, the Prophetess? She describes her native land as one populated by Blakean *Satanic Mills*, where Nature becomes desecrated by Culture:

Oil rigs lull their future
On single acquisitive stems. Silence
Has shoaled into the travellers' echo-sounders.
The ground we kept our ear to for so long
Is flayed or calloused, and its entrails
Tented by an impious augury.
Our island is full of comfortless noises.

The Goddess, like the Bog Queen, relies on sensory perception. She listens to the sound of the land, her words *our island is full of comfortless noises* perhaps echoing Shakespeare's *Tempest*, of Prospero's *I will drown my books*: now the island discourages artists.The ground, once sacred, is ravaged and vivisected, the voice of echo-sounders has violated the silence. Rebirth of nature will take place only if people make peace with each other, and peace and reconciliation will breed poets.

The poem *Undine* shows a redeeming face of the Goddess. Undine is a female water spirit who, if she marries a man and bears him a child, will become human (Funk & Wagnall 1976:1369). Heaney himself called Undine *a myth about agriculture, about the way water is tamed and humanized when streams become irrigation canals when water becomes involved with seed* (Heaney 54). Water is the goddess of life, and her union with man is presented in sexual terms. But water is also the goddess of poetic inspiration, where the images of clogged channels *suggest a pent-up energy suddenly freed* (Stafanović 2001:252), an orgasmic outburst of creation in verse. Digging up the well is compared to liberating a life-giving force:

He slashed the briars, shovelled up gray silt
To give me right of way in my own drains
And I ran quick for him, cleaned out my rust.

The act of digging involves violence: *he slashed the briars*. The digger, or the poet, lets the water muse run free as he watches her *disrobe*, revealing her secrets, uncovering her body for him (Ingelbien 1999:654). The image has obviously sexual implications:

He halted, saw me finally disrobed.
Running clear, with apparent unconcern.
Then he walked by me. I rippled, and I churned

Where ditches intersected near the river
Until he dug a spade deep in my flank
And took me to him.

The water wets ditches near the river, it saturates the soil and then has to be arrested, controlled: *until he dug a spade … and took me to him*. The poet has to channel his inspiration. He needs to master the creative process in order not to let it disperse:

I swallowed his trench
Gratefully, dispersing myself for love
Down to his roots, climbing his brassy grain
But once he knew my welcome, I alone
Could give him subtle increase and reflection.

Water accepts the grain, the muse inspires the poet, giving him *increase and reflection*. The Goddess submits herself to man while losing her *cold freedom*, she warms to the human:

He explored me so completely, each limb
Lost its cold freedom. Human warmed to him.

The *Tollund Man* is a poem which illustrates the role of the Goddess not only as a mother, lover, and layer-out, but also the poet's Muse. The Tollund Man was exhumed in 1950, two thousand years after he had been consecrated to the Goddess, which sacrifice was marked on his throat, encircled with the Goddess's torc. There are moments when the poet identifies himself with the Tollund Man when he admits that their lives can be seen as running a parallel course. In the opening stanza, the speaker seems to be aloof: he wants to see the Tollund Man as a visitor might on a trip to the museum to see the latest acquisitions:

Some day I will go to Aarhus
To see his peat-brown head,
The mild pods of his eye-lids,
His pointed skin cap.
In the flat country near by
Where they dug him out,
His last gruel of winter seeds
Caked in his stomach,

The reader becomes uncertain as to the identity of this *bridegroom to the goddess*:

Naked except for
The cap, noose and girdle,
I will stand a long time.
Bridegroom to the goddess,

Who is naked here, and who is the bridegroom? The Tollund Man was a victim of a fertility ritual. The Goddess is presented as a bride, and as a lover, but also as the Earth Mother who embalms his body with her juices, and preserves the Tollund man's body in much the way that the bodies of saints are preserved:

She tightened her torc on him
And opened her fen,
Those dark juices working
Him to a saint's kept body,
Trove of the turfcutters'
Honeycombed workings.
Now his stained face
Reposes at Aarhus.

Through the *Tollund Man*, the poet hopes to conjure up the past. He resorts to witchcraft while the story of the Tollund Man becomes a source of creative inspiration:

I could risk blasphemy,
Consecrate the cauldron bog
Our holy ground and pray
Him to make germinate
The scattered, ambushed
Flesh of labourers,
Stockinged corpses
Laid out in the farmyards,

To *make germinate* is like a prayer for poetic creativity. The poet hopes to derive inspiration from the ancient lore:

Tell-tale skin and teeth
Flecking the sleepers
Of four young brothers, trailed
For miles along the lines.

In the final stanza the poet openly identifies himself with the Tollund Man, whose *tumbril* resembles his own car, whose *sad freedom* he will share, chanting the names of past men as a magic spell:

Something of his sad freedom
As he rode the tumbril
Should come to me, driving,
Saying the names
Tollund, Grauballe, Nebelgard,

Unfortunately, the Tollund Man will not help him understand the local people who do not seem to have any affiliation with their ancestors:

Watching the pointing hands
Of country people,
Not knowing their tongue.
Out here in Jutland
In the old man-killing parishes
I will feel lost,
Unhappy and at home.

The face of the Tollund Man is *stained*; he is a victim of the Goddess (Green 1983:4–5),[4] like the poet himself, to whom the Goddess, ultimately, denied the privilege of creative inspiration: *Her womb gives forth increase of grain and life, but it also sucks into itself great beasts, trees, and men who feel compelled as Heaney does, to dig inwards and downwards to learn its secrets* (6). Heaney always relates myth to the present, Gifford and Roberts observe that *for Heaney the relevant meanings of the Celtic mythology of The White Goddess are immanent in contemporary history* (Gifford, Roberts 1983:96). Like in *Sybil, Undine* and *The Bog Queen*, in *The Tollund Man* as well Heaney concludes that the imaginative stimulus evoked by the unearthing of the past inevitably leads to a contemplation of the present deterioration and desecration of the human condition in Ireland.

The Tollund Man suggests an affiliation between primitive religions and Catholicism; he is seen as a victim of the fertility ritual, a bridegroom to the Goddess, but also as a relic, as the body of a saint that is preserved and kept as an object of worship. Like the Tollund Man, the Grauballe Man is also a victim, sacrificed to the Goddess. In *The White Goddess* Graves (1961:422) enumerates five seasonal stations through which the Spirit of the Year passed in the cult of Canopic Hercules:

He shall be found. (Achaifa)
He shall do wonders. (Ossa)
He shall reign. (Ourania)
He shall rest. (Hesuchia)
He shall depart. (Iachema)

Graves (423) observes that the formula was adapted from *The Gospel According to the Hebrews*, by Clement of Alexandria, who gave it a Christian dimension:

Let him who seeks continue until he find.
When he has found, he shall wonder.
When he has wondered, he shall reign.
When he has reigned, he shall rest.

[4] Garlanda Green (1983) identifies the Goddess of the poem with Nerthus, the fertility goddess of the bogs who was worshipped by the Germanic people of the Bronze and Iron Ages. The ring, or 'torc' was a distinguishing characteristic of Nerthus and her victims wore neckrings or nooses which marked them as offerings to the Goddess.

Jesus was stationed at Hesuchia (repose, rest), when trees shed their leaves and wait to be reborn in spring (423). The Grauballe Man also is waiting for resurrection:

Who will say 'compose'
to his vivid cast?
Who will say 'body'
to his opaque repose?

Though the word *repose* might suggest that the Grauballe Man is dead and buried, he is more than a *corpse* or a *body*; in his sacrifice there is a promise of new life. Here *repose* means *rest*:

And his rusted hair,
a mat unlikely as a foetus's.
I first saw his twisted face

in a photograph,
a head and shoulder
out of the peat,
bruised like a forceps baby,

A foetus and *a forceps baby* are indicative of painful labour; the face is twisted and the head and shoulder bruised. The child is reborn out of the peat, and it comes back to life after a long period of *repose*; he becomes resurrected.

The first part of *The Grauballe Man* is curiously similar to the beginning of *The Bog Queen*, when the Bog Queen's body, *braille to the creeping influences*, digested by *the seeps of water*, with the brain darkening a jar *of spawn* forms an elemental symbiosis with Nature. The Grauballe Man, excavated from the peat, looks like the Bog Queen:

As if he had been poured
in tar, he lies
on a pillow of turf
and seems to weep
the black river of himself
The grain of his wrists
is like bog oak
the ball of his heel
like a basalt egg
His instep has shrunk
cold as a swan's foot
or a wet swamp root
His hips are the ridge
and purse of a mussel,
his spine an eel arrested
under a glisten of mud.

Like the Bog Queen, the Grauballe Man is well preserved, as if hibernating in tar, compared to an oak tree. In Graves's *Grammar of Myth*, there is included a literary account of tree-worship and tree-symbolism; each tree corresponds to certain sets of symbols. In his essay on John Clare, Goodbridge thus comments on Graves's classification: *Each tree 'speaks' or 'writes', has a narrative, is part of the story of things. […] so the tree's significance must be judged by the feel of the place, and more particularly by the feelings it arouses in the poet and in others* (Goodridge 1994:144-145). The oak tree arouses associations with strength and endurance. Like the Bog Queen, Grauballe is presented in an elemental dimension, as strong, and fully immersed, and equated with Nature. He weeps *the black river of himself*, the grain of his wrists is like the boughs of a tree, the ball of his heel constitutes a piece of volcanic rock, a *basalt egg*, which suggests his regenerative potential. The Grauballe Man becomes feminized; his hips hold a mussel, a life that is hidden inside a shell. The man was a victim to the Goddess, a ritual sacrifice. Like The Tollund Man, The Grauballe Man can be identified with Graves's God of the Waxing Year: both poems concern their respective births, lives, deaths and resurrections. The wound on the Grauballe Man's throat is healed as if signalling that the body is ready for resurrection:

The head lifts
the chin is a visor
raised above the vent
of his slashed throat
that has tanned and toughened.
The cured wound
opens inwards to a dark
elderberry place.

The conclusion of the poem, however, strikes a mournful chord. Instead of the joy of resurrection, the poet feels an anguish of sorrow and sympathy for all bog victims, cruelly *slashed and dumped*. *The Tollund Man* is a poem which illustrates the role of the Goddess as a mother, lover, layer-out, but also as the poet's Muse. The reader assumes that the poet has come to terms with the disturbing experience of viewing the Grauballe Man's body excavated from the peat:

but now he lies
perfected in my memory,
down to the red horn
of his nails,
he is struck by an anti-climactic incision:
hung in the scales
with beauty and atrocity:
with the Dying Gaul
too strictly composed
on his shield,

with the actual weight
of each hooded victim
slashed and dumped.

Although a terrible beauty is born, the Grauballe Man, no longer an individual, comes to symbolize all victims of all times whose *actual weight* unbeautifies the ancient fertility ritual, underlining its tragic, human aspect. Like the Goddess, Heaney's primitive Ireland *can either seduce or show her more violent, "Satanic" side* (Ingelbien 1999:645).

The Bog Queen, the Tollund Man and the Grauballe Man are all victims of violence. However, while both men, the *bridegrooms to the Goddess*, were sacrificed as part of fertility rituals, the Bog Queen experienced a desacralizing intrusion from *a turfcutter's spade*. Could the turfcutter be a poet, who found his Muse? According to Robert Graves:

> *Now it is only by rare accidents of spiritual regression that poets make their lines magically potent in the ancient sense. Otherwise, the contemporary practice of poem-writing recalls the medieval alchemist's fantastic and foredoomed experiments in transmuting base material into gold, except that the alchemist did at least recognize pure gold when he saw and handled it. The truth is that only gold ore can be turned into gold, only poetry into poems* (1961:17).

The turfcutter might then be the poet who recognizes the Muse in the Goddess, who veils her and packs *coomb softly* but then cuts off a plait of her hair and makes her rise from the dark, the process which Graves describes as *rediscovery of the lost rudiments and active principles of poetic magic that govern them* (17).

As Graves declares, the function of poetry is a religious invocation of the Muse, which experience excites *mixed exaltation and horror* (14). The invocation of the Goddess-Muse is a ritual with erotic suggestiveness. Overtly sexual overtones pervade Heaney's poem *Rite of Spring*. The very title refers to cyclical patterns of nature. The water pump has to be defrosted, and the Goddess of Nature has to be freed from the clutch of winter:

So winter close its fist
And got it stuck in the pump
The plunger froze in a lump
In its throat, ice founding itself
Upon iron. The handle
Paralysed at an angle.

The pump is personalized, humanized, a being scared, with a lump in the throat, paralyzed, suffering an intruder or attacker's fist stuck in its body. The image carries erotic overtones of a woman who is frigid, desiring, but unable to overcome some inner passion-preventing cold. The defrosting, or perhaps here

unfrosting, is a violent action which involves fire and flames, twisting and lapping tight, until finally the ice/snow melts and the pump comes back to life:

Then the twisting of wheat straw
into ropes, lapping them tight
Round stem and snout, them a light
That sent the pump up in a flame
It cooled, we lifted her latch
Her entrance was wet, and she came.

In the first stanza, the pump becomes *she*.It assumes a female posture, her entrance becomes wet, and she comes, that is, she achieves orgasm. It is an obviously sexual scene. At the same time, the *she* of the poem may denote Brigid, the Goddess of Poetry, the poet's Muse who, like all nature goddesses, was associated with healing and fertile waters in rivers and wells. Brigid was described as two-faced, one ugly and forbidding, the other pretty and seductive (Gregory 1970:28). In Heaney's poem she also has two faces: the frozen, winter countenance and the warm, seductive look denoting the coming of spring.

According to Robert Graves, William Blake was the only poet who wholly ascribed himself to the ancient bardic tradition: *Blake intended his Prophetic Books as a complete corpus of poetic reference, but for want of intelligent colleagues was obliged to become a whole Bardic college in himself, without even an initiate to carry on the tradition after his death* (Graves 1961:462). It seems that in the poems by Seamus Heaney, we can find evidence that Blake does have an initiate. His worship of the Goddess as a Muse, in which the natural and the poetic come together, marks Seamus Heaney as a bard, a poet and a prophet who, like Taliesin, *gifted with a perceptive spirit* has been initiated to the *primal knowledge*.

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